LGBT+ Communities
Creating Spaces of Identity

Edited by Deborah Woodman

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Meet the editor

Dr. Deborah Woodman (pronouns she/her) is a professor in the School of Social Work, Algoma University, Ontario, Canada, where she teaches courses on gender and sexuality as well as a variety of social issues. She has lived in Sault Ste. Marie for seventeen years with her partner and is a proud member of the Queer/Trans community. Dr. Woodman often conducts training and leads conversations about activism and ally work.

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Preface

Globally, the political situation for Queer and Trans folks is precarious. In many jurisdictions, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to live a safe, out life. In many more, it has never been possible. Our need for community is not lessening.

This book marks the publication of international experiences of LGBT+ communities by an international authorship. Throughout my time editing this volume I had the opportunity to engage in discussion on the topic of how LGBT+ communities are functioning globally. Some chapters have been written from places where being Queer and Trans is not illegal, however, even in these locations the authors speak about the stigmas that continue to be attached to these identities and the challenges of finding others who are experiencing similar struggles. There are chapters from places where being Queer and Trans is punishable under law, and the authors of these pieces are bravely situating the experiences of people in their countries who are attempting to create a community despite the dangers.

For such a geographically broad discussion of community to be possible, it is necessary to carefully consider what is meant by "community." In Chapter 1, "Introductory Chapter: LGBT+ Communities – The Challenges of Uncomfortable Spaces", I speak to why I chose to define community as a loose grouping of individuals who share common struggles and joys. I focus on the need to understand community as much more than place-based. Around the globe, as our right to exist as Queer and Trans people is increasingly challenged, we will continue to search for common spaces, both online and in person, from which to work toward our own safety and identity.

In Chapter 2, "We Are Humans: Discourse Representations of Identities in the Tweets of Nigerian LGBT People", Dr. Olubunmi Oyebanji gives us an excellent overview of what it means to look for others and create community even when faced with restrictive and punitive laws. Dr. Oyebanji reviews the laws in Nigeria and focuses on Twitter as a platform where people are able to express their struggles and celebrations. This chapter uses social identity theory and critical discourse analysis to consider how people are using tweets and the meaning of these tweets. In this exploration of the tweets used by people in Nigeria, we see hope, resilience, and creation of space where LGBT+ people can find each other and a sense of belonging.

Chapter 3, "Developing a Resilient Sexual and Gender Minority Identity Online: The Importance of Social Media for Youth before Coming out" by Lika Brinkman and Ryanne Francot, demonstrates how youth in the Netherlands have internalized stigma and engage in periods of hiding their identity before they come out. Through participant interviews, it was made apparent that youth are finding resources on social media and often rely upon support online before they make their Queer and Trans identities known in an offline environment. This research confirms that identity and community formation in online spaces remains important to youth even in countries where their Queer and Trans identities are not illegal.

In Chapter 4, "Decolonization of Gender and Sexuality: Exploring the Stories of Discrimination, Marginalisation, Resistance, and Resilience in the Communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra in Pakistan", Alamgir Alamgir explores colonization, laws introduced by the British, impacts of Islam, and local moves to decolonize. Through interviews with members of the community, this chapter clearly links the consequences of colonization with the social position of these populations and how they have had to re-create new ways of understanding themselves and the larger social whole. Decolonization is ongoing and presents many challenges, including the impacts of long years of colonization. The author speaks to the complexity of these identities in both historical and current time periods.

In Chapter 5, "Weaponising Digital Architecture: Queer Nigerian Instagram Users and Digital Visual Activism", Dr. Paul explores how Instagram is used both by people who are not supportive of the Queer and Trans community and members of the community who are using the media platform for a space to create community and meaning together. Once again, we hear about resilience in the face of violence and the strength of people in the community to create meaning with each other.

Chapter 6, "Perspective Chapter: Considerations about Sexual and Gender Identities and Their Influence on the Unity of the LGBT Community" by Pilar Rio-Campos, explores the ideas of finding commonality – how challenging this can be and yet how necessary. We see in this exploration the different ways that identity can be considered with a comprehensive review of many of the major thinkers on these issues. The author points to the difficulty of identity as a basis for political movement and suggests that instead, it may be more useful to consider commonalities over different identities to achieve some form of equality. This chapter is essential reading for people considering the idea of a clear LGBT+ community.

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Chapter 1

Introductory Chapter: LGBT+ Communities – The Challenges of Uncomfortable Spaces

Deborah Woodman

1. Introduction

The concept of this book has been exciting for me. As an academic who teaches on issues of gender and sexuality and as a Queer community member and activist the idea of hearing from others about the challenges and strengths of community is something I was looking forward to reading and considering. The quest of this book has been to find authors who are speaking to these experiences of finding community in unlikely places, creating commonality and reinforcing ideas of humanity.

2. Conceptual framework

Let me first locate the notion of community for gender and sexual minority groups. There are many who have been suggesting that especially in large urban centres an identifiable Queer community or location (the idea of the Gay Village) has devolved [1]. Meaning that, particularly in large urban Canadian and American centres, areas where an identifiable grouping of Queer people live is no longer necessary. In these nation-states, we have rights and have been integrated into other urban locations and suburban areas. The need to organize and congregate is no longer as necessary in these spaces, although we all experience pride celebrations where we see the remnants of the former physical locations of gathering. In the argument of devolution, we must be cautious of the Americanization of Queerness wherein what many of us experience gets lost within the normalization of the experiences of a diversity of people in larger urban Canadian and American centres. Furthermore, the idea of devolution has been critiqued as we continue to see Queer and Trans communities forming and re-forming in small urban centres [2, 3] and in spaces where identity claiming is dangerous and represents struggle. Certainly, as someone who lives in a smaller town in Canada, finding others who are navigating Queer and Trans experiences has been necessary. Without the other people in this loosely based grouping of people, I would feel quite alone. For more on this we can look to the work of Henriquez and Ahman [4] to reiterate that for many Canadians living in rural spaces adds to precarity. For people living globally in much more dangerous circumstances because of their Queer and Trans identities, finding others is life-saving.

Therefore, when I was first contemplating how we might conceptualize the idea of "LGBT+ communities" I thought about the way community formation happens, and

where we might find it. I considered the ways that groups form in online spaces, and how group formation can be either organic or contrived and planned. A place-based concept of the community did not fit how we live in spaces and what we might need from them. For many of us, living in challenged spaces, trying to find others who share struggles and can appreciate the complexity of identity is difficult and unsafe. If we live in spaces where our rights are non-existent, where our rights are being contested or even if we cannot see visible signs of Queerness and Transness, we look for other indicators that our lives have meaning and are legitimate. These are often online spaces, where we can see and can be seen. From this, the definition that emerged of community and was used to guide the chapters in this text is the loose grouping of individuals who share common struggles and joys.

Do we, as people who identify as gender and sexual minorities, share anything other than the understanding by the larger society that we are deviant? This question is persistent when we consider the vastness of identities and how intersections must play a part in these interrogations. The idea of deviance as an organizing concept may be as simple as Durkheim [5] suggested, that having a grouping within a larger society that is persistently deviant is useful, because this "deviance" helps others explore and maintain their "normal". For those of us in this category of deviance, the experiences are different from each other. The Queer and Trans people in my small town cling to each other despite their different experiences of class, racialization, gender, ability, sexuality, and age. We derive strength from each other to support challenges and vulnerabilities that are as different as we are. Our persistent deviance is useful for us as an organizing feature and it is this that we use in our pride events to hold us loosely in the midst of larger community norms.

3. Concluding thoughts

It has been an interesting project, reading the drafts of chapters and discussing topics with the authors. One of the best conversations I had with a potential author was about the idea of human rights for Queer and Trans folk. For me, living in Canada, my rights are protected, and I live without fear of losing my job, my housing, my family, or my life. This is not accurate for most Queer and Trans people living around the world. In conversations with the potential author, we discussed how human rights are negotiable. Even in spaces like mine, where I live with privilege, these rights regarding my sexual identity may be taken away if the majority of people in my country decide that I should not have these rights. We are seeing this shift and change all around the world. At the time of this writing, Queer and Trans rights are actively under assault in the United States, Scotland, Kenya and many other places. I read as activists are maimed, silenced, and killed. Just two weeks ago in my own town, we held a counter-protest as protesters were challenging a Queer event at our local library. What this demands from all of us is vigilance and care.

To the people working within and supporting our communities of Queer and Trans folk, I say thank you and please keep up the struggle.

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We Are Humans: Discourse Representations of Identities in the Tweets of Nigerian LGBT People

Olubunmi Funmi Oyebanji

Abstract

Same-sex sexuality is an important topic worth consideration, especially in Africa, where this is still highly considered taboo. As a result of subsisting homophobia in the Nigerian public sphere, social media provides a safe space for collective queer voices. Queer studies in the Nigerian context have mainly been sociological and legalistic. However, linguistic studies on the media representation of same-sex sexualities have explored how heteronormativity is accentuated, without adequate attention paid to how sexual minorities have also used language to emphasize their identities and resist homophobia. Drawing on the Social Identity Theory (SIT), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this study examines the identities that Nigerian LGBT people construct for themselves on Twitter. I do this by considering discourses from the #EndHomophobiaInNigeria, which trended on Nigerian Twitter in 2020. Findings revealed that words, clauses, and other discursive strategies construe LGBT people as humans whose rights should be respected, as a community, and resilient. The significance of this study lies in the potential insights it provides into some of the struggles of the LGBT people for social acceptance and inclusivity, especially in a homophobic environment like Nigeria.

Keywords: identity construction, LGBT people in Nigeria, homophobia, social media discourse, LGBT advocacy

1. Introduction

The Nigerian government, in 2014, enacted the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill (SSMPA), which prohibits marriage or civil union by persons of the same sex, the solemnization of such marriage in places of worship and the registration of homosexual clubs and societies. The law does not just forbid same-sex relations, but also whoever abets it in any way. As a result of this, Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people are often victims of arbitrary arrest, torture, extortion, and other grave human rights violations. For example, in 2018, The Initiative for Equal Rights and other organizations' reports show 213 human rights violations based on real or perceived sexual orientation in Nigeria. The Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) was immediately followed by high levels of violence, including mob attacks,

arbitrary arrests, detention, and extortion of LGBT people by some police officers and members of the public [1].

However, as Nigeria continues to be homophobic, mainly due to cultural and religious conventions, Nigerian sexual minorities have taken to different social media platforms to build online communities, express themselves, relate with other members, find emotional and financial support, and construct their identities. Many sexual minority individuals report several purposes for internet use including creating a positive identity, finding support, and fostering a sense of community [2–4]. Twitter is one such social media platform that has provided a safe place for the LGBT community. With an annual growth rate of 4.4%, Twitter has evolved to become a very successful microblogging site in Nigeria, accounting for about 1.75 million users. Communities with a common interest are formed online. Eve [5], for instance, acknowledges that online social networking media constitute domains where everyone, including the non-elite, can engage in sociopolitical advocacies and activism, toward having real-world implications and changing their social realities. Specifically within the context of amplifying queer voices, [6] has argued that cyberspace is increasingly deployed by users to represent *gay* as an identity and cultural signifier. Many campaigns were initiated in the digital space, with members of the Nigerian queer communities taking to social media platforms to encourage conversations about LGBT existence and rights. The recent were the #EndhomophobiaInNigeria #QueerNigerianLiveMatters.

Several studies in language and gender have asserted that language is not mere words, but a system of cultural values, lifestyle, perceptions, and a worldview that assigns roles and identities to people in the society. Language plays a significant role in shaping individual identities and in distinguishing how one group is different from another group. Linguistic style and language choice, which are repertoires of linguistic forms ideologically associated with specific personas and groups, can index identity. Many approaches to the study of identity suggest that identity is not merely a psychological mechanism of self-categorization that is reflected in the individuals' social behaviors; instead, identity is composed through social action, principally through language [7]. This study, therefore, considers how the use of language by queer Nigerians indexes their identities and ultimately foregrounds their desires. Important research questions for this study are 1. What identities do queer Nigerians construct for themselves? 2. What linguistic and discursive strategies foreground these identities?

2. Literature review

Although the aspects of investigations and the way researchers regarded the non-heterosexual and marginalized sexual groups vary, it is an undeniable fact that there have been numerous studies on the language of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender individuals in particular [8–10]. The breaking point of such a conventional sociolinguistic approach was when lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer studies emerged within many academic disciplines in the late 1960s [11]. However, these studies have been in parallel with the sociopolitical challenge of the groups. This shift led to the emergence of a distinctive field Queer Linguistics that "focuses on how sexuality is regulated by hegemonic heterosexuality and how non-normative sexualities [i.e. gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender] are negotiated in relation to [...] regulatory structures [12]."

With the influence of Queer approaches to language, the scholarly interest shifted to the linguistic construction of heteronormative and non-heteronormative discourses in specific contexts. In this context, the field has interfaces and close bounds with other discourse analytic approaches such as Conversation Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis and Feminist Linguistics [13, 14]. The radical change in the perspective of studies about the language use of gays and lesbians had its roots in the Foucauldian view of "identity" [15]. According to this view, identities are created by social relations of power; that is, they are not fixed and discovered. Therefore, the general tendency in the 1990s, when Queer Theory reshaped the sociolinguistic studies on LGBT language use, was to research how identities are realized through language rather than how gay and lesbian identity is reflected through language.

As identity is emergent, there exists the possibility that resources for identity composition in any interaction may develop from resources built up in previous interactions. In other words, these resources "may draw on structure—such as ideology, the linguistic system, or the relation between the two" [16]. The fact that identity is emergent and discursively produced is evident in situations where speakers use language that does not quadrate the social group to which they are conventionally categorized—whether biologically or culturally. This scenario is obvious in studies of transgender and cross-gender performance by [17–19]. Such studies demonstrate the emergent quality of identity in interactions in which ideologically expected mapping between language and biology or culture was violated and the essentialist preconceptions of linguistic ownership were challenged.

The Indexicality principle [20] is concerned with the mechanism by which linguistic forms are utilized to construct identity positions. Basically, the index is a linguistic form whose meaning relies on interactional contexts. Indexicality is a process involving the formation of the semiotic relationship between linguistic forms and social meanings [21, 22]. This semiotic relationship relies very much on cultural values and beliefs, or in other words, ideologies about who can produce what sorts of language in creating particular identities. According to this principle, identity relations emerge in interaction through several related indexical processes, including (a) overt mention of identity categories and labels; (b) implicatures and presuppositions regarding one's own or others' identity positions; (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles; and (d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups [23]. According to both Hall and Bulcholtz, the labeling and referential categorizing of identities are the most apparent means of forming identities through talk. Another linguistic means of discursively constructing identities is through the indirect pragmatic process of implicature and presupposition regarding one's own or others' identity positions.

Research on same-sex sexualities especially from the linguistic perspective is still far behind in the African context compared with what is obtainable in the Euro-American context. This may be due to the homophobic sentiments that still pervade the African continent. In the Nigerian context, one of the few linguistic studies on same-sex sexualities is [24], which draws on various texts (interactional, literary, journalistic and cinematographic, among others) by and about the "yan daudu—Gay men," paying particular attention to how they use grammatical and rhetorical resources to claim, attribute, mitigate, or deny kinds of agency concerning sex and economic exchange. Adegbola et al. [25, 26] show how Nigerian newspapers sometimes take the moralists' stance in their reports on same-sex sexuality, strategically supporting the institutional

order against same-sex relations. Onanuga [27] considers how a Nigerian newspaper frames same-sex relations and found that is framed mainly as illegality and negativity; not acceptable to the citizens, eliciting a corrective reporting approach.

Social media has emerged as a robust medium for discourses on sexuality given its capacity to challenge mainstream narratives and empower personal views on self-expression. In Nigeria, the growing interest in homosexual expressions through online platforms is yet to receive significant research attention, although scholars are hinting at the influences of social media. For instance, [28] using keyword searches on Twitter investigates how gay Nigerians combat homophobia by using language on Twitter toward self-assertion. The study argues that in addition to harnessing agency through positive self-representation and ingroup affirmation, the digital discourses of Nigerian gay men recontextualize religion as a legitimizing tool, transforming it into a site of affirmative struggle. Analyzing blog posts and web/Facebook pages generated by Cameroonian and Nigerian gay activists [29] also measure the extent to which gay activists adopt a national/local perspective versus the level to which they adopt an international perspective in their online advocacy. Currier [30] attempts to ascertain users' willingness to express an opinion, directions of opinion, and factors affecting opinion formation. The study finds significant willingness to express opinions, propelled by "rising interest in the topic."

Generally, linguistic-oriented research on same-sex sexualities in the Nigerian context has emphasized heteronormativity. However, adequate attention has not been paid to how queer Nigerians construct their identities (not necessarily sexual identities) in their attempt to combat homophobia, especially on social media platforms. This study, therefore, considers the linguistic and discourse strategies deployed by Nigerian sexual minorities in the construction of their identities on Twitter. The significance of this study lies in the potential insights it provides into the understanding of the LGBT lives [31], especially in a homophobic environment like Nigeria, and the strategies explored in resisting homophobia. As such, other minority groups might benefit from these strategies.

3. Theoretical foundation

This study adopts the Social Identity theory (SIT), Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. The Social identity theory [32, 33], developed in the 1970s by Henri Tajfel, is a social psychological approach to the role of self-conception in group membership, group processes, and intergroup relations. Social identity theory defines a group cognitively—in terms of people's self-conception as group members. A group exists psychologically if three or more people construe and evaluate themselves in terms of shared attributes that distinguish them collectively from other people. The theory addresses phenomena such as prejudice, discrimination, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, intergroup conflict, conformity, normative behavior, group polarization, crowd behavior, organizational behavior, leadership, deviance, and group cohesiveness. Processes associated with important social identities include in-group assimilation and out-group exclusion.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is principally concerned with how power abuse, dominance, and inequality are discursively performed and practiced, legitimized, and contested in social or political discourses—texts or talks [34]. In CDA, texts are considered sites of struggle wherein they demonstrate vestiges of conflicting discourses and ideologies competing and struggling for power [35]. A critical approach

to discourse is chiefly interested in the analysis of unequal social encounters between individuals and groups as well as the resistance to dominance by subordinated individuals and groups. The most obvious and distinct tenet of CDA is that discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies and these relations constructively affect social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief of the participants in the discourse. One of the common topics of study that adopt CDA framework is the construction of identities. Perspectives on identity construction in CDA are parallel to the principles of identity studies advocated by Bulcholtz and Hall (2005).

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a social semiotic theory of meaning-making, learning, and social change. SFL maintains that language and other meaning-making systems cannot be understood without an analysis of the immediate context in which it is used and developed, nor can they be understood separately from issues of power, language socialization, and ideology [36]. Butler [37] describes how language simultaneously achieves three functions in constructing meaning. The ideational metafunction constructs ideas and experiences; the interpersonal metafunction enacts social roles and power dynamics; the textual metafunction manages the how of information to make extended discourse coherent and cohesive.

The relevance of SIT, CDA, and SFL to this study is the view that "Identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" [38]. Our identities, and the ways we see and represent ourselves, and our ideologies shape how we communicate, what we communicate about, how we communicate with others, and how we communicate about others. This suggests the connection of the three theories. While SIT and CDA focus on ideologies and identities, SFL provides the linguistic tools for foregrounding these features in the process of analysis. Language is commonly understood as a primary resource for enacting social identity and displaying membership in social groups, hence the use of the three frameworks. Also central to the three theories is the notion of context. The consideration of context is crucial to meaning-making in textual analysis. Just as no text can be free of context, so no text is free of ideology. In other words, to use language at all is to use it to encode particular positions and values. Many scholars working within CDA and SIT have continued to draw on SFL descriptions in their critical analyses of discourses, identifying and explaining what is foregrounded or backgrounded by the linguistic choices, and more specifically the process types and choice of mood and modality made over others [39, 40].

4. Methodology

In March 2020, Twitter was taken over with #EndHomophobiaInNigeria, a reaction to the murder of a gay man in Imo state, Nigeria. The incident portrayed the dark side of queer hook-up culture. This led to the coming together of LGBT Nigerians and activists to condemn this act of violence and advocate against homophobia using the hashtag. I collected a total of 87 tweets posted between March 2020 and August 31, 2022. March 2020 captures the emergence of the EndHomophobiaInNigeria campaign. However, till 2022, the hashtag continued to be in use since sexual minorities continue to suffer backlash as a result of their gender identities. Out of the 87 tweets, 82 were pro-gay while only five were against the movement. Tweets in favor of same-sex practice were purposively selected since the understanding of how sexual minorities construct their identities is the focus of this study. Only 34 pro-gay tweets provided the sample for this study. The tweets are numbered TWT1-TWT35. ("TWT"

stands for "tweet.") In the analysis, however, only a few relevant tweets from the various discursive categories are reproduced.

I adopted a qualitative approach to analyze the contents of the tweets, which I viewed as identity discourse. The tweets were subjected to CDA and linguistic analysis. CDA allows an examination of the contributions of language to identity and ideological formations as identifiable within the context of same-sex relations, while SFL provides linguistic tools for analyzing discourse engagements. Ideological and identity discourses very often demonstrate evidence of the positive "we" representation and the negatives "other" representation. The categories applied in the analysis include actors' descriptions and disclaimers (dissociating from negative identities). Under SFL, transitivity, mood, and modality are considered in the analysis of how the identities of the in-group are defined. For instance, the kind of processes associated with the "we" and their ideological functions are explored. The analysis is done in relation to the Nigerian sociopolitical context.

5. Data analysis and discussion

Queer individuals have constructed different identities for themselves while showing their agitations on Twitter. They have constructed selves as humans, who have equal rights as other humans. Queer Nigerians have used different linguistic strategies to foreground these identities. The identities constructed via the use of language are taken in turn for explication.

5.1 Discursive construction of identities

5.1.1 LGBT people are humans

Nouns used by same-sex identified people construe them as humans just as others. Van Dijk [41] argued that the nominal group is an economical way of packaging information, representing what writers consider relevant and interesting, as well as reflecting values and stereotypes implicit in their discourse. Identity description is characterized by strings of adjectives and nouns, forming what is termed a nominal group, as illustrated by the examples taken from my data. Accordingly, nominal groups in tweets provide one point of departure for the investigation of LGBT identity representations in this study. Nouns such as people, man, men, person, etc., are used. A glimpse at the examples below reveals this.

TWT1: *Nollywood star Yul Edochie condemns execution of* **gay men** *in Nigeria:* "**Gay people** *are* **human beings***!" @PinkNews Jul 14, 2022.*

TWT2: *I raise my candle for the* **gay man** *that was killed in march 2020 that triggered the hashtag #EndHomophobiaInNigeria and for all other queers that have died unjusticely... may you all rest in power.#EndSARS #QueerNigerianlivesmatter@queer_wife, Oct 16, 2020.*

TWT3: *A hate crime was committed and you lot managed to turn such an unfortunate incident into a "rantfest" about how much you hate* **gay people***. Where is your humanity? Jesse of lagos @Jesse65794271, Mar 12, 2020.*

TWT4: *We are* **human** *and loved! Still Yin @Lady_Yinn, Mar 11, 2020.*

Looking at TWT1–TWT 4, it can be observed that sexual minorities often construct their identity as humans, adding the personal nouns *people, men, man, and person* to the adjective *gay*. This usage emphasizes their identity as humans. This identity is further reinforced by the use of the lexical item *human*, as seen in TWT1 and

TWT4. In TWT1, the voice of a popular Nigerian actor is managed as a legitimizing strategy, showing that LGBT people are humans. The Nollywood star, Yul Edochie, is attributed with the verbal process "condemn," which emphasizes the actions/behaviors of non-supporters of same-sex relations as negative. The actor, who is the sayer of the verbal process, is a role model to many young Nigerians and the writer of the tweet considers his words worthy of repetition. The role-model authority is a discursive strategy useful in the process of legitimation [42]. Reporting what the actor said might change the negative mindset of his fans to react positively to same-sex-identified people [43]. The purpose of the condemnation is shown by the verbiage 'execution of gay men. The actor sees the act of execution as a treatment meant for animals TWT1 was propelled by the death sentences given by an Islamic court in Bauchi, Nigeria, to three gay men on July 7, 2022. These choices of words call the attention of Nigerians and the government to the idea that gay people are humans like other humans and should not be executed like animals for their sexual orientation. Apart from the use of *men* and *people*, which connotes LGBT people are human, the relational process is also attributed to the social actor, specifically identifying sexual minorities as *human beings*. This form of identifying relational process is also seen in TWT4, where *we* signify same-sex identified people is the carrier of the attribute of *human*. TWT3 queries the humanity of homophobes, using the interrogative mood as well as representing sexual minorities as humans, gay people.

Relational identification is also used in constructing the identity of non-heterosexuals as humans. This is done by means of personal, kinship terms, such as friend, parents, brother, sister, etc. Examples of how this is done are shown below.

TWT5:*... A* **gay person** *could be* **your: Friend, Brother, Sister, Cousin, Nephew, Niece, Aunty, Uncle, Mother, Father**. *Literally anyone, it's just simple logic as though via any religion, law, or morals Love and respect. Yum-Yum @yomiaka, Mar 12, 2020.*

TWT 6: Your brothers *and* **sisters** *are begging you to lend your voice. You do not gain anything from homophobia. But they lose everything. #EndHomophobiaInNigeria. @ kikimordi, march 10, 2020.*

In the tweets above, relational identification is realized by means of the attributive relational clause in tweet 5, where *A gay person* is identified as your: *Friend, Brother, Sister, Cousin, Nephew, Niece, Aunty, Uncle, Mother, Father.* This construes gay persons as members of families. This further reinforces their identity as humans and appeals to the minds of readers to empathize with the sexual minorities, seeing them as members of their families. Again, the sexual minorities are represented as brothers and sisters to other Nigerians in twt6. They are presented with the behavioral process of appealing (are begging) follow Nigerians to join the fight against homophobia. The use of the behavioral clause not only points to the fact that LGBT people are humans who could be members of anyone's family, but it also appeals to the emotions of the readers to empathize with them. Relational identification at the collective level is the province of social identity theory [32]. At this level, the focus is on oneself as a proto-typical member of a group, such as an organization, or a social category, such as gender.

Relational identification is also deployed as an organizing strategy among the LGBT people, to show their identity as group members. This can be seen in the tweet below.

TWT7*: Our victory is near* **sibs***! Our victory is near and we will keep fighting. Son of the Rainbow AKA LGBTQ+ CLASS CAPTAIN @Blaise_21, Feb 11, 2021.*

The writer of the above tweet represents other sexual minorities as his or her siblings, *sibs*. The use of the lexical item is to emphasize the unity among group members toward achieving a common goal and to encourage their continuous cooperation.

Humans inherently have certain fundamental rights that aspire to protect all people everywhere from severe political, legal, and social abuse. Since sexual minorities are humans, they have rights that should be respected by all and sundry. In the tweets under study, while emphasizing their human status, LGBT people also foreground their fundamental human rights, using different linguistic tools, such as repetition, capitalization, rights related lexical items, among others.

