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The affairs of the home: LGBT+ migrant community navigating physical and digital space in South Africa, during the global COVID-19 pandemic

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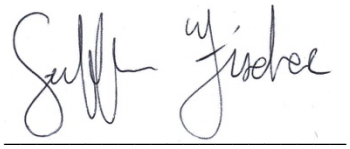
University of The Witwatersrand
Faculty of Humanities
African Centre for Migration and Society
Master of Arts in Migration and Displacement
2021

The affairs of the home: LGBT+ migrant community navigating physical and digital space in South Africa, during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

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Student Number: 0607104E
Supervisor: Dr B CAMMINGA

DECLARATION

I, Steffen FISCHER declare that except for the reference to other people's works, which have been duly acknowledged, this research paper is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in migration and displacement at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university, neither has it been published by any other person or organisation.



30 September 2021

ABSTRACT

Home is an architectural space, a place to settle, to be at peace, to live and be free. To establish a home allows us to envisage a greater sense of belonging that transcends scale and borders: a house on a plot of land or community within a suburb, a city within a country or a WhatsApp group existing in digital space. Using architectural tools such as itineraries, thresholds, tectonics, closet, borders and the home, which transcends the physical boundaries of material tectonics, into social ordering – for LGBT+ migrants, home in this paper, is a community that can exist in both physical and digital spaces. This paper also relies on a GoFundMe campaign launched during COVID-19 as a case study for understanding its navigation between the digital and physical space whilst using networks and existing visible connections which the coordinators had within the LGBT+ migrant community and the experiences of two LGBT+ migrants, Thomars and Ola. The closet is a space that exists within the home and can be combined with scale, where the closet extended becomes the home. The metaphor of the closet is used in this paper to explore how LGBT+ migrants navigate the boundaries between physical and digital spaces. Displacement and human mobility enforce the concept of a home where migrants move, are in search of new homes, to be free across borderlines because their homes have made them vulnerable and exposed, because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The COVID-19 as a triple threat impacted the lives of LGBT+ migrants. The restriction of movement and harsh laws implemented by the South African government meant that occupying physical space placed LGBT+ migrants in vulnerable positions where COVID-19 can be used as a metaphor for the closet. This research seeks to understand how LGBT+ migrants navigated spatial boundaries during COVID-19 whilst exploring concepts of the home and the closet.

Keywords: LGBT+, migrant, identities, belonging, nostalgia, the closet, home, COVID-19, digital space, physical space, xenophobia, South Africa

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EPIGRAPH

An identity is questioned only when it is menaced, as when the mighty begin to fall, or when they reached begin to rise, or when the stranger enters the gates, never, thereafter, to be a stranger ... Identity would seem to be the garment with which one covers the nakedness of the self: in which case, it is best that the garment be loose, a little like the robes of the desert, through which ones nakedness can always be felt, and, sometimes, discerned. This trust in one's nakedness is all that gives one power to change one's robes.

- James Baldwin, The Devil Finds Work: An Essay, 1976

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr B Camminga for their support and insight in shaping my topic. Your patience and care in guiding me along this process have been invigorating and invaluable.

Most importantly I thank my research participants for being so willing and open in meeting and accommodating me both digitally and physically (albeit social distant). Your courage, strength and support in the LGBT+ migrant community are commendable and inspiring.

I would like to extend gratitude to the ACMS staff who assisted us so gracefully during the global pandemic in getting us all online and through the year and special thanks to Dr Jean Pierre Misago & Prof Jo Vearey for their generous financial aid for this research project.

To my mother, Patricia. Thank you for always believing and motivating me to do more, in times where I did not think was possible. To my partner Brandon Mattison for never allowing me to give up, friends and colleagues for your love and support in our navigating a global pandemic together. To André Croucamp for our early conversations about embarking on this new journey and for always believing in my potential, nudging me along ever so gently.

PROLOGUE

Standing proud, head tilted slightly up and eyes engaged on the horizon behind the camera person. The angle of the camera is positioned low to enhance the posture and confidence of the man within the photograph. Wearing all black: t-shirt, slightly ripped jeans, sneakers and a cap – one foot placed slightly ahead of the other – and ambition. Posted on a Facebook account – a digital space – with the hashtag 'selflove2021' and has been liked over 309 times, containing over 36 comments of love and cheering. This photograph is of Thomars, an LGBT+ migrant, activist and founder of the Fruit Basket.

As an LGBT+ migrant activist Thomars embodies much of what this research paper seeks to understand by exploring notions of the closet space and ideas of the home across physical and digital space:

> Home for me is where I am happy. Where I'm fully and completely able to be myself, not hide, not pretend and not try to make other people happy by *hiding* who I am. [Home] is an environment where I am surrounded by people who accept *me* for who I am, a place where I am loved [emphasis added].
>
> - Thomars, Digital Zoom Interview, 17 November 2020

JOURNEYING INTO A THESIS

This body of work navigates and explores, similar in many ways to the way identity 'works' through time, history, space and place. I possess multiple identities: a maker, a designer, an architect, a hacker, a *writer* and a *researcher*. I have endeavoured to challenge myself with this body of writing and research, unpacking internalised homophobia of my queer self, a cisgender Caucasian male gradually gaining my voice and confidence using writing as a medium for investigation and exploration, all the while being aware of my privilege and position.

At the onset of the research proposal, I submitted my work to an editor who was referred to me by a dear friend. I reached out to the editor to assist me with checking my writing for my proposal submission. My research proposal contained the words; 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual', 'transgender', 'refugee' and 'migrant' on the first page of the proposal. The editor completed three-quarters of the work and then stumbled. I would later receive an email from the editor mentioning they could not review my topic for religious reasons, further mentioning that there would be no charge for the work completed – as if this would be a consolation prize for relieving them of any guilt? I felt attacked and hurt but moreover, this email highlighted the reasons behind why I was completing this research. The email demonstrated the importance of LGBT+ research and the activist work I want to be involved, to further break down barriers and stigmas that LGBT+ individuals continue to experience. Being a migrant myself, I have lived in South Africa since 1993 and I have experienced what it means to be illegal within these borders. What it means to be unable to study, to have your bank account closed, to feel 'stuck' in physical space, unable to move, albeit my privilege and access to other resources set me aside from that of my participants. My interest in migration studies has grown over the years, from volunteering in art workshops at a refugee bridging school east of the city, exhibitions raising money for refugee school children to completing my architectural education having the backdrop with themes of migration, the arrival city, nationality and citizenship.

This project navigates between the physical and digital spaces. We often do not think of the migration between the two spaces, as such that we occupy the physical space from within our homes whilst navigating the digital perhaps using our cellphones — as this research also

documents — sending money far and wide, elsewhere to other geographical places within a matter of milliseconds. Perhaps one can read this in the same instance as to how some LGBT+ migrants have navigated between physical and digital spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic within South Africa – it has been a challenging year, yet individuals have navigated through space. There are no clear borders that have been crossed between the two spaces. There are moments where one space is occupied over the other because of visibility and access.

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African Centre for Migration and Society
University of the Witwatersrand

Supervisor: Dr B **CAMMINGA**
Research Proposal: Submission 02
02 September 2020

The affairs of the home: LGBT+ migrant community navigating physical and digital space in South Africa, during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr B Camminga for their support and guidance in shaping my topic.

topic information

> "To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all."
> – Oscar Wilde[1]

INTRODUCTION

info

The proposed research project seeks to understand the relationship between physical and digital spaces as used by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+)[2] migrant[3] communities living in South Africa.

The COVID-19 pandemic has globally further marginalised LGBT+ people, at times removing their visibility when their voices are necessary. The effects of COVID-19 further eliminate the presence of LGBT+ migrants in physical spaces. This has not only removed their visibility, but ensured their access to services is placed on hold. However, COVID-19 has also shown how the community navigate their visibility within digital spaces by making use of platforms such as *GoFundMe* and other social media platforms to transform their physical representation of home, and reclaim the community or affirm a need for belonging.

LGBT+ narratives are often seen as peripheral, a project such as this, by investigating the interplay between physical and digital space, would bring those narratives to the forefront. The interplay between the two spaces highlights these margins and peripheries where LGBT+ migrants in South

---

[1] 'When Wilde went to France, where it wasn't a crime to be gay, he was a man fleeing unjust laws that could be used to persecute him. He was no exile; he was a refugee" (Shamsie, 2016).
[2] Within the body of this research I have dropped the QIA acronym (Queer, Intersex and Asexual) from LGBTQIA+ and replaced this with the '+' symbol. This is to indicate that these individuals continue to exist and are politically useful in acknowledging their own struggles that being QIA. However, the primary focus is that of asylum seekers who directly identify as LGBT individuals.
[3] I use the term migrant within this research paper to describe both refugee and asylum seekers.

Gmail Steffen FISCHER <[redacted]@gmail.com>

Editing

[redacted]@gmail.com> Mon, Aug 31, 2020 at 11:55 AM
To: Steffen FISCHER <[redacted]@gmail.com>

Dear Steffen,

Please find attached the work I have done so far.

This doesn't often happen to me, but unfortunately, due to the subject matter I am not able to pursue this project. Though I appreciate what needs to be said in this regard, I am not able to be a part of furthering the LGBT cause due to having made the choice to embrace Islam, which has led me to a beautiful and peaceful existence, humbly obedient to God, who prohibits homosexuality quite clearly. I should have asked you about the subject matter before I agreed to look at it, and as such, I sincerely apologise for the delay to your project.

I am attaching the edits I made early this morning, with no cost for the time spent.

Wishing you all the best for your road ahead,
[redacted]
[Quoted text hidden]

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891K

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01 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has globally further marginalised lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) migrants, at times removing their visibility when their voices are necessary. Within the body of this research, I have dropped the QIA acronym (Queer, Intersex and Asexual) from LGBTQIA+ and replaced this with the '+' symbol. This is to indicate that these individuals continue to exist and are politically useful in acknowledging their own struggles that being QIA. However, the primary focus is that of refugees and asylum seekers who directly identify as LGBT+ individuals within this research. Furthermore, I use the term migrant within this research report to describe both refugee and asylum seekers within South Africa. Although I have only spoken to a refugee and asylum seeker, I believe their experiences are not only applicable to refugees and asylum seekers but extend to migrants because of the xenophobia which they also experience within South Africa. The effects of COVID-19 have further eliminated the presence of LGBT+ migrants in physical spaces (Scalabrini, 2020). This has not only removed their visibility due to COVID-19 and access to the physical but pushed migrants to occupy the digital space. However, COVID-19 has also shown how the community navigate their visibility within digital spaces by making use of online platforms such as GoFundMe, WhatsApp (an application loaded onto cellphones which allows users to send text messages and voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share images, documents, user locations, and other content within their platform) and Facebook to transform their physical representation of home and reclaim the community or affirm a need for belonging. In the absence of the physical space due to COVID-19, some LGBT+ migrants turned to occupy the digital. This visibility in South Africa was seen by the start of the GoFundMe campaign to raise funds for LGBT+ migrants during COVID-19.

LGBT+ narratives are often seen as peripheral, I will discuss within this paper, LGBT+ narratives also often go forgotten and undocumented. The interplay between the two spaces, physical and digital, highlights these margins and peripheries where LGBT+ migrants in South Africa, for various reasons that this project explores, are forced to position themselves. It is in these spaces that this paper will investigate the difference between physical and digital space by LGBT+ migrants during COVID-19 which shows the obstacles but also achievements that this occupation occurs. It is these spaces that this paper will investigate in

relation to LGBT+ migrants in South Africa during COVID-19 navigate between the physical and digital space and their visibility is particularly noteworthy when we think about how individuals define their visibility in both spaces. Some migrants may seek to have physical visibility within their new chosen homes, but they may not want digital visibility for fear of their identity being exposed to family in the countries they have left behind or fled, therefore the home is always in the making.

In this paper, I will employ the use of some architectural tools which are also theoretical tools that will be used to explore and investigate the relationships between physical and digital space by LGBT+ migrants. These tools are itineraries, thresholds, tectonics, the closet, the home and borders which are navigated and occupied in different ways between the two spaces. To understand the relationship between physical and digital spaces, it is necessary to draw attention to the physical space first. Physical space exists within our immediate reality, which we can touch, feel and navigate. Physical space forms our urban civic centres, the homes we live in and the spatial rooms we occupy. A home is a place in which we find safety and protection. Home can also be a community in which someone feels they belong. For Fortier (2001:p.407) home is a recurring theme when understanding LGBT+ narratives of migration spatially recognising the "power of the model of 'home-as-familiarity'". This paper uses the home as both "a narrative metaphor and … as real-world shelters" (Bryant, 2015:p.262). A home is architecture's most simple placemaking tool, which also differentiates between public and private spaces while also giving visibility to the dichotomy in individual lives (Santiago, 2002:p.15).

LGBT+ itineraries which navigate the thresholds of place and identity begin to show the tectonic interface between migration and architecture. Though an itinerary speaks to something that is perhaps formally planned, those of LGBT+ individuals are sometimes not, especially in scenarios where LGBT+ individuals need to seek rapid escape because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Ticktin's (2020) formulation of "a [migrant] was an active, not passive, figure" and draws our attention to the mobility of migrants in their active search for a new home, where "home [becomes] a destination rather than a origin" (Fortier, 2001:p.407). This paper makes reference to an itinerary because, within the lives of LGBT+ individuals, the hardships of wanting to secure a piece of visibility, exposing a person's identity can be met with misunderstanding. LGBT+ individuals navigate many different paths to find their home, in answer to a basic human need for safety and a desire to express

their true identity. The construction of a home for an LGBT+ person is important since LGBT+ people can be either displaced or banished from their homes because of their sexuality or gender identity or expression (UNHCR, 2011). A home is a place in which an individual may find safety and protection. The understanding of home is an important aspect when dealing with complex histories and narratives of LGBT+ migrants. To ground this inquiry with the concepts of home, I will explore what home means for my two participants, Ola and Thomars, and what it means for them. This structuring of bodies is important in space because we start to understand the layering and ordering of space, particularly that of the closet and the home which are grounded in physical space but can also exist within the digital.

