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“My sexuality sort of complicates things”: community and support for Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer People in Lusaka

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“My sexuality sort of complicates things”: Community and Support for Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer People in Lusaka

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School of …Social Sciences……..

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Table of contents

Introduction

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Language and labelling sexualities…….. 7
Silence and invisibility……. 8
Queer archives…….. 9
Religious and cultural attitudes towards non-normative sexualities…… 10
Anti-LGBTQ legislation and the role of the state…… 11
Support, community building and utopias……... 12
Affect……13

Chapter 2: Methodology

Methodological influences on my research approach……...14

Practical logistics……. 16

Introduction to the key informants……16

Figure 1: Demographics of research participants
The limits of this study……..17

Findings and Analysis

Chapter 3: The invisibility of LBQ women and female-bodied non-binary individuals

Zambia's Christian nation ideology……..18

Idealised Zambian femininity……20

Erasure in healthcare services……... 22

Anti-LGBTQ legislation and selective policing……... 23

Closet pressure…….. 25

Microaggressions…….. 26

Chapter 4: Negotiating visibility and invisibility

Perspectives on visibility and invisibility……. 28

Cruel optimism and in/visibility……... 29

Digital intimacies and danger……... 31

Figure 2: 11th July 2021 post from the Queer Voices Facebook group
Figure 3: 16th July 2021 post from the Queer Voices Facebook group
"I just felt seen in a way I never had before with a man": Navigating interpersonal romantic relationships……. 36

Chapter 5: Support and Community in Lusaka

NGO-facilitated support…… 40

Queer world-making through social events…….. 43

Figure 4: 14th June 2021 post from the Queer Voices Facebook group
Conclusion…….. 47

Appendix A: Questions for participants……50
Appendix B: Participant consent forms……52
Reference List ……49

Introduction

I had never read about LGBTQ Zambians until I started writing them in my fictional short stories (Chela, 2016). The success of these stories made me think more about myself not just as a bisexual person but particularly as a bisexual Zambian and Ghanaian woman. I was interested in finding more people like me with a similar sexual orientation and cultural background. This dissertation and the research process are the fulfilment of that initial interest.

The purview of this dissertation is lesbian, bisexual, and queer[1] Zambians, in particular women and female-bodied non-binary[2] individuals living in Lusaka. This study arises because of a noticeable gap in academic literature where perspectives from members of this group should appear. Formally, not much is known about their lived experiences in relation to their sexual identity. This study seeks to build on the work of area scholars like Adriaan van Klinken (2017; 2015; 2013) and Lilly Phiri (2017) who go a considerable way to describe how cultural tradition, law and religious attitudes constrain and shape lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender[3] life in Zambia, but mainly in the context of homosexual men. By focusing on multiply marginalised genders like women and female-bodied, non-binary people I attempt to rectify the lack of research in this area and add to the body of knowledge about queer Africans and expand notions of a "queer[4] Africa" (Martin & Xaba, 2013).

Zambia is a Southern African country with an estimated population of 18.3 million in 2020 (World Bank, 2021). Lusaka, its capital, is home to around 2.9 million people (World Population Review, 2021) and this study focuses on how the research participants interviewed, living in this city, access support and form community around their sexual identity, although it is criminalised. There are three sections of the Zambian penal code which criminalise same-sex activity: Section 155 Unnatural Offences, Section 156 Attempt to Commit Unnatural Offences and Section 158 Indecent Practices Between Persons of the Same Sex (Zambia | Human Dignity Trust, 2020; Phiri, 2017). Zambia gained independence from the British in 1964. As in many other former British colonies, these laws were introduced during British colonial rule and have been maintained in the post-independence period until the present day. Law enforcement and the judiciary enforce these laws and their very existence colours LBQ life in troubling ways.

This thesis is concerned with a series of questions linked to how queer people in Lusaka, form community and find support. Some sub-questions that frame this thesis are: how do the participants conceive of their sexual orientation? Is their sexual orientation legible to other Zambians, in what ways, and how does this affect their lives? How does religion interact with their LGBTQ identity? Do they subscribe to Western conceptions of queerness or have local versions they relate to more? Do they organise politically and socially around LBQ identities And what unique challenges do they face owing to the intersections of their racial, gender and sexual identities?

In trying to answer these questions I discovered Zambian LBQ women and non-binary female-bodied people are mostly invisibilised owing to heterosexist patriarchal cultural norms, restrictive anti-LGBTQ legislation and the dominance of Christian beliefs in society. This imposed invisibility tends to have negative effects on their lives and ability to build solidarity with other LGBTQ people,

[1] Hereafter referred to by the acronym LBQ.
[2] Non-binary is a gender identity "… of sexual and gender fluidity, a space where identities can change, multiply, and/or dissolve" (Callis, 2014, p. 64). It is an umbrella term that refers to "… several gender identity groups, including … (a) an individual whose gender identity falls between or outside male and female identities, (b) an individual who can experience being a man or woman at separate times, or (c) an individual who does not experience having a gender identity or rejects having a gender identity" (Matsuno & Budge, 2017, p. 116).
[3] Hereafter referred to as LGBTQ.
[4] "Queer" is an umbrella term that encompasses sexual as well as gender non-normative identity positions (Dasgupta, 2019, p. 1). It refers to a "wide continuum of sexual possibilities" (Cohen, 1997, p. 438) and intimacies that cannot always "be neatly defined" (Spronk & Nyeck, 2021, p. 389). I use "queer" in this dissertation broadly to encompass the following sexual orientations and forms of gender variance: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, intersex as well as more other, more fluid understandings of sexual orientation and gender identity apart from the ones named here (e.g. genderqueer, pansexual).

leading to a fragmented community. When they express their sexual orientation openly or display a gender presentation which hints at their non-normative sexuality, they can be subject to microaggressions, reproach from other Zambians or online bullying. Despite the hostile climate, because non-normative sexualities participated in by women and non-binary people are less understood by the general public as compared to homosexual male identities, some LBQ Zambians are able to escape detection. Based on these findings I argue that the participants use several strategies to harness this invisibility to their benefit and they organise covertly around their sexual identity online and offline. These activities take different forms, such as mental health support groups and themed parties. These community building efforts are structured by the affects of love, care and "cruel optimism" (Berlant, 2011), and they help mitigate the negative effects of being rendered invisible and living as LBQ in Lusaka.

In Chapter One, I draw on the disciplines of Queer Studies, African Studies, Sociology and Public Health to explore the different ways queer women are presented in the literature. I review existing scholarship from Africa and further afield on queer archives, invisibility and erasure, anti-LGBTQ legislation, intersectionality, affect theory, queer community building and more. Details of data collection and my own positionality as a researcher reside in Chapter Two, a discussion of methods and methodology.

Chapters Three, Four and Five make up my findings and analysis section where participant responses are analysed and contextualised. Entrenched negative community attitudes towards LGBTQ people uphold the aforementioned laws in Zambia and in these three chapters I elaborate on the different ways this impacts the research participants and their endeavours to create vibrant digital and physical communities. The quote in my dissertation title, "My sexuality sort of complicates things", stems from an interview with one of my six key informants. It's significant because in Chapters Three and Four I flesh out the kind of "complications" that being LBQ adds to the interlocuters' existence. Concomitantly, I explore how the participants themselves conceptualise their own sexual orientation and organise inter-personal relationships with other LBQ women and non-binary people.

Chapter Five of this thesis is devoted to exploring ideas of support and how WAfE (Women's Alliance for Equality) is the only non-governmental organisation (NGO) that caters to the participants' unique intersections of gender and sexuality. The definition of support for the scope of this research is capacious; support is defined as anything that encourages LBQ women and female-bodied non-binary Zambians to feel comfortable with their sexual orientation, supports their exploration of their sexual identity and protects them from state and societal hostilities. Participant responses about the kind of support they desired as well as the existing support structures available to them are analysed in detail.

By way of concluding this thesis, the final chapter reviews the arguments I've put forward about the participants' visibility and invisibility vis-à-vis their sexual orientation and gender presentation and the affects underlying their daily life and community mobilisation. It also addresses the nature of the Zambian LBQ community, the strictures of nationalism and gendered responsibility and the possibilities and perils of queer world-making.

Literature Review

This chapter draws from research in the fields of queer theory, African Studies and public health amongst others, with a focus on knowledge from and about Africa but featuring scholarly contributions and theory from around the world. I start with a section on language, expanding into discussions about silence and invisibility, queer archives, religion and culture and anti-LGBTQ legislation. This chapter closes with an exploration of "support", queer women's communities and affect theory and the implications of current knowledge for my study and analysis to come.

Language and labelling sexualities

The politics of naming is a consistent theme in studies of queer women in Africa. Several researchers point to the concept of 'a lesbian' being a socially distinct Western concept (Currier & Migraine-George, 2017; Kendall, 1999; Swarr, 2012). There are many forms of non-normative sexual identities and practices that exist in Africa which Western LGBTQ discourse is unable to accurately cover. However, terms like "lesbian" have been taken up by many queer women in the global South and according to the literature it appears that queer women use a combination of Western and local terms to describe their sexuality. Usage depends on several factors including class and location.

Scholars detail how words like *motsoalle* (plural *batsoalle*)[5] in Lesotho (Kendall, 1998), *supi*[6] in Ghana (Dankwa, 2009) can exist as a way for women to differentiate female homosexuality from the most socially accepted sexual orientation – heterosexuality. This dominant mode of sexuality has attendant expectations. Women are expected to enter into a monogamous relationship with a man (a boyfriend-girlfriend dynamic or marriage). There are allowances for polygamy in some cultures and infidelity for men is a norm (less so for women) while within the primary relationship.

The aforementioned labels hold within them histories of queer female sexuality in Africa. For example, in South Africa, the Zulu word *stabane*[7] denotes an "intersexual person … having both a penis and vagina" (Swarr, 2012, p. 525) but once unpacked the complexities of this term become apparent. In practice, in the township it is used in a derogatory way to refer to lesbians, underpinned by the assumption that if two women are sexually intimate, one of them must have a penis. The word is further complicated by the fact that some black lesbians are in the process of reclaiming the word (Matebeni, 2011, p. 3) as part of "an indigenous language for sexual and gender diversity" (Baderoon, 2011, p. 2).

Similar sentiments are echoed in Kendall's ethnographic study of female same-sex activity in Lesotho. She observed Basotho women "kissing each other on the mouth with great tenderness, exploring each other's mouths with tongues" (Kendall, 1998:232) but because in Lesotho sex was coded as an act only practiced by men and women, their kisses were not viewed as sexual by the women themselves, nor by Basotho society. These cases exemplify the tensions that queer women have with heterosexuality, and how it affects visibility and invisibility. These cases also allude to how women's actions can also be misconstrued or delegitimised by onlookers because of unsophisticated understandings of lesbian, bisexual and queer identities on the continent. Yet ironically, the illegibility of queer female same-sexuality to some African communities can allow queer relationships to flourish.

In my research I was interested in how LBQ Zambians referred to themselves. What labels did they use and how did those labels arise? Simidele Dosekun, in her study of post-feminism and hyperfeminine appearance in young Lagosian women, demonstrates the effects of African culture

[5] Meaning "special friend" in Sesotho, this term can describe relationships between women that are romantic in nature (Kendall, 1998, p. 235). Kendall's work shows evidence that in the 1950s these relationships could result in marriage (Kendall, 1998, p. 234).

[6] Also expressed as *supi-supi*. Describes "close female friendships that are emotionally and materially significant" (Dankwa, 2009, p. 195) which occur between girls in boarding school but in Ghanaian society the word has also come to refer to adult female same-sex relationships.

[7] Also spelt *istabane/isatabane*.

shifting and combining with globally circulating ideals of independent womanhood and affluence. She remarks how the women interviewed, "share cosmopolitan consumer sensibilities, practices, and reference points with demographically similar women elsewhere" (Dosekun, 2015, p. 186). This made me think about viewing the participants as part of a highly variable albeit globalised queer culture. If they used Western terms to describe their identities and sexual practices, then how had these concepts travelled to their part of the world via globalisation? What were the processes by which they were interpellated into Western LGBTQ identities and trajectories (Benedicto, 2008; Boellstorff, 2003) like "stud"[8] or "coming out"? Furthermore, how did their syncretic identities and actions, because of local specificities, fit into or break away from the conventions and stereotypes of "the modern gay world" (Altman, 1997, p. 418)? The analysis section of this thesis explores the answers to these questions.

Silence and invisibility

In the literature about life in the Global South (e.g. Horton, 2018), there's a marked emphasis on silence as a strategy that queer women engage in for survival. One of Serena Owusu Dankwa's research participants in her study of relationships between queer women in southern Ghana describes the way women conduct themselves as "a silent trade… those who know, they make it in such a way that they will be hailed among themselves, because automatically the people who do it, they know it" (Dankwa, 2009, p. 194). This suggests that queer women in African societies have ways of identifying each other without having to 'come out' explicitly.

Dankwa notes how her interviewees, while living in close quarters with their families, manage to pursue same-sex relationships by adhering to other social norms, like being a wife and mother in one case, and a good daughter and sister in the other case (Dankwa, 2009, pp. 200–202). A similar situation can be observed in Swarr's study of Cora, a queer woman in Soweto, South Africa and her family dynamic (Swarr & Nagar, 2003, p. 501). Gendered responsibility is something that queer women are not exempt from and adherence to certain norms or normative gender roles appears to shield them from critiques of their sexuality so they are able to 'pass' as heterosexual in some ways. Or when appearing together as lovers in public, they can pass as friends or sisters (Baraka, 2006).

Loes Oudenhuijsen (2019) terms the conscious act of using silence as, "queerness beyond discourse" and examines how queer Senegalese women rely on *sutura*, "a word that connotes discretion, modesty, privacy and protection", to conduct their queer female relationships. Nancy Baraka (2006) documents a similar culture of enjoying freedom, while remaining in the closet, amongst queer women in Kenya. Several scholars view silence as a form of sexual ingenuity (Currier & Migraine-George, 2017; Tamale et al., 2014) that creates spaces, albeit liminal ones, for existence and expressing "female sexual agency" (Arnfred et al., 2006, p.74) which subverts sexual norms. This shows a departure from queer culture in Western societies, where coming out is prioritised and sexual openness tends to be prized by queer communities. This is one of the reasons why sexuality in Africa needs to be analysed on its own terms with careful consideration for the meaning of actions within their setting. These differences also underline the need for a queer archive that represents the diversity and particularity of sexualities in Africa.

While silence can be a proactive strategy undertaken by queer women to survive and even flourish in homophobic contexts, for other queer people, being forced into invisibility can be damaging. Black South African lesbians are sometimes subject to "corrective rape", "a form of rape that is 'intended to "cure" lesbians' of their 'aberrant' sexuality" (Matebeni, 2011, p. 22). The way in which butch queer women particularly perform masculinity makes them a target for reprisals from men who view them as encroaching on their territory, and providing unwanted sexual competition for them in the pursuit of romantic relationships with other women (Swarr, 2012). And the very fact that corrective rape exists shows that it is not possible for all queer people to become invisible, pass as heterosexual or conceal their sexual identity. Violence can still reach individuals; as Audre Lorde quips "your silence will not protect you" (Lorde, 2012, p. 81).

[8] "Stud" is a term signifying a lesbian with a masculine presentation of self (Reed et al., 2011, p. 753).

Violence against queer African women is not limited to corrective rape and other kinds of violence (or threats of it) are widely reported in the literature (Gqola, 2006, p.3). Interviewees are subject to epistemic violence and report deleterious effects on their psychological well-being because of being marginalised, the fear of being stoned (Baraka, 2016, p. 49) and exclusion from family life and loss of employment (Nagadya, 2016, p. 69). This violence is legitimised by the LGBTQ criminalisation in most African states (Matebeni, 2011, p. 150) and perpetrated by ordinary members of society as part of a national project to enforce heterosexual norms. Silence can perpetuate invisibility and erasure and can support erroneous beliefs that queer Africans do not exist. The silence on a micro-level by individuals reflects on a macro-level in the literature, where there are gaps in knowledge from particular subjectivities, like LBQ Zambians.

Queer archives

Scholarship on the queer archive in Africa describes it variously as a collection of historical experiences of queer Africans (Epprecht, 2006), and a repository for current experiences, identities and possibilities (Currier & Migraine-George, 2016; Tamale et al., 2014). It attempts to unbury and recover what was suppressed or destroyed by the sexual prescriptiveness of colonialism that sought to present African sexuality as deviant and other (Arnfred et al., 2006). Scholars argue for the importance of the queer archive because African governments claim that queer sexualities are unAfrican (Rao, 2014) and a robust archive provides a counternarrative to state-sanctioned (and often religious) homophobia (Macharia, 2015). In this way the archive can serve as a form of resistance and a well of self-knowledge for queer Africans. Doing queer studies in Africa means taking care to understand "the different types of silences" (Arnfred et al., 2006, p. 73) and erasures in the archive. Rahul Rao unpicks the subtext of the many voices he finds in the Ugandan archive, while researching Kabaka (King) Mwanga II's royal court in the 19th century and the impact of same-sex practices on politics and power struggles during that time. By assessing different accounts of the court, he becomes attentive to what the silences, and framing of events indicate about the political motivations of each source's author. Working with queer archives requires some cautiousness, in order to avoid "creating a queer African subject as a mere avatar of a Western queer subject shaped by the identity politics of post-industrial nations" (Currier & Migraine-George, 2016, p. 197).

Moving further afield to the United States of America, I find Ann Cvetkovich's archive of trauma, a different archive that holds lessons for my study. The archive she assembles is a collection of "affective experience" and "cultural memory from the unabashedly minoritarian perspective of lesbian cultures" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 10). By creating an archive from an openly subjective stance and by being attentive to "the idiosyncrasies of emotional life" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 10) , Cvetkovich's archive enables new ways of understanding American popular culture, political movements, female same-sex intimacy, trauma and how they are all interlinked. She notes that unconventional archives are often the preserve of gay and lesbian subjects who "have had to struggle to preserve their histories … in the face of institutional neglect" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 12). These positions on the queer archive highlight the value of multiple archives in constructing past, present and future sexual identities.