TWT8*: The **rights** of these people must be recognized as we march and protest police brutality, as we cry for the government to #EndSARSNow!#EndPoliceBrutality #EndHomophobiaInNigeria Pink Panther @kito_diaries, Oct 11, 2020.*

TWT9*: LGBTQ+ RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS!*
LGBTQ+ RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS!
LGBTQ+ RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS!
LGBTQ+ RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS! MiriamDera @Miriam_dera, Mar 20, 2021

TWT10*: queer people have as much **right** as everyone else to exist in this country **free from unjust persecution and violence.***

TWT11*: the SSMPA is a ruthless violation of **human rights** targeted solely at queer people and it needs to burn. Fritz@chaotictwitch,March 20, 2021.*

Looking at the tweets above, one notices rights-related terms and phrases, such as *human rights*, *rights, and LGBT rights*. In TWT8, the importance of respecting the rights of LGBT people is represented with the mental process *must be recognized*. The supposed senser is the Nigerian government or Nigerians in general and the sensed is *the rights of these people*. *These people*, here, refers to the LGBT people who are often victims of police brutality. The deontic modal *must* indicate necessity and obligation toward respect for the rights of queer people. *Must* is a deontic modal auxiliary verb that has an assertive force. It portrays compulsion or lack of choice. Therefore, the writer's use of the modal indicates how respect for the fundamental human rights of queer people is important to the writer and the social group; hence, the march, protest, and cry. Also, in TWT9, relational clauses and repetition are used to foreground the notion that the fundamental human rights of sexual minorities should be respected. The identifying relational clause LGBTQ+ RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS, graphologically represented in capital letters and repeated four times emphasizes the agitation of the sexual minorities in Nigeria. The relational clauses equate LGBTQ+ rights with human rights. Capitalization and repetition are linguistic strategies for foregrounding. The repetition of these content words is an indicator of the importance of the meaning they contribute to the discourse. These linguistic devices draw one's attention to the desires of the writers of the tweets and the sexual minorities in Nigeria and impress them on one's mind. It seems to be saying to one that "the text is central to this group, everything in it revolves around it, so don't forget it." In tweet 10, the right of the LGBT people is also foregrounded with the relational clause (possessive). *Queer people* possess as much right as everyone else this is further emphasized by the phrase *free from unjust persecution and violence*. Again in tweet 11, the same-sex marriage prohibition act is represented in an attributive relational clause as a ruthless violation of human rights and the desire of the writer is portrayed with the deontic modal *need to* in the last clause, *it needs to burn.* Generally, in the tweets, LGBT people emphasize the notion that they are equally human whose fundamental human rights should be respected just like other humans.

5.1.2 We are a community

A community is a compact and homogenous group, where members feel, think, and behave in similar and predictable ways, as corresponds to their belonging to the community. It implies a set of processes such as membership, inclusion, identity, feeling of belonging, and an emotional bond or sense of community. LGBT people in Nigeria often construct themselves as a community of people working together to achieve a purpose, in their tweets. This is done by assimilation, which is the representation of social actors as groups [43]. It is operationalized through two minor strategies: collectivization, i.e., "reference to social actors as group entities" and aggregation, i.e., quantifying groups of participants. Specification of social actors as groups has a special meaning for the discursive construction of in-groups in the texts. A glimpse at the excerpts below reveals these.

TWT12*: Very proud of the work* **we** *did and still doing. Very proud of* **the entire queer community** *in Nigeria and* **our** *resilience in the face of injustice. OluTimehin K. @ olukukoyi, Oct 17, 2020.*

TWT13*: The comments under this post shows that as #LGBT individuals and* **community** *in #Nigeria we have serious work to do. Also it is sending a very loud message to* **our** *allies, stop behind the close door allyship,* **we** *are dying. #EndHomophobiaInNigeria.*

Community refers to the development of bonds between a group of people or feeling a sense of unity with one another. A community often shares the same values, beliefs, and worldview. The usage of the noun *community* and *the entire queer community* might be a deliberate attempt to represent non-heterosexuals as a powerful force, that which should be reckoned with. Again, pronouns become a useful tool in the construction of the LGBT people as a community. The first-person plural pronoun *we* and its variants, that is, *us* and *our*, are semantically complex. *We*-pronoun and its variants are both inclusive and exclusive in meaning. These pronouns can simultaneously mean the inclusion of the speaker and other members of the LGBT community and the exclusion of others. Tweets 12 and 13 include examples of the use of personal pronouns that are used to indicate a sense of sameness and solidarity. *We* and its variants appeal to an idealized vision of the community. Functioning as a form of encouragement for community members, tweet 12 praises the activism of LGBT people in Nigeria, an example of positive self-representation and in-group affirmation, while tweet 13 clamors for more work and support and equally identifies the dangerous position the sexual minorities are subjected to in Nigeria, *we are dying*. *Dying* here is not only physical but includes other aspects.

The construction of the identity of the LGBT people as a community also presents them to be many. The game of numbers is also vividly used in the examples below.

TWT14*: As much as gay bashing does not happen often in Nigeria, the societal issues LGBTq people face in Nigeria and most parts of the world is immense and horrible. PSA:* **there are millions of gay people in Nigeria***, they are just in hiding or have married women and vice-versa to fit in Sep 19, 2021@SBADZMD.*

TWT15*: The biggest threat to gay people in Nigeria are their fellow gay people who are still in the closet! Trust me,* **dem plenty***! @AishaYesufu, Jul 3, 2020.*

TWT16*: Send one's child out the country for high quality western education does not make the child more likely to be gay. The tendency to be gay lies with the individual, their choice of life style and company they keep, because* **there are a lot of gay people in Nigeria than you can imagine***. Yam Pepper Scatter Scatter@Kazekagemichael.*

TWT17: *It is 7 years today since @GEJonathan signed a bill (SSMPA 2014) that criminalizes millions* **of Nigerians** *just for living their lives and loving differently! We will never forget!James C.@JamesLantern2, Jan 7, 2021.*

In the examples above, non-heterosexuals in Nigeria are portrayed to be many but in the closet. In the tweets, the existential clauses *there are millions of gay people in Nigeria, there are a lot of gay people in Nigeria than you can imagine* as well as the aggregation strategy of using lexical items such as *millions, a lot,* and *plenty* to quantify social actors foreground the notion that the LGBT community has numerical strength, connotatively suggesting they are powerful.

5.1.3 We are fighters

In the tweets, same-sex identified people labeled themselves as fighters. *Fighter* in this context means one who struggles or resists. It means a person with the will, courage, determination, ability, or disposition to fight, struggle, or resist. The LGBT people, in their tweets, represent themselves as fighters, struggling and resisting homophobia and particularly the Nigerian same-sex prohibition bill. They express their disapproval and dissatisfaction with the issues surrounding same-sex relations in Nigeria. Lexical items relating to fighting, struggle, and resistance are commonly used in the examined tweets.

TWT18: We **will fight** *till our rights are respected! If nothing, we'll do it for the next generation…they should not have to suffer like this. Alaafin of Eko @alaafinofEko, Jan 12, 2021.*

TWT19: 2men down, seems wat they want is **war**. *we go give them Malahat Yhyazad @MuradTuranli, Oct 27, 2020.*

TWT20: **We**'*re all directing* **our anger** *at the people who want to deny us our futures. Try not to be one of them.*

TWT21: **Our victory** *is near sibs!* **Our victory** *is near and we will keep* **fighting**. *Son of the Rainbow AKA LGBTQ+ CLASS CAPTAIN @Blaise_21, Feb 11, 2021.*

This form of construction reveals the contention on the same-sex prohibition act in the Nigerian context. In the first tweet under this category, the writer constructs the LGBT folks as fighters, who are not ready to give up hope in the struggle for freedom. This is shown in the material clause *We will fight till our rights are respected*. *We* which is the actor in the material process *will fight* to collectivize the LGBT folks in Nigeria as working together to achieve their aim. *Will fight* in the tweet signifies their continuous attempt at contending for their rights, which is portrayed by the circumstance of the clause *till our rights are respected*. The resilience to continue in the struggle is seen in the next clause, *If nothing, we'll do it for the next generation.* The decision to continue to struggle is also seen in the next tweet. *Seems wat they want is* **war**.. *we go give them. They,* in the first clause, refers to the homophobes, including the government that criminalized same-sex relations. The writer goes further to refer to the struggle as *war,* which has a more intense effect than a fight. The second material clause *we go give them* reveals the decision of the LGBT people to fight. The clause is in Nigerian Pidgin English, meaning, *we will give them*. The writer says since homophobes have resulted in violence indicated by the death of two non-heterosexuals *two down*, then, the Nigerian LGBT people would join in the war. They are ready to give all it takes for their freedom. The use of the nominal group *our anger* suggests conflict, which could have been triggered by the action of the other. This lexical item reveals the emotional condition of the LGBT folks in Nigeria. The anger is directed at homophobes represented as *the people who want to deny us our futures*. The last tweet urges the LGBT people to fight against injustice. Victory is a lexical item belonging to the

semantic field of war/contention. The writer of the tweet strategically used the lexical item victory to make same-sex identified people see the brighter side of the war by hoping for a positive effect. Again, victory is collectivized with the pronoun *our*. *Our victory* is represented as the token in the relational clause. This clause is also repeated for emphasis. The encouragement to keep fighting is seen in the third material clause.

The struggle has led to the use of hashtags indicating what sexual minorities are contending for. Examples of such are seen in the tweets below.

TWT22*: It's a good day to #EndHomophobiaInNigeria and choke on the fact that queer people exist and were going nowhere…. Also #Queerlivesmatter, gag on that too SPICY EDO PRINCESS, @riastillonfia, Oct 19, 2020.*

TWT23*:#EndHomophobiaInNigeria.*
#EndHomophobiaInNigeria.
#EndHomophobiaInNigeria.

A gay person could be your: Friend, Brother, Sister, Cousin, Nephew, Niece, Aunty, Uncle, Mother, Father. Literally anyone, it's just simple logic as though via any religion, law, or morals Love and respect. Yum-Yum @yomiaka, Mar 12, 2020.

The frequent use of hashtags indicating the interests and desires of members of the LGBT community is a form of hashtag activism. Hashtags are used on microblogging platforms, such as Twitter as a form of user-generated tagging that enables cross-referencing of content by topic or theme. Hashtags (#) are used to index, order, and accumulate public discourse into coherent topical threads [44]. In conflict situations, verbal abuses, assertions, repetition of words, phrases, or sentences and threats may be common. These can be noticed in some of the tweets by members of the LGBT community.

TWT24*: We are planted here. These homophobes will not move us. We are here. We are fucking queer. We are human and loved! Still Yin @Lady_Yinn, Mar 11, 2020.*

TWT25*: Homosexuals are here and we are fabulously made in the image and likeness of God. Uchenna Samuel (SAMUCH) @officialsamuch, Oct 22, 2020.*

TWT26*: If you are a Homophobe, internalized or outright homophobe? Avoid me, better still* **kuku fall and die***!*

The writer of tweet 24 employs declaratives to assert the existence of the LGBT people in Nigeria and their decision to remain, irrespective of the harsh law on sexual minorities and ill-treatment by homophobes. In the tweet, there are five declarative sentences. The first two are represented in material clauses. *We* in the first material clause collectivizes the sexual minorities, the material process *are planted* suggests being strong, rooted, and growth. The circumstance, *here*, refers to Nigeria. It writer uses this to emphasize their identity as Nigerians who are not ready to go or migrate elsewhere just for their sexual identities. This idea is further reinforced by the second material clause with *these homophobes* as the actors of the material process *will not move* and *us (*LGBT people), the goal. This suggests that the actions of the homophobe would not discourage the sexual minorities as they are not ready to relocate. Their assertion is also foregrounded with the other three relational processes, showing their existence in Nigeria, and their identity as *queer* and *human*. Tweet 25 is similar to tweet 24 as the writer also emphasizes the existence of the LGBT community in Nigeria, using the relational process. Also, the material clause, *we are fabulously made in the image and likeness of God*, identifies the sexual minorities as humans created by God. The writer of tweet 26 calls out the homophobes using the interrogative, If you are a Homophobe, internalized or outright homophobe? This discourse strategy is called "kito-ing," a public "outing" of the homophobic actors. Then issues a warning in the form of an imperative (avoid me) and ends with the verbal abuse, *kuku fall*

and die! Ultimately, tweet26 shows the anger of the writer and generally the sexual minorities toward homophobes in Nigeria. The reader of these tweets would have to rely on contextual and extratextual knowledge to make meaning of deictic and spatiotemporal orientations (we, us, these, here, you, me), which have been strategically deployed to heighten the ideological cleavage and conflict embedded in the discourses on same-sex relations in the Nigerian context.

5.1.4 Sexual identity is not by choice

In the tweets, LGBT people also framed their sexuality as not being subject to choice. They constructed their identity as not being able to change their sexuality using different discursive strategies. Examples of such tweets are found below.

TWT27: *Trust me no one chooses to be gay. Do not get me wrong I'm not ashamed of who I am but it's extremely dangerous for people like me especially in Nigeria so why would I gladly pick being gay@EdafeOkporo.*

TWT28: *We are not nobody.*
We are more than this body.
We are not photocopy.
We were made this way Chef Shawn Desroleaux @Oluwatobby, Mar 31, 2021.

TWT29: *Good morning. #ThisIsYourConscienceSpeaking. Imagine being beaten to death just because you are tall, or short, or have a big nose or are a twin, or are bald, or hairy, or for some other attribute that you did not create yourself. Think am o. #EndHomophobiaInNigeria Dr Joe Abah @DrJoeAbah, Mar 11, 2020.*

Same-sex-identified people also construct their sexuality as an orientation rather than a preference. The clauses *no one chooses to be gay* and *we were made this way* foreground this notion in tweets 27 and 28. The writer of tweet 27 goes ahead to question the choice of being gay in an extremely dangerous society like Nigeria. This identity construction emphasizes their helplessness and inability to change their sexuality. The helplessness of members of the LGBT community in Nigeria is also emphasized with the illustration in tweet 29. Of course, no one has a say on being tall or short or on other genetic features as suggested by the tweet. The writer compares their sexuality to other natural features. The writer of the tweet goes further to appeal to the conscience of the readers, particularly the government and other homophobes, using the mental clause *think am o. think am o* is the pidgin English that contextually suggests being somewhat apologetic. The mental process appeals to the consciousness of the Nigerian public. He calls for a rethink on homophobia in Nigerians, which is vividly expressed through the hashtag.

5.1.5 We are not criminals

The disputation of criminal status became a focus for many sexual minorities since LGBT people are often represented as criminals even in newspapers' reports (Adegbola, 2021). The sexual minorities therefore in their tweets disclaim the criminal identity. Examples are found below:

TWT30: *Queer people* **do nothing wrong** *by existing and being themselves. CHIKO@Rainbow_Wxtch, Mar 22, 2021.*

TWT31: *Good Morning. Na gay we gay,* **we no kill person***. #RepealSSMPA #QueerNigerianLivesMatterJean @IAmTheLWord, Mar 22, 2021.*

TWT32: *How do rapists and queer people deserve the same treatment?*

The LGBT people try to vehemently disassociate themselves from crimes and criminals. They employ the strategies of claiming and disclaiming. *Na gay we gay* is a form of claiming sexual orientation while "*We no kill person*" is to disclaim the idea of comparing same-sex identified people to the criminals such as rapists and killers. The use of "*do nothing wrong*'" and *we no kill person* is to disclaim wrongdoing and the act of killing, reconstruct their ill-conceived identity by Nigerians and consequently project what they believe they are (*existing and being themselves,* and just being *gay)*. Tweet 33 expresses displeasure in strong terms about why they should not be compared with rapists.

5.1.6 We are afraid

Sexual minorities are also constructed as being afraid, given the ill-treatment they often receive from homophobes in Nigeria. This form of identity is indexed by the choice of the lexical item fear and other terms or phrases indicating that mental condition.

TWT33: *Once I went for a job interview, I was asked a question that* **left me frozen, my heart raced**. *"Are you queer?" "No" I said, I was poor & badly in need of a job. This is the reality of queer Nigerians,* **erasing & denying their identities** *to just survive Freddie@Freddieunicorn5, Mar 21, 2021.*

TWT34: I am a lesbian *and I am lending my voice to say #RepealSSMPA. I* **am tired** *of loving in* **fear, fear** *of being killed,* **fear** *of been harassed,* **fear** *of jungle justice. No Nigerian Is Better than Another Nigerian Airsplech @fierce_q, Mar 21, 2021.*

TWT35: *Ostracized by the entire Father side family. I* **have to watch** *how I interact with my Boyfriend in public. I* **have to hide** *any suggestive picture of us every time I'm stepping out cos of this stupid law. @preacherkot, Mar 12, 2020.*

Tweet 33 is the experience of a gay man who had to deny his sexual identity just to survive. *Left me frozen* and *my heart race* show the intensity of the fear he felt when he was asked if he was queer. The story as well as the choice of words emphasizes the unpleasant condition sexual minorities are often subjected to in Nigeria. This has made many of them remain in the closet, *erasing and denying their identities*. The discouraged attitude of a lesbian is reflected in tweet 34. She repeated the lexical item fear four times to also show the intensity of the condition of members of the LGBT community. Again, tweet35 shows the actions of many same-sex-identified people in Nigeria. These actions are foregrounded by the material processes *have to watch* and *have to hide,* suggesting that members of the community are scared of what might happen to them if found.

5.2 Discussion

The identity construction of sexual minorities as humans, using different linguistic strategies, is in a bid to agitate against the homophobic actions/reactions against them, particularly the killing and execution of LGBT people by governmental institutions and mob actions legitimized by governmental actions. For instance, on March 10, 2020, a video went viral showing how two men disguised to be gay men in Imo state, set up a gay man, and extorted and murdered him afterward. The video subsequently sparked outrage among LGBT persons and advocates online, trending the hashtag #EndHomophobiaInNigeria., especially since the government did not take any actions against the killers. More recently, in July 2022, a sharia court in Bauchi, Nigeria, sentenced three gay men to death by stoning for their gender identity. In light

of these governmental and extrajudicial killings of queer people in Nigeria, LGBT people in their Twitter posts emphasize that they are equally humans just as heterosexuals. Consequently, being human suggests that their fundamental human rights should be respected as others.

Again, the use of relational identification by LGBT folks, indexed by kinship terms, becomes necessary due to the inhumane treatment LGBT people often receive from the Nigerian public. Relational identification is a strategy to solicit empathy from the general public and to show cooperation among sexual minorities. This strategy emphasizes the role of empathy as an affective response or a cognitive response. Sluss and Ashforth [45] has proposed that high relational identification should correspond with more empathy, understanding, loyalty, cooperation, support, and altruism toward a partner, as well as greater in-role performance. Since kinship often enhances empathy, loyalty, cooperation, and support. This becomes a strategy for advocacy. Human cooperative behavior arises through the acquisition of a culturally grounded social identity that included the expectation of cooperation among kin. This identity is linked to basic survival instincts by emotions that are mentally experienced as culture-laden feelings. As a consequence, individuals are motivated to cooperate with those perceived culturally as kin. It helps LGBT individuals to engage and deepen ties with heterosexuals as well as the queer community and queer culture.

The representation of the LGBT people as a community could have a positive connotation, suggesting strength and cooperation. This form of identity suggests collective activism. The identity also construes the group as being powerful. However, the power has frequently been subdued by governmental agencies/policies and extrajudicial actions, which have made many same-sex identified people remain in the closet, as seen in tweets 14 and 15. A reference to the high percentage of LGBT people constituting a community in Nigeria is calling the attention of Nigerians to sexual minorities. It justifies their claim for freedom and acceptance, though there are no definite statistics for queer people especially since they are an unwanted specie in the Nigerian context.

Given the harsh condition queer people are subjected to in Nigeria, the construction of the LGBT community as fighters could be expected. The identity of the sexual minorities as fighters foregrounds their resilience in the quest for liberation from oppression and social acceptance. Hashtag activism is, however, one of the means to fight. Hashtag activism is the act of building up public support via social media for a cause. This social media tool helps to register people's participation in the virtual world to organize and coordinate social movements and mass protests, which has brought commendable changes in the real world. This study reveals how these hashtags create awareness of the agitations of the LGBT people, challenge mainstream narratives about sexual minorities, and extend public debates on same-sex sexualities. The hashtag activism might come and go, but the awareness and participation that it creates for several important issues are creditable.

Anger is one of the features of fights. Queer people often develop a deeper awareness of heterosexist oppression and may feel anger, distrust, disappointment, or rejection toward people who perpetuate oppression [1]. While anger is often treated as a "dirty" feeling or a pathology, queer anger holds the potential for a renewed politics of (self-) discomfort [46]. Many queer people do not shy away from internal annoyances and are not afraid of constantly discomforting themselves as is the case in TWT 26. Milani [47] calls this a form of radical rudeness, a resistance strategy of deliberate rudeness to disrupt normative structures.

Furthermore, the construction of their gender identities as an orientation rather than a preference is to show the helplessness of the sexual minorities in changing their identities. This suggests that LGBT people do not also have a say on their sexual orientation and opine that it is a misnomer for them to be treated cruelly the way they are being treated by the Nigerian government and other homophobes. LGBT people also continue to foreground the fact that they are not criminals like killers and rapists. Hence, there was no reason for their being hunted and chased around since they do not harm anyone. The logic drawn here is that LGBT people are not criminals like killers and rapists, their members should enjoy their Fundamental Human Rights. Regarding them as criminals, of course, would have a negative impact on their mental health. Again, in such a toxic environment like Nigeria, fear is inevitable, hence the construction of their identities as being afraid. Generally from the tweets, homophobia has been such a critical factor in the lives of LGBT persons who navigate life in Nigeria. Consequently, the construction of the "self" in the tweets is mainly for advocacy.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates the identities LGBT people in Nigeria construct for themselves in their tweets in the bid to resist the status quo, given the opportunity social media offers to marginalized groups such as the LGBT community. Different discourse and linguistic strategies were used to tactically foreground their identities contesting the identities portrayed in the mainstream media. The tweets present sexual minorities as humans who should enjoy their fundamental human rights like other humans, a community, suggesting cooperation numerical strength and power, resilient fighters, not criminals, fearful, and helpless in determining their sexual orientation. The tweets construct the identities of sexual minorities as normative as other sexualities. Generally, these identities are constructed to resist the existing ideological presuppositions that produce homophobia in the Nigerian context.

This study argues that queer visibilities may be strategically utilized as an attempt to liberate sexual minorities from societal structures and their norms. Social media presents an opportunity for the creation of community-based safe spaces, which may increase queer visibilities. However, attempts to create such visibilities may paradoxically result in situations of abuse, violence, human rights violations, discrimination, and stigma against LGBT communities [48]. This suggests that caution must be taken when utilizing queer safe spaces, especially in places that are characterized as heteronormative such as Nigeria [49].

One of the contributions of this study is that it addresses a missing element from the extant literature on the role of social media in the identity construction of the LGBT people as an organizational strategy to resist subsisting homophobia in Nigeria, via the use of certain discursive and linguistic strategies. Again, this article contributes to an understanding of some of the challenges that Nigerian sexual minorities encounter. Lastly, this study provides valuable insights into how Social Identity Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Systemic Functional Linguistics are valuable approaches to the study of identity.

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Chapter 3

Developing a Resilient Sexual and Gender Minority Identity Online: The Importance of Social Media for Youth before Coming out

Lika Brinkman and Ryanne Francot

Abstract

Sexual and Gender Minority Youth (SGMY) often undergo a period of identity concealment before first coming out, in which access to social and emotional support is limited. Simultaneously, SGMY are at risk for rejection and victimization because of this identity, requiring resilience. This study, therefore, focused on how social media can offer SGMY opportunities for the development of a resilient SGM-identity during this period of identity concealment. In-depth interviews were held with 12 Dutch SGMY, who had not yet come out, or had done this recently. Interviews were individually open coded, and then analyzed collectively, to identify commonalities and differences. Five themes emerged, capturing the online experiences contributing to a resilient SGM-identity: (1) realization of SGM-identity, (2) gathering information, (3) finding SGM-representation, (4) finding SGM-connections, and (5) social media as an SGM-positive bubble. The results showed that social media can serve as a bridge during the period of identity concealment, in which SGMY can rely on a supportive community online and develop a positive SGM-identity before coming out offline. These online experiences, which often transcend the borders of countries and jurisdictions, can further help SGMY cope with the risk of adversity offline, and with that promote a resilient SGM-identity.

Keywords: social media, sexual and gender minority youth, resilience, identity, self-concept clarity, self-esteem

1. Introduction

For Sexual and Gender Minority Youth (SGMY), navigating adolescence can be more difficult than for non-SGMY, as they need to incorporate norm-deviating sexual and/or gender identities in addition to typical identity formation, and might fear rejection and victimization because of this [1–4]. Disclosing their SGM-identity, 'coming out', can be seen as a key point in the identity development of these youth [5–7]. Although empirical data is scarce, it is believed that coming out goes together with an increase in psychological well-being [7].

The risk of negative comments, rejections and violence, however, complicates the process of identity disclosure [1, 4, 6, 8]. In the Netherlands, SGMY generally first realize their SGM-identity between the ages of 10 and 14 (40%), whereas the first time they generally disclose this part of their identity to someone else is between the ages of 18 and 24 (38%) [9]. The gap between realization and first coming out can be considered a period of identity concealment, in which access to social and emotional support is limited [4]. This has potential consequences for developing psychopathology, including the internalization of negative societal attitudes: internalized homo- and transphobia [4, 10]. Internalized homo-and transphobia goes together with feelings of shame and alienation, and consequently the possibility of depression and anxiety [1, 11, 12].

A recent publication of a national survey on the attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity in the Netherlands shows that the fear of rejection and violence related to SGM-identity is not unfounded [13]. The amount of people having negative views towards SGM-people is decreasing. The acceptance rate, however, has stagnated. Additionally, negative views increase regarding certain subjects, related to visible expressions of SGM-identities [13]. Moreover, gender minorities are viewed less positively than sexual minorities (60% and 76%, respectively). Although these numbers show a majority of positive beliefs, it also means that about three in ten people still have negative or neutral views towards SGM-people [13].

Additionally, the amount of praise the recently released Netflix TV-show Heartstopper has received, see [14], could indicate a lack of representation of SGM-people in traditional media (TV, movies, etc.). Research has shown the importance of having positive SGM-representation in media, as SGMY often grow up in a heteronormative society in which both implicitly, and explicitly, sexual and gender expectations are enforced on them, leaving them with feelings of incongruence with their SGM-identity [4, 15].

On social media, SGMY has found places in which they can find this representation [15]. Social media are online platforms on which users can generate content and interact with one another [16]. Common platforms among youth are Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube [17]. Although previous research has been right to highlight possible risks of social media, such as unwanted sexual behaviors and bullying [16, 18]. It also needs to be recognized that social media is intertwined with the daily lives of youth, thus making it interesting to study what attracts them to social media [18].

Social media usage is found to have numerous positive effects on the identity development of SGMY, such as escaping from stigma and violence offline, experiencing belonging, building confidence, feeling hope, and accessing events and information [3, 19–21]. With these online experiences, SGMY can find support during the period of identity concealment [5, 15, 17, 20, 22]. Finding support is found to positively contribute to SGMY's resilience [23]. Resilience can then enable SGMY to cope with minority stress, and even thrive despite it [23, 24]. Although resilience as a framework to study the positive development of SGMY is a relatively new area of research, there is a general understanding of how it works [25, 26]. The role social media might play in developing resilience, however, has received little attention [15, 23]. Additionally, SGM-identity development in the context of resilience has not been explored, although interesting insights might be gained from it. It is important to study the lives of SGMY beyond risk, as it gives an understanding of how SGMY develops positively, despite adversities [27]. The current study will therefore focus on the contribution of social media usage by SGMY to the development of a resilient SGM-identity.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 SGM-identity development

It is assumed that identity consists of two aspects: self-concept and self-esteem [16]. Self-concept entails the way we see ourselves. The extent to which this self-concept is clear and consistent across time reflects self-concept clarity [28]. The way we value this self-concept is called our self-esteem [16]. Both self-concept clarity and a positive self-esteem are developed in relation to the environment, in which peers play an important role for adolescents [16]. For this development, two communication skills are necessary: self-disclosure and self-presentation [29]. Self-disclosure can be understood as disclosing intimate aspects of the self with the goal of receiving information, feedback, and interaction [30]. Self-presentation entails selectively presenting the self to others [31]. By disclosing aspects of themselves, and presenting themselves in certain ways, adolescents practice with ideas of who they are, and retrieve social input to help deal with their thoughts [30, 31].

Since 1970, several models have been developed to capture SGM-identity development [32]. Early SGM-identity development models focused on stages SGM-people go through, such as Cass' [33] model: identity confusion; identity comparison; identity tolerance; identity acceptance; identity pride; identity synthesis [3, 32]. Such models, however, do not account for the diversity within the SGM-community, as they are generally based on white, gay, cisgender men. Additionally, they depict the development as a linear process, which does not represent the fluidity of identity development [7].