This paper employs the closet as an architectural spatial concept and conceptual metaphor to carry out its theoretical analysis (Brown, 2000; Cisneros & Bracho, 2019; De Villiers, 2012; Scott, 2018; Sedgwick, 1990). In this paper, I show how – the spatial tool of the closet space as a concept – is useful to understand the histories, identities (Scott, 2018), artefacts and itineraries of LGBT+ migrants – for those who are on the move to escape hardship or persecution because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This is done in relation to the physical and digital spaces by investigating the LGBT+ migrant community in South Africa. The closet can be used as a spatial tool that facilitates or removes visibility between the interplay of physical and digital spaces. In this sense, "spatial metaphors are epistemological statements which can highlight the importance of space in the construction of identity, both conceptually and materially, in the abstract and in the concrete" (Rendell, 2002:p.107). A closet can also be understood as a space in which someone decides their visibility, be it in a physical or digital space. Closets are objects or smaller wardrobe spaces within rooms where one can store articles of clothing or hide personal belongings. In the same way, they can operate as a space in which secrets or thoughts are hidden. Closets for LGBT+ people are interlinked with visibility and secrecy.

When speaking with a participant for this research, Thomars, a LGBT+ migrant notes when asked about the closet that they are out of the closet and proud, "I am never going back into the closet – for any reason – never, never, ever!" Thomars is a Zimbabwean LGBT+ transgender economic migrant who arrived in South Africa in 2010 and was a contact who was provided to me by my supervisor. He is a public figure, activist and is well known within the LGBT+ migrant community within Johannesburg. The first initial interview with

Thomars was held within the digital space of Zoom, and later in physical space by means of a round-table with experts.

> Digital Interview – Zoom
>
> Date: 17 November 2020
>
> Name: Thomars **Shamuyarira** – Founder of Fruit Basket, Johannesburg.
>
> Pronouns: he/him/his
>
> Fruit Basket "advocates for the rights and freedoms as well as the safety and security of LGBT+ migrants, asylum seekers and refugees living in South Africa. The organisation aims at promoting equality and opportunities in a safe and secure environment for LGBT+ persons and groups" (UNHCR, 2020).

Thomars' visibility and identity were being threatened and his only means of escaping was to leave his home in Zimbabwe. "You know when you are what you are and you cannot hide it," says Thomars indicating his sexual freedom was more important to him than the vulnerability and fear invoked from staying in Zimbabwe. When arriving in South Africa, Thomars moved in with his sister but was soon kicked out when she found out Thomars was a lesbian. At first, Thomars did not fully understand what transgender meant until moving to Johannesburg and meeting a fellow Zimbabwean who was transgender. Thomars struggled to find organisations within the city that assisted LGBT+ migrants at the time.

Unpacking the spatial metaphor of the closet, within the context of home, this paper outlines the intersecting categories of gender, sexuality, place and identity in understanding the complex environments that LGBT+ migrants navigate in South Africa. The current discourse around the closet views this space and the notion of 'coming-out' as redundant within a South African context (Francis & Reygan, 2016). However, I argue that for LGBT+ migrants the closet may be a useful spatial tool to understand how identity, space and place are interlinked with one another. The closet as a conceptual space is perhaps the ultimate safe space, in relation to the global north, linked to the ideals and positioning of the home, a threshold which ebbs and flows in space depending on the geopolitical context, "[s]uspended between an "in" and an "out" . . . – between origin and destination, and between private and public" (Eng, 1997: 32 in Fortier, 2001: 409).

Coming-out of the closet in an African context, dependant on the geographical location, can make LGBT+ individuals more vulnerable. In some African countries to be visible is a crime punishable by prison or death. It may also mean freedom – freedom to express their gender

identity and sexual orientation without any persecution. The spatial bounds of the closet become scalar in that it is not necessarily bound to a specific geographical location, which is linked to visibility, "to be seen" (Scott, 2018:p.149) but connected elsewhere through nostalgic ideals originating from the home. The metaphor of the closet is used within a South African context for LGBT+ migrants who have the freedom to be visible, to be seen and out of *their* home closets, living in a country where the constitution allows for such visibility and expression. In this paper I argue that for LGBT+ migrants, visibility becomes a political act of expression, to show that "I exist" in a space, such as South Africa where once they could not, back in their home country. I challenge the colonial status quo and theory on the metaphor of the closet. The physicality of the closet space is also linked to digital space, to be out of the closet is to be physically visible to an LGBT+ person. Digital visibility might also be thought of in this sense. The interplay between physical and digital spaces allows us to understand how LGBT+ migrants navigate between the two spaces choosing when and how visible they want to be. When access to the physical is removed, as happened during COVID-19, the question becomes how do individuals navigate visibility and what can the digital space tell us about this? Digital space transcends geographical boundaries, connecting LGBT+ migrants to other visible online spaces and alternate ideas of the home, such as digital online communities globally. Alternate ideas of the home can exist elsewhere between the digital and physical space. These boundaries begin to construct ideas in what future imaginations of home can be, a sense of belonging, an emotional connection to others elsewhere. As noted by Blunt and Dowling (2006:p.22):

> "geographies of home are relational: the material form of home is dependent on what home is imagined to be, and imaginaries of home are influenced by the physical forms of dwelling… Home is neither the dwelling nor the feeling, but the relation between the two. Home is a feeling and emotion."

Some migrants have relied heavily on their online presence to draw attention to the precarious situation of COVID-19 and how the pandemic has placed members of the LGBT+ migrant community further on the periphery within nation-states. The impact of COVID-19 I argue can be seen as a triple threat on the LGBT+ migrant community in South Africa and can be used as a metaphor for another type of closet space. Since their physical visibility has been taken away because of COVID-19, the national lockdown and restriction of movement for all people removed their access to services and other rights to shelter, home and legal aid within the state were no longer possible. LGBT+ migrants may seek solitude and safety in

physical space whilst having digital visibility or vice versa. Understanding the navigation and interplay between the physical and digital space can be used to guide service improvement, accountability, advocacy and transformation within the community (Letsike, 2019:p.3). Investigating the differences between physical and digital spaces will be useful in understanding the complexity LGBT+ migrants navigate when wanting to be visible or not. In this paper, I seek to understand the differences between physical and digital spaces. How they are occupied by LGBT+ migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic within South Africa. How by using the metaphor of the closet as a spatial tool do LGBT+ migrants navigate their visibility between the two spaces.

The five chapters of this project have been developed exploring the title, the affairs of the home: LGBT+ migrant community navigating physical and digital space in South Africa, during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter one introduces the multidimensional presentation of the home and the closet exploring the physical, material and virtual in cyberspace. Chapter two presents the methodology used within the research, the analytical process and ethical considerations and introduces the participants. Chapter three provides contextual information about LGBT+ rights on the African continent and within South Africa, understanding the role of the Department of Home Affairs whilst investigating the role of nostalgia and the interconnection spatially between home and the closet. Chapter four expands the border and interconnections by exploring what digital access and visibility amongst LGBT+ migrants reveal. Chapter five investigates the impact of Covid-19 which is understood as the triple threat on the LGBT+ migrant community and how this promotes alternative approaches in issues of support and assistance. Chapter six concludes the project and discusses suggestions and effects of COVID-19 on the LGBT+ migrant community.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

There exists a gap within migration literature regarding LGBT+ migrants. This research project aims to contribute and synthesise how LGBT+ migrants have navigated between physical and digital spaces particularly during the global COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. The exploration within this project is important because LGBT+ migrant narratives occupy liminal spaces and a project such as this explores the narratives of LGBT+ identities, migration and belonging whilst investigating spatial concepts of the home and unpacking the metaphor of the closet.

The following research objectives and sub-questions were devised to assist the primary aim:

1. What do the intersecting categories of gender, sexuality, place and identity of the physical and digital spaces mean for LGBT+ migrants, in a time of a global pandemic?
2. How is LGBT+ migrant visibility navigated between the two spaces and what potential risks exist?
3. What are the implications of the global pandemic on the survival and movement of LGBT+ migrant bodies imposed by governments?
4. How has the use of a GoFundMe campaign aided the LGBT+ migrant community?

02 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Approach

This paper draws on one-on-one, semi-structured and in-depth interviews in-person occupying both the physical and digital spaces (using Zoom, a video chatting service provider which allows people to connect with one another online through digital space) to collect data. This method allows a discussion to occur which is based on interview questions (see Appendix A) with a pre-determined list of topics that forms an armature for the discussion and allows the participants to provide other information through the conversation (Bryman, 2012). The benefit of using a semi-structured format is that it allows open-ended responses, where the participants can decide what information will be provided based on the interview questions. Using interview questions allowed for the interview to maintain its course whilst providing some flexibility to develop other thoughts. Writer and scholar Toni Morrison (1993) describes the power and use of language that "lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, and writers. Although its power is sometimes in displacing experience, it is not a substitute for it. It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie." The use of language allows for the creation of diverse experiences and opportunities which begin to cross the spatial boundaries of the digital and physical and "the space between listening and 'storying'" (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2014:p.21).

Storying, though descriptive, allows for hidden nuances within the conversation or data to be revealed. These nuances or liminal spaces hold answers when beginning to analyse the data from the interviews where, "language is theorised as creating reality" (Clarke & Braun, 2012:p.58). The interviews were recorded and transcribed into text, and further coded into themes using an inductive thematic analysis approach to data where "coding and analysis is a bottom-up approach and is driven by what is *in* the data" (Clarke & Braun, 2012:p.58). This method was particularly important to analyse the data from the one-on-one, semi-structured and in-depth interviews in person as, "in analysing the data, you use it to tell a story of the data – data do not speak for themselves" (Clarke & Braun, 2012:p.67). This approach allows for the data to explain *what* is interesting and *why*. The transcription was coded after all the text was analysed and common themes identified. Examples of themes that were extracted from the transcription are GoFundMe, context, networks and community, rapid response,

communities of trust, physical space, digital space, visibility and challenges. These themes offered the emerging data to be collated and grouped together in order to narrate through storying to aid the aims and objectives outlined within the introduction.

The interviews were divided and structured into two parts: the digital and the physical with a focus on the effects and impact of COVID-19 across all interviews. With the implementation of the COVID-19 national restrictions within South Africa during 2020, the University of the Witwatersrand advised that all one-on-one interviews were to be held online limiting physical interactions to avoid any transmissions of the COVID-19 coronavirus. However, as the national lockdown regulations were relaxed an in-person round-table focus group was held in Johannesburg. A round-table discussion is an academic-style format with experts, allowing each participant to partake and share their story. One story in particular showcases this navigation, the rapid response at which the coordinators of the GoFundMe campaign acted as well as border lines crossed multiple times forming communities and networks of trust. This paper relies on a GoFundMe campaign titled, "COVID-19 and LGBTQI people in South Africa" (Camminga, 2020a) was launched during COVID-19 and selected as a case study for understanding its navigation between the digital and physical space whilst using networks and existing visible connections which the coordinators had within the LGBT+ migrant community. It is an important online campaign because of the number of people it reached and the amount of money it raised quite rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic and begins to indicate the importance of visibility within both digital and physical spaces. This highlighted the importance of occupying digital space for the investigation of this research paper aided in identifying solutions within the community. Thomars' public visibility meant his awareness and insight into the experiences of LGBT+ migrants during COVID-19 to be a valuable source of information and research. In this instance it was an informal setting, I adapted the interview questions before our second meeting to the group of participants:

> Physical & Digital Interview – In-person round-table discussion at GALA[1] offices, Johannesburg

[1] Originally named the Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA), the aim was to collect and preserve local LGBTIQ narratives, both public and private. In 2007 the name of the organisation was changed to Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action, while retaining the GALA acronym. This was done so as to address the expanding range of projects and activities GALA had initiated or got involved with, to create dialogue on sexual orientation and gender identity, educate the public, build community among LGBTIQ people, and to inspire action. Now, in 2018, in the celebration of Currently the name is once again being re-evaluated in order to address the exclusion of other queer identities and orientations in the name (GALA, 2018).

Date: 15 December 2020

Name: B **Camminga** – Academic and activist, Digital via Zoom from London. ALMN.

Pronouns: they/them

Name: John **Marnell** - Academic and activist, Johannesburg. ALMN.

Pronouns: he/him/his

Name: Thomars **Shamuyarira** – Founder of Fruit Basket, Johannesburg.

The Fruit Basket.

Pronouns: he/him/his

Name: Keval **Harie** – Activist and director, Johannesburg. GALA.

Pronouns: he/him/his

The sample research of the round-table discussion was held with three organisations: Fruit Basket, the Gay and Lesbian Queer Archive (GALA) and the African LGBTQI+ Migration research Network (ALMN) which were involved in coordinating the GoFundMe campaign.

2.2 Data Collection

All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. Recordings of all the interviews were stored in a password protected digital cloud provider and have subsequently been deleted, as all recordings have been transcribed into written notes. All direct quotes have been transcribed from audio recordings verbatim in English. This paper makes use of desktop research collected from online article sources. Snowballing was used as one method to assist in gaining further contacts within the LGBT+ migrant community.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

A non-medical ethics certificate was obtained prior to interviewing (ACMS2020-07-07, see Appendix C for a copy of the ethics clearance certificate). Consent forms (see Appendix B) were sent to all participants reiterating that the interviews were recorded, and information provided was going to be for academic purposes within this research paper. Completed and signed information sheets were received back from all participants, granting their consent

and information provided to be used within this research paper. In the event that a participant needed to seek additional psychological advice from a trained professional, they were advised of the free WITS counselling service. This information was provided to the participants within the information sheet and again at the beginning of the research interview. With the high price of data within South Africa, money was provided to Ola* which was requested by the participant to purchase data and time at an internet café to attend the interview.

Confidentiality and anonymity were provided by assigning a pseudonym for one participant in order to protect his identity for the purpose of this research as his asylum application is ongoing at the Department of Home Affairs in South Africa.

> Digital interview questions, Physical Interview – Johannesburg
> Date: 21 March, 26 March 2021
> Name: **Ola*** – Journalist, Johannesburg.
> Pronouns: he/him/his
> After the passing of the anti-gay laws in Nigeria in 2014 Ola, a gay man had to leave his home country for fear of arrest and persecution. Ola has done volunteering work within several organisations and was a snowball contact.
> *Pseudonym: name has been changed to protect his identity for the purpose of this research, as his asylum application is ongoing at the Department of Home Affairs.

Furthermore, all transcription notes from the voice recordings hold no identifying information which can cause any harm to the participant. The remaining participant, Thomars and organisations (GALA and the ALMN) hold public visibility in both the physical and digital spaces as they are activists within the LGBT+ migrant community. A draft of the research paper was provided to participants for final sign-off to allow the participants an opportunity to remove any information which they feel uncomfortable with.