Marc Epprecht (2014) notes that queer studies in Africa has its history in anthropology in the colonial era. Homosexual practices were recorded amongst Africans by foreign explorers from the 16th century onwards. Epprecht shows that Estermann, a Catholic priest in Angola from the 1920s to the1940s recounted meeting "'lesbians' who pointedly did not claim spirit possession to explain their sexuality" (Epprecht, 2006, p. 194). That is women performing same-sex acts who displayed their sexual orientation and these practices as way of being outside of religious rituals. Although these early researchers and the queer archive may shine some light on historical queerness, they are tainted by prejudices of the time (Orientalism, racism, sexism) (Rao, 2014; Lewis, 2011) and were "sometimes complicit in the construction and maintenance of racist colonial structures" (Epprecht, 2006, p. 187).

The HIV/AIDS crisis in the 80s and 90s helped fuel a revival in African queer studies and sexual politics as African governments were anxious to contain the spread of the disease and international donors made funds available for the study of sexuality, but foregrounding MSM[9] or queer men. Sylvia Tamale calls this the "re-medicalization of African sexualities" (Tamale et al., 2014, p. 25) and it has led to narratives about queer men being more numerous and more nuanced than those about queer women or WSW.[10] The habits of queer women are understudied and appear less frequently in the literature compared to their male counterparts. Xavier Livermon asserts that "the racialization of the queer body as white and the sexualization of the black body [is] as straight" (Livermon, 2012, p. 302). This miscategorisation creates difficulties for queer Africans in daily life, as explored previously. And it is also replicated in scholarship where narratives of white male queers in the Global North dominate the field of queer studies and there are insufficient characterisations of the black body as queer. According to Rachel Spronk (2019), stylistically studies of African sexuality differ from other area studies. She argues "when one reads the academic literature on sexuality in Africa, people come across as rather loveless and instrumental in their relationships" (Spronk, 2019, p. 26). She attributes this to a centring of Western research agendas, and an othering of African forms of knowing and being, which ignores African theory-making and can distort experiences derived from the data.

Tamale further argues that the medicalisation of sexuality in Africa has been linked to the cause of development and the pursuit of modernity, which has rendered African women's reproduction, "the primary definer of their sexuality" (Tamale et al., 2014, p. 27). McFadden too notes that there "has been a systematic suppression of women's sexual and erotic inclinations" (McFadden, 2003, p. 1) in order to reduce women's power and agency and limit their sexuality to a heteronormative framework. This double erasure – of African female queerness in queer studies and development discourses, and "pleasure, eroticism and desire" (Tamale et al., 2014, p. 35) as a legitimate part of sexuality studies – has made queer women become an invisibilised minority within a broader minority of queer Africans within the archive.

Religious and cultural attitudes towards non-normative sexualities

Christianity in Africa often has an "oppositional relationship" (van Klinken, 2017, p. 2) with queer sexualities. Saskia Wieringa describes how when Christians arrived in Africa and saw the range of sexual and romantic practices, those practices were "no longer seen as illicit (violating lineage rules), but as sinful (a breach of spiritual purity)" which was more serious (Arnfred et al., 2006, p. 72). Today Africans are very religious, with Islam and Christianity being the dominant religions (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010) and interpretations of both religions are used to justify homophobia. Imams and pastors are particularly influential and able to shape societal attitudes and discourses around same-sexuality and they often do so negatively (Isaacks & Morgan, 2006; Mbaru et al., 2018). In the 2010s, homophobic initiatives across the continent have increasingly been funded by conservative evangelical Christian groups in the US (Jjuko & Tabengwa, 2018; Nyeck et al., 2014). In Uganda, Rao (2020) traces the history of imperialist homophobia to the 19th century. He complicates notions of Christianity being imposed on the Baganda, and shows how Christianity was woven into African life by several powerful groups (local and foreign) and how this would not have been possible without the support of African elites (Rao, 2014, p. 187).

The role of religion in the reception of sexual diversity differs from context to context. Some queer women in Amanda Locke Swarr's study of Sowetan lesbians report that their church (the Unity Metropolitan Community Church) is queer-friendly and they take solace in religion (Swarr & Nagar, 2003). In the Zambian context, van Klinken (2015) shows through interviews with queer Christian

[9] Meaning "men who have sex with men". This term often used in public health to indicate the nuance of sexual relations. The term MSM implies a difference between people who conceive of their sexual practices within the framework of a sexual orientation or identity (e.g. lesbians), as opposed to people who may have sex with people of the same gender but do not subscribe to the associated sexual identity (e.g. men who occasionally have sex with male sex workers but are married to women).

[10] Meaning "women who have sex with women".

men, that they reconcile the homophobia their pastors present to them as having a biblical foundation, with their own personal conception of God's unconditional love. These heterogeneous reports show that faith and sexuality is a complex issue and religion cannot be automatically assumed to be negative for LGBTQ people, particularly in the Global South where religion often makes up a larger part of people's identities compared to the Global North.

My reading around culture for this chapter focused on how culture structures the lives of queer women and the intersection of culture, gender and queer sexuality (Bernasconi, 2010; Rahman, 2010), echoing the identities of the research participants who contributed to my thesis. Phoebe Kisubi Mbasalaki's 2019 examination of *ilobolo*[11] negotiations and *ubuntu*[12] amongst township lesbians in South Africa explores how their culture guides negative community reactions to their sexual orientation. And how as queer women they adapt to their culture, and adapt their culture to fit their lives. Mbasalaki argues that by having same-sex marriages and undergoing the *lobola* process, these women perform "cultural labour" which upholds "the very culture that often rejects and expels them" (S. N. Nyeck, 2019, p. 38). This coupling of heteropatriarchal tradition and queer love is just one example of the kind of strategies queer women engage in while living in culturally restrictive and religious societies.

Several scholars acknowledge that traditional African cultures allow some space for gender variance and a measure of flexibility with the gender roles women inhabit. Same-sex marriage has been observed in "more than thirty African populations" (Murray & Carrier, 1998, p. 255). Some notable examples of the former include female husbands amongst the Lunda in Zambia (Clarke, 2021 and the Nandi in Kenya (Murray & Carrier, 1998). Likewise, there is evidence of some traditional acceptance of female same-sexual practices, like amongst the Damara ethnic group in Namibia (Khaxas, 2006) and women sangomas in South Africa. Nkunzi Nkabinde's interviews with other female sangomas who have same-sex relationships, reveal the ancient tradition of taking ancestral wives, whose role is to "help the sangoma by collecting herbs or preparing their attire for ceremonies" (Nkabinde, 2006, p. 242). Although historically sexual relationships with ancestral wives were forbidden, in practice today, some sangomas use this space for intimacy. Nkunzi asserts that "same-sex sangomas are not raped as people are afraid of the sangomas because of the power that they believe sangomas have" (Nkunzi, 2016, p. 232). It is interesting to observe how in this case their status, conferred on them by tradition, insulates them from the homophobia and corrective rape rife in South African society.

Like religion, culture cannot always be assumed to be backward, patriarchal and negative. It is not static; it is in flux and it can be wielded by marginalised groups as a shield in specific instances. However, despite a traditional leniency in gender roles and non-normative sexual practices, both aspects are policed more rigidly in contemporary times owing to the strength of religious beliefs which regard queerness as sinful, and the evolution of what is seen as traditional African culture. In these contexts, a religious (non-secular) state, church elders of high status in society and a narrow heteropatriarchal view of traditional African culture form a trifecta of hostility for sexual minorities.

Anti-LGBTQ legislation and the role of the state

Rao describes the status quo in Africa succinctly saying two fallacies "commonly frame scenes of queer postcolonial contestation— 'homosexuality is Western' and 'homophobia is Western'" (Rao, 2020, p. 18). As he implies the truth is not so simple. Africans have a measure of agency: there is both homegrown homophobia and a long history of homosexuality in Africa. Jjuko et.al. note that in pre-colonial Africa same-sex activity was not criminalised (Jjuko & Tabengwa, 2018). Most of these laws were introduced by colonial rule and have been upheld in the post-independence era as post-colonial African states uphold "nationalist fictions" (Epprecht, 2013, p. 22) of heterosexuality as the only

[11] Meaning "bride wealth".
[12] Meaning "humanity", ubuntu is a philosophy, an "imagination and cultural praxis based upon the idea that where members of a community begin to co-witness each other's realities there are planted the seeds of mutual transformation and inclusion" (S. N. Nyeck, 2019, p. 4).

valuable form of sexuality and kinship. Alternative visions of Africanness and blackness are foreclosed in favour of "patriarchal and heteronormative imaginaries" (Strey, 2017, p. 255). Naisargi N. Dave notes that the identities of being Indian and being a lesbian were mutually exclusive and viewed as "incommensurable" (Dave, 2011, p. 650) in Indian society. A highly contested journey through activism led to a society where "Indian" and "lesbian" began to be viewed as compatible but, as in many other post-colonial states, this journey is incomplete, with significant legal protections still unavailable for queer Indians.

The laws criminalising homosexuality in many African countries invisibilise queer women. The current laws differ from country to country but tend to refer to homosexuality as "unnatural acts" or "carnal knowledge against the order of nature" (in the case of Zambia) (Phiri, 2017, p. 8) or "sodomy" (in the case of Kenya). It is rare for women to be explicitly mentioned in the law yet these laws have been used to prosecute queer women, in Ghana (Isaack & Human Rights Watch Organization, 2018) and Kenya for example (Baraka, 2006). However, the erasure of women in the law is changing.

Jjuuko et.al. detail how in some African countries colonial anti-homosexuality laws have been expanded, "in the past two decades" (Jjuko & Tabengwa, 2018, p. 63), for example in Botswana, the law was changed in 1998 to include women in its scope. More recently the Anti-Homosexuality Bill that Ugandan parliament tried to pass in 2009 was a cause for international controversy and only managed to be signed into law in 2014 (Nyanzi & Karamagi, 2015). One of the major reasons for this shift in the 2000s was the sense amongst African leaders that sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) rights are being imposed more and more on African countries by the West as queer people gain more rights overseas. Thus, increasing the criminalisation of non-normative sexualities, expanding the reach of existing laws and the demonisation of LGBTQ people in the media is an attempt to reassert African countries' cultural and constitutional sovereignty and independence (van Klinken, 2017). There is also evidence to suggest that taking a hardline stance against LGBTQ rights increases African leaders' popularity with the public (Jjuko & Tabengwa, 2018) and their alliances with local and foreign religious groups. South Africa is a notable exception where LGBTQ rights are enshrined in Section 9 of the Constitution (Government of South Africa, n.d.).

Support, community building and utopias

According to existing scholarship queer women in Africa access support through NGOs and communing (virtually or physically) with their peers. In countries where non-normative sexualities are criminalised, internationally funded and local NGOs have to be careful about how they operate. Wahman & Drury's comparative study of Zambia and Malawi shares that "most African countries have an important domestic LGBTQ rights movement, although it might be undermined legally" (Wahman & Drury, 2018, p. 12). They are often unable to register formally as an NGO; they fear advertising their services freely, having events and cannot make their aims explicit. Some NGOs try to focus on topics like HIV/AIDS or feminism and gender equality instead of rights for LGBTQ individuals to evade criticism. The Zambia Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (Zanerela+), TransBantu, Friends of Rainka (FoR) and The Lotus Identity (TLI) operate in Zambia (Phiri, 2017) and appear to take this route.

Susan Holland-Muter's 2019 study of lesbian home-making in the "pink city" of Cape Town brings to light the classed and raced nature of queerness. Her research participants all have conflicting experiences of whether Cape Town is a gay-friendly city, depending on where they live and whether they are black, white or coloured. Their testimonies show "an uneven enforcement of heteronormativities" (Holland-Muter, 2019, p.4), where some spaces are queer-friendly and others are not depending on your racial identity. The study shows the different strategies queer women resort to in order to make community for themselves which include conforming to certain norms valued by the communities in which they reside, as discussed previously.

Queer women's communities are sometimes illegible or fleeting according to Jen Gieseking who calls the "lesbian or lesbian-queer neighbourhood a slippery idea" (Gieseking, 2013, p. 178). She

demonstrates that queer women often have limited economic and structural power compared to queer men, which impacts their ability to purchase property and to create and enforce neighbourhoods and spaces devoted to their sexual orientation (Gieseking, 2013). Jacquelyn Strey concurs, mentioning that in Bangalore, India there exists a "complex intersection between sexuality, gender and public space" that is marked by precarity for queer Indian women because of the dangers of the city and the pressures of respectability (Strey, 2017, p. 247). This affects the dynamics of queer women's communities. Yet despite these difficulties queer women around the world, whether in India (Dave, 2015), Japan (Welker, 2010), or the USA (Rothblum, 2010) seek out connections with each other and "the promise of a larger world—an imagined community of disparate but soon-to-be mingling bodies, exchanging information, technologies, and touch" (Dave, 2015, p. 611).

The online sphere is important especially in countries where sexuality is heavily policed in public and there may be few opportunities to be open about one's sexual orientation without risking harm. McLean et al. (2011) argue the internet provides a space for "subaltern counter-publics and counter-discourses" which makes it a radical space of self-discovery. Queer-centred websites like HOLAA! and MambaOnline are popular with queer Africans and provide information on sexual health, relationship advice, networking opportunities and platforms for freedom of expression. HOLAA! is notable for being focused on queer African women only. In Bryan's exploration of virtual LGBTQ spaces in Uganda, he describes a setting where "this marginalized community convenes in a way that works to normalize divergent sexualities, gender expressions and identities," (Bryan, 2019, p. 29).

Affect

Affect theory is valued amongst scholars for its attentiveness to "hidden-in-plain-sight politically engaged work — perhaps most often undertaken by feminists, queer theorists, disability activists, and subaltern peoples" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 7). Affect is interested in the subtle and sometimes unknown; it allows us to perceive things that are not usually coded as political as having political import. Using affect one can analyse motivations, and how feelings and affects lead to the creation of new visions of the world. José Muñoz has studied depression as an affect of resistance and he describes affect as a way of hearing "… each other and the frequencies on which certain subalterns speak and are heard or, more importantly, felt" (Muñoz, 2006, p. 678). Jennifer C. Nash (2011) argues that black feminist politics has been driven by a love affect and centring love led black feminists in the 20th century to eschew the state as the primary arbiter of justice and reform. This was necessary for these women as the state was one of the main sources of injury and was unconcerned with black women's well-being and liberation. Nash writes "by insistently looking *away* from the state, love-politics practitioners perform frustration, revealing their understandings of the limitations of a regime that is not committed to redressing their harms" (Nash, 2013, p. 15).

In conclusion, sexual minorities in Africa are part of an exciting field of study that observes how modern ideas about identity from the West interact with African understandings or even misunderstandings of sexual and gender identities in a globalised and rapidly changing world. In both the physical world and digital world many challenges face those attempting to form queer communities and access support in the wake of cultural and religious scripts and legal criminalisation of queer sexualities, according to the literature I have reviewed. Research on how queer women label themselves, queerphobic violence, affective structures, and the existing queer archive provide a preview into the types of new knowledge my research may uncover.

Chapter Two: Methodology

This chapter will explain the impetus for this research, how it was undertaken as well as my positionality as a researcher and how it influenced this study. Next follows a consideration of the most important theoretical ideas that aided my analysis. Chapter Two also serves as an introduction to the participants in the study whose responses are analysed in detail in the following chapter.

Methodological influences on my research approach

After reading Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003), I was inspired to start creating an archive detailing the lives and experiences of LBQ Zambians, particularly women and female-bodied individuals. The output would be an unconventional archive, like Cvetkovich's. Traditional archives tend to be static in nature and often filled with facts that claim objectivity, official government documents, and statistics to put forward a version of the past. Cvetkovich, interested in "national trauma histories and their cultural memory" from the viewpoint of lesbian cultures (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 3) fills her archive with slippery entries (like feelings and temporary performance art) and unconventional sources (such as sex toy store ephemera, personal diaries), to foreground "alternative modes of knowledge" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 4). In a similar vein, my archive was to be focused on subjectivity and embodied knowledge from participants gathered to construct a snapshot of the present and potential visions of the future. This record, centred around questions of support and community would take the form of my Master's dissertation. My hope was two-fold: that the content would challenge ideas about Zambian female gender and LBQ sexual identities while also "challeng[ing] common understandings of what constitutes an archive" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 10).

I viewed my positionality and my location in the diaspora (with its attendant privileges like funding and the academic freedom to pursue sexualities research) and how it would affect my ability to conduct interviews with some ambivalence. I use "ambivalence" (Glasby, 2019, p. 26) here in its queer methodology sense, where, as a research approach, the researcher remains open and flexible to different and unexpected outcomes. One of the benefits of an ambivalent approach is that the expansive space, more freed of expectations, can create "a generative site of meaning making for queer and other marginalized subjects" (Glasby, 2019, p. 24).

Before commencing data collection, I thought I might be able to gain valuable insights from the research participants because of a shared sexual identity and nationality. Yet on the other hand because I've lived the majority of my life overseas and have weak socio-cultural links to Zambia, they might conceal some of their experiences, perceiving me as an outsider. Previous research around LBQ women and non-binary people in the Zambian context had not been undertaken so I was unable to entirely prepare myself for participant responses to me and my inquiry. But in practice my research participants were generous with their time and insights and spoke freely on very personal issues.

Joan Didion in *The White Album* writes,

> We tell ourselves stories in order to live ... We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely … by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the 'ideas' with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience (Didion, 1990, p. 3).