Alternative to stage models, D'Augelli's [34] life span approach arose [32]. In this approach, the social context has a central place, and the fluidity of identity is recognized. It therefore better represents adolescent identity development as a dynamic process that is never completed. Six identity processes are identified in this model, operating independently from each other and in no specific order: exiting heterosexuality; developing a personal LGB identity; developing an LGB social identity; becoming an LGB offspring; developing an LGB intimacy status; entering an LGB community [32]. Although this is a model for identity development of sexual minorities, it is shown to reflect the process of gender minorities as well [32]. Empirical research also underlines the importance of the social context for developing a positive SGM-identity, through belonging to a community, openness about their SGM-identity, social support, and having positive SGM-role models [35].

2.2 Social media influence on SGM-identity development

With the recognition of social media usage as an influence on the identity development of adolescents, social media needs to be considered in developmental theories for SGM-identity [3]. Previous models of SGM-identity development have depicted developmental milestones, such as feelings of being different and questioning one's identity, as happened before SGMY have come out, making them private processes [7]. Interaction with the environment, however, is found crucial for the development of self-concept clarity and a positive self-esteem [16]. Social media might offer possibilities for SGMY to interact with others like them and find belonging, before coming out in their offline social environment.

Anonymity, accessibility, and asynchronicity are most often mentioned as affordances of social media, when explaining the use of social media by SGMY for their identity development [3, 19, 21, 29]. These affordances give adolescents an enhanced

sense of control of what, and with whom, they share information, making them feel more secure and assured on social media than in offline situations [16]. Anonymity enables social media users to selectively share information about themselves, to avoid being discerned as a specific individual [29]. Accessibility entails the easy access to information and people, as there are no space and time limits online [16, 29]. Asynchronicity means that online communication is delayed, as it does not happen face-to-face, allowing time to think before communicating, to edit messages, or to delete messages afterward [22, 29].

The existing small research base on social media usage by SGMY and identity development shows an overall positive effect on their identity development, including self-concept clarity and self-esteem [3, 20–22, 29]. While for non-SGMY, these results are inconclusive [29]. This could be explained through the Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model proposes that three conditional variables related to the individual affect their media use and its effects [36]. The combination of the SGM-identity (dispositional variable), phase of identity development (developmental variable), and the lacking social environment regarding support (social variable), could explain the more positive effects of social media usage on identity development of SGMY, compared to non-SGMY in the early stages of this research field.

2.3 Developing a resilient SGM-identity

A recent development in research can be seen in the increased attention for resilience in SGMY [23, 37]. The Minority Strengths Model [38] is developed as an extension of Meyer's Minority Stress Model [39], highlighting the importance of resilience in helping SGMY navigate hostile social environments, and buffer the relationship between minority stressors [2, 24, 38]. Resilience is a dynamic process, as it involves interaction between risk and protective factors, and individual and environmental systems [23, 39, 40]. A distinction can be made between two manifestations of resilience: individual-based resilience and community-based resilience [23, 24]. Individual-based resilience consists of personal qualities and personality traits that a person may possess, making them more, or less, resilient. Community-based resilience also refers to an individual's ability to cope, adapt and thrive. The source of this ability, however, lies within identification with a social network, instead of being an individual quality [23, 24]. It is a sense of belonging to a community that may generate the ability to overcome adversities [24]. With that, community-based resilience is different from the protective factor of social support, as it does not necessarily revolve around direct support from others [24].

With the growing attention for resilience, studies have also tried to depict what contributes to resilience. The degree to which a person is resilient is dependent on the quality and quantity of the resources, and their availability and accessibility [40, 41]. Regarding individual-based resilience, several resources can be defined contributing to resilience: social and emotional support, connectedness, self-esteem, individuality, self-competence, and a sense of power [15, 24, 35, 38, 42]. Specifically, connections with other SGM-people are found to be crucial for the ability to cope with negativity [25, 38, 42]. Connecting with other SGM-people can also serve as a way to recharge, in order to navigate hostile social contexts [15, 43].

Furthermore, two types of resources contributing to community-based resilience can be distinguished: tangible and intangible [24]. The tangible resources show an

overlap with the resources for individual-resilience. These resources can be, among other things, access to SGM-community centers, hotlines, information, role models, and SGM-affirmative laws and policies [24]. Intangible resources refer to systems of belief [24, 41]. Specifically for SGM-people, this entails the internalization of the social values and norms derived from the SGM-community [24]. Indeed, identification with a minority community can provide a collective sense of meaning-making out of shared adversities, which can be empowering and provide the strength to face adversities [15, 37, 43, 44]. The overlap between individual- and community-based resilience is also shown in the Minority Strengths Model [38]. Additionally, this model shows a reciprocal influence between individual- and community-based resilience [38]. Social support and community consciousness are highlighted as positive influences on positive health behaviors and mental health, through identity pride, self-esteem, and individual-based resilience [38]. Additionally, community consciousness, feeling connected with the SGM-community, positively contributes to individual-based resilience, which can be seen as the process of community-based resilience [38].

The main focus in resilience studies in SGM-populations has been on individual-based resilience [23, 24, 42]. Several scholars argue, however, that we should step away from this focus as it can lead to an expectation of resilience in each individual, and consequently removing or reducing social responsibility to protect disadvantaged populations [24, 26, 45]. Obstacles may lie in the access and availability of community-based resilience for SGMY during the period of identity concealment, as this often goes together with a period of isolation from others [37, 44]. Social media, however, might offer earlier access to community-based resilience, due to its affordances.

An explorative study of media-based resilience activities by SGMY distinguished four activities that fostered resilience: coping through escapism, feeling stronger, fighting back, and finding community [15]. These online experiences accounted for a buffer of the effects of marginalization, including isolation and victimization [15]. It has already been established that social media can offer social environments in which SGMY have access to resources such as information and events, they can explore and experiment with their identity, they can engage in SGM-communities, and they can observe others' behaviors and experiences [20–22]. These resilience-fostering activities on social media show similarities with identity development activities on social media, as described previously. This gives reason to believe that similar online experiences can not only offer SGMY identity development experiences, but they can simultaneously also foster resilience. These similarities make it interesting to study the identity development of SGMY through a framework of resilience. Existing studies on SGMY and resilience, however, have not focused on this.

Attaining a stable identity is often spoken of in developmental research as a goal for adolescents. Clinging too rigidly to this view, however, overlooks the fact that identity is dynamic and can change over time and in different contexts [46]. Therefore, we propose the following preliminary 'resilient SGM-identity' definition, better-highlighting identity development as a dynamic process: the ability to maintain a positive SGM-identity, and find resources to do so, living in a society where that identity is seen as norm-deviating. It is hypothesized that the social context plays a central role in developing a resilient SGM-identity. This reasoning is based on the knowledge of interaction with the environment as crucial for developing self-concept clarity and self-esteem, and consequently a positive SGM-identity [16, 35].

3. This study

This study will focus on the possibilities offered by social media for SGMY in developing a resilient SGM-identity during the period of identity concealment. It is precisely in that period social media might offer opportunities that the offline environment does not. The knowledge gained on how SGMY experience social media during this period, might provide insights on how the offline environment of SGMY could better match their needs in identity development. The methodological design will be qualitative of nature, addressing a gap in research on resilience and SGMY, which is mainly quantitative of nature [23, 37]. Resilience will be operationalized as the following: the ability "to survive and thrive in the face of adversity" [24 p.50].

The concept of resilience can offer an interesting framework in understanding SGMY-identity development, given the difficulties SGMY might face in their identity development [3]. The overarching research question that follows from this is *how does social media usage by SGMY during the period of identity concealment contribute to the development of a resilient SGM-identity?* It is hypothesized that three affordances of social media, anonymity, asynchronicity and accessibility, offer opportunities for SGMY during the period of identity concealment to increase their self-concept clarity and self-esteem, resulting in a positive SGM-identity [3, 16, 20–22, 29, 35]. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that the development of a resilient SGM-identity will proceed as follows: through finding a supportive environment on social media, SGMY will be able to maintain that positive SGM-identity, while navigating their (hostile) offline environment through fostering individual-based resilience, and community-based resilience [15, 24, 35, 37, 38, 42–44].

4. Method

4.1 Methodological design

This study used semi-structured in-depth interviews, as it allowed participants to share their experiences in their own words. In total, 12 online interviews were held, in Dutch, and had a maximum duration of 50 minutes. The number of interviews was based on whether data saturation had been reached. A topic list was composed, based on the central theoretical concepts from the literature, which served as a common thread for the interviews to ensure consistency. The participants, however, led the conversation, as they are experts by experience. Therefore, not all interviews followed this exact order in discussing the topics.

4.2 Participants

Participants for this study (n = 12) were between 17 and 24 years old (M = 20.42, SD = 2.47). They identified with diverse gender and sexual identities, which are described further in **Table 1**. The extent to which the participants had come out to people in their offline environment ranged from one person close to them, to several friends, classmates, family members, and everyone. Educational level ranged from pre-university education (n = 2), to post-secondary vocational education (n = 1), university of applied sciences (n = 4), and university (n = 5). Ethnic background was

Participant number	Gender identity	Sexual identity	Age	Educational level
1	Cisgender woman	Pansexual	20	University of applied sciences
2	Cisgender woman	Pansexual	18	University of applied sciences
3	Cisgender woman	Lesbian	23	University
5	Cisgender woman	Attracted to women (prefers no label)	23	University of applied sciences
6	Cisgender woman	Demisexual	19	University
7	Cisgender woman	Bisexual	22	University
8	Cisgender woman	Queer	24	University of applied sciences
9	Gender fluid	Bisexual	18	University
10	Nonbinary	Queer	18	Pre-university education
12	Transgender boy	Bisexual & asexual	17	Pre-university education
13	Nonbinary	Lesbian	23	University
14	Cisgender woman	Attracted to women (unsure about label)	20	Post-secondary vocational education

Note. There is no participant number '4' and '11' because these participants withdrew their application after the participant numbers were established.

Table 1.
Demographic information of participants.

not taken into account. Participants used several social media platforms, and used social media in different ways. An overview of this can be found in **Table 2**.

The participants were selected on the following criteria: (1) they identify as SGMY, or are in the process of doing so, (2) they have not yet come out to people in their offline environment, or have done this within a maximum of 2 years ago, (3) they regularly use social media, and (4) they are between 16 and 24 years old. The criteria for regular use of social media were met when participants use social media a few times a week, or more. The decision for this age range was based on what is known about the ages of coming out and identity development. Additionally, 16 was chosen as the minimum age because parental consent for participation is not needed after this age, which is crucial considering the participants may not have come out to them yet. Furthermore, to anticipate difficulties in reaching a sufficient number of participants for the study, it was decided to include SGMY who have already come out, but within the last 2 years, to increase the range of the sample. These participants were asked in retrospect about their social media usage during their period of identity concealment.

Platforms used	x	%
Facebook	6	50
Instagram	12	100
Pinterest	1	8.33
Reddit	2	16.66
Snapchat	7	58.33
TikTok	5	41.66
Tumblr	2	16.66
Twitter	1	8.33
YouTube	6	50
Finding SGM-content on social media		
Through actively searching for it themselves	7	58.33
Through social media algorithm	6	50
Type of SGM-related accounts followed		
Famous SGM-people	6	50
Not-specified accounts found through social media algorithm	4	33.33
SGM-organizations	1	8.33
Not-specified	1	8.33

Note. x = The number of participants. % = The percentage from the total number of participants (n = 12).

Table 2.
Overview of social media usage.

4.3 Procedure

Participants were recruited in two ways. First, gender and sexuality alliances (GSAs) were contacted through Instagram, (response rate = 45%). Second, Dutch SGM-related Instagram accounts, such as Amsterdam Pride, were approached (response rate = 39%). To ensure the anonymity of those interested in participating in the study, all could apply directly through Instagram or e-mail, and did not have to apply through the institution. The selection criteria for participation were stated in the call for participation. Applicants for participation were further informed on the study through an information letter.

4.4 Reliability and validity

4.4.1 Reliability

Given the sensitive nature of this study, it was paramount that participants felt comfortable. Therefore, participants were offered the possibility to conduct the interview online (through MS Teams) or in person. All participants chose for an online interview. Thus, all interviews were held in similar settings, increasing the reliability. To further ensure a safe space during the interviews, the person who conducted the

interviews, chose to disclose her queer identity to the participants. They indicated that it made them feel safe to open up during the interview, giving reason to believe it predominantly benefited the reliability of the data. Additionally, all participants received the same information on this study, which further ensured reliability.

4.4.2 Validity

In selecting the GSAs that was reached, they were categorized by the province to achieve an even distribution of participants among the 12 provinces in the Netherlands. Furthermore, participants were selected based on sexual and gender identity and age. By doing so, a great diversity within the sample has been ensured to increase the external validity. Last, with the topic list for the interviews based on central concepts from the literature, internal validity was ensured. The interview started by collecting background information about the participant (e.g., age, education, home situation, and use of social media). The topic of SGM-identity was then broached by asking whether they had a clear idea of who they are, how they value their identity, how that came about, and if they had come out or not. In this context, the theoretical concepts of self-concept clarity and self-esteem were discussed. The interview continued on the topic of resilience, through questions about the attitudes towards SGM-identity in the participant's offline environment, how they deal with these attitudes, what their needs are in their identity development process, and how social media can fulfill these needs. The interview concluded with the identity development of the participants in relation to social media, focusing on whether, and how, the affordances of social media influence the behavior of the participant on social media, related to self-disclosure and self-presentation. After the first two interviews were held, the topic list was adjusted to better match the experiences of the participants. The topic of 'social media as a positive bubble' was added after this, under the section of social media usage in relation to identity development. With that, the internal validity of the measuring instrument was increased.

4.5 Ethical concerns

The Ethical Review Board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences of Utrecht University granted approval to carry out this study. Furthermore, after the applicant agreed to participate, and it was established they met all criteria, they gave written consent for participation in the study through an informed consent form. The participant could choose to withdraw at all times. The interview transcripts were anonymized, ensuring the privacy of the participants. Participants were also given the option to read the transcript, and propose alterations. Four participants made use of that option, and one proposed small alterations.

Moreover, due to the sensitive nature of this study, the focus of the interviews was on positive experiences of the participants. However, as a resilient SGM-identity revolves around dealing with a society in which that identity is seen as norm-deviating, topics revolving around negative experiences were inherent to the study. These topics were approached with caution, as the participants' comfort was prime concern. This was communicated to the participants prior to the interview in the information letter. Additionally, helpful resources for the participants were mentioned in the information letter as well.

4.6 Data analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were coded with the qualitative analysis software NVivo. The coding was done in three phases, following a structured approach for analyzing qualitative data [47]. In the open coding phase, text fragments were coded based on the theoretical conceptualizations that guide this research. Then, with axial coding, the coded data was organized into a code tree with main- and subcodes. Finally, during the selective coding phase patterns and connections were unveiled which resulted in a final code tree. The main codes correspond to the themes distinguished in the results. The code tree, therefore, provides the foundation of the result section.

5. Results

Participants articulated multiple ways in which social media shaped their SGM-identity development process. Five themes are distinguished on how social media shaped their SGM-identity development: (1) realization of SGM-identity, (2) gathering information, (3) finding SGM-representation, (4) finding SGM-connections, and (5) social media as an SGM-positive bubble. The themes often overlapped in timing and did not necessarily take place in this specific order. The relation between the themes and the development of a resilient SGM-identity will be explained in the discussion. In **Table 3**, the distribution of the codes for each theme is presented.

5.1 Realization of SGM-identity

All participants described that during their childhood they have always felt different in some way, but they could not easily define why. An important difference can be observed between the realization of sexual identity and gender identity. All participants with a sexual minority (SM) identity knew of the possibility of being non-heterosexual while growing up. But many (six) never thought they personally could be non-heterosexual because of internalized expectations of heteronormativity:

> It was just like, "oh you're a girl, so you will probably like a boy". So then it was like, okay, that probably will happen then. And then you go look for people to like, instead of liking people because you like them. (p.1)

On the contrary, all participants with a gender minority (GM) identity did not know of the possibility to be non-cisgender, as they experienced no representation of GM-identities in society and traditional media. Additionally, all participants with a GM-identity described how they first realized their SM-identity before realizing their GM-identity.

A difference can also be found in how participants first realized their SGM-identity. One-half of the participants realized their SM-identity through having a crush on someone they know, or through talking about love and sex with friends offline. While the other half, including all participants with a GM-identity, realized their SGM-identity through representation of SGM-people on social media: "never thought about there being option that indeed you do not have to like them [breasts] … And I think that started because of social media, that I saw that there were other options as well" (p.13).

Themes	x	%
Realization of SGM-identity	45	12.61
Gathering information	65	18.21
Finding SGM-representation	77	21.57
Finding SGM-connections	112	31.37
Social media as an SMG-positive bubble	58	16.25
Total	357	100

Note. x = The number of references. % = The percentage from the total number of references.

Table 3.
Distribution of themes.

When asked how they think their identity development would have proceeded without social media, five participants said they most likely would not have known of their SGM-identity without social media, leaving them with a feeling of being different but not knowing why. Furthermore, half of the participants believed that the process of defining their SGM-identity accelerated because of social media.

After the first realizations of a possible SGM-identity, all participants turned to social media to confirm their suspicions. However, for some participants this step was performed with great caution, as they did not want to confirm their suspicions: "well at first ... an 'am I Gay?'-quiz, because I was like, this is not happening, this is weird. And then I did not fill in those questions honestly, because the result had to be that I am straight" (p.12).

5.2 Gathering information

For all participants, social media offered access to information on SGM-topics, which was often not available in their offline environment (school, home, friends). The information gathered served multiple purposes. First, most participants (nine) searched for information on different SGM-identity labels and their meanings, to find words for their feelings. For those participants that did not identify with more commonly known SGM-identities (gay, lesbian, bisexual), social media especially opened up a world to them: "bisexual, well that is generally more known than pansexual. So, then I thought, yeah that must be it. But, then I found out the term pansexual and thought, maybe it's not bisexual" (p.2). Second, information helped four participants to feel understood and less alone, because it showed that others have similar feelings: "to feel understood, to feel seen, that you know there are more people like me" (p.13). Third, five participants used social media to find information on practicalities, such as how to have sex with someone of the same sex, petitions for SGM-rights, and support-lines for questions. Last, four participants used social media to educate themselves on SGM-identities different from their own, to better understand and support others within the SGM-community.

Gathering information through social media was not only necessary because of a lack thereof in the offline environment, it was also a comfortable method due to the anonymity online. Seven participants articulated that anonymity offered a way to look for information without needing to explain to anyone and feel judged for it. This enabled them to find clarity on their SGM-identity and become comfortable with it, before disclosing it to anyone:

That you can just quietly search without anyone looking over your shoulder … That you can find options for yourself, and just cross them out again, in a safe environment, if that's not quite what it is. That you can get information about yourself, and about the world, without anyone judging it. (p.10)

5.3 Finding SGM-representation

All participants used social media to find representation of SGM-people. Representation was found in multiple ways: SGM-organizations (e.g., Pride Amsterdam), famous SGM-people and accounts (e.g., Anne+), blogs, memes, and not-specified accounts of SGM-people found through the social media algorithm (e.g., for your page on TikTok). It was often mentioned that recognizability in the stories of others gave participants words for their feelings, as the information did as well: "experiences from people, or explanations about the different identities … And that's how I kind of ended up on pansexual myself" (p.9).

Many participants (seven), including all with a GM-identity, felt alone because they did not have that recognizability in their offline environments, due to few (openly) SGM-people in their offline environment. Finding representation online decreased participants feelings of loneliness, it made them feel safe, and part of a family. Two participants also mentioned that recognizability in small things, such as a rainbow flag, makes them feel belonging somewhere.

Furthermore, some participants also described how recognizability normalized their identity, which increased their self-acceptance: "I think that without the internet, if the queer community was not as active on the internet, that [self-acceptance] would be less" (p.8). Additionally, SGM-related memes and humor on social media were often mentioned (five) as content that helped normalize the identity of participants. Humor in conversation or memes made 'SGM' a less loaded topic, and part of a normal conversation, which was desired by many: "because they are joking about one thing or the other, I thought 'oh but this isn't bad at all', or 'this is okay'" (p.5).

The last theme that arose regarding representation was that seeing happy, confident, and proud SGM-people online encouraged six participants to feel the same about their own identity and increased their confidence: "it really helps to feel comfortable in it, to get energy from it. That I can just see that they are okay with it, and really happy about it, and I want that too" (p.10). Most of the participants (nine) could say that they are now proud of who they are. Some participants (four) specified that they are especially proud of the journey they have been on to accept their SGM-identity, albeit it not having been easy: "because it has not been the most simplest road, for certain aspects. So yeah, I am really proud of that, that I can just sit here and tell this story, but also share it with all my friends" (p.12). Furthermore, not only did it positively contribute to participants' self-esteem, seeing positive online representation also gave hope for their future: "I see that, and it makes me so happy, then it is like, maybe I can one day also be like that" (p.1). Being comfortable in their SGM-identity was also said by four participants to be a factor that made it possible to disclose their identity to people in their offline environment, and deal with the possibility of the risks involved.

5.4 Finding SGM-connections

The reason that participants turned to social media to find connections with other SGM-people, was because they experienced a lack thereof in their offline

environment. This made it difficult for them to talk about it at school or at home, making them feel alone, and as if they had to hide themselves: "it is who I am. And yet, it sometimes feels like that I cannot be that person, or cannot say what I want to say" (p.2).

The main method participants (eight) used to interact with other SGM-people was through the comments under posts. Participants contacted other SGM-people to ask questions, to share their experiences, or to get advice: "like how they found out that they were [SGM]" (p.14). The ease of interaction through social media was influenced by anonymity and asynchronicity. Anonymity made participants feel safe to be themselves because they would not be judged. It also allowed them to distance themselves from their story, making it feel safe to share personal information: "people are really helping you personally, and maybe tell you something personal as well. But you do not know who they are, so the combination of the personal and the anonymous, that makes it incredibly safe" (p.10). Those who mentioned asynchronicity (three), described that having time to think over their words and when, and whether, they will respond to someone, made them feel safe and in control.

Moreover, nine participants articulated that interacting with other SGM-people through social media made them feel validated in their identity: "getting confirmation that it is okay how you identify, or who you are attracted to, who you are as a person, and especially that everyone is so open minded" (p.7). In line with that, four participants said that they felt better understood by other SGM-people than non-SGM-people, because they have shared experiences. Because of this, participants felt no need to know how they identify, or to define themselves with a label: "I mean, imagine that you need to be put into a small box, and then realize that you can also be in a really big box, yeah that's just what freedom is" (p.10). Some participants (four) felt pressured by society to have this clearly defined, even though many participants (six) stated that they personally felt no need for that. In contrast, five participants did state that finding and using a label helped them getting clarity on who they are, and consequently accepting themselves: "you can just put yourself in a box and it is done. Because then you think, okay I belong somewhere and I can move on with my life" (p.3). After they had grown more confident, however, some participants also let go of that label because they felt more comfortable not defined in a certain box. In line with that, nine participants described that their SGM-identity has become the foundation of who they are: "it is for me personally very much something that I hold on to, and also something that I do like to express … But, it's not the only thing that makes me, me" (p.6).

5.5 Social media as an SGM-positive bubble

All participants stated that social media, no matter which platform used, felt like an SGM-positive bubble. They described it as a safe space where they could be their true selves, and escape for a moment the offline environment in which their true self is not always accepted:

> *That I just almost assume everyone uses the correct pronouns, and knows what being non-binary means, and goes all out for 'everyone is equal' and 'trans women are women too'… Every time I scroll through Instagram, I see stories from people I've started following. Then I think 'oh I want to fight for this too, and I also want to be open about who I am, and how I identify myself'. But then I think of the people who I will meet again tomorrow, and then I just know that I'm going to get a lot of questions, and also a lot of negativity, if I actually start being open about this. (p.13)*

Many participants (ten) experience some sort of vigilance when talking to people offline, as they always need to assess what they can and cannot say to someone. Having this safe haven online felt like a relief for most participants.

Being in this positive SGM-bubble has also made four participants feel part of the SGM-community without having to take part in events offline. Especially for those who lived in environments in which there were few SGM-people, those who were not out within their environment, and those who do not like going out and clubbing, social media offered access to this community feeling. Many participants (seven), however, described being part of the SGM-community as more of a self-identification than an active membership: "it is reassuring that it is there, and that just makes me happy, it fits" (p.6). Moreover, six participants also saw their identification with the SGM-community as a form of activism. Identification with this community meant for them that they want to show to the world what they stand for: open-mindedness, equality, and celebrating diversity. Many (seven) participants shared that they want to stand up against hatred, and educate people in their environment on SGM-topics, not only for themselves, but also for the SGM-community:

> *I always say something if someone makes a rude comment ... Because for me it feels like that that person knocks me down in some kind of way. Because, that person says something about something I am part of, and I just do not stand for that. I really want to show my confidence in that. And even if I do not say I'm pansexual at that moment, I think it is important that I do not let myself be talked down as part of a group ... I especially want to pass that on to my own family. (p.2)*

Two participants, however, also mentioned that sometimes it is important to "pick your battles" (p.9) for their own mental wellbeing.

Almost all participants (ten) stated that they have accepted their SGM-identity. Those who had not yet fully accepted their identity, did say that they were in the process of doing so. All participants attributed part of that self-acceptance to the positivity they found online. Some participants (three) also articulated that now they are comfortable with their SGM-identity, they gladly want to help other SGMY in their identity development process:

> *That you can let others know you are not alone, it is completely okay. You know, the feeling you had then, that you can just help other people, and make it clear that there is an entire group available for them ... And that you can show them that it is just a lot of fun. (p.5)*

Last, many participants (six) felt less of a need to escape to social media now that they had accepted their SGM-identity, shared this with their friends and family members offline, and had received positive reactions from them: "Now that I have a better friend group and a better support system in real life, I need it less" (p.8).

6. Discussion

The aim of this study was to uncover how social media usage by SGMY during the period of identity concealment can contribute to the development of a resilient SGM-identity. This study used the following definition for a resilient SGM-identity: the ability to maintain a positive SGM-identity, and find resources to do so, living

in a society where that identity is seen as norm-deviating. The empirical results showed that social media offers several possibilities for SGMY in developing a positive SGM-identity during the period of identity concealment. This study adds to the body of research on SGM-identity development through social media. This study also goes beyond it by bringing insights together with exploring SGM-identity development through a resilience framework. How the results relate to the development of a resilient SGM-identity will be discussed in this section, using the above definition as a guide. The discussion will end with practical implications, strengths and weaknesses of this study, and recommendations for future research.

6.1 Social media as a resource

Due to a lack of information, representation, and connections experienced offline, SGMY turn to social media to find labels, recognition, understanding, community, and to feel free instead of vigilant. Additionally, results show that through social media, SGMY can find places where they can be their true selves, before disclosing their SGM-identity to people in their offline environment. This finding shows that social media can offer identity development experiences during the period of identity concealment, as is shown in other studies as well [5, 15, 17, 20, 22]. Furthermore, this study offers new findings by showing that SGMY can develop a positive SGM-identity online before sharing this information with others offline. As online experiences are not necessarily reflected offline, a focus on social media usage by SGMY provides further support for D'Augelli's model [34] in which the fluidity of SGM-identity development is central. Furthermore, without social media, difficulties might be found in accessing to community—and with that community-based resilience—during the period of identity concealment, as it requires identification with a social network [44]. This study showed that with the bridging possibilities offered by social media, SGMY have access to community-based resilience before having to disclose their identity to people in their offline environment.

The possibility to have these experiences online is ensured by the social media affordance accessibility. The other affordances, anonymity and asynchronicity, provide safety and comfort in these online experiences. These findings build upon previous research [3, 19, 21, 22, 29]. With anonymity, SGMY can privately develop their SGM-identity and find support online, without a need for explanation or fear of judgment from people in their offline environment. This allows them to become comfortable with their identity, before having to share it with others, thus bridging the period of identity concealment. Asynchronicity can offer SGMY comfort in their online search as they are in control of with whom, what, and when they share information about themselves.

6.2 Developing a positive SGM-identity

Social media can promote a positive SGM-identity in several ways, reflected in an increase of SGM-identity acceptance, comfort, and pride. In the realization and confirmation of SGM-feelings feelings of being different and incongruence due to internalized expectations of hetero- and gender-normativity are diminished with information, representation, and connections found on social media. Additionally, the access to information on social media can accelerate the process of self-concept clarity for SGMY. Furthermore, the representation of diverse SGM-identities on social media can be considered vital for SGMY with less commonly known SGM-identities,

because knowledge and understanding of these identities are often more lacking in the offline environment. The above findings are in line with previous studies, showing the importance of information, representation, and connections for SGMY in developing self-concept clarity [15, 20, 35, 44].