03 HOME AND THE CLOSET

3.1 Home Country

What does home mean? Why is it important and what nostalgia does it hold, if any? Where is home now and where was home then? “Is it a destination, a point of exit, single, multiple, or non-existent?” (Camminga, 2019:p.24). The notion of home can be a concept linked to physical space, an existing structure or family home, it can be an imagination of where future ideas and dreams of creating a home – possibly with a lover, making a family – are situated within space and home can exist within digital space, such as online platforms. Or for LGBT+ migrants, “homes—as nations, communities, or bodies—are complex and contingent spaces of inhabitance” (Camminga, 2019:p.24). Home has long been a defining and rooting aspect for most of us, whether stationed in your home city, or in settling in a new one far away, where creating a home further establishes this concept, yet as Camminga (2019) explains, “the desire for home is never a singular space; home is not isolated—it exists in relation to communities, geopolitical investments, and corporeal imaginaries” (p.250). Blunt & Dowling (2006) define concepts of home as central to human mobility the world over:

> “Movement may necessitate or be precipitated by a disruption to a sense of home, as people leave or in some cases flee one home for another. These international movements are also processes of establishing home, as senses of belonging and identity move over space and are created in new places” (p.19).

To begin exploring what home means, it is valuable, to begin with, the physical space where home perhaps has traditionally existed in history when, “thinking about home has been geographic, highlighting relations between place, space, scale, identity and power” (Blunt & Dowling, 2006:p.19). Home is situated within our immediate reality, which we can touch, feel and navigate, “the feeling of security is, of course, one of the most basic feelings we aim to foster in [a] home space… and from the absence of harmful threatening otherness” (Hage, 2010:p.418). Physical space is grounded to the earth and layered with materiality and tectonics. Physical spaces form our urban civic centres, the homes we live in and the rooms we occupy. The physical space of the home is to create safety, protection and can be understood as a place of refuge and safety, free from discrimination and persecution. In this sense, home can also be theorised as a shift in the locality where one identifies a new home and community. Most people want to live where they “belong” (Mbembe, 2018). To belong to a family or

community is important for all individuals. This is where the beginnings of belonging are constructed and realised, where the community is fostered. When investigating space, it is important to understand that it exists within an architectural gaze that accommodates and consists of various objects, textures, materials, surfaces and people who inhabit this space. These begin to form the layers which, in turn, shape and begin to form the beginnings of identity where the body is situated and attached to physical space, the home (Fortier, 2001:p.414).

Further exploring the notions of home, it is important to begin to understand the varieties of a home that exist, as "the construction of 'home' does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, migrant[s]… gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality have an impact on the meanings and aspirations they attribute to the notion of home" (Kihato, 2013:p.72). For the context of this research, what are LGBT+ ideals of home and what does home mean particularly for LGBT+ migrants in South Africa who have left their home countries in search of new homes? Within the discourse of LGBT+ migration, the idea of home is a recurring theme (Fortier, 2001). For the LGBT+ individual as suggested by Bryant (2015) in the process of setting up new LGBT+ homes this process "involves deconstructing the home ideology as a set of particular, heteronormative social constructs that disallow wider conceptual possibilities for spaces and sexualities" (p.262). In this regard home interrogates the opportunities for gendered space, how happenings within the home are private allow,

> "The conception that what happens in private lives is connected with politics is not only useful in understanding domestic [home] life, private space, and even intimacy within the context of power relations, it also helps us understand the [home] in relation to the city, state, and individuals' sociopolitical rights" (Kihato, 2013:p.72).

The private lives of LGBT+ migrants can be seen as positioned within a liminal space situated in the home, that being the closet space. Though a paradox exists for migrants and the navigation between the interior and exterior (that being 'out') of the closet. Being within the closet is to "stay silent" (Frisch, 2021:p.64) and is a political act, one related to oppression which one can see as a form of power relation situated within the home. However, it is also a "strategy to protect yourself from the physical violence of hate crimes" (Frisch, 2021:p.64) which may provide a sense of agency. Yet to position oneself 'out' of the closet allows access to freedoms not experienced in home countries, for fear of prosecution. As Seidman (2004) mentions, "it is perhaps more correct to speak of multiple closets" (p.31) and the navigations between these spaces in understanding how LGBT+ migrants navigate themselves within

South Africa? Francis (2016) further mentions that the concept of the "closet has utility, but it is neither uniform nor universal." The closet can be used as a scale for time, marking the moment an LGBT+ individual 'came-out' the closet becoming more visible. Visibility is important to understand for LGBT+ individuals when,

> "being in the closet is a performance often initiated by the speech act of silence, with individuals concealing their gender and sexual identity to avoid conflict or exposure that can jeopardize the availability of support and personal safety" (Cisneros & Bracho, 2019:p.728).

The spatial metaphor of the closet as a place to hide in if an individual is LGBT+ suggests that the home is also largely a heteronormative space where notions of visibility and vulnerability are navigated. "The dissonance can be severe: at home, disclosure might result in expulsion or even violence upon you, while on the other side of the Pink Line…" home may mean visibility and freedom to express your sexual orientation and gender identity (Gevisser, 2020:p.129). The navigation across borders and thresholds becomes important when compared and linked to visibility in the physical space. Here Gevisser speaks of the Pink Line as a borderline or threshold which divides and separates spaces, the digital from the physical or the closet confines to that of visibility.

Using the closet as a spatial concept may be of value when discussing the visibility of LGBT+ individuals, although not all African countries have such strict laws, making use of the metaphor of the closet can be valuable in providing spaces for LGBT+ migrants to occupy and navigate – "this value-neutral proposition also depoliticizes the act" (Scott, 2018:p.51) – to exist, to be visible and prove useful for governments to begin navigating their stigmatisation of LGBT+ bodies in space. The spatial aspect of nostalgia is important within thinking about the closet because of when the home is left behind. Nostalgia is the attempt to recreate and maintain the home's identity within the present, creating future possibilities an "experience is thus one of a combination of the conflicting emotions happiness and sadness: bittersweet" (Salmose, 2019:p.2). The multidimensional qualities of the closet can be interrogated, similar to that of how architecture and urban space is created, the memories connected to those spaces, to that of home, the merging of materials, identity, race, class, gender and nationality. The repositioning of the closet is important in negotiating the boundaries of liminal space LGBT+ migrants navigate. The nodes of the closet are ever-shifting and are determined by that of the person shifting the boundaries and borders. A person such as Thomars is openly out and visible supports and is supported by his

community. Whereas Ola's navigation is nuanced and different. His choice of not being completely out is negotiated because of where his home is. His access to his national community is limited because of its homophobic and conservative views. "The closet has served [LGBT+] and others well, but it is imperfect" (Scott, 2018:p.146). The closet is no longer the small wardrobe in the bedroom but becomes linked to scale and the notion of a border – or threshold – which one crosses and leaves behind. The closet must be noted that it does not "create passive victims" (Seidman, 2004:p.30). The closet is imperfect because it creates rebellion against the status quo and structural inequalities that kept people apart, but now as Seidman (2004) mentions people navigating the boundaries of the closet must be seen as "active, thoughtful, and risk-taking agents" (p30). The navigation from 'social isolation' to seek belonging, the shift from the closet to "home is necessitated by finding and accessing a community: other [LGBT+] people, or country-of-origin members or family" (Camminga, 2019:p.206). The feeling of belonging, seeking security and safety are the roots to foster the positioning of the home. The closet, which is positioned within the home, therefore, becomes "an existential launching pad for the self" (Hage, 2010:p.419) where the home and the nostalgic closet is the building blocks for LGBT+ migrants and how "memory belongs to the construction of the future" (Hage, 2010:p.419).

In her seminal article on unveiling sexualities, Tamale (2007) speaks of the various levels of fear, the hierarchy on gendered bodies and the need to be heteronormative in order to survive oppression in home countries,

> "In Uganda, it is not surprising that most homosexuals find it difficult to "come out" of their closeted lives or to be open about their sexual orientation. Most blend within the wider society and even live under the cover of heterosexual relationships while maintaining their homosexual relationships underground" (p.20).

Within this regard, the closet in the home is linked and situated in the home country where visibility is hidden and "underground". This direct link to visibility in the physical space can offer a means to further understand various itineraries that LGBT+ migrants navigate on a daily basis. For Thomars, to exist outside the confines of the spatial closet of his home country means freedom. Being out means punishment and prosecution back home, but now it means access to opportunities and a shift from the underground to the visible open. A point in his history that has made him a vocal public figure and activist fighting for the right of the LGBT+ migrant community. "You know who you are, what you are, and you cannot hide it," says Thomars when he mentions that he eventually got kicked out of his family home for

showing his sexuality, at the time as a lesbian. This departure further highlights the heteronormative and gendered spaces which LGBT+ people navigate. “Coming out is not a moment, but a complex set of ongoing processes and practices” (Scott, 2018:p.153) or navigations across the threshold boundaries of the closet and how that navigation is perhaps itinerated. This could also mean an exit from particular circumstances and when exploring LGBT+ migrant narratives such as those from Thomars and Ola, “coming out of the closet is a strategy of visibility that reflects self-acceptance and political action” (Cisneros & Bracho, 2019:p.716) which promises a future of safety and imagined possibilities, where nostalgia in a “curious way connects people across historical as well as national and personal boundaries” (Walder, 2011:p.1).

Ola suggests that the spatial closet does not particularly mean anything to him. Freedom – yes – in being able to live a life without fear of being prosecuted for his sexual orientation. Ola is not part of the Nigerian community in South Africa because he says that they are homophobic. In South Africa, his visibility is navigated cautiously between this Nigerian community and the LGBT+ migrant community. In July 2020 Ola was badly beaten for being gay. Within this instance, for Ola, the navigation of his LGBT+ visibility depends on the spaces he occupies. Here within this context, visibility can be understood as,

> “to announce one’s attraction by ‘‘coming out’’ would not necessarily indicate progress in sexual identity, and it would not necessarily change one’s identity from closeted to liberated as conceptualized in the dominant closet narrative” (Ross, 2005:p.180).

The threshold of the closet space can be seen as ever-shifting depending on how it is occupied, “coming out, or not, reaps personal and societal benefits that need to be understood contextually” (Cisneros & Bracho, 2019:p.718). The body can be seen as a medium, or rather the use of the physical space such as the home which houses all metaphors, domestic space, gender, nostalgia, affairs and so forth. The closet space, is one reference and offers LGBT+ migrants such as Thomars a point of departure to exist and occupy physical space freely, “I am never going back into the closet, for any reason, never, never, ever.”

Within the context of migration, there is an innate desire to find and position oneself at home which as Fortier (2001) suggests can be “achieved by physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security” (p.409, 410). The reference to both the physical and digital spaces are symbolic and transcends the scalar

boundaries in concepts of home, moving from micro to macrocosms in space, "space contains that which is within our physical grasp and that which may be "graspable" only through perception, comprehension, and memory" (Simitch & Warke, 2014:p.105). The physicality of space is constructed with previous experiences, knowledge and environmental conditions in which the ideals of home are constructed physically which become the building blocks for imagined futures (Hage, 2010:p.419).

After the passing of the anti-gay laws in Nigeria in 2014, Ola had to leave the country for fear of arrest and persecution which could result in a 10-year prison sentence. Once in South Africa, a Google search led him to the LGBT+ group at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Johannesburg.

> "I was regular at the meetings and enjoyed the support. There I met Thomars, who subsequently founded the Fruit Basket and invited me as a volunteer, thus making me truly feel at home and a part of the [LGBT+] community."

Grounded to space, "identity is a complex construct through which belonging is declared" (Dasgupta, 2017:p.43). The multiple layers which make up the body within space, where the body as a medium "describing the movement of people" in space in which the body creates and begins to organise itself for "the conditions for configuring border-crossing flows of ideas, images, memories, languages and cultures" (Bond, 2018:p.16) which together with others, begin to form a community. This navigates the borders of physical and digital space.

3.2 South Africa as Host

Affairs of the home begin to highlight space where "sexuality has long been intertwined with space, with queerness historically occupying liminal physical spaces within societies" (Miles, 2018:p.2). This applies to the home where the liminal physical space can be seen as the closet space. This relates to the home because of its liminal placement within the spatial confines of the home. It is here sexual orientation is hidden and navigated through the thresholds of the closet. The orientation of the physical space "whether through relations of caring and domestic labour, affective relations of belonging, or establishing connections between the individual, household and society" (Blunt & Dowling, 2006:p.32) narrate within instances the patriarchy which exists within homes.

Thomars explains that "patriarchy in Zimbabwe is still prominent. Boys do nothing, girls do everything." These heteronormative standards demonstrate internal marginalisation within the everyday structures of the home and further,

> "point to the emotional violence embedded within heteronormativity. In particular, it reveals the intense self-regulation that accompanies life within hostile social contexts and the psychological distress that often goes along with it" (Marnell et al., 2021:p.10).

When Thomars moved in with his sister, being a lesbian at the time, further exacerbated his visibility when his sister kicked him out when she discovered Thomars' sexual orientation and identity. After being kicked out from his sister's house, and in order to be able to live with his brother under his conditions and rules, Thomars had to "denounce his sexuality, being a lesbian". The self-regulation of visibility made Thomars more aware of the distress that was being caused internally, being within the physical and mental confines of the closet.

> "At times home is nowhere. At times one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference" (Hooks 1991: 148 in Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

Thomars settling and finding a home in South Africa was initially uncertain after being kicked out of home for expressing his true sexual orientation. However, with the shifting of family boundaries and borders, the home has now become a physical place where he is able to be free and express his true self where he occupies both the digital and physical space and out of the closet.

For Ola, a gay man from Nigeria who has been living in South Africa,

> "home is no longer a physical space. It is for *me* a place you feel welcome, loved, safe and enabled to be the best version of yourself, [regardless of] your sexual orientation. South Africa feels more like [a] home to me than Nigeria now. I have one less thing to worry about, being arrested and jailed just because I am gay."

Ola further mentions that home is no longer a space attached to Nigeria because it does not offer safety and freedom. This regained freedom, in South Africa, for Ola means that he does not need to worry about being out of the closet and openly gay in Johannesburg. Back in Nigeria, this is a criminal offence (Isaack, 2016). The physical space of "home countries was often described in terms of fear and persecution, whereas South Africa was linked to freedom,

albeit of a limited kind" (Marnell, et al., 2021:p.18). These home countries were countries where one could be persecuted for having a visible LGBT+ sexual orientation or gender identity. For Thomars, home is defined as a place where he is happy:

> "Where I'm fully and completely able to be myself, not hide, not pretend and not try to make other people happy by *hiding* who I am. [Home] is an environment where I am surrounded by people who accept *me* for who I am, a place where I am loved."