I was interested in what stories the participants would tell me, what the story of their sexuality and journey to identification was according to them. What stories did they tell themselves "in order to live" (Didion, 1990, p. 3) in a society where sexual minorities were criminalised? What had they found to be "the most workable of the multiple choices" (Didion, 1990, p. 3) available to them within the constraints of Zambian culture and womanhood? Or were they operating outside these constraints? And if so, how? Stories can be a form of self-theorising. I was curious about what forms of theory the participants were engaging in and how queer theories created in different contexts might apply or fit poorly with their day-to-day. I would attempt to use my participants' contributions as theory to

complicate and grow the body of research about queer Africans. And in synthesising and analysing their testimonies I was interested ultimately in what my dissertation as a story could tell readers about LBQ life in Zambia, of which we know so little.

Relying on ambivalence again I was conscious of the fact they may not have a coherent story about their sexuality. Some of them might be totally closeted and may not have come out to anyone apart from themselves. It could be the case that the participants may have never been interviewed for the purposes of academic research, or even have thought about their sexual identity in critical terms. Some of these things proved to be true and my research needed to convey the idiosyncrasies of their lives and accept the fragmented and even perhaps contradictory nature of their reports. These ambivalences were more important to foreground than normative expectations around LGBTQ communities, which are often grounded in Global North experiences and theories deriving from that region. I did not want to render my participants as "queer African subject[s] … a mere avatar of a Western queer subject shaped by the identity politics of postindustrial nations" (Currier & Migraine-George, 2016, p. 197). Ken Plummer argues that "identities are built around sexuality; an experience becomes an essence; and the new stories that are told and written about homosexuality hold it all together" (Plummer, 1995, p. 86). He observes a chain of events that leads to the creation of new stories and I view new stories as a key output of this research. In curating these experiences, and investigating the different representations of sexual identities I encountered in data collection, this thesis brings new stories about LBQ Zambians into academic record.

I also drew on feminist methodology to carry out interviews. Feminist methodology is preoccupied with "do [ing] the work of 'excavation' … to reveal the locations and perspectives of (all) women" (DeVault, 1996, p. 32) and by extension non-binary AFAB[13] people who are often marginalised in similar ways to cisgender women. Feminist methodology also aims to minimise harm to participants and gather data in a way that supports non-hierarchical structures. I implemented this practically by being open with my participants about myself: my relationship status, my journey to understanding my own sexuality, and my own experiences with Zambian culture as related to the topic. In the end my location in the diaspora didn't create distance between us as we bonded over other similarities. Because our interviews were free-flowing and I allowed the participants to add me on various social media platforms, the "status" of researcher was dissolved and familiarity increased. Many of them were curious about me and took the opportunity to interview me back, which created a more even-footed dynamic. This was helpful and led to further paths of inquiry and a deeper understanding of participant responses. In line with a feminist ethic, I also provided the participants with a copy of the final thesis to read and permitted them to ask questions about the final work.

I analysed and grouped the data according to the themes that recurred most frequently in the interviews. I was particularly attentive to responses that supported the kind of claims about Global South LGBTQ+ communities I had encountered during my engagement with existing literature. But also looked carefully for responses that pushed against dominant assumptions as well, to see if the study could complicate ideas about African queer culture or unearth new findings.

Intersectionality and affect were the dominant theoretical frameworks I selected to examine the data. Intersectionality as first theorised by Kimberlé Crenshaw is, "a black feminist politics of survival and an analytic interested in how race, gender, class, and sexuality interact in complex ways that shape subjects" (Nash, 2011, p. 446). In Crenshaw's initial observation US law at the time was unable to account for women's "intersectional identity as both women and [people] of colour" (Crenshaw, 1990, p. 1224). Discourses "were shaped to respond to both one *or* the other" (Crenshaw, 1990, p. 1224). This was insufficient because women were marginalised in both identities and by the combination of racist and sexist oppressions. The lack of this acknowledgement meant that the law didn't respond to their specific needs or recognise their particular experiences. Following on from Crenshaw the participants in my study exist at the meeting point of at least three marginalised identities: black identity, queer identity and either female identity, or non-normative gender identities. The analysis chapters try to map these identities and how they influence each other as some of their

[13] Assigned female at birth.

identities are acknowledged, while others are invisibilised or intentionally hidden by the participants. In tandem with an African feminist lens, intersectionality as a frame helped me understand the participants' choices expressed through their responses, how they related to the dominant scripts of the culture they were embedded in and thus the kind of support systems they created and sought out. It also shed light on the ways they might be privileged in some ways and disadvantaged it others.

Affect refers to "those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension…" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 1). It is another important frame for this research, where affect is conceptualised as personal feelings, but also subtle political impulses which organise action and social behaviour. I investigated the feelings the participants had about themselves and held towards Zambian culture, as well as the emotional politic that energised community-building initiatives in Lusaka. In following chapters several affects are identified to understand what role they play in the formation of LBQ spaces.

Practical Logistics

The nature of my inquiry meant that safety was a concern. I tried to put as many safeguards as possible in place to protect the participants. They signed a declaration (see Appendix B) giving their consent to be interviewed and were allowed to withdraw their participation at any time before, during or after the interviews. Throughout the research process all participants were assigned common Zambian first names to conceal their identity. Only I had access to the transcripts and the recordings. The recordings and transcripts of the interview are kept in a password protected DropBox storage. This protection was important as it shielded them from the possibility of being outed and criminal prosecution in Zambia.

The call for participants was shared on my social media platforms and WhatsApp groups to source interviewees. The snowballing technique helped as initially there was some trepidation from people who viewed the call. Some feared the call was a trap that would lead to them being arrested for being LBQ. Some participants spoke to other participants to find out about their interviewing experiences and after gaining reassurance, they contacted me to do an interview of their own. Data was gathered during recorded (and later transcribed) semi-structured interviews where I prepared a list of questions, see Appendix A, but allowed the flow of the conversation to determine the order and way the questions were addressed.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic I was unable to travel to Zambia to conduct interviews in person and attend LBQ events as I had initially intended. Interviews were conducted over Skype and WhatsApp video calls and data was provided to all participants who wanted to participate in order to make access to the study more financially viable. On average the interviews were about two hours long and follow-up questions and interviews were done with specific participants in order to clarify previous statements. Some data was also gathered after I was invited to a private Facebook group by one of my participants. Inclusion in this group primarily for LBQ Zambian women and to a lesser extent for other members of the LGBTQ community provided me with greater insight into the community I was studying.

Introduction to the key informants

The research participants interviewed were aged 20 to 33 years old and all lived in Lusaka, the Zambian capital. They identified as cisgender women who were lesbian, bisexual or queer apart from one participant who is a non-binary person. The table below displays more information about the participants that bears on the analysis in the following chapter.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Pronouns	Sexual orientation	Class	Level of education	Relationship status
Zelipa	29	Non-binary	She/they	Queer	Middle class	Master's degree	In a relationship
Musonda	29	Female	She/her	Lesbian	Working class	Bachelor's degree	In a relationship
Sampa	30	Female	She/her	Bisexual	Middle class	Professional certification	Single
Namakau	25	Female	She/her	Bisexual	Middle class	Tertiary-level professional certification	In a relationship
Chanda	20	Female	She/her	Lesbian	Middle class	Undergraduate university student	In a relationship
Katendi	33	Female	She/her	Bisexual	Middle class	Master's degree	Single

Figure 1: Demographics of research participants

The limits of this study

A study with a sample size this small, while being extremely useful, also has some limits. The method of gathering participants meant that the median age of the group, 27.6, skewed young, and this perhaps reflects my own youth and class grouping (middle class, well-educated and 29 years old) as a researcher. This could also be due to younger Zambians being more tech-savvy and using social media more than their older counterparts. Participants were asked to self-identify which class they felt they belonged to and only one of my participants identified as working class.[14] It's possible the prevalence of middle-class participants in my research reflects the dominant class of people who work in activist and NGO spaces in Lusaka. Finally, as the purview of this research was metropolitan LBQ life, it cannot speak to the experiences of rural Zambians of all classes, the majority of the country who comprise 55.93% of the national population (World Population Review, 2021). It is also possible that being physically present at LBQ events in Zambia and meeting my participants face to face could have improved the quality of my research.

Owing to these factors, I've tried to take care with presenting claims about the Zambian context, derived from my data. My findings perhaps speak most accurately about middle-class LBQ youth culture in Lusaka than anything else, although I'd argue that many of the claims would find resonance with Zambians with different demographics. This study serves as a launchpad for further investigation of LBQ Zambians.

[14] Class groupings like upper class, middle class and working class are context dependent. As 57.5% of Zambians live below the poverty line (World Bank, 2020) many Zambians living above the poverty line tend to view themselves as middle class by default. Western markers of middle-class status may not apply directly to the Zambian context and in fact Zambians who self-identify middle class may be far less wealthy than readers using a Western lens might assume. For this reason and reasons of space, the study refrains from making an in-depth class analysis but alludes to the potential impact of class in general on my findings.

Chapter Three:

The invisibility of LBQ women and female-bodied non-binary individuals

This chapter is concerned with the cultural context underpinning this study on the visibility and invisibility of LBQ Zambian individuals. It commences with a discussion of religious influence on the reception of non-normative sexualities and moves to gendered conceptions of Zambian identity. Next is an exploration of how factors in society can render the key informants invisible to each other, broader society and even themselves. I provide some examples of both structural and intimate prejudices the participants face daily. The chapter closes with a few instances where sexuality is rendered visible and how such visibility complicates the lives of my interlocuters. The testimonies that follow are diverse and at times contradict each other presenting a rich portrait of Zambian LBQ life.

Zambia's Christian Nation Ideology

Religion is a dominant feature of Zambian public and private life. It appears Christianity first came to Zambia through colonial intrusion by missionaries from the United Kingdom in the 1880s (Carey, 2003). Results from the 2010 census indicate that "95 per cent of the population is either Catholic or Protestant" (van Klinken, 2017, p. 12), with offshoots like Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism experiencing popularity as well. Religion has at least formally influenced Zambian politics since former President Fredrick Chiluba's tenure starting in 1991. Chiluba "declared Zambia a Christian nation only a few months after his election" and this was enshrined in the amended Constitution in 1996 (van Klinken, 2017, p.12).

Homophobia is a regular feature of Zambian politics with leaders of the largest political parties, Patriotic Front (PF) and United Party for National Development (UPND), regularly taking an anti-homosexuality stance (van Klinken, 2017). The power of the Christian Nation ideology was on full display when, on a visit to Zambia in 2012, UN General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon "called for the recognition of the human rights of sexual minorities" (van Klinken, 2015, p. 4). There was a public outcry from all quarters. President Edgar Lungu, who at the time was Home Affairs Minister, was quoted as saying: "There will be no such discussion on gay rights. That issue is foreign to this country … those advocating gay rights should go to hell. That is not an issue we will tolerate" (Phiri, 2017, p. 11). Negative responses drew on several themes: homosexuality as a Western agenda being pushed on Zambia by international NGOs (Phiri, 2017, p. 11), same-sex practices as going against Zambian culture and Christianity (van Klinken, 2017), and LGBTQ individuals having no place in Zambian society (van Klinken, 2015, p. 5).

Church leaders are often responsible for disseminating anti-homosexuality teachings and "mobilizing … popular anger" (Awondo et al., 2012, p. 150) towards the LGBTQ community. These teachings ripple out into broader Zambian society and many Zambians justify their anti-homosexuality beliefs using the Bible. Namakau, a 25-year-old bisexual woman, was outed by family members. She described the new dynamic she experienced with religious friends and her mother after she was outed:

> Yes, remember my friends? One of them actually said, "We will be praying for you", which really hurt me … And my mom also, when we had our conversation, she said, "You know we are Christian. You know this is wrong" and I said, "Mom, you are religious, I am not. I am spiritual. I believe in God, but I didn't ask to be made like this. I was made this way. I didn't declare that I want to be gay, God, make me gay." And I don't know if she understood what I was saying, but I brought it up anyway.

Namakau displayed what van Klinken describes as "naturalization of homosexuality in religious language" (van Klinken, 2015, p. 8) when she says "I was made this way". This naturalisation serves to "normalize and humanize the gay self" (van Klinken, 2015, p. 9) and is one of the strategies LBQ women in Zambia use to reconcile their faith and their sexuality despite teachings that the two are incompatible.

Participants reported that the majority of churches in Zambia take a negative stance on homosexuality and this made them feel uncomfortable. Their sexuality made them feel they would not be accepted by churches and Christians. Despite this some of them maintained a personal relationship with God; this was the case for Chanda. Chanda is a self-described stemme[15] lesbian who splits her time between studying in a university town about 140km north of Lusaka, and her family home in Lusaka. Chanda, 20, found a way of reconciling her beliefs with her sexuality but it was not always easy:

> At first, I had a problem with it, the combination of both when I was discovering it [being a lesbian] in the beginning. People are telling you no. So, it was really hard … I reached a point where I thought, I've been alive up to today meaning the big guy up there is doing His work and He does care for me. In the morning I'd say to Him, "Thank you for who I am and I wouldn't change anything about me." He made me this way for a reason.

Chanda is Catholic but she is not out at church because although she believes God accepts her, the congregation would be disapproving. Like scholar Patrick Awondo (2012), Namakau expresses that homophobic sentiments are unevenly distributed within African societies. Individual opinions of LBQ women, Christian religion and Zambian culture create a space where unexpected combinations of beliefs exist. She highlights the role of groupthink:

> Individually, I think on an individual scale, for the person, they [i.e. Zambians] don't mind us [i.e. LBQ women]. […] But when you look at it collectively, that's where the problem comes in, because everyone has decided that this is wrong. A woman should be with a man. A woman should get married and give babies and have *ichilanga mulilo.*[16]

Even within the religious fraternity there is division on LGBT issues. While the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ) in 2013 condemned a newspaper advert where the EU was advertising "financial support to Zambian organizations wishing to promote LGBTI human rights" (Phiri, 2017, p. 13), other faith-based NGOs like ZANARELA+ (the Zambia Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS) do support LGBTQ individuals.

Zelipa (she/they) is a 29-year-old non-binary activist. She set up WAfE (Women's Alliance for Equality) in 2015 to "increase and improve the identification and participation of WSW, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women" (Outofthemargins.co.uk, 2020). She explains the relationship between WAfE and ZANARELA+:

> So before we registered, they were actually our fiscal host and they do a lot of the "religion work". They've done a lot of work with sensitising the clergy on issue of sexual and gender diversity and we've [WAfE] been a part of some of these trainings. So there's definitely work happening on that side, we have some allies from the faith communities but it's still ongoing work.

Zelipa's comment exposes the other side of Christianity in Zambian society. While its influence presents a major obstacle to community acceptance of LGBTQ people in the form in which it is wielded by the state, Christianity on a personal level is also used in support of LBQ women themselves, individually or by LGBTQ-sympathetic religious organisations. Overall Christianity tends to push LBQ women into the closet because it creates a climate where non-normative sexualities are viewed as sinful. Furthermore, the strong ties between nationalism and Christianity entrench homophobia, making it difficult to uproot.

[15] "Stemme" is a portmanteau of the words "stud" (referring to a masculine black queer woman) and "femme" (a feminine queer woman) (Wilson, 2009). Someone described as a stemme has a fluctuating gender presentation (Reed et al., 2011, p.753).

[16] Meaning "show the fire" in Bemba, a Zambian language, *ichilanga mulilo* refers to a ceremony where the groom samples traditional dishes cooked by the women in the bride's family. It is part of the courtship rituals that precede marriage.

Idealised Zambian femininity

Closely allied to Christian Nation ideology is idealised Zambian femininity which my participants revealed has a major impact on their sexual identity and behaviour and liveability. Traditional Zambian femininity has its roots in widely-held traditional cultural values. For the limited scope of this thesis, it is helpful to conceive of "culture" using Patricia McFadden's definition, "as gendered practice which excludes women from sites and statuses related to power (in both social and material senses)" (McFadden, 2001, p. 58), and furthermore culture is continually contested by present and historical struggles. This section will explore the manifestation of Zambian culture through the archetype of Zambian femininity or womanhood. If as Judith Butler posits "gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed … a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler, 2004, p. 1), this section seeks to unearth, both "the incessant activity" that is expected and how it makes up "the constraint".

Zambia is home to around 70 different ethnic groups divided into seven main language groups: Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, Lozi (Barotse), Kaonde, Lunda and Luvale (Erdmann, 2007) Yaliwe Clarke's work describes the phenomenon of Lunda women who are referred to as husbands by virtue of marrying into a family (Clarke, 2021, p. 578). Chaze Matakala's survey of female power amongst the Lozi shows evidence of a "matrifocal logic" yet it is "juxtaposed with a structural system of the patrilineal right to succession" (Matakala, 2020, p. 45). It is clear that the roles of women in Zambia are complex, and that traditional Zambian culture might provide some space for fluidity in gender roles.

Despite these nuances across Zambian ethnicities, all the participants in my study shared an uncannily similar description of what the ideal Zambian woman is thought to be. The similarity of their testimonies speak to how deeply the conception of Zambian womanhood is embedded in this society. Namakau said:

> I think, like I said before, their idea of Zambian woman, a good Zambian woman, is a wife and she shouldn't just be a wife. She should be a wife-material wife. She shouldn't drink so much. She should always be home, ready to open for her husband and make sure his meal is hot and ready to be eaten. You put bathing water in the morning [for him] and just such ridiculous nonsense. I think that's what the ideal Zambian woman is because even when you look at the people who they say are people we should look up to, these are women who are married. These are women who go to church. These are women who have children. They are working, yes, but they focus on their family more than they focus on their work, which I hate. I think that's a very flawed concept, I hate it.

Namakau's rich description fleshes out the moral standards and habits a Zambian woman must have. Her contribution echoes a story told to Serena Owusua Dankwa by one of her Ghanaian lesbian interlocuters, Janet. Janet speaks about how her mother wasn't keen on her becoming a professional footballer, and by implication, a lesbian, as she thought it would "prevent her from becoming a full person, through motherhood" (Dankwa, 2011, p. 237). Zambian culture too dictates that church, motherhood and marriage are the model woman's *telos*; without these one is not a full woman. In other words, without marriage and reproduction there is little structural power in Zambian women can wield in this society. Katendi, a 33-year-old bisexual, business consultant, fleshes out more of the personality traits and behaviour that make up this idealised femininity:

> I could spend a whole day answering but essentially an ideal woman is a child… An ideal woman is infantilised. You are supposed to be seen and not heard. You're supposed to be the pride of your husband's eye and you should look pretty all the time, well put together, you don't raise your voice, you know you don't demand your own sexual pleasure, you don't have any ideas of your own. You are just there cheerleading, supporting, making babies, and you know, listening to where you need to be, when you need to be.