Building upon findings from previous research on SGM-identity development through social media, it was found that information, representation, and connections can increase the self-esteem of SGMY through normalization and validation of SGM-identities, diminished feelings of loneliness, and increased feelings of pride and hope. This process reflects the increase of individual resilience [3, 17, 19–22]. Moreover, identifying with a label enables SGMY to become more secure in its identity. The SGM-identity can then be described as the foundation of who they are. This can eventually diminish the need to hold strictly onto that label, which can generate a freeing feeling. The influence of input through information, representation, and connections is supported by theories on developing self-concept clarity and positive self-esteem [16, 30, 31].

6.3 Coping with negativity in the offline environment

Social media can be defined as safe spaces for SGMY because they allow them to create their own SGM-positive bubble, by following accounts and finding content where diversity is celebrated. With that, SGMY can use social media as an escape to a supportive community online, in order to cope with negativity in the offline environment. Previous studies have also found support for using social media as an escape [15, 44]. Additionally, an increased positive SGM-identity was found to result in SGMY being able to cope with (the risk of) negativity in their offline environment. This was portrayed in SGMY wanting to share their SGM-identity with people in their offline environment, despite possible risks of negativity. Additionally, similar to the findings of Craig et al. [15], it was found that finding community on social media, relates to wanting to fight back for this community, by educating people in the offline environment. This reflects a way of SGMY navigating the society in which their identity is seen as norm-deviating, for which willpower was found through social media.

6.4 Practical implications

Two practical implications can be formulated. First, studying the opportunities of social media leads to insights into the needs of SGMY growing up in society today. Indeed, the importance of having information, representation and connections, and the experienced lack thereof in the offline environment, shows that changes in the offline environment are needed. This could be done by incorporating more inclusive sex education in primary and high schools, in which SGM-identities, and the fluidity thereof, are represented. Additionally, more schools should have explicit safe spaces for the SGM-community, such as GSAs, where they can find belonging. However, it is not only the duty of schools to create more inclusive environments for SGMY, this responsibility needs to be recognized society-wide, from a local to a national level.

Second, it is important to emphasize the opportunities it offers, as a risk-based discourse on social media in research and society leads to a misrepresentation of social media, and with that stigmatization of social media users, which is undesirable [18]. Especially when already stigmatized people use it as a means to attain a positive identity [17]. Although the offline environment should be better aligned with the developmental needs of SGMY, social media can simultaneously still offer them

opportunities that the offline environment cannot explained by the affordances of social media. Indeed, via social media, the SGM-community goes beyond the borders of cities and countries and introduces SGMY to community-based resilience and a supportive community worldwide.

6.5 Strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations for future research

This study has several strengths and weaknesses. To start, a diverse sample based on age, sexual-, and gender identity was included in this study. With that, voices of those that are otherwise often underrepresented in research [7], were heard in this study, including asexual, pansexual, unlabeled, non-binary, and transgender youth. No cisgender males with a sexual minority identity participated in this study. To be more representative of SGM-people as a group, it is important to include their perspectives as well. The intention of this study, however, was not to make generalizable conclusions but to increase understanding of developing a resilient SGM-identity through of social media.

Furthermore, no attention was paid to intersections between SGM-identities and non-SGM-identities, such as race, and class. These intersections, however, might offer interesting insights as these identities intersect to create unique experiences for each individual, based on institutional power structures [26]. Thus, intersectionality of identities should be paid attention to in future research by selecting participants based on the intersections of identities. Another recommendation is to undertake a comparison study between two age cohorts of SGMY, to see whether the influence of social media has changed over time. Indeed, many participants articulated that they see changes between themselves and their younger siblings, regarding information, representation, and connections available in the offline environment. While interesting for future research, it, even more importantly, gives hope for future generations to know that they will find understanding and community, and feel free to be themselves, both online and offline.

7. Conclusion

In this study, identity development of SGMY was studied through a framework of resilience. To do so, the term a 'resilient SGM-identity' was proposed: the ability to maintain a positive SGM-identity, and find resources to do so, living in a society where that identity is seen as norm-deviating. The aim of proposing this term was to better capture the dynamic nature of identity development. The results of this study show that this term indeed can be used to study the identity development of SGMY, given the obstacles they may experience due to society's persistent negative attitudes towards SGM-identities.

It was found that finding information, interaction, representation, and community on social media, helps SGMY develop self-concept clarity and positive self-esteem, resulting in a positive SGM-identity. Moreover, as a result of three affordances of social media, anonymity, asynchronicity and accessibility, this process can take place while SGMY have not yet come out to the people in their offline environment. This period of identity concealment is previously often characterized as a period of isolation, in which access to social and emotional support is limited, accompanied with the risk of developing psychopathology [4, 10]. Although it is not to be forgotten that parental and offline peer support and acceptance are important

for SGMY, with the help of social media the need for this might be delayed, allowing them time to come to peace with their SGM-identity. Furthermore, social media fostered individual- and community-based resilience, reflected in an increase of self-acceptance, identity pride, a sense of belonging and wanting to fight back for the SGM-community. These characteristics helped SGMY navigate their (hostile) offline environment, resulting in them wanting to be their authentic selves, despite the risk of adversity.

Overall, the online community on social media platforms can be identified as a crucial factor in the development of a resilient SGM-identity for SGMY. Being part of the online community can be seen as a feeling of belonging, a knowing that there are people who will support you unconditionally, rather than an active membership. The results showed that the online community played various roles in the lives of SGMY during different phases of their identity development process. During the formative phases of their identity, SGMY relies on the community for the confirmation and normalization of their feelings. Whereas later in time, they may feel the need to stand up for the community.

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Chapter 4

Decolonization of Gender and Sexuality: Exploring the Stories of Discrimination, Marginalisation, Resistance, and Resilience in the Communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra in Pakistan

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Abstract

This chapter draws attention on the different ways of colonisation, Islamisation and the decolonization of gender and sexuality amongst the transgender communities called Khawaja Sara and Hijra in contemporary Pakistan. The literature describes that during British colonialism the communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra have been regulated and they were declared criminals with Criminal Tribal Act and Section-377, that produced rigorous repercussion on the living life of trans folks in colonial, postcolonial and contemporary periods. They are now and then were discriminated, oppressed, and marginalised, but this was not the case in precolonial periods where their lives were considered honourable, and they were given respectable positions in the Mughal Harems and other princely palaces. To investigate the contemporary marginalisation and then the survival practices of Khawaja Sara and Hijra as decolonial practice, this chapter engages with 10 members from Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities in a face-to-face direct interview and 04 photovoice interviews in Peshawar city. The findings highlight that Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities has the capacity to resist against the colonised and Islamised policies and to advocate for their rights and to get their voices heard across in their communities. This process is named as the decolonization of gender and sexuality in contemporary Pakistan.

Keywords: Khawaja Sara, Hijra, Guru, Cheela, Dera, Islamisation, Marakh, Murata

1. Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion on to describe the colonisation and then the Islamisation of gender and sexual identities in contemporary Pakistan while taking case of Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities (globally called transgender people). They are the individuals who are born male, but they consider themselves other than

the identity that is given to them at their birth. Khawaja Sara and Hijra's are amongst distinct cultural and ancient communities in South Asia, and are predominantly found in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. At first glance, it may seem that Khawaja Sara and Hijra understand themselves as females because of their gender presentations, however, they have a much more complex and nuanced understanding towards their gender and sexual identities that often moves between and beyond the gender binary. The identities of the Khawaja Sara and Hijra are further informed or challenged by social, cultural, economic, religious, and political forces that both shape the gender and sexual identities in the different ways that Khawaja Sara and Hijra understand and render their identities problematic and subject to discourses of stigma and disgrace from their families and the wider community. This process means that the identities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra are multiple, complex, and ambiguous in contemporary Pakistan.

The identities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra in contemporary Pakistan are made complex because of the ways in which they are understood historically, culturally, and socially. So, Khawaja Sara and Hijra are often subject to negative positioning from wider Pakistani society and are negatively understood by general society as hermaphrodites, neither men nor women, or a third category of gender [1–3]. These understandings isolate them both socially and culturally in the communities where they live. However, the communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra do not identify and understand themselves in this way as this chapter attests. In this vein, the knowledge so far produced by academicians, researchers, advocacy networks and other allies' organisations have strongly declared that Hijra and Khawaja Sara are the most discriminated and marginalised people in contemporary Pakistan, but no developed thesis has been found on the self-narratives and self-understandings of Khawaja Sara and Hijra towards their gender identity and sexual orientation in contemporary Pakistan where they could discuss the colonisation and Islamisation of their gender and sexuality and their different ways of resistance and resilience that are informing decolonization of gender and sexuality in contemporary periods.

Therefore, this chapter draws attention to the findings of a research project conducted with the transgender communities in Peshawar city using face to face direction and a novice photovoice method that generated empirical and photographical data. Peshawar city is situated in the Northern region of Pakistan that has a blend of Pashtu culture which is largely rigid and gives high value to the local norms and religious Islamic teachings. The discussion in this chapter begins with a brief summary of how the gender and sexuality has been colonised and then Islamised respectively and what are the implications faced by members of Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities in Peshawar because of coloniality and Islamisation of gender and sexuality at time of British colonialism and now in postcolonial contemporary periods.

The chapter presents the self-narratives and personal stories of marginalisation, precarity, abuses and violence that are shared and discussed by members of Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities during the data collection process. Later in the chapter, the different ways of decolonization of gender and sexuality is discussed that are performed and practiced by the participants when they are living in their guru-cheela houses and away from their family members. Although the performance and the practices they do, put them in risky and threatful situation in their life but still they are doing them actively because activities like dancing, singing and sex work are their only ways of earning and also their decolonial strategy against the colonised and Islamised policies.

This chapter is divided in to three broad sections. First section starts with a debate on the colonialization and the Islamisation of gender and sexuality using the

already existing literature that is stretched from British colonialism in subcontinent to postcolonial Pakistan and then to the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq- a military dictator in Pakistan in the year 1978–1988. The second section examines the different ways of state institutions, civil society, allies' organisations, and the efforts of members from Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities to decolonise gender and sexuality and the way they legitimise their positionality in contemporary Pakistan. The last section of this chapter is very important because it first describes the precarious positionalities of Khawaja Sara and Hijras and then unpack the decolonialization of gender and sexuality with the description of resistance and resilience amongst the Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities in Peshawar against all forms of marginalisation, oppression, violence and hate crimes.

1.1 Colonisation and Islamisation of sexuality

Before discussing the decolonization of gender and sexuality of Khawaja Sara and Hijra, it is worth first briefly describing how gender and sexuality is colonised, misunderstood, and criminalised that made complexities in the identities of trans communities during British colonialism and then Islamised in postcolonial Pakistan that further declared them the untouchables and sinful communities [4]. My discussion in this section will seek answers of two questions: how and why colonial powers in subcontinent sought to regulate gender and sexuality? In exploring this question my focus will be to find ways that describe how colonialism was and still has an impact on the lives of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's and secondly, to unfold as how and why sexuality was considered an important subject in Hudood Ordinance 1970 in postcolonial Pakistan? My examination around this question will expose the different ways where postcolonialism has an impact on the gender and sexuality in Pakistan. This will be an essential step for two reasons because seeking answers for both the above questions will become a central premise, which will open a debate on the understanding of gender and sexuality in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the subcontinent, and then in postcolonial Pakistan. My discussion in this section will give an account of colonial discourse that legally represented Khawaja Sara and Hijra as obscene and indecent individuals. Therefore, to illustrate colonial gender and sexuality, I first specifically account Section-377, Criminal Tribal Act 1871 in colonial subcontinent and then draw my discussion to Zia's Zina Ordinance (1979) to postcolonial Pakistan.

1.2 Section-377: An anti-same sex regulation

In this section, I discuss the historical trajectory of Section-377 that became an anti-homosexual regulation for same sex relationship in the subcontinent [5]. My discussion in this section tries to answer that how and why the Britishers as colonial rulers were keen to legislate anti-homosexual laws and to govern sexuality [6]. Chaudhry [7] writes in his LLM[1] thesis that before the Britishers arrival into the subcontinent, Indians were ruled by different kingdoms where sexuality was governed through religious texts, poetry, culture, music and therefore these precolonial societies had no uniform laws to regulate same sex relationship between men and boys. Same sex relationships were the common pattern in Mughal periods because the noblemen used to have sex with Khawaja Sara and Hijra's and this was too considered an act of

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[1] LLM stands for Latin Legum Magister (Master of Laws).

masculinity in ancient Indian societies [8, 9]. Perhaps, the concept of sexuality was more fluid during precolonial periods than now and in the colonial time.

During British colonialism, they regulated the gender and sexuality in the sub-continent, where anti-homosexual laws like section-377 were introduced in the later part of 19th Century that criminalised the same-sex behaviours in British India [10]. British empire perceived the members of Khawaja Sar and Hijra communities as cisgender men, and they were considered habitual sodomite which criminalised their relationships, and they were therefore labelled as same sex professional individuals which later categorised as homosexuals [11, 12].

1.3 Criminal Tribal Act 1871

In this section I quickly describe CTA 1871 more in detail and also highlight how and why the gender and sexuality was governed and colonised within in the domain of CTA in the British colonialism. The term "Criminal Tribe" was introduced by the Britisher during their colonialism in India. Speaking broadly, Britisher law mak-ers included all those individuals and communities whom they want to govern and thereby they were described and declared criminals. To govern gender and sexuality in the subcontinent, Part II of the Criminal Tribal Act 1871 was developed specifically for Khawaja Sara and Hijra's to control, regulate and register them in the communities of criminals [13]. Therefore, under the CTA (1871) *Hijra's were introduced as eunuchs who were the male persons and admitted themselves or through medical grounds as an impotent individual* [14, 15]. This explains that those individuals who were involved in 'obscene performance' like singing, dancing in the streets, wearing female clothes, involved in kidnapping of minors and castration were liable to be registered as eunuchs [14, 16].

To control and regulate Khawaja Sara and Hijra's and to stop them from their labelled obscene behaviour, CTA was formulated and focused on the following three main areas,

1. Surveillance

2. Medical examination

3. Registration

Under the CTA 1871 Britishers imposed penalties like imprisonment for up to 2 years with fine if any Khawaja Sara and Hijra's was found in wearing women's clothes and jewellery in the public places and on the streets [15]. Along with this punishment many Hijra's and Khawaja Sara were deprived from their civil rights, and they were no longer in the position to transfer their assets and other properties to their descendants [17]. In this way, Khawaja Sara and Hijras were deprived from their choice to pass their stipends, properties, and other savings to their cheelas. This fur-ther effected these communities because majority of the Hijras and Khawaja Sara were living without their family member or another guardianship. In this way, most of the properties belonging to the Hijra were confiscated and disposed to the Government. These strict policies and malpractices not only enriched the administration's treasures upon taking hold on the properties of Khawaja Sara and Hijras but marginalised them in their daily life that is still prevailing in the contemporary periods. With the help of these policies the Britishers governed the gender and sexuality in the subcontinent

that ultimately oppressed the communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's who were once considered amongst the nobilities inside the Mughal Harems during the precolonial periods [18].

1.4 Hudood ordinance (1979)-An Islamised discourse

On the on onset of postcolonial period in Pakistan, many British regulations were brought forward to the newly independent country that did not stop the discrimination and oppression of gender minorities in Pakistan. With all this, General Zia-ul-Haq, a military dictator, enacted four different Ordinances in 1979 during his military takeover in Pakistan. These Ordinances were given the name of Hudood Ordinance collectively. Zia's Hudood Ordinance was promulgated to make some significance changes in the country's criminal law in order to develop an Islamised nation. Amongst the Ordinances, Zina[2] (Adultery) was declared an illegal practice and was considered a violation against the Quran and Islamic practices. Zina was further declared an illegal practice and a crime against the state. Any Person being found committing a Zina or have done it in the past was legalised of stoning to death [19].

In *Quran*, the punishment for Zina for un-married people is 100 lashes while for married individuals it is stoning to death [20]. As part of Islamisation, Zia's vision was based on the imposition of Sharia Law. Therefore, in major part of Hudood Ordinance priority was given to the implementation of punishments mentioned in the holy Quran and Sunna for illegal practices like Zina, Qazf (false accusation of Zina), consumption of alcohol, and involvement in stealing or robbery.

The above discussion highlights that General Zia ul-Haq with his political Islamic vision Islamised sexuality in postcolonial Pakistan. I argue that Zia Hudood ordinance in postcolonial Pakistan has followed the Britisher's actions against gender and sexual. Under the Hudood Ordinance 1979, strict punishments like life imprisonments and stoning were imposed that denied the rights of same sex attracted individuals in postcolonial Pakistan. Similarly, as discussed here and in chapter-3, Khawaja Sara and Hijra's were also categorised as homosexuals because of their relationships with cis-heterosexual men in contemporary Pakistan.

The historical trajectory discussed here means that the majority of religious leaders in contemporary Pakistan oppose the gender and sexual identities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's because of religious teachings, Islamic doctrines and the legacy of colonial rule. They further widely criticised the activities of trans communities both in their public and private sphere considering them immoral and against the teachings of Islam and also not abiding the local culture. In this way, many members of the Khawaja Sara and Hijra community remain an easy target of hate and violence in the societies where they are living.

1.5 Musharraf enlightened moderation policy (2003)- A liberal discourse

So far, in the previous sections I have discussed the Colonialization and Islamisation of gender and sexuality and its impact on the gender minorities in colonial and postcolonial periods. In this section, I will now discuss Musharraf's Policy of Enlightened Moderation (2003) which laid the foundation of modernity,

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[2] Zina was considered any physical sexual contact or action between male and female who are not bounded under the marriage. Thus, any sexual activity or sexual relationship out of the marriage was considered Zina in Hudood Ordinance

de-radicalization and decolonization of gender and sexuality in Pakistan. My main discussion in this section will be to first introduce General Pervez Musharraf as a military dictator and his differences with Zia-ul- Haq. Next, Musharraf's idea of Enlightened Moderation will be described in detail and at the end I will explain as how and why Musharraf Enlightened Moderation was important to the decoloniality of gender and sexuality in contemporary Pakistan.

General Pervez Musharraf, the last military dictator in Pakistan, imposed a military coup in 1999 and became the President of Pakistan. He held this position for more than 10 years and from 1999 to 2008. Unlike Zia-ul-Haq, who imposed misogynist and oppressive Islamisation policies which targeted women and sexual minorities that institutionalised legal and social discrimination, Musharraf was more open and broader minded, and, in this way, he introduced his policy of enlightened moderation in 2003 that focused on modernity, secularism, and liberal credentials [21]. Enlightened Moderation was an attempt to rebuild Muslim society in Pakistan with liberal concepts and to get rid of Islamic values and denounce the Islamic traditions that have an impact both in the media and at public gatherings.

On 1st June 2004 General Musharraf explains his Idea of Enlightened Moderation with an article in Washington Post.

> *Enlightened Moderation is an important approach, which I think is a win for all -- for both the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. It is a two-pronged strategy. The first part is for the Muslim world to shun militancy and extremism and adopt the path of socioeconomic uplift. The second is for the West, and the United States in particular, to seek to resolve all political disputes with justice and to aid in the socioeconomic betterment of the deprived Muslim world (Musharraf, 2004).*

The above statement illustrates two different situations. One is focused on militancy and extremism in the Muslim world, and the other is a suggestion that western communities end ongoing conflicts with Muslim nations. According to Musharraf, the Muslim world needed to adopt the modern pathways and liberal ideology to defeat extremism and militancy, while the west, especially the United States, was required to provide enough funds and other aids to devise strategies with their key allies' and to gain control on the unwanted extremism and militancy. Musharraf produced his idea of Enlightened Moderation right at the time when the war on terror and hostility between Islam and west were at their peak after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Therefore, addressing the 58th session of United Nations General Assembly in September 2003, General Pervez Musharraf, discussed the new form of threats and challenges to peace and security after 9/11 and the confrontation between the east and the west [22]. In this way, with his concept of enlightened moderation Musharraf had a vision of a progressive and modern society that not only de-radicalised the Islamised mindedness in Pakistan [23], but also in a way it became a trajectory towards decolonization.

Musharraf's Enlightened Moderation provided many opportunities especially to women in Pakistan that empowered them both legally, socially, economically, and politically. New laws were formulated, and many discriminatory laws were repealed during Musharraf's military regime in Pakistan [24]. Furthermore, both print and electronic media was made independent and many trans supportive performance were aired in different late night talk shows. Amongst the policy enactment for the empowerment of women, an honour killing bill was introduced that later became a criminal law in 2004. Under this bill, honour killing was declared a criminal offence and a punishable act in the court of law (Modaik, 2005). Similarly, women protection

act-2006 was introduced that provided security and protection to women in the workplace. This policy was enacted against the workplace harassment of women in Pakistan [25] and lastly the Presidential Ordinance (2006) "the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Ordinance, 2006" allowed every kind of bail to women except their charges in terrorism and murder. Musharraf's regime was considered an important period for women empowerment because it also made reforms in Hudood Ordinance of 1979. The Government appointed 3 commissions that recommended reforms in the Hudood Ordinance in 2006 [26].

At the same time, many Khawaja Sara and Hijra's were appointed as tax collector[3] in the government department [27] and many others have got their roles in different video documentaries in Pakistan. A famous LGBT documentary "Transgender; Pakistan open secret[4]" explained the real-life stories of many Khawaja Sara and Hijra's in Pakistan and also described their lifelong problem that they were facing in their daily life. These problems were in major to discuss the socio-cultural, economic, and political life of transgender communities in Pakistan.

Musharraf's regime was very important because it laid the foundation of a liberal Islamic state that further opened different ways for the decolonization of gender and sexuality in Pakistan. Because with secular and liberal approach, Musharraf formulated many policies and also made reforms in Hudood Ordinance that promoted gender equality and women empowerment in Pakistan. At the same time electronic media were less censored which allow different trans character tv shows, video documentaries that never happened before in Pakistan. These tv shows and video documentaries were the initial tactics by the government via a liberal discourse to moralise the identities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's in the strict, Islamised, and patriarchal cultural environment of Pakistan.

1.6 Aurat March in contemporary Pakistan- A secular right based discourse towards decolonization of gender and sexuality

Since 2018, a new right based feminist discourse of Aurat March (Women March) is emerged with a slogan Mera Jisam Mere Marzi (My body My Choice) which has got a meteoric rise in contemporary Pakistan. This event is organised on International Women's Day (8th March), Pakistani feminists gather in large numbers across the different cities against patriarchy and demand for women rights and gender equality. The Auat march is inspired from a global #MeToo movement [28]. The sole objective of the Aurat march is to advocate for the rights of women and ensure gender equality in Pakistan, but many of the clergies argue against the 'new' feminist moment and view it as the imposition of western debauchery in Pakistan. In this context not much has been written so far in academia but some chunks of information have been produced in the media talk shows and local newspapers that is largely against this movement.

My discussion in this section has two important points. First, it will explain, how gender and sexuality is decolonizing in the context of Aurat march in contemporary Pakistan and secondly, how Aurat march will become a very important game changer for Khawaja Sara and Hijra's as part of the women's movement. Therefore, when I say

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[3] Guardian story on Hijras as tax collectors in Pakistan https: //www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/08/pakistan-hijra-transgender-tax-collectors

[4] Transgender: Pakistan open secret https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-Iji_JmnkM

woman or Aurat, I consider all those who self-identify as a woman, irrespective of their assigned sex at birth.

Najeeb [29] writes that Aurat March in Pakistan is a trajectory to advocate for the rights of women because women rights are already declared and recognised by religion, society, culture, and constitution. So, struggling for to achieve these rights is not challenging religion. Similarly, Siddiqui [30] writes in Tribune about the facts of Aurat March in Pakistan. The writer emphasises that although the Aurat March is an advocacy movement to empower women in their decision making and their choices, but certain clergies and right-wing columnist and commentators have not only condemned it in the past but also claimed that it is an un-Islamic act and they further demanded to charge the organisers under blasphemy-which carries the penalty of death in Pakistan. The provincial government of Khyber Pukhtunkhawa passed legislation and demanded an inquiry to investigate the possibility of a foreign agenda that is supporting the Aurat march in Pakistan [31]. In this way, majority of the feminists' organisers have received intense backlash and even death and rape threats since the inception of this movement in Pakistan [32].

This shows the difficult circumstance for women and other key allies to discuss women or gender issues in Pakistan. When a women's jisam (bodies) are discussed openly, it is considered negative, and implies sexualised intentions. Therefore, it is hard in a religio-cultural patriarchal country like Pakistan to discuss or talk openly about choices and jism (body). Additionally, the dominance of men in Pakistan's patriarchal society has created an over-whelming mindset that instead of holding the perpetrators accountable in major cases like rape, enforced marriages, and honour killing, the victims are blamed (Nafees, 2020). A local newspaper shows the following statistics where 97% of men has committed crimes against the women,

> During last three years, nearly 3794 persons became victims of social crimes in the country that included violence like enmity (572 killed, 214 injured), honour killing (512 & 28), domestic violence (320 and 91), sexual violence (90 and 282), petty dispute (220 and 71), property dispute (181 and 83), child abuse (101 and 75), matrimonial dispute (100 and 32), and many other crimes left 188 dead and 155 injured. If we look at the gender of the perpetrators who committed these crimes, we find only 122 females out of 3794 perpetrators – nearly 3% of these crimes were committed by females against 97% male perpetrators (Nayadur, 2020).

Although, the environment is very tough for the Aurat March in Pakistan because of the male dominant society where patriarchy is deeply embedded, but still every year the supporters of Aurat March are growing in numbers, and they are largely advocating for the rights of women or feminism in Pakistan. I demonstrate that patriarchal societies speak for male dominancy and introduce a male dominant culture that produce ways to (neo) colonisation. This practice gives authority to men and declare them supreme gender in the society. In this way, the patriarchy becomes an agency in provision of power and authority to male gender in contemporary periods, but decolonization is also a reality that goes hand on hand and in against with the (neo) colonial practices in contemporary periods. Decolonization not only speaks against the power and authority but also perform advocacy for women rights and feminism. In this way, colonial forms of power and authorities do not remain persistent and contentiously changing with respect to the time.

1.7 Methodology

The qualitative data that is presented in this chapter is collected in Peshawar which is an urban space of the province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. This research project is approved by Human Resource Ethics Committee (HREC), a committee responsible to analyse and evaluate all methods and methodologies under informed ethical standards. During the data collection in-depth and photo-elicitation interviews were conducted with ten members of Guru-Cheela communities (18 years and above) and 04 photovoice interviews within the guru-cheela communities. Participants include gurus and cheelas who resided in their Deras. They were asked open ended questions regarding their early childhood life in their parental houses, their acceptance into their family and community, and how their parents responded to their gender and sexual identity. All the participants belong to a diverse group with different socio-economic, gender and sexuality status and majority of them have a rural family background, but at the time of interview, they migrated to Peshawar to find security, anonymity, and earning opportunities. The exit population of trans communities is not known but some of the Government and non-government level statistics are available, but they are not authentic or fail to provide the exact population of transgender communities in Pakistan. Amongst these statistics the census conducted in Pakistan in 2017 have of reported that there are 10,418 Khawaja Sara individuals in Pakistan, but this figure was widely criticised by the national level organisation with a question as how in a population of 208 million will only be this least numbering of trans individuals.

The process of data collection was scheduled and completed in the months between May–September 2020, when the Government of Pakistan announced relaxation in the COVID-19 pandemic, public health lockdown restrictions. All the interviews were face-to-face and recorded through an audio recorder after obtaining consent from the participants. On completion of the face to face in depth and photo-elicitation interviews, the interviews were carefully translated and transcribed and properly analysed with thematic analysis using computer-based software i.e., NVIVO.

