

**'NOW YOU SEE ME, NOW YOU DON'T' – A STUDY OF THE POLITICS OF
VISIBILITY AND THE SEXUAL MINORITY MOVEMENT IN KENYA**

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

This study explores the varied ways sexual minority organisations in Kenya negotiate their choices, decisions and actions when determining how, when, and why to be publicly visible or retreat from visibility. This they have to do in the context of the threats of retribution on the part of Kenyan state leaders to their efforts to protect sexual minority rights. Sexual minority organising carries the risk of verbal abuse and the threat of arrest and other retribution. In spite of this, sexual minorities have organised themselves into publicly visible social movement organisations over the last ten years. In addition to the hostility of the Kenyan state, these organisations operate within the context of the uneven situation with regard to the constraints or otherwise of organising as sexual minorities between the Global South and North. The situation is further complicated by the role of donors, who bring their own experiences and agendas from the Global North, not always appropriately, into African contexts. Amid such varied responses to sexual minority organising, how, when, and why do Kenyan social movement organizations become publicly visible or retreat from visibility?

To recognise the various forces that influence (in)visibility choices that sexual minority organisations have to negotiate, I used sociologist James M. Jasper's (2006) concept of "strategic dilemma". Sexual minority social movement organisations field strategic dilemmas when they strategise around whether and how to become visible, modify their public profile, or forgo political opportunities. To understand the micro-political dynamics of how sexual minority social movement organisations negotiated such strategic dilemmas of visibility and invisibility, I analysed 200 newspaper articles and sexual minority organisational documents and conducted 12 in-depth interviews with staff, members and leaders of sexual minority social movement organisations.

Ultimately the findings of this thesis centre on the fluidity of visibility and invisibility as was experienced by Kenyan sexual minority organisations. (In)visibility was experienced in diverse ways as a process that included a series of steps that do not have absolute values nor are they necessarily coherent in different time and space. My findings advance social movement theorizing by demonstrating the importance of studying social movements in the global South. In addition, my findings contribute to postcolonial feminist and queer theorizing by showing how marginalised sexual and gender minorities in Kenya struggled strategically to assert their democratic inclusion in the state.

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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
EASRI	East Africa Sexual Rights Initiative
GALCK	Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IGLHRC	International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission
ILGA	International Lesbian and Gay Association
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex
MWA	Minority Women in Action
NACC	National AIDS Control Council
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation
NSM	New Social Movement
PPT	Political Process Theorizing
SMOs	Social Movement Organisations
TRP	The Rainbow Project
VCT	Voluntary Counselling and Testing

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Introduction

Ahm...you know,...people tend to think activism must be done loudly... [pauses]... as in on the streets or in front of journalists...I mean, look at how other organisations are doing it...what they do not understand is that our [sexual minority organisations] situation is different...I mean, for obvious reasons we cannot be on the streets...but we are at other venues and we are making our noise there...ahh, I guess what I am trying to say is just because you do not see us on the streets making noise does not mean we are not working (Interview, 17 November 2008).

The above quote illustrates well the central topic of this thesis. This quote indicates that while the socio-political environment may not be favourable for sexual minority¹ organising, the movement's visibility and/or invisibility is not always forced, there are times when sexual minority organisations strategically plan to be visible or invisible. The quote from one of the interviews intimated that, in spite of much of the academic literature indicating that sexual minority movements must evolve in the direction of public visibility if they are to succeed, there just might be an alternative story. This study is about the visibility dilemmas sexual minority organisations grapple with in Kenya. It is their story of how they experience visibility and invisibility in diverse ways.

The sexual minority movement in Kenya is small and, for most part, remains visible to a select audience. However, January 2007 was a turning point; a massive crowd of sexual minorities used the World Social Forum as a place to “come out”. The tent, dubbed ‘Q-Spot’, organised by the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK) was the most sought after tent in the entire forum. The presence of a well-organised group of sexual minorities provoked quick and hostile media response from the general public and religious organisations that never could imagine such a group existed and condemned them as immoral and unlawful.

¹ While a plethora of terms exist and have existed since the pre colonial times in African languages for a variety of sexual patterns outside what is considered heterosexual, there is not a single inclusive term of all minority sexual patterns (Murray, preface). Nor for that matter does such a term exist in English and so in order to summarize the cumbersome list of possibilities, the term sexual minority is used. Although this term is limited in its inclusiveness – and barely touches upon the complexity of sexual patterns found throughout traditional and contemporary African societies, I use it in this project to refer to those sexual minorities whose basic human rights are not included in the greater human rights movement in Kenya. I do so however in lieu of a term that would encompass all variations of healthy sexuality without imposing upon them western models of sexual identities.

Anti-sodomy laws feature prominently in many penal systems in Africa. In Kenya, not only are there repressive legal provisions against gays and lesbians, but even the existence of gay and lesbian organisations – their basic right to association – is endangered. Public gatherings of sexual minorities are almost inconceivable under the pressure of law and state homophobia. The few attempts of gays and lesbians to engage in public political manifestations, always in coalition with, and to some extent under, the protection of other, more mainstream groups, have been met with intimidation.

Despite efforts by the state and members of the public to keep sexual minorities out of public view, sexual minorities have transformed themselves into visible social movement organisations (SMOs) at certain times over the past decade. By SMO, I mean “a complex, or formal, organisation which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement ... and attempts to implement those goals” (McCarthy and Zald 1977:1218). This thesis examined the strategies sexual minority SMOs in Kenya used to become publicly visible or withdraw from visibility. The act of promoting itself as an organisation to different audiences, including the public, constituents, the media and the state, constitutes “visibility,” whereas withdrawing from target audiences constitutes “invisibility.” “Strategies” consist of the choices that SMOs make in the pursuit of visibility or invisibility with audiences and constituencies (Gamson 1975).

I selected Kenya as the place where to conduct my research, for while the current government seems to be unconcerned about interfering with a range of rights relating to gender identity and sexual orientation, a number of factors influence the life choices sexual and gender minorities make. These factors fall under three categories: state sanctioned homophobia expressed in terms of laws that prohibit homosexuality and tolerance of verbal and physical homophobic violence by the media and public; global variance in regard to sexual minority opportunities and constraints; and, the availability of northern funding that supports sexual minority organising. Amid such different responses to sexual minority organising, how, when and why do Kenyan sexual minority social movement organisations (SMOs) become publicly visible or retreat from visibility?

As this study will show, these factors play a big part in determining how sexual minority SMOs navigate between visibility and invisibility when making strategic choices around: which spaces to occupy and how to occupy them; how to avoid the over-exposure of the

media which also influences how SMOs attract and recruit members; and, how and when to choose which campaigns they will be involved.

To answer the central question this thesis asks and to understand how the above factors influence the (in)visibility of sexual minority SMOs, I turned to sociologist James M. Jasper's (2006) concept of "strategic dilemma." Sexual minority SMOs encounter many strategic dilemmas as they try to find optimal ways to achieve movement and organisational goals (Jasper 2006). Jasper defines a strategic dilemma as the predicament of selecting between "two or more options, each with a long list of risks, costs and potential benefits" (2006:1). Sexual minority social movement organisations encounter strategic dilemmas of visibility or invisibility when they decide whether and how to become visible, modify their public profile, or withdraw from public view. This dilemma can be especially salient for sexual minority SMOs that operate in socio-political contexts hostile to sexual and gender minorities because they confront opposition that may harm members or hamstring organisational plans (Palmberg 1999). The use of a strategic dilemma approach was key for it afforded me the flexibility of tracing how decision making and deliberation within SMOs about becoming visible or invisible to certain audiences or constituencies unfolded (Jasper 2006). This approach also kept me from treating visibility and invisibility as unchanging qualities of SMOs.

To understand the micro-political dynamics of how sexual minority SMOs navigate a series of strategic dilemmas that involve issues of visibility toward audiences or constituencies, I analysed 200 newspaper articles and sexual minority SMO documents and conducted 12 in-depth interviews with staff, members and leaders of three sexual minority SMOs: Minority Women in Action (MWA) - Kenya's first sexual minority SMO that focused on women who have sex with women; Ishtar - the only sexual minority organisation that exclusively addressed the sexual health of men who have sex with men; and the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK) - a coalition body that brings together sexual minority organisations in Kenya.

In this thesis, I explore the varied (in)visibility strategic dilemmas these three SMOs encountered as they tried to find optimal ways to present themselves to target constituents and audiences specifically: the sexual minority community, partner organisations, media, the state and international donors.

Significance of the Study: Why Study Sexual Minority Movements?

Visibility is a useful strategy and theoretical orientation that sexual minority movements in the global South have embraced (Chabot and Duyvendak 2002). Just as publicity functions differently in distinct political fields (Beissinger 1999), sexual minority persons around the world experience visibility and invisibility in diverse ways.

Many scholars have examined the production of visibility of sexual minority persons as individuals and as a group, primarily in the North. These processes include promulgating positive messages about sexual minorities in the media, which “can prepare the ground for gay civil rights protection” (Hennessy 1994:31-32). A large body of scholarship shows how performing sexualities publicly creates spaces for fluid social and sexual identities (Butler 1990). Geographers, in particular, have studied how sexual minorities in north America and Western Europe mask their sexual identities to avoid harassment or violence in heterosexualized public settings (Steinbugler 2005). Research on the queering of spaces in the Ivory Coast (Nguyen 2005) and Thailand (Sinnott 2004) expands existing research on sexual minority identities outside north America and western Europe, the use of public space by sexual minority persons and groups, and the processes by which sexual minorities opt to become visible or withdraw from visibility (Corteen 2002).

Though these studies make important contributions to the growing literature on sexual minorities’ performances of identities, the conceptual opacity of visibility still beleaguers many studies of sexual minorities’ publicity. What happens after a sexual minority becomes visible? Does the performance of visibility end with a permanent state of visibility? Unless scholars address these questions, the assumption that after “coming out” publicly, sexual minorities in the global North and South remain out, goes unquestioned. Visibility for sexual minorities becomes a default *outcome* or *accomplishment* dispersed across time and space, rather than an unfolding social process, strategy, or performance that takes place within a confined time and space. Sexual minorities’ public visibility may be a political victory in north America or western Europe, but regarding the concept only as an accomplishment obscures the processes by which sexual minorities elsewhere do or do not emerge publicly and the obstacles they face in so doing.

Just as scholars ignore the processes by which sexual minorities became and remain visible (or not), they also disregard how sexual minority SMOs become visible. The “struggle to be

seen” (Guidry 2003:493) transcends movements for social change, yet few studies interrogate how social movements cultivate visibility, even though it is crucial to an organisation’s ability to broker relations between unconnected activists or groups or obtain funding or support from international donors. Studying how SMOs cultivate public visibility or retreat from public view, can shed light on how activists prioritize and tailor their messages for certain audiences. This is especially crucial in hostile socio-political environments where the visibility of sexual minority SMOs makes for a good target for state and non-state actors opposed to such organising.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter One contextualises the study. Although this thesis explores how sexual minority SMOs navigate between visibility and invisibility, it is in putting the movement into some historical and social context that the resilience of these SMOs, and the manner and strategies they employed to stay in a relatively unwelcoming environment – their agency- can be uncovered. This chapter looks at national, regional and international actors, who play a major role, not only by influencing sexual minority SMOs decisions on whether to be visible or invisible, but also when the SMOs emerge from invisibility, these forces play a role in influencing how visibility will be presented. This thesis accepts that sexual minority SMOs have always had a public and private face, but suggests that the assumption that they must always remain publicly visible renders them invisible.

Chapter Two conceptualises the study and outlines a theoretical framework against which the data is analysed and discussed. The chapter presents a review of social concepts that do not specifically focus on sexual minority organising but instead look at a range of theoretical ideas which will facilitate an informed and critical understanding of the empirical data. Three theoretical perspectives: postcolonial feminist, queer and social movement theories underpin the analysis of the data and the discussion of the findings.

Chapter Three describes the methodology adopted in this study. It first looks at the theoretical perspective that justifies the methods used, then goes on to discuss the process of determining and accessing the sample which informed the study. The chapter also details the collection of data and the interview procedure, as well as, recounts the post-interview phase of the research process. Other matters concerning the position of the researcher in the research and ethical considerations are discussed here.

Having established that a range of factors determine how variable organisational visibility and invisibility can be, Chapter Four uses the strategic dilemma approach to examine how strategic choices about visibility unfolded differently for the three SMOs. The chapter seeks to address three questions: first, how does state hostility and repression affect how, where and when sexual minority SMOs choose to become visible to different audiences? Second, how does the presence and possibility of funding from northern donors influence sexual minority SMOs decisions to be visible or invisible? Third, how does global structural unevenness shape the visibility and invisibility of sexual minority organising? In using primary data collected through intensive in-depth interviews, this chapter gives voice to members, staffs and leaders of sexual minority SMOs themselves thereby bringing a rich description of the SMOs everyday (in)visibility dilemmas and how they navigated them.

I conclude my examination of Kenyan sexual minority SMOs in Chapter Five by revisiting the contributions my dissertation makes to the bodies of theory I examined that is, social movement, postcolonial feminist and queer theories.

Chapter One

Contextualising the Movement

It is not right that a man should go with another man or a woman with another woman. It is against African tradition and biblical teachings. I will not shy away from warning Kenyans against the dangers of this scourge. Statement made by Former President of Kenya, Daniel arap Moi (East African Standard, 1999).

A decade after former President Moi made the above statement there is no assurance that the current crop of Kenyan top politicians may no longer make such discriminatory statements. Sexing the nation is an integral part of the Kenyan state's management of sexuality. In sexing the nation, the state undertakes a process of, not only assigning biological sex (for example, by requiring all citizens to identify their sex/gender on birth certificates, identification papers and passports), but also takes a keen interest in the sexual activities of bodies found within its borders. This is expressed through legislation and public political utterances. In these spaces, the state actively seeks to subdue, subsume or erase the voices of sexualised Others as a way of ensuring legitimacy of their own claims to represent the Nation. Such claims, however, are fragile and frequently contested.

The first major public spectacle that showed the state's interest in the management of Kenyans sexuality was in 1995 when Kenyan women rights activists returned from the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, in Beijing, China. During this period, it would have been impossible for sexual minorities to declare their sexual orientation publicly: the taboos were too strong and the fears too great. Sexual minorities existed and a few could be found within the civil society especially the women's movement. Kenya has a long history of vibrant women's rights organising, and a strong contingent of women attended the Beijing conference as Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) representatives and government delegates. On their return, however, all found that stereotypes about what had gone on in Beijing were already starting to enshroud their work. Sexual rights and sexual orientation had been high on the list of controversial issues tackled in Beijing. The prominence of topics around sexuality drew sensationalist media and public attention. The Kenyan media primarily focused on the lesbians among the attendees, particularly publicising a lesbian rights march held near the conference site. Articles also singled out and identified Kenyans who were

present in Beijing, suggesting they were lesbian, in what some saw as a barely concealed threat.

The threat was not idle. Legal prohibition of male homosexuality in Kenya dates from British colonial rule and criminal sanctions are frequently enforced against practising male homosexuals. Kenya's Penal Code contains two clauses on homosexual acts. Consensual sex between men² is criminalised by Section 162, 3 and 5 of the Penal Code of Kenya under 'carnal knowledge against the order of nature' and 'gross indecency'. Despite the fact that this is a law rarely enacted; it is a law that has been used primarily to control sexual minorities who are harassed and falsely arrested on different grounds such as public nuisance.

The Kenyan government interpreted the presence of Kenyan women at the Beijing conference as a threat to the Nation. This was evident in the former President's public remarks when the delegates returned. He questioned what Kenyan attendees had been doing at a "gigantic gathering for lesbians". A newspaper article headlined "Moi says no to unAfrican sins" recounted that "the government rejects the immoral culture of homosexuality and lesbianism raised during the Beijing women's conference." "We Kenyans have rejected resolutions made in Beijing;" Moi was further quoted as declaring that "words like lesbianism and homosexuality do not exist in African language" (The Daily Nation 1995). According to President Moi, Kenya had no room or time for homosexuals and lesbians. Homosexuality is against African norms and traditions, and even in religion it is considered a great sin. Like President Moi, Kenya's first President, Jomo Kenyatta, once claimed that there is no African word for homosexuality. This proves, he argued, that "homosexuality is foreign and totally unAfrican" (The Daily Nation 1998). Kenyatta's and Moi's opinions reflect a disapproval of sexual minorities that runs broad and deep in Kenyan society.