Speaking to Ola, he mentioned how relatively safe his home is, "my landlord knows I am gay and is okay with it, he even warned me of some homophobic tenants [in the building] to back-off or they could be prosecuted for going against the laws of South Africa." From the experiences of Ola and Thomars, we can understand what role home plays in seeking refuge. Escaping violence and persecution, the 'affairs' of their home countries, meant re-establishing home elsewhere. Understanding Thomars' initial journey in finding and establishing home was difficult, in the beginning, he had to hide within the spatial borders of the closet. Within this situation, the closet can be understood as a space that can conceal one's visibility. The closet acts as a space where one has to hide themselves to seek safety and protection.

3.3 Department of Home Affairs

"Imagine having to flee your own country because of being persecuted for who you are and for who you love" (Zappulla, 2018). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) notes, LGBT+ migrants face many forms of discrimination and often flee their countries of origin because they fear being prosecuted and imprisoned (UNHCR, 2010:p.6). South Africa is a common destination for LGBT+ migrants fleeing their homes because of the progressive nature of the South African constitution in which provides an opportunity for LGBT+ individuals to be protected and given safety.

South Africa is one of 22 African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, South Africa) where same-sex individuals are not criminalised (Kruuse,2014:p.153). "Homosexuality represents one of the last bastions of legally backed and state-sanctioned oppression and intolerance on the African continent"

(Tamale, 2007:p.22). Tamale speaks of the homophobic tendencies which still exist across many African countries. This makes South Africa a desirable home for individuals who seek safety due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. South Africa became the first country in Africa to allow same-sex marriage in 2006 through the creation of the Civil Union Act (Nullis, 2006). The progressive laws within South Africa protect the rights of LGBT+ individuals and extend to include migrants creating "a beacon of hope on the continent and a 'safe haven'" (Marnell et al., 2021:p.3). These sentiments can be felt across the African continent where LGBT+ migrants leaving their home can be seen, as I have argued above, stepping out of the metaphorical closet, navigating their way to a new home, where they can enjoy the freedom to express their sexual orientation and gender identity without prejudice from the state.

Access Chapter 2's (AC2) Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seeker Program aims to support LGBT+ people through the creation of safe spaces, advocating for an improvement of living conditions, access to services and protection and respect of human rights (Letsike, 2019). AC2 works with those who have fled their home countries because of "homophobic or transphobic death threats, exclusion from society due to stigma and discrimination, assault and fear of prosecution" (Letsike, 2019). In addition, LGBT+ migrants:

> "may be exposed to physical and sexual violence, including rape, torture, honour crimes and murder at the hands of authorities and private actors. They may be inappropriately treated or denied access to health care and other social services, including housing, education, and employment and, in some instances, arbitrarily detained" (O'Flaherty & Fisher, 2008).

However, a paradox exists within South Africa and the treatment of migrants entering its borders, whilst the country "legally 'welcomes' [LGBT+ migrants], yet structurally and socially isolates them" (Beetar, 2016:p.101). Some of the homophobic sentiments have stemmed from political leaders, where President Zuma was quoted, "when I was growing up, *unqingili* (a homosexual in Zulu) would not have stood in front of me. I would knock him out" (Kindra, 2006) and late Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini, the leader of the country's largest ethnic group was reported calling "gay people rotten" during a speech. The unapologetic behaviour of leaders within the country continues to transcend into the general public, where "South Africans still perceive LGBT+ individuals as inherently immoral and "un-African", and thus pay little attention to the abuse they endure on a daily basis in the country" (Mhaka, 2021).

The gendered division of space is prevalent in South Africa and continues to divide and harm the LGBT+ community. Over the past year, the amount of LGBT+ lives which have been lost due to gender-based violence is unfathomable where, "four in 10 LGBT+ South Africans knew of someone who had been murdered because of their sexuality" (Morris, 2017). Earlier in the year, more than 20 LGBT+ and human rights groups (including AC2, GALA, Gender Dynamix and Iranti) from across the country called out President Ramaphosa and the government "for not taking a stand against LGBT+ stigma and discrimination" (DeBarros, 2021), after the numerous attacks on the LGBT+ community which further highlights the "pervasive system of gendered governance across society" (Camminga, 2019) in the country. Migrants in search of a better life and home, are often seen as competing within the local labour job-seeking market. This has caused "over the past decade, anti-immigrant sentiments [to flare] up across the country in form of large-scale xenophobic attacks, most notably in 2008, 2013 and 2015" (HBF, 2018). These xenophobic attacks create instability within the country and further jeopardise migrants' livelihoods, some of which have crossed many dangerous borders to get to South Africa.

Marnell et al. (2021), further explain that "a border crossing of any kind is dangerous, for it marks one out as an *other*, a potential threat to social categories that are fragile at best – 'citizen', 'subject', 'male', 'female' (p.2). Chikalogwe of People Against Suffering, Oppression and Poverty (PASSOP) an organisation, further explains that in terms of xenophobia and sexual orientation the issues that LGBT+ migrants experience as a 'double challenge' (HBF, 2018), echoing this response Marnell et al. (2021) he notes that:

> "[LGBT+] migrants are regarded as a double threat; in that they disrupt both hetero-patriarchal norms and claims to nationhood. This is particularly true in South Africa, where homophobic, transphobic and xenophobic discourses have coalesced to create an intensely hostile social environment" (p.2).

This double threat in South Africa, first as being a migrant and second being part of the LGBT+ community, places LGBT+ migrants in precarious situations. The experiences left behind in home countries combined with homophobic and xenophobic encounters in South Africa for LGBT+ migrants are further compounded within local migrant communities as Ola's attack by other Nigerians in South Africa attests too. As Marnell et al. (2021) explain in relation to South Africa "[LGBT+] migrants do not experience homophobia/transphobia in one place and xenophobia in another, but rather live both concurrently" (p.5). This relates

to the double threat migrants experience, especially when engaging with the Department of Home Affairs in their asylum applications in the physical space.

3.4 Migrant Mediation by the Department of Home Affairs in South Africa

The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) is:

> the "custodian, protector and verifier of the identity and status of citizens and other persons resident in South Africa. This makes it possible for people to realize their rights and access benefits and opportunities in both the public and private domains. The DHA controls, regulates and facilitates immigration and the movement of persons through ports of entry. It also provides civics and immigration services at foreign missions; and determines the status of asylum seekers and refugees in accordance with international obligations" (DHA, 2021).

The DHA maintains and controls the conceptual entrance of the physical notion of the home "is a perplexing site" (Camminga, 2019:p.206) that is perhaps seen as the form of the state, South Africa. The home or country of origin is navigated treacherously in search of a new home. The mandate at the borders and port of entry is to document and assist persons seeking refuge and safety. However, Chikalogwe says:

> "[Discrimination] already starts at the border. Even though South Africa guarantees refugee status to LGBT+ people fleeing prosecution on the basis of their sexuality, some LGBT+ asylum seekers are simply turned away at South African points of entry" (HBF, 2018).

Over the last ten years, there have been 63,339 asylum applications made per year (Scalabrini, 2020). The amount of application far exceeds the capability and speed of the DHA to process this volume. In the end, the ones who suffer are migrants who experience many difficulties in obtaining legal documents. The difficulty in searching for a new home is more complex where Camminga (2017) notes, "the first step is not entering an [Refugee Reception Centre (RRC)] but finding one. Arguably, the home intended by the DHA for asylum seekers is seemingly a constantly perplexing, vexed, and elusive edifice" (p.63). Having to renew asylum permits every 6 months, to long slow queues at RRCs aggravate the daily lives of migrants as a whole. Not to mention that the acceptance rate of refugees is a mere 4% (HBF, 2018). The situation for LGBT+ migrants holds no benefit for their applications, as they are met with homophobic and transphobic slurs. The DHA further exacerbates the lives of LGBT+ migrants in their search for belonging, of home within South Africa. Whilst the DHA allows LGBT+ migrants

to claim asylum by being an LGBT+ individual, those who do attempt this route are victimised for their sexual orientation or identity. “The experiences many of the LGBT [+] asylum seekers have to go through in their home countries are very traumatic” (HBF, 2018) and to have the DHA add to these experiences when it is the department's role under the constitution is unfounded. It is important to understand what LGBT+ migrants experience when applying for their asylum papers, already a double threat – the first threat being that of a migrant and the second is identifying as an LGBT+ individual. Dill et al. (2016:pg.86) state that while the Refugee Act No 130 of 1998 theoretically provides a safe home for migrants who face criminalisation and persecution in their home countries, in practice, the implementation of this progressive legislation is perforated with inconsistent and insufficient technical implementation. These irregularities continue “structural and direct violence that threaten [LGBT+ migrant] lived experiences” (Dill et al., 2016:p.86) highlighting threats of xenophobia, homophobia and other basic access rights to services and justice can be seen as mentioned earlier as a ‘perplexing site’.

When asked about whether it is beneficial to apply for asylum as an LGBT+ migrant with the DHA, Thomars suggests that explaining his sexual orientation made the application worse when approaching government officials. The application process is already difficult being a migrant because of the various hurdles migrants go through, from finding RRCs, to long queues and having to take time off from paid work to travelling to and from RRCs,

> “The officials say they need a newspaper article with solid evidence to prove that yes you ran away [from your home country], that yes you got attacked and that there are police reports that you were beaten up. Do we wait until we have to be beaten up and killed before we can make a plan?”

This question shows the frustration experienced by LGBT+ migrants and where LGBT+ migrants “navigate the spectrum between invisibility and hypervisibility in their home communities and countries” (Dill et al., 2016:p.92). The contrast between invisibility and hypervisibility is again, perplexing. To be invisible to DHA officials whilst navigating hypervisibility when positioning oneself within your immediate national community, who are homophobic, all the while being treated as an ‘other’ and experiencing xenophobic slurs are just a few lived experiences that Thomars and Ola navigate. Thomars believes that officials aggravate the application process because officials are not diversity trained in dealing with various sexual orientations and genders, “you're coming to be gay *here*, you leave your [home] country to come and do that *thing* here…” Here the tone of the DHA officials and their nuances

of homophobia against Thomars implies that they do not want LGBT+ individuals within South Africa, therefore reinforcing the second threat, being that of homophobia. When talking about the application process with Ola, he explains that it took him over a year to secure an asylum permit at the DHA. He has been beaten by guards, and the officials are also rude and corrupt. In frustration, he paid R10,000 to an 'agent' who said they would speed up the process of getting his refugee permit. To date, he still does not have a permit. There are two options for asylum seekers, to continuously reapply for permits every six months or live within the borders of their new home illegally, which many do because the DHA system is difficult for migrants and is worse off for LGBT+ migrants should DHA officials find out about their sexual orientation and gender identity. This further exacerbates an already stressed labour market for local citizens, thus adding to the threat layer of xenophobia. It is well documented that access to the home, that being of South Africa, is extremely difficult for those who seek a portion of the physical space within its borders, especially when a dismal 4% of applications are approved (HBF, 2018). Thomars further explains,

> "they [the DHA officials] make you feel as if they are doing you a favour by giving us papers, but they are not because it is our right. The fact that the country's constitution [in reference to the home country left behind] criminalises homosexuality is enough of a reason for you to leave and come to South Africa. When you go to the Department of Home Affairs, they terrorise you. It is a mess. You would think that being [LGBT+] person is the added advantage, but it's the biggest *disadvantage*. For us, it's harder."

In this scenario, Thomars' frustration with DHA officials is understandable as well as in the hopes and recognition of LGBT+ individuals by the constitution yet being an LGBT+ migrant further confirms the notion of a double threat, as Thomars not only has to circumnavigate being a migrant and the xenophobic nuances by DHA officials, but also homophobic slurs.

04 DIGITAL ACCESS AND VISIBILITY: WHO GETS TO BE ONLINE?

Sherry Turkle (1995) argues that digital space plays a critical part in LGBT+ individuals because "the self is multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with [online] connections" (p.15). Over the last decade, digital technologies such as the internet, Facebook and WhatsApp have reshaped previously accepted spatial ideas in cities, in ways that embrace online environments more than ever before (Miles, 2021a:p.204). Digital space can operate between two instances: online and offline. The digital space specifically interrogates this portion of research where digital visibility relates to the various digital platform spaces such as WhatsApp, Facebook and GoFundMe which are occupied. The occupation of digital space, "is in itself a site of imagining and making one's home" (Kuntsman, 2009:p.xv). The notion of home can exist beyond the physical space where groups and communities exist such as, "Facebook presents new opportunities for LGBT+ individuals in the possibility of finding networks, social support and information" (Cooper & Dzara, 2010:p.104). These digital spaces are important spaces for LGBT+ migrants in search of a home, whether it be in the physical or digital spaces, as this chapter seeks to explore how these spaces are particularly navigated. The occupation of the digital space between online and offline depends on access to the internet, electricity and data in South Africa. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these spaces are navigated by LGBT+ migrant bodies and are also, "sites of political, cultural and social negotiations and re-negotiations between [communities] and individuals" (Miles, 2021a:p.206). Online spaces are diverse, and with a wealth of knowledge at one's fingertips, users create a different form of visibility and can "provide many opportunities for home-making and home-imagining, especially for migrants" (Kuntsman, 2009:p.1). Similar to that of the physical space, a digital space can shift and transform, exerting a wider reach and connecting many more people across multiple scalar geographies. The digital space offers an important opportunity for LGBT+ migrants to connect with other LGBT+ individuals who are physically separated and in alternate spaces (physical or digital) and provide a communicative space for socially marginalised groups and act as a resource for community organising (Kuntsman, 2009).

Miles (2021) speaks of the technological hybridisation of digital applications that connect LGBT+ individuals. Similar to that of Facebook and WhatsApp these applications are important spaces informing the notion of community, events and information, especially for

LGBT+ migrants arriving within the city. Here Mile (2021) defines, “define hybridisation as the layering, synthesizing, or collapsing of digital and physical realities. The result is a hybrid reality, landscape, or place…” (p.205). I argue that this hybridisation can be borrowed and applied with the spatial confines of the closet, especially when exploring the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the LGBT+ migrant community. Living alone without one’s community can be seen as “(re-)closeted” (Miles et al., 2021:p.414). The spatial investigation using the metaphor of the closet and the positioning within the home or other online homes is important for this discussion. Kuntsman (2009) discusses the border between online and physical space as which one crosses “terrains of sexuality, identity, speakability and humanness” (p.99). This becomes important when exploring online spaces as being hybridised when thinking about the structural inequalities which exist for LGBT+ migrant bodies in navigating these spaces.