2. Decolonizing the gender of Khawaja Sara and Hijra in contemporary Pakistan

The previous sections of this chapter have first highlighted the coloniality and Islamisation and then the different ways of decolonization of gender and sexuality through the policies, ordinances, moderation, and advocacy movements in colonial subcontinent, postcolonial and cotemporary Pakistan. This demonstrate that the colonised and postcolonial practice that Colonised and Islamised the gender and sexuality are now turning around in contemporary periods and soon they will be revisited in future. In this section, my focus will be to investigate the living lives of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's in contemporary Pakistan and to make an analysis of their frequent marginality, discrimination, and oppression as an impact of British colonialism and Zia's Islamism because the human history during colonialism is embarked with discrimination and oppressions.

Taking into account the mainstream intolerance and the non-acceptability of Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities, is not only problem in South Asia but the LGBTIQ communities across the globe are facing the brunt of in-justice, violence, oppression, and discrimination because of the colonial rule's legacy in the past.

However, identity politics of LGBTIQ communities is turning the prevalent situation and its continuous circulation it is becoming into mainstream of acceptance in western culture and so as in South Asian countries like Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh where certain policy enactments have given voice to the communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's in contemporary periods. Therefore, through decolonization an organised contentious effort is underway to repeal colonial enactments policies and other legislation. In this vein, decolonization of gender is an important step in making of equitable and just society and to reclaim our culture and identity that have been taken from us through Victorian moralities.

2.1 Contemporary discrimination of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's and their resilience as decolonial strategies in Peshawar

Discrimination and oppression are the similar concepts that go hand on hand within the living life of transgenders or Khawaja Sara and Hijras. These are not the new concepts but thoroughly discussed in the literature by researchers, academicians, and development practitioners. In this subsection, I discuss the contemporary ways of discrimination that the Khawaja Sara and Hijra's face in their early age and their daily routine life and then describe the support that participants get from gurus in their guru-cheela houses as their survival strategy where they show their resilience and resistance to the colonialist and Islamised policies in Peshawar. I argue that Pushtun culture is largely based on heteronormative and patriarchal principles which bring problems like discrimination, criminalization, homelessness, and poverty for transgender or Khawaja Sara and Hijras. This culture is largely inspired from different colonial policies and Islamised practices that makes the living life difficult for people with diverse gender and sexual identities. Therefore, this sub-section describes the different stories of violence, marginalisation, and oppression that participants have faced in their daily routine life. Discussing the contemporary discrimination of Khawaja Sara and Hijra will give the reader an idea that how these communities are under effect for so long.

During the in-depth interviews, Nargas, a guru in her thirties replied that,

> *Yes! I faced a lot of discrimination in my life. It started when I was very young. I never know the term Khawaja Sara and Hijra and never know the meaning of it, but I came to know about them from my family. My family never appreciated my behaviour and always came hard on me with their harsh attitude and negative response which was unbearable for me at my younger age. My family used to call me Hijra because the term is used when people laugh at us or hate us on our behaviour. I did not get proper schooling and I left my studies at my very early grades. Teachers and my friends used to pass comments on me inside the school classroom and outside (Nargas IDI).*

Nargas's discussion is important at this point of time because she explains the relationship of discrimination that are entranced in transgender identities in Pakistan. She describes that in the early days of transgender person the terms like Hijras and Khawaja Sara are new for them because individuals with transgender characteristics do not know the exact meaning and definition of these terms. But as participants growing up in their families, they then know that these terms are the labels of structural discrimination set forth by the cisgender people against them in the societies. Therefore, the term Hijra becomes an attribute of a person who is effeminate, whimsical, girlish, and sometime sexually passive [33]. Similarly, Jami, [34] writes the physicality of a Hijra person. Her writing explains that Khawaja Sara and Hijras are not only physically

discriminated and oppressed but they are described with extreme writing in literature. The following quote is taken in original from Jamis [34] writings and to show the level of presentation of this community in the literature.

> *Large and ugly looking person, with big hands and feet, wearing high tone colours and makeup (beard is noticeable), emphasis on certain body parts (breasts, hips etc.), exaggerated movements and non-verbal gestures including clapping, cracking obscene jokes, vulgar in talk and gestures etc (2005, p.4).*

The studies of Aurat Foundation [35] and Alizai et al. [36] explain the discrimination of Hijra communities in Pakistan that deny them basic human rights. Similarly, the studies of [33, 37, 38] describe that discrimination of hijra's is a general practice and is deeply rooted in Pakistan. Jami [34] further writes that hijra's in Pakistan are discriminated against and they are denied from getting quality education, health services, and availing employment opportunities.

Similarly, when Raveena a senior guru was asked regarding the discrimination and oppression,

> *Yes, I experienced a lot of discrimination from my father and brother when I was young for being a Khawaja Sara or Hijra. My father did not enrol me in high school like my other brothers. He warned me repeatedly that if you behave like this you will not go outside because if other people see you, then they will laugh at us, and we will lose our honour and respect in our community. I left home when I realised they my family will never accept me in my trans identity. Leaving home was my coping strategy, because I thought that this will be a right decision for me and for my survival in the society. Therefore, I left home and joined the guru cheela houses (Raveena, IDI).*

Raveena is of the view that discrimination is lifelong. She describes that we all perform gender diverse roles that is based on our gender and identity. These gender diverse roles are usually considered as stigma and shame for the families of transgender people that subject them to regular social discrimination and Isolation [39]. Young Khawaja Sara and Hijra's leave their homes because of the rigid behaviour that they face from their family members. Here, Raveena considers leaving home as a coping or survival strategy in Peshawar. Because many of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's have find their personal validation and also an opportunity to assimilate in the Hijra identity and become a member of the Khawaja Sara and Hijra community [39]. Therefore, in order to survive against the familial discrimination and show their resilience, participants find their identities as they understand when they join the guru-cheela houses.

Shanza, a cheela in her twenties replied that,

> *Yes, my life is full of discrimination, and I have a lot of stories of my discrimination to tell. "Mong ho che pa ha bad poha sho no da kor na ra sara discrimination start she" (Direct Pashto Quote) We are not fully matured yet, and our family members start discriminating us. (English translation). This discrimination is not only limited to family but when I was in my school age, my friends used to call me Reema (A film actress in Pakistan) in school. I think they were using this name as an abuse and to discriminate me that I am not like them, or they are not like me.*

Shanza discussion further express the process of discrimination in the life of transgender person. Awan [39] writes that discrimination is so deeply rooted in the

living life of Khawaja Sara and Hijra that many of the members try to avoid visiting public places like markets, banks, hospital and even mosque, which is a place of worship, because participants feel that they may be physically harmed and mentally abused. Shanza also discusses that in her early school days, other fellows in the class used to discriminate her by calling with bad names. The participant further discusses her helplessness for her frequent marginalisation that she faced both in the family and so as in the school. Therefore, in response to this discrimination, Shanza questions herself because this produced lots of stress and tension for her and as a result she discontinued her educational pursuit.

All the above stories of participants describe the power and male dominant culture in *Pashtun* families and so as in the societies in Peshawar city. This explains that how Khawaja Sara and Hijra's are discriminated and denied from their rights in their earlier part of life now and then from colonial time in subcontinent. During the course of this study more than 10 Khawaja Sara and Hijras in Peshawar were physically abused and brutally killed by their intimate partners or by their family members. This describes that because of patriarchal environment, and cisheteronormative culture, many of the participants get little support to address or to speak against the violence and marginalisation they experience. Participant's responses show that family members were not willing to accept them, therefore they dropped out from schools either by themselves or by their family members. They also faced ridicule and humiliation from their parents and other members of their families. Awan (2018) discussed in his PhD thesis on Hijra in Punjab and the data that I have collected in this project in Khyber Pukhtunkhawa, explains that all Khawaja Sara and Hijra's face different kinds of discrimination in their early childhood that include their maltreatment in families, humiliating behaviour in the communities where they live, and the abusive attitude and harassment in their educational institutions from teachers when they were in their primary grades.

The streams of discrimination in the lives of Khawaja Sara and Hijras do not end in youth but continue in later parts of life and therefore affect them in their professional workplaces. This was evident in the story of Alishba who discussed in the following way,

> *I experienced a lot of discrimination for being a Khawaja Sara, but this was not limited to my earlier part of life. When I did my master's in economics and got a job in a reputable company, I came to know that the senior management had a bad eye on me. One day my manager insisted for sex that I refused. My refusal made me fired from my job. This is how a cis-gender men treat or behave with us and discriminate us (Alishba IDI).*

Similarly, Nayela a guru talks about discrimination in their daily life when they go out for shopping to the local market,

> *Discrimination of Khawaja Sara and Hijra is a routine day happening. Therefore, we most often try to pass our time inside our houses or rooms. But, if by chance we ever visit a market for shopping or buying groceries. The general community that includes pedestrians, shopkeepers, drivers, conductors etc try to harass us by calling us different names and putting obscene words on our identity (Nayela, IDI).*

Mehbooba shared her story of discrimination once she went with her sister for medical treatment to a local hospital in Peshawar city,

> *We experience a lot of discrimination in our life for being a Khawaja Sara or Hijra.*
> *As I said earlier, we do not receive proper health facilities in hospitals. Once I went to*
> *hospital with my sister and the staff there was not serious to provide us proper medical*
> *service. They were looking for us, surprisingly. We thought that might be we are not*
> *human or like aliens. After an hour of running around in the hospital from one ward*
> *to another, I threatened the doctors that if they did not provide us the proper services,*
> *then I will make their video and will put it on social media pages (Mehbooba, IDI).*

Participants quotes explain the different dimensions of discrimination that they face in their daily lives and routines. The data shows that discrimination is a lifelong process for the participants. It starts from their early childhood within their parental families. Participants discussed in the earlier chapters that they leave their parental houses because of the negative behaviour and the discrimination that the faced in their life. It means that participants leave their houses with the hope that they will be free from any discrimination when they join the guru-cheela houses. This was very disappointing for Nayela as she discussed that people in the wider communities consider them a symbol of fun because when they see any Khawaja Sara or Hijra individual in the market or any public place, they start laughing at them and even tease them with bad names and sensual gestures like "pa so ba oky ma sara, so darkam che oko (Pashto Quote) how much you will take for one time sex (English translation). So, this demonstrates that not only the Khawaja Sara and Hijra's are responsible for sex working but they are also compelled by many cisgenders' heterosexual men towards sex work.

Nayela further added that people around us always try to degrade them for our gender and sexual identities. This was also discussed by Alishba as she was an educated member of the community and having a good job in a reputable company, but still she was discriminated and abused many times like the other member of Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities. Alishba shared her story that her senior in the office asked for sex many times because I was helpless and looks like women/girl, and when she refused the demands of senior, she was fired from her position. Lastly, Mehbooba shared her story of the discriminative attitude of service providers when she and her friend was in the need of emergency relief services in the local hospital in Peshawar. They booth were ignored and even ridiculed by the concerned staff in the hospital and no emergency support were provided well on time. Considering the different stories, I assume that discrimination, oppression, and physical abuse is an inclusive practice against the members of Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities in Peshawar city. These inclusive practices are because of the deep-rooted Islamised teachings and patriarchal culture. This was also found in the study of [40] because they described that sexual minorities are largely discriminated because of religious ideologies. Similarly, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are facing a negative attitude of people globally and they are considered sinful people in the context of religious fundamentalism [41, 42].

Therefore, I demonstrate that colonial laws and Islamic ideologies are so entrenched in the local socio- cultural practices in Peshawar that do not allow Khawaja Sara and Hijra to perform their identities in a way as they understand and therefore, this is the reason that they all are frequently discriminated by their parents, family members, and other different groups in their wider communities. The data discussed above explains the same situation because all participants in the study have faced discrimination from their family members and others around them because

they believe that Khawaja Sara and Hijra's are committing crime that is not allowed by law and performing sin because their performance are not prohibited in Islamic teachings. These discriminatory practices are the series of colonial regulations and the Islamisation almost decades ago but still they are facing the brunt of it even in contemporary periods.

When members of Khawaja Sara and Hijra are forced to leave their parental houses, they then join the guru-cheela communities. Awan [39] declares this an entry for Hijra into a new world where they utilise their modes of resilience and resistance against the hegemonic policies and negative mind set. This is very important phase for Khawaja Sara and Hijra's because joining the guru-cheela houses is like a rebirth for participants, because they get new name, and they get a new form of life. They get chances and choices to easily perform their gender and sexuality without any restrictions, and they are also fully supported and well protected by their guru's and other members of their communities. I demonstrate that guru-cheela partnership of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's is a mean to decolonize gender, because with the support of these partnerships/relationships they can easily perform their gender in a way as they understand. Additionally, the migration of participants to change their place and relocate themselves when they find themselves in trouble or in risky situation gives them support to stand firmly against all forms of discrimination when they are in their guru-cheela relationship.

The following responses from participants describe that when participants leave their families, they immediately join the guru-cheela houses in Peshawar city, which is not only welcoming to them but also give them full support. This was discussed by Azeema,

> *When I left my family house, I came to the guru-cheela houses with the help of my friend. I was very worried at that time, as I had no money and no house to live. I am thankful to my guru because she extended her every possible help in my support. I survived till this point of time with the help of my guru. "Za ho deer pareeshana oma kala che ma koor pre hodoo. Ma v oss ba sa k (Direct Pashto Quote) I was very worried when I left my home. I thought what I will do now (English translation) (Azeema, IDI).*

Mehbooba shared that there are two different circumstances in the life of a Khawaja Sara and Hijra. One is their family life, and the other is their life inside the guru-cheela house. These two circumstances are opposite in nature.

> *We have two different situations in our life. On one side, we are totally ignored by our family members. They do not support us and even they do not accept us on our death. But on the other side we are fully supported in our guru-cheela houses. We immediately reach to the location when we are informed that any member from our communities is in trouble and needs our help. I am thankful to my guru because she supported me a lot in my life. I have no contact with my family member since I joined this community, but my guru is the only person who is everything for me (Mehbooba, IDI).*

Similarly, Chutti a novice cheela has responded that she has got love and affection from her guru, like her own mother,

> *My guru treats me like her daughter, and I consider her my mother. In this picture-4 I am standing with my Guru. The picture depicts that I am like her daughter, and she is*

> *like my real mother. My guru always supports with me when I am in trouble. "Che kala*
> *yao sari koor predee awo yawazi she no biya hagha ta support zarorat v" (Direct Pashto*
> *Quote) Whenever individuals like us leave their families, then they need a support which*
> *we get from our guru-cheela relationship (English Translation) (Chutti, PVI).*

The above different narratives points to the different ways in which a newly entered Khawaja Sara and Hijra into guru-cheela houses, are supported and protected by her guru in Peshawar city. Individuals with trans characteristics have two set of families i.e., family of origin as her biological family and family of his choice as her logical family. Graham et al. [43] discuss that family of choice is very important for transgender people because it provides them emotional, physiological, physical, and material support. Therefore, family of choice becomes important because of its support while biological families remain detrimental for many transgender individuals [44]. This was also found out in the data that many biological families of participants do not keep their contacts with their children, but the data shows that they (families) are happy when their children leave them for ever. At the start, majority of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's become isolated, and they feel alone but when they join their guru-cheela houses. Then their gurus take the responsibility of their cheelas by providing them food, shelter, water, and decision of their earnings. Therefore, doing favours in shape of taking responsibility and providing means of earnings the newly entered members feel protected and they also get a chance to live with ease. In addition, guru-cheela communities also provide opportunities to both guru's and cheela's to advocate for their rights and also enable them a to speak against all the ongoing negative social and societal practices against them in contemporary Pakistan.

In western scholarship the relationship of transgender people to community is recognised within by term "family of choice". Wilson [45] describes that families developed on the basis of choice, are very enticing for transgender people than their biological families. These queer families have strong kinship bonds and, in this way, individuals who are bonded by choice support one another. The study of Galupo et al. [46] describes that chosen families share a common interest of belonging, comfort, and they have the knowledge of their issues, therefore, they all extend their support from shared resources. This was also common in the guru-cheela relationship of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's families in Peshawar city, where Khawaja Sara and Hijra's that they along with their gurus' and other members always support their friends who were in need of help. Thus, queer families in the west and guru-cheela houses in the non-western culture have much value and a huge importance in the lives of people with trans characteristics, because their families (choice) provide them support, security, and protection where their biological families fail to do so.

2.2 Social activism and enactment policy of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's in Pakistan

This section discusses the social activism and the enactment policy that are formulated for Khawaja Sara and Hijras in contemporary Pakistan. It un-packs the struggle of Khawaja Sara and Hijras and the support of their key allies' that they are doing for their empowerment and in this way, the "Transgender welfare and empowerment Act 2018 is one of the milestones achieved. This milestone is made possible because of the long-standing social activism and the struggle done by Khawaja Sara and Hijras and their key allies in contemporary Pakistan. In this section, I am using postcolonial insights of Gayatri Spivak "Can the subaltern speaks" to further explain the triplet marginalised and vulnerable living condition of Khawaja Sara and Hijras that make

them more precarious individuals that the other cisgender women. Furthermore, I explain the different ways where Khawaja Sara and Hijras are using different means like advocacy platforms, press conferences and television talk shows to get their voice in contemporary Pakistan.

Spivak [47] in her postcolonial insights has discussed the status of women during British colonialism. Spivak considered that subalterns are those individuals who have no accessibility or reachability to the hegemonic power. They are not only oppressed but are also unable to be powerful and remain subalterns throughout their lives. Spivak uses the term subaltern for rural woman and asserts that the subaltern as a woman in the Indian society becomes the victim of double oppression. On the one hand, poor women experience class-based subalternity and on the other hand, they are faced with gendered subalternity. The term subaltern has become synonymous with marginalised and disempowered minority groups in postcolonial theory with a specific focus on gender and ethnicity ([48], p. 354).

Spivak argues:

> Let us move to consider the margins (one can just say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women along the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lower strata of the urban proletariat. ([47], p. 78).

> The ... phased development of subaltern is complicated by the imperialist project - is confronted by a collective of intellectuals who be called the 'Subaltern Studies' group. They must ask, Can the subaltern Speak? .... Their project is to rethink Indian colonial historiography from the perspective of the discontinuous chain of peasant insurgencies during the colonial occupation. ([47], pp. 78–79).

Subalterns in Spivak thinking are those individuals who belong to third world countries, and they are divided by gender, class, caste, regions, religions, and other narratives. All these individuals are unable to speak for themselves and in this way, they fail to stand in unity and lack representation and presentation of their identities. In this section, I describe the vulnerable positionalities of Khawaja Sara and Hijras from colonial to postcolonial periods and then in contemporary Pakistan. I discuss the systemic marginalisation and discrimination of Khawaja Sara and Hijras in a detail. Then borrowing the term subaltern from Spivak theory of "can the subaltern speaks" I demonstrate that Khawaja Sara and Hijras are the neo-subalterns in contemporary Pakistan as they have little access to their rights and their voices are neglected and, in this way, they fail to speak for themselves. Further, their contributions are not recognised, and by large they suffer from the effect of erosion from their identities in the societies. Khawaja Sara and Hijras are very open to frequent physical and psychological violence and sexual abuse, because of the strong patriarchal setup, rigid social and societal operating measures and also the transphobic behaviour in the wider communities. They have not only low accessibilities to the basic life facilities, but they are not accepted because of their different gender and sexual identities. Therefore, Khawaja Sara and Hijras become a more precarious individuals than the cisgender women in contemporary Pakistan.

Living with precarious positions the communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijras are continuously putting their efforts to empower themselves and make their voices listened. In this vein, members of Khawaja Sara and Hijras communities are working closely with different humanitarian organisations in Peshawar city. These organisations are the key allies' that provide support and also, they (organisations)

do advocacy for the rights of Khawaja Sara and Hijras in contemporary Pakistan. In addition, members of Khawaja Sara and Hijras have formed Trans-Action Alliance[5] that a provincial organisation and is working for the wellbeing and protection of transgender and intersex community. This organisation includes membership from both the civil society organisation, Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities, Lawyer associations, and local philanthropies. Trans-Action Alliance aims to improve the gender identity and gender reassignment equality, rights, and inclusion in Peshawar Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.[6] Trans-Action alliance is the first ever organised community movement of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which represent 48,000 to 55,000 transgender and intersex community from 25 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA). Following are some of the pictures that are taken from the website on the consent of Trans-Action representatives (**Figures 1–4**).

Similarly, members of Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities also struggled for national level legislation. In 2009, Supreme Court of Pakistan ruled in favour of Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities for the provision of right to vote, right to equal health, educational and employment opportunities (ICJ, 2009). In addition, with the directives of Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2012, Khawaja Sara and Hijras were granted computerised National Identity Card with the third gender by the National and Database Registration Authority (NADRA) [2]. In similar vein, on 7th March 2018 the Senate of Pakistan passed the "Transgender person (protection of rights) Act 2018. Under the Act, transgenders were provided authority to declare their self-perceived gender identity without being facing the medical examination board of physician (Senate, 2018). This was a landmark achievement for the members of Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities and for their allies in contemporary Pakistan. In addition, the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has recently tabled a provincial bill of transgender rehabilitation and empowerment to the assembly for approval.

Figure 1.
Members of Trans-Action meeting with Speaker of Provincial Assembly Contents.

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[5] https://transaction.org.pk/

[6] The above pictures from 1 to 4 are obtained and shared here with the consent of trans action Pakistan. These pictures are available on the trans action Pakistan website.

Figure 2.
Chairperson Trans-Action alliance doing press conference.

Figure 3.
National level consultation organised by trans-Action Alliance.

Figure 4.
Participation of Khawaja Sara and Hijras in provincial sports gala.

2.3 Decolonizing the sexuality of Khawaja Sara and Hijra in contemporary Pakistan

The previous section has thoroughly discussed the colonisation and decolonization of gender in contemporary periods. This section draws attention on to the living experience of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's in Peshawar city and examines participants' sexuality, sexual orientation, and their intimate relationship with other men as their boyfriends within the intersection of political, cultural, and religious forces. Furthermore, this section also considers the desires of Khawaja Sara and Hijra for others that provide a nuanced understanding to their sexual identity in contemporary period. As discussed in the earlier section of this chapter that same sex relationships and same sex desires are widely subjected to threat publicly and also are prohibited in the light of different laws in Pakistan, but the data conducted in this research show that the members of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's communities are practicing their sexuality in a way as they understand. During in-depth and photovoice interviews participants shared stories about their intimate relationships with other cis-heteronormative individuals and discussed their own desires to do so.

I demonstrate that the presence of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's in non-western culture is an important entity that offers a continuous challenge to the colonial legacy of gender and sexuality in contemporary Pakistan. This section describes- how the Khawaja Sara and Hijra's develop their intimate relationships with their boyfriends (Marakh) and will also discuss the responsibilities and obligations on both individuals when they are with one another during their intimate relationship. Moreover, the discussion will further highlight those challenges that push the communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra away from the mainstream in contemporary Pakistan (**Figure 5**).

2.4 Khawaja Sara and Hijra's intimacy and their sexual practices with cis-heteronormative men- A practice to decolonise their sexuality

This section follows the discussion on the intimate relationship[7] of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's with cis-heteronormative people as their boyfriends in Peshawar city. The term "Marakh" a Pashtu word, is used for the cis-heteronormative man who has relationships with Khawaja Sara and Hijra. These relationships are developed across the different regions of Khyber Pukhtunkhawa. This term is equivalent to the term "Griya" which is used in Punjab region in Pakistan [2]. The Girya or Marakh relationship within the communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's are very important because it gives legitimacy and acceptability to the sexual union between a Khawaja Sara/Hijra and a man in their own understandings [39]. This was also discussed with Chocolate in a photovoice interview when she responded in the following way,

> I am in a relationship with my boyfriend from the last six years. In this picture, I am sitting with my boyfriend on a sofa. I always assume that my boyfriend is like a husband for me, and I am his wife. "Za dasi ganram che za da di hapal malgaree jenny yama awo di mata as Khawand lage" (Direct Pashto Quote) I believe that I am the girlfriend or wife of him, and he is like my husband (English translation). As I said, I feel like a girl because of my gender and sexuality.

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[7] "Intimate partner" to refer to a person who has or has had a romantic, emotional, and/or sexual relationship with a transgender person ([39] p. 251).

Figure 5.
Sitting near with a Marakh or boyfriend on the sofa.

   Chocolate statements illustrate the sexual union and sexual relationships that are already discussed in Khan's [2] and Awan's [39] research studies. Here, in a photographical discussion, Chocolate explains her gender and sexual identity as she understands them. Chocolate strongly believes that she feels like other females or girls and therefore, she loves to wear feminine dress and desires for her boyfriend to satisfy desires that are entrenched in her sexuality. This indicates that the intimate relationship between Khawaja Sara/Hijra individual and a cisgender person is always built or develop on the conventional ways like a husband-and-wife relationship is developed. In this way, Chocolate further reflects that we also have choices in selecting our intimate partners and the same are also done by the cis-heteronormative individuals. Both members develop their relationships based on their own well and the choices that they prefer either to develop their relationship with a young or older age individuals. When further asked in terms of preference of selecting the young and old cis-heteronormative partners. Shanza further added that,

> *Majority of our Khawaja Sara and Hijra members like to have an adult partner (35–40 years) to whom we call "Kansra or Kansragan" in our Hijra Farsi while some of our members also like to have a young partner (18–25 years) to whom we call "Banta or Bantagan" in our language. In addition, we also love that our partner has a muscular figure, Bearded face and also a high posture to give us satisfaction and fulfil our desire just like other female or girls want or desire to do so (Shanza PVI).*

   Shanza's reflection is interesting at this point, because it shows her own choice and preferences of selecting an intimate partner. Although these relationships are stigmatic and challenged by law in Pakistan but still, they are commonly practiced in the communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's in Peshawar city. The relationship between a Khawaja Sara/Hijra and a cis-heteronormative man is being considered an illegitimate practice in the non-western culture of Pukhtoon society but still it is repeatedly practiced. The data shows that although intimate relationship for Khawaja Sara and Hijra's are illegitimate and challenged by law and local culture but still they are regularly practiced. And this means that the intimate relationship is an enticing practice for

both Khawaja Sara and the cisgender person in many ways because first Khawaja Sara and Hijra being understanding of themselves in opposite gender (female) and enjoys their intimacy with other cisgender people. Secondly, the cisgender people also give them opportunity and their availability for developing the intimacy relationship in between. Thirdly, although the intimate relationship of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's are challenged by both society, culture, religion, and law but there are many loose spots present in both the socio-cultural spaces (discussed in detail in the previous chapter) that give participants a chance to perform their sexuality in a way as they understand. Last but not the least Shanza statement demonstrates that being Khawaja Sara they also idealise the hegemonic personality of men and for that they also love to have a strong partner that could give them love, security and protection.

Similarly, Alishba, a cheela in her twenties add in this way,

> *If you look into picture 6, we both are looking exactly like a husband and wife. My boyfriend is wearing a masculine dress with a male shawl wrapped around his neck, and I am fully dressed in female clothes giving an impression of a female or cute girl.*

Alishba's narration adds that majority of the boyfriends are the married men who have their own families including children but still they love their relationships with Khawaja Sara and Hijras. In the similar vein, Alishba has also an intimate relationship with a married man, and she was very happy with him. They routinely meet with one another and often went out for shopping, hangouts and perform sex. This indicates that cis-heteronormative men are married men in majority who develop a relationship with Khawaja Sara/ Hijra's in Peshawar city. At this point, I would like to add here that the discussion on marakh and his relationship with Khawaja Sara and Hijra's is beyond the scope of this chapter (**Figure 6**).