The ideal Zambian woman is bonded to her community through her acts (i.e. mothering, praising the Lord, child-rearing) and her investment in institutions (i.e. marriage to men, attending church). As Phoebe Kisubi Mbasalaki couches it: "Marriage is a powerful mechanism for social belonging, for the community's acknowledgment of a binding relationship" (Mbasalaki, 2019, p. 38). Rather than womanhood being an individual state of being, it is achieved through relationality to others and fulfilling the roles of wife and mother. Adrienne Rich in her writing on compulsory heterosexuality argues that women are forced into "playing the feminine, deferential role required of 'real' women" (Rich, 1980, p. 642). A combination of compulsory heterosexuality, idealised femininity and reproductive pressure limit the range of options for Zambian women.

Zambian women's behaviour is policed by their families and society at large. They are policed about their sexuality and also around embodying gender and femininity correctly, the latter of which will be discussed in the section on physical appearance further on. In Zambian culture moving out of the family residence as a young woman is seen as unusual for heterosexual and LBQ women alike. Even though Zelipa self-identifies as non-binary, she is not out to her family about her gender identity (they only know about her sexual identity) thus they treat her as a woman and a daughter. Zelipa recounted a huge argument she had with her father when she wanted to move out into her own place with her girlfriend:

> And my dad was livid – because I told him I'm moving out and he says no, a girl child – these were his exact words – "a girl child only leaves her father's house to go to her husband's house."

Zelipa's father's phrasing is repeated often in Zambian society. The view is commonly held that a woman must be under the care of her parents during girlhood and the natural order of things is for that burden of care to be transferred to her husband when, not if, she gets married. Heterosexuality and its attendant institution of marriage are viewed as inevitable.

All the participants mentioned there was pressure exerted on them by family members and society in general to get married. Awondo writes, "homosexuality is powerful symbolic terrain in Africa, as elsewhere" (Awondo et al., 2012, p. 154) and this symbolic weight is particularly evident in marriage pressures the LBQ people face. To Musonda (she/her), a 29-year-old lesbian, it was said frequently, "Oh, your friends are getting married. Don't worry, your time will come too" and "We are waiting for someone to show up". Implicit in these sentiments is a drive to chromonormativity, specifically what Dana Luciano calls "chronobiopolitics, the sexual arrangement of the time of life" (Freeman, 2011, p. 3). Chronobiopolitics turns life choices like marriage and reproduction into normative social demands. Elizabeth Freeman writes, "In chronobiopolitics, this process extends beyond individual anatomies to encompass the management of entire populations." And so Zambian women are perceived and managed not as individuals but as a group. This contributes to the invisibility of LBQ women as assumed futures imposed on them of marriage and children mask their non-normative sexual orientations. And for Zelipa, the erroneous assumption she is a woman, further invisibilises her.

According to the UN 2013 Fertility Report, the average age when Zambian women embarked on their first marriage was 18 years old (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2014). The participants in the study had a median age of 27.5 and their families and Zambian society were attempting to "retemporalise" them into heterosexual time, because the dominant thought was at their age they should be married already. It is thought that being LBQ precludes the opportunity to become married because one is attracted to women and two women cannot get married because of the law. In addition, female same-sex relationships are viewed as sinful according to Christianity. Therefore the "someone" Musonda was told about could only be "a man". The norm is that a romantic relationship is between a woman and a man. And likewise, a family can only look a certain way as well. Namakau fleshes out the cultural norms around the composition of Zambian families:

> To the average Zambian, what a family is it's a man, a woman and children. That is the definition of the family. They don't look at a single woman as a family or a single father and his child as a family. So what more two women or two men? Because even divorce is just frowned upon.

To be an LBQ woman is to remove oneself from the "traffic in women" (Rubin, 1975). Zambian LBQ people transform the very meaning of Zambian womanhood and remove themselves from the predetermined roles dictated by culture. Thus, the very existence of LBQ people is viewed by Zambian society as a threat. In fact, the actions of the interviewees are "…both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life" (Rich, 1980, p. 649).

Several participants mentioned that some LBQ women they know engage in relationships with or even marry men but then continue to pursue romantic relationships with women covertly, which it could be argued is a kind of strategic invisibility. Musonda shared a situation one of her female friends had been in, where they had been involved with a married woman:

> I do know someone; she was seeing some married woman and she would say "I'd go spend the night at their house and the husband would be okay with his wife sleeping in the guest bedroom with the guest because we're women, 'They like to talk, they're catching up'".

This scenario displays the two sides of invisibility for Zambian LBQ women. There is societal pressure for them to present as heterosexual, get married and build a traditional family, so many of them do get married. As Zambian society is culturally heterosexist and deeply patriarchal, LBQ women are rendered invisible. This invisibility constrains their behaviour but also allows them a measure of freedom. From the quote above it is clear that the woman who was a guest was not viewed as a sexual threat, nor was any infidelity suspected by the husband. In fact, stereotypes about women being loquacious provided a convenient cover for the two women lovers.

Musonda while recounting this story said, "I think most Zambian men are oblivious. I think they just think women are really good friends." Here Musonda alludes to the ability to pass and evade detection in a homophobic society. The dominant heterosexual culture's misunderstanding of queer women, or denial of their existence or poor ability to perceive queerness can be a form of invisibility that helps Zambian LBQ women practice sexual autonomy without interference. This partial freedom complicates the idea that invisibility is always negative in this context.

Erasure in healthcare services

An area of concern for the interviewees was the difficulty in finding LGBTQ-accepting doctors and healthcare services. They all expressed reservations about being able to share their sexual identity with their healthcare providers. Sampa, a 30-year-old bisexual teacher, feared that even though doctors swore an oath of confidentiality, they might out her. She said:

> Yes I fear I would be outed because there's a strong belief that Zambia is a Christian nation and that it [bisexuality] goes against what the Bible says. That belief takes precedence, that Zambia is a Christian nation, and they have the right to discriminate against us on that basis, regardless of what they swore and what they are supposed to do as medical professionals.

The research participants feared being judged or lectured so most hid their sexual orientation from healthcare providers. Musonda mentioned that there are no sexual health options tailored to LBQ women at all. She once tried to access PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis). The doctor she consulted was aware she was a lesbian and he told her: "Your sex is not risky, so you can't [go on PRrEP]. It's fine, you don't need PrEP." At work here was an erroneous assumption, that Musonda engaging in sex with other women was not risky enough to warrant her being on PrEP.

Researchers like Patricia McFadden (2003) have noted that in public health amongst other disciplines, LBQ African women are understudied and appear less frequently in the literature compared to their male counterparts. This is even more true for non-binary Africans. The disparity in academia appears to be reflected in public health programmes. The HIV/AIDS crisis in the 80s and 90s helped fuel a revival in African queer studies and sexual politics as African governments were anxious to contain the spread of the disease and international donors made funds available for the study of sexuality of MSM (men who have sex with men) or queer men (Tamale et al., 2014), as well as treatment and healthcare initiatives tailored for men. Sylvia Tamale argues that this medicalisation of sexuality in

Africa has rendered African women's reproduction, "the primary definer of their sexuality" (Tamale et al., 2014, p. 27). For LBQ women who may not want to reproduce or who may want to start a family with another partner who is not a cisgender man, a heteronormative healthcare system falls short.

Feedback from the participants supports scholarly arguments. The lack of LGBTQ-friendly healthcare was one of the reasons Zelipa founded WAfE. She says:

> Initially our thought was just to mobilise and bring some visibility to LBQ women because both of us had worked in the other NGOs for quite some time but a lot of the reach and target was gay men. So most events you go to you'd have very few women turning up. So we formed WAfE first of all just to bring visibility to LBQ women and mobilise LBQ women.

Owing to the relative invisibility of LBQ women, few Zambian institutions think about catering to them and their needs, including the medical fraternity. If one does not exist, how can one be treated or cared for?

Musonda, who works for WAfE, provided her perspective on why it was founded, saying, "… when you look at mainstream LGBTIQ programming the focus is often on gay men and trans women and I think for the most part, a lot of other women were left out and left behind."

Several participants related their struggles with mental health, caused in part by the stress and fear of living as a sexual minority in a society where their sexual identity was criminalised. To try and rectify this WAfE runs mental health campaigns and has meetups around the topic where people can share what they're going through. WAfE aims to create a relaxed environment, more casual than a formal meeting, to discuss these issues. Zelipa elaborates on the form that one campaign took. She says:

> The first one we ever had was a concept that was adapted from what they were doing in Nigeria. We had "The L Word", just talking about loneliness within the queer community, the LBQ community, exploring how do you experience loneliness within your family? Within your friends? At work? But then also trying to find solutions; what is it that we can do?

In this way NGOs like WAfE compensate for the erasure of LBQ women in the conceptualisation of Zambian public health services, but as this analysis explores later on there are limits to these compensatory mechanisms.

Anti-LGBTQ legislation and selective policing

The existence of anti-LGBTQ laws in Zambia coerced some of my participants into being closeted or selectively "out" to a few trusted friends or family members. The threat of law enforcement and criminal prosecution pushed them into invisibility. This section will explore the current homophobic legislation in Zambia, its history and whether the laws are enforced.

There are three sections of the penal code which criminalise same-sex activity in Zambia: Section 155 Unnatural Offences, Section 156 Attempt to Commit Unnatural Offences and Section 158 Indecent Practices Between Persons of the Same Sex (Phiri, 2017; Zambia Human Dignity Trust, 2020). As in many other former British colonies, most of these laws were introduced by British colonial rule. However, they have been upheld and the violence inherent in them reinscribed in the post-independence era by nationalist liberation projects. Several scholars enumerate how these projects sought to cast citizenship as male and heterosexual to the exclusion and punishment of other groups (McFadden, 2021; Mupotsa, 2010; Strey, 2017).

Evidence that these laws are acted upon is present in news reports, but male homosexual activity makes more frequent appearances in the media. Two men caught having sex at a lodge in 2017 were sentenced to 15 years in jail at trial in 2019 (Zambia Daily Mail, 2019). Antonios Maniatis notes that the sentence handed down by the judge was considered lenient, as the maximum sentence for violating these penal codes is life imprisonment (Maniatis, 2020, p. 62). A year earlier, *Lusaka Times* reported that the police were investigating two women accused of being lesbians (Lusaka Times,

2018), however conclusion of the investigation has yet to be reported on. This was the only instance of an arrest of LBQ women in the news I was able to find online.

While the penal codes are in place, the police do not appear to use them against LBQ women routinely. Keeping in mind that the sample for this study is small, none of the participants interviewed knew of any women who have been arrested by the police for contravening the law. In a conversation with me, Musonda explained that the response of the Zambian police was unpredictable. I asked Musonda if the police would arrest two women suspected of engaging in same-sex practices and she responded:

> **Musonda:** I honestly think sometimes it just depends on the people or the police officer that's there.
>
> **Interviewer:** Okay.
>
> **Musonda:** Because I think it depends. They'd be like "Okay, are we going to escalate this issue?" Because like I said earlier, I don't think they really think of lesbian relationships as relationships, so therefore that means their sex is not really sex. But even in that scenario they'd say it was just indecent assault.

When Musonda asserts that for the police "their [LBQ women's] sex is not really sex", she highlights how Zambian society has never "value[d] the sexual diversity that exists and has always existed among black women" (Fogg-Davis, 2006, p.60), instead prescribing that all women are heterosexual. This shows how deeply entrenched the understanding that sex can only occur between a man and a woman is for the majority of Zambians. Although the law provides for prosecution of LBQ women using the section on Unnatural Offences and Indecent Practices Between Persons of the Same Sex, I would argue that the disparity in prosecution means that homosexual men and women are judged differently by Zambians. This view invalidates LBQ women, non-binary people and their sexual practices, and many participants were infuriated by their sexual identity not being taken seriously by other people. However, this invalidation means they are less policed by the state, thus allowing them a measure of autonomy and preventing them from suffering the full might of the law.

Zelipa shared the kind of situations that sometimes land members of the LGBTQ community in trouble with the law. These events tend to happen in mixed spaces where both LGBTQ people and heterosexual people socialise:

> I mean there have been some incidents where physical altercations happen. It depends on the place again. They [the place's security] will throw you out if you just started the fight. But if it's because someone said, 'Oh this is a guy, why is he dancing like this?', so someone is picking on you, we've had situations where the bouncer will ask those people to leave. But then there are other times … We've mostly experienced this with trans women because if they are out and about and someone starts something, saying, "This is a man wearing women's clothing," or whatever, the police get involved. That's when those favours come in – there are organisations that focus more on that side of things. So if the call comes in usually it will be directed specifically to them, some favours may be called in. Other times they've [the organisations] had to just pay and keep things hush-hush so it doesn't go anywhere.

Musonda and Zelipa are emergency contacts at WAfE, so LBGTQ people call them if they end up in trouble with the police. They are rarely contacted because cisgender LBQ women are rarely bothered by the police. Instead, they sometimes receive calls from gay men or trans women trying to reach any of the LGBTQ-friendly NGOs for help. They tend to direct these calls to organisations like Transbantu and Friends of Rainka who have better experience and more connections to deal with any legal issues LGBTQ people might be facing.

All of the participants reported that gay men and trans women seemed to face more immediate threats from law enforcement as opposed to LBQ women. Despite this the participants were afraid of the police and the spectre of law enforcement regulated their behaviour with other women in public and led to them organising LGBTQ social events in secrecy. It could be argued while the police and the law are used against LBQ women, it is rare. More common is the "policing" of sexuality done by

laypeople in society and this policing is unevenly distributed. Not all LBQ Zambian people are invisible and the following two sections discuss instances where their sexuality is more legible to some people and how it complicates their lives.

Closet pressure

Issues of closeting and outing link closely to invisibility and this section analyses how both states of being present in the research participants' lives. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes that the closet is "a shaping presence" (2008, p. 68) for most LGBTQ people and this is true for the participants of this study. The Western model of queer (and particularly white) sexuality takes coming out as a foundational, coming-of-age moment in a queer person's life. Silence or remaining closeted is assumed to be linked to shame surrounding one's queerness. Kathy Weston writes, "Coming out has historically been valorized as a site for contestation, for gaining political power, and for attaining self-respect (in Horton, 2018, p. 1060). However, scholars in Africa and Asia have written about alternate modes of living a queer life where silence has political and personal value (Currier & Migraine-George, 2017; Oudenhuijsen, 2009; Tamale et al., 2014). Silence is a strategy that queer people engage in for survival in hostile communities but for Brian Horton it is more than that. He argues:

> Silence is not the complete objectification of queers to power, but is indicative of multiple, conflicting desires for individuality and sociality, sex and kinship, respectability and queerness (Horton, 2018, p. 1066).

Many of my participants had close relationships with family that they valued. Chanda, Katendi and Sampa were not out to their parents; they were "closeted". Their sexuality if it were to be revealed would be a potential source of conflict with their parents. It can be argued that they remain closeted because they have a "fidelity to kinship" (Horton, 2018, p. 1065) and view themselves not as individuals but part of a family unit and "broader family structure" (Horton, 2018, p. 1067). It appears that they do not prioritise their individual needs, to come out and be openly LBQ, over group needs (the group being the Zambian community), that they remain closeted or pretend to be heterosexual. Zambian behaviour is influenced by former President Kenneth Kaunda's Zambian Humanism philosophy which was the foundation of the post-colonial Zambian state created in 1964. The details of this philosophy were enumerated in *A Humanist in Africa*, first published in 1966 (Mwangala, 2009, p. 37) and *Humanism in Zambia and a Guide to Its implementation*, published in 1967. According to Kaunda:

> Zambian humanism rests on the social values of traditional Zambian society as they were before these were distorted by the capitalist influences of western industrialisation and colonialism. These include the extended family, community, mutual aid and respect for persons (Mwangala, 2009, p. 40).

The values of "extended family and community" (Mwangala, 2009, p. 40), speak to a society similar to India, where one is expected to "makes choices through his or her relationality to others" (Horton, 2018, p. 1067).

Chanda suspects that her mother knows she's a lesbian because she wears a lot of masculine clothing. However, she has neither admitted it, nor has her mother asked her outright. She says:

> So, I was waiting for the right time, but when it comes to my mom, it's that thing of she's your mom so she knows, but she doesn't want to tell you straight up … I think now she's just waiting for me to say, "Okay, here's what's up. I'm gay." And I'm pretty sure on that day she'll be like, "Honey I know, I know, I know. I was just waiting for you to say it."

Chanda would like to come out explicitly to her family one day but since she is still studying, she is unsure when the best time to do that would be. The poor economic situation in Zambia means that few young Zambians can afford to leave home until they are much older. She fears formally coming out would lead to her being disowned and cut off financially. Sedgwick notes that when gay children come out to their parents it can have the unintended effect of putting the parents "into the closet" in their "conservative community" (2008, p. 80). The parents then feel they have a secret to hide from

their peers. For Chanda, to come out may also open up her family to gossip and scrutiny from outsiders. It is limited to view the coming out as only the speech act. Chanda appears to be out to her family as safely as she can be in the Zambian context without risking family bonds.

Three of the participants I spoke to were outed by other people before they could come out to their families at their own pace. The experiences of being outed were traumatic and accompanied by feelings of betrayal and surprise. The outing reflects some of the structures at work in Zambian society. Women's behaviour is regulated not just by their parents but other adults in society, who help enforce social norms. Namakau explains what happened to her:

> My mom just told me that people have been sending her messages and screenshots about me. Let's say they would see me with my girlfriend at the mall, they'd send her a message. Or if I shared something on one of my socials they'd take a screenshot and send it to her and so then she finally just said, "You know what, I keep hearing this from a lot of people. Is it true?" I told her because I don't know, I just got tired of lying. So, I told her, even though I planned on coming out at a different time, in different setting, when I'm not in her house.