The hybridisation of the closet space and its border merges identities, materials, inside and ‘out’ the seemingly easy navigation of closet borders where, “bodies and spaces—cyber and ‘real’—are entangled’. These circulations generate pertinent questions about the way that we practice online life and what that looks like embedded in physical experience” (Miles, 2021b:p.207). Thomars within this instance can be seen as occupying a hybridised digital space. This space he navigates amongst various digital homes such as Facebook events and information, WhatsApp communication and connecting to other geopolitical spaces elsewhere using the GofundMe campaign to raise funding for LGBT+ migrants within the city. The various scalar borders which he navigates are an interesting focal point for this project. “The crossing of the virtual border, physical to digital and vice versa – these challenges show the inequalities of LGBT+ migrants, those who have visible access and the resources versus those who lie within the periphery, inhabiting the liminal spaces” (Anon, 2003:p.14). Digital borders are useful in understanding the political visibility of LGBT+ individuals when navigating spaces. Ideas in navigations Camminga (2020c) maps as flows and contraflows that are explored to investigate what they reveal about nationhood, gender, and sexuality as they emerge at the digital and physical borders between Africa and the Global North (p.1). These investigations can be linked back to the idea of the closet, a hybridised space that LGBT+ migrants continually navigate and define for themselves. Though accessing the digital space can be cumbersome with high data prices within South Africa, it is a means to access and “obtain information via phone calls, texts, emails and social media” as noted by Ola. For Ola, digital access is difficult, especially with no computer and only a low-end smart cellphone, he

prefers the physical space, and the small luxuries that come with it, such as meeting other people at exhibition openings, networking with others for future collaborations. Although Ola used a digital space such as Google to find a community, it was a way to network contacts within the physical space, to grow and develop. Pre-COVID-19 his visibility within the LGBT+ migrant community and physical space meant he could establish roots and a home within the city:

> "Belonging to a community means I can reach out for help and counselling whenever the need arises. It is very important for me to feel safe and comfortable as it helps me think and feel better and be in a mental space to be productive and avoid severe depression. The community also provides opportunities for professional and social networking, making life more bearable."

Home far extends the boundaries of physical space as noted home can be the position of online spaces and communities. This positioning or 'enabling medium' can be viewed, "While nostalgia mourns distances and disjuncture's between times and spaces, never bridging them, technology offers solutions and builds bridges" (Boym, 2001:p.346). Similar to how nostalgia operates within the physical, it too can cross the digital border far beyond the existence of where home originated – home will exist in the future with continuous flows of movement through space and time. Online homes may exist far beyond the physical homes left behind.

Miles (2018) notes that "the internet could provide not only a space but also a figurative home for LGBT+ migrants. As a result, the internet has often been interpreted as a protective environment for [LGBT+] subjects" (p.3). This highlights the interconnection of the physical and digital spaces, such as GALAs queer lockdown digital pamphlet which was distributed on WhatsApp. These various digital scapes highlight the nuanced hybridisation that occurred particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This network exists in a home that can be situated across both borders, yet "become part of everyday life" (Miles, 2021a:p.207).

Although when we think about community and where it exists, the community can be as important if not more in the digital space where vulnerable LGBT+ individuals can choose their visibility and access thereof. In this context, a digital closet is a digital space that positions itself online. Similarly to the physical closet, the digital closet can too be occupied and hidden within underground networks, "an internal space with connotations of claustrophobia and containment, but also safety and comfort" (Miles et al., 2021:p.409). The difference with a

digital closet is that it can shift and transform – it is fluid – and extend across multiple scalar geographies through the internet and digital spaces, connecting those previously unimagined therefore becomes hybridised. Though the closet metaphor once was negative with the assumption that individuals want to come out of the closet, Miles et al. (2021) argue that the "familiarity with a restrained space like the closet might help in the era of COVID-19. After all, what is home quarantine if not a larger closet?" (p.409) and where "The relationship between the closet and lockdowns may actually be closer than initially conceived" (p.411). This points to my argument using COVID-19 as a metaphor for the closet, within this instance, it becomes a blurred line between the borders an LGBT+ migrant navigates. Although both Ola and Thomars are 'out' within their community, Ola navigates his sexual orientation more in the physical space. The navigation LGBT+ migrants undertake is interesting in relation to the closet space during COVID-19, as "may be under increased scrutiny when they are sharing a small space with significant others for extended periods of time" (Miles et al., 2021:p.412). It is within this period of time and space that create closet conditions where LGBT+ migrants have to mitigate their visibility and freedoms, either pushing on or offline. However, "in academic literature, the Internet [digital space] is generally considered to be a facilitator of the coming-out process" (Szulc & Dhoest, 2013:p.349) and is seen as creating a safe space in various platforms. Again here the visibility and vulnerability due to COVID-19 are interesting when understanding the navigation of space by LGBT+ migrants.

As noted above, the digital closet can also be the positioning of home for some. Creating a safe space is, as Dasgupta (2017:p.40) mentions, probably the single most important factor that underlies the formation of digital queer spaces. Safe spaces are important for LGBT+ individuals within a country such as South Africa where homophobic hate crimes occur. In this regard, in other countries such as Nigeria where Ola comes from, the importance of having access to the internet and digital communities is very important. This allows LGBT+ individuals to connect more broadly to other LGBT+ communities elsewhere and can be the proverbial closet space where future imaginaries of sexual freedom and past homophobic homes are left behind. This visibility further connects to those who choose to be less visible. In this sense,

> "when viewed as part of an entire discursive system of gender and sexuality, the metaphor of the digital closet and its rhetorical functions become more visible, thus also conveying its significance in terms of contemporary LGBT[+] agency and subjectivity" (Gorkemli, 2012:p.79).

The move to occupy online spaces has provided an opportunity for vulnerable LGBT+ individuals to partake in the search for a home, "the [digital space] is recognized as a safe place to engage in *social interactions* with like-minded people and thus provides a promising support network for LGB[T+ people]" (Szulc & Dhoest, 2013:p.349) however, it comes with risks of being exposed or outed[2] online. With visibility comes vulnerability. The use of digital rooms can expose individuals within the LGBT+ community who live very private lives as mentioned above, in fear of being threatened. Digital and physical communities have played an important role for LGBT+ people during the COVID-19, especially for LGBT+ migrants who have lost their physical homes rooted elsewhere. With regards to the closet space, this is interesting as it perhaps also exists with an environment of secrecy within the LGBT+ migrant community because of the diverse and cultural backgrounds individuals come from, as Ola has noted previously, his national Nigerian community is very homophobic. When no one is 'home' in the physical space, one can argue that one can exist 'out of the closet' or when you leave your home behind you. Does the closet space reconstitute and challenge movement and challenge real ideals of being visibly out. Therefore, depending on where home is situated, home becomes the bounded spatial denominator which can be both constructive in creating community or destructive in pushing individuals away depending on the dynamics of the environment thereof.

Not all online presence is that of anonymity or secrecy. The digital borders which LGBT+ migrants cross are sometimes political. Camminga (2020) notes a transgender woman, Miss Sahhara from Nigeria who was crowed First Princess at the world's largest and most prestigious beauty pageant for transgender women, Miss International Queen did not leave silently. Miss Sahhara used the digital space to provide "a new political visibility of individuals" being both transgender and African. This political visibility has become an important visibility instigator as Miss Sahhara has transcended all boundaries and borders into homes and closet spaces providing a sense of hope for those LGBT+ individuals on the African continent who continue navigating their visibility. This is really powerful as her presence has

[2] "I use the word outed as this refers directly to queer theory. The notion that a member of the LGBT+ must come out the closet to be recognized is a part of the Euro-Western trope. [The] necessary assumption of a modern North American "gay" identity by Brazilian queers… contends that the dissemination of the North American "coming-out" story in Brazil has had the effect of fixing a bourgeois public/private divide that has reinforced hegemonic class and sexual interests" (Anon, 2002:p.6). "The globalization of lesbian and gay identities and the U.S. model of identity politics have caused concerns among scholars" (Gorkemli, 2012:p.64).

created a digital community space for those who engage and interact in which aims to, “disrupt dominant discourses of nation, ethnicity and culture” (Kuntsman, 2009:p.16).

The website *GoFundMe* acts as a digital space that brings a different sense of visibility. This online visibility is to show the precarity in which LGBT+ migrants have been placed due to the impacts of COVID-19. Some migrants have disproportionately lost their jobs or are unable to work whilst the country grapples with the ramifications of a global pandemic. The various boundaries and borders that COVID-19 has brought are not all bad. Investigating the metaphor of the closet and how COVID-19 has pushed LGBT+ individuals ‘back’ highlight the fluid spaces and border which LGBT+ migrants occupy. Though some are more visible than others, this visibility has aided those in vulnerable spaces. The digital visibility of LGBT+ migrants during COVID-19, “were unable to access aid because of their migrant status, and then received little support from diasporic and local communities because of their sexual orientation or gender identity” (Reid & Ritholtz, 2020:p.1107) can be better understood as the digital visibility of the GoFundMe campaign provided much-needed support to LGBT+ migrants. The successful navigation of the digital space within this instance shows the importance of LGBT+ migrant community networks, whilst highlighting the lack of support from the government.

05 COVID -19: A SHIFT TO THE DIGITAL

From midnight on 26th March 2020, South Africa went into a hard lockdown for 21 days to curb the spread of the COVID-19. A hard lockdown within the context of South Africa is an emergency protocol set in place to restrict the movement of people. At the beginning of the hard lockdown, only employees of essential services could move and cross-district borders. A strict curfew was in place to further prevent the movement of people. People caught out in public with no clear reason were fined or taken to police authorities for further questioning. This hard lockdown saw the restriction of movement for all people. The livelihoods of the LGBT+ migrant community have been severely impacted by the national lockdown within South Africa. Much like other minorities within South Africa, LGBT+ migrants have been further isolated by the COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 I argue can be seen as a third threat on the migrant community in South Africa, where the onset of the lockdown further placed the community on the periphery of physical spaces, Ola says that "the pandemic has resulted in me not seeing friends and associates for over a year. I obtain information via [digital space] phone calls, texts, emails and social media." The triple threat did however open up a new and amplified use of digital visibility through occupying various online and social media platforms. The global COVID-19 pandemic has stressed and exposed the insecurities of the LGBT+ migrant community, bringing into focus their already fragile livelihoods within urban physical spaces. When the lockdown happened, foreign-born migrants were excluded from state support such as food parcels and grants, making survival difficult and placing migrants in even more precarious positions, including the inability to buy food and pay rent. The COVID-19 highlighted the precariousness of the current situations within South Africa as informal trades which are linked to physical spaces such as restaurants, bars, beauty salons and sex work have been affected. With the closure of the majority of business, the DHA was one state office that closed too, meaning that all asylum applications were paused. LGBT+ migrants were further placed in vulnerable situations far worse than usual and did not qualify for financial aid because their documents remain unprocessed (Collison, 2020). Coupled with the fear of being caught and questioned in the streets at the onset of the national hard lockdown, this placed migrants in difficult situations, Harie says that, "there was no way of really reaching out to the [LGBT+ migrant] communities in any kind of physical way, because of the way the state executed the lockdown, it meant that the [LGBT+ migrant] community was at high risk because of securitisation." Unable to work

in order to pay for rent in physical spaces or put food on the table, the impact of COVID-19 at the beginning of the lockdown can be seen as a triple threat to their wellbeing and livelihoods. Ola explains the impact of the COVID-19 impacted migrants differently,

> "Prior to the pandemic, I was an editor for an airline magazine. Since the aviation sector has been severely affected, the magazine is no longer being produced on schedule, so my main source of income vanished. I have been surviving on charity and handouts."

Chikalogwe, the director of PASSOP in relation to his work with LGBT+ migrants explains that the outbreak of the COVID-19 has and will continue to hit LGBT+ migrants in South Africa, particularly hard (Collison, 2020). The precarity for LGBT+ individuals is felt especially by those whose dreams and aspirations have now been placed on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes all applications at RRCs, not to mention education and employment opportunities. Mudzuri, an asylum seeker who fled Zimbabwe, interviewed in an article *Queer refugees battle COVID-19 on top of prejudice* (Collison, 2020b) published on a digital platform called *New Frame* explained that the COVID-19 had made life in South Africa worse rather than better:

> "The worst part of it is I told myself, 'I am going to South Africa, so things should be much better'. But I would say maybe if they actually killed me at my home place it was going to be much better than to live like this in a foreign country where no one knows me".

Because of South Africa's hard lockdown, the closure of many businesses has even placed more pressure on an already stressed employment market. At the beginning of the lockdown, there was no access to food or basic assistance if one was a migrant. This put immense pressure on individuals fighting for survival, further placing LGBT+ individuals within liminal or peripheral spaces. In an effort to assist the migrant community, on 19 June 2020 The Scalabrini Centre, a Cape Town-based refugee advocacy and support organisation whose "vision is to foster the cultural, social and economic integration of migrants, refugees and South Africans into local society" secured the court order allowing asylum seekers and special permit holders, (which does not cover the migrant population) to apply for the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grant (SRD grant) of R350 (Karrim, 2020). The Scalabrini Centre won the court case allowing some migrants to apply to the Social Relief of Distress Grant (Scalabrini, 2020). Though the amount may seem small, it at least provides an opportunity to place food on the table. Two different reports, by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans And Intersex Association (ILGA) (ILGA, 2020:p.5) and Human Rights

Watch (Human Rights Watch, 2021:p.604) exposed the lack of support by the Department of Home Affairs and South African government by specifically overlooking the LGBT+ migrant community and people with disabilities by including food parcels during the COVID-19 pandemic. The South African government has since initiated various opportunities however, the flaw in the system is that migrants seeking support by applying for grants need to be registered asylum seekers with the correct papers – ironically the asylum permit needs to be updated and reapplied for every few months (HBF, 2018) – creating a vicious cycle for migrants who already struggle to find employment, financial aid and food for the table.

For Ola, COVID-19 has had a severe impact on his wellbeing and his visibility as he now feels disconnected because most events have been pushed online. Using COVID-19 as a metaphor for the closet highlights the triple threat experienced by LGBT+ migrants during this time threatens their livelihoods whilst "raising fundamental questions about spatial justice in Africa's rapidly transforming cities" (Kihato & Landau, 2020:p.1) which reveal who gets to access and benefit from rights and economies. The loss of his job due to the pandemic means that his steady source of income placed him in a vulnerable situation, often unable to pay rent for his home. The high cost of data, rolling blackouts and crime has exacerbated Ola's connection to the online world. Before the implementation of lockdown, his laptop was stolen, which means that his access to digital spaces is hampered, and he now needs extra money to access an internet café. This becomes an issue when conferences, social events and other meetings have all since been pushed to digital spaces because of the ramifications of COVID-19, the third barrier which Ola is navigating where strict lockdown regulations, "edicts like social distancing, hand washing, curfews and policing (which no doubt save lives) *entrench* these structural injustices" (Kihato & Landau, 2020:p.3). LGBT+ migrants similar to Ola were stuck in their homes during the lockdown with few resources also were confined to the digital closet. Here Ola can be thought of as in a digital closet. In contrast, however, it is interesting to note Thomars' very visible experience and his occupation in digital spaces which gained him and his organisation traction online where donors and other organisations call on him to participate in meetings. The GoFundMe campaign was another digital space where he was very visible, being the face of the LGBT+ migrant community during COVID-19.