Taking the western literature in consideration on intimate relationship of transgender, Tobin [49] in his research discusses that cisgender partner always delegitimized his partner transgender gender identity. While Riggs et al. [50] in their study suggest that many transgender individuals find difficult to negotiate their intimate relationship with their cisgender partner because they believe that their bodies are the reason that make hindrance in their smooth intimate relationships. Similarly, for

Figure 6.
In a happy mood with my Marakh (Boyfriend).

many transgender societal barriers like negative social attitude, stigma, extremism can therefore also affect their intimate relationship with their cisgender partners because these societal barriers bring mental health problems for both [51]. But, in this research participants have discussed their sexuality and their intimate relationship in different ways. The data show that it is common practice in the life of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's to have or to keep a boyfriend or husbandly relationship with cisgender men. Within the context of their intimate relationship, a Khawaja Sara/Hijra's recognise themselves as woman and a wife, whilst the cis-heteronormative men are considered as boyfriends or husbands. For Khawaja Sara and Hijra's their intimate relationship is one of the main aspects because doing so they are challenging the normative assumptions of gender identity and sexuality which directly line up with the process of decolonization. The normative assumptions are largely focused on binary of gender, where men and women are allowed to be partnered in relationship, and those who perform against the normative assumption their action are not only challenged but their relationship are prohibited in the context of local culture, religion, and laws. Therefore, for many the intimate relationships of Khawaja Sara and Hijra are illegal acts, but for Khawaja Sara and Hijra their intimate relationships are important because of their gender and sexual identity in ways as they understand. In this way, members of Khawaja Sara and Hijras are not only performing their gender and practicing their sexuality, but they are challenging the coloniality of gender and sexuality.

Nisar [52] in his PhD thesis discusses that almost every participant of his research project has had a romantic relationship with other men at some stages of their life, whilst Awan [39] describes it a non-lineage sexual relationship in the communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijras. Shanza a cheela in her twenties and a girlfriend cum wife of a cis-heteronormative person in a guru-cheela house, expresses her feelings in the following way,

> *I am in a relationship with my boyfriend from the last four years. If you look into the picture, you can see that I am standing very close to my boyfriend just like a female, or like a girlfriend or like a wife. I am fully dressed up in feminine way with light makeup. My boyfriend too is wearing a masculine dress and he has a beard and moustache too. These characteristics show my intimate partner is different from me.*

Shanza, when reflecting her intimate relationship or partnership with her boyfriend, articulates an understanding of her own gender and sexuality and her partner too. She states that my boyfriend has masculine characteristics like beard, moustaches and he is also wearing a masculine dress, while she too herself defined and identified in feminine way with light makeup and femininely dressed. This shows that Shanza understands herself different from the gender identity that has given to her on birth. She further describes her sexuality in a way as she is delighted and feels satisfied with her boyfriend who has wrapped hands around her and trying to hug her like a husband that can easily be seen in the picture. At this point the picture shows two different scenarios i.e. On one side it explains Shanza's understanding of her gender and sexuality and secondly it also describes her relationship and her level of satisfaction that she is getting in her daily routine life. However, in the study of Tobin [49] some of his participants were unwilling to enter in an intimate relationship because of dissatisfaction and discomfort for their bodies, but in Shanza case she was very satisfied for being a transgender woman with feminine sexuality that derives towards cisgender men as her immediate partner (**Figure** 7).

Figure 7.
Standing in a good mood with Marakh like husband and wife.

In the similar vein, Nayela a guru in her thirties lives in Peshawar. She was in a relationship with a boyfriend for 10 years but at the time of photovoice interview, she had breakup with her partner. She added in the following way,

> *My partner always considered me as his girlfriend, therefore, I used to wear women dresses for him and to give myself a girlish outlook. We both were attracted towards one another and have developed sexual relationship. We were like in a husband-and-wife relationship.*

Like Alishba, Nayela has also a period of time when she was in a relationship with her boyfriend for 10 years. She describes her relationship in good terms because she was happy and relaxed from her boyfriend. I demonstrate that for Khawaja Sara or Hijras, relationships.

are very important because they get love, care, protection and fulfil their sexual desire. Nayela further adds that intimate relationships are kept secret in the communities because people in the wider communities consider them homosexual and then they face hardship and stigma. But Nayela deny the assumption of homosexuality because for her, her intimate relationship was heterosexual in total because she considered herself female or girl. Participant further discussed that she and many like her friends attempt to transform and develop their physical appearance like females or girls by taking hormones and visiting regularly for medical check-ups.

During the interview, Nayela further adds that its much hard for senior Khawaja Sara/Hijra's like us to find another good relationship after our break ups.

> *"Che kala zamong break up oshe no mong sara dery options ye. Ya ho mong bal talluq joor ko, ya mong bus daka shan pate sho, ya mong zanla bal ashna oguru kam ta che mong Ruta wayoo (Pashto Direct Quote). When our relationships break up then we have three options ahead. We either develop another intimate relationship, or we stop making any other relationships, or we try to look for a young cis-heteronormative person Ruta in Hijra Farsi (English Translation). In this picture-9 I am looking an old enough because my body gained weight and I am no more a cheela. Although, I wear colour full dresses and even dance in the night parties (Nayela PVI).*

Figure 8.
Fully dressed like women in blue and wearing a Shawal.

Nayela's above statement demonstrates clearly that break ups and separations in relationships for them are very common and it happens to every Khawaja Sara and Hijra individual very frequently. As discussed earlier these relationships are neither properly documented nor they are bounded under certain obligations likely written documents of understanding or relationship deeds. Therefore, the chances of separation are very high because of no legal protection or documentary proofs. But the lack of documentation sometime produces ease in the life of participants because they do not want to put themselves liable to someone for longer period of time. Shanza discusses that when our boyfriends start putting extra restriction or put us under certain limitation like not allowing us to participate in dance parties, restricting our meetups and other movements then we try to early separation (**Figure 8**).

Riggs et al. [50] study explain that transgenders in Australia consider their past intimate relationship experience when they want to develop their relationship in future. Especially the older transgender individuals have less belief in their relationship if they could occur in future. This was also find out in Nayela's discussion as she described that for Khawaja Sara or Hijra there are three options after their breakup i.e., she looks to find a new partner and develop another intimate relationship based on her past experience, or she may quit for ever and stop making further relationship if she is senior enough and has bad experience in her relationships or if she still desires but is not accepted further by any cisgender men then she starts a different kind of relationship called "Ruta" in Hijra Farsi. In a "Ruta" relationship probably a senior Khawaja Sara or Hijra develops a sexual relationship with a young cis-heteronormative boy or young individual based on her desire. This relationship is different from marakh and Murat relationship and is also beyond the scope of this chapter.

The above discussion highlights the sexual orientation of Khawaja Sara/Hijra's and describe their romantic/sexual relationship that they develop with other cis-heteronormative men as part of their partnership in Peshawar city. The data discussed in this chapter further concludes that almost every member in Khawaja Sara and Hijra communities in Peshawar city have gone through this process and have had their relationships with men in the past. Therefore, Shanza stated in the following way,

> *I would say that there are very limited numbers of Khawaja Sara or Hijra individu-*
> *als who are not in a relationship with their boyfriends. Sanga che pa society ki da*
> *yao hazy khawand sara relationship v. Daka shan boyfriend zamong yao intimate*
> *partner v" (Direct Pashto Quote) We develop a husband wife relationship with*
> *our partners same as like a woman develop her relationship with other man as her*
> *husband or male partner (English translation) (Shanza IDI).*

Using the concept of hybridity from postcolonial theory to discuss participants intimate relationships with cisgenders in the cis-heteronormative and Islamised culture, I demonstrate that although the prevailing cultural environment in Peshawar city and the identities of participants are opposite to one another, but still the Khawaja Sara and Hijra's are practicing their sexuality according to their own understandings. At this point of time the concept of hybridity is an enticing concept to discuss because, Bhabha argues that the purity of any culture is a myth in society and the culture has an ever-changeable essence characterised by flux and transformation which is anchored through interconnectedness and inter-mixedness. Therefore, any foreign traits or new sentiments that are introduced in a specific culture produces third spacing and a way out of binary thinking, which is ultimately supporting the identities of transgender communities. Bhabah [53] explains the permeability nature of culture in his concept of Hybridity that diffuses different traits and develops a new diverse cultural identity.

Similarly, on one side the existing laws, religion, and cultural norms are strictly prohibiting homosexuality, which legally includes the sexual relationships of Khawaja Sara/ Hijras, but on the other side the participants neither fall short of their desires and nor they fail to explore their sexual identity in a way as they understand because of their fully supported relationship with cis men. This shows that participants can easily find opportunities and so as their partners to practice their sexuality in the extreme Islamised culture of Pakistan because of the permeable nature of existing culture that allow other newly introduced practice to diffuse in. In this chapter, I found that Khawaja Sara and Hijras were in their intimate relationship with their partners in a culture that was famous for its rigidness and under strict Islamic teachings. All the members of guru-cheela communities were free to meet with their intimate partners and even during the data collection I personally meet with some of the intimate partners too who came to see them to their Deras. This shows the fluidity and permeability of culture where many new practices are diffusing easily. But, at same time Khawaja Sara and Hijra still face many repercussions both religiously, culturally, and politically that make their relationship tough for them but not impossible. Although they can practice their relationship easily, but they cannot perform them openly because of stigma and public ridicule. Huddart [54] calls this a hybrid space that always emerges in the doubleness and resist against any power and representation. However, for participants and their partners it is not easy to perform their intimate relationships but are not impossible and, in this way, the challenging aspect of participants becomes a kind of betrayal from the cultural norms that goes hand on hand and against the prevailing socio-cultural environment where they are living. This hybridization of culture and sexuality is being possible of hybridity which is a move towards decolonization in contemporary periods.

3. Conclusion

Decolonization in contemporary Pakistan is meant to change the marginalised and oppressive status of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's and provides support to stand against

those policies that are affecting them since long. This is because members belong to gender minorities in contemporary periods are getting more awareness of their rights and having said that societies especially the political institutions, allies' organisation more open and acceptable to the self-perceived gender identities. Although they are still discriminated too, and their lives are challenged by many in the wider communities but at the same time communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's also struggle to adjust themselves in a way as they understand their gender and sexuality with their constant resilience and resistance to those policies and regulation that made them criminal and complex their identities. Friere [55] writes that frequent marginalisation and obstacles aware those communities who are impacted. Therefore, to relive themselves and get freedom, those who are oppressed start struggling within their own communities or groups against the draconian laws and policies, where decolonization becomes the only option left that find different ways for those who are in marginal position and leave them with no choice but to liberate themselves from the cycle of discrimination and oppression. I, therefore, demonstrate that the performances of Khawaja Sara and Hijra like waring of feminine attires, painting of lips and faces and wearing jewelleries and the practices of developing intimate relationship and desire for other cisgender men is not only their resistance against the colonised and Islamised policies but also is a step towards decolonization of gender and sexuality in contemporary Pakistan.

This chapter described participants understanding and their gender and sexuality i.e., who they are, what they want to be either male/female or both and how their living lives are intersected in the wider communities where they are living. The scholarship developed in this chapter first bring the discussion on the coloniality of gender and sexuality within the impact of the British colonialist regulations, and Islamisation of gender and sexuality through Hudood ordinance in postcolonial Pakistan. Finally, the chapter discusses the decolonization of gender and sexuality within the context of Khawaja Sara and Hijra and the different ways that they do and understand in their daily routine life. After engaging with the members of Khawaja Sara and Hijra in a face to face direct and photovoice interview and drawing on the responses provided this chapter describes that participant are struggling and ensue their resilience with the support of their key allies against all the barriers that are confronted to them. Therefore, this chapter develops a body of knowledge that is centred outside of the western culture, and which is mean for to highlight the unsettling global hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality in contemporary Pakistan.

In this chapter using postcolonial theory as theoretical framework my discussion explains the decolonization of gender and sexuality in contemporary Pakistan. I demonstrate that when the same sex sexuality is widely regulated in a culture that does not give opportunity of expression then sexual minorities like Khawaja Sara and Hijra's find themselves in a difficult circumstance because their understandings are challenged with different socio-cultural norms, different policies, and religious teachings but at the same times those who are repressed always in the struggle to find different ways for their survival as per their understandings. Therefore, drawing on the history of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's in the Mughal and Ottoman empire their positions were of respectable individuals, and they were counted amongst the nobilities because the culture was open to accept same sexual love. But with their repressed sexualities and complex gender identities they were criminalised under the Britishers colonial policies and their stoning to death and physical punishment within in the Islamised legislation in Postcolonial Pakistan during Zia regime.

Similarly, the mystical powers, spirituality, and the legality in Khawaja Sara and Hijra performances have also put them amongst the people with sacred positionalities
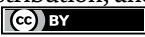
where they are considered a sign of good-well and the extinguishers of dark time. However, these sacred positionalities are very limited in some parts of the country and are applicable to very few communities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's individuals in Pakistan. A small chunk of cisgender people hardly believes in their sacredness and spirituality although the sacred imaginative positionality cannot be ignored in Pakistan. Despite of these myths, Khawaja Sara and Hijra's are under severe and extreme environment, and they are regularly discriminated and marginalised in all walks of their life. Research scholarships (discussed earlier) have declared that colonial polices are largely responsible to introduce the participants as criminals which outcasted them from the mainstream and they are now and then pushed to sex work and other immoral activities. Therefore, the discourses like spirituality and criminalization introduce the participants within the context of legality and illegalness in their identities that further complex and multiply the identities of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's in contemporary Pakistan. To address the problem of multiplicity and complexity in the identities, member of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's were engaged in a face to face and photovoice interviews do discuss their gender and sexual identity formation and the different ways as the understand themselves in a postcolonial Islamic Pakistan. The data discussed in this chapter were participants self-narration and their stories of marginalisation that showed impact of colonised and Islamised policy regulation, but this was not limited but the discussion further described the decolonization of gender and sexuality where members of Khawaja Sara and Hijra's were struggled to advocate for their rights and practicing their sexuality. This research comes up with the aims to identify and analyse the religious, social, cultural, economic, and political forces shaping pre-colonial and colonial understandings of Hijra/Khawaja Sara gender and sexual identities in the sub-continent and to explain the different ways in which those who identify as Khawaja Sara and Hijra in Peshawar city negotiate these various forces in their processes of identity formation and sexual orientation.

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Chapter 5

Weaponising Digital Architecture: Queer Nigerian Instagram Users and Digital Visual Activism

Paul Ayodele Onanuga

Abstract

The body and its portrayal are significant to the politics of gender identity and sexuality. As Instagram constitutes a public domain for self- and group-representation, I appropriate its affordances in the interrogation of queer visibility and digital visual activism within the Nigerian queer community. The central assumption is that the images and their accompanying texts are ideology-laden and consequently become entrenched in the battle for visibility against heteronormativity. I pay attention to six purposively selected queer Nigerian Instagram handles and cull ten representative images for analysis. I integrate the contextual affordances of hashtags and photo-tagging in my discussion of how Instagram contributes to and nourishes public queer discourses in a homophobic space like Nigeria. I conclude that these images as semiotic resources facilitate the decryption of queer marginality and mainstream queer narratives digitally.

Keywords: queer, Nigeria, Instagram, Visuality, activism, visibility

1. Introduction

Within many creative ventures and spaces, art has been utilised as a vent for the expression of repressed feelings and opinions as well as for foregrounding the realities of marginalised communities who attempt to break the boundaries which dominant groups or ideologies have constructed against them [1]. These vents are mainly invigorated through protest art forms. Protest art of course has diverse manifestations, ranging from the visual, physical, musical or theatrical. Oftentimes too, beyond the intention or manipulation of the art creator, protest art may be ideologically motivated or political in view of their context of creation or execution. Thus, interpretations of the dimensions and implications of protest arts may emanate from the consumers or viewers or coalesce the intentions of the creator and those of the consumers. What is essential is that protest art provokes reactions and seek to draw attention to issues within the society. This aligns with the claim by renowned novelist and Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison that "All good art is political! And the ones that try hard not to be political are political by saying, 'We love the status quo'" ([2]: 2). Regardless of the various possibilities of mediations in the interpretation of protest art however, the essence of their creations is for the contestation and protestation of social injustices. Consequently,

in this article, I extend the manifestations of visual protest art to the digital space and contextualise digital visual representations as protest art within the context of queer visibility and the contestation of heteronormativity. Specifically, I interrogate queer positive images on Instagram as instantiated by Nigerian queer users, and this is geared towards examining the place of semiotic modes – images and text – in the affirmation of queer-positivity and in contesting the repression represented by heterosexuality.

Several studies have explored the place of protest art in queer activism. For instance, Tessa [3] identified that 'queer visual artists and activists in South Africa are using their practice to counter and dismantle institutional racism, sexism and homophobia'. Chin [4] examined 'the role of the arts in the relationship between urban governmental institutions and queer and transgender people of color (QTPOC) community organizations'. Chin's study concluded that 'the arts serve as the linchpin between QTPOC efforts to counter the intertwined mechanisms of racism, sexism, transphobia and homophobia, and municipal imperatives to promote economic growth and address the social exclusion of marginalized populations' (ibid.: iv). Burk [5] engaged the diversity of LGBTQ art in the United States of America and submitted that 'LGBTQ artists maintain a position of marginality in order to critique dominant social norms, and use art as a means to document marginalized communities and promote subversive messages'. Rosendahl [6] also considered the role of musical discourse in queer agency. More specifically, the study focused on the role of musical discourse at the annual Toronto pride festival in the negotiation of social power and identity within the queer community, and observed that '[g]endered and racialized groups used musical discourse to challenge power structures' (xi). In these studies, there is an identification of the significance of protest art in queer advocacy particularly in combating the structures of heteronormativity which forcefully push queer existence on to the margins of societal visibility.

In Nigeria, studies on queer visibility are only now just becoming mainstream and gaining traction, with scholarly interventions spanning literary texts and movies, as well as others which come from the perspectives of sociology, psychology and education [7–9]. In the current study, I interrogate how Nigerian queer users use images as forms of protest art on their handles. Central to my interrogations is the question: How is visual activism negotiated as a strategy of resistance by Nigerian queer users of Instagram? A key assumption in this study is that queer-positive images by Nigerian queer Instagram users represent attempts to challenge societally-legitimised and dominant narratives around heteronormativity. In addition, their visual appeal help in asserting queer visibility within the liberating affordance of the digital space. Consequently, one can identity these 'deviant' users as recognising the influence of digital visual representations and perceive these representations as integral to contesting the marginalisation occasioned by gender ideology, sexism and homophobia. I further assert that these activist strains which currently manifest within the digital space are ultimately expected to trickle down to the physical space as the Nigerian queer community invigorates its advocacy for societal acceptance and legal acknowledgement.

2. Being queer in Nigeria

Representation is critical to marginalised communities, including those who identify as queer. Halperin [10] perhaps best captures this use of 'queer' when he states that:

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men.

Although Dreger [11] affirms that "anatomy is not going to tell us for sure what sex is all about" especially in view of the identification of the fluidity of sexual categories, in most contemporary Nigerian societies and cultures, male and female exist as the recognised gender dichotomies while heterosexuality is represented as the normative sexual identity. Consequently, gender categories and sexual identities that extend those earlier identified are regarded as 'abhorrent' ([12]: 128), unacceptable and non-normative. The marginalisation stems from the need to control the performance of sexuality since it is regarded as a 'highly value laden terrain' ([13]:36). This identification is in line with the above excerpt from Halperin on the definition of queerness. The consequence of this definition and typecasting is that such queer individuals are disempowered and their identities are made illegitimate since they are repressed by the dominant groups.

While the identification of marginalisation and repression of people who present as queer is not restricted to the Nigerian socio-cultural space, advocacies have contributed to the recognition of these alternative gender and sexual identities and to the legalisation of queer existence in many hitherto queer-phobic spaces abroad. In Nigeria however, the noose of queer-phobia continues to be tightened as legislation through the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) of 2014 [14] as well as through the opposition posed by socio-cultural and religious tropes which are weaved into the public discourses around queerness [15, 16]. Unsurprisingly therefore, Nigeria is categorised among the most homophobic nations and continues to be a hot spot for queer silencing and invisibility.

Contemporarily – and by this I mean the last ten years – many studies have engaged queerness in Nigeria [17, 18]. While some of these studies toe the line of the traditional by moralising against queer identities [19], many of the studies have indeed drawn attention to the plight of the Nigerian gay and lesbian community [20–22]. Many of these studies have been sociological in orientation, drawing attention to the social attitudes, health outcomes and psychological effects of the prevailing societal orientation on the wellbeing of Nigerian queers. In addition, there have been interrogation of queerness from the literary and filmic angles [23–25]. This viewpoint has also been richly explored as more creative ventures continue to engage the reality of queerness in Nigeria. From the linguistic perspective however, more needs to be done. This is because language is critical to representation. Language is also a tool for the propagation and fossilisation of identities and ideologies, largely determining social attitudes and behaviours. For instance, Adegbola's [26] study indicates that Nigerian gay people are negatively evaluated and ideologically portrayed as criminals and dangerous in media reports. These findings emanated from a discourse analysis of news reports from 'three popular Nigerian newspapers (*Vanguard, Nigerian Tribune* and *The Punch*) within three years (2013–2015, being the period of intense debate on the legalisation of the anti-gay bill in Nigeria' ([26]: 80). Onanuga [27] also engaged language use within queer-oriented tweets by Nigerians. The study focused on the #ArewaAgainstLGBTQ hashtag and evaluated the ideological contestations (pro- and anti-) expressed in the digital platform, Twitter. A critical identification from the study is that the digital space provides robust participation and interaction among Nigerians on the potentially combustible topic of queerness. This realisation could however be hinged on the provision of anonymity owing to the level

of self-disclosure by participants, which in turn nurtures a lessening of perceived risk online [28]. It is from the springboard of digital affordance that the current study interrogates visuality on Instagram as an activist tool in Nigerian queer narratives.

3. Concretising digital visual activism: instagram as site for queer visibility

Instagram is a visually-driven social media application. The platform allows users to share photos, videos, and other multimodal materials – all of which are attuned to the propagation of human sociality. Unlike Twitter and most other social media platforms which heavily rely on text, Instagram's niche is its image and video sharing affordance. Indeed, the creator's description of the application give credence to this viz.:

Instagram is a simple way to capture and share the world's moments. Follow your friends and family to see what they are up to, and discover accounts from all over the world that are sharing things you love. Join the community of over 500 million people and express yourself by sharing all the moments of your day—the highlights and everything in between, too [29].

MacDowall and Budge [30] assert that Instagram's popularity and widespread use extends beyond its affordability of digital photography, videography and image-sharing, affirming that the architecture of Instagram represents a new relationship to the image and to visual experience, a way of shaping ocular habits and social relations. The authors foreground the contributions of the structure of Instagram – remarked as the tactile world of affiliation ('follows'), aesthetics ('likes') and attention ('comments') – and submit that the platform significantly contributes art spaces, audiences and aesthetics. These qualities, when aggregated, align with what Kristeva's ([31]: 163) remarks as 'semiotic language' and are fundamental to the appropriation of the platform for queer visibility and agency. The multimodal ensemble which Instagram avails implies that the 'verbal, visual and rhythmic aspects of semiotic compositions' ([32]: 209) on the platform become valuable resources in understanding the relationship that these semiotic materials can proffer within the narratives on gender and sexuality.

Images and words complement each other in different ways to create meaning, with such meanings critical to and reliant on the context of realisation. Consequently, like other social media sites, Instagram has been appropriated for activist purposes, especially as it provides multimodal affordances to its users. For instance, it has been used in the engagement and promotion of political movements like *Black Lives Matter* and *Marriage Equality* [33]. It has also been a contributor to queer rhetoric and discourses, allowing users to ventilate their perceptions and attitudes to issues around their sexuality and identities. Thus while physical visual arts for queer advocacy may be subjected to censorship and official restraints [5], the digital space circumvents some of such hindrances in the users' activist drive. The novelty of the manipulation of the digital enablement has motivated the upsurge of multimodal approaches to online engagements [34, 35]. This has in turn manifested within queer discourses [36, 37] where the analysis of non-heteronormative representations have been examined in multimodal data.

In view of the foregoing, I extend the application of multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) to images shared by Nigerian queer individuals on Instagram. MCDA is adequate and useful in the investigation of the identifiable issues of language use, power and inequitable relations construed in and through discourse by a combination of modes in a wide range of contexts, particularly in online spaces as in

this study. I submit that the queer images constitute ways of promoting queer visibility and courting social acceptance. Underlying these representations however is the activist orientation of challenging existing social structures which militate against queer existence. I operationalise visual digital activism in consort with Tessa [3] submission that this implies 'using the visual as a form of activism, or to catalyse or support other forms of activism'. One can contextualise this in view of the inhibitive reality of the physical space for queer-identifying Nigerians. Owing to this oppressive corporeality, the digital space has therefore grown to becoming a safe space for "the affirmation of gay identity and the validation of many forms of relationships" ([38]: 1098). For instance, on Twitter, many queer Nigerians have handles from where they represent their identities and do queer advocacies. Some others use these online ecologies to out themselves and seek queer communality. The use of images for positive queer representation and visual activism on Instagram also inscribes the space as critical to the framing of not only individual identities, but also to the constructed narratives around queering.

As Carnes ([39]: 1) avers, when queer people represent themselves, they attempt to reclaim the narratives around their identities 'in a world that continues to marginalize and oppress … sexually and gender fluid and non-normative people'. This sentiment is shared by Southerton et al. [40] and Opara et al. [41] as they adjudge that marginalised LGBTQ communities turn to the shared online communities in the contestation of gender hegemonies. These studies thus serve as motivation for the aim of my current inquiry.

4. Methods

Regarding the roles of scholars in unravelling the invisibility which has been accorded to queerness, I envision the appropriation of Instagram by Nigerian non-heterosexual communities as being peculiar 'specific techniques and methods to reveal invisible, silenced and repressed knowledge' of their sexual identities ([42]: 17). Therefore, data for the study are harvested through purposively selected Instagram pages – @queer_nigeria, @queeeringnigeria, @lgbtqnaija, @lgbtq_nja, @lgtb.ng, and @queerasylum. These are queer positive handles that are owned by Nigerian users, although some of their posts are obviously transnational in outlook and advocacy. Because Instagram is mainly visual or graphic in orientation, ten (10) representative images are identified, extracted and subjected to analysis. I apply the tenets of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis to the data since these images represent 'one of the semiotic systems that constitute a culture [one that is understood] by reference to its place in the social process [and] modelled as a resource for making meaning that has evolved' ([43]; cited in [44]: 3).

Ledin and Machin [45] affirm the value of subjecting the intersection of multimodality and critical discourse analysis as they attest to the need for 'clear, robust concepts [in multimodality] that can be used as part of CDA with its emphasis on digging out the discourses buried in texts to reveal (…) power relations and ideologies'. The noteworthiness of this blend of theoretical orientations is also identified by Kress and van Leeuwen [46] who draw attention to the necessity of integrating the diversity of communicative modes in linguistic analysis as they state that 'language always has to be realized through, and comes in the company of other semiotic modes', therefore 'any form of text analysis which ignores this will not be able to account for all the meanings expressing in texts'. They further submit that images "can

'say' the same things as language – in very different ways" ([47]: 50). Since the images are still, they are regarded as complete meaning-making semiotic resources alongside the texts that accompany them. This is unlike moving images that enable motion, editing, and the integration of other modes such as music.

In my analysis, I integrate Machin and Mayr [48] submission that it is only through intensive descriptive evaluation and analysis of what has been represented through semiotic values that one can reach informed conclusions about the symbolic meanings that the representation conveys. This implies that while the images are themselves directly denotative, they are imbricated with more extensive interpretations – connotation – which come from an acknowledgement of the contextual peculiarities from which they are produced. As a consequence, I embed my familiarity with the LGBTQ ecology in Nigeria in my analysis and discussion of the semiotic resources that constitute my data. I further incorporate the peculiarity of Instagram's architecture as well as the contextual realities in the Nigerian environment in subsequent discussions.

5. Weaponising Instagram: the politics of 'likes' and post dissemination

Zappavigna [49] uses the term 'social photography' to draw attention to the production and proliferation of social media images on various digital platforms [50]. These images have potentials for becoming viralised when they are circulated across Web 2.0 platforms on the digital space. This reality also suggests that more public engagement, a digital affordance which Chugh et al. [51] attribute to the manifestations of likes, shares and comments, become not only measurable; they also become critical to evaluating the implications of such online discursive contents. Schoendienst and Dang-Xuan [52] share the same perception as they submit that commenting and liking contribute to and help strengthen social relationships especially as the online interactions are simulations of real face-to-face relationships. It is thus unsurprising that users engage in self-disclosure online as a way of cultivating group affinity and aligning with the convictions of the larger public or members of their community. Critical to these public engagements are visuality and representation, especially when they are performed to draw attention and stimulate change in perception. In line with this orientation, Schoonover and Galt [53] submit that:

LGBT political movements have long insisted on publicity as a mode of activism: from Pride marches to anti-homophobic violence actions, to everyday forms of gender expression and even public sex, the street forms a necessary political space for queer representation. What it might mean to be queer – and to perform queerness – on the street varies enormously in different national contexts.