After the Beijing uproar, President Moi let the issue lie for some time. In 1997, however, a new controversy on sexual minorities consumed the Kenyan press. In what was billed as a 'lesbian syndicate,' three women were publicly accused of running a "lesbian sex ring" in Kenyan secondary schools. The three women were employees of the United Nations Environment Program; one of the three was Kenyan, and was named as the ex-wife of a cabinet minister. The other two were labelled as "European" in press articles. The articles stressed the link between "perversion" and the "lesbian-infested UN" amid calls for the

² And possibly between women, although this remains unclear

Europeans to be deported (The East African Standard 1997; The Daily Nation 1997). According to an article titled “UN Link in Lesbian Sex Ring” the three were accused of “supplying free hard drugs to [female] secondary school children before luring them into the syndicate” (The East African Standard 1997).

A storm of sensational headlines filled newspapers. “Arrest This Sex Pest!” one demanded, noting that the Minister of Education called for “Action on the top lesbian syndicate ‘godmother’”. Others read “Ex-minister’s former wife supplied students for ‘love’ with elderly women” and “Schoolgirls in Lesbian Sex Trap” (The East African Standard 1997).

This trend set a pattern for future campaigns led by government officials, religious institutions, the media and public against sexual minorities. The strong social disapproval of homosexuality by the Kenyan state and the open hostility sexual minorities’ faced in public spaces was indicative of why the Kenyan sexual minority community remained invisible. The hostile socio-political environment made it impossible to visibly mobilise a sexual minority constituent.

Fear of government repression and loss of financial support from Christian or religious affiliated groups prevented many human rights organisations from identifying and openly supporting sexual minority initiatives. Other organisations, particularly women’s organisations, that may have been supportive of sexual minority rights, were not out of fear that openly supporting a sexual minority programme would threaten gains made in the women’s rights struggle. Furthermore, the criminalisation of homosexuality meant that groups supporting sexual minority rights were forced to operate invisibly, disguised under the banner of HIV and AIDS.

The lack of organisations that openly identified themselves as supporting sexual minority initiatives had far reaching effects on the sexual minority community. Those who identified themselves as sexual minorities and suffered human rights violations because of their sexuality often had no means for recourse and no support system. Likewise, it contributed to the invisibility of sexual minorities by encouraging the culture of silence and shame surrounding homosexuality which, in turn, further isolated an already marginalised segment of society.

The first real opportunity for Kenyan sexual minority cooperation presented itself in 2000 when Hivos, a Dutch development organisation, approached the Gay and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) to assist with the training of sexual minority organisations it was supporting in East Africa – namely Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Hivos felt that GALZ and The Rainbow Project (TRP) in Namibia represented useful examples of how sexual minority organising is possible in hostile climates. GALZ subsequently hosted a seven-day training course in October of that year, labelled The Africa Exchange Programme (AEP), for five East African sexual minority groups that were only visible to donors and a few members of the sexual minority community. Much of the discussion centred on what sexual minority groups should visibly organise around, and more specifically, on whether they should present themselves openly as sexual minorities or disguise some of their activities under the banner of HIV and AIDS. At the end of the AEP training, the organisations present formed a loose coalition called African Solidarity through Sexual Rights Task Force (ASSERT) and made plans to continue trainings and discussions in Namibia. However, as with many international projects of this nature, the main organisers became distracted by more immediate national concerns and the programme failed.

A second attempt to organise sexual minorities occurred between 2005 and 2006. Prior to this period, sexual minority organising was weak due to lack of funding. In 2003, northern funders, mainly HIVOs, had stopped funding sexual minority SMOs when they learned that some organisations had obtained funding under possibly false pretences. Donors had hired an independent researcher to investigate where their funds went and which sexual minority SMOs were or were not legitimate. Thanks to the independent researcher, donors discovered that SMOs had been submitting annual reports that “could not be true” (Fieldnotes, 3 December 2008).

In October 2005, northern funders, namely the Ford Foundation Office of Eastern Africa and HIVOS in partnership with Urgent Action Fund Africa (UAF-A), turned to southern African sexual minority activists to help solve the problem in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Donors invited the directors of Behind the Mask and The Rainbow Project to act as consultants with budding sexual minority SMOs and disseminate the donor-hired researcher’s findings among east African activists. Several meetings further coordinated by UAF-Africa from March 2006 led to the first sexual minority conference on sexuality hosted in Nairobi in June 2006 (Urgent Action Fund 2007). Following the conference, sexual minority individuals and

organisations decided to form an umbrella body, the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK), to coordinate sexual minority organising in Kenya (Urgent Action Fund 2007). Donors had also been instrumental in building strategic organisational allies for the sexual minority community by encouraging human rights SMOs to mainstream sexual minority issues into their agenda. Most of these allies had been involved in one or more donor convenings on sexual minority rights in east Africa (Horn 2008).

To outsiders, foreign donors might seem unusually interested in investing and cultivating the sexual minority movement in east Africa, as evidenced by their recruitment of southern African activists to work with burgeoning sexual minority SMOs. Donors assumed that sexual minority activists from east Africa would listen to, and work well with, activists from southern Africa, presumably because of their common collective identity as Africans. Donors also supposed that east African sexual minority SMOs could learn from the success of southern African sexual minority SMOs that were able to organise and remain highly visible amid state homophobia and repression (Urgent Action Fund 2007). This regional unevenness led to increased donor interest in African countries where sexual minority organising was invisible with the aim of assisting sexual minorities from their repressed social positions through political action. The fact that in southern Africa publicly visible sexual minority organising had been possible in the midst of state homophobia and repression made east Africa's hostile political atmosphere seem ripe for sexual minority activism. This regional imbalance put a lot of pressure on east African sexual minority organisations keen to replicate the political organising success of sexual minority SMOs in southern Africa.

While the emergence of vibrant sexual minority organising in southern Africa presented opportunities for sexual minority SMOs in Kenya to link with regional networks, the global political climate had changed considerably presenting its own set of challenges and opportunities to sexual minority organising. Among the barriers to sexual minorities' ability to organise included the global economy that made communication easier with the West unlike national and regional communication and the vision of international human rights groups as merciful saviours. These two factors meant that many sexual minority groups expended most of their energies wooing international funders instead of looking to build their national or regional alliances. Although many closeted groups conducted important work quietly, some emerged for the singular purpose of tapping into foreign funding and attending foreign conferences. At times, this extended to explicit acts of fraud whereby individuals,

under the guise of spurious organisations, claimed acts of oppression in order to access funds for personal gain. This led to division and suspicion where established sexual minority groups in Kenya sometimes voiced scepticism about the emergence of new sexual minority organisations, to the extent that some organisations were seen as groups of heterosexuals jumping on the sexual minority bandwagon to access foreign cash.

In addition, the increasing spate of those seeking asylum in the West on grounds of persecution related to their sexual orientation also gave the general impression, in some quarters, that sexual minority organising is largely geared towards opening up escape routes from the country. Rising donor interest in sexual minority organising also played a big role in the way sexual minority SMOs organised for attracting donor funding was key for organisational sustainability.

The presence of Northern donor's, and their interest in supporting sexual minority organising, however, also gave rise to state hostility strongly expressed in nationalistic terms. This support, interpreted as cultural imperialism, was seen to be driven by the North through donors who were believed to be the generators of sexual minority identities, ideas and organising through provision of funding, information and resources for political organising. The fact that Kenyan sexual minority SMOs had uncritically adopted Western labels of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) had been interpreted by the government and public as a result this foreign influence.

It is within this contradictory environment that sexual minority organisations in Kenya operated. An environment where socio-political and economic-structural factors create possibilities and/or foreclose options for the sexual minority SMOs. The situation described above shows that in Kenya, SMOs involved in marginalised politics, such as sexual and gender minority organising, struggle from a point of invisibility, due to state and public hostility. In spite of this, donor influence and global transformations make it possible for sexual minority SMOs to emerge from their position of invisibility. The seemingly contradictory positions sexual minority SMOs' exist, where they are usually invisible to the state and general public but visible to select audiences at a select time and space, indicates how visibility and invisibility, for these SMOs, is a manipulable condition that is strategically planned whenever possible.

Amid such complex organisational responses to visibility and invisibility how, when and why do Kenyan sexual minority SMOs choose when to be visible or to retreat from public view? This thesis looks at the strategic choices related to visibility and invisibility that informs sexual minority organising and the forces that influence these strategic choices. To fully understand how sexual minority SMOs make strategic choices about their visibility, a theoretical framework to help provide explanations for what emerges underpins the study. This conceptual framework is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Two

(In)visibility in Feminist, Queer and Social Movement Theorizing

Introduction

How groups manage to achieve public visibility remains a mystery for some scholars. Ruud Koopmans (2004) casts this question in the following way

On an average day in a random Western democracy, thousands of press statements are issued by a variety of parties, interest groups, and movement organisations, hundreds of demonstrations, meetings, strikes, vigils and other protests are staged, and numerous press conferences vie for the attention of the public and policy-makers (P.371).

This statement indicates the uphill struggle for groups to attain public visibility. However, very little organisational activity comes into public view (Blee and Currier 2005), if scholars take a strict view of the media controlling visibility in a top-down manner. By studying visibility and invisibility through SMOs' strategic choices, I hope to disrupt the assumption that events or issues only achieve public visibility in one way: through the media. Examining a range of strategies demonstrates how variable organisational visibility and invisibility can be.

SMOs often achieve public visibility when they take advantage of political opportunities. Koopmans (2004) uses political opportunity as a concept to describe how SMOs try to obtain media coverage or reach certain audiences as they manipulate opportunities to their advantage. Koopmans and Susan Olzak (2004) portray these opportunities as distinctly discursive because activists use the public sphere strategically to "communicate messages to fellow activists and political adherents" and "to gain crucial information about the actions and reactions of authorities, political opponents, allies and sympathizers" (p.199). This description demonstrates how SMOs may use the media strategically for gathering and disseminating information. Although Koopmans (2004) expressly focuses on visibility from the media perspective, I am more interested in examining visibility and invisibility from the perspective of SMOs.

Just as organisations may pursue public visibility at times, they may also pursue public invisibility. This is an unstated assumption in Koopmans' (2004) and Koopmans and Olzak's

(2004) discussions of organisation actors' pursuit of strategic public visibility. An SMO in a repressive socio-political context may eschew public visibility in favour of invisibility in order to avoid confrontations with a group that makes threats against the well-being of the organisation or its members or to concentrate on projects that do not necessarily require media attention (Earl 2003). Activists may decide that it is more judicious to wage their protest through backchannels by engaging in subtler cultural and political forms of resistance, such as "behind-the-scenes behaviours rather than public ones" (Earl 2003).

Connected to the need to be invisible, SMOs may construct interior spaces to allow members to withdraw from public scrutiny and plan their next moves safely. Such free, or safe, spaces "are environments in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue" (Evans and Boyte 1992:17). Safe spaces are variations of free spaces. They are likely more insular than free spaces, due in part to the feared repression that an SMO or individuals who possess a stigmatized identity face. Free or safe spaces are often unobtrusive and not readily observable by casually interested individuals because they are part of pre-existing groups or social institutions or are physically more inaccessible to public viewing (Morris 1984). Though some scholars question the utility of free and safe spaces as a concept (Emirbayer and Sheller 1999), Mai Palmberg (1999:267) regards safe spaces as key to the relationship between sexual minority SMOs and the sexual and gender minority community. For Palmberg (1999), safe spaces function as a precursor to political organising. She contends that organisations operate as a "safe space" for sexual minorities because they "provide meeting places and ...answer the psychological needs of insecure and harassed gays and lesbians" (p.267). SMOs may therefore operate as concrete safe physical spaces where sexual minorities can explore their sexual and gender identities.

Pursuing visibility may be an important overall strategy for sexual minority SMOs in Kenya since countering homophobia involves exposing it in multiple places: the state, social institution, public sphere, and private sphere (Koopmans 2004). At the same time, sexual minority SMOs may decide to recede from public visibility or limit their visibility so that they can pursue projects without harassment from the state or other opponents. To understand the complex socio-political environment within which sexual minority SMOs are embedded and how this environment affects how the SMOs experience visibility and

invisibility, I devised a conceptual framework that draws from theoretical perspectives that treat visibility and invisibility as tropes for social and political oppression.

In the next section, I examine three theoretical frameworks: feminist, queer and social movement theory. I used the work of feminist theorists to situate sexual minority organisations within a theoretical perspective that illuminates how visibility and invisibility can act as a conduit through which oppressed groups materialise publicly as groups with political agendas. This leads to the reflection that a sexual minority SMO, depending on how it navigates between visibility and invisibility, is able to survive an inhospitable social environment. One way of conceptualising this survival is through the idea of agency that resilient individuals, and groups, seem to have which, in turn, enables them to resist hostile environments. I turned to queer theory to explore and theorise how sexual minorities' individual-level visibility and invisibility impacted on their ability and willingness to organise. Social movement theory was also used in this study to understand how sexual minority SMOs devise and deploy strategies of visibility and invisibility to structure and restructure themselves.

Conceptual Framework

Postcolonial and African Feminist Theorizing

Postcolonial and northern feminist scholars share an interest in giving voice to women (of colour) in colonial and postcolonial contexts (Mohanty 2003). Postcolonial and northern feminist researchers have investigated how and why historical accounts silenced women and sexual minorities as political agents in the global South (Mohanty 2003). Silence is an analogous trope to invisibility in that histories have not treated women, and by extension, sexual minorities, in colonial and postcolonial societies as publicly visible subjects (Spivak 1998). Such silencing of women's experiences is sometimes duplicated in postcolonial scholarship. Postcolonial feminists have identified and tried to correct the masculinist bias of some postcolonial thought.

Just as postcolonial feminists locate and remedy gender biases in some postcolonial scholarship, they also identify and correct ethnocentric bias of some northern feminist theorizing. In this manner, postcolonial feminists decentre the United States and other northern countries as default countries of reference (Mohanty 2003). "Postcolonial feminist

theorizing” faults “Western feminist theorizing” for homogenizing women’s experiences and subjugation under the category of victimization (Mohanty 2003). In particular, Chandra Mohanty (2003) takes issue with Western feminism’s assumption that it holds the keys to deliverance of all “Third World women”. Uncovering the “ethnographic universalism” that plagues some feminist theorizing, Mohanty (2003) questions the appropriateness of the category of “women” because the use of the term as a “homogeneous category...robs [women in the Third World] of their historical and political agency” (p.39). For Mohanty (2003), feminist theorizing must be more sensitive to the multiple, interlocking oppressions women (of colour) in different countries face when making their experiences visible and recognise how women are agents of power and history in their own right. Feminist, historical, and sociological studies that examine women’s participation in anticolonial and nationalist struggles are examples of restoring women’s agency in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Understanding that women make decisions on their own behalf, albeit within a sometimes limited range, corrects the tendency of some feminist and postcolonial studies to treat women as the “site rather than the subjects of certain historical debates” (Loomba 1998:222). Postcolonial feminists recognise how “women are not just a symbolic space but real *targets* of colonialism and nationalist discourses” (Loomba 1998:222). This mode of inquiry is useful because it identifies how the agency of women, and potentially sexual minorities in postcolonial contexts, can redress persisting colonial inequalities.

Responding to the postcolonial challenge of self-representation, African feminists sought to re-define their position based on the continent’s historical realities of marginalisation, oppression and domination brought about by slavery, colonialism, racism, neo-colonialism and globalisation. This enabled African feminists to add their voices to the work of other feminists from the global South, who critique the eurocentrism of some “western feminists”. African feminist theorizing identified a range of nationalist, patriarchal and colonialist mechanisms that have rendered women invisible. Yet within African feminism(s), sexual minorities remain invisible. This is due to African feminists’ concerns about how state leaders and opponents of homosexuality use non-normative genders and sexualities to discredit feminism. “Managing” the visibility of feminism in Africa has appeared as a practical and theoretical concern for African feminists. Kenyan feminists, in particular, have been sensitive to the portrayal of feminist organising and the characterization of women’s rights in the country. The subordinate position of women in the society worked against

identification of homosexuality as an issue of concern for feminists were aware of the visibility problem that certain feminisms pose in traditional, indigenous African societies.

Homosexuality has been particularly problematic for some African feminists (Tamale 2003), as evidenced by how heterosexism and heteronormativity go unquestioned (Muthien 2003) in some African feminist theorizing. For example, Gwendolyn Mikell (1997:4) describes African feminism – in the singular – as being “distinctly heterosexual, pro-natal, and concerned with many ‘bread, butter, culture and power’ issues.” Such a heterosexist bias has rendered African women whose sexuality and gender do not map onto traditional gender dichotomies invisible. Homophobia thus becomes typical of some African feminisms and exclusionary practices are common for some African feminists when homosexuality emerges as a subject of debate (McFadden 1996). “When an attack is made on homosexuality in our presence, many women ...who ‘normally’ consider themselves tolerant (that definitive characteristic of African progressiveness), either participate in the attacks (they are perverts!; they are sick!; they are influenced by Whites!; etc) or they shy way” (McFadden 1996: viiii). For McFadden (1996), what angers some African feminists about female homosexuality is lesbians’ opting out of heterosexual family and community structures, which strikes them as betrayal. The privileging of individual sexuality over group responsibilities underscores some African feminists’ rejection of homosexuality as a barrier to feminist political organising (McFadden 1996). Maintaining a gender and heterosexual dichotomy becomes important to some African feminists. Some African feminists have however, initiated critiques of heterosexism and begun to support sexual minority organising (Tamale 2003; Machera 2004). In this manner, sexual minorities are becoming visible in potentially positive ways for African feminists, suggesting possible new alliances between sexual minority and feminist organising.