5.1 Bridging the Physical and the Digital: Organisations and Visibility

The visibility of organisations has been important for LGBT+ people prior to and during the global pandemic. LGBT+ organisations have been important for those seeking homes and communities. Organisations play an important role in aiding LGBT+ individuals with shelter, food and other necessary items to survive. Organisations exist in both physical and digital spaces. COVID-19 amplified the two spaces in interesting ways. Organisations that are heavily rooted in physical space prior to the pandemic such as GALA distributed their newsletter through platforms such WhatsApp as well as a 'Queer Lockdown' digital pamphlet. These digital pamphlets can be circulated easily across various communities and are an important resource as they cover various issues relating to the LGBT+ and migrant community visibly sharing heartfelt stories of similar experiences which resonated with many of its readers. Digital pamphlets such as the ones from GALA are able to get a further outreach than the physical which is important especially in a time of a pandemic where accessing information, safely, about one's community can provide a sense of connection, especially where this source "may be the individual's first contact with others who share similar interests" (Dasgupta, 2017:p.44). Harie explains,

> "GALA wanted people to share their lived experiences during this time within the lockdown because often moments such as these, of queer experiences within history are completely erased and it was very interesting that LGBT+ people shared a lot of their experiences living in physical spaces during the lockdown. Not all LGBT+ people and migrants necessarily wanted to be identified for obvious reasons due to visibility and vulnerability however, their responses were quite incredible."

Thomars' first organisation was called, *LGBT Rights Africa* which was initially a Facebook page and a WhatsApp group. He thought that by having the acronym 'LGBT' in the name, together with the word 'Africa' it would be easily searchable and visible by other LGBT+ migrants arriving and living in the city. LGBT+ migrants came from various geographical regions within Africa. The speed and scale at which social media and digital spaces can be accessed, "transgress[es] geographic boundaries" (Dhoest & Szulc, 2016:p.6).

Thomars notes his awareness, "I have a small amount of privilege, so I knew that I wanted to help and do something within my community, I just didn't know how." Thomars would host workshops with the little money that he had saved to try to assist his community and gather more visibility. These workshops were held within the physical space whilst

organised through the digital. In 2016, Thomars wanted to formalise his ideas and thinking of his initial organisation LGBT Rights Africa and the formation of the Fruit Basket was born. The organisation advocates for the rights and freedoms as well as the safety and security of LGBT+ migrants, asylum seekers and refugees living in South Africa. The organisation aims at promoting equality and opportunities in a safe and secure environment for LGBT+ people and groups (UNHCR, 2020a).

Pre-lockdown, the services of the Fruit Basket did not include financial support however, Thomars says that "the moment that lockdown happened it was as if everything that I had ever wanted to do, I got the chance to do it." This changed as the need for rapid response to the LGBT+ migrant community during the lockdown meant providing more than just food parcels in the physical space. The global pandemic and the hard lockdown affected the lives of many in various ways, "if this pandemic teaches us anything, it is that the [COVID-19] has no boundaries, and the wellbeing of both rich and poor are co-dependent" (Kihato & Landau, 2020:p.6). As previously mentioned, the closet positioned within the home also has no boundaries, perhaps ones that are fluid and frequently change dependant on the scope of work by the person operating its threshold, for shifting identities and visibility. For the Fruit Basket, COVID-19 meant gaining an unprecedented sense of visibility both by its members, but also by donors wanting to assist organisations helping LGBT+ migrants affected by the lockdown, where the government had previously excluded them. The Fruit Basket can within this situation be seen as coming out of the closet through its visibility in both the physical and digital spaces. Here the closet and the threshold navigates the visibility in as such as it exposes the issues and threats LGBT+ migrants are most vulnerable for, xenophobia and homophobia. The paradox of visibility is navigated cautiously, to be too exposed and seen could be dangerous, yet to remain hidden can could mean the difference to be helped.

Because the Fruit Basket has existed since 2016, this aided with gaining the funding the organisation needed as it was seen as being established within the LGBT+ migrant community. This provided donors with a sense of trust in providing much-needed funds and support the Fruit Basket was seeking. Marnell further mentioned that COVID-19 disproved that "donors traditionally fund only programmatic work" in a shift where now discretional funding was equally if not more important. Thomars explains that this newly gained visibility placed the Fruit Basket 'on the map' both locally and internationally where the organisation

was beginning to be acknowledged for the work it was doing and was being included in donor programmes, services and meetings.

> "Now when organisations are looking for someone to represent LGBT+ migrants in Johannesburg, they call the Fruit Basket. Which is something that never happened in the past. It is one good thing that has happened because of COVID-19."

Despite the challenges of the pandemic where access to the physical space had been jeopardised, acknowledging a community organisation such as the Fruit Basket is monumental in terms of the visibility for LGBT+ migrants within the city, where the state overlooked LGBT+ migrants (Human Rights Watch, 2021:p.601). Inhabiting physical spaces within the city's margins, the visibility of the Fruit Basket together with other organisations acknowledges the shortfall of government. However, the organisation continues to provide hope, visibility and safety for LGBT+ migrants who do not have the freedom of visibility due to their legal status within South Africa.

The restriction of movement for all people within the borders of South Africa posed many challenges for people not allowed to leave their homes. Thomars mentions, "during lockdown people couldn't move. They couldn't go outside, to work, to go to the streets and sell what they needed to, in order to make money to provide for food on the table. These people were living from hand to mouth. Moving to digital space during COVID-19 had its challenges." Thomars refers to the LGBT+ migrant community here, the impact of not being able to leave one's home for an LGBT+ migrant meant facing not one but three threats within this instance. One threat being that of an LGBT+ individual amongst other migrants' places LGBT+ people in harm's way, especially when national communities are homophobic towards LGBT+ people – within this situation, this could possibly 'out' an LGBT+ person because others would begin to learn the identity of the LGBT+ individual, "they have fewer economic opportunities, and more likely to be poor, particularly in contexts where some LGBT people were left out of government's economic recovery measures" (Reid, 2021). The second threat is being a migrant, possibly with no legal papers positioned within the city. Access to space is met sometimes by xenophobia, yet stringent lockdown regulations "not only punish transgressors but also collectively reinforce people's fears of state caprice and coercion" (Kihato & Landau, 2020:p.4). The third threat now being COVID-19 meant not being allowed to move freely out and away from the home. The effect COVID-19 had on LGBT+ migrants placed them in precarious situations in physical space, besides having to worry about where food and money to pay rent would come from, but also to fend off possible harm against them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Here the home as a closet

site shifted many invisible borders which LGBT+ migrants had to navigate; visibility, the return to the 'closet', home as being the geographical link back to home countries because of being situated within a home – albeit homophobic – community. When discussing the visibility and borders of space, especially navigating between the physical and the digital space, it is important to note the access to these spaces and what it means for the livelihoods of people who utilise either-or, or both as a means of survival. An element of success during COVID-19 for an organisation such as the Fruit Basket meant greater visibility within the LGBT+ migrant community, being acknowledged especially in a time when the South African government did not recognise minority groups within its border such as LGBT+ migrants.

At the beginning of the lockdown, Thomars wanted to meet in digital space with people who needed financial aid. An irony existed navigating between the physical and the digital, Thomars explains, "imagine sending money to someone who was struggling [to place food on the table or pay rent] and dictating that the money sent must be used for data [to meet in a digital space such as Zoom], knowing very well that person is hungry – only for them to join in the meeting and discuss the problems that they have? I just couldn't do it." During the interview, Thomars indicated a clear sense of frustration with the difficulties in navigating the physical and digital space. This frustration is an outcome of the state overlooking LGBT+ migrants at the onset of the national lockdown and indicates how the state continues to view migrants within its borders. This aligns with the notions of xenophobic attitudes that continue to exist in a post-apartheid South Africa, which further "emphasize competition between citizens and the increasing number…of African migrants over scarce resources and opportunities, particularly at a time of high unemployment; poor service delivery" (Misago, 2017:p.41). Although the Fruit Basket was receiving some initial funding, it was not enough for the number of people affected by the extended lockdown. It was at this intersection in time and space where Thomars in discussion with the coordinators of the ALMN and GALA began to conceptualise the crowdfunding GoFundMe campaign to assist LGBT+ migrants in need of help, whilst the South African government forgot about them.

Organisations such as these exist between physical and digital spaces. They are important spaces as they are connected to networks and other organisations that extend greater than their immediate reach and have assisted many LGBT+ migrants during the national lockdown with financial aid, access to health services such as medication and food and toiletry parcels. Ola's

life has changed drastically occupying physical space from having a secure job and income this has all changed and COVID-19 has threatened his livelihood,

> "It has led to a drop in my quality of living as sometimes I am without money to buy food. The Fruit Basket helped with four months' rent during the [hard] lockdown as well as [the] provision of food vouchers that saved me from total starvation. I also have like four month's rent in arrears and have to be pleading with the landlord always [not to be evicted]. He has been patient just because I've been there since 2018 and never defaulted until COVID-19."

Had it not been for organizations and their networks, relief to the LGBT+ migrant community would have not been as successful. As LGBT+ migrants face greater obstacles because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, within the itinerary of an LGBT+ migrant, the lockdown is an additional obstacle in the search and making of a home. COVID-19 has displaced the LGBT+ migrant community, further exacerbating their safety and freedom in physical spaces which will be explored within the case studies of this research below. However, it is not only COVID-19 that has had an impact, but the imposed restrictions on movement and livelihoods have pushed people toward destitution and starvation. The measures taken by governments in response to COVID-19 have had a dire physical and psychological effect. Consequently, "being stuck in inadequate living conditions, especially in shared bedrooms, where they cannot even be alone, feel secure, and deal with their trauma, causes many LGBT+ [migrants] to feel depressed and even suicidal" (Tschalaer & Held, 2020). This means that COVID-19 has jeopardised the livelihoods of the LGBT+ migrant community already positioned on the periphery of already marginalised migrant networks in South Africa. As the GoFundMe (2020) campaign notes, "with scarce access to housing that is both affordable and safe, many LGBT+ people are slowly being driven to destitution. The reality is that, for many in our community, survival is now on the line" (Camminga, 2020b).

5.2 Campaigning for Community

Transitioning from one space to the other requires an acknowledgement that organisations at the beginning of COVID-19 navigated these digital invisible 'borders' quite rapidly. The move to digital space was to provide necessary and important information to the LGBT+ migrant community which otherwise could have not been done in physical space because of the lockdown. This meant that organisations had to move more intentionally, having more of an online visible presence to facilitate the distribution of information within their geographical

networks. This rapid movement can be seen as coming out of the digital closet. The organisation had to navigate the digital space, in some cases on behalf of the LGBT+ migrant community, to be the face or the home to those who did not have access to the digital space. Organisations moving to the digital meant that they too gained visibility.

The physical exists in tandem with the digital and vice versa. In exploring this navigation and how LGBT+ bodies navigate these spaces, it is important to provide case studies to explain this navigation. Online spaces are diverse, and with a wealth of knowledge at one's fingertips, users create a different form of visibility within the digital space however, as I begin to note in the case study below the digital space has its complications when trying to access. South Africa has some of the highest data prices on the African continent making access to digital space difficult for many people (Bottomley, 2020) and in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown, financial aid for rent, food and other items take priority over high data prices. The precarity in which LGBT+ migrants have been placed due to the impacts of COVID-19 have pushed many into visible spaces.

The use of the GoFundMe campaign is one example of a digital space that was used successfully because of the inadequate financial and grant support given to the migrant community during the COVID-19 pandemic (Scalabrini, 2020). The GoFundMe campaign, 'COVID-19 and LGBT+ people in South Africa' was particularly successful, and the campaign's visibility extended around the globe using the campaign coordinator's existing networks. The website is a crowdfunding digital platform that allows users to raise money for a series of events from challenging circumstances such as accidents to educational needs. Having online visibility does create a transitory space for the LGBT+ migrant community to navigate in a time where movement is restricted. LGBT+ minorities face greater levels of exclusion than their heterosexual counterparts (Bhagat, 2018:p.4). The GoFundMe platform has transcended the borderlines of the digital space affording LGBT+ migrants an opportunity to take ownership and control of a dire situation, providing them with visibility. The platform does this by using existing networks in physical space by users that are shared through digital spaces. The GoFundMe digital space has provided a sense of agency, social and developmental skills through local and international networks however, it of course comes with having to be visible. Within this instance, organisations such as the Fruit Basket were used as well as public activists such as Thomars where visibility was not an issue.

The use of the GoFundMe platform is being used to elicit economic support for a community already placed within the periphery of urban centres where this can be seen as a digital 'coming-out.' Given that LGBT+ migrants have become more visible particularly in digital space during COVID-19 because of initially being excluded from planning by the Department of Home Affairs and the government of South Africa. The use of social media "transgresses national boundaries" connecting people with relatives elsewhere in home countries where sexual orientations are unknown (Dhoest & Szulc, 2016:p.5). I want to suggest here that the metaphor of the closet can be used as a spatial concept to cross geographical boundaries online. This is done by accessing other digital spaces from homes or physical spaces which do not have LGBT+ visibility, where one can have a visibility online in the digital space, but not have physical visibility.

The Gay and Lesbian Queer Archive's (GALA) core focus is archival work. In starting the campaign, the archive was concerned about how the information would be distributed and how it might be possible for them to assist people who are also going through intense challenges of being in the closet at home and not feeling safe to go outside at all? Harie notes,

> "if you think about the ethics of care, with the community we engage in and lived experiences we are trying to retain as a way of preventing erasure, the only way we can build this relationship of trust is by ensuring we are there for our community when it is most needed. Establishing a relationship with the Fruit Basket meant supporting not just the LGBT+ community but the LGBT+ migrant community as well. Activism at its heart is about community accountability."