Namakau and her mother are in the process of reconciliation as the outing occurred not long before our interview. Zelipa was also outed and she says her family have come around which means "we don't really talk about it but at least they don't say anything dumb about it." This détente could be said to put Zelipa in a place of partial visibility, a "don't ask, don't tell" scenario, where she is visible to her family as queer but they are unlikely to share her sexuality with outsiders or to discuss her sexuality with her either.

In general, the interlocuters' testimonies expose how closeting and outing aren't finite actions, instead they are ongoing processes that are selective and context dependent. The size of the closet, as it were, is determined by the ability of their community to accept them. And likewise, their visibility/invisibility flickers. One of the places where we can chart the repercussions of acting in gender non-conforming ways is the presence of microaggressions.

Microaggressions

Based on my study there appears to be a difference between how sexualities are policed in Zambia compared to some of the other African countries where female same-sexuality and queer relationships have been researched. Perhaps one of the most extreme examples of homophobia and violence against LBQ women can be found in South Africa, where the phenomenon of "corrective rape", where women are "'explicitly raped' because of their sexual or gender non-conformity", occurs (Matebeni, 2011, p. 153).

Zambia is a markedly less violent society than South Africa and Zambians often describe themselves as peaceful people. The participants, when asked about violence against LBQ women, were unable to provide any instances of it occurring in their context. As the sample size of this study is quite small, the presence of violence towards LBQ Zambian women cannot be ruled out entirely.

However, all the participants did mention that they had faced verbal abuse in the form of microaggressions.[17] While physical violence is more of a spectacle, the negative ramifications of microaggressions cannot be understated as they construct a hostile society for members of the LBQ community, add to minority stress (Vaccaro & Koob, 2019) and make them feel unsupported. Chanda, Zelipa and Musonda faced more microaggressions from strangers. The microaggressions they endured were directed at their style of dress, mannerisms or gait but were implicit critiques of their assumed lesbian identity and/or gender presentation. In public spaces more masc-presenting queer people exist in what C. Riley Snorton describes as "a glass closet…where they are marked by hypervisibility and confinement, spectacle and speculation" (Snorton, 2014, p. 4). It is possible that

[17] For the purposes of this dissertation a microaggression can be considered to be, "the commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental forms of discrimination that, regardless of the perpetrator's intent, disparage and oppress people who hold minoritized identities of sexuality and gender" (Vaccaro & Koob, 2019, p.2).

more feminine-presenting LBQ women, as discussed earlier, are more invisibilised and pass as heterosexual women easier because of stereotypes Zambians hold about the way LBQ women present.

Mignon Moore in her survey of African-American lesbian New Yorkers writes, "the harshest, most critical language about black lesbians is reserved for women with a nonfeminine presentation of self" (Moore, 2006, p. 117). One of my interlocuters, Chanda, who describes her appearance as "stemme" – mostly stud but sometimes wearing femme[18] clothing – has had the experiences Moore describes. Chanda mentioned that in shops or at *salaula*[19], more feminine women were served first even when she arrived before them. Her personal style evokes the following responses from people at the market:

> "You! Are you male or female?" Or "Why are you dressed like a boy can't you dress more like a female." That type of thing. That's most of the comments. "You're a female dress like one." "Look at how she walks, she walks like a guy."

Musonda experienced similar remarks from strangers, like "Oh, so you wanted to be a man?" Implicit in these comments is how LBQ women can be perceived as a threat by wider Zambian society. Zethu Matebeni notes that for butch lesbians in South Africa, their bodies become the "site of discursive power and struggle" (Matebeni, 2011, p. 154); the same is true in Zambia. In the latter case, Musonda's style of dress threatens the monopoly on masculinity held by men as she displays female masculinity on her female body. The subtext of this remark is that owing to her appearance she is a sexual competitor to other men. Her more masculine appearance makes her legible as a lesbian. Musonda's love of other women thus makes some men view her as a sexual rival. The respondents highlighted comments from men as being more sexually graphic and aggressive, with them being told: "Oh no, you should try me out. Maybe I could change you". Or "How do you girls do it? I can make you straight", and "What do you see in girls?"

With family members who were aware of the participants' non-normative sexual identity or unconventional gender presentation, microaggressions were extremely common. Most of them were told "You'll snap out of it eventually", "You're just a tomboy" and "It's a phase". Heterosexuality and "finding the right guy" were presented as a solution to the "problem" of their LBQ identity, and they were encouraged to conform to an idealised Zambian femininity, as discussed above, through their dress and behaviour. The presence of microaggressions shows that despite the participants' general invisibility, and sometimes their attempts to keep a low profile, certain factors make them more or less visible to different people.

This chapter has explored the idiosyncrasies of homophobia in the Zambian context and its roots in the law, religious nationalism and cultural ideals of femininity. I explored in detail, three areas in which there were palpable effects on the participants' lives: institutional erasure in the field of healthcare, microaggressions and closeting. From all quarters there are attempts by Zambian society to delegitimise LBQ people and dissuade them from expressing themselves through their dress or pursuing romantic relationships with women or other queer people.

[18] In LGBTQ culture "femme" refers to women or non-binary people who have "a general appreciation and identification with a feminine aesthetic quality, often associated with makeup, feminine clothing…" (Levitt et al., 2003, p. 105). Femmes are often viewed as being "feminine … and less dominant in terms of relationship roles" (Reed et al., 2011, p. 753).
[19] Second-hand clothing market.

Chapter Four: Negotiating visibility and invisibility

Having elaborated on the cultural context and attendant social pressures the key informants face, this chapter serves as a deeper analysis of different perspectives on the visibility and invisibility of LBQ Zambian individuals, since the politics of visibility is a central debate in discussions of queerness (Currier, 2012; Otu, 2016). Based on prior research on LGBTQ life in Zambia by van Klinken (2020; 2017; 2015; 2014; 2013), Phiri (2017) and this study, some tentative conclusions can be drawn about the role of invisibility in queer Zambian lives. The chapter moves to a discussion of participant usage of digital social platforms, and closes with how the participants manage romantic and sexual relationships in Lusaka.

Perspectives on visibility and invisibility

It can be argued that most Zambians do not automatically assume two women or femme-presenting or femme-assumed people who are close to each other are in a romantic and sexual relationship. LBQ women and non-binary people are often able to pass as heterosexual in ways that people of other queer identities, like homosexual men who socialise with each other, are not able to. Sampa believed that this illegibility or misreading is in part because "…the prevailing view is that these identities or orientations [being LBQ] are Western constructs," thus they do not exist in Zambia. Several scholars including Nyanzi (2015), Rao (2020) and Tettey (2016) explore how the common belief that queer sexualities are immoral Western imports, not indigenous to Africa, provides justification for anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. In this way queer people are demarcated as "… un-belong[ing] to the nation" (Mupotsa, 2010, p. 4), specifically post-colonial African states.

Several participants suggested that people outside the LGBTQ community often mistake LBQ women couples for friends, cousins or sisters, which aligns with global trends in Global South countries. For example, Musonda is currently in a relationship with another woman, Namakau, and she notes that before she was outed, her mother with whom she lives assumed the two of them were merely best friends. Certain acts like being a woman or person who dresses in a stereotypically masculine style may arouse suspicion in onlookers, or break the shroud of invisibility. Otherwise, it remains intact.

For Zambians who are aware of non-normative sexualities being practiced locally, LBQ women's sexual identity is often reduced to sexual acts. Here, visibility comes at the price of regularly having one's sexual identity misconstrued. That is one of the costs of coming out or being open about one's sexual orientation. Namakau explains, "The guys will ask me questions about LBQ women. I'll get a lot of sexual questions so I feel that all they think identifies us is sex when it's beyond that. The sex is nice, but it goes beyond that." Many of the women's retellings of how Zambians responded to their sexuality are reminiscent of the words of Maxine Wolfe, who on lesbians and lesbian bars said, "our culture has been trivialised as a 'life-style'" (Wolfe, 1992, p. 139). In the Zambian imagination, it could be argued that being lesbian, bisexual or queer is not viewed as a legitimate identity, nor are LBQ relationships understood to be as complex and multi-dimensional as a heterosexual ones.

Gay men in the LGBTQ community appear to attract the most attention from Zambians; they are hypervisible according to several respondents. Zelipa shares:

> And even just within broader society I think that when you talk about homosexuality the instant thing in someone's mind is gay men and anal sex… so sexuality is seen through a single lens of sex. … it's definitely more focused on men I mean the LBQ [women] are now starting to be more visible, more frequently um but yeah there's still a lot of focus on gay men.

This focus on gay men or MSM is a trend also replicated by NGOs in the Global South working in public health and SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) rights. Zelipa's motivation for founding WAfE in 2015 was to rectify this inequality, as enumerated in Chapter Three.

Some of the negative effects of being invisible are feelings of isolation, being misunderstood and marginalisation. The queer female and non-binary experience, particularly for women of colour, can be said to be marked by invisibility in several settings including India (Dave, 2015), Scotland (Siraj,

2011), South Africa (Potgieter, 1997) and undoubtably many others, to the extent that isolation can be said to be one of the dominant affects of queer female and non-binary sexuality.

As explored in Chapter Three, even in the founding concepts of the Christian post-colonial Zambian state, as Danai Mupotsa in her discussion of family and African nationhood phrases it, "young women continue to un-belong to the nation" (Mupotsa, 2010, p. 4). This is ever more true for LBQ women. The invisibility Zambian society demands from my research participants, makes it difficult for them to recognise each other as LBQ, form bonds and build community. Some of my participants experienced anxiety and depression because of how their sexuality would be received if they "came out". The fear of being outed also caused them anguish as well as uncertainty about who they could trust. All related the pain of their sexual orientation and in Zelipa's case, gender identity, not being affirmed by all friends, family and strangers.

The respondents were aware of the freedom other LGBTQ people have in countries more accepting of homosexuality and it made some of them feel despondent about living in Zambia with their sexual identity concealed. Chanda, a lesbian woman, shared some of her plans with me saying:

> Yes, I would leave Zambia. So long as I see there isn't any change, I am sure I will do that. When I'm done with school I'm getting the first ticket out of this place so I can go to a place where I know it's [being lesbian] legal.

Chanda's contribution shows the lengths some of the participants were willing to go, to even leave their home country in search of a new place with greater LGBTQ acceptance.

These interlocuters' testimonies recalled Rich's image of lesbians in the closet being "exhausted in the double life" (Rich, 1980, p. 657). They expressed frustration at being unable to share their identity openly and how being careful about which parts of themselves they revealed to others took a toll on their mental health. Chanda related some of the turbulence that characterised her journey of self-discovery around her sexual orientation. She said: "You're just confused. You don't know who to talk to. I got into a deep kind of depression, I was battling with anxiety and self-harm just because of that." Horton, speaking of the people he terms "silent queers" in India, alludes to "the violences of living at the margins" (2018, p. 1071), a phrase which sums up the Zambian LBQ experience as well. The isolation with no one "to talk to" that Chanda described, speaks to the kind of violences Horton describes.

Since LGBTQ rights are not enshrined in the Zambian Constitution, LBQ people have few avenues for recourse if they are subject to discrimination or violence. Invisibility also prevents them from gaining rights that would protect them, and legal rights which would honour their long-term affectual commitments (e.g. civil unions or marriage equality). Historically many LGBTQ communities have had to organise and protest until states provided them with equal or comparable rights and protections as their heterosexual counterparts. Notable examples being the Stonewall Riots in 1969 and AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power's (ACT UP) mobilisation for HIV/AIDS treatment in the 1980s America. Although the participants in this study are able to hold events around their sexual identity, building a queer liberation movement is difficult. The nature of these meetings and the constraints that shape them will be discussed more in Chapter Five. Invisibility also means that the institutions that are meant to protect them, such as government healthcare centres and the police force, do not "see" them in their entirety. Instead of protection, homophobic institutions only have the capacity to provide them with inadequate care and possibly traumatise them in the process.

Cruel optimism and in/visibility

Zambian society cannot wholly "see" them as it will only accept parts of them. Zambian culture will accept queer women as women if they perform heteronormativity and present as strictly cisgender through their dress and behaviour and fulfil the role of the ideal Zambian woman; ergo become the ideal heterosexual and cisgender subject. In order to integrate they must erase any hint of LBQ sexuality, or non-normative gender identity. Similarly, Hawley G. Fogg-Davis notes black lesbians in

American social movements have often been forced to bifurcate their identity, separating their blackness (race) and womanhood (sex). Few places will accept them in their entirety and they are made to "divide and prioritize social identities that are integral to their self-concepts and life experience" (Fogg-Davis, 2006, p. 59). To fulfil societal demands several of my participants were closeted, concealing their sexual orientation, which helped protect them from censure.

Without diminishing their discomfort with being invisible and the distress it causes, it is interesting to note that not all my interlocuters viewed visibility in the same way. Katendi had a less negative view of invisibility than the rest of the group. She explains:

> But I think the thing for me is invisibility and acceptability [*sic*] I find, in terms of this particular subject, seem to go kind of hand in hand. Maybe because I haven't quote unquote come out and therefore sought to be accepted, I haven't particularly sought to be visible.

Visibility is not a high priority for Katendi, she places more value in accepting herself rather than seeking external affirmation. Privacy about her sexuality is important to her but not because she is ashamed of her sexual orientation, several of her friends know she is bisexual. Her privacy stems from a personal preference and during our interview I noted she was one of the more introverted participants.

In *The Argonauts*, Maggie Nelson recounts a conversation with her partner Harry Dodge about words and language. She writes: "Once we name something, you [Harry Dodge] said, we can never see it the same way again. All that is unnameable falls away, gets lost, is murdered" (Nelson, 2015, p. 7) . Nelson's partner Harry believes once things are named they can be disciplined, civilised and the act of putting phenomena into words means something ineffable is lost. But Nelson has a more positive view of the power of language, she counters that until things are named, it is as if they do not exist.

It's worth exploring the potential implications of these two arguments in the Zambian context, which I term pro-privacy and pro-visibility. According to the pro-privacy argument, more visibility, especially without state support and community acceptance of non-normative sexualities, would mean more potential to be policed and disciplined formally by law enforcement and informally by ordinary Zambians. Therefore, some LBQ women like Katendi will prefer invisibility. Not seeking visibility can itself be understood as a political stance which favours autonomy and freedom from external interference. It speaks to a commitment to live life on one's own terms despite being mired in a homophobic society.

Zelipa held a different view as she is openly queer and has a career as an LGBTQ activist. While explaining how WAfE's online social media presence is managed she says:

> … the other pages [Twitter and Instagram] are open for anybody to follow and we did that deliberately I think just to be in people's faces – they may not like it but it's important to just be visible. Eventually they'll just get used to it. Or they will die. I don't know which one will happen first.

Her more radical stance presents visibility as key to changing society's perceptions of LBQ people and garnering community acceptance ("Eventually they'll just get used to it"). She views increased visibility as beneficial, despite the related risks.

It can be argued that Zelipa's stance is an example of cruel optimism. Lauren Berlant describes cruel optimism as "an affective structure that points to being stuck or suffocated in the exact same place where individuals or groups have also attached their optimism for flourishing" (Berlant, 2020). Zelipa has attached her optimism for flourishing to a society hostile towards LGBTQ people; her belief that "Eventually they'll just get used to it", speaks to a sense of optimism. Zelipa (and I would argue all the participants who wish to remain in Zambia), have "an attachment to compromised conditions of possibility" (Berlant, 2020) because the state will not confer full citizenship and rights upon them, nor will society recognise the validity of their non-normative sexuality identity. Their lives and how they express their sexual identity are compromised. Their affective relationship to Zambia can be said to be characterised by cruel optimism. Far from being a negative affect, scholars like Berlant (2011) and Danai Mupotsa (2021) view it positively. From Zelipa's quote I would argue in a similar vein that

cruel optimism can be a positive logic which can energise mobilisation and effect societal and legal change that benefits queer communities. It has in Berlant's words a "transformative ambition" (Berlant, 2020, p. 2). And in fact, cruel optimism as a political affect is one which sustains and fuels resistance. The following chapter will explore more manifestations of cruel optimism in the activities of my key informants.

Digital intimacies and danger

In interviews participants shared how they use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp to access other LBQ people. Many scholars including Bryan (2019), , Dasgupta (2019) and Warner (2005), have reported that online communities provide safe spaces for marginalised people looking to explore their queer sexuality, create a personal identity and form community and intimate sexual and romantic relationships. The interviewees said they looked out for clues on a user's profile or posts to see if they were likely to share a similar sexual identity. Having a rainbow flag emoji in one's profile was an identity marker that participants searched for when assessing user profiles. The value this symbol holds speaks to how discursively embedded the participants are in "global gayness" (Benedicto, 2008, p. 280). Queer "western" milestones like "coming out" and queer iconography like the rainbow flag, have influence in Lusaka, though it is by no means a pink capital and in fact LBQ people exist within Lusaka as a hidden subculture. It could be argued that because these participants live in a society where LGBTQ culture is hidden from mainstream discourses, they look further afield to access aspects of globalised LGBTQ culture which appeal to them. They then import and assimilate these aspects into the nascent localised LGBTQ culture which this study attempts to chart. My interlocuters are active participants in globalisation and through their habits we see the embodiment of the transnational, which Inderpal Grewal argues is "constituted by heterogeneous and historicized 'connectivities' through which meanings, practices, capital, commodities, and people travel" (in Dosekun, 2015, p. 965). This theme applies to the participants' social media habits but as this chapter will show throughout, it also has resonance for other parts of their lives as primarily middle-class, well-educated Zambians.

Musonda's preferred social media platform is Facebook and she used another strategy to identify LBQ women. The 29-year-old lesbian checks if the woman she's interested in connecting with has any shared mutual friends and who they are. If she and the woman share mutual friends who are LBQ, she assumes the woman is likely LBQ as well. Both these strategies display how the participants weigh up their desire to commune with people who share their sexual identity with their safety. Fraser (in McLean et. al.,2011) terms these kinds of online spaces, "subaltern counter-publics … spaces through which groups can create and distribute counter-discourses in order to form and assert their own interpretation of their identities and interests". In societies where there is hostility towards LBQ women, online spaces are viewed as "safer and easier than doing so offline" (Pond et. al., 2017, p.17).

I was invited to join Queer Voices, a private Facebook group set up by Namakau in March 2021 to fill a gap she noticed in the Zambian social media landscape. She wanted to create a digital space that was "less strict, less serious, more social" than other LGBTQ NGOs' online spaces. The group is very popular: it had 475 members by June 2021 and continues to grow, with the majority of the members being LBQ Zambian women and a few gay men and transgender individuals featuring. Namakau and her co-founder, another LBQ woman, started the group by snowballing: they invited other women they knew who in turn invited other people to join. Group members are allowed to make provisional posts, which are reviewed, approved or rejected by the founders. The approved posts appear in the group's feed. The group is fun and lively with members posting amusing LGBTQ memes, heartfelt lonely hearts ads, inspirational quotes, and their hopes and aspirations related to their sexual identity. Some of the most popular posts are the ones selling sex toys, whose possession, importation and sale are illegal in Zambia. They fall under Section 177 of the penal code which bans "obscene matters or things … tending to corrupt morals" (AfricaNews, 2018; Government of Zambia, n.d.) including pornography. The Queer Voices group acts as an informal fixer between LBQ women who wish to acquire sex toys and the black-market vendors who sell them.

Below is one of the posts that appeared in Queer Voices in July 2021.



Figure 2: 11 July 2021 post from the Queer Voices Facebook group.

The Spill the Tea[20] series run by the group's administrators stimulated group discussion, and facilitated the sharing of experiences, opinions and advice. This post asked the group about "being with", meaning having sex or a relationship with, "married closeted people" and/ or "queer married people". The comments featured different women relating the drama of their sexual exploits with married women and other women making public that they are looking for covert assignations with married women. The comments thread had the jovial tone of gossip between friends. It could be argued that this post in particular is an example of the LBQ community in Zambia gauging their internal norms and values as well as coming to an understanding of the context in which they live and how other LBQ women manage their sexual and romantic relationships in Lusaka.

Below is another post which indicates one of the major affects I observed in the group, optimism.

[20] To "spill the tea" is a slang phrase that originates from queer black drag culture in the Southern USA. It means to share gossip or a "hidden truth" (Merriam-Webster, 2020). The phrase's travel to an online space run by Zambians is further evidence of the global dissemination linguistically of American LGBTQ cultures.

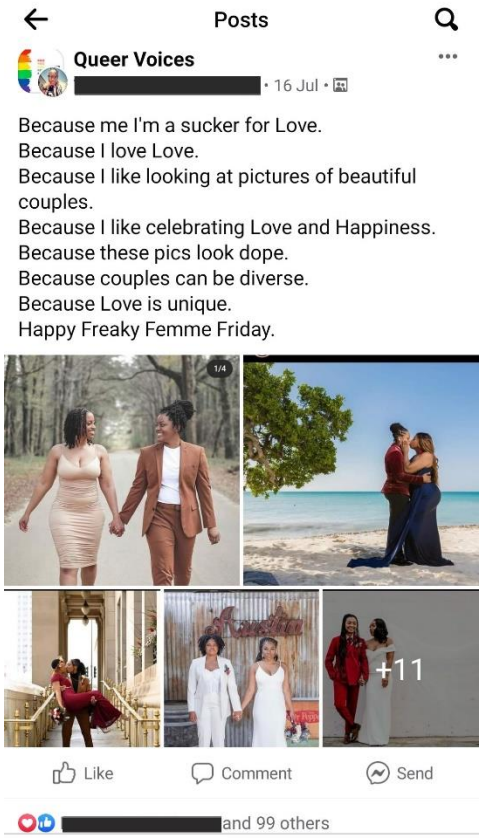


Figure 3: 16 July 2021 post from the Queer Voices Facebook group.

The post features an array of wedding or engagement photoshoots with black, ostensibly LBQ women. Many of the photos appear to show American couples and they represent a loving commitment to marriage or coupling. This post received a wealth of "likes" from group members meaning many in the group admire or aspire to the same ideals. I would argue that for many LBQ Zambians Western presentations of queer love inspire their conceptions of a queer utopia. These images and the symbolism: the white dress or suit, prominent engagement rings and typical engagement shoot poses (i.e. swooping a lover into one's arms) allude to a kind of "new homonormativity" (Duggan, 2002, p. 179). Homonormativity as defined by Lisa Duggan is a form of neoliberal politics,

> that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (Duggan, 2002, p. 179)

I propose that the heteronormative institution being upheld by this post is monogamous marriage, exemplified by heterosexual couples. The valorisation of this institution speaks to a homonormative longing, held by some of the group members, to have access to the privileges and rights their sexual counterparts possess and to perform Western heterosexual traditions. It is interesting to observe that group members appear to source these images from the Global North, and rarely post images that derive from other African countries with LGBTQ rights, like South Africa. As Dosekun remarks, "the hegemony of Western-originated content is well-established in cultural studies of globalization" (Dosekun, 2015, p. 966). These sorts of posts are evidence of continued US cultural dominance even on the supposedly democratised and geographically decentralised internet. These images are not necessarily negative even though they stem from inequalities in cultural production. Content like this has the power to "engender[s] contextual and contradictory, localized, and hybrid interpretations" (Dosekun, 2015, p. 966) and it will be interesting to see in the long-term how this nascent LGBTQ

community transforms aspects of foreign queer content into local versions that speak more directly to their reality.

Posts like Figure 3 are oriented towards futurity. While the members may not currently all be in the kind of romantic relationships they desire, nor have their sexual orientation recognised and affirmed by broader society, the positive nature of the posts insulates them from the discontent that characterises their reality. The group's content reaches forward to a not-yet-articulated time and not quite realised desires. In essence, a kind of digital utopia is formed. The group members raise their queer voices in "rejection of the here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world." (Muñoz, 2019, p. 1). The fact that the group's existence is public on Facebook, but the content of the posts is private to only members of the group, renders Queer Voices and its participants simultaneously visible and invisible and speaks to the complexity of visibility in Zambia discussed prior. Unfortunately, this community has suffered from security issues. This chapter will return to the Queer Voices group in the section below about queer world-making.

Security issues are a factor for LBQ women when choosing an online platform. Namakau prefers to use Twitter where she has a profile picture that does not show her face and her username is a pseudonym; both elements provide her with a feeling of security. Her Twitter account allows her a measure of anonymity so she can post queer content or strike up discussions about sexuality without her identity being compromised. About her online presence she remarked, "I use my social media platforms to draw in women like me. I'm very vocal." Namakau had a girlfriend while this research was being conducted and was mainly using social media for friendship and activism, to connect with Zambian feminists and LGBTQ activists. She interacts with LBQ women on Twitter first and then moves the conversation to WhatsApp or an in-person meeting if she feels they are getting along well.

Zelipa's status as an activist means she is in the public eye, so her user experience of social media is different. She uses her real name on all social media platforms and is openly queer. She elaborated:

> Facebook, Twitter and Instagram – I usually get a lot of messages from people. I think a lot of them also come from women who are not out, who are figuring out their thing and again when you see my pictures, the way I look, I'm sure it tells them this is a gay person so maybe that's why that happens quite a lot.

The testimonies of my participants correspond to other research on how LBQ women identify each other on digital platforms. Research on Tinder usage by Pond et. al (2017, p. 12) of bisexual women in New Zealand found they "devised a strategy to only swipe right (yes) on women who presented themselves visually in a way that they deemed 'gay enough'". It is not sufficient to simply be online. Legitimacy and being seen as "gay enough" factors into the way LBQ Zambians interact with each other as well. As Zelipa and Musonda's comments indicate, online users must perform a level of queerness or allow their sexuality to be legible enough so they can form the digital connections they crave. It can be inferred that LBQ users who are less *au fait* with the argot and symbols of global gay identities (Benedicto, 2008) may be less recognisable to their peers, further cementing their isolation. The tension of class, access and global knowledge shaping each user's experience and online success, echo Dasgupta's findings in his study of Indian gay Facebook groups (Dasgupta, 2019).

Despite the valuable connections that can be formed online, LBQ people are not immune from danger in digital spaces, nor are these spaces inherently egalitarian as some scholars may imply. Half of the informants were not out on social media because of the present dangers. Namakau vacillates between presenting her "authentic" self (a bisexual woman) on social media and falling in line with heterosexual norms dictated by Zambian society in the real world and also online by the majority of users. The digital platforms she uses are not neutral. While she attempts to curate a queer-supportive online space for herself and others, other users are shaping the norms of the space in contradictory ways that curtail her rights and freedoms as a bisexual woman. Her identity is "constantly negotiated, an insecurity that can never be secured" (Benedicto, 2008, p. 281); she must manage trolls online and homophobic commentary from other users, which impinge on her ability to be bisexual online freely.

Namakau was outed by a family member to her mother based on the content of some of her Facebook posts and she no longer uses the app for this reason. She finds it to be a triggering space and contrasts the attitudes towards LGBTQ people on different platforms. She says:

> Facebook is where you see stories pop up about the [LGBTQ] community and the comments will be very negative and sort of put you in a bad state. But when you see a post on Twitter, there's so many people siding with the community compared to on Facebook.

Namakau's experiences online show off some of the perils of social media platforms for LGBTQ people in a society where organising around one's sexual identity offline is dangerous. Social media platforms can become the only way for LBQ people to connect, but once a virtual space becomes hostile towards them, they may become reticent to log on and lose out on perhaps the only sense of community available to them. In fact, two of my interlocuters, Katendi and Sampa, dislike social media in general and reported using them infrequently or never, so were unable to access the support systems and community that these platforms provide LBQ women.

Chanda, a 20-year-old self-identified stemme lesbian, uses WhatsApp to connect with other LBQ women on her university campus and is in a group chat for studs with about 12 other women. She mentions that the femmes have a separate WhatsApp group and there are plans to have more groups. She says:

> We've said let's just make one group chat but I don't think it has been made yet. This [WhatsApp group] one was just for the studs. When I got into the group, they said the femmes are quite hard to handle. And they said let's just have one where us as studs can relate to each other because it seems there are more femmes than studs. So if we have one as studs, we can freely talk about being studs. But then we're thinking of opening one which has everyone in it.

The WhatsApp group members coalesce around being "studs". Their use of the label, which originates from African-American LGBTQ communities, is more evidence of the research participants' interpellation into Western forms of queer identity that have gained social currency globally (Boellstorff, 2003). The identities of studs and femmes are often constructed in opposition to each other and can function in exclusionary ways for those who identify as both or neither. In our interviews, Chanda mentioned that she prefers to be the more dominant partner in her relationships, which lines up with how other researchers have found that studs perceive and conduct themselves (Reed et al., 2011; Moore, 2006). These multiple identities evoke the diversity of Zambian LBQ women and how these different groups brush up against each other pleasantly or can fall into conflict with each other (i.e. "femmes are quite hard to handle"). The fact that they have parallel support structures also speaks to these sub-identities like "femme" and "stud" possessing niche needs that WhatsApp groups like Chanda's fulfil.

Chanda enjoys her studs WhatsApp group because the members serve as "each other's support system". In the group they offer each other advice on how to handle the homophobia they experience in the world and share coping skills. It is clear that within the group the members form "intimate queer attachments … through narration of pain and a sense of shared compassion" (Dasgupta, 2019, p. 67). There they are free to be out to each other when they might not be out to the rest of the world; in this way their sexual identity is affirmed.

In conclusion, most of the interviewees value digital intimacy accessed through engagement with other LBQ Zambians on social media, and the immediacy and sense of community it provides. They use online activity to find friendship, love and sex and it complements the physical meet-ups which occur less often in Lusaka. It can be argued that by being open about their sexuality online, the participants perform "the cultural labor of visibility [which] occurs when black queers bring dissident sexualities and gender nonconformity into the public arena" (Livermon, 2012, p. 300). At times this visibility comes with a price. The online spaces Zambian LBQ people frequent can be fraught, displaying internal tensions in the LBQ community as well as the same prejudices and homophobic abuse common to offline culture.

My participants' investment in using social media platforms where they might encounter queerphobic hostilities and other dangers speaks to a measure of cruel optimism. The participants may receive negative comments on social media, which is, in this scenario, the object of their desire. This object can "threaten their wellbeing" (Berlant, 2010, p. 94) yet they are attached to it and determined to use it. As they are attached to social media with cruel optimism, I argue this propels them to create digital counterpublics which do welcome them, like Queer Voices.

The ways the interlocuters use social media to support each other despite the risks can be viewed as "everyday resistance". James C. Scott delineated everyday resistance as the ways "people act in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine power", ways that are "typically hidden or disguised, individual and not politically articulated" (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 2). How they engage in romantic and sexual relationships can also be categorised as everyday resistance and the following section will explore this fully.

My interlocuters attempt to mitigate the negative aspects of social media through several strategies and have varying success with curating their digital utopias. Social media can be exclusionary, and the kind of user experience different people have can be dependent on class, social capital and purchasing power. Without access to mobile data, a phone of one's own, and the ability to translate oneself into particular identities that are recognised by the rest of the Zambian LBQ community, prized digital intimacy and communion can be difficult to attain.

"I just felt seen in a way I never had before with a man": Navigating interpersonal relationships

Sampa, one of the participants who had dated both men and women, provides the title for this section while describing the reciprocity and equality she felt when she first dated a woman. Her comment suggests that interpersonal relationships can open up new worlds for the people within them. This section is devoted to the participants' responses about their romantic and sexual relationships and will delve into the inner workings of the Zambian LBQ community, exploring how the participants label their sexual orientation, perform gender roles in LBQ relationships and perceive internal tensions within their community.

Bianca Wilson (2009), drawing on her research of African-American lesbians, observes that "within lesbian sexual culture" (2009, p. 298), women identify "with labels along masculine and feminine continuum", i.e. butch or femme and anywhere in between. The same can be observed in my study. The sample exhibited knowledge of identity markers used in other LGBTQ communities across the world like "lesbian", "gold star lesbian", "bisexual", "queer", "femme", "stud", and "butch" and used them in their responses in reference to themselves and other LBQ women they knew. Some participants like Zelipa, Musonda and Namakau who were more involved in NGO work used the acronym LBQ suggesting they were more conscious of the global rights discourse of SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity). In this way all the interviewees linguistically reproduce "putatively Western forms of homosexuality and homosexual desire" (Benedicto, 2008, p. 277) in the construction of their LBQ selves. I was unable to locate any indigenous Zambian words for homosexuality or other minority sexual orientations. My participants also had no knowledge of any such terms. It is possible that this missing language is a result of colonial erasure and religious suppression of non-normative sexualities.

The labels listed above are linked to physical appearance and behaviour as well as gender roles. Wilson further argues that "specific gender labels" create a system that "organise[s] sexual life" (2009, p. 302) and relationship dynamics. This appeared to be true in the Lusaka scene based on my participants' testimonies. Zelipa is a masculine-presenting non-binary lesbian and found that based on her outward appearance some women assumed that she took a specific role in romantic relationships. She commented:

> They see me or when we're getting to know each other because of the way I present they assume I will expect certain things from them because I'm masculine and that's not the case. I actually, I hate it. Like

> I don't want someone that's running after me like a child, picking up after me, I don't like it – if you want to do it, it's fine, but I don't expect it from somebody. It's not a rule that has to be done … there's always expectations even there [in a relationship] – if you have more muscle you're expected to be the gift giver.

These remarks reflect how Ghanaian women organise their relationships with other women according to Dankwa's (2012; 2009) inquiry into female same-sex intimacies there.[21] Mbasalaki describes a similar convention around butch lesbians in the South African context (Mbasalaki, 2019, p. 40)

Namakau, who is bisexual, described some of the other assumptions women in the LBQ community make about each other:

> … I think there are tops and bottoms in the LGBTQ setup here. What do we call it? Usually like subs, submissives and doms, dominants maybe that's what we'll call it. And because of heteronormative stereotypes, people will always assume the stud is the dominant one when that's not always the case. Some studs are actually submissive. Some femmes are very dominant. Some can be either.

Namakau's comment reveals that often a woman's display of "female masculinity" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 56) via the way she dresses, e.g. as a stud, is taken by other LBQ women to indicate that she will play the role of "the man" in the relationship or be more dominant. Namakau is currently in a monogamous relationship with Musonda and she explained that how her sexual orientation has changed over the course of her life. While currently she refers to herself as queer or bisexual that wasn't always the case:

> When I was younger, I was more comfortable with bisexual because it meant that people would most likely assume that there's a high chance of me ending up with a man … Yes, so I was comfortable with bisexual because it meant that I wasn't really living in the heteronormative society completely. For a long time, I'd say, "I'm straight, I just like to kiss girls."

For Namakau labelling herself bisexual served two functions. It allowed her to express her reservations about her attraction to women and about heteronormativity, while also partially staying within its confines. Because "people would most likely assume that there's a high chance of [her] ending up with a man", she was sheltered from some of the more stringent criticism she would receive if she identified as a lesbian. Being bisexual provided her, in Michelle Gibson's words, a modicum of "heterosexual protection" (2000, p. 73). Namakau later remarked that the more she socialises within the LGBTQ community, the more she realises that bisexuality is "kind of frowned upon" and it distressed her.

As a sexual identity, bisexuality is overlooked and poorly understood leading to biphobia and bisexual erasure in both heterosexual and LGBTQ communities. This is well-noted by multiple researchers including Callis (2009), Ault (1996) and Stone (1996). It appears similar attitudes are present in the Zambian context. Sampa, a bisexual woman, mentioned that she disclosed her bisexuality in a previous relationship. She explains, "I did disclose [being bisexual] to the last guy I dated and of course he took that as an opportunity to suggest a threesome." Her statement shows how her former partner, instead of respecting her sexuality in itself, could only understand it in the context of an opportunity for group sex and centred it around his male desire. This highlights one of the prevalent misapprehensions about bisexuality and is regrettably a common response that women who come out to their partners as bisexual receive (Hayfield et al., 2014).

Katendi, a 33-year-old bisexual, was one of the participants who socialised less often with other people than some of my other interlocuters. She described herself as anti-social in general but had gone to one or two LGBTQ events in the last two years. Katendi spoke about the biphobia she experienced from other LBQ women:

> **Katendi:** And unfortunately I think that even within the [LGBTQ] community – maybe that's why I don't go out of my way to like be a part of the community. I've found there's divisions. I've met some people who identify as lesbians who are just so disgusted that I would even be with a man … Which

[21]Dankwa's participants related that the woman who approaches the other woman first, is viewed as "the man" and to carry out a relationship "the man" must provide financially (2012, p. 254) for their partner.

> I've also found kind of sad. I'm like bruv we're getting enough shit, stress from outside of the circle and then you're bringing like negativity and bad vibes into the circle. Like I can't do that.
>
> **Interviewer:** So would you say you've experienced biphobia in the community?
>
> **Katendi:** I would say that. I think bisexuality is either considered to be not a real thing or dismissed.

Katendi's contribution highlights the danger in assuming Lusaka has a united LBQ community when internal prejudices threaten unity and exclude certain members. Adding the dimension of gender identity, Zelipa mentioned how some Zambian lesbians wouldn't date her because she was non-binary and they considered themselves attracted to women only. For some individuals even the label of lesbian is a narrowly defined identity and an element of cissexism may be present. These perspectives in general display the contradictions between how the interlocuters present themselves and how they are perceived by others. My research indicates that the LBQ community in Lusaka is complicated by differing beliefs, stereotypes and interpretations of various identities.

There are no official statistics on the existence of LBQ people in Zambia. The respondents believed the LBQ women's community in Lusaka to be large, comprised of hundreds of individuals, yet they expressed that everyone in the community ends up dating everyone else. Zelipa reports:

> … the [LBQ women's] community is small, like we just keep changing, exchanging partners. I would date you next – after the relationship you'd probably be dating someone I know … We're all exes somehow.

It is possible that the LBQ community Zelipa references feels small, because the community is limited to people of a similar class and background. This is common to LGBTQ and heterosexual communities across the world, where people socialise within their class bracket, but there is an added dimension to this in Lusaka. Since my research participants exist in a hostile society, safety is a priority. People who are known by many other people in the LBQ community may be seen as less of a risk: less likely to out their partners and better cognisant of the stakes of pursuing a queer relationship in this context and the strategies employed to survive.

Most of the participants described people within the LBQ community as fairly promiscuous. Namakau expounds on why this may be the case:

> It's that thing when you discover yourself late or you still need to have your "ho" experience. Your favourites, your heartbreaks, all of this. But because that didn't happen in your teenage years, because you didn't have a chance to meet queers, it's only happening much later. It looks like you're playing around when you're just also trying to figure out this thing as well.

Namakau's comment highlights the impact of being closeted on LBQ people's sexual behaviour and sense of self. Being closeted due to societal pressures makes it difficult for them to meet and pursue romantic and sexual relationships with other LBQ people in their teenage years. Their heterosexual counterparts are sometimes better able to explore romantic and sexual connections in that stage of the life cycle since their sexual orientation is more supported. Thus, LBQ people's development in this arena can be more delayed; "[it] didn't happen in your teenage years …". Namakau's comment alludes to the presence of multiple temporalities in a society which denies the existence of sexual diversity. Jack Halberstam in his study of queer urban subcultures argues that members of the LGBTQ community often lack "the heteronormative imperative of home and family, [and] they also prolong the periods of their life devoted to subcultural participation" (Halberstam, 2003, p. 321). In this case, having "your 'ho' experience" can be read as prolonging "subcultural participation" (Halberstam, 2003, p. 321). Moreover, in the Zambian context where LGBTQ people are excluded from institutions like marriage and child-rearing because of anti-homosexuality laws and a lack of community acceptance, it could be argued that many LBQ people live in "stretched out adolescences" (Halberstam, 2003, p. 314) and conduct their romantic and sexual lives with youthful abandon.

Despite this, at the time interviews were conducted four of the six interlocuters were very happily in romantic relationships with women: three were monogamous, and the fourth was polyamorous. Musonda spoke effusively about her current girlfriend, the joy their relationship brings to her life and how different it is from her previous relationships with men. She explained: "I feel content. It's effortless. I do believe with her I've experienced a lot of personal growth. I'm getting a lot more comfortable in my skin." For the partnered participants, relationships with other women and getting to express their sexual orientation in a relationship held great value. Their defiance of social norms by forming and sustaining intimate relationships with each other is a form of everyday resistance.

The other two participants were single at the time of interviewing. Their opinions of the community were that it was more nebulous, with many different social cliques and scenes. It is likely their perception is informed by their relationship status and it provides an interesting counternarrative, highlighting the differences between single and coupled LBQ life. Sampa, when asked what her hopes were as a Zambian LBQ woman, replied with the following:

> A greater sense of community. I feel we're fragmented because we're in hiding. A lot of us are in hiding. I'd like to see more interaction, engagement, more community.

It's possible that being in a relationship allowed some of the participants access to greater LBQ community, as they could tap into a broader network made up of their partner's queer friends and exes. Their single counterparts unfortunately could not draw on the same benefits.

This chapter has shown that the Zambian LBQ community, while heterogenous, displays enough coherence to qualify as an affective community, that is a community centred around the affective desire for other women or female-bodied non-binary people. Offline and online, the research participants create "spaces of belonging in the performance of everyday life" (Mbasalaki, 2019, p. 38). Relationship dynamics in Zambian LBQ relations display many of the hallmarks of LGBTQ relationships elsewhere, both their glories and their shortcomings. Isolation certainly entrenches stigma and it is possible that as the Lusaka queer scene develops, i.e., as people socialise more and become more comfortable with their own sexuality and that of others, prejudices may weaken. The participants interviewed represent a small group but they hoped that more LBQ Zambians could be more accepting of the diversity their fragmented community clearly displays.

Chapter Five: Support and Community in Lusaka

This chapter is devoted to how LBQ people interact with, support and love each other while living in Lusaka. While the previous chapter focused on how Zambian society invisibilises the research participants, Chapter Five is devoted to how they combat this sometimes suffocating invisibility using various strategies. I explore the work of local NGOs, followed by a critical discussion of support, and an analysis of social parties and queer nightlife as a form of queer world-making and everyday resistance.

NGO-facilitated support

NGOs are the lifeblood of the LBQ community in Lusaka. Because of the Zambian government's forbidding stance on LGBTQ rights, it provides little to no support to individuals who identify as such, nor the NGOs who endeavour to support them. One notable exception is MSM or homosexual men who are able to access health-related support in the form of HIV/AIDS management. However, initiatives in this area are medicalised and focused on illness, condomisation and ARVs, rather than being centred on male same-sex sexual identities. This is how many NGOs supporting LGBTQ Zambians operate in a grey area and manoeuvre around restrictive laws and the bounds of social acceptability. The Zambia Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (ZANERELA+) (est. 2005), TransBantu (est. date unknown), Friends of Rainka (est. 2008), The Lotus Identity (est. 2015) and the Women's Alliance for Equality (WAfE) are all NGOs currently operating in Zambia (Phiri, 2017) who provide some support to LGBTQ individuals.

In 2015, Zelipa founded WAfE, the first feminist, LBQ women-focused NGO in Zambia. She said,

> Initially our thought was just to mobilise and bring some visibility to LBQ women because both of us had worked in the other NGOs for quite some time but a lot of the reach and target was gay men. Most places [i.e. NGO events] you go to you'd have very few women turning up. So we formed WAfE first of all just to bring visibility to LBQ women and mobilise LBQ women.

Musonda, who works for WAfE, provided her perspective on why it was founded. She said,

> … one of the reasons why WAfE was formed because I think when you look at mainstream LGBTIQ programming the focus is often on gay men and trans women and I think for the most part, a lot of women were left out and left behind.

It's interesting to observe that within the NGO space and broader society LBQ women and non-binary people echo the sentiments of feeling, "left out and left behind" in different ways. The multiple marginalisation of these particular subjectivities living in Zambia is evident.

WAfE's activities include mental health awareness initiatives, safe sex campaigns, safe space creation and documentation of human rights violations. Their overall goal is to contribute to creating "a Zambian society where WSW, lesbian, bisexual, transgender persons and non-binary female-bodied persons realise their human rights and have said rights fully protected and enforced." Zelipa shared an instance of how this support is conferred:

> …We're trying to create spaces for people to just come and talk, away from the formal meetings and your flipchart – you just bring you. We tried to have monthly conversations, a different theme each month. The first one we ever had was a concept that was adapted from Nigeria so we had "The L Word", talking about loneliness within the queer community, the LBQ community. So it was exploring how do you experience loneliness within your family, with your friends, at work, but then also trying to find solutions. Like what is it that we can do?

While these interviews were taking place, WAfE was running mental health awareness campaigns on their social media accounts and trying to connect LBQ women with LGBTQ-friendly mental health services as well. The organisation endeavours to create events that appeal to LBQ women and these

have included workshops as well as more informal social gatherings and themed parties. The workshops have another unofficial function as according to some of the research participants, they are a good place to meet other eligible LBQ women. WAfE tends to serve LBQ women "between 18 and 30 years old" but its founders would like the NGO to draw in older LBQ women, although factors in their personal life make their inclusion a challenge. Several of the participants mentioned that older LBQ women in Lusaka tend to be married to men and if they were to attend WAfE events they may accidentally out themselves. Zelipa suggests this is why older LBQ women stay away from events and may prefer to only interact with the NGO on social media. WAfE receives its funds from private donations and overseas donor organisations, not limited to but including The Other Foundation (based in South Africa) and Hivos (based in the Netherlands).

There are some obstacles to registering an LGBTQ NGO in Zambia. The community an NGO would be servicing is engaging in acts which the state designates as illegal so the government may deny the registration and even arrest the would-be founders. Both Namakau and her co-founder would like to register Queer Voices so they can expand operations. As a registered NGO they would also be able to attract funding from donors more easily, as many of them need the sense of security and formality that administrative registration confers on an organisation's activities. Zelipa related that other LGBTQ organisations had to "water down their language" in founding documents in order to be allowed to register officially as an NGO. To set up WAfE she pursued an alternative route to formalise its activities:

> … the NGO route is more comprehensive, they'll really dig into your business, your core activities, your constituents. We went through the registration as a company because there isn't so much scrutiny on what you're doing, we just say we're dealing with health and other social services and that's it. So then they don't come digging into our business and whatnot.

Registering WAfE as a business as opposed to an NGO is a strategic choice that allows Zelipa to help her community with minimal interference. Techniques like this are a cunning way of working around legislation and an example of how LBQ people in Zambia utilise their relative invisibility to their advantage.

Srila Roy cites Naisargi Dave's division of Indian queer politics into three stages, two of which I've excerpted here. She writes:

> First, one that adheres to a Western model of lesbian identity politics calling on women to identify and interpellate themselves not just as 'lesbian' but as part of a transnational political community based on this identification. Second, the sexual minority support group that is also based on identity, but eschews political mobilization in the name of safety and support (Roy, 2015, p. 159).

It could be argued that WAfE's initiatives fall into the first and second categories of organising. They are not currently mobilising support for LGBTQ decriminalisation[22] or for the current penal codes to be repealed, which I would envisage to be the next stage in the evolution of queer politics in Africa.

Vinthagen and Johannsson (2013) review James C. Scott's concept of everyday resistance, comparing it to more confrontational forms of resistance. In the former "one seeks 'tacit, *de facto* gains' … [instead of] … 'formal, *de jure* – recognition of those gains'" (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 5). These two kinds of resistance and arguments in support of them were present in the data I collected, exemplified here in Chanda and Katendi's views that follow. All of the participants were in support of decriminalisation, although they were sceptical of whether it could ever occur because of widespread and fiercely held homophobic beliefs. Several were not confident that decriminalisation in Zambia was attainable. Katendi elaborated:

[22] Following on from Vasu Reddy's definition, decriminalisation here means the "systematic process that recognises the equality of gays and lesbians by the law… [the] legislation that makes legal that which was once illegal" (Reddy, 2006, p.146), and includes decriminalisation for other LGBTQ identities as well.

> … we [i.e. Zambians] would have to get over the whole "Christian nation" thing. I think as long as that is the tagline that the country chooses to be identified by, there is not a great likelihood that there will be decriminalisation, at least not in my generation's lifetime I think.

Katendi's comment suggests that the biggest obstacle to decriminalisation, i.e. "formal *de jure* recognition" (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 5), is religion and by extension Zambians' conception of the nation and themselves, which is a profound statement. Chanda foregrounded the issue of acceptance, i.e. "*de facto* gains" (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 5) within any legalisation and rights discourse:

> **Interviewer**: Is marriage equality also something you would like to see in the future in Zambia?
>
> **Chanda**: Yes … Acceptance is the main thing. Acceptance needs to come with everything. Granting the rights to live with someone, granting the rights to actually be in a relationship, being married to someone, I feel like we need that.

Which of these two types of gains and two forms of resistance are prioritised or not will greatly influence the shape of the future of LBQ life in Zambia.

Chanda, while in favour of legal rights, wisely raises the issue of community acceptance. It can be argued the two go hand in hand when creating LGBTQ-supporting societies. South Africa is a notable example of a country not far geographically from Zambia where formidable legal rights, protections and recognition for LGBTQ individuals are marred by poor community acceptance, often resulting in deadly homophobic and transphobic violence (Livermon, 2012; Mbasalaki, 2020; Muholi, 2004). All the respondents spoke of Zambian cultural attitudes towards LBQ people in fairly absolute terms, with some hesitance about whether these beliefs could be shaken or changed. The participants' mobilisation around their lesbian, bisexual and queer sexual identities is at times "extinguished by constraints, but also mobilized and incited by constraints" (Butler, 2004, p. 15). Judith Butler makes this argument in *Undoing Gender* with regards to how social norms influence behaviour. It can be proposed that the lack of legal reform on the horizon for sexual minorities in Zambia energises the creation of independent support structures since LBQ people know they cannot rely on the state for support.

Finally, I questioned the participants about the kind of support they desired the most. Most of the interlocuters noted that even when these services were offered to sexual minorities, the focus was on MSM and homosexual men. Their recommendations were that more initiatives should centre women and female-bodied non-binary people. Instead of prescribing what support meant to the participants, the open-ended questioning allowed them to determine its meaning for themselves. Dave notes that, "political communities always form through disparate needs, agents, and agendas" (2015, p. 616)which accounts for the miscellaneous responses I received on the topic of support.

The support desired by the participants can be divided into the following themes: social, health, and safety. In terms of social support participants suggested that solidarity increasing activities, LBQ Pride marches, more parties and opportunities to meets more queer people, (for some especially for the purpose of dating), would make them feel supported. Jacquelyn P. Strey, on queer Indian women's nightlife in Bangalore, describes this sentiment as a "drive ... [to] internal visibility where the women meet to 'coexist with people like them'" (Strey, 2017, p. 259) as social events are a celebration of their LBQ identity and an opportunity to gain affirmation from peers. Sampa summarised her thoughts around support in our interview:

> **Interviewer:** In an ideal world what kind of support would you like to see for LBQ women?
>
> **Sampa:** The same support that straight people, gender conforming people receive. The same legal support, the same kind of support from medical professionals, from the community at large. In general acceptance, that would be great.

Perhaps more nebulous concepts, yet extremely important ones, like "general acceptance", "recognition" came up repeatedly in interviews. The participants desired for people to view their sexual orientation and relationships as legitimate; good social support can help provide this. Further they desired a level of parity with their heterosexual counterparts in term of services provided.

Health was key for the interviewees, in its sexual health and mental health incarnations. Sexual health support could be improved for them by better access to LGBTQ-friendly healthcare professionals who were knowledgeable about sexual and gender identity issues and could provide non-judgemental sexual and reproductive health services. Katendi, who is interested in having children in the future, mentioned that LBQ-friendly family planning and fertility treatments would be valuable. Pleasure is an important part of health which is often discounted and some informants remarked that better access to sex toys would be beneficial for them. Mental health was a major concern and the interviewees offered up LBGTQ-sensitive counselling that provided coping mechanisms for dealing with queerphobic family and friends as well as advice about IPV (intimate partner violence), as a key service which could alleviate the strain on their psyches.

The rest of the feedback I would categorise as safety-related. Participants like Musonda wanted mobilisation around legal reform to build a safer more inclusive future for LGBTQ Zambians. They all wished to conduct their interpersonal relationships, engage in public displays of affection and attend social events without fear of arrest and/or castigation from broader Zambian society.

In conclusion, without NGOs like WAfE there would be no institutional support for LBQ people in Lusaka. They have helped pioneer what care and support can look like for sexual minorities in Zambia. It can be argued at the core of this is a politics of love and care. Jennifer C. Nash reads black womanism and feminism in the US through the lens of affect theory, observing that its dominant affect during second wave feminism (roughly 1960s-1980s) was love, but not just love as an emotion but love turned into "a theory of justice" (Nash, 2013, p. 2) that structured the movement's demands and organising. Black feminists in the US expressed love as an organising logic explicitly; conversely, in this research context, it can be argued that same love logic is utilised unconsciously. The participants' conception of support is complex and varied, suggesting that an ideal scenario would be for multiple NGOs and community and faith-based organisations to operate in Zambia to service LBQ people, and for there to be legal reform around laws pertaining to sexual minorities and non-normative sexual practices. However, as decriminalisation is some way off, it will be interesting to see how the LBQ community continues to evolve and support each other in light of this major constraint.

Queer world-making through social events

In contrast to the previous section, this section is devoted to social events in Lusaka for LBQ people; these are more informal settings where they can form bonds over a shared sexual identity and create a sense of belonging. While I scheduled to go to Zambia to attend these events, the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic curtailed travel. For an insight into these events, I relied on secondhand testimonies of the sample who attended them. Due to the pandemic, there were also fewer of these kinds of events held in 2020 and 2021 than in the previous years.

Lusaka has a lively nightlife scene with a mixture of pubs, bars and nightclubs dotting the capital. Popular venues include Grandaddy's Shoka Nyama, G Greens, Keg and Lion, and Capones. However, there are no places that are officially or unofficially gay friendly. All the participants had frequented these venues but were careful not make advances towards women in these spaces. These events I discuss were conceptualised by WAfE and managed by their small team. The parties run by WAfE are very popular; all but one of my participants had attended them. Two of these WAfE events, namely Pride and Pose will be discussed here. These events are part of an underground LBQ scene. In the absence of an LGBTQ neighbourhood (à la The Castro, San Francisco or Green Point, Cape Town) or specific gay or lesbian bars in Lusaka, these events gain even more importance to attendees. Without a permanent physical site, the queer world created is more ephemeral and the traces of LBQ nightlife

are less legible to outsiders. Some of these events are for LBQ women and non-binary female-bodied people solely, like Pose, and others, like Pride, included the whole LGBTQ community.

WAfE's themed event based on *Pose*[23] occurred two weeks before my initial interviews were conducted in 2020. The event was hosted at Adventure City, a youth play park with a constellation of swimming pools and a conference centre. The ball was held in one of the larger conference rooms and by all reports was a joyful occasion with around 100 people there. Attendees split themselves into "houses", different teams that competed in categories like "Best Legs", "Paris Runway", "Face" and "Vogue". The winning walkers won trophies and all enjoyed the party, voguing and dancing freestyle to music after the competitive portion of the evening was over.

The relaxed and queer-friendly atmosphere imbues the event with potentiality, pace José Muñoz; things that would not ordinarily occur in other places in Lusaka are able to unfold. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz argues we have a similar relationship to queerness as an asymptote has to a curved line, saying, "we may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as a warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality" (Muñoz, 2019, p. 1). This conception of queerness as a hopeful affect which is somewhat unattainable in the present, thus existing most fully in the future, reflects the current situation for LBQ people in Zambia. Through these events they engage in queer world-making, but the queer world of their dreams does not exist yet in the physical.

At this particular event there was a woman selling sex toys, which are illegal in Zambia, yet she felt safe enough to conduct business at the event, which is a testament to the liberatory nature of the evening. Several respondents reported that they would not display affection openly for their partners or other women in most places in Lusaka, but they felt comfortable kissing women in front of other guests at these events. Although they are not sex parties, these events provide a safe space for LBQ women to socialise, be intimate with each other, express themselves and explore their sexuality. The private feelings between two people that are evoked and on display at these events become what Ann Cvetkovich calls "public feelings" (Cvetkovich, 2003) that can be organised around politically.

hooks' concept of "homeplace" which she describes as "the one site where one [i.e. black women] could freely confront the issue of humanisation, where one could resist" (hooks, 1990, p. 384), provides a useful framework for analysis of the Pose and Pride events. For hooks, homeplace was a haven, a place of healing and affirmation where black women engaged in domesticity to ward off despair, and counteracted the damaging effects of racist American society across the centuries. These homeplaces with their revelry and celebration are a "site of redress" (Nash, 2013, p. 15) for this affective community in particular. The parties hosted by WAfE are a "necessary resistance" (hooks, 1990, p. 387), a temporary homeplace for the attendees, that is revived at every subsequent party. Scholars like Abu-Lughod (1990) and Vinthagen & Johansson (2013)have explored how resistance can be creative and subtle, taking unexpected forms in order to challenge power.It could be argued that my participants engage in queer "everyday resistance" (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013) by hosting and going to these parties.

Since 2018 the LGBTQ community in Lusaka has hosted a Pride event. Zelipa remarks:

> We had two [Prides] and it became a thing … the first year [2018] we did it we just kind of wanted to try it out and see how they [the LGBTQ community] respond to the idea. I think people were very cautious, scared, stayed together in a group. But I mean it went well, we had I think maybe 40 people at the first one.

Sampa, who attended the same Pride, provided her perspective as a guest:

> It was super fun. It was really just a small gathering. People hung out in groups. There was food, music, poetry. Very low key. I would definitely go to another one. I met someone there [i.e. another LBQ woman].

[23]*Pose* is an American television show set in 1980s New York with a cast of queer men and trans women. The action centres on the voguing and underground gay balls the characters compete in, as well as how they manage their houses, earn a living through sex work and grapple with the rising HIV/AIDS crisis.

For participants like Sampa and Katendi who use social media rarely, these events are one of the primary ways they encounter other LBQ women and without them they risk being isolated.

News of the first Pride spread and at the second iteration the following year there were about 150 people and some attendees "travelled from other towns just to come", according to Zelipa. In 2019 a Queermas[24] was also held which was successful too. Guests brought presents for each other and it took place at Zelipa's private residence, meaning it was smaller than the other events. She hopes it will become an annual occurrence. For the Pride events they managed to get a grant from The Other Foundation[25] to cover costs. Some small cash grants have been provided by other international NGOs to help with the costs of running the other events. Although these events are popular within this community, they are not large enough yet to attract media attention.

Organising these events involves sophisticated strategising; usually a level of secrecy about where and when the event is taking place and the exact nature of the event is maintained. WAfE must ensure guests are safe, the location is secure and make sure their allies are aware of the event beforehand. She elaborates:

> … we just try to educate people [i.e. party guests]: if we're having a gathering and we share details like location don't share them with anybody else. When we're having the events you can take pictures but share them after the event is over. We've worked for a number of years with some police officers that are friendly and some lawyers. So if we're having a huge gathering we usually just give them a heads up. Then they can be ready in case we need some help. … if anyone asks, it's just a party. We're just hanging out, chilling, it's not a gay party. We usually try and send out those messages when we're bringing people together.

Zelipa describes how members are encouraged not to refer to the events as LBQ-focused to outsiders, even though in actuality they are. "We're just hanging out, chilling, it's not a *gay* party" (emphasis added) indicates the kind of compromises that the respondents have adopted to survive in a homophobic context. The party-goers' sexual orientation makes them subject to punishment and to evade scrutiny they must disavow the political and subversive nature of their gatherings. This strategic denial helps them to circumvent societal constraints on their behaviour.

These parties are dependent on a delicate balance of multiple stakeholders and crucial information and sometimes this balance cannot be maintained. In 2021 Pride, a party which was to be held on the 26th of June, was cancelled owing to security concerns. The existence of the event was leaked to the general public on Twitter on the 13th of June. A bisexual woman intended to attend Pride and her boyfriend tweeted jokingly about his uncertainty surrounding her desire to attend the event. According to my key informants this tweet spread like wildfire on Zambian Twitter and even became a topic of discussion offline. The tweet as it was posted in the Queer Voices group appears below.

[24]Queermas is an event that takes place near Christmastime and is popular with LGBTQ communities across the world. As queer people often have difficult relationships with their families, the event celebrates chosen family with a Christmas dinner or lunch party setting with friends (ICONIQ, 2019).
[25]The Other Foundation is an NGO based in South Africa "dedicated to advancing human rights in Southern Africa with a particular focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Southern Africa" (The Other Foundation, n.d.).

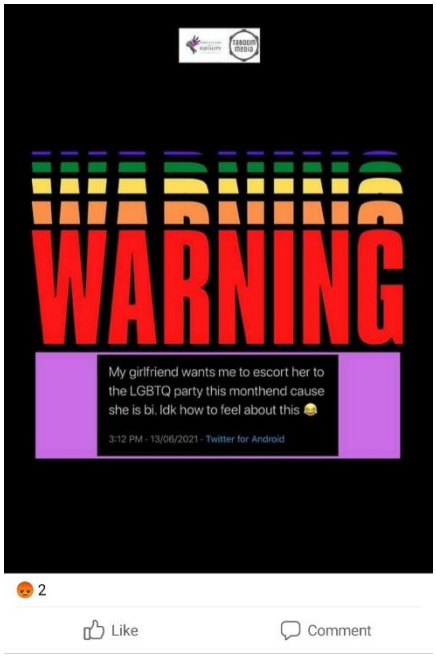


Figure 4: 14th June 2021 post from the Queer Voices Facebook group.

The administrators added the "warning" graphic and cautioned group members about the need to keep LGBTQ parties clandestine. A few days later WAfE decided to postpone and then cancel the event entirely. Because its existence had been made public, there were fears that if the event were to go on as planned, the police would raid it and a spectacle would be made of the LGBTQ community. In addition, because 2021 was an election year and homophobia is often used by political leaders to win votes, there was a concern that force may be used against guests to convey the Zambian president at the time, Edgar Chagwa Lungu's homophobic stance[26]. This unfortunate security breach reminds us of "the utter fragility of these semisecret worlds" (Dave, 2015, p.611). The Zambian LGBTQ community was disappointed by the cancellation of Pride but comments underneath the Facebook post, reiterated that personal safety for the potential guests was more important.

This chapter has explored how the participants' desire to connect with others like them and how they achieve or sometimes fail at this. In speaking to the participants one can feel "the[ir] need and desire to nurture each other" in a way that is "not pathological but redemptive" (Lorde, 2012, p. 109). This quote by Lorde comes from her influential essay, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" and the participants are breaking down the master's house of normative sexuality with myriad tools – NGO-led support initiatives, digital utopias, homeplace construction through parties and LBQ romantic and sexual relationships. They express and act on these desires, "to nurture each other" (Lorde, 2012, p.109) at parties, in online social media platforms and privately. It can be argued that a politics of love and care underpins this affective community. But sometimes love is not enough and they fail, or they are compromised by internal prejudices or external pressures. In these queer failures, one can observe a cruel optimism at play that highlights the participants' resilience and capacity for hope and ingenuity. This everyday activism and quotidian resistance speaks to a spirited clandestine and nascent subcultural community that is not yet fully established.

[26] In 2019, Lungu encouraged Zambians to "reject homosexuality" and inferred homosexuality and related similar identities were "alien practices in Zambia" (Lusaka Times, 2019).

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored how LBQ women and female-bodied non-binary people in Lusaka, Zambia access support and build community in a context where their sexual identity and practice is criminalised by the state and denigrated by society. First, I investigated the sociocultural expectations imposed on my interlocuters and the nature of the society they lived in, in order to situate the participants' gender and sexual orientation within broader ideas of Zambian nationhood, womanhood and heterosexuality. By tracing those contours and the effect of anti-LGBTQ legislation and conservative Christian beliefs on the group, I observed that they were largely invisibilised as LBQ women and non-binary people.

Second, I delved into what erasure, invisibility and visibility meant in practical and emotional terms for my key informants. The participants had shared identities and declared themselves to be part of a "community". Yet my inquiry found that the so-called community felt nebulous to some. It was home to competing opinions and prejudices which created divisions in the community. The dynamics of class also impacted how different participants were able to access the community. Similarly, participants' personal appearance and political stances impacted how society treated them and thus their perceptions of invisibility and visibility. The homophobia directed at them was heterogeneous as was their understanding of it and reaction to it. Intersectionality, as a theoretical frame was able to account for the complexity of their experiences.

Third, I analysed what support, care and community meant to the key informants, finding that they valued a combination of digital counterpublics and in-person support. The participants felt they needed support in different aspects of life, including mental health, sexual health and with respect to the social. Some desired support that would increase solidarity amongst LBQ women and female-bodied non-binary people and address the fragmentation of the community. There was an overarching sense from respondents that they needed support tailored to the intersections of their gender identity and sexual identity to rectify the multiple marginalisation to which they were subject. As I showed in Chapter Three, when Musonda was told by a doctor: "Your sex is not risky, so you can't [go on PrEP]", there is clearly a need for support (in this case healthcare) founded in an understanding of the lives of women of this unique subjectivity.

Online I discovered that the participants of this study were not passive users of globalised social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. Instead, they used the functionality of the various applications to create secure digital communities where they could celebrate their shared hopes and desires, whether political or romantic. An ethic of love and care underpinned the participants' community building efforts. They displayed a cruelly optimistic affective attachment to Zambian society, which was the originator of much of their suffering. Cruel optimism galvanised their queer world-making through parties and NGO-run support structures for LBQ people. The parties and socialising were a source of real hope and enjoyment for the participants and the organisers were able to hold them without state interference, by wielding strategically the invisibility of the attendees and spreading information along covert networks.

Despite this, both online activity and in-person events entailed an element of danger: some participants were outed to family and friends because they were open about their sexual orientation online; the Pride 2021 party was cancelled because details of the event were leaked to outsiders. The transient fragile nature of queer publics was evident. These occurrences make clear that the public and the private, visibility and invisibility, and online and offline, are not distinct but shifting realms that overlap, affecting how LBQ Zambians socialise with each other. It also highlights the ways in which no matter how marginalised certain groups are, they always retain a measure of agency to push back against oppressive structures.

This thesis troubles the mainstream narrative of Zambia as a cisgender heterosexual Christian nation; it shows gender variance and sexual diversity among Zambians despite the aforementioned constraints. Zambian nationhood is an exclusionary project. Myths of cisgender and heterosexual

primacy are enforced by legislation and law enforcement but more commonly and perhaps more effectively by social pressure and "policing" by laypeople – families, friends and strangers. This study helps expand ideas of what it means to be a Zambian woman and to pursue alternative, that is, queer subjectivities and socialities. It also rejects the overwhelming assumption that there are only Zambian men and woman, when there are Zambian non-binary people as well. It raises questions as to whether Zambian citizenship is really available to all its people, if people with queer identities are erased in the nation's conception, are subject to political suppression and have their rights denied. The political desires of the participants also gesture to various futures LBQ Zambians imagine for themselves and indicate how struggles for civil rights for sexual minorities in the country may unfold.

This study shows how Zambian LBQ people disrupt global trends in queerness in some ways while conforming to them in others. My participants used Western conceptions of queerness to articulate their identities; some of these guided how they managed romantic relationships as well. Media and language created overseas helped inspire their ideas of queer utopia. This suggests that globalisation and the circulation of Western cultural output remains popular in post-colonial societies, because of easy availability and continued US cultural dominance. But also because many metropolitan queer Africans are forbidden or constrained from creating their own queer creative output.

One of the implications of this study is that more research into queer sexualities in Zambia needs to be urgently undertaken. This is necessary to expand knowledge about Zambia in particular and the archive of African sexualities more generally. Queer community building is often fraught and communities do not always coalesce easily. Research must account for a recognition of the agendas of various actors within communities and how differences and tensions shape the very communities individuals claim to be a part of. There's a need to complicate understandings of the lives of contemporary queer subjects, female subjects, and non-binary subjects, in the wake of the post-colonial African state, who tends to persecute queer sexualities to promote a heterosexist national project with rigid gendered social roles. In addition, although transgender and non-binary identities are often intertwined with queer sexualities, they have distinct specificities which deserve dedicated research in the Zambian context. Further research should also attempt to decentre health, in its narrow conception of alleviating disease, to balance out the wealth of African sexualities research that uses HIV/AIDS and other illnesses as a starting point for understanding our continent's people. Likewise, ideas of resistance need to be broadened, in order for research to account for the myriad, at times subtle ways LGBTQ Africans resist state-sponsored homophobia, outside of rights discourses, in a meaningful fashion.

Appendix A: Questions for participants

Please could you tell me your age, your gender and how long you've been living in Lusaka?

What class grouping would you consider yourself to be part of (e.g. working class, middle class, upper class/elite)?

What level of education do you have?

Do you work? If so what is your profession?

Who do you live with?

Are you on good terms with the people you live with?

Have you 'come out' to your family?

To your knowledge is anyone else in your family gay?

If your family know about your sexual orientation, how did they react?

If you haven't come out to anyone, why?

Are you single or do you have a partner?

Are you dating currently?

In general, who do you find yourself attracted to?

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Do you know other Zambian women who describe themselves in the same way?

Do you socialise with them?

Do you feel that words like lesbian, bisexual and/or queer apply to you?

Are you open about your sexuality with other people outside your family?

Do you have any queer Zambian friends online or in real life?

Do you use social media?

Do you use social media to meet other LGBTQ+ locally?

Would you say that you have ever experienced discrimination due to your sexual orientation?

How would you describe your physical appearance and the way you dress?

Have you ever considered yourself to be butch or femme, a mixture of both or neither?

Have you ever experienced any workplace discrimination because of the way you dress?

What do you think about Zambian society's attitudes to homosexuality, in particular queer women?

Considering the stigma surrounding homosexuality would you like to continue living in Zambia?

Have you ever tried to apply for asylum overseas because of persecution or discrimination in Zambia?

Do you ever feel yourself taking on certain gender roles when you interact with other women in a sexual or romantic setting?

How would you describe your gender identity? Has this changed over time?

Do you ever engage in sex of any kind with other LGBTQ+ people?

If you have not yet, would you like to pursue sexual and romantic relationships with other women in the future?

When you are facing difficult situations and need help who do you turn to?

Are your primary healthcare providers aware of your sexual orientation?

Have you ever used any professional support services for queer people in Zambia?

Are you part of any online groups centred around homosexuality that provide you with support?

Would you consider yourself a religious person?

Do you attend church?

Does your church ever address the topic of homosexuality or discuss LGBTQ+ people? If so what are their teachings?

Have you been to any LGBTQ+ focused events? If so what was your experience of them like?

Do you think Zambian society has certain expectations for women? If so what are they?

Have you ever experienced pressure to get married?**Appendix B: Consent Form**

Project Name: Queer Women in Lusaka: Care, Community and Support

Name of researcher: Efemia Chela

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 the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded for exclusive use by the researcher	YES	NO

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

…… (signature)
……(name of person seeking consent)
…… (date)

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