African and postcolonial feminist theorizing are critical to this study for they offer an incisive analysis about the interlocking mechanisms that render sexual minorities and women invisible and powerless. Invisibility may actually afford sexual minorities and women an advantage, by hiding their political organizing. However, equating the lack of political organizing on the part of oppressed groups to the nonexistence of sexual minorities is grossly inaccurate (Alexander 2005). Simply because political organising of women or sexual minorities is not readily publicly visible does not mean that it does not exist; activists may have to negotiate layers of public visibility in order to preserve their resources, and in some

extreme cases, their lives (Alexander 2005). Theories of agency and resistance are therefore an essential part of this theoretical framework for they sit well with, and are of particular significance to, the study of sexual minority SMOs. Enacting agency and being resilient implies that individuals, and groups, have more options than to passively accept detrimental circumstances. They can act both to lessen the effects of the problems and difficulties that beset them and to use the difficulty in such a way as to move on from it and create a better life. This is especially pertinent in framing this study as it allows for the possibility that sexual minority SMOs, even from a position of subordination and disadvantage, take action to allay invisibility.

In theoretical terms, this study's focus is on the enactment of agency in everyday life by sexual minority SMOs who have are sometimes forcefully confined and controlled to the point of being made almost invisible in the community in which they operate. One outcome, or expression, of that agency is the visibility of sexual minority SMOs, which is a form of resistance against the control and hegemony of the society that put and attempts to keep them in a subordinate (invisible) position. Resistance is essentially about opposition, usually to aspects of the superiority of the status quo. In the case of sexual minority SMOs, it is likely that they would oppose the dominance of heterosexuality. They would oppose the status quo that attempts to make them invisible. However, resistance theory also suggests that the purpose of such action is not only to struggle against the dominant ideology represented by the status quo, but to effect social change. For example, Giroux states that

Resistance has to be measured against the degree to which it contains the possibility of galvanising political struggle against the issues of power and social determination (Giroux 1983:111)

However, not every act of opposition has to be interpreted as resistance that seeks social change. Secondly, even those acts that may be construed as resistance may not necessarily be carried out as a deliberate attempt to effect social change but simply to have a better life outside of it. For example, sexual minority SMOs may eschew public visibility and not enthusiastically interact with the community in which they live simply to secure themselves from what they see as pressures to conform. Resistance is not always about social change, it can also be about self-emancipation. It is about securing the ability to act, even from a subordinate and inferior position within the status quo. It is about the freedom to reject and

defy the status quo without necessarily attempting to overturn it. In this sense, resistance is also about the exercise of power from a position of powerlessness.

African and postcolonial feminist theory provides useful analytic tools for my research because these modes of inquiry demonstrates how visibility and invisibility can serve as strategies for contesting power, such as through “invisible”, micro-level forms of protest that colonized persons performed (Spivak 1988). These theoretical perspectives illuminate how visibility and invisibility can act as a conduit through which oppressed groups, such as colonised indigenous groups, enact agency to materialize publicly as groups with political agendas and how they may begin to forge alliances with other oppressed groups.

Queer Theorizing

Queer theory, it might be argued, emerged from feminist theory. The necessity for the development of such a theory arose in the first place from the hegemonic position males and masculinity occupied in society that meant that social situations were usually understood in a patriarchal framework/ideology. Similarly, it was the assumption of, and an imposition of, a heteronormative perspective that led to the necessity of specifically queer aspects of social inquiry. Warner (2002) notes that political organizing around sexual dissidence takes place in a heteronormative public sphere. Understanding Habermas’ (1991) distinction between the private and public spheres is particularly helpful. In the nineteenth century in north America and western Europe, coincident with rise of colonialism, the source of personal autonomy shifted from the private sphere of the conjugal family to the public sphere. “Privatized individuals viewed themselves as independent even from the private sphere of their economic activity – as persons capable of entering into ‘purely human’ relations with one another” (Habermas 1991:48). Individuals attained social relationships apart from economic transactions in civil society by exchanging ideas democratically in the public sphere. In the public sphere, individuals crafted, developed, performed, and honed their civic subjectivities, affording them the status of citizen. Individuals developed and equipped themselves with mentalities that enabled them to contribute to the maintenance of the public sphere. Like-minded individuals who objected to political mandates engaged in public-spirited debate in the public sphere (Lichterman 1996). In this sense, the public sphere could potentially facilitate and constrain political organizing. Feminist and queer theorists challenge the exclusionary principles of the public sphere and the masculinist, ethnocentric, racist, and

classist bias in the construction of a universalist, white, heterosexual, middle-class man who participated freely and without constraint in the democracy Habermas (1991) describes as emerging from the public sphere (Warner 1999).

Challenging the exclusionary nature of the public sphere permits those who espouse queer politics to destabilize sexual identities publicly. Thus, the queer invasion of heterosexualized spaces, such as shopping malls, amplifies sexual minorities' public visibility (Richardson 1996:16). There is a tension between visibility and invisibility in the public sphere in the sense that although a heterosexually saturated public sphere may operate such that it demands the invisibility of sexual and gender minorities, enough openings exist to afford sexual and gender minorities the agency to determine whether visibility or invisibility is the best strategy. Diane Richardson (1996) examines the line of thought that Michael Warner (1999) exposes in gay and lesbian politics that aim for normalcy. She asserts, "Being queer is not about seeking the democratic right to privacy, the right to do what one wants in private, it is concerned with establishing *safe space for public sexualities*" (Richardson 1996:15, my emphasis). The connection between the configuration of spaces and the construction of diverse meanings leads us to think of the visibility/invisibility dynamic as a variable and relational dimension rather than an intrinsic condition of individuals.

Within this framework, establishing a safe space for public sexualities might entail promoting the visibility of sexual and gender minorities, demonstrating that homosexuality is not unAfrican, and challenging widely held assumptions about sexual and gender minorities circulating in the public sphere. Visibility emerges as a fundamental question for Kenyan sexual minorities especially if they are to overturn queer theory's eurocentrism that comes from its privileging, and high dependency on, western empirical evidence. This is a gap I hope to fill with this research.

Social Movement Theory

Whereas queer theory heralds the promise of public visibility as a means to destabilise identity categories (Green, 2007), social movement research investigates how organised sexual and gender minorities package and disseminate their claims. Queer theory is interested in *why* individuals use public visibility to overturn stable sexual identity categories, whereas social movement theory attends to *how* groups make themselves and their claims public.

I draw on two strains of social movement theorizing – new social movement (NSM) theory and political process theory (PPT) – which together, explain how SMOs devise and deploy strategies of visibility and invisibility based on their internal processes and response to an external socio-political context. Mario Diani and Donatella della Porta (1999) define social movements as “(1) informal networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilise about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest” (della Porta and Diani 1999:16). This definition highlights the major components of social movements: how collective identities hold members together, how groups develop and pursue their goals through protest, and how politics and culture serve as sources of conflict that mobilize groups to act.

Recently, theorists have adopted the concept of ‘New Social Movements (NSM)’ as a broader framework in which to understand the meaning of social movements (Ryan 2006). It has been argued that social movement theory “neglected such issues as identity, emotion, culture and various social-psychological factors (Crossley 2002: 13); thus, the emergence of a new paradigm which could account for these particularities. Kaldor (2003) argues that NSMs respond to ‘old’ movements which have been ‘tamed’ through bureaucratisation, professionalization, or transformation into ruling political parties or trade unions. New social movements tend to adopt issue based politics to “express their political frustrations” through innovative and new forms of protest.

NSM theorizing examines the political organisation and identities of the new middle class that contribute time, energy and resources to achieving shared goals of social and political change. NSMs are often organised non-hierarchically and put consensus-based, participatory democracy into practice (Offe 1985). Theorists regard sexual minority movements as NSMs because they occupy a space of “non-institutional politics which is not provided for in the doctrines and practice of liberal democracy and the welfare state” (Offe 1985:826). NSMs also respond to the “broadening, deepening and increasingly irreversibility of forms of domination and deprivation” that accompany capitalism (Offe 1985:845). In their pursuit of “quality of life concerns,” NSMs are self-reflexive in that they persistently question their ideological orientation and purpose, inculcating the norm of “conscious choices of structures and action” (Pichardo 1997:421). According to Potella and Jasper (2001), NSMs seek “recognition for new identities and lifestyles,” a statement consistent with the equation of NSMs with identity politics (p.286).

NSM theorizing will remain limited as long as researchers cite only cases from north America and western Europe, which suggests that this phenomenon depends on a certain mode of economic development with attendant rights and privileges for the new middle class (Pichardo 1997). NSM theorizing also offers an identity-based account of how movement groups recruit members and make their identities relevant and worthy of public attention. An account of these processes “gives us a window on the implicit meaning that makes organisation in the abstract...mean very different things in different contexts” (Lichterman 1998:408).

By itself, NSM theorizing can account for the initial emergence of a group through the solidarity that sexual and gender minorities express through their shared experiences of oppression and for the collective identity that develops within the group and sustains participation. Yet it does not account for the processes by which the group perceives external opportunities for deploying sexual identities that contest a dominant heteronormative framework. Political process theory (PPT) however, is sensitive to the political environment and looks at the opening up of political opportunities for particular groups (Habib 2005).

Political process theorizing considers social movements as the primary actors in a field of political opportunities and constraints (della Porta and Diani 1999). Although theorists initially designed the model to explain social movement mobilisation in western democratic contexts (Schock 1999), other scholars have used the framework to show how changes in political opportunity structures make collective action potentially more rewarding under some conditions, so encouraging the formation of social movements (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 1998). According to Sidney Tarrow (1998), shifts in the political opportunity structure can incite or obstruct social movement activity and also initiate a new phase of political action. However, like new social movement theory, PPT also assumes that public visibility is an intrinsic feature of any social movement, for as Francesca Polletta (1998) observes, scholars often define movement emergence using a spatial metaphor: its ability to surface, to emerge, and to gain enough momentum that scholars notice it.

Within a PPT framework, the shift from the authoritarian regime of President Moi to a more democratic regime ran by President Kibaki in 2002 resulted in more opportunities for sexual minorities to organise, generating cascading effects such as an increase in sexual minority cultural and political visibility. PPT is useful for explaining the ascendancy, maintenance and

dissolution of sexual minority organisations in Kenya because it draws attention to the ebb and flow of movements over time as shifts in the external political environment make certain actions possible, and others less possible.

To merge new social movement and political process theory, I use the strategic choice framework that allows analysts to focus on how, when and why SMOs make certain strategic choices (Jasper 2004). By strategic choices, I mean the decision to use SMO resources to execute a task in pursuit of a larger organisational or movement goal. Internal SMO dynamics and an external socio-political context influence the choices that SMOs make (Jasper 2004). “Strategic choices are made within a complex set of cultural and institutional contexts that shape the players themselves, the options perceived, the choices made from among them, and the outcomes” (Jasper 2004:5). By focusing on the micro-political decisions that take place within SMOs, researchers can examine how choices unfold and affect the development of SMOs (Blee and Currier 2005). Strategic choices can encompass deciding whom to recruit (McAdam 1988), which tactics to use (Van Dyke 2004), which audiences to target (Gamson 1997), how to present a collective identity publicly (Bernstein 1997) and whether and how to respond to political opportunities (Blee and Currier 2006).

Conclusion

Drawing on theoretical traditions that treat visibility and invisibility as tropes for social and political oppression, three theoretical frameworks that offer alternative discourses to mainstream heteronormative discourses that subverts and silence sexual minorities were used. Though these theories have been criticised for their western bias where “African material tends to be overlooked, seemingly token or relegated to the margins” (Epprecht 2004), the deconstructive stance of postcolonial feminist, queer and social movement theories are powerful in rendering what has been marginalised visible and thereby challenging hegemonic discourse.

Postcolonial feminist theorising is used to understand how oppressed groups overcome political and social invisibility by overturning the constructs that colonialists used to divide and control indigenous Africans in places like Kenya. The ability to overturn these constructs is a result of resilience that enabled individuals, and groups, enact agency even from a position of disadvantage and relative powerlessness. This thesis stresses that resistance theory allows for the possibility of meaningful actions on the part of socially subordinate individuals

or groups. By exploring how sexual minority SMOs manage their visibility, this thesis is essentially looking at how these SMOs enact agency and self-determine their own lives in the socio-political environment in which they operate.

Queer theory dealt with questions of everyday visibility of sexual minorities, for example publicity in heteronormative spaces, and how this relates to sexual minority organising. It looked at how sexual minorities disrupt the heteronormativity of everyday life. Queer theory will be used to expose Kenyan sexual minority SMOs that have been hidden or thought not to exist. It will be used to explore how individual level visibility influences the SMOs decisions about visibility. The utilisation of queer theory, therefore, forces a re-think on questions of visibility when it comes to sexual minority SMO and whether their visibility is as straightforward as some scholars have argued.

Finally, I drew heavily from social movement research and theory that explains the behaviour of social movement organisations. Specifically, I looked at new social movement theory to understand why sexual minority SMOs formed collective identities and how this identity was used. Political process theorizing was used to examine how external political factors influence how social movements organise. Because I am interested in how sexual minority SMOs manage their visibility, and movement strategies are inextricably tied to their socio-political environment, I used a strategic choice framework to merge the new social movement and political process theorizing. By studying sexual minorities SMO's visibility and invisibility using a strategic choice framework, I hope to disrupt the assumption that events or issues only achieve publicity in one way: through the media. Examining a range of strategies demonstrates how variable organisational visibility and invisibility can be.

The next chapter presents the methodology adopted in this study and how the study was devised so as to both respond to the research questions outlines in Chapter One and to analyse the data within the conceptual framework formulated in this chapter.

Chapter Three

The Research Process

Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology adopted in this study. It gives an account of the ways in which data was collected and an outline of the research devices used to view and analyse the data. The chapter goes on to discuss the role of the researcher in the research and concludes with a consideration of ethical issues.

This study follows the principles and assumptions of qualitative research. Qualitative research has several identifying characteristics (Oka and Shaw 2000) including the use of highly detailed descriptions of human behaviours and opinions (Heath 1997). Qualitative analysis involves making sense of these descriptions by looking for ‘patterns and relationships’ in the data that lead to an explanation of the phenomena under discussion (Seidel 1998). The research questions usually evolve as the study progresses and there is a tendency for it to become narrower or more focused as these research questions are teased out (Seal 1988). In qualitative research, it is not generally assumed that the specific findings of one inquiry may apply to other situations and caution is taken in any extrapolation of the results. Thus, there is a concern for, and attention given to, the uniqueness of a particular context and a particular group of informants.

To understand how the strategies of visibility unfolded differently for social movement organisations (SMOs), the unit of my analysis, I studied sexual minority SMOs in Kenya. When formulating my research design, I confined my case study selection geographically to Nairobi (the capital city) for I had hoped, being the largest city, it would offer a variety of sexual minority SMOs to select from with differing levels and types of visibility. This decision was informed by studies of sexual minority organising in other countries in the global South that were concentrated in urban centres (Epprecht 2004, Palmberg 1999).

The Research Methodology

Understanding the internal logic that drove Kenyan sexual minority SMOs’ strategic choices motivated my use of multiple qualitative methods. Multiple methods can “illuminate previously unexamined or misunderstood experiences” and “increase the likelihood of

obtaining scientific credibility and research utility” (Reinharz 1992:197). Researchers describe the use of multiple methods as “triangulation,” which describes the process of using mixed multiple methods to generate coherence about and increase the validity of findings (Blee and Taylor 2002). I gathered and analysed media reports and historical organisational data and conducted and analysed in-depth qualitative interviews to understand sexual minority SMOs’ strategic choices about visibility and invisibility.

I employed a sequencing strategy for executing my data collection (Mason 2002). By sequencing strategy, I mean that I staggered my data collection so that I only gathered information relevant to Kenyan sexual minority SMOs’ strategies of visibility and invisibility. The first step consisted of amassing and analysing organisational archival data on sexual minority organising as captured by the media, sexual minority SMOs and organisations that partner with the SMOs. For the second step, I interviewed sexual minority SMO staff and members. I discuss my collection and analysis of documents below.

Before entering the field, I had intended to observe sexual minority public and commercial spaces, such as bars and clubs in Kenya because I had anticipated that SMOs might casually recruit members from and advertise events at such venues. After engaging in archival research and interviewing SMO members and staff, I discovered a gap between sexual minority SMOs and sexual minority public and commercial spaces (Gevisser 1995). SMOs did not use such spaces for recruitment or advertisement. I therefore decided to forgo observing sexual minority public and commercial spaces³.