COVID-19 pushed GALA to think outside the box in terms of what the organisation's core focus was. And this was transcending community borders and being inclusive to all LGBT+ people within South Africa, including migrants. The Gay and Lesbian Queer Archive (GALA) and the African LGBTQI+ Migration research Network (ALMN) call the 'ethics of care' in responding to a crisis, COVID-19 which no one knew how to manage or mitigate. In their efforts of creating digital visibility through awareness for the LGBT+ migrant community, the organisations have begun to solidify the notion of home here in South Africa that LGBT+ migrants are seen, acknowledged and cared for.

5.3 GoFundMe Campaign: "COVID-19 and LGBT+ people in South Africa"

When opening the digital webpage of the GoFundMe campaign 'COVID-19 and LGBT [+] people in South Africa', you are addressed with a short descriptive video by Thomars and later Dumesani from the Holy Trinity LGBT+ Ministry. Thomars is a well-known public figure and activist within the LGBT+ migrant community in Johannesburg. He explains how his organisation the Fruit Basket assists the LGBT+ migrant community where migrants are vulnerable to violence and abuse and further seek help because of the COVID-19 pandemic where migrants are unable to work for food and rent. The title of the GoFundMe campaign reads, "COVID-19 and LGBT [+] people in South Africa." Before the GoFundMe campaign even began, there were tensions about the use of the platform and how the organiser would run the campaign. The tensions existed between the digital and physical spaces. Some concerns included:

1) GoFundMe requires a name and for their responsibility to be guaranteed. Camminga was chosen as the main organiser because they were situated in the United Kingdom due to the lockdown and global travel restrictions. They had access to a local bank account, which was a GoFundMe requirement.
2) A meeting with Camminga & Marnell's boss, Prof. Jo Vearey (director of the African Centre for Migration and Society) had to be held because ethically in the future both Camminga and Marnell could be accused of paying for interviews with LGBT+ migrants. Camminga mentions "that on the surface it may look as if I have paid for interviews with LGBT+ participants however, in the long term it would seem that I've contributed an investment to this community and now everyone is beholden to me to provide me with data."
3) The coordinators' other ethical concern was could their work be read in the future as objective. Given the financial exchange that would happen, the issue of visibility for all the coordinators and individuals involved is substantial.
4) How do they navigate the visibility of the people who become the 'face of need' becomes difficult to manage?
5) How do the coordinators manage the visibility of the people who are communicating with them and providing donors with cellphone numbers? How much data is reported back to donors?
6) How would funds be sent to LGBT+ migrants who did not have South African bank accounts?

The above points narrate the challenges the coordinators had to navigate in order for the campaign to begin. These ranged between the digital and physical spaces and in a period of

a national lockdown mean negotiating which available services, such as the eWallet money transfer service, access online platforms in digital spaces which reach physical spaces in other geographical locations. The rapid response at which the coordinators began to arrange the campaign was critical in the first few weeks of the national lockdown. The GoFundMe campaign has been shared 916 times through various local and international physical and digital networks, raising over R200,000.00 supporting LGBT+ migrants from 17 African countries. Accessing international networks through digital spaces was one method of a rapid response to the lockdown situation within South Africa. The use of the eWallet service which is provided by First National Bank, allows its customers to send money instantly to anyone with a valid South African cellphone number where funds can be withdrawn from ATMs (Automated Teller Machine) (FNB, 2021). The eWallet service acts as a digital bank account that is linked to the cellphone number of the user. Users can opt to withdraw all the funds sent to their cellphone number or only withdraw a portion of the money, leaving the remainder in the digital account for safekeeping. The choice to send money was something that grew out of necessity because early on into the lockdown the coordinators wanted to minimise people's risk in engaging with state authority in physical space. This was an important factor because if you were a migrant caught without legal documentation, it would mean being detained. This was just one aspect of the hard lockdown, as Camminga says, "money was important because cars were being attacked as more and more people became desperate." Marnell discusses the moral compass at which they were organising and distributing money, which was extremely important in giving LGBT+ migrants the choice in how they would be spending money. From the onset, Camminga together with the other coordinators wanted people to make their own choices on how to spend money, whether it was for food, rent or what was an immediate need at the time. They didn't feel like they had the right to make those decisions. These initial concerns and comments became the beginnings of forming relationships of trust within the LGBT+ migrant community but came out responding rapidly to a situation no one knew a lot about.

The navigation between the two spaces meant that had to negotiate many metaphorical borders, such as the visibility of LGBT+ migrants. Whilst not all LGBT+ migrants had access to digital space, networks and connections within the physical space began to arise within the community. It is here where visibility in the physical space was equally important to assist those with no access to the digital. Rohit Dasgupta (2017:p.39-43) argues that "[LGBT+] cyberspace allows public sites on the Internet to be co-opted, doubling up as a public

space to form ‘community’ and a private space for intimate encounters.” Whilst both the digital and the physical space each allow individuals to navigate their visibility, public and private, the use of public organisations such as the Fruit Basket, GALA and ALMN as the visible faces to the campaign that provides privacy for LGBT+ migrants who negotiate their visibility, perhaps seeking safety in physical space. The interdependent relationship between the two spaces was critically important to ensure assistance and aid reached all members, near and far within the LGBT+ migrant community, but more importantly that LGBT+ individuals were kept safe from other threats throughout the campaign and lockdown.

This navigation between the physical and digital becomes important when understanding the impact, it has on human lives in space where the uncertainty of perhaps both spaces was at risk. The cost of high data prices in the country, load-shedding by Eskom the energy supplier and the restriction of movement for all people placed the lives of those vulnerable, especially at risk. Load-shedding is a planned rolling blackout is done countrywide as a controlled option to respond to unplanned events to protect the electricity power system from a total blackout (Eskom, 2020). The old saying that “cash is king” still resonated strongly during the pandemic, albeit now digital money is used as a means to access physical money other than withdrawing from ATMs in order to pay for food and rent. Camminga comments on the importance of money, providing ownership to decision making by those in need rather than allowing donors stipulate what they thought was best, “even if you converted [money] to a shopping voucher, you’re still saying this person must go to a Shoprite (a discount grocery store within South Africa), it may not be that a Shoprite is even close to them and on top of that, a number of LGBT+ migrants stay in places where they pay the rent and so what is most needed – food or rent? This was not our call to make when a person’s entire structure of safety is based on the fact that they pay the rent for the household, then that choice no matter how humble you are will always come first.” The lines between communicating in the digital space whilst navigating the physical spaces in order to move and transport goods from one person to another who needed them more are significant in further exploring how the LGBT+ migrant community operated amongst themselves, further strengthening these networks of care and reinforcing the element of trust and accountability.

Marnell also highlighted that it was not their job to police people whether they received two or more payments. Because they thought that people were making that judgement because they were sure people were making those decisions for themselves. This further strengthened

trust amongst everyone. The rapid response rate meant that a level of trust was being established within the community. Marnell continues to say, “it was a beautiful moment of community solidarity and self-organising to try and work out how to respond to very complicated needs.” These beautiful moments of solidarity within the LGBT+ migrant community have reinforced and changed perceptions of donors observing from the outside.

As mentioned previously, the success of the rapid response in changing the parameters of donor requirements meant accessing much needed rapid funding. But this is also important in rescripting the conversation of how a nation, South Africa views minority groups within the country. As Camminga mentions within our interview, “we need to disrupt this notion that there are migrants and that they are needy people that they cannot be trusted… racism, xenophobia and homophobia are folded into this idea – how hard does this person have to work, to prove, in order to gain access to funding and support?”

The mechanisms of the GoFundMe campaign, although originally met with concerns, offered a level of autonomy for the coordinators. This meant that they could meet regularly and distribute money without being hampered by donors’ special requirements. Harie explains,

> “that's why accountability is important to ensure that we acted quickly to respond to the crisis but also informing stakeholders, donors and individuals where this money was going. And all the people who have been donating wanted to know this… where was this money going and was it going to the right channels in helping people.”

The consistency around the use of digital platforms is important in establishing and maintaining a community of trust, especially when dealing with LGBT+ migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic where their visibility and vulnerability is in jeopardy. Because of the rapid response of the relief occurring within the physical space, the issue where some LGBT+ migrants wanted to help and provide information too quickly to others, meant that they could regret their decisions later on as providing such information, especially to journalists who fetishized and romanticised the dire situations which people were going through for a mere photograph meant that this would strip away the protected visibility of the community where the coordinators were trying to protect. Camminga explains an example where donors would like a paper trail for their records where they wanted bank statements as proof of where the funds were going. However, bank statements are linked to eWallet accounts, which are linked to cellphone numbers. An arduous process of redaction had to be completed physically by

the coordinators as part of their ethical commitment to ensure that cellphone numbers were not revealed, protecting the data of recipients and their visibility. The usefulness of the eWallet service meant that there was a clear paper trail, which was important for donors donating large amounts.

As mentioned, the GoFundMe campaign raised about R200,000. Some of the money received was because it was a digital campaign however, to make a campaign such as this successful, physical space and strong existing networks are needed. The way the campaign was envisioned from the beginning involved spreading information to existing personal and professional networks on a local and international scale of the coordinators involved. Through these networks and using digital spaces, the campaign gained momentum and spread quite rapidly. Marnell mentions that the success also had to do with the digital footprints. For example, as GALA and the Fruit Basket, both have websites and the organisations are not-for-profit with registration numbers easily available, it proved invaluable in being accountable for funds being donated. A digital report on the campaign meant that the level of trust and accountability within the campaign was trusted by donors and individuals donating money.

Marnell mentions that there were "people who were very visible such as Thomars, who acted as a central point in Johannesburg, and there were others [based] in Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban. Thomars was already a visible figure where he was sharing information and reaching out to people" through his organisations Facebook page and other digital platforms. There were many LGBT+ migrants open to communication through WhatsApp groups that had been formed in digital spaces and these digital spaces, were very active in passing information within the LGBT+ migrant community. Marnell discusses that the networks became quite visible very quickly at the beginning of COVID-19. Whilst Facebook helped to spread information far and wide in digital spaces together with Google search engines, there was a lot of communications that also occurred through physical space networks which happened by word-of-mouth.

When discussing the impact of the COVID-19 and the rapid response at which organisations had to act, local LGBT+ organisations (GALA, Fruit Basket, Iranti, Gender DynamiX and Triangle Project) across South Africa came together and formed a leadership group and met on a regular basis to coordinate efforts on the ground in physical space. Harie explains that

the most successful thing to come out of the COVID-19 lockdown is the realisation that early on organisations needed to work together to meet the needs of the local LGBT+ and LGBT+ migrant communities. All the organisations were facing the same challenges where people were reaching out in need of food and money. Although there was a government grant which was being handed out to South African citizens, in the beginning, it excluded migrant communities placing them further on the periphery of visible spaces.

5.4 Forming Communities of Trust

Harie explains that throughout the entire process of the campaign the coordinators wanted to keep the funders and the community updated frequently as to how the money was being spent so that people know that there was a level of accountability as well as transparency. The GoFundMe digital platform gave the organisers autonomy but allowed them to continue to build and harness a system of trust with individual donors, which is why the GoFundMe campaign was so successful. However, it was not just for the donor's trust that was needed. Trust was especially needed for the LGBT+ migrants that the campaign was helping which became particularly noteworthy when having to navigate between the digital and physical spaces. Trust far exceeded these boundaries too and into the physical community itself, where individuals within the LGBT+ migrant community began assisting one another. Harie says there were many instances where some people did not have access to digital spaces or cellphones, "this person doesn't have a phone but send the money to me and I will get the funds to them." This is an indication of a lack of access to digital space for some. At the onset of the hard lockdown, these situations began to form the beginnings of a community of trust, the restrictions of movement across the country meant that rapid response in getting funds out to people who needed them was critical.

It is evident just how well people were working and helping one another in physical space whilst communicating through digital spaces strengthening relationships. The role of the LGBT+ migrant community during this pandemic was to ensure help reached as many people as possible through the rapid response of the coordinators and the GoFundMe campaign. "I got told to send money to one person before I sent the money, I got an SMS (Short Message Service: a system used for sending text messages to and from cellphones) saying actually this person now has the money they needed as the landlord has allowed some flexibility with rent," says Camminga. Here is a community of people who make decisions on a communal

basis to survive where people are honest about what they received and therefore passed on the care whether it be food or money.

Due to the stringent national regulations of the hard lockdown, this means that LGBT+ people began to live together in physical space because LGBT+ migrants were being evicted or could no longer afford the rent for their accommodation. Self-organising networks of care evolved out of this process where one person within the home would receive money and distribute the money amongst individuals who did not have access to digital spaces, such as cellphones and eWallet services. Marnell mentions, "one woman in Pretoria called me and said I've got a food parcel, but I need medication, so please send me R200 not R500 or maybe I can share it with another person?" The dynamics of the hard lockdown for LGBT+ migrants meant that navigating physical space became problematic for many, the added threat of COVID-19 placed LGBT+ migrants in precarious situations. Thomars says, "some people were kicked out because they couldn't afford rent or the places where they were staying were not safe." These comments that began to come out of the LGBT+ migrant community showed the importance of physical space for LGBT+ people. This highlighted issues around visibility and vulnerability in physical space, where once visibility meant freedom, now possibly it means being vulnerable and in danger. Using COVID-19 as a metaphor for the closet is useful when exploring the navigation of LGBT+ migrants between spaces. Talking with Marnell he mentions that the housing circumstances changed overnight with the implementation of the lockdown. LGBT+ migrants had been living with the same people for a long time, and this environment changed the dynamics of the physical space as now no one was going in or out of their homes. "Therefore, someone's exposure and vulnerability increased exponentially, and so it was not necessarily that the housing arrangement had not changed *per se,* but the dynamics meant that it was now unsafe as people had more time to notice LGBT+ people and to interrogate them or threaten them. Some people reached out and needed some sort of movement to new homes." COVID-19 magnified the visibility of LGBT+ migrants.