It is in this wise that Ifekandu [54] regards social media spaces as 'safe spaces' for the exertion and assertion of queerness since such spaces afford queer individuals the possibilities of assuming a "surviving mode" Buyantueva [55] away from the inhibitions of non-virtual milieus. This viewpoint is operationalised in **Figure 1** which proclaims the humanity of queer-identifying individuals.

The textual message in the image – We are all the same inside – constitutes both a lamentation against homophobia in Nigeria as well as an advocacy for the acknowledgement and acceptance of queerness. By capitalising the texts and placing each word on a line, the creator foregrounds the message and gives it salience and prominence. The word 'same' contrasts the othering experiences which queer-identifying people are constantly subjected to in Nigeria. By drawing attention to sameness, queer advocates attempt to crush the deprecative constructs which encumber queer
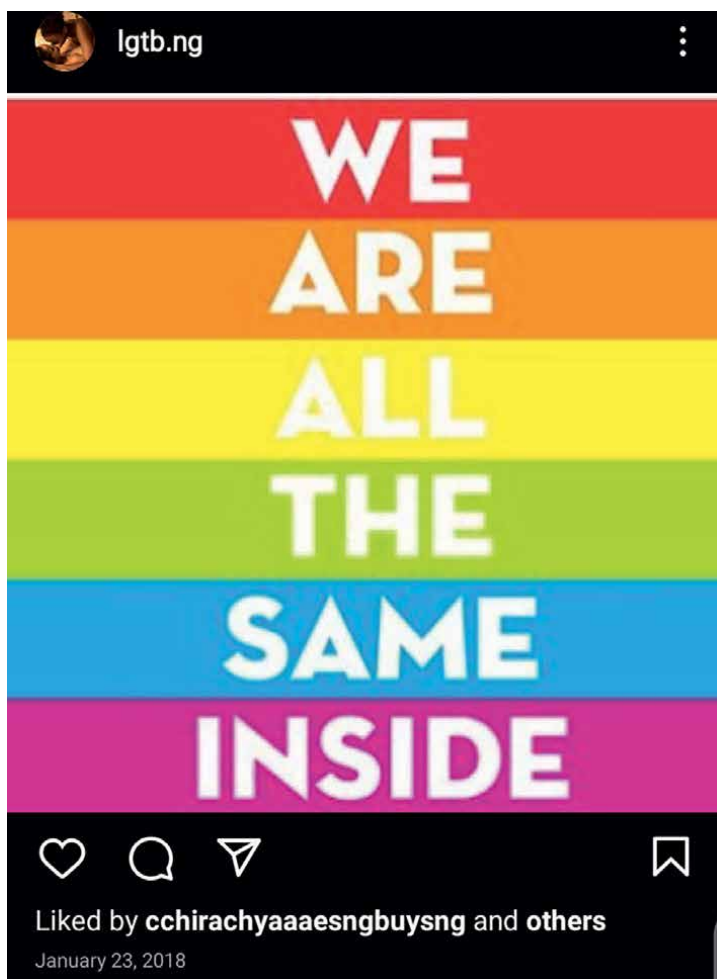
Figure 1.
We are all the same inside.

performativity. The linguistic choice of 'we all' further encodes an inclusivist ideology which attempts to reconcile the identitarian notions of 'being' and 'becoming' that manifests in queer discourses. While heteronormativity perceives queerness as a 'becoming' identity, queer rights proponents assert their identities as 'being'. Therefore the realisation of 'we all' breaks the barriers of dichotomies and instead propagates an inclusivist orientation, one which embraces the diversity of sexual and gender identities. The image therefore lends itself to challenging the 'normative silencing' ([36]: 9) and othering to which non-heteronormative identities are subjected. Furthermore, the promotion of a homonormative space is visually stimulated by the background of the text – in the use of the queer rainbow (more discussions on this semiotic resource in a subsequent heading).

Within the examination of 'likes' and virality of post dissemination, Instagram has a peculiarity. While on Facebook and Twitter, the number of likes which a post garners are clearly stated, on Instagram, one has to click on the likes to see its 'likers'. It is therefore more difficult to measure the engagement of posts shared within the context of the propagation and promotion of queerness. According to Ghaisani et al.

[56], likes and shares on social media show the impressions of users on the subject of a post. They may also provide insight into user behaviour [57]. An examination of user engagement with **Figure 1** shows that the post was liked by 13 users. However the politics of maintaining visibility or staying in the shadows is brought into better context in relation to **Figure 2**.

If 'likes', 'comments' and 'shares' connote digital engagement of posts on a platform like Instagram, it is thus ironical that the post from @queerasylum in **Figure 2** expressly deters users and members of the Nigerian queer community from overtly revealing their identities or directly engaging the post. The deterrence is however necessary based on the focus of the post: it is to help queer-identifying Nigerians flee the country and gain asylum in queer-enabling spaces. The post acknowledges the toxicity and threats which follow queer visibility in the Nigerian context and attempts to counteract this by protecting the identities of prospective asylum seekers. This it does by directing interested parties to send direct messages to signify their interests. This realisation contrasts the usual or normal expectations where wholesome engagement is rated by the number of views, likes, comments and shares which a post garners (**Figure 3**).

Visuality is also critical to queer advocacy on Instagram. In negotiating the activist thread, one identifies critical engagements of what can be termed 'normative' social perceptions. Using symbols that are mutually meaningful and representative of heterosexuality, the activist handler of @lgbt.ng draws an equation with gender representations coated in the LGBT colours. Through a breakdown which indicates:
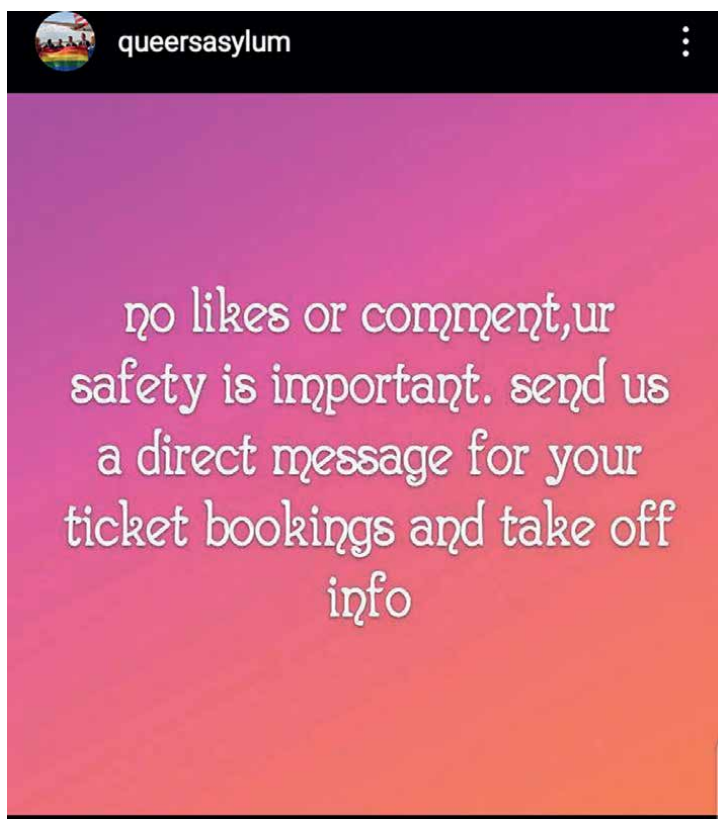
Figure 2.
No likes.

Figure 3.
Definition of love.

male + male, male + female; and female + female, the poster asserts that all of these are manifestations of love and are acceptable forms of human identities and relationships. 'Love' is textually realised thrice and also symbolically identifiable thrice. The submission at the end: 'Love knows no limit' suggests that the limitations to the expression of love, one which has criminalised same-sex relations, are merely human creations.

The quest for acceptance and legalisation of queerness is central to queer advocacies in queerphobic spaces. Of course, Nigeria is very anti-queer, an archetype of what Rahul Rao [58] regarded as 'a contemporary gay heart of darkness', and the situation has been worsened with the promulgation of the same-sex marriage prohibition act in 2014. While many of the protestations against the restrictions of the law have mostly been orchestrated online [27], there have been documented low-key physical protests especially since 2020, with queer protesters physically and vocally joining

the #EndSARS protests of October, 2020. Indeed, on May 1, 2022, there was what is considered the 'first open queer protest in Nigeria'. The protesters expressed their opposition to the discriminatory legislations like the crossdressers' bill which was being considered in the nation's legislative houses at the period as well as called for the repeal of the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act. Through their physical activism, they drew attention to the plight of Nigerian 'othered' sexual and gender identities and sought for 'queer liberation now'. This physical assertion of the necessity of queer agency and visibility manifests in **Figure 4** from the Queerasylum handle. Although @queerasylum is not a Nigerian queer handle, the persona behind the handle travels around queer-stifling places and gives publicity to the lived realities of shackled queer existence. In **Figure 4**, one encounters the manifestation of transnational advocacy in queer narratives. Thus while the poster announces that: 'Finally we are in Nigeria. Nigerian's get set', we see a Kenyan flag raised by one of the protesters in recognition

Figure 4.
Projecting Nigerian queer protest.

of the challenges faced by queer people in different parts of the continent. Indeed, in April, 2022, a young Kenyan queer, Sheila Lumumba, was gang-raped by six men and murdered in her house in Karatina, Kenya. Such targeted attacks and killings are also rife in Nigeria. This also contextualises the use of full face masks by many of the protesters who, being conscious of the need for protection and safety, hide their faces. However, by providing visibility to the foregrounded placard with the expression: 'Nigeria: LGBT We are together', the queer protesters marshal an ideology of communality. They therefore decry all manifestations of discrimination, rejection and violence against queer-identifying individuals while also expressing a unity of purpose regardless of national affiliations. Through their activist actions and movement digitally and physical, these nascent Nigerian vocal queer protests constitute a decentralised nodal advocacy that 'links the nation across borders and oceans' and instrumentalise a 'new ecumene that enables many of the communicative, cultural and socioeconomic exchanges, which, in the previous 150 years, could only have existed within the structure of a nation-state' [59].

6. Handle-tagging and hashtagging for activism and advocacy

According to Thomas [60], the social media landscape 'shows how the underlying material-semiotic operations of social media now crucially define what it means to be social in a networked age'. This implies that one must engage and contextualise digital practices and online engagements, especially on social media platforms, as 'computational processes of collective individuation that produce, rather than presume, forms of subjectivity and sociality' ([60]: backpage). With specific attention to the affordances and specificities of Instagram, Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis [61] aver that image-tagging through the use of photo-hashtags serve as 'annotation metadata' which act as descriptive resource for the 'visual content of an image'. They submit that 'Instagram hashtags, and especially those provided by the photo owner/creator, express more accurately the content of a photo' ([61]: 114). Their observations resonate within the context of the present study as the Instagram handlers integrate hashtags as well as photo-tags in their posts, in recognition of the possibilities available on Instagram as a subset of the digital media ecology.

Thus in **Figure 5**, we encounter the front-page celebration of the popular African-American media personality, Niecy Nash and her spouse, Jessica Betts. Apart from lauding the use of the couple's image on *Essence*, as the first queer couple on the cover of the well-regarded magazine, one can also frame with celebration as an acknowledgement of Niecy Nash's peculiar side story: she used to be in a heterosexual relationship. Consequently her coming out – in which she exposed her attempts at ignoring her sexuality and conforming to heteronormative structures – and embrace of her closeted lesbianism become useful narratives for queer advocacy. Fittingly, the text accompanying the Image closes with 'Black Love Wins' as well as the love emoji and the queer rainbow flag. These textual representations remark the multiple marginalisation and minoritisation which the couple must have faced (and be facing) – they are queer and black. The realisations are transposed to the Nigerian context where being queer automatically translates to invisibility, violent victimisation and government-aided criminalization.

According to Rambukkana [62], hashtags perform three significant functions in digital discourse; they may perform as 'an affective amplifier (sometimes); useful in linking or constituting particular publics (sometimes); and even able to subtend communities'. The accompanying hashtags as shown in **Figure 6** fulfil these functions.

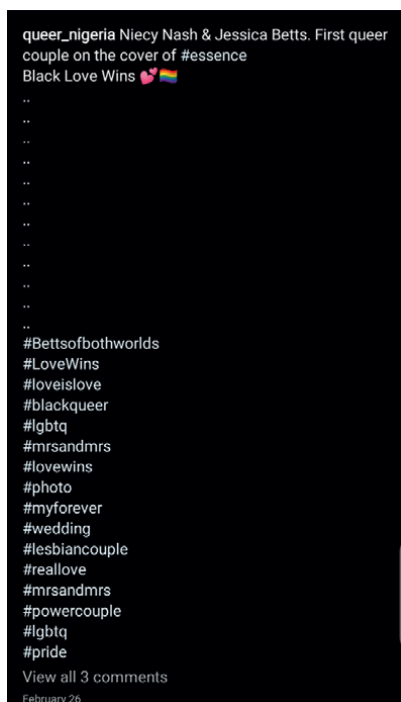**Figure 5.**
Celebrating celebrity visibility.

Figure 6.
Accompanying hashtags.

Although the image in the post is not of the account handler, its use, alongside the deeply emotive hashtags, is critical to and crucial for queer activism in Nigeria. This becomes striking when one connects it to the larger context of queerness and queer visibility. Subsequently, one can interrogate the visual realisation as a node 'in the becoming of distributed discussions in which their very materiality as performative utterances is deeply implicated' ([62]: 3). This is because having celebrities come out and visually acknowledge their sexualities and gender identities serves as motivation to the disadvantaged masses and defuse queerphobic reactions. Consequently one can assert that visual social media practices offer an important perspective on how photography both shapes and is shaped by mass practices. Notwithstanding the resort to elitism and the publicity accorded to an individual with celebrity status as a ways of acknowledging queer visibility, the digital visuality of queerness 'highlights how social media is modulating the relations possible between the self, the viewer, ambient audiences, and the ambient publics' [50]. This reality occasions the celebration of Niecy Nash's and Jessica Betts' front page appearance as a lesbian couple on the highly-rated celebrity magazine, Essence (**Figure** 7).

Considering the widespread systemic oppression which is visited upon Nigerian queer people, they are also subjected to significant discrimination in terms of

Figure 7.
Publicising opportunities for Nigerian queers.

economic and social opportunities. To combat the recurrent marginalisation and attempts at rendering them invisible in view of their sexual orientation and gender identities, members of the Nigerian queer community make available liberating programmes and opportunities to help less fortunate members. In this, Bisi Alimi is a household name within Nigerian queer advocacy and outreach circles. Indeed he is recognised as the first Nigerian to out himself on a national platform. While he eventually had to flee from the country in view of threats to his personal safety, he has sustained his support for queer livability and visibility in Nigeria. A main front for his activities has been through the Bisi Alimi Foundation.

Across the images discussed in this section, it is obvious that the handlers and users as post-creators recognise the affordances of Instagram and use those to their information dissemination. Handle-tagging and image-hashtagging facilitate dialogic exchange and social bonding which, within the context of queer visibility and advocacy, constitute vital resources for digital visual activism especially in line with the potentialities available on Instagram.

7. Decrypting marginality and mainstreaming queerness in Instagram narratives

A recurring trope in the othering of queer identities is the assertion that they are non-natural and depraved expressions of sexuality and gender. This viewpoint seems to have its roots in British Colonial antigay laws in Nigeria between the 1860s and mid-1950s which regarded non-heterosexual orientation as *unnatural offences against the order of nature* [63]. Consequently, one witnesses cultural and religious moralisations against as well as psychiatrisation/medicalisation of queer identities, ideological perspectives that eventually culminated in the Nigerian anti-queer legislation (Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act of 2014). These negative expressions manifest in the deprecative rendition of queer portrayal, and represent societal weapons harnessed by the Nigerian community against non-heteronormative identities. For queer-identifying individuals, the need to counter such claims and perceptions are critical to queer agency, especially as they have immediate implications on their survival [64]. This is because public narratives on identity feed into and influence the perception of and attitudes to minority sexual and gender identities. The queer Instagram users whose public posts are engaged in this study have therefore taken up the gauntlet as they are often ready and charged to counter oppositional narratives and to push queer-positive advocacies. Some of such visual activist renditions are presented and discussed below:

Figure 8 employs a short narrative to contest the perception that people who identify as queer were either influenced by some depraved experiences or are products of some unnatural tendencies. In the narrative, the poster equates, through the use of a simile, the reality of being left-handed to being queer – *some people are, most people aren't and nobody really knows why*. The poster thus draws attention to the fact that the presence of left-handed people has not led to their minoritisation; instead, other people only acknowledge their difference without any resultant discrimination. There is an equivalence sought through the post – that the same reaction should be extended to queer-identifying people since their 'difference' is also a natural one. The frustration with the largely homophobic leaning of the Nigerian public further manifests in the comment that follows the post: *Fuck homophobic (sic) do not bring that disease to me....* Through this, the poster-commenter rejects the estrangement which is visited

Figure 8.
The naturalness of queerness.

upon queer Nigerians as a result of their sexual and gender identities. Interestingly however, the comment also falls into the prejudicial rut which it seeks to reject. This is embedded in the reference to homophobes whose perceptions and attitudes are also regarded as a disease. By regarding homophobic attitudes as 'disease', the commenter upturns the balance of representation which has been in favour of heteronormativity and latches on the affordance of power as they maximise the social media space as well as their Instagram page as a domain for the exercise of agency.

Building on the narrative which seeks to shift queerness and queer identities from the margins, **Figure 9** asserts through the simple sentence – *It's not a phase* – that identifying as queer is a form of being and that it is not an unstable identity. Through the submission, the poster makes an interventionist venture which counters widely-held perceptions that queer-identifying people are only pushed by a fleeting desire to explore. Such viewpoints reject the possibilities of the naturalness and intrinsicality

Figure 9.
Being queer is not a phase.

of queerness, positing instead that queer tendencies are deviant signals of depravity and moral decadence. The recrimination in **Figure 9** thus constitutes a rebuttal of heterosexual propaganda, one which deprecates and 'others' queer identity.

In addition, **Figure 9** can be perceived as exhortative to members of the queer community who may not be confident about their sexual identities or who may have doubts in accepting their orientations. Existing literature indicates that, because of the suffusing influences of heteronormativity, many closet queers vilify themselves for being 'different', with some hoping that they may be able to repress their closet identities and ultimately conform to societal expectations [65–67]. **Figure 9** is therefore an importunate expression for closeted queer people to be accepting of

their 'difference' and embrace their identities. Within the overall landscape of queer advocacy and activism in Nigeria, ensuring self-acceptance, communality and unity of purpose within the queer community is seen as a precursor to the ability to challenge the normative structures which continue to minoritise and render their lived realities invisible.

Consciously embedded in these figures (**Figures 8** and **9**) is the queer rainbow flag, the colours of which are semiotically used to convey inclusivism and togetherness. According to Anderson [68], the rainbow flag within queer discourses is used to stimulate an 'imagined community', one which transcends the discrimination of heteronormativity to invoke and mobilise following among people who identify as non-heterosexual. Chasin [69] also acknowledges that 'the rainbow flag stands as an emblem of gay nationalism, simply because flags are a standard symbol of nationhood'. Thus in the data analysed, the contexts of realisation and invocation of the
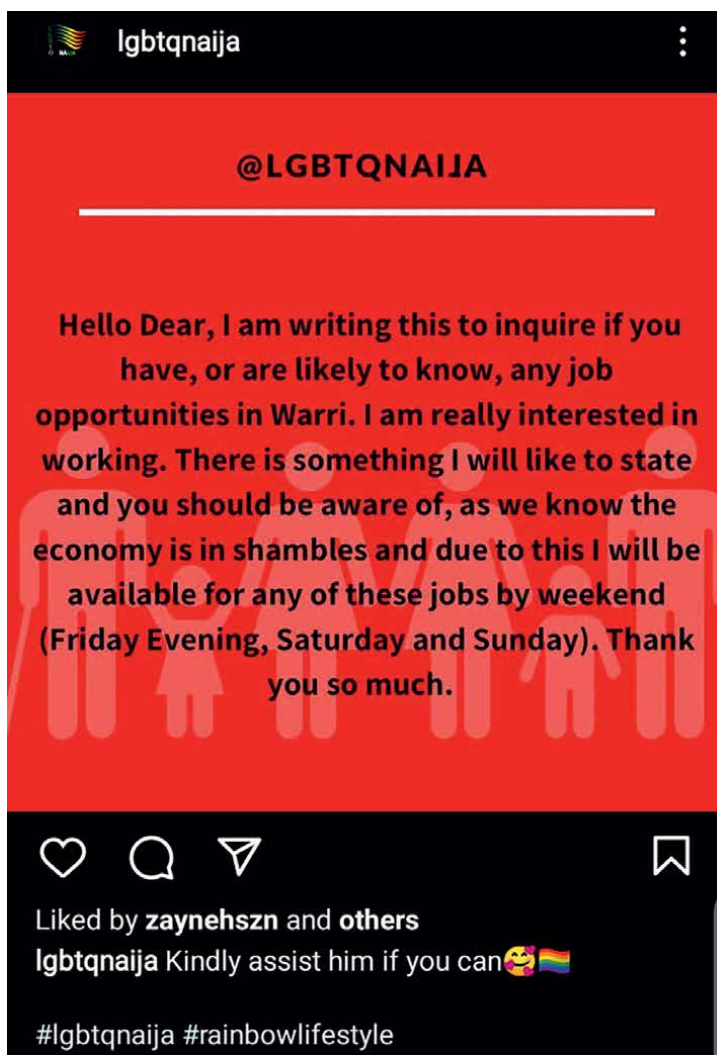
Figure 10.
Rendering assistance as queer support.

rainbow flag determine the ideological strain that is being cultured and dispersed. Whereas in **Figure 8**, the queer rainbow is represented through the love shape – as a way of preaching self-love to queer-identifying Nigerians –, in **Figure 9**, the queer colours appear twice: first in the fonts of the text which are thus foregrounded, and again in the comment accompanying the post. To cultivate positive feedback within the queer community, the poster encourages other users to signal support by dropping 'a rainbow if you agree' that being queer is not a phase.

However, beyond engendering self-love and stimulating psychological communality online, these Instagram users are also very pragmatic. Queer-identifying individuals are subjected to and contend with discriminatory practices that span healthcare, job and career opportunities, and wholesome representation in the public space [70–72]. Within these spaces, these individuals are denied their agency as opportunities which normally should be publicly available are denied them based on their (oftentimes perceived) sexual identities. The social media scape thus becomes a veritable locale where queer individuals can challenge the punitive realities of their physical existence and also provide valuable and worthwhile functional opportunities to remediate their plights. Queer-identifying Nigerian users of Instagram therefore seek as well as extend valuable information as a collaborative way of strengthening in-group affinity. This in-group sustenance forms the crux of **Figure 10**:

The @lgbtqnaija handler shares a direct message sent by a follower. The follower makes an inquiry on the possibilities of getting a job in view of the prevailing demanding economic situation. The follower is probably a student who needs additional income and thus sees the need to work during weekends. By sending the message to the handler who subsequently posts the message, one identifies an in-group synergy aimed at enabling other in-groupers with opportunities that are ordinarily denied them by the largely homophobic Nigerian society. The @lgbtqnaija handler sustains the advocacy with the text: *kindly assist him if you can*. The text is accompanied by the semiotic resources: the love emoji and the queer flag, which connote the kind of positive relationship encouraged on the platform and sustains an in-group camaraderie which is expected to be nurtured even beyond the digital space.

8. Instagramming Nigerian queerness: linking the knots

While the platform may not be the most popular among Nigerian social media users, for the Nigerian queer community, Instagram has grown from just being a platform for photo and video sharing. This is because these users understand the wider social and ideological implications of representation which underlie the images projected by individual handles. As consequence, the six queer handles explored in this study manipulate the interface of the platform in the transmission of their queer-positive ideologies as well as for visual activism purposes.

Dewan [73] and Provvidenza et al. [74] reinforce the potency of visual communication over words, and this seems to be a critical awareness in Instagram-domiciled queer narratives. The image-text interplay identifiable across the images subjected to analysis illustrate the multiplicative nature of meaning in the verbal-visual orchestration and uncovers that attitudinal meanings can be implicitly conveyed through image-text interaction and contextualising information [75]. Since images tend to assist in facilitating the synthesising and sharing of information, they further facilitate the construction of specific ideologies – and in the case of the context of this study, they help in creating queer-positive awareness and visibility. Thus, while

Alichei [76] draws attention to the persistence of homophobic rhetoric even online in Nigeria despite the liberalisation of identities which the digital space has enabled, Nigerian queer people inscribe their presence on the platforms as a way of marking territories. The implication is that in spite of the enhanced visibility and opportunity to challenge extant normative structures which digital platforms have provided, queer-identifying individuals still navigate treacherous on- and offline existence, as evoked in their digital submissions.

The peculiarity of Instagram also manifests in the user engagement metrics – likes and hashtagging. While these are weaponised to ensure wider engagement, one also recognises the manifestation of gender and identity politics as these determine the context where such metrics and engagement evaluation become integral to queer normativity. Thus, where a positive outlook is envisioned for queer advocacy, in-group users and allies are encouraged to boldly make themselves visible. However, in other scenarios where there are fears of homophobia or compromised identity, likes are either suspended or discouraged.

Furthermore, there is an identification of an ideology which is embracing of all sexual and gender identities. While there are identifiable contexts where heterophobia is expressed, the images mostly attempt a resolution to the gender wars perceptively stoked by heteronormativity. Through these public stance of ameliorating the provocative narratives of heteronormativity, these Instagram discursive engagements constitute a platform for positive digital activism, which are expected to spill over to the creation of an enabling physical space. The digital narratives also constitute platforms for the centring of queerness within Nigerian digital and post-digital discourses.

More critically however, through the Instagram posts and comments, one recognises an in-group vitality which hinges on an ideology of sustenance and assistance. Predicated by and built on the gender identity hierarchies and alterity which the Nigerian society had created, members of the queer community in Nigeria assist one another through opportunities that can facilitate economic power. This lies on the recognition that strong economic power can strengthen queer agency and in turn assist in queer visibility and legalisation [77, 78].

9. Conclusion

This article has studied the use of queer-positive images on Instagram as bookmarking and embodying visual digital activism. A standout observation in the visual representations across the Instagram handles examined in this study is the absence of personal photographs by the handlers. Undoubtedly, this is related to the Nigerian space which constantly attempts to invalidate queer existence as well as the violent outcomes which have followed accusations of queerness in the country. However, by using the images which engender queer visibility – either through celebrity images or images from protest contexts – these graphic representations have been shown to indeed constitute activist semiotic resources for the contestation of the deprivation and invalidation which homophobia has for long sustained within the Nigerian society. Furthermore, the integration of an in-group ideology in the narratives help to foster a sense of communality – preserved by a 'we' vs. 'them' perception. These viewpoints become vital in providing reassurance for queer-identifying individuals who find it difficult to navigate the homophobic suffusion of the Nigerian physical and digital spaces. Through the visual advocacies too, opportunities for economic

growth and empowerment are nurtured since these are deemed vital to surmounting the challenges of queer-phobia. Consequently, it can be concluded that, like other social media platforms, Instagram has provided a vent for the dissipation of hitherto repressed expressions of queer identities in Nigeria. Unsurprisingly, the queer Instagram post handlers and the commenters have mastered the opportunities availed by the platform and have indigenised their activism to both fit Instagram's enablement and the peculiarities of the Nigerian gender and sexual identities ecology.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 6

Perspective Chapter: Considerations about Sexual and Gender Identities and Their Influence on the Unity of the LGBT Community

Pilar Ríos-Campos

Abstract

The claim of the recognition of individual and collective identities is in charge of the social and political debate. What have traditionally been struggles for material reasons, class interests now move to the cultural. In this way, a displacement of the material to the symbolic is produced. With this emphasis on the recognition of identities, regardless of many times, faced with each other, that is, gays, lesbians, transsexual people, and transgender suffer very different discrimination in the field of cultural in this work we intend to reflect on whether identities are really as malleable and so dependent on the will of individuals as it is intended, and if social equality can be achieved exclusively through cultural policies, as well as analyze whether the emphasis on the identity helps to achieve the objectives of the collective or if, on the contrary, it ends up being harmful to it.

Keywords: gay, lesbian, LGBT, identities, queer

1. Introduction

In this work, we intend to carry out a reflection on the identity or identities, on their alleged malleability and/or fluidity, in addition to their ability to achieve the social transformations that they supposedly have as their objective.

In our Western societies, the demand for social and political recognition of identities, both individual and collective, has taken on great importance in recent years. In other words, there has been a shift from struggles over economic and material issues to those aimed at cultural and symbolic aspects and of what is related to the tangible, measurable, and verifiable: the objective, to the level of the merely subjective: what a person can feel from their internal experience, although it cannot be perceived by anyone else.

These postulates defend that each person has the right to self-define as it considers in a flexible and fluid way and that, in addition, it can do it without further

limitations than those that he herself self-imposes. In this way, external conditions are denied: social, political, economic and even biological. It reaches the extreme of converting mere subjective perceptions elements of belonging so anchored in the position occupied by individuals in the social structure such as: social class, sex and gender; Basic elements in the social classification structure in our societies. That is, it is intended that people can choose freely without more external interference, what social class or to what sex or gender they belong, without taking into account factors as objectives as the capital they possess, the sexual organs or the education they have received. None of this is relevant, the only thing that matters is the internal perception of the individual and his will. In this way concepts such as: class identity, sex identity or gender identity are used, when class consciousness should be discussed, and extrapolating this terminology: sex and gender awareness. In some cases, it seems that they are essential characteristics of individuals, that is, they are born with them and are entitled to express them freely. Paradoxically, because this contradicts the approach to the fluidity and flexibility of identities, since, if they are essential, the will of individuals would not play any role in their creation. Therefore, two completely opposite, contradictory and incompatible positions are defended.

This shift from material claims to cultural ones, with its corresponding emphasis on identity, has the effect of continuously creating borders between the different groups that compete with each other for that recognition instead of fighting together for common goals. Which has a double effect: on the one hand, it ends up dividing LGBT groups into a multitude of particular identities; and secondly, it benefits the strongest, which in this case would be gay men, to the detriment of the rest. This produces discrimination against other groups within the collective and even the invisibility of some. This is the case of the transsexual group when using the prefix trans as an umbrella term, including transsexual and transgender people, when they have very different conditions and totally opposite objectives, values, and approaches, as discussed below.

Likewise, we see how the queer movement has abandoned any analysis of power relations and, therefore, of patriarchy, focusing its attacks against feminism. As Gimeno points out, in queer theory, "universal concepts are replaced by an anomie of meanings that prevent the articulation of any political subject that can confront power or oppression" [1].

The emphasis on identities, therefore, is making the LGBT collective political from which it is possible to carry out a critical analysis of the system of oppression, articulate resistances and claim substantial changes that directly affect the power structures that build that system of oppression.

2. What do we understand by identity?

Throughout history, the concept of identity has been understood in various ways:
In ancient times, identity was considered as an essential substance that was not subject to changes or transformations, without cracks or contradictions [2], so it consisted of something stable and permanent [3].

In Modernity, identity was considered as something that the individual develops in his relationship with the environment, especially with significant others. Consequently, identity is considered as the product of the socio-communicative processes that are established between the individual and his or her environment [2]. In this perspective, identity is something that is built through relationships with others

and with the world around us. It is not something that belongs only to the individual, but is created by people in their interaction with the environment.

Postmodernity considers that identity is fluid, unstable, and fragmented, in which multiple unresolved contradictions are produced [2]. Therefore, it is something temporary and temporary. According to postmodernism, identity is not something fixed or stable, but something that is constantly changing and often contradictory. Postmodernists believe that there are multiple unresolved contradictions within identity. This means that identity is not something unitary, but something fragmentary. Furthermore, postmodernists believe that identity is temporary and can be changed.

These conceptions of identity should not be considered exclusive or contradictory, rather they can be understood as complementary since they all provide something essential to understand this difficult concept. It is necessary that there is an invariable, stable part that allows us to recognize ourselves and that others recognize us at different chronological moments and different situations. Obviously, people, as social beings that we are, we are built as individuals in relation to our environment and we are strongly influenced by the social categories established in the construction of our identity, therefore, identity is, at the same time, dynamic and varies throughout our life and in different situations. In addition, it must also be taken into account that there is a more or less important part in that construction, which depends on the individual's will as being able to make decisions about his own life [4].

The first time this concept was used from a psycho-sociological perspective was in 1946 by Erik Erikson [5]. In its most basic form, identity is a set of principles, beliefs, and values that define who we are. These principles, beliefs, and values help determine our actions and procedures. We all have different identities, but we also have a set of shared identities. These shared identities are based on the general belief in the same set of principles, beliefs, and values.

Hall considers that identity is the "meeting point" between the discourses and social practices that place individuals in a place within society and the very subjectivities of individuals who have the ability to make decisions [5]. Álvarez-Muñariz, meanwhile, understands that identity is "the awareness and assumption of ways of being, thinking and acting that give meaning and meaning to a person's life" [6]. Personal identity is the concept that an individual has about himself, while social identity is definitions or categorizations made by the environment "the others" about the individual. That is, how others see us. Therefore, we can consider that identity has two dimensions: one individual and one social. Or, as Álvarez Munárriz points out, an interpersonal dimension and an extrapersonal dimension [6]. These two dimensions are inseparable, they form a unit.

For Giddens, identities are the product of a reflexive process that occurs throughout life and that connects the individual with himself and with social norms [7]. While Duggan considers that:

"Identities cross the space between the social world and subjective experience, constituting a central organizing principle that connects the 'I' and the world. Multiple and contradictory individual identities structure and give meaning to personal experience. Collective identities -of gender, class or nation- forge connections between individuals and provide links between past and present, constituting the basis of the cultural representation of political action" [8].

Therefore, individual identity is the way a person defines himself. It is what makes a person unique and different from everyone else. Social identity is the way a person is perceived by others. It is what makes a person identify with a social or cultural group. Individual and social identities are interconnected, so that a person's social identity is

conditioned by her personal identity and, to a large extent, it is built based on social identity.

In general, identity refers to the unique characteristics and attributes that make up an individual. This can include things such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and even personal preferences and interests. Everyone has their own unique identity that makes them who they are. However, these criteria on which that individual identity is based are usually socially defined. Therefore, we can say that it is created and recreated daily, through relationships with others and with the world [3]. Identity is not something that belongs only to the individual, but is created by the individual through relationships with others and with the world around him. It is said to be something social [3].

From these definitions, we can conclude that identity is something that concerns both the individual and the collective, that it implies, at the same time, inclusion and exclusion, and that its function is to endow a person's life with meaning and connect individuals with the world. Environment.

3. How is identity constructed?

There is no single answer to this question, as identity is a complex and multi-layered concept. However, there is considerable agreement that identity is built through our interactions with others, as well as through the stories we tell and, we tell ourselves, about ourselves. Furthermore, our identities are shaped by the groups to which we belong, as well as the cultural and social norms to which we are exposed.

Identities are formed progressively throughout life, although the most critical stages are childhood and adolescence. They are built based on the interpersonal relationships that are established throughout life, and there are many factors that intervene in the formation of an identity: age, sex, religion, culture, family, social environment, etc. The family constitutes, however, a fundamental starting point in this process, since it is where the first values, norms, beliefs, behaviors, roles, and the first notions of how individuals think of themselves are assumed. In fact, the first relationship we have with identity stems from the identification that our closest environment makes of us. As Torregrosa points out:

"Even before we can identify ourselves with our name, or with our body, or with our parents, etc., we are identified by them and through them. Our identity is, prior to our personal identity, an identity for others. Only from the others can we have initial news of who we are" [9].

Therefore, any idea we have of ourselves arises through the capture of the self-image in the other [9].

Within the more or less wide range of possibilities that we have at our disposal, we can choose, to a certain extent, with what, and with what not to identify. Although, paradoxically, what we choose not to identify with can also be part of our identity in a conscious or unconscious way [5].

Later, as the relational environment expands, identity development will be subject to other influences [10]. Therefore, the construction of identity is a complex process that takes place throughout the life of the individual. As Marcús points out "… identities are built on the basis of previous significant experiences: they are based on historically constructed habits considering social and individual trajectories. So they are not established on a void even once and for all" [2].

In this way, identity determines the way in which we see and interpret the world and how we relate to the social context. That is, as we have mentioned before, the conception that an individual has of himself will be a reflection of what his environment. It has led him to believe about himself, although this does not mean that the subject is completely passive in the construction of his identity and simply limits himself to acting as a mirror of what his context transmits to him. Each subject has their own personal ways of interpreting this information and elaborates it based on many other elements. For example, a socially stigmatized person will reflect that stigma in his identity, but that stigma does not come from within, but is produced by the social context. In the case of sexual diversity, we can find internalized homophobia, caused by the stigma attached to non-heterosexual orientations. Internalized homophobia would consist of the personal assumption of social rejection of sexual diversity by people belonging to sexual minorities [10].

Each subject has several nodal identities from which the other elements are organized. These nodes are not definitive, but rather vary depending on various factors and take on relevance depending on the context [11]. The most common are: nationality, sex, religion, age, social class, profession, etc. These are socially defined differentiation criteria, which constitute a collective knowledge and, therefore, are internalized by the individuals of that society, so they are part of their own consciences [12].

Understanding that identity is a social construction does not mean that people's ability to influence its creation is denied, but rather it underlines that this construction is carried out jointly with the environment "but whose rules of composition are derived from that context, and not of the organism that supports it" [9]. This link between the environment and the individual is what allows people to know their place in the world. As García-Martínez points out:

"The relationship with the world and with existence allows the individual to become aware of himself and thus define his identity. The question "who am I?" can only be understood accompanied by two other questions: "what are my relationships with others?" and "how do I position myself in the world?" [11].

4. Identity, difference, and power

Identity is built through difference [13], because it is what allows an individual or a group to distinguish themselves from others. This requires establishing a border between the "identical" and the "different." That is, for there to be an identity, there must necessarily be an otherness or alterity. Only in this way can identities serve as elements of "identification and adhesion" [4]. This construction is not based on all the characteristics, nor on objective criteria, but is usually carried out through a selection of elements that are socially created as criteria of social differentiation, such as: class, sex, age, sexual orientation, etc. In this way, "identity difference is not the direct consequence of cultural difference; The particular culture does not by itself produce a differentiated identity; this can only result from the interactions between groups and from the modes of differentiation that they incorporate into their relationships" [11]. Following Butler, we can say that identities are constituted through exclusion, creating an outside where they would find constituted subjects as "abject and marginal" [14]. Bauman supports this idea arguing that "Identity means to stand out: to be different and unique by virtue of that difference, so that the search for identity can only divide and separate" [12].

The construction of an identity not only requires the constitution of borders that separate what is identical from what is different, but also supposes the creation of a hierarchy in which the "outside" is located at a lower level, while what is that remains inside acquires the quality of substantial, essential. This leads us to affirm that identities are constructed within "the game of power and exclusion" [13]. Expanding on this idea, Marcús affirms that, for the construction of identities, what is excluded acquires more importance than what is included, and that these differences are established through a series of power games [2]. Identity categories usually have a moral component and seek to establish a social hierarchy, with some groups being considered more worthy and valuable than others for possessing certain characteristics.

In these power relations, certain individuals and groups have the ability to impose the criteria through which limits and hierarchies are established and, therefore, to establish the definitions of themselves and others.

"The set of identity definitions works as a classification system that fixes the respective positions of each group. Legitimate authority has the symbolic power of making its categories of representation of social reality and its own principles of division of the social world be recognized as well-founded..." [11].

It is from these games of power that the lens of the gaze is established and through which the everyday becomes "just as it is." This position is determined by the different power relations (economic, political, and cultural) that constitute the different fields [15]. These categories tend to create and "reproduce social reality" based on the interests of those who have the power to control the creation of identity categories [9] and the ability to include or exclude others from these categories and the benefits that come with them.

This situation creates inequalities of opportunity and power because some people are included in certain identity categories and are therefore considered full members of society and its institutions, while others are excluded and considered outsiders. In this way, one of the main functions of these categories is to reproduce a social hierarchy and the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups based on the evaluation of their value and social importance [9].

In conclusion, identity categories are created and used by people to establish social relationships and communicate their social position. These categories are created and used to constitute and reproduce a social hierarchy and establish a social order. As Butler indicates: "Identity is a culturally limited principle of order and hierarchy, a regulatory fiction" [14].

A person can be made up of a number of different identities [16]. For Bourdieu, one does not have an identity, but a series of identities that imply a certain number of oppositional relations, that is, one is really an inhabitant of a specific field, of a determined class, of a series of positions within the fields, and finally, of a system of power relations that define and determine the identity of the individual. In this way, the content of an identity is determined by a set of positions within a social structure [15].

In this way, at the end of the 19th century, the concept of homosexuality appears within medical and legal discourses, considering it as a "global identity that is imposed on the subject" [17]. That is, what until then were considered only as simple sexual practices that did not define the individual who carried them out,end up becoming "identities and political conditions that must be studied, reported, persecuted, punished, cured" [18]. Thus, the totality of an individual's being is defined from a partial category such as sexuality, "taking the part for the whole" [16]. From that moment on, a progressive essentialization of sexuality, gender, and sexual

difference takes place, until it ends up being elevated to the category of natural and placing them beyond any historical or cultural context [19].

Therefore, homosexuality is an invented category, a category that exists only in the cultural and social struggle of a society, it is neither natural nor universal. Thus, the invented category of homosexuality is a reflection of the generalized discrimination against sexual and gender minorities, inherent to the heteropatriarchal structure of our societies. Likewise, Foucault defines the heteronorm as a "dominant system of representation and forms of practice that privileges and normalizes heterosexuality as universal and natural" [17].

Homosexual identity is constructed from a medical definition, and the exclusion that it causes, results in power relations. The individual can only be thought of within the sociocultural parameters in which he inserts himself. Building an identity around sexual orientation is something that only non-heterosexual people do. Therefore, sexuality forms an important part of the identity only of those who have non-heterosexual sexualities.

Identity can only be built based on social schemes that allow it. For example, homosexual identity is constructed from a context of know-how that creates homosexuality as a determining characteristic of individuals, not only as behaviors. That means that "excessive" homosexuality can only be done within the context and in the parameters that marks the "medication". Consequently, the "homosexual identity" is created from outside individuals and assumed and claimed by the subjects who fall within that definition and, therefore, are excluded by it. In this way, we can affirm that, creating identities based on categories established by the same system that builds discrimination strategies, ends up being a way to submit to that system.

5. Redistribution recognition

In this context, Fraser argues that, since the end of the twentieth century, social and political struggles have gone from seeking economic redistribution to claiming cultural recognition, that is, group identities [18].

This author suggests that there are two types of injustice: economic and cultural or symbolic. The first is located in the economic structure of society, and its solution consists of the redistribution of wealth [18]. The second is located in the social patterns of "representation, interpretation and communication" [18], in it would be found, among others, sexuality. The solution to this type of injustice would have to do with the recognition of diversity [18].

Therefore, redistribution would deal with material issues such as income, property, and access to basic goods among which would be for example: housing, education and health. For its part, recognition demands the achievement of symbolic aspects such as the elimination of stereotypes, the representation of minorities and their social participation.

The possible solutions that Fraser poses to this type of claims vary according to their degree of depth or capacity for transformation. The "affirmative" solutions are limited to making superficial changes without going into the final cause of the inequalities, while what he calls "transformative solutions" seek to modify the situation by acting on the root of the problems. Transformative solutions are more effective, but require much more time and effort. The affirmative ones are quicker and easier to apply, but it is necessary to apply them repeatedly, which leads to the stigmatization of the groups they try to benefit [18].

The groups or groups that seek recognition seek the affirmation of their specificity; While those that raise redistributive demands, are aimed at disappearing as a group. For example, the proletariat, would not aspire to recognition, but to its disappearance as a class, as well as feminist claims about gender, its goal is that it disappears, not to multiply. On the other hand, the claims of the LGBT groups will aspire to affirm their specificity as a group, as well as those of the queer theory that intend to multiply the genres and that these are recognized. Affirmative recognition solutions increase the valuation of disadvantaged groups, but do not affect the basis of these differences; While the transforming solutions of recognition, transform the assessment structures, so the differences are destabilized and, consequently, the identities [18].

If the objective is to reach a more just society for all people, it is necessary They are also transformative. The type of demands that claim only recognition create division in the LGBT collective, and of these with the rest of society. In this fight for the recognition of identities, some groups will benefit to the detriment of others. Bauman It expresses it as follows: "The proclaimed redistribution demands in the name of equality are integration vehicles, while the recognition claims reduced to pure cultural distinction promote division, separation and, finally, the bankruptcy of the dialogue" [12]. Because identity policies end up obtaining exclusion, since others are seen as the different and, therefore, as the enemies. While, if a community is based on universal values, it means that all human beings have the same rights and the same duties, regardless of their differences.

6. Sexual and gender identities. Is there an LGBT community?

We usually talk about the LGBT community as if it were unitary and compact; as if all the groups that make up sexual and gender diversity had the same problems and interests. However, the truth is that it is not. Within this community there is great diversity and the interests of each of them not only do not coincide on many occasions, but also become incompatible with each other. Gays and lesbians start from very different positions in the social structure because, regardless of their sexual condition, they are still men and women in a patriarchal society. Bisexual people are almost completely invisible within the group, on many occasions, even discriminated against when it is considered that they are not capable of fully accepting their homosexuality. The "T" of the acronym LGBT, before referring to transsexual people, now also includes transgender people, two groups that have completely opposite approaches and problems.

In relation to trans laws that are being approved throughout the world, there is no agreement within the LGBT collective. In 2019, the "LGB Alliance" was created in London and, subsequently, other similar associations such as Canada, Iceland, Ireland, Australia and Spain have been created. These associations are the product of the split of LGBT+ groups of these different countries. They declare that they have separated from their organizations of origin due to the discrepancies they have with them and the lack of opportunity to have in them to expose and defend their views. That is, they accuse LGBT+ associations of creating a iron censorship that prevents debating everything that does not coincide with dominant political approaches, especially in relation to trans issues. The new groups propose that the defenders of the Trans Movement are protecting positions that go against the rights of lesbians, gays and bisexuals. From their point of view, the objective of these policies that deny the material reality of sex, is to end homosexuality in all their forms, so they consider

them homophobic and, especially, lesbophobes and misogynks. They accuse Queer theory of complying with the sexist prejudices of society, not admitting that there are women and men who do not adapt to these stereotypes. Likewise, they claim that, homosexual people are attracted to other people of the same sex, not of their same gender, so, accuse of transphobia to those who do not want to maintain relationships with people of the other sex, as the theory does queer, it's homophobia.

This situation has been aggravated from the moment in which all the weight of the demands was transferred to the cultural or symbolic sphere. The emphasis on identities, in addition to highlighting differences and increasing borders and exclusions, leaves out of the analysis the structures of domination and the material conditions of life. In other words, there is a total depoliticization of the phenomenon of sexuality, turning it into a merely personal matter. As a consequence, they end up creating a multitude of groups, which find nothing in common between them and, therefore, cannot unite, that is, constitute themselves as a political subject, to carry out profound social transformations that allow the inclusion of these under equal conditions, only some very limited objectives are achieved that leave intact the structures that cause that discrimination. This condemns them to compete with each other to achieve their goals. The emphasis on identities from an individual and personal point of view has produced a simplification in the analysis and a loss of vision of the complexity of the phenomena. In addition, the emphasis on identities leads to organize politically around the interests of each group, without taking into account how these claims affect the rest of the groups.

The political model of explanation of sexuality, mostly developed by feminism and, more specifically, by feminism-the lesbian, considers sexuality as a political and social construction that aims to maintain the patriarchal system through the institution of heterosexuality mandatory. This means the exclusion of all kinds of sexualities that do not respond to this social organization scheme. Therefore, without the elimination of patriarchy and heterosexuality as a hegemonic model, it is not possible to end the discrimination suffered by sexual minorities. However, the dominant claim of the LGBT collective, based on queer theory, responds to a naturalistic model, not only of homosexuality, but of sexuality in general. That is, sexuality has a biological origin, so non -heterosexual people cannot be responsible for their sexual preferences. Sexuality has been considered as a political and social construction (lesbian feminism approach], to a biological interpretation represented by the "sexual orientation" model that gays defend. The objective, therefore, is not the transformation of the social system, but the modification of borders so that those people who previously considered system dissidents are included. This depoliticization responds to a strategy that implies the acceptance of certain types of sexualities in exchange for avoiding the transformation of the structures of power prevailing around the sex-gender system.

In the same way, lesbian feminism has always raised lesbianism as a political option, something that could be chosen by women to get out of patriarchal oppression; however, when women stop having their own spaces for debate and are integrated into the LGBT movement, these approaches have been censored, political explanations of sexuality have disappeared from the debate as a "space of resistance to heterosexuality and patriarchy" [1], assimilating, in this way, the gay approach that is biologistic and, therefore, depoliticized [1].

This depoliticization affects the conception of what is trans in the same way. Transsexuality is considered something biological and never a cultural association between sexual organs and social roles. Similarly, gender is considered an essential characteristic in human beings, hence the interest shown by these currents in

so-called "trans childhoods," coinciding with the most reactionary and traditional patriarchal discourses, with the only difference that now, sex separate from gender, or more specifically, instead of trying to adapt gender to sex, as has traditionally been done, what is intended is to adjust sex to the gender with which that person claims to identify. However, at the same time and in a contradictory way, it is affirmed that identities are fluid, malleable and that they depend on the will and desires of the subjects. This aims to question the political subject of feminism and the legitimacy of women in the fight against the conditions of oppression to which they are subjected because of their sex; as well as neutralize the advances in terms of equality achieved by the feminist movement. This is what has been called: homopatriarchy.

Gays are involved in a conflict of interest within the LGBT community, since, at the same time that they want to stop being discriminated against for their sexual preferences, they want to continue maintaining their privileges as men, so criticism of patriarchy is out of the question. However, in his analyses, it is not possible to transform the institution of compulsory heterosexuality or heterosexism, without eliminating the patriarchy that is at the base of that system.

Luisa Posada Kubissa comments on this that:

"The system of patriarchal domination is a system with social, sexual, political, symbolic and economic dimensions. The resistance to heteronormative sexuality and its deconstruction supposes a resistance to one of the dimensions of the patriarchal system, but not to patriarchy as a system of total domination -if, furthermore, it were even possible to transform some dimension of patriarchal domination without transforming the rest. In short, the eradication of gender subordination that feminism proposes can and should be allied with the transgender and queer movements, but we believe here that it has to continue to be a substantive, radical and critical struggle. A struggle with its own long history, its own signs of identity and its own interests, which cannot come to be dissolved in these movements, but rather have to be oriented towards a main objective: to eradicate inequality and patriarchal oppression of half of the humanity" [20].

The same thing happens with gender. Queer theory pretends that it is simply an identity. These movements consider that identity is something completely flexible, modifiable, selectable. Therefore, gender would be something that anyone can modify at will. However, feminism defends that gender is a patriarchal structure of domination of women. In no case would it be an identity, although, obviously, the gender in which we have been educated constitutes an essential part of our identity.

Overcoming gender so that it ceases to be important is not the same as multiplying genders to overcome the sexual binarism [21]. Because, as Posada Kubissa points out, the female "gender identity" is constructed in opposition to the male model that is dominant. We could add that the rest of the genders proposed by queer theory and transfeminism can only be created taking as a reference the hegemonic model of masculinity and the masculine-feminine binarism, so, ultimately, this approach is not it leaves the established paradigm [20].

"Queer theory makes a general critique of the gender system and heteronormativity, but confronts gender as if it oppressed men and women in the same way, as if it were inscribed neutrally on bodies, often forgetting that the what gender inscribes on the bodies is the hierarchy and also forgetting the material conditions of existence to which said gendered inscription on the feminine and masculine bodies gives rise. Queer theory presents us with a depoliticized gender that is unrelated to women's real lives, unrelated to economic inequality, violence, or freedom of movement or choice.

As Jeffreys denounces, power relations have disappeared from queer theory, as well as class privileges and unequal access to resources" [1].

Likewise, despite the fact that queer theory postulates that the intersectionality that occurs between all categories of oppression must be taken into account, at the same time issues such as the regularization of prostitution, pornography, and surrogacy are defended, using as I argue the right of people to freely use their bodies. These analyses never take into account the socioeconomic origin of the people who work in this field, nor the treatment that women receive in these areas. In other words, the material and economic aspects that condition the lives of these people are not considered, in a tacit defense of capitalist neoliberalism [22, 23].

7. Conclusions

As we have developed throughout this work, identities are not as malleable or as flexible as claimed, nor are they as strongly linked to the will of individuals. Identities have more to do with the differentiation criteria established by the social system. These criteria seek to create a hierarchy that serves to place individuals in different places in the social structure. It must also be taken into account that they are created and maintained by certain hegemonic groups that control power in societies. The sexual and gender categories themselves have been created by a patriarchal system that has established only heterosexuality as legitimate and has excluded those who did not fit into these categories through medical and legal discourses.

Obviously, building identities based on structures created from the heteropatriarchal power, is nothing more than submitting to its designs, unless, these identities are established as a strategy to dismantle the discourse itself from which it starts. Which means that identities should not be understood as an end in themselves, but as a means to create a political subject that seeks the elimination of the social categories that build discrimination.

But, for this, it is not enough to pretend to carry out superficial changes that eliminate the most serious forms of discrimination, it is necessary to dismantle these discourses from the foundations, questioning the bases on which they are based. In other words, it would not only be about ending heteronormativity, but also seeking the disappearance of the patriarchy that has created heteronormativity as a strategy of domination.

Obviously, cultural conflicts are very important, and there are groups deeply discriminated against for this. However, it is necessary to find a balance between the two dimensions of injustice if we want to carry out real transformations in society and thus eliminate the injustices suffered by multiple groups and collectives. Cultural claims must be complemented by struggles for redistribution or economic justice. We cannot forget that subjects are not neutral from the social point of view, but are marked by a series of characteristics that place them at a certain point on the social scale. Pretending to ignore this would only perpetuate inequalities.

Identities are necessary for the construction of political subjects, but as long as they are not considered essential identities but policies of resistance to heterosexuality as an oppressive institution of the rest of sexualities.

Likewise, we propose to avoid identity politics as much as possible to replace it with policies that seek the disappearance of collective identities, so that the objective is the equality of all people as individuals, not as members of groups.

This last proposal would need to be done gradually, since it is true that some groups and collectives are in a situation of social disadvantage, so they cannot achieve equality as simple members of the citizenry. But it would be necessary to establish objectives that seek the deconstruction of the symbolic and cultural structure of society, as well as economic transformation, rather than identity policies that reinforce the difference of these groups.

From our point of view, the emphasis on identities will end up causing a deep fragmentation in the LGBT community, creating a multitude of unconnected groups that will defend their immediate and particular interests, competing with the rest.

Conflict of interest

I declare that I have no type of conflict of interest regarding the topic worked on in this chapter.

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Edited by Deborah Woodman

No matter where LGBT+ people are found on the planet and no matter what our legality is, we are creating community and meaning as acts of resilience and rebellion. This book introduces a discussion about the action of creating a community, expressed by a global authorship encompassing the Netherlands, Spain, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Canada. Being Queer and Trans in some of these spaces is illegal, while in others it carries a stigma. In spite of the challenges and the consequences, LGBT+ people persist in seeking out community both online and offline. The various chapters include interviews, analyses of tweets and Instagram posts, and considerations of the utility of identity as a category. Each chapter considers the historical links, real-life experiences of people, and how social contexts contribute to what we now see globally. This exciting text will inspire readers to question how community is formed, where it can be found, what methods can be used to explore communities at risk, and how to understand what we discover.