Newspaper and Archival Research

I limited my search of newspaper articles to those published between 1995 and 2008. I chose to begin the search in 1995 because it marks a period when Kenyan state leaders began publicly issuing antigay statements that elicited responses from the public. My primary mainstream news sources were *The Daily Nation* and *The East African Standard*. Before entering the field, I acquainted myself with developments in the Kenyan sexual minority movement over the specified period by gathering online articles from the two primary news sources.

³ See Chapter Four for a detailed discussion on how sexual minorities experience spatial exclusions.

When I entered the field, I quickly realised the limitations of media data. I had a distorted sense of the existence of sexual minority SMOs in Kenya before I started my archival research. None of the media reports I gathered mentioned the existence of a sexual minority organisation or organisations that had implemented activities targeting the sexual minority community. This distortion is likely attributable to different forms of bias that affect how the media portray social movements and protests (Ortiz et al. 2005).

In the case of sexual minority SMOs, the media opted to cover the group's eccentricity in keeping with the mainstream news media's commercial interest in entertaining readers⁴. With a weak independent media that is equally prejudiced, it was difficult to access reliable information on sexual minority organising from the media. Due to this media bias, I decided not to gauge SMO visibility based on their media visibility because synonymising social movement or SMO visibility with media coverage flattens visibility into an outcome. Instead, I treated the media as one of many audiences available to social movements and SMOs and as one source of information about SMO strategies (Gamson 1975).

I spent several days collecting organisational materials from different human rights and development organisations that had documented their joint activities with sexual minority SMOs. I first gathered documents related to the origins of the sexual minority movement and then moved to activity specific information. I did not include these data in my document analysis, but they enabled me to write a historical account of the movement's activities between 1995 and 2008. My criteria for clipping articles included mention of sexual minority SMOs by name, homosexuality, and/or sexual minority organising. I collected very few relevant documents from the news media for most of the articles focused more on individual homosexual identity. Out of the 182 newspaper articles found, none was specific to sexual minority organising.

I collected eight organisational documents (fliers, pamphlets and constitutions) produced by sexual minority SMOs in addition to seven organisational activity reports from their partner organisations. I organised and coded these documents thematically according to issue, event and strategic choice.

⁴ Chapter Four goes into detail about the media dilemma and how it influences the SMOs (in)visibility strategic choices.

Interviewing: Accessing the Sample

Gaining access to the sexual minority SMOs was complicated at first. Conversations with local activists proved important to how I approached the SMO leaders. I had to prove that I was trustworthy to staff and members. I prepared a short, jargon-free research proposal that explained the parameters of my research; I made it clear that I was interested only in the organisation's activities and not individual members. I stated that I wanted to learn about how the SMO presented itself publicly, interacted with different audiences, and decided to work on or withdraw from certain movement campaigns.

An activist at the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK) put me in touch with the managing director of GALCK. I was invited to attend and present a short brief on my research at a steering committee meeting where each organisation was represented. On presentation, I was asked to put the request in writing directly to the management of GALCK who was then to circulate the request to their member organisations. After the presentation, I briefly spoke to members of each of the organisations where it was brought to my attention, unlike I had previously thought while carrying out archival research, that most of these SMOs were less than three years old.

Through information I further obtained from informal discussions with sexual minority activists after the above meeting, I learned that the GALCK, Minority Women in Action (MWA) and Ishtar were the three organisations that would be suitable for my study because the three SMOs were the most politically and socially active within the sexual minority community. I therefore sought out the three organisation's heads most vigorously.

Though I gained access to these sexual minority organisations fairly quickly and easily, there was a slight hesitation from the SMO leaders who were concerned about how the research would portray their organisations. They seemed very sceptical about my intentions to study their organisations; their concern illustrated how important their SMO's public visibility and reputation were to them. The fact that I am an employee of the Kenya Human Rights Commission (on study leave) and I had worked, in the past, with some members of the sexual minority community enabled me to obtain their trust easily. The research was seen as important in improving the working relationship between sexual minority SMOs and the Kenya Human Rights Commission.

Interviewing: Determining the Sample

To capture a range of sexual minority SMO staff and member attitudes, I engaged in purposive sampling where I selected activists to interview (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003). I strategically sought activists with different roles in the sexual minority SMOs that were selected for the study. The activists selected had to have been involved with the organisation long enough to describe its decision-making process, audiences, constituency and campaigns. Selecting activists to interview based on their role in the organisation, instead of using other criteria such as age, gender or length of time in the organisation, made sense because I was interested in their understanding of how the organisation made strategic choices. It is likely that their role in the organisation influenced their proximity to decision-making processes, which in turn provided them with a more in-depth understanding of different strategic choices.

Identifying potential interviewees was an ongoing process as I was referred to other participants by interviewees'. This technique is commonly referred to as 'snowball sampling' in that the sample size increases as the research process progresses (Smith 1975). This had distinct advantages for this research. For example, there were many informants would not have responded to my request for participation if they had not been asked by another member.

Conducting the Interview

To ensure that I understood how, when and why social movement organisations made certain strategic choices about their visibility or invisibility, I interviewed SMO staff and members. Using a digital voice recorder, I conducted 12 in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews with sexual minority SMO leaders, staff and members. By semi-structured interviews, I mean that I used an interview schedule with a predetermined list of possible questions I could ask respondents, but I let respondents' answers to the question guide the order in which I posed questions or provoked new and follow-up questions not on the schedule. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to understand strategic choices "from the perspective of movement actors" (Blee and Taylor 2002:92).

I interviewed staff and members at the second meeting after I had spent the initial meeting getting to know the interviewee, introducing myself and the research in depth and seeking

their permission to conduct the interview at a time convenient for them. The time spent during the main interview was a little over two hours. There was always the small talk over a cup of tea or a meal before the tape was switched on. There was the Consent Form (appendix I) to be filled which was done before the tape was switched on. This pre-interview time was important for a number of reasons. Reference has been made to the prominence given to issues such as building trust, gaining confidence and reciprocity, in order to obtain rich data (Dowsett 1996). This is of even greater significance when the matter is one in which "...the participant has a strong personal stake" (Lester 1999:1). Given that it was the initial encounter before the interview, there was need for the interviewees and me to be as relaxed as possible. The pre-interview chat became a time of familiarisation (Alston 1993)

During the interview, I asked respondents about shifts in the group's visibility and invisibility strategies, how the organisation tailored its strategies for different audiences, how the organisation decided to publicize its work and goals, and the organisation's routines for making itself accessible to the public and the targeted constituency. Additionally, I asked respondents to comment on recent occurrences in which the organisation took strategic steps to make itself publicly visible. I also asked respondents about what attracted them to the organisation and their attitude regarding the correlation between individual sexual minority and organisational visibility and invisibility (appendix II). I compared interviewees' responses to questions about the organisation's routines as checks against my notes and analysis about the SMOs' strategic choices about their visibility and invisibility.

I emphasised to each interviewee that they held control of the situation and that it was largely they who dictated the direction and the tenor of the interview. It was the interviewee who not only revealed information, but also gave varying prominence to the information they related. To this end, I made the interview conversational and initially erred on the side of chat. In the second interview, I corrected this and was less conversational. But at the same time, I did not want to align the interview to a psychologist's couch or to a lawyer's witness box.

Because the interview guide was used to focus the interview, the scope of the questioning was roughly uniform from one interview to another (Minichiello 1990). The sequence, time, and detail given to the various aspects of the interview varied according to each interviewee's wishes (Patton 1990). While it was true that I saw myself as being there to listen (and to hear), to learn (and to be taught) and to watch, I was not there as some kind of voyeuristic,

non-participant. The interviewees did not see me in that light either and the data is richer for that.

I conducted all my interviews in English and protected the anonymity and confidentiality of subjects by using pseudonyms for each interviewee in my field notes and transcription of interviews. I kept my field notes, transcribed interviews and digital interview files on a laptop computer encrypted with a password, ensuring that I was the only person with access to this information.

Dealing in Data – The Analytic Process

Once the interviews were concluded, the primary data in its raw form had been collected. The primary data consisted of 12 in-depth interviews and the researcher's journal. Deciding whether to transcribe the tapes personally or have them professionally transcribed was something of a dilemma. Having them transcribed had huge advantages in terms of time although it would be expensive and there was the concern about accuracy.

There was one significant advantage in doing the transcriptions personally, having personally conducted every interview and having subsequently listened to each tape on at least one occasion, accurately transcribing the interviews was an opportunity to become even more intimately acquainted with the data. I was able to include in the transcription notes and recollections, simple explanations of things said and unsaid, of mood, as well as being able to include notes of pauses and other emotional elements of the interview.

Not only was the tape transcribed verbatim, with most of the '*ahms*' and '*ahhhs*' included, but also the pauses. Each transcript was headed with the number, date and place of the interview, as well as any necessary additional material. The interviewee dialogue was prefaced with the initial of the interviewee's first name, and the interviewer dialogue was similarly prefaced with the initial of my first name. On completion, each interview was checked against the audiotape for accuracy and the field journal to insert any additional notes. The series of interviews was transcribed in about five weeks and come to 186 pages of typescript.

Coding

I analysed the news media articles and organisational records data separately from the interviews. This separation made sense given my interest in understanding sexual minority SMOs strategic choices contemporaneously and over time. I utilised the same thematic coding categories for all data as a way to ensure consistency in coding. I integrated news media articles and organisation records and then coded them together thematically, and I repeated this process for the interviews.

Coding was a manual operation using electronic, rather than print-based text. Initially the transcripts were open-coded, whereby each piece of the transcript needed to be electronically cut from the transcript and pasted under its relevant code. It was at this point that the transcript was broken down. This was done interview by interview. Additionally, each piece of data needed to be traced back to its source. So, each interview was given a number and each page of the transcript was also numbered.

The second phase of the coding process that was undertaken is often termed 'theoretical' categorising. At this stage, the initial codes were grouped into a higher or more abstract form of conceptualisation. Another 'cut and paste' was done, this time re-organising the open coded data under the new theoretical categories. These theoretical categories arose from a collapsing of the open codes into far fewer categories, largely in response to asking how the data might be arranged so as to answer the questions posed in the introduction of this thesis.

The Researcher in the Research

My gender, class and sexuality affected my research in different ways. Being female, educated, middle class, and new to most members of the sexual minority community, activists regarded me suspiciously especially when I informed them that I was interested in carrying out a research on the sexual minority movement of Kenya. A couple of the activists had interacted with northern researchers and perceived them as people whose research had the potential to determine if they received funding. In this regard, most interviewees were very guarded during the initial meeting but as we got to know each other and they better understood the research, they became more relaxed. Interviewees also wanted to know how the research would benefit the movement and their organisations (Steady 2004). I explained

that it would take some time to analyse my data and to formulate conclusions which I would share with them at a later date.

My sexuality became a topic of conversation for staff and members at a couple of the SMOs (Swarr 2003). Initially I felt the antagonism from activists who were aware of my sexual orientation. One explicitly informed me that she disliked that people who are considered “straight” now want to identify with their movement because it was finally attracting donor interest. Others felt that I must either be ‘bi-curious’ or a closeted lesbian due to my interest in sexual minorities. Some interviewees also inquired about my sexuality in more circumspect ways, as an attempt to gauge if my interest in the sexual minority community was genuine and a way to get to know me as a person. In Kenya, due to the consequences of sexual minorities admitting their sexual orientation openly, some activists and antigay opponents assume that those who support sexual and gender minority organising must also be sexual minorities. Understanding this dimension of their query, I answered their questions as best as I could, though I instituted boundaries whenever possible to ensure that I did not disclose information that would restrict my access to the organisation or potential interview participants.

Ethical Concerns and Limitations

Ethical concerns were extremely important in the sampling (and collection) strategy. Confidentiality was paramount. Fortunately, the list of possible interviewees I was given by the directors of the SMOs had been contacted and expected I would contact them. Further, the email request I had sent to GALCK with the attached copy of the proposal was circulated through the SMOs list-serv which is traditionally kept confidential.

Another ethical concern was where to conduct the interviews. Most were conducted at quiet public eating places where I made a point to keep all documentation out of public view and would turn off the tape recorder when approached by either a waiter or someone who knew us. Permission was sought from each informant if they were comfortable with the place of interview with the option of suggesting a venue they felt most comfortable. Other places where interviews were conducted included the Kenya Human Rights Commission and GALCK offices as well as some individual informants’ places of residence. Ethical considerations in relation to the interview process have been discussed above.

The hostile socio-political environment sexual minority SMOs operate makes it very difficult for such organisations to operate. In Kenya, there are only four sexual minority SMOs, known to a select constituency, which all operate under the GALCK umbrella body. The limitation of interviewing SMOs that operate under one coalition body is that there were a number of activities and strategies that were replicated across the organisations; this replication is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Qualitative research is about humans studying other humans in research relationships. The research process is, therefore, by its nature, highly subjective (Fraser 1993). This study looks at sexual minority organising in Nairobi, Kenya. This chapter has provided a detailed and transparent outline of the methodological approach used in the research as well as an accounting of the methods and processes adopted in the collection and analysis of the data.

Designing a research project that involves multiple qualitative methods takes a great deal of thought and refinement. The project that I imagined doing before I entered the field is not the research I ended up conducting. For instance, I discarded a part of my project involving the observation of sexual minorities' public spaces in Nairobi because the hostile environment did not allow for social movement organisations to use such spaces to recruit members or supporters or to advertise their work, this further reinforced sexual minority invisibility. Also the scantily available media and organisational information on sexual minority organising narrowed down the research considerably. Further, I modified the interview templates routinely to reflect how my understanding of the SMOs strategic choices had changed. I did not want to lose or miss any data, a fear that I share with many qualitative researchers. Nevertheless, employing multiple methods, and especially the use of the semi-structured interview format, was done precisely to allow for a more authentic story to be told. In the following chapter I detail and discuss the findings of the research.

Chapter Four

Navigating Strategic Dilemmas

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore how three sexual minority SMOs navigate a series of strategic dilemmas that involve issues of visibility toward audiences or constituencies. I examine how these strategic dilemmas unfolded within each organisation with respect to the country's socio-political environment. The chapter first introduces each of the organisations then I consider how the organisations' exclusionary and inclusionary orientations guided their strategic choices. By exclusionary strategic choices, I mean decisions intended to shield an organisation and its members from harm and scrutiny and to cement a homogeneous and insular collective identity. Because these SMOs had a common primary goal of eliminating violence against sexual minorities', they made exclusionary strategic choices that created and maintained safe spaces for their members. Inclusionary strategic choices are those designed to cultivate relationships with diverse audiences and to cement an SMO's broad, inclusive, and national collective identity. The chapter then discusses how the three SMOs negotiated strategic dilemmas within a context of state hostility, international donor pressure and global structural unevenness. I am interested in understanding the role these forces played in determining how, when and why these SMOs made certain strategic choices and the consequences of those choices.

Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK)

The Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya is a coalition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and intersexed (LGBTI) and LGBTI-friendly organisations in Kenya. GALCK was formed in June 2006 with the goal of promoting and defending the recognition and acceptance of sexual minority organisations and individuals' rights and interests (www.galck.org accessed 8 October 2008). The small group of sexual minority activists that formed GALCK sought to ultimately create a safe and enabling environment for sexual minority individuals and organisations in Kenya. The SMO was borne out of a need not only to bring together members with common experiences around discrimination, harassment and loneliness, but also to curb the growth of fraudulent sexual minority SMOs that had mushroomed in response to the availability of donor funds (Horn 2008). The fact that very

few non-governmental organisations catered to the sexual minority community, and those that did rarely gave back to this community, made it necessary for the establishment of an organisation that would coordinate programmes on sexual minorities.

...we felt the need to have a coalition that would work as an entry point to the LGBTI community first to secure the identities of people within the different organisations and secondly to act as a link between the organisations and partners....we also felt that there were a lot of briefcase [fraudulent] organisations that had cropped up that did not account to the community...also there was no human rights organisation that we could turn to for assistance (Interview, 27 November 2008).

By the time GALCK was established, a number of individual sexual minorities had reported cases of discrimination, blackmail, extortion and violence to various human rights organisations but no organisation had taken up their issues seriously. The organisation was therefore to act as the public face of the movement, not only as an instrumental means to achieve movement goals, but also as a means of recruiting and mobilising participants and linking them with like-minded partner organisations.

The situation for sexual minorities by the time we thought of forming GALCK was very bleak; first, the sexual minority community did not have a face. Sexual minorities generally did not know where to turn to for support. This was because no organisation was tackling issues on gay and lesbian rights in Kenya. Even when individuals reported incidences of discrimination and violence on the basis of their sexual orientation none of the organisations the reports were made to took up the issues. When we sought redress from human rights organisations and asked they incorporate issues of sexual minorities in their programmes, they seemed more fascinated by our mere existence than on the issues we were reporting. In some cases we were blatantly informed that gay rights were not a priority in Kenya. It became clear that if we wanted things to change, we had to do it ourselves (GALCK member, interview 3 December 2008).

Before the formation of GALCK there were about 15 organisations that purported to be sexual minority organisations. However, out of this number only eight were known to sexual minority activists to be serious organisations. When GALCK formed, it registered eight organisations while the other seven, seemingly not interested in joining the coalition, chose to remain independent. However, within three months of the formation of GALCK, four of its member organisations closed due to lack of participation within and outside of the coalition.

The other seven that did not register under GALCK found it difficult to secure funding or gain credibility among the sexual minority community or with partner organisations as a result they all closed.

One of the reasons why there was need to form GALCK is that there were a lot of groups that said they were doing something for the LGBTI community but they were actually not doing anything. It was a fundraising gimmick and all were fake...so I can tell you that some of the leaders of those other organisations were just as shocked as everyone else to actually see there are genuine gay and lesbian people...because of GALCK's presence some of those organisations went through the process of natural attrition as in they died on their own accord because they became irrelevant for they did not have genuine membership (Interview, 27 November 2008).

Early in its existence, GALCK functioned more informally, suggesting that the SMO took a while to consolidate its structure and internal culture.

All of us who took part in the formation of GALCK were interested in bringing together organisations in a coalition that would work as an entry point for the sexual minority community. When it started, we did not have a building, we did not have paid staff. We were meeting in private people's houses, at social gatherings or within gay and lesbian friendly organisations. We were simply a group of activists interested in bringing together all the scattered closeted sexual minority organisations and individuals under one umbrella (GALCK member interview, 3 December 2008).

GALCK, like most sexual minority SMOs around the world, went through a number of growing pains: externally, being in an environment that is repressive towards sexual minority organising at the same time internal challenges consisting of preparing leaders, recruiting and retaining members, and developing a shared vision. Settling into formal routines and growing as a collective, GALCK established a volunteer (member) management committee⁵ comprising of one member from each organisation under its umbrella. The committee's initial agenda included: recruiting and registering sexual minority SMOs; sourcing for allies within the human rights and developmental sectors and applying for funding to enable the organisation put in place internal structures.

...through the help of Liverpool VCT, we started getting in touch with different civil society groups and especially those that organised around human rights. The problem then was that

⁵ Henceforth referred to as 'the committee'

only two of us were out publicly then and we both were young and had no idea what organising or activism meant or terms to use in discussions with civil society. A member of Liverpool VCT trained us on what to say at these meetings (Interview, 3 December, 2008).

With the support of Liverpool VCT (voluntary counselling and testing), the committee was able to publicize the vision of the organisation to human rights and development organisations. It was however the persistence of some members of the committee that saw the increase of partner organisations willing to work with the SMO. As GALCK grew, members of the committee had to agree on the management of the organisation. Committee members initially disagreed about the level and type of organisational structures that were to be put in place. As is typical of new social movements, members favoured a vertical organisational structure rejecting any hierarchical form of representation and institutionalisation. In resolving this issue, the committee had to give in to donor pressures that required an SMO to put in place administrative and financial structures if the SMO expected to be funded. However it was agreed that the SMO would not act like a watchdog of the other SMOs. They would remain autonomous and could choose to work within or outside the coalition.

Once the organisation put structures in place its credibility among donors and partner organisations grew considerably. GALCK received funding for organisational space and was able to recruit four full-time staff. The SMO hired a manager, accountant and two programme officers. The funding also enabled the organisation to accommodate member sexual minority SMOs within its premises offering each organisation a desk, two computers and funds to pay a stipend to one volunteer. GALCK also set up a resource centre that was open to the sexual minority community and partner organisations.

Through their organisation, GALCK addressed a broader, somewhat different, set of goals than the other sexual minority SMOs under its umbrella. The organisation reached beyond the sexual minority community and sought to build alliances with other organisations and also support the formation of new sexual minority collectives. Besides the training and logistical support it offered sexual minority SMOs, GALCK organised a series of private parties in an effort to reach the broader sexual minority community. However, these were soon abandoned for lack of funds and because they did not succeed in drawing in new activists.

We have financial and administrative structures in place but they are very flexible whereby we have a programme officer who works with our organisations [SMOs under coalition]

assisting them to meet their targets and write reports...our goal has always been to defend the rights of sexual minorities and make the public understand how it is we are excluded from our society and why we should be included therefore all the organisations activities work towards this goal...because we work with different organisations that attract a varied membership, I can say our membership is mainly middle and working class, however more men than women (GALCK member interview, 27 November 2008).

Unlike the other sexual minority SMOs which chose not to be publicly visible, GALCK was publicly visible not to seek to win power, as “old” movements had, but to defend sexual minority rights. They sought, not just to gain tolerance, but to reshape society’s thinking about sexuality. Their goal was not to seek primarily autonomous space, but social integration.

Minority Women in Action (MWA)

Minority Women in Action, founded in May 2006, was formed following a conference organised by the Urgent Action Fund-Africa. At this conference it was observed that lesbians were not represented in most sexual minority organisations in Kenya where for most part, all the leadership was male. MWA, from the onset, devised an exclusionary orientation that guided its strategic choices about visibility towards its constituency as it created safe spaces for lesbians who were vulnerable to violence and marginalisation. The SMO consisted of a small group, whose activists were between the ages of 25 - 35, MWA never tried to recruit on a mass scale and actually limited membership by criteria such as, lesbian, bisexual or transgender female.

MWA was founded after we realised that although there were organisations that catered to both gays and lesbians, issues of gay men sort of took precedence and lesbian issues were silent. The founders decided to start the organisation to represent lesbian, bisexual and transgender women who were not represented in women’s organisations as well as LGBTI organisations that give more space to gay issues (Interview, 25 November 2008)

Until it developed a constitution and elected a rotating committee, in 2007, the SMO had a loose structure made up of ad hoc member volunteers. Most of its active members were professionals, members of the “new middle-class” evoked by NSM adherents. New social movements have been described as growing out of a reaction to the failures of so-called old social movement, rather than being inspired by and allied with them. The formation of MWA

was also a response to the failures of the Kenyan women's organisations that kept lesbian issues and rights out of their organisation's agendas.

We approached FIDA [prominent women's rights organisation in Kenya] to assist in dealing with issues of violence within lesbian relationships and they informed us that they do not cater to that community. From the way they responded and their body language, it seemed like they had never even thought that there could be such a community in Kenya (Interview, 8 December 2008).

For most part, MWA's initiatives to partner with the women's movement were met with rejection, despite group member's history of activism in women's organisations. Feminists and women leaders not only failed to openly defend lesbians when the state, the church and the media launched vicious attacks, but also refused to support the SMO when individually approached for support on issues that would not necessarily draw publicity and that the organisations had expertise in handling such as capacity building.

...we then realised that we needed to look out for ourselves ..[pauses], ahh..we simply set out to create a safe and secure space for LGBTI [lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and intersex] individuals where we could be ourselves without the need to hide, support each other, learn about our identities, and build self esteem...we would meet monthly and sometimes even organise outdoor social activities (Interview, 18 November 2008).

From the beginning, a primary objective of the SMO was to build internal strength by promoting self-esteem, combating internalised guilt and developing a new lesbian identity. MWA put a lot of premium on personal development programmes for members that ranged from workshops on safer sex practices to addressing issues that members struggle with. As the organisation grew and external demands increased, from international donors and potential partner organisations, for the SMO to be more involved in public advocacy for minority rights, members began to feel alienated by these forces that seemed to pull the organisation toward involvement in external political activities. Most members feared that if the organisation got involved in political activities, their identities would be disclosed and lives put in danger. Others members felt that publicity would bring attention to the organisation and, by extension, to members who were reluctant to go public about their sexual orientation.

The public is not ready for us, and if we put ourselves in their faces, we should be ready for the backlash...I do not think we have prepared ourselves properly for what would happen if we go fully public (Interview, 11 November 2008).

Being a member of GALCK, the SMO partnered with other sexual minority SMOs in organising public events such as the World Aids Day and World Social forum. Apart from their appearance at these events, MWA seemed to have entered the public eye reluctantly. Participation at these two events was limited to only some members as the question of whether the organisation should be involved in external public activities remained unresolved. The lack of a firm position on this issue alienated the organisation externally with potential donors and partner organisations and internally among members to the point that some members left the SMO when they felt that it was becoming too public.

Ishtar

For Ishtar, HIV/AIDS organising emerged as an offshoot of the SMO's sexual minority activism. A large part of their mobilisation took place in response to the HIV epidemic and due to vulnerability of men who have sex with men (henceforth MSMs). The SMO was formed in 1997 when a Catholic priest started a programme targeting gay commercial sex workers with the aim of influencing their behaviour change. With a grant received from the German Embassy, the priest staged a play, Cleopatra, which spoke to the dangers of HIV/AIDS among MSM commercial sex workers. While the play was intended to be an outreach programme to make the public aware of homosexuality and AIDS in Kenya, it simply perpetuated the "western myth that HIV/AIDS was a gay disease" (Weiss 2006). Nonetheless, the success of the play led to the formation of Ishtar in September 1997. Ishtar was registered as a self-help group that deals with issues of sexual health and HIV/AIDS. In 1998, the priest left the country and the group of MSM that had worked with the priest took up the organisation and continued to run projects informally. They however changed the SMO's focus from trying to change the men's sexuality to focus on the sexual health of MSM, specifically around HIV/AIDS.

Ishtar was started by a priest who wanted to inform the Kenyan society that homosexuality exists in Kenya...he got funding and organised a play called Cleopatra that was shown at Kenya National Theatre...when he left the country, the guys who were involved in the play decided to take over the organisation...since they knew many MSM they were able to mobilise a lot of people for activities (Interview 25 November 2008).

Like MWA, Ishtar was also the archetypal new social movement. The SMO's had a working class membership of 300. It had no formal structures and was run by about 10 active volunteers and a self-appointed coordinator who primarily mobilised members for events. However, the organisation had a very strong collective identity.

We functioned like a briefcase organisation for most part. We would meet in bars, restaurants or people's houses until we got into collaborations with organisations that would occasionally give us a desk in their offices. However this working arrangement became difficult for the office space was borrowed and sometimes we would get there to be told someone is using the desk. It was not until GALCK came onboard and secured funding to house us [coalition partners] that we got some form of permanence. What we had working for us in those earlier years was our large membership, the fact that we could mobilise so many MSM on short notice was something no other organisation could do (Ishtar member, interview 5 November 2008).

The collective identity among members emerged prior to the strategic recruitment of a constituency. Then, all members were mainly MSM commercial sex workers who were attracted to the organisation for it offered free condoms, lubricants and sexual health talks. Due to grassroots visibility leading to a large MSM membership, the organisation grew attracting the attention of National (Kenyan - National Aids Control Council – NACC) and International (United Kingdom - Liverpool VCT) AIDS based organisations. This increased visibility led the coordinator to decide to diversify membership beyond commercial sex workers. In the year 2002, the SMO started an outreach programme that sought to recruit MSM from different backgrounds and regions. These outreach programmes were however stopped due to lack of funding.

...we had so many members that we got the attention of National Aids Control Council who had all along ignored MSMs in their work. By then everyone seemed to think that MSM were all commercial sex workers so we thought it was important to get more members from middle and upper class to break this myth that MSM were commercial sex workers.

We also got Liverpool VCT interested and funding some of our projects. Through our partnership with Liverpool VCT and the Aids council, we got to be involved in a number of international and local research missions (Ishtar member interview, 27 November 2008).

The SMO's specialised focus and the "funding prioritization of sexual health issues for gay men in the sexual minority movement" (Kole 1999: 6) made Ishtar very popular among its

partner organisations. However, its internal structures remained ad-hoc. In 2007, the then coordinator was captured on television interviews at the World Social Forum speaking on behalf of the MSM community. As a result of this appearance, he received threats that forced him to leave the country suddenly. This abrupt departure affected the SMO as it was organised around the coordinator who knew where all key documents were kept and possessed the institutional memory. It took a while for the organisation to reorganise itself but even after this experience, the organisation was still structured around one key individual.

By the time he [coordinator] left Ishtar, we were still functioning as a one man show which he was the boss and I was his assistant. There was no treasurer; in fact there was no kind of organisational structure at all. He simply left us without any idea what to do next. GALCK put pressure on us to do something about our situation. I quickly stepped up and contacted some active members on the need to revive Ishtar and structure it. In a meeting we nominated ourselves to several posts based on what one was good at...I was good at mobilising people and since I knew the way around, I became the director. So that is how we did it, we structured the organisation by ourselves. (Interview, 27 November 2008)

The departure of the coordinator, and the formation of GALCK, made the SMO's key members start thinking of putting formal structures in place. At the time of my interviews, the SMO was in the process of putting together a constitution and applying for a bank account. The SMO, with the support of GALCK and Liverpool VCT, has also embarked on a year-long capacity building programme for its members.

The SMO, through partnership initiatives with NACC, Liverpool VCT and GALCK had participated in a number of nationwide research, national and international sexual health workshops and conferences, and outreach programmes. One of the SMO's key achievement was their involvement in the drafting of NACC's 10-year strategic plan which included a provision for MSM.

We may not have structures in place but we have been able to take part in a number of major projects. For example, the Aids-council put us in touch with a number of researchers who invited us to take part in studies on MSM...Liverpool also conducted a research where Ishtar members participated. We also participated in the drafting of the Aids-council strategic plan that now includes a section on MSM (Interview, 27 November 2008).

Strategic Dilemmas

While these three SMOs' faced different challenges in their growth due to the stigmatization and marginalisation of sexual and gender minorities, they established themselves as credible SMOs working for sexual minority rights among the civil society circle in Kenya. Their success was in part due to their ability to juggle and respond to strategic dilemmas. In this section I explore several strategic dilemmas GALCK, MWA and Ishtar encountered about visibility. First, I consider how the SMOs handled the strategic dilemma of creating safe spaces for their constituents in an environment where public spaces are constructed around heterosexual bodies - leading to hostility against sexualities and genders that do not conform. Second, I examine how the SMOs navigated the media dilemma that is, how they dealt with media bias towards sexual minorities. Third, I examine how the SMOs dealt with the dilemma of public recruitment. Fourth, I delve into how the SMOs navigated the dilemma of strategic alliances that is, how they chose work in collaboration with other partners and how this impacted on their visibility.

The Dilemma of Space

In September 2007, the Kenya Human Rights Commission, in collaboration with the sexual minority community, organised the first ever sexual minority conference in Kenya which brought together sexual minority activists from east Africa, international donors and mainstream human rights activists. One evening, during the course of the conference, a group of conference participants decided to go out to a concert. The concert was at a trendy bar in an upmarket section of Nairobi. One of the participants, a young man from Burundi, found himself cornered by a patron who took one look at him and asked: "...are you normal? Before the Burundian could response, he was punched very hard" (KHRC 2008).

The above situation illustrates how public spaces in Kenya are constructed around particular notions of appropriate sexual behaviour thereby excluding those sexualities that do not conform. The state, through anti-sodomy legislature, as well as, public discourses on homosexuality, monitors bodies and/or sexualities that enter the public realm to ensure they confirm to the heterosexual "norm". This constant surveillance means that sexual minorities are constantly made aware of the space they occupy especially when in public and have to mask their true identities in order to function peacefully. Paradoxically, Kenya was the chosen site for the above conference due to the fact that it is considered more "tolerant" of

sexual minority organising unlike the other east African countries pointing to the regional unevenness with regard to sexual minority organising. While Kenya is considered more tolerant than other African countries, public homophobia had at times turned violent toward those who portrayed their sexuality in ways that was considered “abnormal”. For this study, I had initially intended to observe public spaces such as bars and clubs anticipating that sexual minority SMOs might recruit members from and advertise events at such venues. However this was not the case, public hostility toward sexual minorities in public spaces was so violent and impulsive that many did not frequent bars where most violence tends to happen. Also sexual minority SMOs could not risk freely advertising their events in public spaces due to the possibility that the invisible spaces sexual minorities craft for themselves would be infiltrated.

We tend to organise our own exclusive parties because bars in Nairobi can be very dangerous places for us [sexual minorities]...in any case, we have more fun by ourselves than when we are constantly wondering who is watching us and what they are thinking. But this does not mean that some of us do not go to bars and clubs, we do...but we have to conform which is hard (Interview, 25 November 2008).

This constant feeling that one is being observed was also felt when working in strategic alliances:

We would attend meetings and feel everyone’s eyes glued on us...it’s so uncomfortable....you know, even when we hold public events, many people just come to see look at us [laughs]...you know, look at what a gay person looks like (Interview, 3 December 2008).

The need to create spaces that were considered safe for sexual minorities, where they could be themselves without fear or intimidation, was therefore very important for the three sexual minority SMOs. This opportunity presented itself in 2007 when GALCK secured funding from European donors enabling them to lease space that would house all coalition partners. This opportunity meant that the sexual minority SMOs would not only have a physical office to organise from but also, their members would have safe physical space where they could explore their sexual and gender identities.

The SMOs’ however had to decide where to locate their office, a process that surfaced a series of other dilemmas. Members had hoped to find space in the suburbs of Nairobi where there would be little likelihood of interference from the general public. Establishing office

space in downtown Nairobi, while ideal due to accessibility, would mean too much visibility for the SMOs' due to the large population that is located in central Nairobi. The SMOs' strategy to locate themselves away from large numbers of people was primarily due to safety concerns, thus reinforcing the organisations exclusionary strategic choices.

The SMOs' were unable to find vacant office space in the suburbs of Nairobi and were forced to locate to the industrial area. This area has a high presence of casual labourers and is situated in the south and southwest of the city centre. It takes its distinctive urban pattern from the former railway lines which used to feed and service the industries, workshops and production facilities located in the area. It is now a region sandwiched between the high-density residential areas of a fast growing belt of informal settlements. Its proximity to the informal settlements and unused areas, which are inaccessible to police vehicles, has contributed to area's high crime rate. The area generally has a poor image and is considered to be a dangerous place, especially at night. Most companies in the area have installed security equipment: barbed wire, watchtowers/houses, fences, walls and alarm devices. Taken together, these factors contribute to a steady atmosphere of danger and fear. Lack of vision vis-à-vis urban development planning has led to congestion on the roads as residents from the low income areas commute into the area serving as the army of industrial reserve from which the industries draw their labour.

Regardless of the surrounding environment, the SMOs' structured their office space as welcoming and nurturing to enable members to be more assertive. Further, to ensure member's security, the SMOs' made a series of strategic decisions about their physical organisational spaces, such as monitoring internal and external space. From outside of the building, there was no visible sign advertising or identifying the SMOs' office. Any new visitor to the office had to be directed to the office door. Within the office, there were very few materials that would identify the work of the organisation. Other than the visible resource books that were mainly on sexual minorities, there were no other documents or posters within office space.

The modelling of the organisation's space in a manner that assured member's of their safety attracted and retained members, allowing the organisations to maintain their footing in industrial area. Members and staff prized the security that came from associating with other sexual minorities which created both homogeneity among members and staff and insulated

them from cultivating working relationships with Kenyans who differed from them. Thus, homogeneous members and staff were insulated when they were within the SMOs' confines, a safe haven from Kenya's diversity and turbulence.

The SMOs' office location, a place where civil society organisations and their target audiences were least likely to be located, reinforced their invisibility. Further, the location posed security dangers for members, especially those who worked at night. The neighbourhood also caused a number of members to be quite fearful because the neighbouring population was mainly male and poor. Members believed that this demographic would be the most easily provoked if they felt emasculated by the presence of openly gay men.

Whenever I meet one of our members outside the building and I hug and kiss him, I can feel the tension around me. The men who work outside, especially the guards stare at us with looks of disgust...it scares me every morning when I walk to the office and I feel their irritated stares following me until I disappear into the building (Interview, 27 November 2008).

In October 2008, a GALCK staff member was confronted by area police on patrol on his way to work. They told him that they were aware that there were some illegal activity taking place at their offices and they were planning a "visit" to their office soon. Such threats mirror the psychological and physical insecurity that many sexual minorities face every day that forced them into invisibility.

We are aware that our presence in this area has began to attract attention. People walking on the streets stare at us when we walk into the building or when we stop to hug and kiss a member of the same sex. Some of our members have become so frightened by the kind of attention this office is pulling that they limit their visits to our offices. They feel that it is just a matter of time before either the police pounce on us or the neighbourhood askari's [guards] and people who are constantly watching us. You realise that our organisation is located in an industrial area... most of the workers who work here are day labourers from very poor backgrounds (Interview, 27 November 2008).

Sexual minorities, who signified their gender and sexuality through their physical appearance, were the most frightened. The public visibility of non-normative genders and sexualities was therefore a basic concern for the SMOs for the organisation's physical space had began to attract negative attention from the surrounding public. Most members opted to

dressed accordingly. This performance was carried out to enable them exist semi-peaceably within the larger society where generalised violence underscored the specific violence meted on sexual minorities.

Eradicating violence against sexual minorities was the SMOs' chief goal as such a culture of security blanketed the organisations' space. The SMOs' achieved this goal by inculcating homogeneity in safe organisational physical spaces. Within the larger external environment of risk, the SMOs' worked from a default position of invisibility. However, as the SMOs' became increasingly exposed, at the time of my interviews, the SMOs' were planning a meeting with the head of the area police. They hoped that at this meeting they would secure police protection and support for their organisation. The SMOs' also hired a full time guard from a known security group and were making plans to install an alarm system.

While the sexual minority SMOs' succeeded in creating homogeneity in safe organisational physical spaces, the hostile environment outside the organisation was a constant reminder of the need to establish safe spaces for sexual minorities in the public. Within this framework, the need for positive visibility on sexual minorities emerged as a fundamental concern for the SMOs however; the media, the primary source of information on sexual minorities, remained a challenge.

The Media Dilemma

Media? Our best friend and most feared enemy [laughs]...you know, there are countless occasions when most of us [sexual minorities] have made a conscious decision not to participate in public campaigns. The fear of media exposure makes us prefer to remain in the sidelines ... there those who don't worry about the media, they are the ones who most often take part in public campaigns on behalf of the organisation (Interview, 28 November 2008).

The above quote represents the dilemma sexual minority SMOs have with the media. While on the one hand the media is recognised for its role in the formation of sexual minority identity both at the individual and community level, on the other it is evaded and feared due to its potential of use this role in ways that put the lives of sexual minorities at risk. Sexual minority SMOs are aware of the crucial role mainstream media plays in shaping societal attitudes. However, in Kenya, sexual minority issues were generally excluded from mainstream media in the sense that if they are shown at all, it was often in a negative sense or stereotypical setting.

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...publicity is really a double edged sword...you will get it...but at a cost. We want sexual minorities to know about our organisation, that it exists and it can help them, but at the same time, we realise that attracting such publicity we will also attract all sorts of violence, not only physically, as in our location will be exposed but psychologically as well in the way all sorts of negative stereotypes on homosexuals will be used to describe us....with the media, we walk a thin line (Interview, 25 November 2008).

State and public opposition to the presence of sexual minorities usually played out in the media where the most public and vitriolic attack against sexual minorities occurs. This negative portrayal of sexual minorities was seen to cause public fear and loathing that was usually expressed violently. To cope with the overwhelming media bias, sexual minority SMOs devised two strategies of resistance, they either did not participate in media processes at all or they appropriated mainstream media content to give it a sexual minority affirmative meaning.

We usually do not involve the media in our activities however if there is an article on the paper or television that is not true, we write to the various news stations and correct it...of course they do not respond or correct what they said... However, if there is something that we really have to say through the media, we use our inside people and we sometimes see a more positive article follows the bad one....personally I know some media people...so...what we do is, if there's something we need covered or corrected I approach those individuals ... (Interview, 25 November 2008).

The sexual minority SMOs' favoured radio and print media, who they were more likely to work with, unlike television which was considered too visual as such posed greater security risks. The threat posed by television was experienced during the World Social Forum in 2007 when members who spoke on camera during the events organised by sexual minority SMOs faced a number of threats leading to one member seeking asylum in America. This was also the case after another member appeared on a televised show on homosexuality in Kenya. As a result of this appearance, she was intimidated and threatened with violence forcing her to move out of her neighbourhood. These violent episodes scared other SMO members who self-enforced public invisibility specifically shunning public events organised by sexual minority SMOs.

...after she appeared on that show, she was hustled and got threatening letters at her apartment from neighbours who wanted her move out. She stayed away from her house for a while and eventually had to move out.....there is also the World Social Forum, the media were just taking pictures of guys without permission. I mean they would capture people at the Q-Spot tent and then have a story about gays in Kenya. Imagine the shock of those who had not come out to their parents...there is this guy, that's how his family found out that he was gay, after he was on camera at the World Social Forum. For me, I keep away from any camera regardless that means I do not participate in any public events we [sexual minority SMOs] organise (Interview, 18 November 2008)

The above interviewee's decision to avoid the media, and as a result public events, is not uncommon among sexual minority individuals and SMOs. The fear of retribution not only affected SMO visibility but how the organisations chose projects and set priorities, as well as, how they measured goals and visions against political realities and risks. For instance, Minority Women in Action (MWA) started out as a support group for lesbian, bisexual and transgender females focusing more on internal identity than on the broader socio-political arena. However, as MWA became more involved in public activities and campaigns, the organisation had to make a decision as to the level of public visibility that the organisation was willing to expose itself to. MWA engaged network members in an active conversation about becoming more active and visible in political activities. Members had been discussing the potential impact of making their sexual work more visible – and naming it as such – although not always in formal conversations. One of the members I interviewed named some of the concerns around the SMO taking part in public campaigns.

Minority rights advocacy remains very unpopular, even mainstream organisations with the resources and capacity to carry out such campaign do not out of fear for their lives. We are a young organisation that has just started, why should we put our lives at risk like that? Most members believe that we can do a lot of important work invisibly...For others, they joined the organisation for social reasons and now that it is thinking of working more publicly they worry that their identities may be disclosed. This fear [of exposure] is so real that some are even talking of leaving the organisation if it becomes fully involved in public advocacy. It is not just the right time, I think we need to cover a lot of ground quietly first, create a bigger constituent, before we speak publicly (Interview, 18 November 2008).

The fear of media exposure during public events was observed during the first public campaign organised by GALCK in 2006 commemorating World Aids Day. GALCK secured

participation space for its member organisations to display materials and talk about HIV/AIDS among sexual minorities. Then, GALCK had just formed and there had been no discussions about how the SMOs would handle media publicity. The SMOs decided to set up a tent and distribute information about the sexual minority community and the AIDS-related work that had been carried out by Ishtar. Liverpool VCT provided funding to produce more materials for distribution. On the day, however, very few members came to the event. Those who attended stayed away from the tent or would only approach the tent as outsiders interested in getting to know more about the organisation. Further, very few members turned out for the planned street march and even they were not willing to carry the GALCK banner. Most of those who were willing to take part were either open about their sexual orientation, or those who did not care what would happen as a result.

...when we set up the tent most members [sexual minority community] were not willing to be seen to be part of the sexual minority activities. They were there at the site but most would only approach the tent when there was a large crowd around and pretend to also be interested in getting to know more about the organisation (Interview, 18 November 2008).

Similar behaviour was visible at the World Social Forum in 2007. Although the Q-Spot tent, a tent dedicated to issues on sexual minorities and organised by GALCK, attracted a lot of attention, very few members of the sexual minority SMOs took part in the activities organised.

Most of us chose not to go to the World Social Forum because we knew the media would be there and were afraid of being outed [exposed]. There was too much attention given to the sexual minority community during this period...I simply watched from the comfort of my home when it was all reported in the news (Interview, 18 November 2008).

Fear of individual media exposure caused sexual minorities', and by extension the sexual minority SMOs, to take fewer risks. They especially avoided projects that drew media attention in the name of making strategic decisions. In many instances, the SMOs had good reason to be cautious in their public presentation, thus public self-censorship became a logical response to the fear of misrepresentation or reality of violence.

During the conference we had done everything to ensure the media did not know about it, then I get the call and am told journalists are already here, we were all thinking, oh my...there are 16 *white* donors [laughs]...I know you understand why we panicked...can you imagine

what that story was going to be like? To simply avoid misrepresentation, we simply told them we will give them a press release after the event and completely refused them entry (Interview, 18 November 2008).

However, there were instances where the possibility of media exposure had been exploited by some keen to use sexual minority vulnerability as an excuse to cash in from unsuspecting western donors. This was the case when an American based religious organisation opened a branch in Kenya and had Kenyan religious leaders working with the sexual minority SMOs:

....why we stopped working with this people is because the people who are involved in this organization are really questionable and that raised questions about their motive for it seemed they were using LGBTI issues as a perfect opportunity to get funds..... one of their priest had appeared on a pre-recorded show on homosexuality and before it even aired, they started claiming that they were having problems because of the show.... One of the priests or coordinators involved was saying they had been chased from church because they are supporting LGBTI people they have been chased out of their house as well....Other Sheep America sent them money to move out of their neighbourhood and settled them elsewhere without even asking us if these cases were true. They did not even check if the homosexuals who were at that show were facing similar problems (Interview, 18 November 2008).

Though there had been times when media exposure had led to genuine cases of harassment, claims like the one above had also been observed where people would seek financial support from donors under false claims of insecurity due to media exposure. This kind of discourse fed well into international press, international human rights organisations and funders who were thought to want to hear African sexual minorities' tales of tragedy and disaster thereby attracting international attention and accompanying resources.

As a way to deal with the excessive negative portrayal of sexual minorities in the media, the SMOs' turned to alternative means of organising where sexual minority issues would remain visible, but the SMO members would be invisible, especially to the media. They did this through seeking deeper partnerships with prominent human rights organisations who understood that due to public hostility, they would have to represent sexual minority SMOs in public spaces. Further, after members who appeared on television received threats, they decided that it was more judicious to wage their protests through backchannels by engaging in subtler cultural and political forms of resistance. In periods of political and cultural tranquillity, when sexual minority SMOs appeared to be stagnant, due to their perceived

invisibility, the SMOs were involved in various alternative media campaigns, using theatre, internet and art. At the time of the interviews, they were also considering working more closely with radio and print media which they considered less risky.

To deal with the dilemma of mainstream media, the SMOs planned to build more personal alliances with liberal journalists who they could influence to produce positive articles on sexual minorities. They also planned to conduct trainings to journalists on sexual minority issues. The need to build good relations with mainstream media was crucial to the sexual minority SMOs for it also had far reaching effects on their ability to recruit new members as is discussed in the next section.

The Dilemma of Recruiting

As emerging organisations, sexual minority SMOs needed to publicise their services and activities in order to recruit and mobilise their target constituencies. However, public recruitment was compromised not only by the tension between maintaining a public profile while protecting the private safety of existing members, but also the need to delineate and authenticate membership.

Following the 2002 elections that saw a new, more democratic, government in place, sexual minorities became more visible in public spaces prompting sensational media reports. The heightened visibility of sexual minorities drew a lot of negative media interest that sought to expose spaces that were considered “gay”. This forced visibility put a lot of sexual minorities’ lives at risk leading many to opt for public self-enforced invisibility frightened by the over-exposure collective “gay spaces” drew. The negative publicity not only made public recruitment for sexual minorities SMO’s a complicated process but also, the SMOs’, fearful of infiltration by spies or imposters, were unsure if a prospective member was genuine or a journalist seeking to expose the movement.

To deal with this issue, Minority Women in Action limited public recruitment to their organisation website and put in place a vetting system. This was highly unpopular, particularly with new members.

There is this one member who recently joined who even the idea of vetting annoyed her thoroughly...she was of the opinion that she has enough problems simply being a lesbian, now

she has to be scrutinised before she joins an organisation? She was not comfortable with this at all and made it very clear (Interview, 18 November 2008).

Vetting was conducted by existing members who interacted with new members to ensure that they were “genuine” lesbian, bisexual or transsexual females. In a community where sexual identity is constantly under surveillance, some members felt that such scrutiny was discriminatory and demeaning. However, some established members felt that the exercise was necessary to safeguard their space.

The vetting process is not about investigating other’s sexuality...it is about making sure that a person is genuine and they are not coming into our spaces as spies or imposters with ulterior motives (Interview, 18 November 2008).

Most new members viewed the vetting system as a means of exclusion and another form of discrimination. For them, investigating their sexuality replicated the discriminatory dynamics which such groups were supposed to redress.

I am not sure if they vetted me because I was introduced to the organisation by an old member however, I knew that I was under observation. This was very disturbing, although I understand why they do it, I felt exposed and vulnerable (Interview, 25 November 2008).

Such a system, although was deemed discriminatory, was seen as necessary due to the repressive environment in which the SMOs operated. New members therefore went through the process.

Ishtar, unlike MWA, was not worried about authenticating its membership for its HIV/AIDS approach to organising invisibilised the SMO’s sexual minority component. The SMO attracted new members through sexual health workshops, HIV testing drives and member recommendations. Since the organisation’s services and activities were limited to MSM, rarely did people who did not identify as MSM join their organisation.

While the preference to remain invisible was a strategic choice made by some of the SMOs during recruitment to safeguard members, invisibility was also forced. The hostile socio-political environment made it impossible for the SMOs to maintain permanent public visibility that would have made it easier for sexual minorities to contact the SMOs. This meant that the SMOs could not have their physical address readily available limiting their

recruitment to a certain class and age group that could only be accessed through the internet and member referrals.

Forced visibility, brought about by media exposure, also led a number of sexual minority SMOs to shut down when they sensed that the invisibility they had crafted for themselves, as screen from state and public hostility, was about to be exposed. This decision to shut down some sexual minority SMOs primarily affected GALCK whose membership is organisation based; recruiting SMOs that focus on sexual minority issues. When GALCK was formed it had eight local sexual minority organisations under its umbrella: Minority Women in Action (MWA), Gay Kenya, Ishtar, Galebitra, Tomik, Diverse Outing, Changing Attitudes and Equality Now. None of these organisations took part in public activities and for most part operated invisibly. GALCK's presence however changed that for it made the strategic choice to be publicly visible. As GALCK's contacts and dealings became public, four of the organisations, scared of the visibility the SMO was attracting, dropped out of the coalition.

Since we [GALCK] were formed in 2006, we just became bigger by the day. The leaders of these organisations felt threatened by the fact that we were not scared of public attention, infact to some extent, we sought that publicity. We produced pamphlets which had all the organisations under the coalition and contact details for each organisation. The problem was that since these organisations had no formal structures, the contact person had to be the name and personal contacts of the head of the organisation. In this way, it became personal and some of the organisation directors, afraid of being 'outed' [exposed] closed (GALCK member, interview 3 December 2008).

The public visibility of GALCK was seen as a threat to some of the SMOs that had been working invisibly in the field. They feared that the visibility GALCK was attracting would put their lives in danger therefore opted to close the organisations.

Another connected strategic dilemma that emerged during discussions on recruitment and membership involved how to publicly present transgender and intersex individuals who were viewed as "disturbing both gendered and sexual dichotomies" (Humphrey 1999). The widespread concern was that when transgendered people self-define as (gay) men or as (lesbian) women, their narratives are discordant with the physical or psychological reality inscribed upon their body - this was seen to bring confusion into the movement. This is captured in the following statement, where a lesbian wants to welcome *all* lesbians into the

group, but harbours anxieties about the actual or potential maleness and masculinity of transgendered lesbians:

I do quite strongly believe that if someone does identify as a transgender female, although is still biologically a man, they can come into our group. But how does this look, having a man in a lesbian group? I know he is now a woman, but biologically he remains a man. How do we go for meetings with a man and still say we are a group about women who love women? Wouldn't the people in that meeting think we have lost our mind cause we have a man in our group? I personally think we need to discuss this issue more, because I am also not comfortable having a man in our spaces (Interview 18 November 2008).

For the above activist, how the organisation publicly presents itself was a major concern if transgender individuals were to be included in the organisation. A public presentation that does not resonate with the target audience was seen as a threat that could make it difficult for the SMOs to identify audiences they can influence. While none of the SMOs had intersex members, both MWA and Ishtar had a transgender member in each of their organisation. The transgender in Ishtar was biologically male while the one in MWA was biologically female. Both organisations did not provide any services for transgender individuals so in most cases the transgendered persons were forced to play out traditional gender roles.

If a transgender who is biologically female was approach us, we would simply have to send her to MWA. In any case, we do not have any services for them, and for me, she ... or should I say he...not sure how to say it, but for me, if she is biologically female she should be at MWA who provide services for women (Ishtar member, Interview 27 November 2008).

For GALCK, the dilemma of representing transgender and intersex persons was evident during the naming of the coalition. On the one hand, including transgender and intersex in the name of the organisation would be consistent with the sexual minority SMOs' efforts to overturn exclusionary state policies and to represent the interests of marginalised sexual and gender minorities. On the other hand, the public might become offended by the presence of transgender individuals, who, as one activist claimed, "do not fit anywhere", alongside gay, lesbian and bisexual activists and concentrate on the "confusion transgender individuals bring into the group", instead of the merits of sexual minority rights abuse claims (Fieldnotes, 18 November 2008). The SMO's dilemma of how to self represent and whether to include 'T' and 'I' representing transgender and intersex into GALCK's organisational name illustrated how important the SMO's public visibility and reputation were.

GALCK made a strategic choice not to include transgender and intersex in its name for it was, as a member put it “...too much for the public” and would “confuse them [the public] more” (Fieldnotes, 18 November 2008). Activists disagreed about the level and type of visibility the organisation should give to transgender and intersex persons. Some members felt that naming the organisation the gay and lesbian coalition made other sexualities invisible making it seem as if eligibility of participation in the sexual minority movement in Kenya was conditional upon adopting a ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’ identity.

We were accused of isolating the trans [transgender], bisexual and intersex community by adopting a name that was so specific to two sexual identities. One person even told us that we were forcing everyone to either be lesbian or gay (Interview 3 December 2008).

However, activists agreed that the low representation of transgender and intersex activists and issues was an issue for the entire movement. It was agreed that all the SMOs had to put concerted effort towards the recruitment of transgender and intersex individuals and understanding their issues. The organisation’s name was therefore adopted for it was “easier” to “sell” to the public for gay and lesbian identities were already widely discussed in public discourse as opposed to other sexualities.

We agreed to remain the gay and lesbian coalition cause it was simple for the public to understand what these terms mean after all the media only focused on these two identities...if we start naming all the other identities, that would draw too much attention to the different sexualities that we represent as opposed to the issues we present (Interview, 3 December 2008).

In all the exclusionary recruitment tactics employed by the SMOs that is: vetting of new members and inclusion of transgender and intersex individuals, existing members remained immune to, and incognizant of, the membership exclusions that their organisation’s exercised. Members did not witness these exclusionary choices in the open because staff members enacted them as embedded bureaucratic decisions. Thus, the lack of mention of difference within the organisation was in keeping with the organisations insularity and homogeneity.

The SMOs also tried to recruit allies from the government and nongovernmental sector. While there had been a proliferation of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and political initiatives advocating legislature recognition of all human rights of all individuals, only a

handful of these organisations were willing to speak to the discrimination and violence sexual minorities experience. Despite sexual minority SMOs' efforts to increase their visibility through tightening cooperation and increasing organisational partnership with civil society organisations, my interviews revealed that many civil rights activists remained reluctant to associate with sexual minority organisations in any way thereby enforcing the SMOs invisibility. The feeling of disillusionment with civil society organisations was echoed in many of my conversations with sexual minority SMO staff.

At the beginning, our relationship with the organisation was healthy but today, its strength has faded. Then, there was a gay member in their staff who used to advocate for sexual minorities projects to be mainstreamed in their programmes. We had a wonderful relationship and there was mutual respect, however, when I look back, this was because in most cases we dealt with him directly and rarely with other staff members. However when he left the organisation, the relationship turned cold and very formal...often we have encountered strong resistance in the name of bureaucracy (Interview, 3 December 2008).

While GALCK and the other SMOs had a few organisational allies, to a large extent, these partnerships were driven by international donors who funded large projects only if carried out in collaboration with mainstream NGOs. While this strategy had led to the formation of some good partnerships, these partnerships tended to be based on particular individual's commitment rather than broad organisation commitment. Such that, the success of the partnership is dependent on the commitment of one individual who is willing to work with sexual minority SMOs. This causes problems for the sexual minority SMOs when they try to access services and support from these ally organisations when the supportive individual is not available.

When she left, there was a gap for there was no one to push for our issues and when we asked the committee why our projects were not being implemented, they told us we were not pushing hard enough. We worked with them and put together a strategic plan that included MSM but when it comes to implementation of the plan, nothing has happened since" (Interview, 27 November 2008).

While sexual minority SMOs believe that partnering with civil society is a crucial strategy toward making sexual minority issues visible within the broader human rights sector, efforts to create partnerships with human rights organisations, especially, had been met with resistance and in some cases outright rejection.

“It is like they fear being associated with us, even when we go for meetings with them, one can see the antagonism in their body language and the way they are awed at our presence” (Interview, 17 November 2008).

The harsh socio-political environment sexual minority SMOs work discouraged many human rights groups from entering into partnership with these SMOs. In an effort to “manage” their visibility among their target constituents, many civil society organisations felt that taking on issues of sexuality would alienate their constituents. According to the sexual minority SMOs, the organisations they approached for partnerships distanced themselves from sexual minority work seeing risk in the alliance rather than strength.

Some of the biggest problems we’ve encountered is being turned away by human rights organisations. When we approached one prominent human rights organisation for partnership, their response to us was we were young and our sexual identity is a “passing cloud”. They went further to tell us that when we are much older, we will change and in any case, they do not know of any sexual minority community. On further discussion, they informed us that that working with us [sexual minorities] is “too risky” for the mainstream and may alienate their conservative audiences and funders” (Interview, 3 December 2008).

Such marginalisation had devastating effects on these SMOs’ ability to defend or claim their rights in other situations or within other authoritarian institutions. The exclusion by some human rights organisations reinforced the sexual minority SMOs invisibility thereby threatening the existence of the movement. It ensured that sexual minority SMOs remained voiceless and unseen. An immediate consequence of such silencing is that it served to confirm the assertions of political leaders who claim that homosexuality does not exist in Kenya.

While the need to build alliances with mainstream organisations was a crucial strategic choice that would bolster the sexual minority movement, working in alliances also affected the visibility of the SMOs as the next section details.

The Dilemma of Strategic Alliances

...before GALCK, all of our public activities were done together with other organisations, I don’t remember any one activity we did alone...now with GALCK all public events are done with either GALCK or other organisations [laughs]...(Interview, 18 November 2008).

Whether to work in isolation or in strategic alliances with sexual minority SMOs or other like-minded organisations is a strategic dilemma with which sexual minority SMOs grappled with. While working in isolation would mean the SMO would gain more visibility, members of the SMOs worried that isolation could translate to excessive visibility that would be dangerous if they did not have supportive allies by their side.

....you see, what it [banner on the wall] says is that this is a Liverpool VCT project, so if anyone comes and claims that we are doing illegal work, we will ask them what is illegal about a VCT project (Interview, 25 November 2008).

The need to eschew public visibility, in favour of invisibility, in order to avoid confrontations that would affect the well-being of the organisation was a strategic choice Ishtar and MWA made prior to the establishment of GALCK. In doing this, the SMOs concealed sexual minority issues under mainstream organisation's broader agendas that were considered "safe". While this provided the necessary cover from hostile audiences, it however translated to the invisibility of sexual minority SMOs. Ishtar, for example, had worked for over ten years in collaboration with various mainstream organisations however, the SMO, and the issues it advocates, remained invisible to the wider public. Strategic alliances most of the time meant either the key organisation took all the credit or sexual minority issues were not prioritized.

...we really had no say, you know....but for us, we understood, I mean....these organisations were very conservative and the nature of their message was targeted to specific people not homosexual men, and you know, they could not go out there and just start talking about homosexuality just because they were working with us... (Interview, 18 November 2008).

In order to win support of some groups, sexual minority SMOs had to negotiate and compromise their positions rendering sexual minority issues less visible. This 'vanishing act'- the withdrawal of personal needs and political demands beneath a shadow of self-sacrificing invisibility – exacted a profound personal as well as political toll on the organisations.

In a meeting with representatives of various developmental and human rights organisations to discuss a proposed Kenyan law on reproductive rights, a sexual minority activist drew attention to the draft bill's shortcomings on sexual rights. After naming a few provisions that needed to be included, she was told by other organisation members that "including issues of sexuality only further complicates an already complicated issue and in any case, including

sexuality in the bill will be to kill the bill before it even had a chance". She claims that the worst aspect of this attack was the disheartening diffidence of the organisation she was representing. Members of her organisation "gave no support" and tried to distance themselves from her comments (Fieldnotes, 13 November 2008).

The establishment of GALCK was meant to increase sexual minority visibility by pushing sexual minority issues directly to the wider public:

...we needed an organisation that could engage with the public, that's what GALCK was set up to do...you know, at least as a coalition it was not working alone unlike one of us [individual SMO]... (Interview, 25 November 2008).

The formation of GALCK was therefore a major achievement for it signalled an increase in visibility on sexual minority SMOs and issues. However, it was not long before the partnership with GALCK also became a dilemma for the sexual minority SMOs under the coalition. While GALCK was a welcome presence for its ability to divert visibility, especially public visibility, from the SMOs to the umbrella body, the increased visibility of GALCK meant that donors and key stakeholders only recognised and thus wanted to work with GALCK, thus diminishing the visibility of the member organisations.

GALCK is our brain child, but the child is growing faster than the parents. Everyone only seems to know of GALCK, the rest of us [SMOs] are becoming more invisible by the day. When we thought of GALCK, we never foresaw a situation where it would take over our niche, but that is what is happening (Interview, 27 November 2008).

GALCK's visibility grew quite rapidly. With a membership that was more available to volunteer their time, GALCK began implementing projects that should otherwise have been implemented by the coalition partners soon after inception. Their ability to cover a lot of ground quickly made the SMO very popular within the first few months it was established. GALCK's presence was especially felt among the sexual minority SMOs.

GALCK's presence has really changed how we operate, we now have permanent work space where we are able to organise our activities ... we have been introduced to new project ideas, partners, and donors. You have to understand, back then, unless someone has a special interest in our organisation, chances are they would never have known about us...it's like we have come from a dark age [laughs]...it's like our eyes have been opened and now we can see all these opportunities that are everywhere (Interview, 18 November 2008).

GALCK's success in streamlining sexual minority organisations attracted northern donors who were cautious to fund Kenyan sexual minority SMOs due to the fraudulence and dysfunctions they had encountered in previous years. GALCK's success was very important to northern donors who had been channelling money to sexual minority SMOs through intermediary human rights organisations. While this had led some mainstream organisations to include sexual minority issues within their organisation agendas, their involvement in these issues did not translate to increased visibility of sexual minority SMO's, individuals or their issues. GALCK's presence was therefore crucial to northern donors who had a credible sexual minority organisation to work with in building the sexual minority movement in Kenya. Donors saw GALCK to be legitimate because of its: public visibility as a sexual minority SMO, its visibility among the sexual minority community, and its visibility among partner organisations. In other words, they saw legitimacy in the structures the SMO had put in place for, unlike the other SMOs', GALCK could document its activities and spending in ways that assured the SMO a public profile.

Publicly, GALCK was more visible than the other organisations, taking up projects that required public visibility more willingly than the other SMOs under the coalition. While on one hand this was a result of self-enforced invisibility on the SMOs brought about by fear of the hostile environment, as the activist below shows, there was an element of forced invisibility.

...they tend to be more visible because they have the donor and partner organisational support that we lack. I bet that donors do not even know we exist, these days, all we hear is GALCK, the other organisations have simply being pushed to the background (Interview, 27 November 2008).

GALCK's visibility among key stakeholders coupled with its willingness to participate in public activities and ability to account for donor funds made the SMO more likely to get project funding than any of the other SMOs it houses. This fuelled, confusion, competition and distrust among the SMOs in what they felt was unfair advantage given to one SMO which contributed to their invisibility.

Sometimes we feel like GALCK wants to come into our space and do our work, which it is not supposed to do...we found a proposal that GALCK was selling to donors, and most of the activities they were planning to implement are actually Ishtar activities. They even took credit for some of the activities we implemented as Ishtar...I do not know what we will do about this

cause we [Ishtar] do not want to seem to be fighting them [GALCK], but if we do not do anything, we will soon be rendered redundant and chances are we are the ones who will close shop and not them [GALCK] (Interview, 27 November 2008).

This invisibility brought about by competition and confusion was, in part, produced by donors who were more supportive of GALCK to the extent they referred other SMOs back to GALCK when they approached them for funding.

The other organisations, when they approach the donors directly for funding, what has been happening is that in the last year, donors have referred them back to GALCK...it's like they expect GALCK to validate these proposals. This puts us [GALCK] in a very sticky position, but you have to understand, these donors have been swindled off so much money, they are very careful when working with any sexual minority organisation" (Interview, 3 December 2008).

Despite what seemed to be a mutually beneficial working arrangement between GALCK and donors, GALCK staff felt uncomfortable playing any role in evaluating SMOs under its umbrella for funding. They believed it was problematic for a sexual minority SMO to vet similar organisations for funding. This situation not only placed GALCK in an unequal power relationship with other SMOs but also, by donors flocking to GALCK, boosts their public visibility while contributing to the invisibility of the other SMOs.

...you know what is interesting is that GALCK has become the reference point, if anyone wants to partner with any of our organisations, the entry point is GALCK, even donors and partner organisations refer potential partners, donors, researchers to GALCK...you see what I mean, everything is coordinated from GALCK...but this is what we wanted right [laughs]..I am not sure if I am making sense...but you know when I think about it...I am not even sure we know what we got ourselves into...how then do we [individual SMO] build ourselves if GALCK is all people know....and you know they know it because of the work we [individual SMO] do...I don't want to sound like it's a competition for money or that I am jealous that they [GALCK] get funding, but...do I make sense? (Interview 18 November 2008)

This competition for donor attention manifested itself in terms of priorities. The SMOs seemed to put more energy toward 'being seen' by donors as opposed to meeting their target constituents' expectations. This was evident in the way a lot of effort was being put toward implementing public activities that centred on HIV/AIDS which attracted more funding than any other projects. Considering the funding priority on sexual health was for MSM, funding

for lesbian related projects attracted very little funding as such lesbianism remained relatively invisible.

We are told that women who have sex with women (WSW) are not a vulnerable group, as such, there are no activities set aside for us. However, in my opinion, there seems to be too much interest in men who have sex with men (MSM), to the point that it seems that it is all we are doing. Even GALCK has gotten into that bandwagon and are now getting funding for AIDS related projects for MSMs type activities (Interview 25 November 2008).

The fact that GALCK had also started sourcing for funding for HIV related projects, a specialised area that Ishtar had carved out for itself was seen to move toward responding to donor priorities.

We spend so much time trying to please donors and so little building our coalition. I know we need money to make anything happen, but all our efforts cannot be put toward attracting donors, we rarely discuss issues about how the coalition should be strengthened through new memberships...we are not talking about the times I have told you where we feel that is GALCK taking credit for our work, or the issue of violence against us [sexual minorities]... (Interview, 18 November 2008)

The lack of recognition of individual SMO's contribution to GALCK's success was seen as the contributing factor to GALCK's visibility and the other SMO's invisibility. This was also acknowledged by GALCK member who noted that:

...I think as GALCK, we need to also give more credit to the SMOs because all our projects we implement together with member organisations. It seems that GALCK takes all the credit, so in many ways, we are killing the spirit of the other organisations (Interview, 3 December 2008).

The fact that all projects implemented by GALCK had been a coalition collaboration effort is often not reflected in donor reports. In this way, GALCK also, albeit inadvertently, contributed to the invisibility of the SMOs.

...while we are working for a common goal, we seem to be competing for recognition and funding...but the coalition is young, and everyone wants to be a hero and heroine [laughs]... ahh, I think in a few years, it will be clearer where the boundaries are but at the moment there is a worrying rise in competition and mistrust that is fuelled by a number of internal and external pressures (Interview, 3 December 2008).

Conclusion

Amid state and public hostility, pressure from international donors, as well as, global structural transformations, Kenyan sexual minority SMOs are yet to crystallise sufficiently however have devised ways to deal with the contradicting pressures these forces produce. The state-produced hostile environment, coupled with northern donor's increasing pressure for sexual minority SMOs to organise and foreground sexual minority concerns in the public, prompted sexual minority SMOs to cultivate a selective approach to their visibility with different constituencies and audiences. By fostering an exclusionary orientation, in order to provide safe spaces for members away from everyday hostilities, while at the same time adopting an inclusionary orientation in order to enter into strategic alliances, sexual minority SMOs were able to navigate strategic dilemmas of visibility and invisibility in ways that enabled them manifest their agency.

This research demonstrated the sexual minority SMOs' agency and capacity for resistance that drove their determination to improve the lives of the sexual minority community in Kenya. This agency was seen in the way these SMOs' confronted and navigated a series of strategic dilemmas that involved issues of visibility and invisibility in relation to space, media, recruitment, and strategic alliances.

Given Kenya's 40 year dictatorship that was very repressive with regard to social participation and the use of public spaces (Widner 1993), the SMOs' preference for making exclusionary strategic choices was not surprising. Responding to the country's political and social legacy of intolerance and violence, the SMOs prioritized creating exclusionary safe spaces that could on the one hand, work as a place to plan and politically organise while on the other, provide psychological, physical and social stability for members. In this way, the SMOs exclusionary strategy was an attempt to improve the situation of its constituencies of sexual minorities and to bring sexual minorities concerns to the attention of audiences, such as human rights organisations, donor organisations and the media.

We formed this organisation because we felt the need to have a place where lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender individuals would get physiological and emotional support...we but also a place that would help build capacity amongst LGBTI through partnering with different like-minded individuals and organisations (Interview, 25 November 2008).

However, due to international donor pressures as well as global variations, the three sexual minority SMOs had also to adopt an inclusionary orientation and reach out to a wider constituency. The SMOs aligned themselves with regional sexual minority SMOs, as was the case when they partnered with activists from east and southern Africa, and formed strategic alliances with human rights organisations through casting sexual minority rights as a human rights issue. The SMOs worked with a number of human rights and pro-democracy SMOs to further the sexual minority agenda. They also used these strategic alliances as a cover for organising.

HIV/AIDS proved a workable entry point for our organisation to start working on issues of sexual minorities. It also helped us build partnerships with developmental and human rights organisations that were interested in our work (Interview, 27 November 2008).

As this study has demonstrated, the socio-political and economic context in which GALCK, MWA and Ishtar operated exerted a great impact on the ways they constructed and managed their visibility. The sexual minority SMOs' experiences demonstrated that visibility and invisibility is not structured through a dichotomy. Rather, visibility and invisibility is an unfolding social process, strategy or performance that takes place within a confined space and time (Jasper 2004) and influenced by a number of factors. The participants of this study illustrated that although combining visibility and invisibility strategies produced positive and negative effects, the strength of the Kenyan sexual minority movement stemmed from its ability to combine visibility and invisibility strategies in dealing with the various forces that made contradictory demands on the movement. This maneuver between visibility and invisibility was done with the primary goal of promoting the interest of the sexual minority community.

Indeed, their experiences reveal that the public visibility of sexual minority SMOs challenged the social order which had been taken for granted and been invisible. Activists in the movement agree that the emergence of sexual minority SMOs constitutes the movement's most important collective success of the past 10 years. That is, they agree that the politics of visibility has had a positive impact on the movement for it has enabled them to challenge social norms, lobby for the inclusion of sexual minorities in policies and form support networks internally as well as externally through collaborations with allies nationally, regionally and internationally.

While visibility constituted a value in some spaces, such as within human rights organisations, in other spaces, visibility was a threat to the SMO's. One of the negative consequences of visibility was that once the distance from the sexual norm became notable in hostile environments, the SMOs and their constituents became vulnerable to different forms of violence. As a result of this likelihood of violence, during hostile periods, the SMOs retreated from visibility but devised different strategies to ensure sexual minority issues remained visible. These included, working with mainstream organisations to repackage their messages in either human rights or developmental terms, using HIV/AIDS as a cover for their organising and adopting 'behind the scenes' protest methods such as internet petitions and protest letters. As the SMOs showed, the choice to be invisible did not connote an inevitable demise of the movement, the SMOs opted to become publicly invisible so as not to antagonise the government and public (Baraka 2005).

While global structural unevenness emerged as a factor that influenced how the SMOs positioned themselves, this study did not deeply interrogate this factor. More research needs to be done in this area to trace how global structural unevenness impacts sexual minority organising in the South. Subsequent research could also investigate the influence that South African, Namibian and Zimbabwean sexual minority organising has had in east Africa and map out resistances to southern African hegemony with respect to sexual minority organising in the continent. Such research could illuminate the geopolitical dimensions and limitations of organising around sexual and gender minority rights.

Chapter Five

Theoretical Contributions

This thesis has examined the experiences of sexual minority SMOs in Kenya. It sought to understand through theory, literature and empirical study how state hostility, international donor pressure and global transformations influence sexual minority SMOs' strategic choices on visibility and invisibility. This thesis wanted to understand how, when and why sexual minority SMOs' in Kenya became publicly visible or retreated from visibility. The politics of (in)visibility that surround Kenyan sexual minority SMO's had to be explored not only, to learn more about how power shifts and how sexual minority SMOs opt to participate or withdraw from power struggles (Foucault 1978), but also, to demonstrate the importance of decentering feminist, queer and social movement normative reference of sites in the global North. In light of the findings of this study, this dissertation concludes by making several scholarly contributions to social movement, postcolonial feminist and queer theorizing.

Contribution to Social Movement Theorizing

First, I regard visibility and invisibility as social movement organisational dynamics worthy of further study. Widely accepted definitions of social movement's state that organised collective action must be sustained and visible over time (Tilly 1978); such a definition places a premium on the publicity of political organising, yet treats it as an unquestioned assumption. Indeed, few studies interrogate how social movement organisations become publicly visible or withdraw from public view into invisibility. As this study has shown, an SMO's visibility or invisibility involves strategizing and deliberation.

Second, this research demonstrates that when social movement organisations are invisible in moments of political opportunity, it does not necessarily mean they are floundering. SMO invisibility may be a sign that an SMO is forgoing a political opportunity. Social movement organisations may withdraw from public visibility and intentionally forgo political opportunities while they deliberate whether to take advantage of them.

Third, this research casts light on sexual minority organising in Kenya, which social movement scholars have hitherto overlooked. Social movement theorizing could be greatly enriched by considering the complexity of organising, especially around sexual minority rights, in countries in the global South. To demonstrate the importance of decentering social

movements in the global North as normative referents in social movement analysis, I chose to study how sexual minority SMOs negotiated strategic dilemmas related to their visibility and invisibility in Kenya.

Contributions to Queer Theorizing

Social movement scholars have turned to queer theorizing for resources on how to understand mobilizing around shifting collective and sexual identities (Bernstein 2005; Gamson 1995; Rupp and Taylor 2003). According to Mary Bernstein (2005), “queer politics was...the antithesis of identity politics: a theory and a politics with which to transcend group categories and to bring diverse groups of marginalised people together under one umbrella” (p.56). In this way, queer theorists encourage activists and scholars to imagine ways to destabilise and decentre sexual and gender identity categories (Berlant and Warner 1998). I borrow this notion of destabilization by concentrating on how power shifts and how Kenyan sexual minority organisations opt to participate or withdraw from power struggles (Foucault 1978). Instead of examining how these SMOs define and mobilize sexual and gender identity categories, I focus on the strategic actions and choices of Kenyan sexual minority SMOs. Thus, my analysis does not freeze SMOs’ use of sexual identity categories, but instead demonstrates how SMOs refine and shift such categories, rendering them more flexible. In my analysis, I have tried to demonstrate how some identities and categories undergo modification through the SMOs’ actions and decisions, as was seen in *Minority Women in Action* and *Ishtar* delineation of female and male transsexuals.

Just as I have avoided crystallizing sexual and identity categories in Kenyan sexual minority SMOs’ work, I have also tried not to ascribe political strategies to organisations simply because of their relationship with a the hostile state. I eschewed using pre-existing categories of sexual minority organising strategies in the hope that grounding my data collection and analysis in the everyday political realities of Kenyan sexual minority SMOs would allow me to understand the strategic dilemmas that SMOs faced in all their complexity. For instance, I did not use the trope of “coming out” in this dissertation, unless sexual minority SMO staff or members mentioned it to me. Some scholars assert that “coming out” can be an important political strategy for sexual minority persons in the global South (Chabot and Duyendak 2002). Coming out tends to refer to the self-disclosure of one’s non-normative sexual and/or gender identity to a target audience (Cage 2003). Chabot and Duyvendak (2002) blur the

distinction between individuals coming out and the formation of sexual minority social movement organisations. In other words, they conflate individuals coming out with the establishment of SMOs. I do not disagree that coming out as a strategy has gained in popularity around the world or that it differs in implementation, frequency, and quality in local arenas (Bacchetta 2002). However, a rise in the number of sexual minority social movement organisations does not necessarily mean that more sexual minority persons have come out publicly.

Sexual minority social movement organisations may be “out” even before many individuals are. For instance, the formation of GALCK sought to shield member organisations and by extension individual members, from publicity. GALCK was created to not only synergize sexual minority SMOs in Kenya but also to attract sexual minority members and organisations into the movement. Creating sexual minority organisations for persons who have not yet (and who may not ever) claim their collective identity demonstrates how flexible sexual and gender identity categories are, a key contribution to queer theorizing. The emergence of sexual minority SMOs in Kenya that lacked sexual minority persons to support the organisation is also an example of how African sexual minority organising do not necessarily follow the patterns of sexual and gender minority organising in the North or elsewhere in the global South. Future research could elucidate how, when and why sexual minority social movement organisations favour or shun coming out as a strategy.

Social movement SMOs do not even have to be populated by sexual and gender minorities; they merely have to claim to represent them. As my research shows, out of the 8 sexual minority SMOs were operating prior to the establishment of GALCK, 4 turned out to be credible organisations that actually represent sexual minorities. Those who claimed to lead these potentially fraudulent sexual minority organisations did so because it was lucrative. They knew northern donors wanted to support democratic growth and human rights throughout the continent. Northern donors’ interest in financing sexual minority organising may indicate a pattern of establishing sexual minority SMOs before sexual minority persons have emerged to organise themselves.

What is different about the pattern of northern donors’ financial support to fledgling sexual minority organisations in Kenya is that they are encouraging east African activists to build organisations very quickly. While the authenticity of these SMOs can be questioned where

donor interference in the formation of sexual minority SMOs could be seen as feeding into the overall perception that homosexuality is a western import, the fact that sexual minority SMOs are created for persons who have not yet (and who may not ever) claim these collective identities demonstrates how manipulable sexual and gender categories are, a key contribution to queer theorizing. This is also an example of how African sexual minority organising does not follow the patterns of sexual and gender minority organising in the North and elsewhere in the global South.

Contributions to Postcolonial Feminist Theorizing

Though I have consciously avoided using the rhetoric of citizenship in my analysis of how Kenyan sexual minority organisations handled strategic dilemmas related to their visibility and invisibility, sexual minority organising in this country is an example of a citizenship movement. A “citizenship movement,” like the sexual minority movement, makes demands for full political and social inclusion on behalf of a constituency, such as sexual and gender minorities (Jasper 1997:7). My focus on how Kenyan sexual minority SMOs navigate how and when they are visible or invisible to state appendages advances postcolonial feminist theorizing, which places urgency on understanding and challenging how the state regulates bodies and pleasures of women and sexual and gender dissidents (Alexander 2005).

Final word

This thesis, in exploring the politics of visibility among sexual minority SMOs discovered and uncovered strategies the SMOs use to navigate strategic dilemmas related to their visibility and invisibility. In staying and thriving, though with challenges, these SMOs resisted the dominance and heteronormativity of the social environment they operate and demonstrated how staff and members of the SMOs were actively engaged in transforming their socio-political environment. These SMOs are, as Snow and Benford argue, “signifying agents” (1992:136). What they signify and why, what they struggle for and how, these are questions were only answered by looking beyond global structural shifts and the confines of formal political organisations to the socio-political relationships that shape the internal and external environment in which they operate. As one GALCK activists put it:

...it is so hard...you know, we knew that it wouldn't be easy for there are so many forces we are fighting...but we are determined to stay, we will not let them shut us down...we need to

defend our place in society as a whole and make society respect us for what we are, for what we do, for our work (Interview, 27 November 2008).

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Appendix I

Research Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Cynthia Mugo, a Master's student with the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town.

This project explores the when, where, why and how gay and lesbian movement organisation in Kenya choose to become visible and invisible. You will be asked some questions about your own experiences and impressions of the movement in Kenya. Your responses will be audio-taped (with your permission) however; your responses will be kept anonymous, as such, it will be impossible to identify you in any report of this research.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. You may also feel free to not answer any question asked to you.

After the study, you will be completely briefed as to the purpose and nature of the study, as well as given references that further explore the topic.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study:

Signature _____

Date _____

Print name _____

I agree to have my interview with Cynthia Mugo audio-taped. I understand that my name will not be associated with the audiotape or the transcript. You may discontinue taping or ask that the tape be stopped at anytime during the interview.

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix II

Interview Schedule

Script for interview: I am Cynthia Mugo, a Master's student at the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. I am conducting a study of the gay and lesbian movement organisations in Kenya. I will be interviewing you about your history of activism and, particularly, your impressions of the movement in Kenya. The interview will take approximately one hour. Professor Brenda Cooper, of the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, is supervising my progress on this project.

1. Describe the history of your organisation, how, when, and why it was formed. Be as detailed as possible.
2. Could you describe the organisation's membership (class, age, gender)? How did they find out about the group? Has membership changed over time?
3. How do new members come to know about your organisation?
4. What is the organisation's relationship to the sexual minority community? Is the organisation known to the community? What is the organisation known for in the community?
5. What kinds of activities was the organisation initially involved in and how has this changed over time? What has caused the changes (if any)?
6. What 'mainstream' organisations has your organisation partnered with in the past (*ask specific examples of activities and organisations*)? How did you enter these partnerships?
7. How would you describe your organisation's relationship with mainstream media (*probe for detail*)?
8. Do you think there is a link between the visibility of the organisation and sexual minorities "coming out"?
9. What do you think it means for an organisation to be visible? (*ask specific examples*)

10. How important do you think it is for an organisation to be visible? How should it be visible?
11. How important do you think it is for an organisation to be invisible?
12. Do you think that there is a link between visibility of the organisation and sexual minorities “coming out”?