These circumstances and nuances become difficult to explain to donors and service providers where the visibility of LGBT+ individuals in physical settings became threatening environments. I argue that COVID-19 played a role of the metaphorical closet by either 'outing' or hiding individuals in physical space. "A transgender man reached out to me who was living with his brother, but in lockdown, he was being assaulted because he could no longer contribute to the household and was then kicked out and needed a place to stay

urgently," says Thomars. These stories begin to show the dynamics of visibility in which LGBT+ individuals navigate in physical space. Here the restriction of movement for bodies creates vulnerable situations that might not have necessarily been an issue before. In understanding how LGBT+ migrants occupy physical space Camminga mentions that they "tend to hang out with each other and form small community bubbles because of the manner in which South African sometimes works, in terms of the combination of homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia, there is an underlying structure that is already formed – a sort of physical community to each other. COVID-19 has disrupted physical spaces where LGBT+ migrants could no longer be together." This disruption means that some LGBT+ individuals had to revert to closet spaces or risk jeopardising their safety because of being too visible. Here it is worthy to note the systemic societal structures which still exist within South Africa (Dill et al., 2016). It is interesting to note that Chikalogwe has echoed Camminga's words albeit two years prior, which further highlight the continued dynamics which migrants face on a daily basis,

> "the various xenophobic flare-ups we have witnessed over the last decade are just the tip of the iceberg. Immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers from the continent face xenophobia on a daily basis: when they go shopping, when they are looking for jobs, and in the neighbourhoods, they live in. Rejection, cold responses and even insults are regular occurrences in their everyday lives" (HBF, 2018).

In unpacking what it means to be an LGBT+ migrant, it is important to note the dynamics of what community means to some, furthering the lived experiences that LGBT+ migrants go through. When I speak with Ola, he mentions that he does not interact with his Nigerian community because they are extremely homophobic due to the religious background Nigerians come from. This places LGBT+ migrants on the periphery of their migrant communities but also highlights that being LGBT+ does not benefit you within your migrant community. Again, the re-positioning of oneself within the metaphorical closet to find a home and belonging is navigated with precaution. Although LGBT+ migrants socialise together, Camminga mentions that they may not live together because it draws greater attention, "so now you have this difficult moment of having attention drawn to you because during lockdown people are home all the time. There is a loss of physical contact with your [LGBT+] community. Again COVID-19 has disrupted this entire dynamic of how the community could possibly function." Access to the physical space folding in issues and concerns with visibility where visibility becomes a border of vulnerability when thinking of

fluid shifting borders, physical and digital, “the liminal city is a place of shifting boundaries” (Kihato, 2013:p.119).

Marnell explains that LGBT+ migrants began living together despite the vulnerability this posed, “because they had to survive, and they were doing their best to be in overcrowding conditions with each other. But this was very stressful as people were under immense financial and psychological pressure at this point. There were definite tensions because LGBT+ individuals were visible. These tensions are understandable given the safety, security and financial concerns which they had at the time during dire circumstances.” In highlighting the tension of visibility in living together, safety in the LGBT+ migrant community is formed within the physical space despite the obvious safety concerns for LGBT+ migrants to navigate. Chikalogwe highlights:

> “For LGBT+ people, the situation is compounded by the fact that, even though it has a very liberal constitution, South Africa is still a society full of prejudice and conservative views towards same-sex relations and gender nonconformity. Homophobic comments and, in some cases even violence, in the form of beatings, corrective rapes and killings, are part of the reality LGBT+ people face. Law enforcement tends to turn a blind eye. Victims have come to realise that there is still a huge gap between the laws and their implementation in South Africa” (HBF, 2018).

Thomars notes that the Fruit Basket although mostly visible within LGBT+ migrant community bubbles, was not recognised by other local or international donors’ pre-lockdown which posed issues, that LGBT+ migrants “are economically marginalized by their immigration status” (Reid & Ritholtz, 2020:p.1106). However, one element of success which COVID-19 brought was that an organisation such as the Fruit Basket became obviously visible in a digital space. Thomars existed outside the confines of the digital and physical closet. This visibility earned him the trust of the LGBT+ migrant community as well as donors. The frequency at which information about the funds and the GoFundMe campaign further strengthened his visibility online in the digital space, as LGBT+ migrants were actively receiving money and food. When speaking with Harie he noted, “as information went out about the GoFundMe campaign across digital spaces, such as Facebook, a lot of people began to message GALA asking how to help and donate. The visibility increased for LGBT+ migrants who needed support.”

The active efforts of Thomars and the those involved helping distribute money and food formed and strengthened an internal community of trust which exposed a vast network of LGBT+ migrants in South Africa. This too can be seen as a political act showing the government that the LGBT+ migrant community exists and is visible. Through Thomars' active efforts within the LGBT+ migrant community and the help which the Fruit Basket provided to LGBT+ migrants within Johannesburg during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fruit Basket won the UNHCR NGO Innovation Award 2020,

> "The Award celebrates efforts and achievements of NGOs who developed innovative approaches for protection and delivery of services to refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR… and amplify the acts of solidarity and innovation in an age of uncertainty and disruption… in response to COVID-19 at global, regional, national and local levels" (UNHCR, 2020).

06 CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this study is to understand how LGBT+ migrants navigate space during COVID-19 whilst also exploring spatial concepts of the home and the metaphor of the closet. “The story of [LGBT+] migrants is not one of absolute oppression: the narratives demonstrate the dynamic processes that allow [LGBT+] migrants to forge a sense of belonging despite concurrent vulnerabilities and structural discrimination (Ou Jin Lee, 2019 in Marnell et al., 2021). Often within media and academia, stories of LGBT+ migrants are misunderstood and/or misrepresented. This project engages with relevant literature in LGBT+ and migration studies. In an attempt, I employ the use of two architectural spatial concepts, the closet and the home to challenge and highlight ideas and experiences of visibility and invisibility, safety and unsafety and how these operate between the physical and digital spaces. This project, as mentioned uses a variety of participants to assist in answering the aims and objectives.

The meaning of home is both narrow and broad depending on the user and circumstance of how an LGBT+ migrant occupies it. Home can be rooted and grounded to place but can also extend into digital space where a home can be found in online communities. Home can become the embodiment of an individual which forms the beginnings of new home imaginations. The precariousness of home is also rooted in time and space that shows a cyclical movement transcending boundaries and borders, “if nostalgia is a symptom of being stuck in and out of time – a form of repetition” (Worby & Ally, 2013:p.459). This notion can be linked to that of liminal spaces occupied and navigated across the physical and digital spaces. Home is also political, where access to home becomes threatening with potential risks for the LGBT+ migrant community. This space is precariously navigated in a time of a global pandemic where LGBT+ migrant bodies were excluded and forgotten by the government of South Africa revealing and highlighting the “structural injustices” (Kihato & Landau, 2020:p.3). It is here where I argue that COVID-19 can be seen as a triple threat to the LGBT+ community but also employed as the metaphor of the closet, where LGBT+ migrants navigated their visibility. Kihato & Landau (2020) confirm and reiterate that “marginalised communities in African cities face a double disadvantage… They also occupy spaces where compliance with the law is difficult” (p.5). These connections to the physical space highlight the vulnerability of LGBT+ migrants within the city. COVID-19 pushed the borders and boundaries for organisations such as GALA and the Fruit Basket to think out-the-box and become creative in the distribution of

information (WhatsApp Lockdown Digital Pamphlet) and financial aid (eWallet, GoFundMe Campaign) in using only the digital space. It showed the strengthening and importance of physical networks which extended geographical and geopolitical borders, showing solidarity in a global pandemic using digital space to raise over R200,000 for LGBT+ migrants in need when the government excluded them. And acknowledging the efforts and hard work of the Fruit Basket and the support from organisations by ALMN and GALA by placing the Fruit Basket "on the [global] map." The grounding and successes of this come without acknowledging the rapid response that some of the participants took, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the LGBT+ migrant during a time of uncertainty were seen and not overlooked when the state had done so. This highlights the current affairs of the home within South Africa, the *real* triple threat (not COVID-19) to LGBT+ migrants. Whilst the introduction of a third threat against LGBT+ migrants became relevant in understanding the treatment of LGBT+ migrants within South Africa, where the third threat being that of COVID-19 exacerbating the lives of many during the multiple lockdowns which were experienced within the country. COVID-19 did however open a new and amplified use of digital visibility through occupying various online and social media platforms.

However, there were few successes to come out of COVID-19 in terms of visibility within the physical and digital spaces. As Marnell explained when talking about donor funding, COVID-19 disproved that "donors traditionally fund only programmatic work" in a shift where now discretional funding was equally if not more important which has opened the metaphorical closet door to how future research and aid relief work can be thought of this directly shifts the focus from conducting workshops in physical space to relooking how future programme work can be concluded in the digital space. As GALA has shown through the archiving of LGBT+ migrant voices throughout COVID-19, it is important to understand and acknowledge the difficulties which LGBT+ people still have whilst navigating physical spaces. When thinking of the community of trust which was developed on the ground in physical spaces amongst LGBT+ migrants, begins to narrate the coordinated efforts of a community and their efforts in supporting one another, in their newfound home. The many invisible borderlines which were crossed in both the physical and the digital space show the emergence of new hybridised spaces, places and identities, where one can begin to see the body as the site for that of the home.

Whilst the exploration of the closet space for LGBT+ people are interlinked with visibility and secrecy, this sentiment can be understood where LGBT+ migrants leaving their home can be seen as navigating their way to a new home, where they can enjoy freedoms, out of the closet. In using the closet as a spatial tool for investigation, and its assimilation to the home which transcends through the body, perhaps it would be useful to use COVID-19 re-ordering device. I explained the visible occupation of the closet by Thomars, where he states “I am never going back into the closet, for any reason, never, never, ever.” Whilst Ola can be thought of as placed within a digital closet because of the lack of access to online space. Using COVID-19 as a metaphor for the closet, in this instance “the closet creates an internal space with connotations of claustrophobia and containment, but also safety and comfort” (Miles et al., 2021:p.409).

The hybridising of the closet space which is navigated between the physical and the digital space pushes the border of the binary world, male and female, inside and out and allows for a diversity of bodies to navigate and occupy spaces and challenge the heteronormative status quo. The cost of invisibility would be counter of what has been explored in this research project – motionless, erased, stripped of identity and confirmative, where “the closet therefore help illuminate for us how the regulation of same-sex desire and [LGBT+] identities occur in particular places” (Tucker, 2009:p.204). What does a future LGBT+ migrant neighbourhood which fosters belonging look like. The evolution of the closet space has been defined and hybridised by that of the COVID-19 pandemic that can be used to “shape the experiences of LGBT+ people” (Miles et al., 2021:p.414) in the future. Will South Africa’s Freedom Charter be envisioned so “that our country will never be prosperous or free until all people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities” (African National Congress, 1955).

“The question, 'When are you going home?' can be responded to in the following manner: home is here, in my migranthood.” - Rey Chow.

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APPENDIXES

1.1 Appendix A: Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

African Centre for Migration and Society
University of the Witwatersrand

Steffen FISCHER
Supervisor: Dr B CAMMINGA
Date

The affairs of the home: LGBT+ migrant community navigating physical and digital space in South Africa, during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTIONS

This section is to engage and informally introduce the participant to the researcher. It is meant to comfort the participant in a semi-structured storytelling manner, 'storying selections contribute to the significance of conducting humanizing research in ways that privilege the co-construction of knowledge, human agency and voice, diverse perspectives, moments of vulnerability, and acts of listening" (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2014:p.23).

Good day, my name is Steffen Fischer. Thank you so much for your participation in my research.

AFFAIRS OF THE HOME / HOME AFFAIRS

Please note that I would like to record this session so that I can use the content from our conversation as part of my research. If you prefer that I do not record this conversation, I will only take handwritten notes. I will also share the draft research before my final submission with you for approval. If you wish to retract or pull your story from my research study at that point, that is also okay and is not a problem.

In the event that you need to seek additional psychological advice from a professional, the contact details are Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU), Shameen Naidu, shameen.naidu@wits.ac.za & info.ccdu@wits.ac.za, +27 11 717 9141 - the services are offered free of charge at no cost to you. Should you run into any issues contacting CCDU, please kindly let me know and I will gladly assist.

QUESTIONS:

1. What name would you like me to use within this research? (Is there a pseudonym/alternative name?)

2. How old are you?
3. How and when did you know of your sexual orientation?
4. What is your pronoun?
5. How did you find your current home/community?
6. What is your definition of home?
7. With the discovery of your sexual orientation and or gender, how has this changed your life?
8. Do you have any hobbies/things you like to do in your free time? I am a maker and like to make art with my hands; art and sewing are my two favourite things to do.
9. What is/was your occupation?
10. How has COVID-19 impacted your life and wellbeing?
11. Did you have challenges in accessing social grants with the Department of Home Affairs during lockdown with regards to COVID-19? Please elaborate.
12. Do you have access to health care & education?

PHYSICAL SPACE

1. Where in Johannesburg do you live? How important would you say is having found your community?
2. Is the place you live in, a safe space? Please elaborate.
3. Has COVID-19 impacted your life and living conditions and in what way? Please explain.
4. How important is it to you to feel safe and comfortable? Does being positioned with your community help with this?
5. Do you belong to any organizations or social groups?
6. Did you use any organizations for assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic? And in what way?
7. How important is it to you that you belong to these organizations or social groups?
8. Can you explain how you benefit from them?

DIGITAL SPACE

1. How has COVID-19 changed the way you now socialize/obtain information from friends, your community and family?
2. What digital platforms do you use to communicate with?
3. Do you feel safe when using digital platforms?
4. Do you use any digital platforms to make money on?
5. How has the shift been, moving from a very physical world to a digital one?
6. Which do space do you prefer, physical or digital?
7. In what ways has COVID-19 changed your life and your presence within a digital world? Please explain.
8. What challenges (if any) have you experienced?
9. How do you arrange social activities in lockdown? Do you use digital platforms, or do you physically go to places?

CONCLUSION

Thank you once again for your time and care in conversing with me. I value our conversation and all that you have told me. If at any time you wish to contact me or further discuss anything, please feel free to contact me. I will be in contact with you when I have completed my research, in order for you to check what I have written.

1.2 Appendix B: Ethics Consent Form

Consent Form

African Centre for Migration and Society
University of the Witwatersrand

Steffen FISCHER
Supervisor: B CAMMINGA
Date

The affairs of the home: LGBT+ migrant community navigating physical and digital space in South Africa, during the global COVID-19 pandemic.
By, Steffen FISCHER

I, …….., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle/highlight the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will be public	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use quotes from the interview in his / her research report	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

Steffen FISCHER
Date

1.3 Appendix C: Ethics Approval Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: ACMS2020-07-07**
PROJECT TITLE	The affairs of the home, LGBT+ migrant community navigating Home Affairs in South Africa.
INVESTIGATOR	Mr S Fischer
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	African Centre for Migration and Displacement
DATE CONSIDERED	8 December 2020
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	`LOW RISK
EXPIRY DATE	13 December 2021

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 14 December 2020 **CHAIRPERSON**

(Professor Jo Vearey)

cc: Supervisor: B Camminga

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature **Date** **__14_/__12___/_2020__**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES