# The Courageous Sisters, Erotic Subjectivity, and the Maneuvering of NGO Frictions in Accra, Ghana

By

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# Abstract

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of what I refer to as a group of working-class queer women and their uneasy relationship with transnationally funded non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Taking a queer, post-colonial perspective on transnational governmentality of bodies and sexuality, the research shows the friction between working-class queer women and NGO spaces in this regard. Firstly, this dissertation focuses on the disconnect between NGOs that purport to work with sexual minorities and their inability to connect with 'lesbians,' including those queer women who attend NGO events, and focuses on how technologies of recognition and confession are carried through NGO spaces, as a form of neoliberal transnational governmentality. In this vein, this work examines the ways in which certain cisgender male dominated NGOs in Accra have come to be historically reliant on northern donor (public health) funding through HIV interventions, and how these NGOs rely on individuals to "come out" to participate in NGO services through categories of risk. Following this, the dissertation explores the more recent interest of these NGOs to include of all of those under the "LGBT umbrella," including 'lesbians,' in their work.

This dissertation specifically focuses on participant observation with a core group of queer women, who maneuvered through increasingly professionalized NGO spaces that sought to include them in their work. Through a focus on lived realities and participation in NGOs, this dissertation shows how this group came to embody the friction between supposedly 'local' norms regarding sexuality in the post-colonial Ghana context, and transnational forces, while staying true to their desires although they were often labeled as the product of 'foreign' influences. Through accounts of time spent in homes, bars, NGO spaces and trainings, and on the social media application, WhatsApp, I show how a *nyaanyo* (the Ga term for friend) counter public was created by these individuals as a space of their own, through which a complexity and multiplicity of desire and experience was articulated. Eventually, I show how the "Courageous Sisters" NGO was formed as an NGO based

on the *nyaanyo* counter public formed in WhatsApp, a case which highlighted the multifariousness of contextualizing queer women's experiences while also showing the importance of digital communities for expressing embodied realities, creating counter public discourses, forming belonging, and maneuvering a context in which working-class queer women were seen as victims in need of intervention by NGO's.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the various people whose help, guidance, and lived experience have been invaluable for the completion of this project. Firstly, it is no doubt that the center of this research and a large debt goes to Rebel, Lady, Patricia and Obaara, whom offered their time, friendship, assistance, care, and insights into the ways in which individuals continue to live lives of pleasure and optimism despite the constant threats to precarity and violence that are an everyday reality for many. The unwavering optimism, hope, perspectives and humor of this core group of people kept me going during my time in Accra and have fueled the writing of this dissertation. I am forever in debt to their welcoming me into their community. This dissertation is also indebted to the newly formed Courageous Sisters NGO, a group that continues to grow and inspire despite the very real conditions of precarity and vulnerability for many of its members.

I am in forever grateful to Mohammad, the founder of the Solace Brothers, an NGO that was just getting started when my research began in 2015. It was Mohammad's enthusiasm for intersectional human rights work which led to my meeting many of the core research participants. May your passion and legacy live on through the many people you have inspired along the way, and may you rest in peace my dear. I am also extremely thankful to the Executive Director of the Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights (CEPERG), Kweku, whom without his generous letter of invitation to Ghana, this research would never have taken place. Kweku's invitations to various meetings in Accra, as well as the invitation to serve as a volunteer with CEPERG in the capacity of a visiting researcher have given me the privileged opportunity to get to know many insightful persons working on the topic of sexual health and human rights in Ghana. It is through this time with CEPERG through which this research project began, as various volunteers and peer educators offered their generous time and wisdom. A special thank you to Michael and Kwabena, whose hard work and dedication were entirely

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## List of Abbreviations

AFED – Alliance for Equality and Diversity

CEPHRG – Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights, Ghana

CHRAJ – Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice

COC – Centre for Culture and Leisure

CPP – Conventions People's Party

CS – Courageous Sisters

GALAG – Gay and Lesbians of Ghana

GFATM - Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria

HRAC – Human Rights Advocacy Centre

ICPD – International Conference on Population and Development

ILGA – International Lesbian and Gay Alliance

ILGHRC – International Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Commission

IMF – International Monetary Fund

ISDAO – Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest

LBQ – Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer

LBTW - Lesbians, Bisexuals and Trans Women

LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

LGBTIQ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer

M.O.B. – Money over Bitches

MSM – Men who have sex with men

NCGW – National Council of Ghana Women

NCWD – National Council for Women in Development

NGO- Non-governmental organization

PAILGA - Pan African International Lesbian and Gay Association

PEPFAR – President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

PNDC – Provisional National Defense Council

RFSL – The Swedish National Association for Gay, Bisexual, Transpersonal, and Queer Rights

STIs – Sexual Transmitted Infections

TIERS- The Initiative for Equal Rights

UN – United Nations

UNAIDS – The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

WAAC – West African Aids Clinic

WHO – World Health Organization

WID – Women in Development

WSW – Women who have sex with women

## Introduction

*i.        Maneuvering Frictions*

I passed through a second metal detector, handing over my notebook for investigation to a Ghanaian woman dressed in military camouflage. As I entered the community room of the U.S. Embassy in Accra, I was greeted by two Americans: a Latino man in his 30s, a young woman of European descent with black mid-length hair; and a mid-30s Kenyan man, dressed in business casual. They were setting up for the day's presentation, a "Gender and Sexuality Training," as it read on the Power Point projection.  Just after my arrival, others also entered the room: staff from NGOs working on human rights and sexual health in Ghana, and as it stood, I was one of two *obruni* women in the room.  *Obruni* is a term in the Southern Ghanaian Twi[1] dialect which literally means "foreigner," and is oftentimes associated with foreigners of European descent (Pierre 2012).  Of the twenty NGO representatives from local Ghanaian NGOs, nearly all of them were represented by cis gendered-appearing men. With this representation and given my interest in understanding how queer women might be involved in this process, I couldn't help but feel uncomfortable with the fact that this space was missing an array of voices. After a bit of mingling, the Deputy Ambassador of the U.S. Embassy opened the event, delivering statistics regarding the U.S. State Department's interventions in HIV since 2003. The Ambassador finished, explaining that the PEPFAR[2] (President's Emergency Plan for Aid Relief) principles, include a "call for tolerance," the "protection and promotion of human rights,"

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[1] The Twi language is the most commonly spoken language in Ghana.
[2] Reinstated through President George W. Bush's politically and socially conservative, notoriously Christian-inflected term in office, PEPFAR promoted the Abstinence, be faithful, use a Condom (ABC) approach, with more attention to the A and B and less to C (Dietrich 2007). This is further analyzed in Chapter 1.

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and the idea that "gender and sexual minorities can't be further imperiled," according to U.S. foreign policy at the time.

Following the initial introduction at the training and a few other activities, there was a local NGO panel. The panel reinforced the notion that local knowledge was different than what could be covered by the gender and sexuality trainer's global expertise, as the NGO leaders sat at a table facing the rest of the rows of chairs. Kweku, the executive director of the Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights, Ghana (CEPERG), introduced himself as an "African indigenous homosexual[3]," and shared with the group his personal story in which he struggled with his sexual preferences because of his Christian convictions as a former pastor and television producer. Kweku also explained the history of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community in Ghana as having "grown on the wings of HIV." The initials LGBT as they appear throughout this dissertation, were used by two organizations: The Human Rights Advocacy Centre (HRAC), and CEPERG in Accra. The initials were also used by individuals in reference to the idea of a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/transsexual imagined community, locally, transnationally, and globally. In my use of LGBT, I take the approach that these categories are informed by local, transnational, and global influences, which I explore throughout the dissertation. There were also a variety of terms used by those perceived to be cis- gender male individuals, including homosexual, as referenced by Kweku above. However, there was also another term, *saso,* a Ga[4] and Twi term which literally means "peer," that has more recently been used as a discrete term to refer to fellow queer persons who were also perceived to be male.[5]

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[3] Homosexual was used by individuals I came across in the research, and as a term to describe someone who has intimate relations and or desires for someone of the same-sex and or gender, and as an umbrella term by those who were a part of this research to describe gendered and intimate variance.

[4] Ga is the third most widely used dialect in Southern Ghana, following Twi and English.

[5] Also, the term *kojo besia* is a Ga and Twi term which had become derogatory in recent years and describes a man who does not conform to typical forms of masculinity and referred to those who had same-sex erotic desires and were gender transgressive.

Followed by Kweku was Nana, who, also presenting as male with his/their suit and tie, was working for a transnational NGO that was funded directly by PEPFAR. Nana also spoke of a new coalition, the Alliance for Equality and Diversity (AFED), a group whose members consisted of local NGO's working on human rights and sexual health in Ghana. The group's aim was to be more inclusive of all of those within the LGBT community. Nana emphasized the urge to see what was happening with "other key populations" beyond men who have sex with men (MSM), including, for instance, "lesbians."

The Ghanaian NGO leaders were concerned with the lack of turnout of "lesbians" at NGO events, and this interest from leaders and NGO donors in the missing lesbian, also coincided with the concerns of the U.S. government. The training at the Embassy was a part of a global tour to 39 different PEPFAR countries as part of the Global Equality Fund Initiative enacted in 2011, following a speech by Secretary of State at the time, Hillary Clinton in the same year. The fund was intended to "support programs that advance the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons around the world," as a "collaborative effort led by the U.S. Department of State, bridging government, companies and NGOs with the objective of empowering LGBT persons to live freely and without discrimination" (BBC News 2011).

This mobilization of LGBT politics as an issue of concern for U.S. foreign policy was part of a larger politics of sexuality and gender that promoted a racialized rescue narrative in which the emancipation of Ghana with the help of the U.S. state is legitimized because of the Ghanaian criminal code, which criminalizes "un-natural carnal knowledge" (Republic of Ghana 1960), an inheritance from British indirect rule. As a part of these politics, I suggest that the figure of the Ghanaian queer subject, was taken up in U.S. foreign policy, and in this particular occasion is the "marker for Euro-American sexual enlightenment and tolerance" against a back drop of criminalization of same-sex practices in the country (Dhawan 2016, p. 53). This queer subject is pivotal for what Jasbir Puar

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identifies as a form of sexual exceptionalism, as an aspect of Puar's concept of homonationalism (2007). I argue, that this is a neo-colonial form of politics between Ghana and the U.S. and is a relationship through which a notion of a progressive or modern sexuality is becoming "racialized as a property of the West and a deficiency on the part of the rest" (Hall 1993; Haritaworn, Kuntsman & Posocco, 2013, p. 4). This foreign policy, supported by then President Barack Obama, was promoted without regard to the U.S. neo-colonial and particularly Evangelical influences regarding gender and sexuality norms which have impacted both financially and ideologically the history of PEPFAR policies as well as the proposal of an Anti-Homosexuality Bill in 2012 by a Ugandan Parliamentary member (Kaoma 2012). My interest in this messy, contradictory transnational web was what brought me to this research project and provoked my interest in understanding what transnational actors were involved in projects regarding gender and sexuality in the country. However, my research in Accra became focused on the feminist project of paying attention to lived and embodied experiences of those who are most impacted by neoliberal configurations, and this focus guides my research as a way of speaking back to transnational projects.

As documented through the U.S. Embassy meeting, this Euro-American neoliberal agenda was inevitably a part of a larger process in countries such as Ghana, in which a historical relationship between the U.S. and Ghana is reliant on a narrative of the progressive U.S. needing to teach the under-developed Ghana how to liberate its sexual and gender minorities. I use neoliberal here to articulate what Aihwa Ong describes as a more recent globalized form of governmentality, and in the case of northern donors' interest in the discourse and implementation of rights in Ghana, as a "strategy that opens up the space of shared citizenship beyond the terrain of the nation-state, incorporating the disruptions and flows of globalization" (2006a, p. 15). What makes this form of governmentality specifically neoliberal is the fact that neoliberal logics travel through both economic policies and programs, as well as creating specific cultural and subjective logics which meet up with various

contexts. In this definition I follow Ong's conception of "technologies of subjectivity" as biopolitical techniques of rule that are enacted through policies, donor funding, and NGOs (2006a, p. 6), and I suggest that such technologies were influenced by U.S. foreign policy, which focused (at the time) on campaigning for equality for LGBT persons, and did so as a part of neoliberal transnational governmentality.

This U.S. Embassy meeting was one of the first events that occurred at the beginning of an eight month long ethnographic study in 2015. This study began with my focusing on NGOs working on issues of sexual health and human rights in Accra. This included thinking through the processes through which social movements that focus on gender and sexuality become professionalized, or rather, the process of NGOization (Lang 1997). Historically, NGOization has developed among NGOs in Ghana working on sexual health and human rights in Ghana, due to the need to respond to the 17% prevalence rate of HIV infection among men who have sex with men (MSM) (Moore et al 2017), and the more recent interest to fund LGBT human rights initiatives. The two NGOs with which I spent my time were CEPERG and the HRAC, organizations based in Accra, Ghana. CEPERG is an organization mostly receiving funding from the U.S. dominated Global Fund and from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) for their work on sexual health and HIV interventionism with the MSM population. They have only recently begun to work with more diverse populations, due to funding from The Swedish National Association for Gay, Bisexual, Transpersonal, and Queer Rights (RFSL). It was through the invitation of Kweku, the Executive Director of CEPERG, that I was invited to this U.S. Embassy meeting, as well as many other meetings and trainings with other donors and NGO leaders throughout my time in Accra. Through this time spent with NGOs I came to notice that queer men and *saso* persons oversaw and dominated these NGO spaces and had little idea about why the "women" did not show up to NGO events. My interest

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was also in line with these NGO leaders, in that I wanted to know how and whether queer women were interested in NGOs working on these issues, and if so, why they weren't attending such meetings.

In my use of the term queer women, I am referring to a group of people who are perceived as female born and who have same-sex desires. I use queer here as an analytical tool to deconstruct the category of woman as socially constructed, and to describe a variety of expressions including perceived same-sex desire, and gender non-conformity within the group, which also included individuals who identified as men (Dave 2012). While I acknowledge queer as a Euro-American term derived from political movements in the U.S., and therefore limited in its ability to conceptualize various erotic experiences, I believe a queer analytical framework is helpful as a tool to critique heteronormativity as inherently fragile, as well as to denaturalize categories of analysis such as man/woman, masculine/feminine, homo/hetero, and to challenge binary thinking regarding gender and sexuality to follow queer theory's deconstruction of the "presumed natural relation between sexed bodies, gender, and desire" (Pigg and Adams 2005, p. 5). I follow Judith Butler's identification of gender as a social construction through "the repeated stylization of the body" and through a "set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (1990, p. 33). This understanding of the body as a site from which social constructions of difference and interlocking systems of power are projected, signified, and performed, (ibid) is helpful for analyzing the social construction of gender, sexuality, and identity as embodied, but also informed by local, transnational, and global influences.   I believe that this foundational notion of gender as not inherently connected to the body, nor to sex, is a critical lens through which individuals in this research project might be understood as challenging gendered and sexual norms.

I also follow the phenomenological view of embodiment as "a paradigm or methodological orientation" which requires that "the body be understood as the existential ground of culture"

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(Csordas 1993, p. 135). Such a definition of embodiment is derived from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's definition, that "perception begins with the body", and the body is "a certain setting in relation to the world" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 303). This conception follows scholarship that suggests that there is a link between the body, subjectivity, and identity (Braidotti 1994; Rubin 2003; Namaste 2000; Shrock et al. 2005; Bordo 1993; Spronk 2014). I follow this line of thinking, most especially to understand the ways in which individuals in this research transgressed norms in regard to how the body (or their prescribed sex at birth) was perceived by the wider public, and redefined and understood their own bodies, gender, and erotic selves outside of these norms.

In addition, I also try to hold central the complexity of the simultaneous social construction and performative aspects of gender and sexuality (Butler 1990). For example, I move towards the notion that individuals in this study perform their embodied forms of gender, sexuality and identity in various spaces, through which they seek to solidify what is typically viewed as a transgressive. In this way, individual's knowledge and construction of their own erotic selves and gendered selves came from their own bodies, informing the larger culture surrounding them. I also use this framing to draw attention to the ways in which heteronormativity is constructed as the norm in Ghana. To challenge heteronormative and binary presumptions about gender, sexuality and desire, but also to highlight the embodied realities of individuals, I use various terms to destabilize the notion of heteronormativity. I refer to individuals as those who are perceived to be women, men, and male or female as well as non-heteronormative men and women. This deconstructs normative assumptions about gender identity and sexual desire, but also includes those who did not necessarily identify with nor conform to the definitions of what it meant to be a man or a woman in the context. Also, as far as the terminology used throughout this dissertation is concerned, the use of the terms man and woman are to be understood as terms which refer to the self-defined gender of the person I am referring to. When I

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am referring to persons whose gender identity and their biological sex are aligned, I use the term, cisgender before referring to someone's gender.

As the research unfolded, I gradually got to know a group of working-class urban queer women in Accra through my NGO contacts. While I also got to know a few middle-class queer women, this dissertation focuses on those working-class individuals whom were directly connected to NGOs or NGO leaders as potential 'subjects,' and who attended NGO trainings. There were no middle-class queer women who participated in these NGO events. The core group of individuals that this research focused on were in fact, living in neighborhoods in which NGO programs that historically focused on HIV interventions already had a large base of recipients or participants. These neighborhoods in which the core participants lived, and in which NGOs had a significant history were in the Ga – Adangbe[6] dominated areas of Osu, and Central Accra, the southern, coastal part of Accra, Ghana. I wanted to spend time with these individuals, to understand how NGOization affected them, and what their everyday life was like. The two main informants in this ethnography, Lady and Rebel, and some of their close friends, including Patricia and Obaara, were a part of this group, and participated in this ethnography with interest and great patience. It is through the parts of their lived experience that they shared with me, that most of this dissertation is based.

My interest in the convergence of working-class queer women's lives with the neoliberal transnationalization of issues of sexuality and gender is inspired and framed by anthropology of globalization scholar Anna Tsing's concept of friction, or the "heterogeneous and unequal encounters," of processes of globalization which "can lead to new arrangements of culture and power" and "zones of awkward engagement" (2005, p. 5). I use this concept to understand the ways in which interventions and notions of progress from northern or transnational donors are directed to NGOs

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[6] The Ga-Adangbe are an ethno-linguistic group indigenous to the Southern coast of Ghana.

in Accra, and what sort of processes occur as a result. My research particularly uncovered the ways in which non-normative desire in Accra intersected with NGO agendas, and how this can create a "zone of awkward engagement," (ibid) in moments, discourses, and everyday lives. In her influential work on female same-sex erotic practices (or experiences) in Southern Ghana, Serena Dankwa lays the ground work in describing how, in this context, discretion and indirection are the norm when it comes to same-sex desire (2009). Given this, I began to wonder, how do NGOs and practices operate in this environment? And how do these different regimes coexist, interact, and come together? And more explicitly, how do queer women maneuver within and among these transnational frictions?

Following these research questions, I began ethnographic fieldwork through time spent with Rebel, who identified as a man and sometimes as transgender, but was categorized as a lesbian and a woman by NGOs and his peers. I focus on how, through HIV funding for MSM interventions in Ghana, NGOs that were interested in involving 'lesbians' in their work were reliant on the visibility and cultural labor required of individuals to "come out" through what became, I argue, the biopolitical category of lesbian. In my use of the biopolitical category of lesbian, I use biopolitics in the Foucauldian sense, as the ways in which 'techniques of power' control bodies and populations (Foucault 1978). I suggest that the category became a mechanism through which bodies became governable through policy, as lesbian has come to be a signifier of 'risk' in global policy through activist usage of the term in the 1990s in claiming protection from violence on the global stage (Rosenbloom 1995 in King 2010, p. 34). Therefore, I suggest that the use of the category in global policy to make claims based on the logic of recognition has imbued the term with meanings and values in NGO work, including the idea that the lesbians were victims of violence and at risk, and that the term refers to a fixed sexual identity in relation to female same sex practices. I show how this use of the category creates a visibility or "coming out" process for queer women through which individuals can then make claims to rights and protection from violence. While the body of those perceived to be lesbians

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became objects of power, I argue that they are also a site through which power is resisted (Foucault 1984, p. 83; Grosz 1989; Nyanzi 2011).

Through my time with Rebel, I focused on how he was involved in NGO processes through the form of "cultural labor," Xavier Livermon's concept of the "cultural labor of visibility" that happens when "black queers bring dissident sexualities and gender nonconformity into the public arena" (2012, p. 300). Following this, I began to also notice the "culture of silence" among queer women when they attended male dominated NGO events. Signe Arnfred uses this phrase to think about the "different types of silences," and the knowledge this provides in contexts in which discretion prohibits "discursive rather than sexual acts" (Arnfred 2004, p. 73 in Dankwa 2009 p. 193). In order to understand this culture of silence, I began to focus on how the queer women I came to know narrated their desires and the affective dimensions of their everyday lives, focusing particularly on Lady, Rebel, and their immediate social network. I explore how during moments and spaces that I shared with individuals, how they were exploring what Jafari Allen calls their "erotic subjectivity" (Allen 2012, p. 329). Allen's concept builds on Audre Lorde's use of the term erotic as a "a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives" (1984, p. 57 in Allen 2012). In my use of the concept of "erotic subjectivity," I am adding my knowledge of *nyaanyo,* the Ga term which literally means, "friend," which was used by individuals as a way of mutually recognizing other non-normative women and was used by this group to refer to each other in a discrete way. This term, *nyaanyo,* was a way to explore the embodied experience of discretion among queer women in Accra as a form of knowledge. It had recently been adopted to be used within this specific community among each other in public spaces, which emphasized their need to create spaces for themselves based on discretion.

Through examples of time spent in homes, bars, NGOs, and on WhatsApp, I also show how a *nyaanyo* counter public was created by queer women. I take counter public from Nancy Fraser's

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articulation of a subaltern counter public as a "parallel discursive arena" in which individuals from "subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses" (1990, p. 123), I expand on Allen's definition, as a way in which individuals may create "new forms of affective and erotic relations and rules of public and private engagement" from which "new choices and new politics" are created (2012, p. 329), and Jose Munoz's concept of a "counter public performance" (1999, p. 25). By bringing the two terms together, as a *nyaanyo* counter public, I am simultaneously referring to the ways in which queer women were a subordinated social group who, while operating in supposedly heteronormative spaces, created spaces friendly to non-heteronormativity through a form of tacit knowledge, while also creating discursive arenas for the expression of desires and troubles that run counter to the mainstream. I also suggest that this *nyaanyo* counter public was based on an affective economy among queer women, in the sense put forth by Sarah Ahmed, that feelings are produced as "effects of circulation" through a "sociality of emotion" (2004a, p. 9). In chapter three, I give examples of how people like Lady and Rebel used WhatsApp, a free mobile phone application for smart phones, and how this closed space that they created was a part of a *nyaanyo* counter public and was a space to perform their erotic subjectivities.

Eventually, I show that through relationships with transnational and northern donors, and with the help of male NGO volunteers and the leadership of Lady, a self-identified Christian and lesbian, the "Courageous Sisters" training took place as an encounter between the two worlds of the NGO and the *nyaanyo* counter public. This training was an assemblage of meanings and interpretations of power and empowerment, in which translations occurred between the two worlds. I explain how a WhatsApp group was formed from the training, and trace how the group eventually becomes an NGO for "LBQ" women, as it was described by Lady. Lady's registration of the CS as an NGO, I suggest, created a "hybrid form" of both an NGO and a *nyaanyo* counter public. By "hybrid form," I am inspired by Sonia Alvarez's (1999) use of the term in reference to feminist NGOs balancing

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between collective movement-making and professionalization and bureaucratization. This perspective considers the various forms NGOs may take, as well as their differing political effects (Alvarez 1999; Helms 2014). Therefore, the Courageous Sisters NGO challenges former conceptions of NGO spaces, while also taking up and making use of NGO discourses of empowerment, identity, and human rights other than those prompted by northern powers. I argue that the relation to categories of the group simultaneously reinforced a fixed sexuality, while also being a part of a translation, enabling a form of belonging within the group, and becoming a potential source of politicization.

*ii.      Transnational Sexuality Studies in the Post-Colonial African Context*

Serena Dankwa's interdisciplinary pathbreaking study on female same-sex erotic practices in Ghana (2009) forms a crucial foundation for this research. In her work, Dankwa engages with the "set of practices" by women who have same-sex relationships and elaborates on the Southern Ghanaian key term, *supi* as a "close friendship between two adolescent girls, whether or not their relationship has a sexual dimension" (2009, p. 192). Dankwa's research is particularly important, as the author emphasizes that in Southern Ghana, "erotic context is formed through practice and performance and is not discursively named or understood as a social identity" and that these understandings of female same-sex passions revolve around the notion of secrecy and are based on tacit but vibrant forms of knowledge" (ibid.) This notion informs the ways in which I came to ask my research questions, and from which I wanted to understand how this erotic context through tacit knowledge may be in friction with NGO discourses and visibility in regard to one's desires and relationships.

To focus on the lived realities of queer women in my work, I am responding to feminist and anthropological calls to highlight agency, pleasure, eroticism, and desire as legitimate forms of knowledge. Women's sexuality in the context of sub-Saharan Africa has mainly been framed as hyper-

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sexualized, portrayed in the frame of the victim, and/or bio-medicalized within public health and development frameworks (Bakare-Yusuf in Jolly et al 2013; Maina Ahlberg & Kulane 2011; Nyanzi 2011). To remedy this, Sylvia Tamale calls on scholars to move beyond studies on sexuality in Africa that are focused on violence, disease, and reproduction, and to highlight agency and pleasure (2011a, p. 23-31). Dankwa's work responds to this, as the author pays attention to women's "voice" and "practice" of their "passions and desires" as a central concern (2009). Also, along these lines, anthropologist Rachel Spronk's research with individuals in Nigeria and Ghana focuses on pleasure, emotional fulfillment, and "the sensual qualities of sexuality" as important for understanding the ways in which "erotic practices" are "mediators and shapers of social knowledge" (2012; 2014, p. 11). This focus on pleasure, emotional fulfillment, and the erotic lives of individuals is also central to the framing of this research and are pivot points through which I focus on the embodied realities of this group.

To follow these interventions, I focus on the agency, affective dimensions, and expressions of pleasure of queer women in addition to the spaces and silences they inhabit. For instance, I am guided by Signe Arnfred's concept of a "culture of silence" as a form of knowledge, and I respond to Sylvia Tamale's call for feminist research methods that focus on the emotions of the participants (2011). This is also in line with queer scholarly calls that attend to affect (Cvetchovitch 2003). To do this, I pay attention to the expressions of emotions among queer women and the ways in which they formed an affective economy (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b). This affective economy included the emotional effects of navigating relationships, economic precarity, and erotic desires, and was the foundation of the *nyaanyo* counter public created among queer women.

In general, this study is a part of a larger discussion within anthropology of gender and sexuality, as well as queer anthropological scholarship and globalization processes. Many scholars have pointed out that globalized terms such as homosexual, gay, and lesbian and or the LGBTIQ acronym are part of a western discourse of identity (Dankwa 2009; Hoad 2009; Massad 2007; Tamale 2011;

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Valentine 2007). I am interested in and inspired by the ways in which these categories must also be understood as always ever changing in their meaning and the ways in which they function in the Ghanaian context. Tom Boellstorff, in his ethnography based on non-normative persons in Indonesia, uses the term, "dubbing culture" as a notion developed to "avoid a narrative in which Western gay identity represented the assumed endpoint for homosexualities worldwide" (2013, p. 58). Boellstorff's use of the term "dubbing," (2003) offers an analytical guide that explains that globalized or hegemonic identities can be used in particular contexts, and reformulated, or "dubbed" (ibid). I suggest that this notion of "dubbing" is useful, but it is limited in its implying that authentic indigenous queer subjects take up global categories, which I argue, does not consider the complexity and agency through which subjectivity is formulated.

To more accurately account for this complexity, I build on the work of several authors in my conceptualization of categories and the construction of subjectivity in Ghana. For instance, Jafari Allen, in his ethnographic work in Cuba, makes note that the concept of "erotic subjectivity" focuses on the complexity of lived and embodied experience, as well as an "intersubjective" experience, one that is a way of sharing the self and therefore political (2012, p. 327). This framework therefore accounts for the multiple dimensions that inform individuals subjectivities. In so far as categories are concerned, I make use of Xavier Livermon's perspective, who in his work on South Africa, explains that "western-derived" terms don't necessarily obliterate or become hegemonic as they are used in non-western contexts (2012 p. 305). More specifically, Livermon explains that instead, both local and global north terms "take on additional meanings related to local understandings of gender and sexuality" therefore changing meaning of Western derived terms, as well as the local ones (ibid). This perspective allows for a more complex and nuanced understanding of the ways in which individuals make use of terms, how they imbue terminologies with meaning, while highlighting the agency of individuals to make use of terminology. In this vein, I also follow the work of David Valentine in his

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ethnography on transgender as a category within activist networks in the U.S. (2007). Valentine shows that transgender is useful as a "category of social action and social justice activism" and was also central to debates among activists which helps to think through how categories are a site through which agency and politics can be articulated (Valentine 2007, p. 25). This is also in line with Naisargi Dave's ethnographic work in India, through which the author focuses on the affective dimensions of queer activist's work and highlights the agency of individuals to use supposedly globalized sexual identity categories (2012). In short, I stand by the perspective that global north terminologies are not just appropriated by individuals who then become inauthentic versions of a localized indigenous queer self but are a part of a complicated performance of desire and identities that are influenced by embodied realities, local meanings, as well as larger complex transnational and global processes (Boyce et al. 2012).

In addition to this, I build on philosopher Kwame Appiah's use of rooted cosmopolitanism to describe the ways in which individuals are connected to and embodied in their local contexts, while aspiring to and becoming a part of transnational and global flows of capital (1997). This form of rooted cosmopolitanism is a way to explain how individuals are a part of and intertwined with local, transnational, and global flows of communication and knowledge in a post-colonial African context. While there is a considerable debate in cosmopolitan studies on the use of the term as a middle-class concept (Balakrishnan 2017), I follow Rachel Spronk in her use of the term, cosmopolitan as "not simply an expression of class or social status" but a way of thinking through a "mix of local and global qualities" (Nyairo 2005; Nyairo & Ogude 2005 in Spronk 2012, p. 11). Adding to Appiah's concept, philosopher Achille Mbembe defines afropolitanism as "a way of being in the world" which also refuses a "form of victim identity" and moves towards thinking through "identity politics" beyond specific notions of local and global and an essentialized African identity (2007, p. 30). I make use of this concept to think through the ways in which queer women made use of certain categories of gender

and sexual identity while also being rooted in their embodied realities in the Ghanaian context. I also make use of anthropologist Jessie Shipley's concept of "afro-cosmopolitan subjectivity," which the author uses to explain the ways in which subjectivities are constructed in the post-colonial sub-Saharan African context in relation to processes of neoliberal globalization (2009, p. 634). I therefore, use the term afro-cosmopolitanism as a way to read through queer women's experiences in a neoliberal post-colonial context. Furthermore, I argue that this notion of afro-cosmopolitanism, while typically considered to be middle-class concept, is applicable in identifying and understanding the ways in which working-class queer women have cosmopolitan as well as globalized aspirations that are not only rooted in the local context.

This way of thinking through sexuality transnationally in a post-colonial African context is also influenced by other works on gender variance among non-heteronormative women in the global south. For instance, in Gloria Wekker's groundbreaking ethnography on Mati Workers in Suriname (2006), the author frames her study through the concept of a political economy of sexuality, in which "people shape collectively on the basis of their cultural archives and changing political and economic circumstances" (Wekker p. 67 cited in Weiss 2011, p. 657). I follow this epistemological sensibility, through framing this study in the context of a history of colonial governmentality that intersects with the body, gender, race, and sexuality, and the ways in which gender and sexuality are a central aspect of processes of power, while also attending to local logics regarding intimacy. In her work, Wekker highlights that mati work is a practice of female same-sex practices within a dual-sex system, that does not function as an identity (2006). I take up this framing of thinking through the ways in which local logics around gender and sexuality are embedded in political economies of sexuality and may not operate as a fixed identity. Similarly, Saskia Wieringa and Ruth Morgan (1999) identify the friction between constructing a notion of the "west" and the "rest" in ethnographies on sexuality and subjectivities in non-western contexts. The authors' anthology was particularly helpful in questioning

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categories and understanding the complexity of female sexualities and genders in various contexts that do not neatly fit into simplistic dichotomies of "Western" or indigenous (p. 2). In addition, I found Francisca Stella's (2014) work to be useful, as the author's analysis of lived experiences of women in Russia illuminates the ways in which the Western notion of "coming out" and the visibility of lesbian lives is particularly intersectional. Similarly, I also consider and keep central the multiple aspects of individual working-class queer women's lives as it relates to their ability to 'come out' in NGO spaces. Moreover, I found Evelyn Blackwood's work on *tombois* in West Sumatra (1999) particularly helpful in understanding the ways in which female masculinity is articulated in different contexts and the ways in which *tombois* "resist and shape their identities from local, national, and transnational narratives of gender and sexuality" (in Wieringa & Blackwood 1999, p. 181). I make use of this contextualization of female masculinity in particular, as I understand the variety of expressions and embodied experiences of gender among queer women in Accra.

Similar to Dankwa, other scholars have also documented contexts in which discretion prohibits "discursive rather than sexual acts" (Arnfred in Dankwa 2009, p. 193). However, in addition to Dankwa's work, there exists only a small collection of studies on the lived experiences of non-heteronormative women and same-sex practices in Sub-Saharan Africa. This includes Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wierenga's (2005) anthology of oral history research carried out by African women which lays out a diversity of experiences of women who have sex with women in various regions. This anthology was the first of its kind, and articulated the variations of experiences, including masculine identified women, women who deflected western "coming out" narratives and identities, and those women who preferred localized experiences of discretion. Such a study lays the groundwork for thinking through the variety, complexity, and multiplicity of erotic and gendered experiences of queer women in my research beyond Euro-centric frameworks. Additionally, Stephan A. Murray and Will Roscoe (1998), put together an anthology that includes studies of "female husbands" and female same-

sex sexualities in various Sub-Saharan African contexts, which gives examples of the various forms of female same sex experiences of erotic desire, and various kinship formations that are considered to be rooted in indigenous cultural logics. These studies further inform the epistemology of this project, which keeps central a context specific analysis of the ways in which intimacy, the erotic, and subjectivity is conceptualized and experienced in Southern Ghana.

The recent edited volume by Hakima Abbas and Sokari Ekine (2013), dives into a post-colonial and decolonial critique of Western based assumptions and politics regarding sexuality and gender in the African context. This anthology blends together critiques of the neo-colonial impacts of 'aid conditionality' by northern governments, offering perspectives through which to analyze the neo-colonial dynamics in transnational projects concerning gender and sexuality in the context. I make use of and add to this analysis, to deconstruct the effects of transnational interventions on the realities of those on the ground in Ghana. In addition, Henriette Gunkel's (2010) recent study on the cultural politics of female sexuality in South Africa is an example of framing the connections between the politics of female sexuality and post-colonial processes of power, contextualizing the colonial history of a racialized sexuality and the ways this informs current forms of nationalist notions of patriarchal heterosexuality in the country. I follow this analysis to historicize the ways in which heteronormativity in Ghana's post-colonial context is explicitly connected to remnants of colonial biopolitical governmentality.

Regional West African literature that I have built on includes anthropologist Rudolph Gaudio's ethnography on gender transgressive individuals in Northern Nigeria (2009) which focuses on the social practices of "*yan daudu*," or feminine men, as "claims to and performances of cultural citizenship" (p. 7). This work gives insight into the ways in which "social actors who do not enjoy full citizenship rights because of their age, gender, caste, race, disability, or other forms of embodied social difference" experience the everyday in a West African context (ibid). Through my focus on the

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performance of erotic subjectivities among working-class queer women in a West African context, I add to such literature, in centralizing the various dimensions of queer women's social positioning in relationship to a heteronormative wider public in Ghana. I also make use of concepts derived from anthropological work that analyzes the social effects of HIV interventions in West Africa. In this vein, I build on the work of anthropologist Vinh Kim Nyugen's research in Cote d'Ivoire which unpacks the complexity of HIV interventionism in context (2010). In his work, Nguyen makes use of the Foucauldian notion of "technologies of the self" (1993;1998) and the production of "confessional technologies" in Cote d'Ivoire during the rise of the HIV epidemic in the 1990s (2010). Nguyen explains that through such confessional technologies, individuals had to "come out" as HIV positive to receive services from NGOs (2010). This way of bringing together biopolitics with technologies of the self, provides the theoretical and contextual background for thinking through the ways in which individuals interact with hegemonic phenomenon such as HIV interventionism, which I make use of and build on in my analysis of the effects of NGOs.

In addition to Dankwa's work, influential literature on the topic of women's agency in Ghana includes Claire Robertson's work which gives socio-historical context to the experiences of working-class urban women in Ghana and their maneuvering of political and economic changes throughout Accra's more recent history (1984). In this work, Robertson gives attention to the ingenuity and ability of urban women, which informs my choice to highlight the agency of non-heteronormative women as they maneuver NGOization and the frictions around female same-sex practices. However, I take my research one step further in paying attention to the effects of the NGOization of gender and sexuality in Ghana, particularly. While there is literature on NGOization in Ghana and how this affected the women's movement in Ghana (Tsikata 2009; Anyidoho & Manuh 2010; Hodžić 2009; 2016; 2017), there is currently no scholarship to date that examines how female same-sex practices converge with processes of NGOization in the context, and how queer women are intersectionally

positioned as well as invisibilized. Along these lines, Ashley Currier engages with the idea of LGBT activism and the effects of visibility on individuals in their contexts (2014). This work offers a framework from which I also critically analyze the effects of NGOization upon the well-being of individuals in Ghana, including the effects of "coming out." I make use of these more nuanced and complex analysis of NGOization to examine the Courageous Sisters NGO as both a *nyaanyo* counter public and an NGO space.

On Ghana, there exists only a small body of literature that has engaged with non-heteronormative sexuality and gender. From the perspective of understanding the effects of bio-medicalized interventions and studies on MSM in Ghana, Akua Abrafi Ofori Gyamerah's work is a starting point through which I contextualize the effects of HIV/AIDS and STI's studies among MSM in the post-colonial context (2017). I add to this public health focused study to give ethnographic detail of how these interventions eventually affect queer women's realities. Ghanaian communications scholar Wisdom John Tettey's work on homosexuality, moral panics and discourses in the Ghanaian media (2016), gives context to a "mediatized homophobia," a particular phenomenon in Ghana. This mediatized homophobia is Tettey's conception of the effects of discourses of religious and political leaders in the media which contribute to a specific rhetoric of governmentality (ibid). Tettey's work is helpful to conceptualize the complexity of the context in Ghana, and I make use of his analysis in my understanding of the wider heteronormative public sphere in the context. Other studies which lay out the groundwork for understanding non-normative gender and sexuality in the context include the work of French Canadian anthropologist Karine Geoffrion, who focuses on festive transvestitism among youth in southern Ghana, as a production of a "temporary liminal time-space for the exploration of gender practices and sexualities," and gives context to the foreignness of the term homosexual (2012). Also, North American African Studies scholar Kathleen O'Mara's work lays out previous research on the "LGBT community" and their practices of citizenship in Urban Ghana

(2013), which provides a considerable map for thinking through the ways in which NGOs which focus on sexuality and gender are central organizing politics of belonging for individuals.

Apart from Dankwa's work, there is no research to date that specifically looks at the everyday realities of non-heteronormative women in Ghana. My work adds to this specific regional literature as an interdisciplinary study which considers the processes of neoliberal transnational governmentality in a post-colonial context, the effects of this on non-heteronormative women, and the ways in which individuals navigate the effects of these processes, as they become objects for NGO intervention. Additionally, my work engages with queer women's everyday realities and erotic subjectivities, and the ways in which they make use of media technologies through the creation of digital publics, documenting the formation of a queer women's NGO which has its origins in a digital public. My focus on the digital as a space through which embodied queerness was expressed and experienced was influenced by what I found to be an important space for queer women. This also follows ethnographic work that takes into account the different forms through which desire is articulated. For instance, anthropologist Shanti Parikh examines young people's heterosexual desires and practices in Uganda through love letters, an ethnography which informed my own methodology to look at WhatsApp as a space in which affective dimensions of desires and practices were constructed, and through which memes and texts could be considered as forms of expression (2015).

In this way, this research also builds on ethnographies which consider social media, mobile technologies, and digital spaces as intertwined with non-normative realities. For example, anthropologist Mary Gray's (2009) exploration of the construction of counter public spaces among non-normative youth in the rural U.S., also takes into consideration digital publics as vital for the performance and creation of non-normative subjectivities and communication. Thomas Hendricks' ethnographic work on male same-sex desire in the urban Congo analyzes what Hendrick calls a 'homoerotic economy,' and the various vocabulary that arose through a "creative vocabulary of erotic

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SIM cards," which considers the complexity and messiness of the performance of identity in the context, but also how this is embedded in the use of mobile phone technologies (2016, p. 1). In addition, there is a more recent development of literature on the creation of digital publics among women in South Africa. For example, Desiree Lewis, Tigist Shewarega Hussen, and Monique van Vuuren (2013) look at Fraser's definition of 'subaltern counter publics' to define the ways in which media platforms used among young South African women formed "spaces" which often focused on social engagement, fun, and pleasure (p. 48-56). And more explicitly, authors Nicki Mclean and Kagura Mugo explore "queer digital communities" in digital spaces as providing opportunities to construct counter publics and counter discourses in South Africa (2015, p. 97). I build on this exciting and new literature, as it emphasizes a recasting of needs and desires which I found evident among queer women on WhatsApp, and where I found an array of expressions of lived experience that were not directly expressed outside of digital spaces. This focus on the digital realm has made this project especially novel, adding to my contribution to the previous literature on the topic, as the discourses, desires, performances, and connections between queer women are expressed in new and previously un-articulated ways in this space.

### iii. *Methods, Reflections, Terminology and Ethics*

This dissertation is based on 8 months of multi-sited queer feminist ethnographic research in Accra, Ghana. Central to this ethnographic research is a critical reflexivity of my own position as I engaged in the ethnographic method of participant observation in various spaces. While reflexivity and participation are ways of dealing with power inequalities, I acknowledge that they do not absolve them, and that I am also a part of the "friction" that I seek to interrogate (Hodžič 2017). As a part of this friction, my attentiveness and reflexivity to my positionality is the pivot point through which a large part of my method and epistemology stem and inform my feminist framework and approach to

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interrogate the effects of neoliberalism (Craven and Davis 2013). Therefore, the methods used in this research are a "political process, a 'space' in which complex issues of context, voice," and ethics have been embraced (Tamale 2007).

In the context of the history of research on sexuality and gender in Sub-Saharan Africa written historicization of a supposed "African sexuality" has substantially been discursively constructed through knowledge production dominated by colonialists, colonial ethnographers, missionaries, and academics as hyper-sexualized, essentialized (close to nature), or against nature and barbaric (Epprecht 2008; Arnfred 2004). Consequently, this history and context requires an ethical, sensitive approach on the topic and research participants, as well as consistent reflection on power and positionality throughout the research process. Feminist post-colonial scholars have challenged western feminists in their engagement with transnational projects. Gayatri Spivak famously challenged the colonial notion of "saving of the brown woman from the brown man" in post-colonial critiques of gender and imperialism (Spivak 1988). I take this critique seriously and reflect on my own position as a transnational feminist queer researcher and any notions of saving the brown queer woman from the brown queer man. This is in line with scholar Sherene Razack's feminist call for a critical reflection on the ways in which our positionalities are embedded in global relations of inequality (2001 in De Jong, 2017 p. 2). Razack asks that individuals reflect on the ways in which we are relationally constructing ourselves as "saviours" or "progressive" in opposition to those who are less fortunate or in need of saving (2001, p. 170 in De Jong 2017, p. 2). While I am attentive to this relationality, I also challenge this dichotomy in my research, and chose to focus on relationship building, connections, and the agency of my core research participants through their erotic subjectivities, or the erotic as power (Lorde 1984) and highlight how individuals negotiate their identity within "systems of oppression" (Bernard 2016, p. 8). I also reflect on the historical and political context of my positionality in the Ghanaian context. As a foreigner or *obruni* in the Ghana, I was a part of a neoliberal transnational

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governmentality in which race, class, power, and privilege are embedded within gender, sexuality, and knowledge making. Anthropologist and African studies scholar Jemima Pierre contextualizes the term *obruni* in Ghana, as "associated with class and cultural standing of whites (and whiteness) in Ghana," but also points towards a particular racialized identity which assumes not only a higher class, but also a higher "cultural standing, education level, and outlook" (2018, p. 77). This meant that despite my working-class background, my racialized whiteness and education were relationally constituted in the context as having a higher cultural standing which required consistent reflection.

As a way of making use of critical reflexivity, given my structural positionality and my interest in doing research with and about the realities of working-class queer women, this project is informed by a transnational feminist research method. Transnational feminist researcher Rachel Afi Quinn calls attention to the centrality of ongoing relationship building as a core principal in transnational feminist research (2015), and one which can help to deconstruct the binary of the outsider/insider. As a part of this, I take seriously my efforts to continue ongoing relationships with my core research participants. Also, the core research participants also opened up to me due to my identifying as a queer lesbian, and this vulnerability on my end was an essential queer and feminist ethnographic choice. By this, I mean that my identifying as queer and lesbian with my informants challenges my outsiderness as a queer ethnographer (Roscoe 1996, p. 204). This is in line with feminist ethnographer Richa Nagar's point that reflexivity is not only about positionality, but explicitly about challenging objectivity through vulnerability and an open-ness to acknowledging one's mistakes in translation (2014). Nagar reflects that the role of the feminist researcher in transnational projects is to use critical reflexivity and vulnerability to complicate the dualism of outsider/insider (ibid). Through this vulnerability, my outsiderness created a space for participants to share stories of heartbreak and the emotions of relationships and everyday struggles, which was met with a sensitivity, vulnerability, and attention to wellbeing of those who shared their time and thoughts with me (see Behar 1996). This

follows feminist standpoint as a methodology that centers knowledge production around embodied experiences and the narratives of those typically "othered" (Hill Collins 2000; Harding 2004; Yuval-Davis, N. 1997), and prioritizes the creation of spaces that focused on "sensitive issues critical in sexuality research" such as emotions tied to trauma related to gendered, classed, ethnic, ableist, and sexual experiences, colonial and imperialist narratives which are highly classed, moralistic, and racialized, and cultural sensitivities around the topic of queer subjectivities which may arise (Tamale 2011: 29; Yuval-Davis, N. 1997). Therefore, I also chose to highlight the affective dimensions of ethnographic work (Rooke 2010, p. 26), which is in line with feminist, queer and post-colonial scholarship that challenges the "devaluation of emotions" as they are tied to "gender, race, and class" (Frye 1983; Lorde 1984; Prokhovnik 1999; Ahmed 2000; 2004; Skeggs 2005 in Bargetz 2015, p. 583).

I began the ethnography as a participant observer by volunteering with two NGOs, the HRAC and CEPERG, and co-producing reports with these organizations and their leaders on the topic of discrimination, health, human rights, and LGBT issues specific to Ghana. The participant observation method was important to clarify specific non-verbal practices that are unable to be read through discourse (Patton 2002) and included observation with NGO workers at NGO offices and trainings. While I was invited into NGO spaces and trainings as an unquestioned *obruni* expert on the topic of female sexuality, I was simultaneously and not unsurprisingly seen as ignorant regarding what it meant to be living as a Ghanaian – and more particularly what it meant to be vulnerable as a queer Ghanaian. This required consistent reflection and maneuvering. This follows queer anthropologist Margot Weiss's suggestion to view the research and the anthropologist "in relation to the circumstances of the people studied" (2016, p. 172). The research process was thus a relational process, between myself and my core participants, who consistently exercised control and agency over their engagement with me. I also reflect on these issues throughout the analysis.

After a few months in Accra, I was welcomed as a queer woman into the lives of a core group of research participants who were already connected to NGOs as working-class participants in trainings, whom I met through my contacts with NGOs, and with whom I developed relationships in the process: primarily Rebel, Lady, Patricia, and Obaara. It was with this core group with which most of this multi-sited ethnography took place through participant observation in bars, homes, NGO offices and trainings, parties, and WhatsApp. The range of ages of my closest participants included Rebel, who at 35, was the eldest and the closest to my age, and with whom I found common ground for consistent and constant reflection and conversation. Patricia was in her late 20s, and Lady and Obaara in their early 20s. This group identified as Ga, and spoke Ga and Twi as their first languages, with English as their second. This research was conducted in English, and while individuals also spoke English with me, they often spoke in Ga or Twi when they were interested in being discrete. While this is an obvious limitation, it highlights the agency of individuals to practice discretion in my presence.

While I did not complete qualitative interviews with all the core informants, I spent time with them all and we talked extensively. In addition to this core group, I completed 25 interviews with non-heteronormative women, (including working-class and middle-class women) throughout Accra, 9 interviews with middle-class and working-class non-heteronormative men who worked or volunteered with NGOs, and 6 interviews with NGO staff. While I was able to speak with some middle-class queer women during my research, I was not able to use the method of participant observation with this group, and therefore refrain from deep comparison. However, I do believe that middle-class women were not interested nor reliant on NGO spaces as that of working-class queer women, neither were they the targets. These two groups distinguished by class differences had very different relationships to NGO spaces, and very different pressures in regard to what gendered expectations they maneuvered in their familial contexts. I also found that middle-class queer women

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oftentimes had different needs and relationships to identity categories, and oftentimes expressed that they had more to lose in terms of the price of coming out with a specific category such as lesbian. However, middle-class women had more access to financial resources and therefore access to the creation of alternative spaces in their home, through which intimacy and lived realities could operate outside of the public eye. These interviews took place in spaces the participants had chosen and in which anonymity and comfort were available. To focus on the well-being of the participants, and to follow the ethics of doing no harm as laid out by the Canadian government's CORE Panel on Research Ethics, the basis for CEU's online training, the participatory research was based on verbal consent and anonymity with research participants who were made aware of my research intentions, and interviews conducted were done through both verbal and written consent. For written consent, I provided and read out loud a list of several questions to the research participant regarding their awareness of the purpose of the research. These questions asked the participant if they understood the following: that the research was to be used to complete the requirements for a doctoral degree at my university, that participants could opt out of the research at any point in time, that participants did not have to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable with, and that all participants would remain anonymous. I have used pseudonyms for all participants in this research, and the pseudonyms of both Lady and Rebel were self-chosen. I have also used pseudonyms to refer to specific hang out places that my core participants and I attended, to keep these spaces anonymous for participants. In addition to offering anonymity through the research process, I also explicitly made it clear to participants that in no way would I make the research participants visible through photography or the use of video.

This ethnographic research has also had participatory elements through which the research itself was a part of a translation process between NGOs and working-class queer women. During the research in 2015, I was an active participant in helping to apply for funding for the first training for

queer women, participating in the training itself as a queer person, and it was through a good deal of my WhatsApp contacts that the CS training was communicated. Eventually, I too became a member of the Courageous Sisters as a WhatsApp group member and an NGO member. I continue my relationship with CS and in 2018 was invited by Lady to become the Secretary on the Board of the Courageous Sisters, which I have taken on since November 2018, alongside Ghanaian NGO leaders, researchers, lawyers, and other queer women. I also continue my relationships with the CS on WhatsApp as well as with my core informants. With funding in the future, my hope is to return to Ghana to do a follow up with my core research participants, as well as with the CS to see how individual lives and the organization have transpired in the now almost 4 years since I have visited Accra.

While my lack of speaking local languages is an obvious limitation, I make note of both the English and local terminology that arose throughout my time in Accra as critically important to understanding the ways in which individuals relate to each other, to myself, to NGO spaces, as well as to categories. The use of English was embedded with local logics that I needed to learn, comparable to learning a foreign language. I follow both English and local terms through the anthropological methodology of emic theory, or the notion of analyzing and making use of concepts that arise "in the field" from the participants in my research (Boellstorff 2010, p. 220). This included a constant reflection on the use of terminologies, the relational aspects of research, the power and position I had to produce knowledge, but also deflecting assumptions that I was an expert or the knowledge bearer. Similar to feminist anthropology's interrogation of male bias in anthropology (Stacey 1988; Abu-Lughod 1990), queer ethnography prioritizes the participants as producers of knowledge, developing theory through their everyday experiences of gender, sexuality, embodiment, and how these may be tied to everyday experiences (Boellstorff 2010; 2007; Weiss 2011; Weston 1993). This requires an attentiveness to the ways in which political and economic forces construct sexuality (Boellstorff 2007,

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p. 22; Wekker 1991), but also how my research as well as my positionality as a white self-identified lesbian and queer woman carries with it the symbolic weight of the lesbian category as also an association with a higher class and social standing, as well as mobility (Wekker 1991).

There were several emic terminologies that arose from the field that the core group of queer women used for themselves or referred to each other: lesbian, sister, *nyaanyo*/friend*, tom, stud, stemme, femme*, bisexual, man, woman, transgender, LGBT and *supi*. These terms were full of meaning in relation to context, usage, and space. For example, there were many occasions when individuals preferred the term lesbian rather than *supi*, because according to them, *supi* was a "bad" term, associated with "bad things" and lesbian, despite it reaching the meta-level discourse in Ghanaian popular media as foreign, was considered a more positive term. The term lesbian, though not consuming or cancelling out other terms, seemed to be used as an umbrella term as it was often used synonymously with various other Southern Ghanaian and English terms. While I followed an emic approach to the research, I also follow anthropologist Naisargi Dave in acknowledging the agency of those individuals who did use the term lesbian (2012). Furthermore, as Dankwa's research on *supi* in southern Ghana has unveiled, "female same-sex passions revolve around the notion of secrecy and are based on tacit but vibrant forms of knowledge" (Dankwa 2009, p. 192). According to Dankwa, this form of knowledge created "homosocial spaces of intimacy", through a "language of allusion rather than a specialist, subcultural vocabulary" (ibid). However, I suggest that a "subcultural vocabulary," while used in closed spaces with me and others, was not used comfortably in all spaces, and the term *nyaanyo* was used in public places to refer to each other while remaining discrete (ibid).

 I also consider the use of local terminologies as information regarding the many ways in which desire and intimacy are experienced in Southern Ghana. One example is the way in which desire, practice, and identity can be formed relationally, for example, through what Dankwa refers to as the concept of "situational gender" (2013). Dankwa uses the concept to examine ways in which intimacy

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and relationships are "performed" (ibid), or rather, how gender performance is situational, according to one's relation to another through intimacy. There were also several English terms which showed evidence of a situational gender as described by Dankwa. For example, a *tom* is someone who identifies as the masculine or top in a perceived female same-sex relationship, who also performs or identifies as masculine, or the man, or a *stud*. This can be a term, therefore, which can also simply describe someone whom is perceived as female born and who is gender-nonconforming. Similarly, a *stud* is someone who identifies as the masculine and or top in a perceived female same-sex relationship, who also performs and or identifies as masculine, and or the man, or a *tom*. A *femme* is a category to describe oneself oftentimes in relation to a tom or a *stud* and is literally the person in a partnership who is considered to be the 'woman.' I met many individuals who identified as *stemmes*, or individuals who could be both a *tom* and or a *femme* depending on their relationship and feeling towards another. And a *stemme* is a term used to describe someone in a female to female relationship who describes themselves as both a top/*tom* and a *femme*/bottom, or in fact, outside of this dichotomy. Moreover, as I understood it in Accra, lesbian as a term was informed by the experiences and realities of those who are perceived to be female born and gender non-conforming persons, depending on their access and usage of English and sometimes, their interest in NGO spaces. Therefore, the term was used to describe a variance of gendered and intimate experiences. Kinship based terms to refer to queer women were present, including sister, a term that was used especially within NGO spaces to refer to the group. Due to the need for discretion regarding one's same-sex desire, I also noticed that beyond the core group and the research participants with whom I did qualitative interviews, many non-heteronormative women avoided me. This affected what I was able to find out about the realities of queer women and limited the research to the core group of participants and the interviews that I conducted. This was also telling about the core group as people who were willing to engage with me. For instance, as working-class queer women, they were targeted by but also interested in attending

NGO events. They were also open to the notion of an outsider or *obruni* doing research, and my queerness was an acceptable form of insiderness, despite my being an outsider by nationality and race. I assume this working-class group were more open to me as a researcher who was connected to NGOs as they were the target group for NGO interventions, and attended the NGO trainings. At the same time, I was only able to carry out semi-structured qualitative interviews with both Rebel and Lady, as we spent the most time together and therefore established a relationship of trust. It was difficult to pin down a time and place to do interviews with the rest of the core group, and my suspicion was that sitting down to talk with a recorder between us was not a preferred format of sharing information for many of them or was viewed with suspicion. Thus, my positioning as the outsider and the supposed expert with an association to NGOs may have been simultaneously beneficial yet limiting.

### iv. *WhatsApp and Digital Ethnography*

As a queer feminist ethnography, this research was also expanded to the medium of digital technologies as it moved between both material or physical spaces in Accra, but also included online or virtual spaces such as WhatsApp. Researchers have identified the use of alternative mediums as important for feminist research, as they have the possibility to better understand research participants' voices and experiences (Brydon-Miller 2003, p. 21). Following this understanding, the medium of WhatsApp was significantly important in my research process to understand "tacit or routine" aspects of the everyday among queer women (Hine 2015, p. 73). It was through WhatsApp that I began to understand the ways in which the affective dimensions of participants' lives as well as information about informants that they did not find important to share with me through interviews or participant observation in the "actual world" (Boellstorff 2008; 2013). Tom Beollstorff has pioneered the use of digital ethnography as a methodology, and I use his concepts of "virtual" and "actual" worlds as well as his digitalized concept of participant observation to inform my own methodology (2008). By "actual

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world," I am referring to the idea of the physical, everyday world, versus the "virtual" or online world (ibid).

Once invited by research participants to have their WhatsApp numbers, I began a series of texts to get to know people, to introduce myself, and to arrange a time to hang out in the "actual world" (ibid). As a member of WhatsApp groups, I participated in group conversations and shared information, and focused on queer women's use of WhatsApp as a digital platform, and how this is also a site for self-making. Once I joined WhatsApp groups, I participated in the group dynamics of sharing information, memes, and humor. WhatsApp was also a format that acted as a closed space for individuals, or rather, a space they could control through their acting as gatekeepers, controlling who they friend, what groups they join, and for group administrators, who belonged to their WhatsApp groups.

I also followed the ethics of informed consent when using information from specific WhatsApp profiles, including contacting the user directly through WhatsApp and asking for their permission to use information, which included explaining the research, as well as the quote or meme to be used, and informing the participant of their options to opt out as well as my intent to keep all participants anonymous. All WhatsApp materials are also anonymous when shared in this dissertation and all stored data has been kept on a disk drive rather than my smart phone, which, if lost, could compromise the identities of individuals. I have also shared the written results of the research with Lady, Rebel and Patricia in both the written academic format of the dissertation chapters as well through WhatsApp questionnaires that confirmed core results. Sharing the writing process and results was a way of continuing relationships beyond the period of research but also a way to include participants in the analysis and to affirm their positions as knowledge bearers.

*v. Overview*

This dissertation is divided into 5 chapters. In the first chapter, I give context to the history of governmentality and the effects of these processes. This includes contextualizing both the colonial apparatus of law as well as the missionary apparatus and it's impacts on constructions of a particular European form of heteronormativity as inherently racialized through its construction as modern. Following this, I conceptualize the post-colonial period, including the impacts of a neoliberal transnational governmentality in Ghana, and its various impacts on subjectivity as it relates to sexuality. This includes a contextualization of development interventions and NGOization in Ghana as they relate to women's rights, gender, and sexuality.

In the second chapter, I begin with ethnographic examples from my time in Accra, beginning with the introduction of Rebel, a person whom was identified by their peers as well as NGOs as a woman and a lesbian, but who identified as a man and a transgender person. In this chapter, I show how NGOs constructed the category of 'lesbian' as a biopolitical category of risk and were reliant on the cultural labor of persons like Rebel who need to "come out" in the NGO space to participate through the category. Moreover, I show how a 'culture of silence' existed among queer women at a meeting that includes both queer men and women and those who did not identify with this binary, and throughout the chapter I explain how in addition to this "culture of silence," there existed multiple barriers for queer women to join in NGO spaces.

In the third chapter, I introduce Lady, who presented herself to me as a lesbian, and who was dealing with the emotional stress of having queer relationships in Accra. Lady and the other queer women, I argue, were a part of a *nyaanyo* counter public, a space in which they reformulate their needs, desires, and create narratives about who they were in a space only they can access. Lady, a petty trader, was the administrator of a WhatsApp group, called M.O.B., or Money Over Bitches, that was also a part of a *nyaanyo* counter public. I show how this group served as an example of how queer women form an affective economy based on common experiences, and use the group to communicate

emotions, identities, and to re-affirm their simultaneous erotic subjectivity, gendered experiences, and Christian spirituality.

In the final chapter, I introduce the first training designed specifically for queer women, which was made possible through WhatsApp contacts and the creation of the Courageous Sisters WhatsApp group. This chapter explains that the training, although informed by sexual health and human rights discourses, was a meeting up of the *nyaanyo* counter public and the NGO space. I show through different training exercises, and through the discourse of empowerment, how the training offers something different and affirmative, if not empowering to queer women. To analyze the first training that was specifically for non-heteronormative women, I contextualize the discourse of empowerment as it has been taken up through gender and development discourses, as well as Ghanaian NGOs. I suggest that these discourses of empowerment were modified and translated by those who are subjected to them. From this training, I then explain the development of the Courageous Sisters as an NGO, which was headed by Lady as the first Executive Director. Through her professional development, and funding from a Northern donor, I show how the Courageous Sisters becomes a "hybrid form," of an NGO (Alvarez 1999) through which Lady acts as an intermediary in the process of translation.

## Chapter 1: Transnational Frictions, Neoliberal Subjectivity and the Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Ghana

Since the 1990's, Ghana has experienced a proliferation of discourses and discussions around sexuality, and sexual identity. These discourses show a friction between what are considered "local" conceptions of nationality, Christianity, and Ghanaian sovereignty as they intersect with issues of gender equality, human rights and sexual rights that are framed as foreign. While Ghana's 1992 constitution states that everyone, whatever their "race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, religion, creed or gender" (Republic of Ghana 1992), is entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms, politicians and religious leaders have constructed gender equality, sexual rights, homosexuality and lesbianism as foreign. In 1993, the Ghanaian state passed the Criminal Code Amendment Act, which continues to criminalize "unnatural carnal knowledge' which was inherited through British colonialism (Republic of Ghana 1960). At the same time, during this period in the 1990s, the liberalization of the media created a new public sphere that was made up of "private, commercial FM and TV stations and media houses" (DeWitte 2012, p. 85). This new public sphere that was developed marked a lack of control by the state of the media and provided mainstream platforms for Christian leaders (DeWitte 2012; Meyer 2008). At the same time, this liberalization opened up technologies such as the internet to more users, creating access to information, knowledge, and a proliferation of diverse expressions of the self (Avle 2011; Dankwa 2009). This period in the 1990s included a proliferation of internet users and also the influence of Pentecostal-Charismatic church leaders in Ghana looking to make waves by denouncing same-sex practices. It was also during this period that these leaders condemned what they termed "*supi supi lesbianism,*" and interestingly, connected "*supi supi lesbianism*" with decadence associated with the global north (Ahinful 1998 via Dankwa 2009). It was this construction of "*supi supi lesbianism*" which forced a "coming out" of *supi* into the public sphere, or onto a meta level (Dankwa

2009), reformulating the term and its usage into a derogatory nomenclature. This demonization of adult women's same sex bonds has created frictions for those who are deemed as "*supi supi lesbians*" and has constructed a common knowledge of *supi* as a "bad thing," including the association of *supi* with a non-Christian immoral self.

According to Karine Geoffrion, in Ghana the label "homosexual" has been imposed by Ghanaian political and religious discourse, for example, and does not map onto the local realities of same-sex practices and desires (2012). Foucault pointed out that the homosexual as a specific category or 'species' was constructed in the late 19th century Europe, as part of a regime of knowledge (1987). Building on the Foucauldian idea that sexuality is a 'dense transfer point of power' (1976, p. 103), Henriette Gunkel articulates that the notion of 'post-colonial homophobia' is a highly contentious topic, especially as it is taken up by activists, NGOs, and governments in the global north as a form of neo-colonial discourse (2010, p. 26). Attempts from actors from the global north to "tie aid to the acceptance of homosexuality," form part of a collection of forces which create moral panics among religious and political actors in the country (Tettey 2016, p. 87). Wisdom Tettey locates these moral panics in Ghana as a part of a "mediatized homophobia," or rather the discourses of religious and political leaders in the media which create a specific rhetoric that become a pivotal aspect of governmentality (2010; 2016, p. 87). In response to the repercussions of this mediatized homophobia, mobilizations around human rights as they relate to sexual identity have been increasing in Ghana. Notably, NGOs historically funded by Northern donors through HIV interventions have formed coalitions, making use of the constitution to protect themselves from state sanctioned criminalization and the material repercussions of this, including violence and discrimination. This has manifested through the formation of the Alliance for Equality and Diversity (AFED), a coalition made up of leaders from different NGOs who have historically been working on HIV projects that target an MSM

population. As mentioned in the introduction, AFED is interested in being "inclusive of all those under the LGBT umbrella," including, for instance, lesbians.

I understand the Ghanaian post-colonial context as a collection of various discourses, counter-discourses, and publics and counter publics through which gender and sexuality is a site, among other points of tension, through which a friction is being played out. As I explained in the introduction, I am referring to friction here as "heterogeneous and unequal encounters," of processes of globalization which "can lead to new arrangements of culture and power" and "zones of awkward engagement" (Tsing 2005, p. 5). Sexuality has become a concept, metaphor, discourse, and object, among others, through which this friction occurs, and is further exacerbated by northern interventions and funding of issues concerning both sexuality and gender, and the proliferation of NGOs in Ghana receiving such funding. Here, the notion of friction allows a conceptualization of Ghana's past and present as developed through encounters 'across difference' by which translation is possible (2005 p.6). Tsing uses translation as a way of taking into account the agency of individuals and organizations, and the ways in which processes of power and knowledge are not just exercised from top down, but also include "resistance, interpretation", and are "transformed, translated, distorted and modified by the individuals" who are subjected to them (Lendvai & Stubbs 2009, p. 676; Tsing 2005). For the sake of understanding specific articulations of power in a post-colonial context, I focus in this chapter on understanding transnational process of power through the analytic of governmentality as introduced by Michel Foucault to refer to the ways different forms of knowledge are "embedded within programmes for the direction and reform of conduct" (Foucault 1978; Foucault 1991b; Dean, 1999, p. 18). While making use of this analytic of power I also challenge the simplistic but widespread notion of a local versus global dynamic. This includes thinking through power and knowledge as constructed on various levels, including the local, transnational, national, regional, and global, and through encounters "across difference," (Ferguson & Gupta 2002, p. 981-983) resulting in the construction of

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heterosexuality and Christianity as the norm in the national imagination. In my conceptualization of

Ghana's public sphere, I find useful Nancy Fraser's notion of "competing publics" (1990), which

critiques the Euro-centric notion of the Habermesian public to think through the fact that there are

multiple and smaller publics that also regulate people's participation in specific spheres. This also

considers "pluralism" as a post-colonial phenomenon (Mbembe 2001b; 2001a; Fraser 1990). I will

contextualize this pluralism as well as the post-colonial context further at the end of this chapter.

Firstly, friction at the site of sexuality in the post-colonial context requires a re-reading of how

colonialism in Ghana constructed heterosexuality as the norm, and how this was particularly tied to

race, showing the inherent instability of heterosexuality (Gunkel 2010, p.28). Furthermore, this re-

reading includes understanding how missionaries were also a part of this project in Ghana. Therefore,

the first part of this chapter situates anthropologist Sadia Hodžić's concept of "cultural sovereignty,"

in the post-colonial context (2009, p. 331-360). Hodžić describes "cultural sovereignty," as a discourse

of Ghanaian political leaders which posits human rights, gender equality, and sexual rights as "foreign

imports" that are a threat to "Ghanaian culture" (ibid). This concept of cultural sovereignty is helpful

to read these anxieties and moral panics in the public sphere through the lens of a colonial and

missionary history of racialized and sexualized northern interventionism. In this chapter, I will discuss

the various phenomenon that have occurred in Ghana which inform its current post-colonial context.

This includes a historicization of governmentality, as it intersects with gender and sexuality during the

British colonial occupation. While I don't attempt to pin down an authentic notion of female same-

sex practices in Ghana,[7] I do, however, consider the ways in which indigenous kinship and religion

were devalued through colonial governmentality. In my use of governmentality, I also focus on the

analytic of biopower to think through the specific ways in which female sexuality and specific bodies

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[7] Gloria Wekker argues that there is an inability to historicize and pin down female same-sex practices in the pre-colonial
context without falling into the trap of Euro-centric categories of thought (1999 p. 134).

were sites through which power was and continues to be enacted. Following this, the second half of this chapter focuses on Ghana's post-colonial context through the analytic of neoliberal transnational governmentality. In my conceptualization, I think through the ways in which neoliberal economic policies and logics are transported through various technologies of rule in the form of transnational projects such as northern donor funding of civil society and NGOs. This includes contextualization of the effects of development and interventions which take up HIV/AIDS, sexual rights, and women's rights. I argue that through processes of northern funded NGOization, donor logics and universalisms that rely on specific technologies are taken up by NGOs, and then maneuvered and navigated by various individuals who are interested in participating with the NGOs, receiving services or attending trainings.

### 1.1. Colonial and Missionary Governmentality and the Construction of the Heteronormative Family

In this section, I outline how colonial and missionary efforts imposed a form of governmentality in Ghana, which constructed the gendering of public space, heteronormative marriage as the norm, the regulation and control of female sexuality, and the positing of Christianity as a superior form of religion. I suggest that this was mapped onto a context in which Ga forms of kinship and religion, specifically, were devalued in the process. Due to the regional focus of this research, while I understand that both the Akan and Ga ethnic groups were affected by colonial regimes, in this section, I focus more particularly on Ga kinship systems and notions of religion.

Ghana is a relatively newly independent West African country which, following a period of British indirect rule, became an independent republic in 1957. The country is incredibly diverse ethnically and linguistically, as there are over one hundred languages spoken, and three major ethnic groups: the largest is the Akan, and the second largest are the Ewe and Ga. Historically, the Akan were a part of the Ashanti empire which covered the central region of Ghana, while the Ga were

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generally a coastal group (Allman & Tashijan 1996; Odotei 2002). In present day Accra, the Ga dominated areas are still along the coast, including Jamestown, Osu, and Central Accra, the urban parts of the Greater Accra region, in which this research project took place. Also, while the country is host to multiple religions such as Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions, the current population is predominately Christian with a growing popularity since the 1970's of Pentecostal Christianity. With this complex assemblage within the imagined boundaries of one nation, an ideology of post-colonial Christian heterosexuality is discursively and legally constructed as "Ghanaian." The politicization and hegemony of this form of heterosexuality as the universal for all Ghanaians also intersects with hierarchies and differentiation in terms of gender, sexuality, religion, race, ethnicity, and class.

British occupation began in what was then known as the Gold Coast from 1867 and lasted until Ghana's independence in 1957. The project of British colonialism in the country was mostly produced through a white supremacist notion of European superiority (Ray 2015). Through legislation around marriage, the colonial government constructed what African and African American studies scholar Carina Ray identifies as the 'color line' (2015, p. 2-3). Edward Said identified the phenomenon of "orientalism" or the Euro-centric or Western knowledge construction as a coherent part of the imperialist project, which posited the 'orient' in opposition to the 'occidential' (1978). Scholar of African history and colonialism, Mamhood Mamdani (1996) similarly explains that in Africa, colonizers used differentiating processes to legitimize their rule and enacted these through law, as well as through discourse that constructed knowledge that represented colonizers as modern, and the locals or natives as "traditional" (Mamdani 1996; Pierre 2012). The colonial project thus used the notion of the 'traditional' and the 'modern' as a way of constructing dichotomies of power, through what Signe Arnfred identifies as "dark continent discourses" in regard to African sexuality, deriving from the construction of "Western thinking from Enlightenment onwards", which rely on "dichotomies and

hierarchized binaries, where one is not only separate/different but also above/better than the other" (2004, p. 8). In the Ghanaian context, these dichotomies were created through the definition of a heterosexual family which relied on constructions of a masculine public sphere and a feminized private sphere. The construction of the heterosexual family also relied on the creation of the sodomite in opposition to a heterosexual norm. These dichotomies were further manifested in missionary discourses which posited 'traditional' forms of religion as evil in opposition to Christian spirituality.

Through a feminist re-reading of historical accounts of Ga social systems, the Ga kinship system was a multi-faceted system which enabled autonomy for those perceived to be Ga women and gave them access to economic power, particularly in pre-colonial and post-independence Ghana (Robertson 1984). Ga women were and are a part of the public sphere through their role in trade. According to feminist historian Gracia Clark, in Southern Ghana, women had a role in the market which pre-dates colonial rule, and wealth was a prerogative in lineage and marriage for all genders (2001, p. 298). This engagement with the market and trade in combination with multi-faceted kinship systems would have given opportunities for substantial power to women. In anthropologist Margaret Field's interpretation of Ga social systems, she points out that, considerable autonomy was available to Ga women through trade and a patrilineal, duo-local system of gender, through which those perceived to be women shared compounds with their "mothers, their mother's sisters, their daughters, and their female children" (1940, p. 46). These spaces and modes for creating autonomy were posited by European colonizers as 'traditional' in opposition to a modern European construction of a middle-class, heterosexual family which relied on gendered roles which regulated women to the private sphere, and males to the public sphere.

Foucault defined governmentality as the ways in which different forms of knowledge are "embedded within programmes for the direction and reform of conduct" (Foucault 1978; Foucault 1991b; Dean, 1999, p. 18). Foucault used the term governmentality to define the ways in which

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biopolitics was enacted through the discipline and control of the state via discourses of the individual body and control over the "mechanics of life" of the "species body" (Foucault 1978). The species body, according to Foucault, was the 18th century acceptance of Western societies that human beings are biologically a species (2007). I use this analytic of biopolitics, along with the perspectives of various anthropologists, feminist scholars, and historians to think through the ways in which sexuality was a "dense transfer point of power" (ibid) during colonialism (Gilman 1985; McClintock 1995; Stoler 1997), and how the body was and is an object of power and also a site through which power is resisted (Foucault 1984, p. 83; Grosz 1989; Nyanzi 2011). More specifically, Ann Laura Stoler explains the centrality of biopolitics, and hence race, to the production of citizenship during colonialism. Thus, Stoler identifies more explicitly that the imperial relationship relied on the production of the citizen through biopolitical technologies enacted between the metropole to the colony and identified this relationship as 'contemporary racism' (Stoler 2010, p.150). Foucault also identified biopolitics as intertwined with race, and the author describes the process as the construction of identifying non-normativities through race, sex, and sexuality, which then allowed for the management of the species (Foucault 1978). Biopolitics was thus a process through which the notions of proper gendered and sexual relations were defined. This included creating Euro-centric normativities regarding masculinity, femininity, and sexuality, which were deeply entrenched in notions of European morality.

At the center of this biopolitical process was the female body, as the British colonial project was concerned with indigenous women's sexuality and constructed a racialized conception that the "black female embodied the notion of uncontrolled sexuality" as inherently immoral and diseased (Gilman 1985; Hammonds 1995, p. 172). Overall, this example of scientific racism at the time was a production of knowledge around gender, race, and sexuality which was used to justify colonial rule, and the implementation of various forms of techniques through which to control the mechanics of the population. Nigerian feminist scholar Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí identifies the biopolitical "othering" of

racialized bodies in colonization projects and explains that the body was the site from which gendered and sexualized colonial law and discipline were inscribed and resisted and visualized, putting the African body into the gaze of the colonizer (1997, p. 5). Following these insights, we can think through the biopolitics of colonialism as inherently intersectional in the classic U.S. black feminist sense as articulated by Patricia Hill-Collins: positing "that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization" (Hill Collins 2000, p. 299). Also, feminist scholars have further articulated gender and class as central to the construction of the nation. Nira Yuval-Davis confirms that the project of producing a nation has substantially included the production of the proper notions of "man-hood" and "woman-hood" (1997), and Anne McClintock identifies the intersectionality of the imperial project as relying on the production of and "self-definition" of a European middle-class from the urban metropole to the colonies (1995, p. 5). Additionally, McClintock articulates that in the intersectional imperial project of producing race through class and sexuality, gender was more specifically "cross-hatched" with labor power (ibid). Thus, the imperial project relied on the creation of gender differentiation as a tool of racial and class domination, constructing "whiteness and blackness, masculinity and femininity, labor and class" (ibid, p.16).

During British indirect rule, a collection of forces and events converged, constructing the European model of a monogamous heterosexual family form as the norm through the intersection of religion, sexuality, gender, and economy during the colonial occupation, which affected all ethnic groups, including the Akan and the Ga. Following the Atlantic slave trade and during the period of colonization of the Gold Coast, the colonial government sought to solidify state formation and profiting of the colony through the production of cocoa in the region (Austin 2005). Through British indirect rule a system of biopolitical governance was enacted to control the colonial population through the juridical apparatus and the implementation of penal codes and acts at the intersection of

gender, sexuality, race, and class. As a part of this governmentality, the colonial state used "technologies of rule" (Foucault 1978), or rather, "techniques of power" to control bodies and populations through different means such as law, science, discourse, policy, medicine, and juridical power of the state through criminal codes and constitutions (Foucault 1978; 1997; 2004). This included prescribing proper heterosexual marriage to reduce polygamy (Soothill 2007, p.84), and criminalizing concubinage, sodomy, and prostitution in the Gold Coast. In addition, colonial governmentality regulated supposedly uncontrolled female sexuality through biomedical interventions and legislation around syphilis and STDs. And finally, as a complementary apparatus of colonial governmentality, Christian missionary projects in the region enacted techniques of discipline and control, or "the exercise of power over and through the individual, the body and its forces and capacities, and classes of people" (Dean 1999, p. 19). This discipline was carried out through education and the construction of confessional technologies through which individuals could access 'healing' through confessing the evilness within themselves. As an aspect of this discipline, according to Foucault, confessional technologies were a Christian technology of an 'incitement to discourse' (1990, p. 21).

Once the British arrived at the Gold Coast, they began implementing legislation around marriage, outlawing inter-marriages to prevent European men from 'going native' (Ray 2015, p. 6). This was an example of the a biopolitical form of power enacted through the technique of juridical power (Foucault 1978, 1997, 2004) and shows how the colonialists were particularly concerned with the 'mechanics of life' including who should reproduce and with whom (Foucault 1978). By way of out-lawing inter-marriage, Europeans sought to control the population and reproduction, and in the process, marked racialized borders around sexuality between the colonizer and the colonized. This is also an example of creating a politics of knowledge surrounding sexuality and intimacy, through the notion of a European sensibility and moral superiority in the colonial encounter (Stoler 1995; 2002).

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Through this politics of knowledge technologies were then used to discipline the population to manage its wellbeing (Foucault 1979). This was further exemplified through the 1884 Marriage Ordinance, introduced by the British in the Gold Coast to give an "alternative to customary marriage," (Soothill 2007, p. 84). The ordinance was entrenched in Christian respectability politics, including the idea that "'European marriage,' otherwise defined as a monogamous companionate union" was a superior form of marriage (Ray 2015, p. 6). Through the ordinance, a Christianized conception of the family was constructed as the norm as a form of modernization at the time. This posited indigenous forms of kinship or 'customary' marriages as well as polygamous practices as "traditional" and trapped in time. This conception of what anthropologist Ifi Amadiume calls the production of "European patriarchal paradigms," (1998, p. 20) created shifts in social organization, and kinship. Historian Jane Soothill makes note that the influence of colonialism, prioritized the non-lineage heterosexual relationship, which was not the case in pre-state Ghanaian societies that also practiced polygamy and various kinship formations (2007, p. 80). These sorts of legislative changes also reconceptualized space, and the division of the public and the private became a "site of production" of colonial technologies of rule as this reformulation of the spheres of life was central to the production of "racialized colonial worlds" (Stoler 1995, p. 26; 2002, p. 9). Therefore, it was assumed that the intimate or private realm of knowledge making, such as "carnal knowledge," should be regulated by law (Stoler 1996).

This reconceptualization of space during the phase of colonialism, relied on European notions of the "the house being female and private" in opposition to the "outside being male and public" (Ammo-Adare 2013, p. 45). This included a move from lineage marriages to an increase in "conjugal family" units, which was the antithesis of Ga constructions of kinship (Allman & Tashjian 2000), and prioritized a public and private divide and therefore, a Westernized, masculinized conception of space (Sinnott 2013). Thus, juridical techniques such as the Marriage Ordinance constructed knowledge and

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truths about kinship, masculinizing the public sphere, invisibilizing other forms of kinship, and constructed the notion of heterosexual, monogamous, and Christianized marriage as the norm.

British colonial rule sought to govern female sexuality in the Gold Coast, most particularly through reconstructing marriage as heterosexual and patriarchal, and through colonial medical interventions and anxieties about prostitution. Feminist scholar of coloniality, Jacqui M. Alexander articulates that heteropatriarchy operates through the discursive and legal construction of a "marginal underground of noncitizens" (Alexander 1997, p. 66). This construction of marginality through the creation of the sodomite lead to prioritizing specific forms of sexuality and gendered power.  In 1885, British colonialists implemented the Criminal Law Amendment which criminalized sex between two consenting males, labeling it as sodomy, which was a technology which sought to discipline specific bodies and the control of the population through the object of sex (Foucault 1977, p. 125). The penal code section 145 defined sodomy as the act of "carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature" or the permitting of a "male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature" (Human Rights Watch 2008, p. 19). The code focuses primarily on the act of a "male person," and criminalizes any sex that is supposedly "un-natural," or rather, technically, any sex that is not between a penis and a vagina.  If found guilty, a person could be imprisoned for up to fourteen years" (ibid). Additionally, this implementation of juridical power was substantial in the colony, as it brought same-sex practices into discourse, and simultaneously constructed sexuality as governable and as an object of discipline through the construction of the "sodomite" as a specific category (Alexander 1997, p. 66; Ratele 2011). Foucault acknowledged this as the identification of the homosexual as a species outside of the population, which also reified the notion of the family as central to the management of the population (Foucault 1978, p. 37). This criminalizing of sodomy further confirmed European conceptions of the Gold Coast as a "porno-tropic" site (McClintock 1997; Dhawan), as well as racialized conceptions of the African male as a barbaric sodomite. These confirmations

perpetuated a politics of knowledge that sought to regulate and control black masculinity and a perceived uncivilized hyper-sexualized black male sexuality (Ratele 2011), while invisibilizing sex between women as part of its description.

British authorities were also concerned with disease, and targeted females, especially mobile and or un-married women as conduits of syphilis and gonorrhea (Allman 1996; Akyeampong & Agyei-Mensah, S. in Oppong 2006 p. 48; Roberts, 1987). As historian Meghan Vaughan rightly points out, these concerns over sexual behavior and disease were common in the colonies, and they were anxious reactions to complex economic changes, and the "enormous strains" on gender and inter-generational relations (Vaughan, 1991, p. 144 in Akeampong, p. 49). Feminist scholar Desiree Lewis states that the criminalization of prostitution in African urban areas during colonial rule was an effort to establish black female bodies as having excessive sexuality (Lewis 2012, p.206), while African feminist Sylvia Tamale explains that it was a convenient way to control the mobility of female bodies (2011). Another penal code, section 138, criminalized prostitution and was part of the colonial attempt to curb women's sexual autonomy and to regulate sexual diseases. British missionaries and colonizers justified this legislation through the British penal code, as a way of establishing a heteronormative and reproductive sexual code of conduct for the colonizers, missionaries, and indigenous populations alike.

These colonial biopolitical forms of governance were mapped onto a Southern Ghanaian context, in which Ga kinship structures were also deeply embedded with Ga religion. Historian Harry Nii Koney Odamtten articulates the centrality of Ga religion to the politics of knowledge that existed within Ga kinship, but also the fact that both men and women were considered knowledge bearers (2012), with women conducting rituals and "rites of passage" through motherhood, and their role as decision makers, "priestesses" and "healers" (Odamtten 2012, p. 116). For example, in Ga councils, elderly wise women called *yeemei* were referred to for final decisions when decision making among men was not obtainable (ibid). Both anthropologists Marion Kilson (1972) and Margaret Field (1940)

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identified in their work that the role of religion in Ga communities and kinship systems was quite central, and embedded in everyday life, and that houses, or compounds were oftentimes arranged around a central god or deity. Marion Kilson's ethnographic work in the 1960s showed that the Ga religion was based on "cognatic kin units" or *we,* in which both priests *(wulomo)* and mediums *(wongtse)* were intermediaries between a divine being *(wong)* and mortals (1972, p. 172). Thus, while the Ga religion reified motherhood and fertility as a source of power, it also gave space to other roles for women, specifically. Kilson highlights the ways in which mediums or priestesses were able to hold autonomous spaces that were outside of the emphasis on maternity and motherhood in Ga society, and were able to gain power despite not having children (1972, p. 174). According to Kilson, mediums were said to have social and psychological insight to "resolve complex personal issues," giving them considerable power in Ga social systems (ibid, p. 176). This fact, along with the demand that mediums abstain from sex during their training, eludes to an alternative space for kinship, and alternative forms of gender and sexuality within Ga religion. However, the unfortunate history is that European missionaries in the Gold Coast constructed the Ga religion in opposition to and inferior in comparison to a Christian spirituality.

Another form of the colonial biopolitical apparatus was embodied in missionary projects in the 19th century Gold Coast. This included, but was not limited to, the German and Swiss Basel Mission and the American based Faith Tabernacle. These missions enacted techniques of governing gender and sexuality during a period in which cocoa farming became the main colonial enterprise in the country from 1835 and through indirect rule, and the Basel Mission and its missionaries were central to the start of the cocoa industry. Both missions eventually constructed sex- segregated English language schools, through which learning Christianity as well as Christianized understandings of gender and sexuality were central. In addition, the missions assisted in constructing moral panics around gender and sexuality during this period of colonialism. Established in 1835, the Basel Mission,

would become central to the "re-shaping" of identities through Christianized, evangelical discourses (Sill 2008, p. 16) and the creation of boys' and girls' schools (Asare-Sanso 2017). At the same time, these schools were deeply embedded in a theology of marriage and family and proper European notions of femininity (Asare-Sanso 2017). These schools served as apparatuses of biopower through which a politics of knowledge around norms was enacted. Through the Basel Women's Mission, a German/European (white) conception of 'womanhood' which relegated women to the private sphere of domesticity in the heterosexual family form was promoted as superior (Sill 2008, p. 16). These discourses and ideals sought to construct the house as a "female and private" space in opposition to an "outside being male and public" which was formerly, "non-existent in West Africa" (Ammo-Adare 2013, p. 45). Also, the Faith Tabernacle Congregation, a Philadelphia-based church established in 1918, gained power through the process of colonialism, the creation of English language schools for children, and through the offering of protections from witchcraft (Mohr 2011). The congregation actively promoted Christianized versions of witchcraft through the discourse of 'evil spirits' and 'the Devil,' which the Tabernacle offered protections against through forms of Christian healing (Mohr 2011, p. 78). In 1930 a law was implemented by the British colonial government to end "witch finding," while at the same time, the government emphasized "curing through confession over punishment," thus, constructing the technology of confession to rid oneself of evil (Gray 2001). This was an example of the construction of confessional technologies for Christianized healing. At the same time, the Mission proposed that 'traditional' forms of religion were evil, and often cast local priests and priestesses as witches (Onyinah 2004, p.112). The gendered elements of witchcraft accusations have a long European history but are also evident in historicized accounts of witch finding in Ghana which often accused women who operated outside of the heteronormative Christian family of the practice (Gray 2001). In response to the colonial government's banning of "witch finding,"

Ingenious African Churches were constructed to respond to the rise in witchcraft (Gray 2001; Onyinah 2004, p. 110). These churches would later form the movement of Pentecostal churches.

These missionary discourses which insisted that local forms of religion were evil, inherently disempowered Ga religion and the considerable attachment it had to forms of kinship. Although I don't claim that Ga social systems were devoid of forms of patriarchy, the combination of wealth available to Ga women's role in trade, duo-local and dual-sex social systems, and the availability through Ga religion to carve out space for alternative kinship systems all point towards spaces of power and autonomy for women as well as flexibility around gendered roles as gender intersects with class (wealth), age, and religion. These kinship systems and notions of gender were not obliterated by colonialism; however, a Christian heteronormative conception of the family has been hegemonic in the post-colonial context. In the following section, I focus on the ways in which sexuality and the heterosexual family form constructed through colonial governmentality are reified as Ghanaian and African, and how this heteronormative logic is in friction with a supposedly non-normative sexuality and gendered experience. I also show how forms of governance around gender and sexuality as they intersect with race continue in the post-colonial context through a neoliberal transnational governmentality, which I will define in the following sections.

*1.2 Plurality and Governance in Ghana's Post-Colonial Context*

With the understanding of the governmentality of sexuality as a product of the colonial encounter, we can read through religious and political articulations that construct homosexuality and lesbianism as un-Ghanaian as a direct response to colonial constructions of racialized sexuality. While colonial forms of governmentality to a great extent relied on the construction of a modern civilized self through the family and heteronormative Christianized constructions of gender, as well as

confessional technologies for Christianized healing, the effects of this governmentality are evident through frictions between constructions of an "authentic Africanness" (Dosekun 2007, p. 80-1 in Ekine 2016) and a discourse of "cultural sovereignty," as articulated by Pentecostal religious leaders and politicians (Hodžić 2009, p. 331-360). Mamdani further articulates that colonial processes are evident through the postcolonial tensions which posit "civil society and liberal human rights discourses against supposed African values" (1996, p.3).

At the same time, there is a substantial amount of literature which critiques the development industry as a neocolonial project, through which northern powers continue the construction of a progressive and modern west and a traditional rest that needs saving from poverty (Bawa 2016; Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994; 1999; Mawuko-Yevugah 2014, Mohanty 1991; Saunders 2002; Spivak 1988). Following others, I see the northern interventions in Ghana as part of a continuance of the colonial construction of the 'traditional' and the 'modern' dichotomy through which "dark continent discourses" regarding African sexuality continue in the post-colonial context (Arnfred 2004, p. 8). These discourses travel through development projects, policies, and economic logics which further the colonial "dichotomies and hierarchized binaries, where one is not only separate/different but also above/better than the other," (Arnfred 2004, p.8). The development industry and northern powers have been critiqued for relying on the "third world woman" as a monolithic category of woman who is a victim in need of saving (Mohanty 1984), while reifying gender dichotomies, and universalizing the heteronormative family and marriage as a part of a moralizing discourse (Sharma 2008; Correa & Jolly 2008). More recently, northern donors from countries such as the U.S. and Nordic countries have become involved in funding initiatives in issues pertaining to gender and sexual minorities which are informed by northern conceptions of identities and activist logics. Since the 1990s, activists and NGO leaders in Ghana have engaged with northern donors' logics and the larger development

industry to challenge discourses of cultural sovereignty and the criminalization and marginalization of queer persons, further complicating the Ghanaian post-colonial context.

Despite the political support for the reaffirmation of laws criminalizing un-natural carnal knowledge through the criminal code in the 1990s, in June of 2011, the "Ghana Men's Study," funded by PEPFAR through the Center for Disease Control Ghana Country Office (a U.S. body) was carried out by the Ghanaian Aids Commission (GAC), which operates under the office of the President of Ghana. This U.S.-funded, and Ghanaian government-coordinated bio-medicalized study was the first of its kind in Africa which focused on HIV/AIDS and STI's among MSM (Gyamerah 2017, p. 253). Through the implementation of the study, sex practices were brought into public discourse explicitly through a transnationally funded government commission, making sexuality, but also the bio-medical category of MSM, governable. This preliminary report on the MSM community in Western Ghana sparked an open public debate regarding sexuality in Ghana in 2011. In response, Western Region Minister Paul Evan Aidoo called for the arrest and rounding up of all "gay people" (ibid, p. 257).

The mediatized homophobic response was so profound, that international political actors became involved: David Cameron released a statement saying that he would cut UK aid to "countries that fail to support gay rights" (Tettey 2016), and in 2011, Hillary Clinton launched the Global Equality Fund. The fund was intended to "support programs that advance the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons around the world," as a "collaborative effort led by the U.S. Department of State, bridging government, companies and NGOs with the objective of empowering LGBT persons to live freely and without discrimination" (BBC News 2011). At the same time, U.S. President Barack Obama supported GEF and "issued a memo ordering American diplomats abroad to advance the rights of [LGBT] persons" and simultaneously attempted to threaten to "withhold aid from Nigeria and Uganda" in response to their proposed anti-homosexuality bills (Nsehe, 2011 in Gyamerah p. 148). In March 2012, Ghanaian President Mills, responding to David Cameron's

statement, claimed that he would never support the decriminalizing of homosexuality in Ghana. These political, state, and religious responses reinforced the association of foreignness, and more specifically, the global north with homosexuality, "*supi supi* lesbianism," and more generally, same-sex sexuality, and are a direct reaction to a history of foreign interventions on the topic. These moral panics are a discourse of cultural sovereignty, or an articulation by religious and political leaders that specific sexual rights and women's rights claims are foreign. Such discourses of cultural sovereignty have material repercussions for those at the intersection of localized moral debates around gender and sexuality. In 2011 there was a physical attack in a predominately Ga neighborhood in Accra, Jamestown, upon supposedly identifiable LGBT persons, prompted by the rumor that it was a "lesbian birthday party" (O'Mara 2013). This attack highlights the larger friction regarding female same sex practices and the notion of lesbianism as foreign.

The complexity of Ghana's post-colonial context can be thought through what Achille Mbembe calls pluralism, which considers the various "religious networks, private companies, institutions, and NGOs" which form a "multiplicity of organizing principles, networks, and institutions" (2001b, p. 7). Mbembe makes note that this pluralism is a part of the process of transnationalization for states in post-colonial Africa, in which the "market road to capitalism" "accentuates the conflict between the cosmopolitan and a nativist vision of identity and African culture" (ibid). Thus, Mbembe also highlights that considering this complexity, sexuality is a "site" in and of itself, from which identities are "staged, performed and enacted" (ibid). Following Mbembe, I suggest that we can conceptualize Ghana's post-colonial context as including a plurality of forces on various levels, which are complicated by transnationalization. As shown above, more recently, northern donor HIV/AIDS interventions through studies of MSM in the country have added to Ghana's post-colonial plurality. These recent changes in the post-colonial context enact new techniques of governance and new forms of citizenship through the "object" of sexuality (Pigg &

Adams 2005), which create what Amy Lind identifies as "new sexual subjects of development" (2010, p. 3).

There has been considerable anthropological work on deconstructing development and its various discourses, knowledge production, and mechanisms of power (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990; Pigg 1991). In general, this power is implemented through what Kriemild Saunders identifies a "powerful development apparatus" established through northern dominated institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations (UN), and multilateral and bilateral agencies, which follow the ideology of a "managerial and interventionist approach to growth and national development" of "poorer" nations (2002, p. 2). Further articulating this dominance through instrumentalized approaches, Arturo Escobar traces how the foundation of the development industry relies on neoliberal market logics, which are evident in the devastating implementation of 1980s International Monetary Fund's (IMF) structural adjustment programs and the World Banks' implementation of "market friendly development" strategies in the 1990s (1995, p. 57).

In Ghana these structural adjustment policies were implemented in the early 1980s and were first and foremost packaged with the neoliberal logic of the rolling back of state power, the privatization of social services such as healthcare and education, and the economic logic of the unrestrained market. Government studies scholar Mawuko-Yevugah (2014) identifies this as a form of post-colonial power enacted through what he calls the "architecture of aid" via northern funding of civil society in Ghana (p.2). The author conceptualizes this proliferation of the aid industry through northern funding as neocolonial form of Foucault's notion of governmentality, or "developmentality" in the context (p. 5). Similarly, Ferguson and Gupta (2002), elaborate on the concept of transnational governmentality as "new practices of government" by global and transnational actors, highlighting the ways in which these actors are naturalized and legitimized in states' authority over 'the local' (2002, p. 981), Anthropologist Aihwa Ong describes this dominance of neoliberal market logics as well as the

changing role of the state as neoliberal governmentality (2006a). Thus, following these conceptions of governmentality, I use the analytic of neoliberal transnational governmentality to think through the ways in which various "techniques of power" are enacted in the neoliberal era (Foucault 1978; 1997; 2004).

Ong defines the framework of neoliberal governmentality as the modern version of biopower through which new techniques for governing the population and the individual are enacted through the dominance of neoliberal economic privatization as well as non-state institutions that create new spaces for citizenship (2006a). More specifically, Ong suggests that NGOs play a role in challenging state sovereignty, and they reconfigure relationships of governance as well as sovereignty (ibid). Critical development scholar Amy Lind also follows this framework, articulating that "neoliberal governmentality" as a framework "captures the layers of institutions that are involved in defining and regulating" intimate lives (2010, p. 5). The decentralization of the state forced many African states, including Ghana, to become financially reliant on northern states and institutions for social welfare, health care, and human resources, developing donor reliance, and neo-colonial relationships between international financial organizations such as the World Bank, IMF, and donor countries such as the U.S. (Tripp 2004; Mamdani 1983). During this same time, in the 1980s, in tandem with economic liberalization grew the promotion of democratic values through the proliferation of NGOs throughout the continent of Africa (Kamat 2004; Hearn 2007; Bernal and Grewal 2014). These NGOs became the "magic bullet" for the development of a civil society and social welfare sector in so called under-developed nations (Alvarez in Grewal & Kaplan 2014, p. 285), and they traveled with structural adjustment programs, as donors began to rely on NGOs to implement policies and provide services, as the state was no longer able to provide social welfare services. This also enacted a process of NGOization, or the professionalization of social movements (Lang 1997 in Bernal & Grewal 2014, p. 1).

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These NGOs and northern donors' policies which operate outside of the state have played a large role in defining citizenship in the neoliberal era (Ong 2006a; Lind 2010). I suggest that the impacts of interventions which focus on the object of sex, have created a plethora of NGO and donors' logics which rely on and reinforce social technologies used to "disseminate development projects" (Nguyen 2010, p. 247 in Pigg & Adams 2010). I approach policy as a technology of rule that is then taken up by NGOs and through which technologies of subjectivities are used to "manage populations" (Foucault 1978). I follow Ong's conception of "technologies of subjectivity" as biopolitical techniques of rule that are enacted through policies, donor funding, and NGOs (2006a, p. 6). I see NGOs as mediums through which the meaning of the citizen in neoliberalism is changed, which according to Ong, also reconfigures sovereignty (ibid, p. 6-7).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I propose that this reconfiguring of sovereignty through technologies of subjectivity is thus reliant on technologies of the self as they are used to articulate one's erotic life. Here I am referring to Foucault's notion of technologies of self as the "domination of others and those of the self," which rely on individuals to enact "operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (1993; 1978, p.18). I also use the notion of "technologies of the self" following anthropologist Vin Kim Nguyen, who, in his work on the production of "confessional technologies" in Cote d'Ivoire during the rise of the HIV epidemic in the 1990s, explains that individuals had to "come out" as HIV positive to receive services from NGOs (2010). Nguyen's definition of confessional technologies builds on Foucault's concept of 'incitement to discourse' and the Christian technology of "passing everything to do with sex through the endless mill of speech" (1990, p. 21). I argue that NGOs working on sexual health and human rights in Ghana rely on confessional technologies through which individuals must "come out" and share their narratives of discrimination or experiences of violence to receive NGO services.

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I further show that NGOs rely on individuals to "come out" through technologies of confession, but also technologies of recognition in order to receive services. By this, I mean that transnational and global articulations of identity models of recognition by activists, organizations, institutions, and northern donors are enacted through NGOs as new technologies. In my use of identity models of recognition, I am referring to Nancy Fraser's formulation that the identity model of recognition is a neoliberal phenomenon throughout social movements in the 1970s and 1980s, which the author identifies as replacing calls for redistribution of resources, due to the "assault on egalitarianism" through the enactment of neoliberalism (2000, p. 107). Thus, I suggest that NGOs rely on technologies of recognition and confession through which individuals must "come out" through categories such as LGBT, or MSM and share their stories of discrimination in order to receive services. I argue that this is the enactment of a new form of biopolitics, through which the "nature" of sex, the desire to locate sexuality, and the construction of the homosexual as a "personage" and simultaneously a species outside of the population is enacted in new ways (Foucault 1978, p. 37). These new categories are juxtaposed as outside of the Ghanaian heteronormative family. Thus, by using and reaffirming the use of specific categories based on sexuality such as MSM, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, individuals are susceptible to becoming subjects or categories that are then managed by NGOs, and who then may be at risk of becoming legible within the wider public.

While I use these analytics to think about how power is enacted, I also suggest that this is not a completely hegemonic process, but a process of translation, through which meanings are constantly transformed, translated, distorted and modified and interpretations as well as resistance are enacted (Lendvai & Stubbs 2009, p. 676). This framework of translation also considers how I understand the complexity of queer women's subjectivities, which are not only informed by NGO technologies, but are informed by embodied realities, the complexity of the context, the liberalization of the media and the use of social media technologies, as well as the ongoing porousness through which notions of

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local, transnational and global are constantly informed by and informing each other. Along these lines, Mbembe suggests conceptually moving away from a simplistic notion of an African geopolitical essentialization of identity, through the concept of "afropolitanism" (2007). The concept, Mbembe identifies as "a way of being in the world" which also refuses a "form of victim identity" and is a concept that moves towards an "integral transformation of identity politics" beyond the dualistic construction of the local and the global (2007, p. 30). More specifically, building on Mbembe's concept of afropolitanism, the idea focuses on the agency of individuals to define themselves, but also the complexity of identity in post-colonial African contexts, which challenges simplistic notions of an authentic African-ness, and accounts for the complexity of transnational and global influences which construct and influence identity. This notion of afropolitanism is helpful in thinking through the complex ways in which individuals navigate neoliberal formations in the Ghanaian context through agentive subjectivities, while also remaining attentive to the formations of governmentality in the country. Throughout this dissertation I show the ways in which these neoliberal technologies are maneuvered through a process of translation by individuals and organizations in Accra. Here, in the last part of this chapter, I summarize the ways in which what I call neoliberal transnational governmentality has been enacted in the Ghanaian context through various interventions. These interventions include the economic liberalization and the dominance of the development industry, U.S. and northern funding of civil society and NGOs, the effects of the U.S. Culture Wars over sexual rights, (including the influences of PEPFAR), and the impact of HIV interventions in the country.

### 1.3 Development and Sexuality

In thinking through neoliberal transnational governmentality and the ways in which this operates in Ghana, it is also important to make note of the ways in which the "development apparatus" has historically taken up issues of sexuality, gender, and human rights (Saunders 2002, p. 1). During

the UN Women's Decade from 1976 to 1985, the Women in Development (WID) approach was adopted by northern donors and implemented through civil society projects in the south. This approach has been critiqued by scholars as perpetuating patriarchal norms regarding gender relations, including reifying women's dependence on the state and the family (Saunders 2002, p. 4). This WID approach was also coopted by many state leaders and was influential in the NGOization of social movements and defined as the inclusion of women in development interventions which to a great degree focused on instrumentalized and essentialized constructions of the gender binaries and the heteronormative family through which women must be empowered to work to survive neoliberal economic conditions (Bedford 2009 in Mason 2018). For example, Kate Bedford (2009) analyzes how the World Bank relies on neoliberal "proper heterosexuality" in its programmatic approaches to gender, through its assumptions that individuals operate through heterosexual marriages in the private sphere, and considers women's work outside of marriage and the home as an aspect of neoliberal economic growth (Bedford 2009 in Mason 2018).

Moreover, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) conference in Cairo and the 1996 UN's Bejing Conference (the Fourth World Conference on Women) have also been critiqued for their instrumentalization of issues gender (Grewal & Kaplan 1994; Ong 1996; Spivak, 1995 in Roodsaz & Raemdonck 2018; Cornwall et al 2008). However, at the same time, the Beijing conference created the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was also a catalyst for the NGOization of feminist movements and women's rights movements and marked the creation of the historic 'paragraph 96' which was adopted by national delegates at the conference (Nyanzi 2011). The paragraph includes articulating human rights in relation to sexuality, explicitly:

> The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity for the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behavior and its consequences. (UNFWCW 1995 in Nyanzi 2011, p. 487)

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However, scholars have made note that sexual rights as a concept are quite ambivalent (Richardson 2000 in Nyanzi 2011, p. 487), and the use of the framework is often taken up by northern policies and donors through a Euro-centric LGBT paradigm, meaning donors rely on essentialized identity categories (Cornwall et al 2008). Additionally, anthropologists and other scholars on development have critiqued the industries' approach to sexuality, as relying on neo-colonial moralizing discourses and policies through bio-medicalized, public health frameworks which usually focus on reproductive diseases, violence, and HIV/AIDS prevention (Correa & Jolly 2008; Nyanzi 2011; Pigg & Adams 2005). For example, anthropologist Stella Nyanzi identifies how the sexual behavior of sub-Saharan Africans has predominately been "subjected to multiple and rigorous mechanisms of monitoring, control and forced compliance" through biomedical interventions (2011 p. 482). This has included various northern institutions funding of interventions that focus on population control, reproductive health, and more recently sexual and reproductive health and rights through public health frameworks (ibid). Such approaches promote "equity and well-being" with a "series of risks and distortions related to gender and sexuality" (Correa & Jolly 2008, p. 250), and are a continuance of racialized conceptions of Africans, and more particularly, black females as embodying an "uncontrolled sexuality" (Gilman 1985; Hammond 1997, p. 172). Additionally, these public health frameworks in development policy reinforce biological essentialisms regarding women's roles as reproducers, "deploying epidemiological taxonomies" in approaches to sexuality and gender (Cornwall et al 2008, p. 25), and have usually focused on victimization frameworks and medicalized approaches based on categories of risk rather than "pleasure and well-being" (Nyanzi 2011; Petchesky 2000, p. 26).

In more recent years, states from the global north such as the U.S. have implemented policies and proposed potential aid conditionality in support of sexual health and human rights. This is evident

through the statement at the U.S. Embassy in 2015 during my research, that the PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for Aid Relief) principles have more recently included "a call for tolerance, "the "protection and promotion of human rights," and the idea that "gender and sexual minorities can't be further imperiled," which is a part of the Global Equality Fund Initiative enacted in 2011 following a speech by Secretary of State at the time, Hillary Clinton the same year (BBC News 2011). The fund was intended to "support programs that advance the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons around the world," as a "collaborative effort led by the U.S. Department of State, bridging government, companies and NGOs with the objective of empowering LGBT persons to live freely and without discrimination" (BBC News 2011). I argue that this inclusion of LGBT persons as an issue and concern for U.S. foreign policy, is a part of a rescue narrative through which the U.S. state posits the Ghanaian "queer subject" as the "marker for Euro-American sexual enlightenment and tolerance" (Dhawan 2016, p.53). Jasbir Puar identifies this as a form of sexual exceptionalism, which attaches "the recognition of homosexual subject, both legally and representationally, to the national and transnational political agendas of U.S. imperialism" (2007, p. 9). This fits into the broad phenomenon of Puar's conception of homonationalism, or the inclusion of homosexuality and homosexual bodies in U.S. nationalist projects (2007), and is in line with what feminist scholar Hakima Abbas in response to the effects of such discourses in Uganda, states, that such impositions assume that Africans are "not yet civilized enough to tolerate gay and lesbian people" (2012, p. 16-19). I found that this racialized rescue narrative and policy implementation through U.S. based funding has had a substantial impact on the discursive and material realities of queer persons in Ghana, as individuals are required to "come out" to organize and access funds while the Ghanaian state seeks to deny the movement in favor of "cultural sovereignty" (Hodžić 2009).

In addition, the PEPFAR policy which seeks to include gender and sexual minorities, I argue, is an example of the adoption by the U.S. state of the "inclusion-difference" paradigm derived from

Euro-American LGBT public health activism, which, according to Steve Epstein, sought to use sexual orientation and identity categories in order to be recognized by U.S. state public health policy during the 1980s HIV/AIDS epidemic (2007). This bio-medicalized paradigm is an intersection of development approaches to sexuality which have relied on HIV interventions and bio-medicalized approaches based on categories of "risk," which are mapped onto a context through which local logics around female same-sex practices are centered around indirection and discretion (Dankwa 2009). This paradigm brings same-sex practices in particular into discourse through U.S.-based activist logics and categories, through which individuals and populations can then be managed. This paradigm also places value in supposedly Euro-American identities and categories as markers of progress (Altman 2001; Valentine 2007), while localized notions of erotic desire and intimacy are devalued (Wekker 1991). I argue that the use of this U.S. public health activist-based inclusion-difference paradigm, as Epstein (2007) calls it, enacts technologies of confession and recognition in the Ghanaian context, which is then taken up by NGOs through northern funding and policy. These technologies are then maneuvered by individuals to participate in NGOs. However, this inclusion-difference paradigm is also in friction with the history of governmentality in the region, which has overall, led to the construction of a racialized, and thus, fragile heterosexuality based on the notion of a superior European and Christian conception of sexuality and gender. Furthermore, these PEPFAR policy proposals that seek to include gender and sexual minorities, also ignore the impacts of the U.S. culture wars which have been carried out indirectly through PEPFAR interventions and through U.S. Evangelicals as intermediaries.[8] I argue that this is an example of the consequences of Puar's notion

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[8] Opoku Onyinah (2002) suggests that Pentecostalism in Ghana has followed the theology of American televangelist Oral Roberts, who preached a 'prosperity gospel,' the idea that prayer will bring wealth, and whose teachings have been applauded by President John Evans Atta Mills (Ghana Web 2010). In addition, notoriously homophobic U.S. televangelist

of homonationalism, or the inclusion of a "sexually progressive multiculturalism" which justifies foreign intervention (2013, p. 336), while Ong describes this as a form of neoliberal exceptionalism, or rather, the "departure in policy that can be deployed to include as well as exclude" (2006a p. 5). This exceptionalism, I argue, includes the lack of interrogation or reflection on the history of U.S. neocolonial interventionism in Ghana.

*1.4 Neoliberal Governmentality in Contemporary Ghana*

Ghana's independence in 1957 after British indirect rule was almost immediately followed by a coup which ousted the country's first President, socialist and Pan-Africanist leader Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who led the country under the Convention People's Party (CPP) towards under the slogan of 'self-government now' (Prah 2003, p. 3). As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Nkrumah and his presidency became a focal point during the Cold War which would end in CIA collaboration (Stockwell 1978, p. 160 and Botwe-Asomoah 2005, p. 201) in a military coup that ended his government. Following this coup, the country would experience two decades of military rule and coups which heavily impacted the state of women's participation in the public sphere and the economic well-being of the country (Mama 1995 in Prah 2003, p.5). Ghana air force member Lt. J.J. Rawlings led the last coup in 1979 and became President with his Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) Party, and later in 1983 implemented the Economic Recovery Program, which relied on structural adjustment policies and the privatization of state services and industries (Gyimah-Boadi 1990 in Gyamerah 2017). This program was in large part due to the influences of the U.S. government at the time and would lead to neoliberal governance through the development apparatus (Tripp 2004;

Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network has been running in Ghana since 2010, and the network itself is also connected directly to former President Atta Mills and his political work (ibid).

Mamdani 1983). The dominance of the development apparatus through economic policies such as the Economic Recovery Program marked the beginning of Ghana's financial reliance on northern governing entities such as the U.S. for social welfare, health care, and human resources through the encouragement of U.S. funded NGOs in the country. Moreover, the predominately neoliberal institution, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) would become the largest funder of Ghana's civil society in the 1980s, through the logic of "partnerships" and with the agenda of promoting democracy in the post-cold war context (Mawuko-Yevugah 2014; Hearn 2010). This institution would also be an apparatus through which neoliberal policies were enacted and supported as a part of its development agenda. These various changes began the implementation of a transnational neoliberal governmentality in Ghana.

Prior to neoliberalism in the country, under Nkrumah's party, women's groups formed the National Council of Ghana Women (NCGW) an official wing of the CPP to address women's issues of all classes, including working women and market women, and the government responded to women's demands to change their status in marriage (Prah 2003, p. 4). However, the introduction of a Women in Development (WID) approach through the development apparatus in Ghana was highly instrumentalizing, through which northern donors funded projects in which women were "independent actors" within development projects, constructing a U.S. centric notion of a "liberal individualist ideology" (De Jong 2017, p. 19; Prah 2003). This created a shift from the previous women's movements in Ghana, which were seeking redistribution rather than recognition during Nkrumah's presidency. This also created a state centered approach to women's movements, as feminist scholar Manuh Prah highlights that the Rawling's government accepted WID approaches to women's economic roles, and establishment of the National Council for Women and Development (NCWD) in response to international pressures (2003, p. 6 -8). This meant that the government condoned women's movement would be an extension of the state, rather than an oppositional force

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that would then make demands for redistribution. This was the beginning of a neoliberal mutation, through which women's NGOs that were informed by the logic of recognition proliferated and middle-class women became professionalized feminine autocrats (Mama 1995). However, this process also marked the professionalization of feminist legal activism in Ghana. The 1990s, for instance, saw the development of a national campaign against domestic violence (Prah 2003), and Ghanaians have also taken a role in shaping 'global' development discourses, just as "'local' organizations have absorbed, appropriated and refracted these discourses" (Cornwall & Anyidoh 2010, p. 147). In her research in Ghana, Sadia Hodžić describes the result of feminist legal activism through the proposal of the Domestic Violence Bill in 2007, which became a controversial topic of debate in Ghana and a "site of intense campaigns and struggles between the government and NGOs" (2009, p. 331). The government of Ghana publicly opposed the bill as a foreign imposition which was against the family (ibid). The states opposition to the criminalization of domestic violence, Hodžić identifies, was an articulation of "rights" as foreign and Western and culture as local, which intersected with heterosexuality as the norm (ibid).

With the introduction of Ghana's new constitution in 1992, and the beginning of its official democracy, citizenship in Ghana was re-defined through the juridical apparatus, creating new technologies of recognition using the discourse of human rights and women's rights. Historically, these local and transnational struggles are also connected to and translate the meanings from global struggles over "cultural representation, or recognition, and access to material resources or redistribution" through women's rights, human rights, and sexual rights discourses (Franco 1989; Fraser 1997 in Lind 2010, p. 5). On a global level, the UN's Bejing Conference (the Fourth World Conference on Women) led to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was pivotal for the growth of feminist movements through NGOization (Lang 1997). It is here I consider moving beyond a fixation on the binary logic of good or bad understandings of NGOization, which

several authors on the topic have done (Alvarez 2014; Helms 2014; Hemment 2007; Murdock 2008; Thayer 2000; 2010). In particular, I follow feminist scholarship such as Sonia Alvarez's interrogation of the complexity of NGOs in Latin America (2014), Saida Hodžič's work on Ghanaian women's NGOs (2009), and Elissa Helms research in former Bosnia-Herzegovina (2014) which look at the different ways in which NGOs are a part of a process of change, and are taken up as simultaneously professionalized and neoliberal, while also creating possibilities for agency and translation. For example, an effect of this NGOization was that the term empowerment was given popularity in the Ghanaian context through women's empowerment initiatives carried out by organizations, activists, and researchers in Ghana following Bejing (Manuh & Anyodoho 2015). I explore the various translations of this discourse of empowerment and its manifestations in Ghana in chapter 4.

*1.5 Global Frictions: The Culture Wars*

A significant site of friction between notions of "cultural sovereignty" and sexual rights is caused by the neoliberal governmentality through the effects of the "U.S. Culture Wars," which have been active throughout the African continent since the 1980s (Ekine 2016; Koama 2012; Long 2005). The transnational reach of campaigns that came out of struggles in the U.S. often labeled as Culture Wars are identified by Kapya Koama (2012), as the result of fundamentalist U.S. Evangelicals seeking new frontiers to promote their ideologies of the family and can be traced to anti-homosexuality bills in both Uganda and Nigeria, and various organizations such as the Family Research Council[9] and the

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[9] The Family Research Council is an American Conservative Christian non-profit charity and lobbying organization, "defending religious liberty, the unborn and families, according to their website (Family Research Council 2018)

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World Congress of families[10] (ibid). The culture wars operate as a site of conflict on a global level at the intersection of sexual rights and Evangelical interpretations of Christian religion.

The 1996 Beijing Conference was also a pivotal moment in which "sexual orientation" as well as sexual rights was written into policy as a means for claiming one's human rights (King 2010). This was due to the establishment of the International Lesbian and Gay Alliance (ILGA)[11] as a consultant at the UN level since 1978, and a global sexual rights movement that developed through transnational connections from the start of the HIV epidemic in the 1980s (Altman 2001; Boyce 2014). Katie King points out that this was also a point in which the U.S. based International Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Commission (ILGHRC) (now known as Outright International), in partnership with organizations in the South, produced the report, "Unspoken Rules: Sexual Orientation and Women's Human Rights," with the aim of addressing lesbianism as a human rights issue at the level of the UN (Rosenbloom 1995 in King 2010, p. 34). This was a specific historical moment, through which the category of lesbian would be brought into discourse to call attention to the effects of violence and discrimination on female same-sex practices on a global level. However, this relied on the inclusion-difference paradigm in order to create protections against violence and discrimination. This paradigm is an example of the move to claims of recognition which were enacted in the neoliberal era, and the construction of the category of lesbian as a category of "risk" to be governed within policy and interventions (Epstein 2007). At the same time, it is also an identity through which individuals are politicized based on their lived or embodied experiences, which I further articulate in the chapters that follow.

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[10] The World Congress of Families is a United States coalition the promotes Christian right values internationally, including the opposition of same-sex marriage and abortion (World Congress of Families 2018).
[11] ILGA's acronym has only recently changed to include Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex.

In addition, the claim to rights based on sexual orientation at Beijing coincided with the successes of the South African LGBT movement, including the lobbying for protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation as well as the right to same-sex marriage in the 1996 constitution (Currier 2010, p.157; Hoad 2007). These successes were met with a moral panic among religious leaders. For example, in 1998 religious' leaders throughout Africa were forced to address sexuality as it directly followed the Beijing Conference at the Lambeth conference[12] (Koama 2012). The conference created resolution I.10, regarding human sexuality, declaring that "in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage" (ibid). This defining of marriage by African religious leaders was a pivotal juncture through which the Conference rejected the "ordination of gays and lesbians" and "brought Africa to the forefront of LGBT opposition" (ibid). This moment identifies a friction between the successes of LGBT activism and African religious and nationalist anxieties which construct homosexuality, gays, and lesbians as foreign.

### 1.6 Therapeutic Citizenship and HIV interventionism

The growth of NGOs in Ghana also coincided with the growth of HIV/AIDS which in turn influenced the development industry in Africa in the 1980s. The mostly U.S. dominated northern response to the HIV epidemic was embedded with assumptions that 'Africa is lost anyway' or rather, that Africans were somehow regressive, barbaric, and primitive (Arnfred 2004; Jungar & Oinas 2004). These racialized assumptions reproduced colonial discourses which posited Africans as hypersexual, promiscuous, and immoral[13] (Epprecht 2008; Flint & Hewitt 2015; Patton 2002 in Gyamerah 2017,

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[12] The Lambeth Conference is an informal meeting of Anglican bishops that has been historically dominated by colonial and missionary bishops.

[13] This was predominately embedded in what Cindy Patton identifies as the construction of an "African AIDS" (Patton 1985).

p. 10), and echoed interventions and moral panics regarding syphilis which attached the notion of uncontrolled sexuality to black African women within HIV interventions (Hammonds 1995; Oppong 2006 in Oppong et el 2006). For example, in the 1990s USAID funded[14] strategic "national campaigns for behavior change" in Ghana, which included the notoriously conservative Applied Behavior Change framework that was immersed with concerns of supposedly immoral sexual behavior (Debus & Jimmerson 1993; Day & Smith 1996; Helquist & MacDonald 1993 in Hardee, 2008, p.3). These discourses which informed the responses to the epidemic, further fueled racialized constructions of hegemonic heterosexuality[15] as Ghanaian, but also fueled panics around women's supposedly immoral hypersexuality. These interventions also created a form of therapeutic citizenship based on transnational interventions through bio-medical knowledge, the funding of NGOs to provide HIV interventions, and the implementation of policy around supposedly immoral behavior and hypersexuality. This form of therapeutic citizenship constructed a notion of one becoming a citizen through access to AIDS treatment, education, and support through the funding of NGOs, and the reliance on confessional technologies that prompted individuals to "come out" with their stories (Nguyen 2010, p.132).

It wasn't until 2002 that the Ghana AIDS Commission[16] was created by the Ghanaian government, with funding from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (GFATM)

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[14] This included implementing an Applied Behavior Change (ABC) Framework, which mostly focused on curbing supposedly "immoral behavior" (Debus & Jimmerson 1993; Day & Smith 1996; Helquist & MacDonald 1993 in Hardee, 2008, p.3).
[15] This also reiterated JD Caldwell et al's (1989) construction of an epidemiological monolithic category of 'African sexuality' that hypothesized that the spread of the HIV epidemic in the 1980s was due to the notion that Africans were essentially immoral (1989 by Caldwell et. al in Tamale 2011, p. 17; Epprecht 2008).
[16] One of the commissions first projects was funded by USAID, and promoted a conservative, heteronormative, and moralizing approach to HIV prevention through the Abstinence, Be faithful, use a Condom (ABC) approach, with more attention to the A and B and less to C. These moralizing interventions reified Christianized notions of a morally superior sexuality and produced neoliberal technologies which required "technologies of the self," or a reliance on the governing of the self through behavior change, while avoiding socio-economic conditions and social inequalities as possible causes (Wojcicki, J. M. 2005).

(mainly a U.S. funded organization), the U.S., and the United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). The Commission was the first coordinated state response to HIV and included a plethora of NGOs reliant on northern donors and their subsequent logics. This created a process of NGOization through HIV intervention, and state collaboration. By 2009, under Barack Obama's Presidency, PEPFAR included MSM as their target population, and these PEPFAR and Global Fund interventions were combined with UN and WHO funding and policy which also included MSM. The creation of MSM as a key population within policy constructed a bio-medical category of 'risk' through which behavior and sexuality could be governable through interventions (Epstein 2007). This new form of biopolitical governance through neoliberal transnational interventions and policy over "key populations," further reifies same-sex practices between males which was criminalized in the penal code section 145. The creation of a key population based on the category of MSM reifies that this is a stigmatized behavior to be governed, and in combination with U.S. inclusion-difference paradigm's HIV policies, technologies of recognition and confession through the category were enacted. This mapped onto a contrasting social context through which a fixed sexuality identity for same-sex male practices was not necessarily the case, and through which verbal indirection and discretion are the norm regarding sexual matters.

This neoliberal biopolitical governance also led to the professionalization of organizations such as the Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights (CEPERG), through implementing policies and managing individuals willing to "come out" as MSM and or to confess their risky behavior. The Executive Director of CEPERG, Kweku explains that the LGBT movement in Ghana was "born on the wings of HIV," due to the high rate of HIV among *saso* individuals. CEPERG would become an organization that would rely on confessional technologies and technologies of recognition, through which it could provide services to individuals and meet donor targets for HIV intervention. At the same time, CEPERG was also informed by popular education models, and through its (albeit lowly

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paid) peer educator program, carried out various sexual education programs in various lower-income

regions of Accra, creating a community of experts in these target communities on the topic of sexual

health. Kweku, whom I have mentioned in the introduction, is also connected to international LGBT

organizations that have further supported NGOs such as CEPERG. I further discuss Kweku and

CEPERG and these various processes in further detail in Chapter 2.


*1.7 NGOization of Human Rights and LGBT Issues*


Prior to the forming of CEPERG, Kweku previously created the organization Gays and

Lesbians of Ghana (GALAG), who, according to their title, made use of the technologies of

recognition through the mobilization of LGBT and identity categories associated with sexual rights

and human rights. The formation of GALAG came at a time following significant lobbying work at

the United Nations Commission on Human Rights from 1998-2002, and the development of sexual

orientation and gender identity as issues to be taken up by the commission (Long 2005).  The group

was intensely resisted by specific political leaders, who, in 2006, reacted with moral condemnation to

the announcement by GALAG that it would host an ILGA conference in Accra (O'Mara 2013; Tettey

2016). This announcement was met with resistance to the notion of a supposedly "western" tactic of

"coming out," due to its connection to Northern run international organizations at the time, and,

therefore, was assumed to be connected to foreign-ness (O'Mara 2007). I discuss the outcomes of this

further in the following chapter.

Despite the frictions in the public sphere sparked by supposedly western tactics of "coming

out," however, highly professionalized NGO leaders in Ghana working on sexual health and human

rights are a part of  global and transnational networks at the intersection of sexual health and human

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rights on the Pan-African and West African regional level.[17]  The Pan African sub-section of ILGA has been growing since 2013 and has active Ghanaian members.  More recently, there is a growing trans-national coalition of funding bodies and organizations. In 2015, the Nigerian organization, The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS), based in Lagos funded several human rights capacity building programs for individuals working in sexual health and human rights, and was responsible for funding the Courageous Sisters training that I discuss in Chapter 4.

In Accra, there were a plethora of actors, counter discourses, NGOs and coalitions that have formed through the NGOization of human rights, HIV, and sexual health.  Claims to rights in reference to the 1996 Ghanaian constitution, have been a recent discursive technique on a local and national level, and a counter discourse to the proliferation of mediatized homophobia.  Despite the re-instatement of the criminal code in Ghana's 1992 constitution that criminalizes non-heteronormative sexuality, there exists a proliferation of legal activists and lawyers who are funded through various northern donors providing human rights trainings to those attending NGO trainings focused on sexual health and human rights.  This includes Ghana's Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), an organization that provides trainings and encourages individuals and groups to use the online anonymous discrimination reporting system in order for CHRAJ to make yearly reports about the status of human rights in the country. In addition, the HRAC provides legal services to individuals based on the inclusion-difference paradigm as it pertains to the rights of individuals in the Ghanaian constitution.  Recently HRAC created an LGBT legal team at

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[17] Following my research in Accra, in 2017, a West African activist led fund dedicated to strengthening and supporting a West African movement for gender diversity and sexual rights was developed, the Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest (ISDAO).  The organization's goals include providing support and advancing the rights and safety of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer people) in the West African region (ISDAO 2018).  The organization refers to the use of this acronym with a reflective approach to homogenizing categories, acknowledging that it may not be "exhaustive of the people and communities we represent" (ibid).

the behest of human rights lawyer and former Minister of Gender, Nana Oye Lithur. Lithur was also not afraid to produce counter discourses to the growing mediatized homophobia in the country and in 2011 announced that the 1992 Constitution "states that we are all equal before the law and every person in Ghana posses [sic] human rights [sic]." (Citifmonline, 2011e; see also Myjoyonline, 2011e in Tettey 2016, p. 96).

Due to a more recent rise of discourses condemning sexual rights and sexual identities in the public sphere, as well as a rise in violence affecting individuals, NGOs such as HRAC and CEPERG have worked alongside CHRAJ to train individuals on their human rights enshrined in the Ghanaian constitution, including for instance, the right to privacy. Also, there has been the recent development of the Alliance for Equality and Diversity (AFED), created in 2015 with the support of local, transnational, and northern partners. These organizations are substantially dominated by those perceived to be male, due to the proliferation of funding for HIV interventions for MSM. Those on the board of AFED recently announced that the group is interested in engaging and working with "all of those under the LGBT umbrella," including "lesbians." The partners aligned with AFED include northern donors such as the U.S. and Netherlands Embassies, and the NGO members include the West African Aids Clinic (WAAC), the Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights (CEPEHRG), FHI360, the Human Rights Advocacy Center, CHRAJ, and the Solace Brothers Initiative, among others. In addition, there is a growing community of NGOs working in collaboration with new foreign donors, including the Heartland Alliance from the U.S., The Swedish National Association for Gay, Bisexual, Transpersonal, and Queer Rights (RFSL), and most recently, there has been the establishment of the Ghana Pride Fund project, which is funded and coordinated by the Centre for Culture and Leisure (COC) the oldest LGBT organization in the Netherlands. The conglomeration of these various NGOs and their growing capacities regarding human rights trainings

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and the inclusion of lesbians in their work created a specific moment in time in which there was considerable pressure for those perceived to be 'lesbians' to participate in human rights trainings.

The public sphere in Ghana has been a site of contestation over sovereignty, with sexuality, women's rights, and sexual rights as objects of moral concern by Pentecostal religious leaders and politicians seeking to gain popular support in the current context (Tettey 2016). As a consequence, this neoliberal friction posits subjects categorized as "at risk" populations such as MSM, and LGBT persons as simultaneous targets for intervention and empowerment for NGOs, while also marking them as foreign influenced in the larger Ghanaian context. While processes of a transnational neoliberal governmentality are enacted through neoliberal economic institutions and logics and transferred through development programs and northern funding of NGOs and civil society, various technologies of inclusion and confession are inherited through Euro-American LGBT public health activism and HIV interventionism. Unfortunately, these technologies do not necessarily map onto the Southern Ghanaian context in which female same-sex practices are not typically verbalized through a fixed sexuality identity. Those NGOs and NGO leaders whose funding mostly relies on northern donors to address the epidemic among MSM, and who are interested in furthering their cause to include "all those under the LGBT umbrella," seek to include various groups in their efforts to address human rights as well as HIV intervention. While northern donors create policy and fund various NGOs which demand equality, inclusion, recognition, and empowerment for those disadvantaged by gender and sexuality, this creates a space of friction through which those perceived to be female must navigate. In my research I carried out with a core group of working-class queer women who were embedded in HIV targeted communities, attended NGO trainings, and who were interested in engaging with NGOs working on sexual health and human rights in Ghana, I suggest that they maneuvered these various logics and technologies through a process of translation, through which meanings are constantly transformed, translated, distorted and modified and interpretations as well as

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resistance are enacted (Lendvai & Stubbs 2009, p. 676). The following chapter outlines the ways in which these various queer women I met were a part of NGO processes, and the ways in which a "culture of silence," showed evidence of a friction between working-class queer women's specific positionalities, desires, and interests, and the interests and concerns of NGOs.

## Chapter 2: "We Want to Be Free": Queer Women and the NGO

Rebel[18] and I were meeting only for the second time at a spot which would become our frequent meeting place, a container bar on the red dirt path which went through back alleys to reach his family compound, and which could reach all the way to the tro-tro[19] transport stop near Dankwa circle. As part of the trail, a series of containers were full of traders selling various items throughout the day; we were there for the container which at night became a drinking spot by the name of "Malibu," and which was painted with palm trees on its metal sides. After we shared a friendly handshake, with the masculinized snap on the end, he relaxed in the plastic chair under the tree on the path just beyond the container bar. We shared a packet of Marlboros in the dark as we sipped on beers – he a Gulder, me a Star, and we began one of our many conversations on his positioning with NGOs in Accra, a conversation that Rebel in general, seemed very interested in. While we were hanging out, he also addressed the issues and concerns for people like him: those typically categorized as lesbian. Although Rebel self-identified as a man, he was also identified as a lesbian and transgender by NGOs and was referred to by his friends as 'her,' however, I would like to honor Rebel's self-identification and use male pronouns. As I asked Rebel what it was like for him and people like him in Accra, he explained, "I have two children. I had already made up my mind that I was not going to give birth, but this is Africa," as he puffed from a cigarette and wiped sweat from his brow with a sweat rag. As we continued, Rebel highlighted another issue important for him: his relationships to others, and his roles in these relationships – most importantly, his role as a parent of two small children, and that he was "everything to them, god brings gifts you know?" Despite Rebel's self-

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[19] Tro-tro is the Ghanaian Pidgin English or localized version of English which means "trosky," but refers to a small bus or van used for public transportation.

identification as a man and simultaneous complex and multiple positioning as a Christian, mother, father, daughter, and petty trader, he was considered to be a lesbian leader by NGO leaders and organizers working on human rights and sexual health issues in the city. Furthermore, Rebel's introduction was twofold, in talking with me, a cisgendered *obruni* queer woman who identified as queer and lesbian. Because of my identity as a woman, queer, and lesbian, Rebel also found it important to explain the pressure to give birth in Accra, as an issue that he assumed that I could relate to. With Rebel's framing, it was clear that he supposed that I may have the option of having more control over the timing of and choice of giving birth, and that I did not have the same pressures to reproduce as a perceived cisgendered woman in the U.S. and Hungary. There was an openness as well from Rebel that led me to be believe that he trusted me as someone to talk to about his identity, and that I was familiar with the LGBT acronym based on my lesbian identity that I had shared with him upon our first meeting. However, it was clear to Rebel and myself that we were differently positioned regarding our relationship to material resources, as well as global power.

The context of Rebel's involvement as a lesbian in the NGO networks in Accra was a part of a larger history and had occurred at the same time as other neoliberal shifts to promote LGBT equality as part of a process of neoliberal transnational governmentality. At the time of this research, within Ghana's NGO and human rights community, there was a call for furthering and funding of specific projects which focused on sexual health and human rights for sexual and gender minorities, and with it, a naming and calling for the lesbian, (as referred to in NGO spaces) and the "sisters" (also as referred to in NGO spaces) to come forward, an effort to include individual working-class queer women into the fold of this global, and materially unequal process. In this chapter, I show the ways in which NGOs in particular were forced to rely on and or refer to the visibility and "coming out" of those categorized as lesbian, such as Rebel. To analyze the ways in which NGOs were interested in engaging with "lesbians" in their work, I follow Aihwa Ong's explanation that NGOs are susceptible

to the powers-that-be because they are constructed as "practitioners of humanity," in that they are "defining and representing varied categories of human beings according to degrees of economic, biopolitical, and moral worthiness" (2006b, p. 504). Because NGOs were reliant on showing a particular "moral worthiness," to donors, I suggest that they were hyper-focused on the biopolitical category of the lesbian, and her moral worthiness through her victimhood (ibid).

The neoliberal shifts to claims of recognition in order to access rights, I further suggest, has created NGO reliance on specific technologies of confession and recognition through the category of lesbian. Due to the use of the category of lesbian in global policy to address issues of violence at the level of the UN in the 1990s, I argue that NGOs respond to such policy through constructing the category of lesbian as a category of bio-medicalized 'risk' through U.S. and southern based activism that addressed lesbianism as a human rights issue at the level of the UN in the 1990s (Rosenbloom 1995 in King 2002, p. 34). Furthermore, as the category is taken up by NGOs in Accra which have been informed by bio-medical frameworks through HIV interventions, the lesbian category becomes a category of risk to violence which then needs to be governed through policy and interventions (Epstein 2007). This process of categorization creates a visibility or "coming out" process, through technologies of recognition and confession, as it constructs the biopolitical categorization of the lesbian as a fixed sexual identity, and the reliance on discourse through which individuals can then make claims to rights and protection from violence. Thus, by using and reaffirming the term lesbian, individuals are susceptible to becoming subjects or categories that are then managed by NGOs, and who then may be at risk of becoming legible within the wider public. Furthermore, in this chapter, I show in the case of an attack on a so-called "lesbian party," how becoming a subject of violence may be associated with the category of lesbian, and how NGOs come to rely on lesbian confessions of violence which then construct working-class queer women as legible subjects positioned to receive NGO services.

I am inspired here by anthropologist Vin Kim Nguyen, who, in his work on the production of confessional technologies in Cote d'Ivoire during the rise of the HIV epidemic in the 1990s, explains that individuals had to "come out" as HIV positive in order to receive services from NGOs (2010). More specifically, this "coming out" occurred through confessing one's becoming positive, and I argue that a similar phenomenon took place among working-class queer women in Accra, in which "coming out" as a lesbian in the NGO space through sharing stories of violence and discrimination was a part of a confessional technology (ibid). In my use of "coming out," I am referring to "coming out of the closet" with one's sexual orientation, a concept that is typically historicized as a Euro-American queer experience, deriving from a context in which identity politics and visibility are prioritized and considered liberatory through the logics of recognition. The universalization of this concept of "coming out" has been challenged by theorists such as Eve Sedgwick for its dichotomous notion of the "liberated" subject that is out of the closet, versus the "un-liberated subject" who remains invisible within the closet (1990). Also, scholars such as Joseph Massad (2007) and Neville Hoad (2009) have critiqued the universalization of this understanding of liberation based on visibility as a hegemonic norm. A part of this critique is deconstructing the myth that liberation through visibility is associated with Northern contexts in which "coming out" and the politics of recognition exist in contrast to an un-liberated, closeted Southern context (ibid). And to further clarify, "coming out" within the Southern Ghanaian context is not available to many queer women for various reasons, as I will explore throughout this chapter.

This "coming out" process required a specific form of "cultural labor" (Livermon 2012). Here, I refer to Xavier Livermon's concept of the "cultural labor of visibility" that happens when "black queers bring dissident sexualities and gender nonconformity into the public arena" (ibid, p. 300). This cultural labor of visibility implies that in post-colonial Sub-Saharan contexts, black queer persons have a considerable amount of work to do in producing their selves as simultaneously black

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and non-heteronormative. In this way, the cultural labor of individuals such as Rebel became about visibility and challenging misconceptions in the wider public while also dealing with the frictions that occurred due to this legibility (Tsing 2005). These frictions that must be managed by persons like Rebel are due to the fact that perceived to be female same-sex practices were typically based explicitly on "tacit forms of knowledge" and a non-discursive form of desire in the context (Dankwa 2009). As a part of this reality, material differences as a working-class person exacerbated one's ability to produce such cultural labor through visibility both within my research and within NGO spaces, as these processes may leave individuals vulnerable to material repercussions.

In this chapter, I argue that in addition to this biopolitical "coming out" process, there were many barriers to queer women's access and participation to both my research, and more particularly, NGO spaces. These barriers disabled individual abilities to become a part of these NGO processes and agendas. More specifically, through ethnographic anecdotes I describe these barriers to NGO spaces which included structural issues within NGOs, and the context, including the inability of NGOs to properly address working-class queer women's issues. Most importantly I show how this inability was significantly affected by further barriers for working-class queer women, including a culture of discretion regarding issues of sexuality, a lack of access to education (and in this particular case, NGO education and professionalization), precarious and informal labor, the ways in which female same-sex sexuality was understood in the law, and compounding pressures for those perceived to be cisgendered women to reproduce the family through marriage and giving birth. Moreover, I argue that these barriers were also a part of a general "culture of silence" that existed among queer women in response to NGO efforts and spaces. In my use of "culture of silence", I am referring to Signe Arnfred's concept, which the author uses to explain a way of thinking about the "difference types of silences," and the knowledge this provides in contexts in which discretion prohibits "discursive rather than sexual acts" (Arnfred in Dankwa 2009, p. 193). Through reading this "silence"

as knowledge, therefore, this chapter connects silences to barriers for queer women to access NGO spaces, but also to larger structural issues with "coming out" in the Southern Ghanaian context.

*2.1 Protecting, Training, and Making Visible "Lesbians"*

In order to put into context what I mean by a process of "coming out" required by NGOs in order for queer women to receive services, I will first explain one of the instances that is a part of this process, which included an NGO based response to a supposed attack on a so called "lesbian" gathering in Jamestown in March of 2012, a year before my research began. According to NGO workers, the assault occurred when a group of un-identifiable vigilantes threw feces on individuals attending what the perpetrators thought to be a "lesbian party." According to NGO workers, it was briefly afterwards that NGO involvement with issues concerning working-class queer women became more prominent. According to a worker at a local human rights NGO, the Human Rights Advocacy Centre (HRAC), a non-profit operating in Accra's Ga center, Osu, the organization provided those who were targeted with links to "various institutions that are mandated to protect," which included the HRAC. After providing such resources, the HRAC then connected individuals to funds from the Heartland Alliance in the U.S., which were then used by those who were targeted to relocate out of the community for some time. In addition, it was following this Jamestown event that the HRAC expanded their human rights framework and focus to more actively include services for those facing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. HRAC was prompted to develop a full-fledged "LGBT program" as they referred to such, which included a hired advocate and designated legal advocates who had become experts on the issue of the criminal code in Ghana and provided resources to individuals in need. Previously, through HRAC, the advocacy of the former HRAC Executive Director, Nana Oye Lithur, also the former Gender Minister, helped to pave the way for such a program to develop. Such programming has since focused on giving resources and

attention to all non-heteronormative individuals experiencing the outcomes of the effects of this particular event at the Jamestown "lesbian" party.

According to NGO workers, this particular event was an example of a need for individuals to seek temporary material assistance from NGOs such as the HRAC. In my observation, this need also created a form of epistemological violence that could come from identifying or asking someone to identify as lesbian in the context in order to receive NGO services. The conundrum, therefore, is that to mitigate vulnerability to attacks, individuals oftentimes needed to create avenues to NGO services, through becoming involved with NGO spaces, and identifying as a "lesbian." The issue at hand was that to receive assistance from NGOs, individuals were forced to come out through technologies of recognition and confession in order to claim their rights and to report incidents of discrimination. Unfortunately, this coming out as lesbian, also required individuals to negotiate the lesbian category, and its relation to violence and the law.

In addition, my research became implicated in this process, as my interest in spending time with individuals who were categorized as lesbians by NGOs inherently reinforced the predicament of providing cultural labor on the part of those who were researched, which included talking about "lesbianism" and spending time with me. Oftentimes I would introduce my project as research on those who had lesbian and *supi* relationships. This leading introduction could have influenced individuals such as Rebel to identify with the term lesbian. Also, my reliance on English as a form of communication could have persuaded individuals to translate their experiences into the English term, lesbian, although there was evidence that individuals like Rebel were already familiar with this English term and their relationship to it. Thus, individuals who were seen with me, and or were a part of my research, could have been categorized and identified as lesbians, indirectly. Those NGOs working on sexual health and human rights issues who were yet to develop relationships with lesbians in the community were eager for me to share any conversations I was having with queer women and or

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reports of human rights discrimination and or human rights abuses against lesbians. Such an interest in these conversations was due in part to endeavors to document such abuses to donors, which required assigning a socially constructed value to the term lesbian, and to those who are visibly identifying with the term as morally worthy subjects that the NGOs were representing to donors (Ong 2006b, p. 504). The consequences of this lesbian categorization were that individuals were associated with the term in NGO environments, thus constructing subjects which then are susceptible to being "outed" by others within the community as a lesbian.

### 2.2. Where is the NGO for Queer Women?

Kweku shifted the gears of his SUV as we passed through the condensed traffic just north of Accra. After our day in the CEPERG office where I volunteered, I was tagging along with him while he ran his many errands. It was one of the few chances I would get to spend time with him during his busy schedule as the executive director of CEPERG, the organization he formed after GALAG. As mentioned in the introduction and previous chapter, Kweku is one of the first and foremost activists in Ghana to "come out" and to become involved in international LGBT organizations and funding, which highlighted the significance of his self-identification as an "indigenous homosexual." In Kweku's case, in a follow up email in 2018, he explained this identification,

> I did not learn or [was not] introduced to homosexuality. I still remain African and love my country, culture and people but I am not welcomed because policies and traditions and culture do not protect and support my livelihood. – Kweku, 2018 (follow up email)

As we continue our conversation, Kweku shared with me the history of the LGBT movement in Ghana. Kweku explained that after the Ghana based organization GALAG announced that it would host an international conference in Accra in 2006, and the subsequent backlash, GALAG ended and new approaches to change were decided upon. In his depiction, Kweku described that, "after we saw

what was happening in Uganda, we began to focus on community education models." He was referring to the reaction of Ugandan activists to the Anti-homosexuality bill proposed by David Bahati in 2009, (with the funding and support of U.S. Evangelical Scott Lively). The "coming out" of Ugandan activists at the time, was received with a state and media sponsored homophobia, and in 2014 a Homosexuality Act was signed into law by authoritarian leader Yoweri Museveni. The Ugandan sexual rights' movements well-established and skilled activist legal team successfully fought against the Act, and it was ruled unconstitutional in 2014. Kweku was concerned that the same violent backlash as well as bill proposals may also happen in Ghana, and with this, he and others had decided to approach the issue of same-sex sexuality and human rights through community centered education models, rather than through the Western tactic of "coming out." Thus, CEPERG was formed. The approach, Kweku described, was central to making change in what he deemed a highly conservative and highly Christianized Ghana. The approach also shows that stigma and fear is associated with western terminologies (gay and lesbian), and foreign influence, as GALAG was a part of a larger international network of LGBT organizations. It was assumed that this international network, or ILGA was giving money to and therefore substantially influencing activists in Ghana to be gay for pay, which discredited any possibility of the existence of local gay and lesbian identities, activists, and organizations. When I asked Kweku directly about queer women and their involvement in the NGOs, he said that historically, most of the funding in Accra had focused on MSM and HIV interventionism, which excluded queer women.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, by 2009, under Barack Obama's Presidency, PEPFAR included MSM (men who have sex with men) as their target population, and these PEPFAR and Global Fund interventions were combined with UN and WHO funding and policy which also included MSM and were then taken up by the Ghana Aids Commission. The creation of MSM as a key population within policy constructed a bio-medical category of 'risk' through which behavior and

sexuality could be governable through interventions (Epstein 2007). These HIV policies, which seek to include MSM, and therefore, demand the use of technologies of recognition and confession through the category. This neoliberal biopolitical governance also led to the NGOization of organizations such as the CEPERG through implementing policies and managing individuals willing to "come out" as MSM and or to confess their risky behavior, and the organization CEPERG would come to rely on confessional technologies and technologies of recognition, through which it could provide services to individuals and meet donor targets for HIV intervention. At the same time, this focus on MSM would invisibilize queer women's issues within HIV interventionism and the larger approach to claims to rights based on sexual orientation.

In contexts in which most research and funding has focused on MSM and HIV, there has been an invisibilization of women's same-sex experiences in relation to HIV. This invisibilization also contributes to the lack of understanding of the social complexity of female same-sex sexuality (Matebeni; Reddy; Sandfort & Southey-Swartz 2013), and this lack of understanding of female same-sex sexuality is believed by providers, researchers, NGO leaders, and queer women themselves (ibid). At the same time, in Ghana, an influx of funders concerned with re-diversifying their efforts to be more inclusive of those under the "LGBT umbrella" had led to calls to include queer women in human rights agendas. Similar to the ways in which the "MSM" population were a "key population" in HIV interventionism, the lesbian is now seen as a form of a new "key population" in LGBT interventionism.

For instance, the establishment of AFED as mentioned in the previous chapter, was an example of such change. AFED is a coalition organization which had developed from the works and efforts of the Human Rights Advocacy Centre (HRAC), the Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights in Ghana (CPEHRG), the West African Aids Clinic, and the West African Association to Combat Aids (Ghana's oldest HIV intervention-based NGO) which, according to an NGO worker

who was a part of the coalition, was "inclusive of all those under the LGBT umbrella." It is important to note here as well, that the government was specifically supportive of funding HIV interventions through the Ghana AIDS Commission, a "supra-ministerial and multi-sectoral body established under the chairmanship of H.E. The President of the Republic of Ghana" in 2002 (Ghana AIDS Commission 2018). However, the AIDS Commission did not use terminology such as "LGBT." Funded generally by the Global Fund and USAID, the Commission uses public health discourses or categories, such as MSM, or "key populations" (Gyamerah 2017).

This AFED coalition includes HRAC, an organization that had begun at the time, to focus on human rights trainings which also targeted the inclusion of women, and or the sisters, while CEPERG had historically focused on community-based education which combined human rights through MSM and HIV interventionism. Within the organization, CEPERG, there were two programs for sexual health outreach. One was funded by the Global Fund which focused on MSM interventions, and one was funded by The Swedish National Association for Gay, Bisexual, Transpersonal, and Queer Rights (RFSL). This particular RFSL project included a peer education program which was being led at the time by Zeytuna, a cisgendered woman who was married to a man. It was within this particular RFSL project in which sexual health approaches included an attempt to engage with the topic of sexual health education from a point of view of sexual and gender minorities, as RFSL was particularly focused on "LGBT" projects. This new focus included employing at least two cisgender women at the time, as peer educators.

HRAC's work included producing a documentary with funding from the Netherlands Embassy. The documentary was produced in the hopes of representing different faces and stories from the "LGBT community" in Ghana, and was produced by the HRAC LGBT team, consisting of two officers working on the topic. The documentary was to be used only by the HRAC in creating conversation with and among the "opposition" as it was explained to me by one of the HRAC's LGBT

focused staff. As a part of his work to achieve 'freedom,' Rebel was included in the documentary, and spoke out simply to say, "we want our rights," while he did not specifically identify with any categories during the few seconds that he appeared. His visibility in the documentary, was an effort to show diversity and inclusion in the "LGBT community" through a variety of voices but was also an example of how NGOs relied on the cultural labor of individuals such as Rebel to "come out" and to speak about issues important to them.

At the same time as NGOs such as HRAC relied on Rebel's cultural labor, they were still struggling with other approaches to being more inclusive. For example, as HRAC focused their interventions mainly on human rights-based approaches when working with "women" in Accra, these reignited the stereotypical assumption that lesbians were not at risk for HIV and were therefore not in need of HIV intervention. Meanwhile, sexual health focused organizations like CEPERG were making their best attempts to do so, while their historical focus on MSM interventions included a variety of assumptions regarding the term, lesbian, including the assumption that it was impossible for lesbians to have sexual health needs. This lack of knowledge on behalf of NGOs regarding the sexual health of queer women was one of the structural issues which had contributed, I argue, to further impacting the culture of silence among queer women in NGO spaces.

*2.3 The First Mixed Meeting*

This culture of silence among queer women in NGO spaces was evident during one of the first human rights focused trainings I experienced while in Accra with the HRAC. The training occurred in a rented building in the diplomatic area of Osu in Accra and was organized by two non-heteronormative male NGO workers at HRAC who specifically focused on LGBT issues within the organization. Those queer women who came, and with whom I rode in a taxi with to get there, included Rebel and Rebel's closest friends, Lady, Patricia, and Obaara, individuals who, as working-

class persons in communities that had received services for HIV intervention, were very familiar with these NGO trainings already. I noticed during the meetings breaks between human rights presentations, that these queer women were not mingling with the rest of the group, although many of them came from the same neighborhoods in Accra. The training, hosted by the HRAC, focused on human rights and a presentation by the new HRAC Executive director (a self-identified heterosexual man), and the local police chief (considered an ally of the HRAC). The police chief shared his understanding of gender based on knowledge obtained from a former training from the U.S. embassy, as mentioned in the introduction. Later, I asked Patricia what she thought of the chief's presentation. "He is okay, he's cool," she said. She explained that she had heard the chief and met with him before, and that she was familiar with the NGO environment, and was happy that the police chief was speaking with them. Patricia carried herself with a swagger in her buttoned-up shirt, exuding a confidence and a toughness, her hair neatly braided into cornrows sat against her head. As a member of AFED, Patricia was familiar with the NGO trainings but tended to remain silent.

Also, I noticed a disconnect between the police officer's awareness of the sense of security people may or may not have with the police. While the police chief was "cool," in that he showed tolerance to the community by attending their training, there remained a disconnect between the police chief's understanding of human rights abuses by his officers and the reality that many individuals had previously reported that they were blackmailed by individuals and the police who wanted money and or had stolen from them when they were "caught in the act" and or assumed to be homosexual. These blackmail cases, revolved around and relied on the police arresting, fining, and harassing individuals because of a perceived homosexuality. This "outing" through blackmailing was the number one issue that was shared by non-heteronormative male individuals during their participation in NGO trainings hosted by HRAC and CEPERG. Many of the queer women, however, did not want to share their issues related to "outings" and harassment. During this training, when asked by NGO leaders to

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express their concerns – the leader of the HRAC asked, "now, let's hear from the women," the room

fell silent. I came to understand that the silence in the room, but also Patricia's silence, were due to a

culture of silence among this group of queer women regarding the issues that were important to them,

due to the combination of a context of discretion in Southern Ghana, further impacted by the many

barriers to not only NGO spaces, but social and economic well-being.

One such barrier I discussed with Patricia a few months after this "mixed" training. I was

invited to a meal at Patricia's home she shared with her wife, Obaara, and their small son whom

Obaara had given birth to. The couple called each other husband and wife among other queer women

and me, but referred to each other as friends in other spaces, to remain discrete. When I asked if they

were married, Patricia replied that they would be if they were in the U.S. While Obaara prepared our

meal tucked away in the back of the family house, her husband, Patricia, entertained me, the guest.

Meanwhile, Patricia also took care of their two-year-old son, whom Patricia was proud to tell me was

already learning his English letters. As he wrote his letters on a whiteboard, Patricia explained that

she felt that she wanted to help start an organization for lesbians like herself but that she didn't think

that she was smart enough to do so, "me I'm not good with writing and those things," she explained.

During the day, Patricia was a petty trader, and negotiated informal sales throughout her neighborhood

and networks, a job which required hustling and a business mind. She was plenty smart, but she

highlighted the gap between someone like herself who was a working-class trader, and the kind of

person or skills demanded by the NGO sector. She told me that she aspired to own a club, where,

she explained, "we can all go there." This barrier was not only a lack of a specific education, but also

the pressure of economic precarity faced by individuals. Because of the pressure to take care of herself

and her family, Patricia had to use the skills she had to offer in the way she thought would earn money,

and this didn't always translate as NGO work, which disappointed NGO leaders who wondered why

she didn't participate in all the meetings. This lack of education and the pressure of economic precarity were in addition to other barriers for queer women in NGO spaces.

Despite the manifestations of femininities within the group of non-heteronormative men, or *saso*, the spaces which were carved out through the NGOs were dominated by those who can perform the requirements needed of an NGO professional. Such requirements included the ability to read and write in English, but also to have knowledge about human rights discourse, to articulate an LGBT focused vocabulary, and to have the ability to discuss sexual health priorities, including HIV. Those who are able to acquire these skills on a professional level were able to become employed in NGOs, and with luck, were able to travel internationally. These specific NGO positions had the possibility of extending one's social network transnationally and internationally, offering a payoff to the cultural labor of visibility or "coming out" in the NGO sphere. These NGO positions were encouraged and made possible through northern funding that supported human rights and sexual health discourses, as well as the ability to travel. In addition, these NGO spaces were already male dominated, and in Southern Ghanaian culture, the ability to "speak" and to claim space for speaking was a form of social power (Yankah 1995), and social power was also highly gendered (Shipley 2013). Thus, while non-heteronormative men transgressed gender norms, many were able to perform hegemonic masculinity in ways that gave them credibility, funding, and listener-ship in NGO spaces and trainings. These specific spaces were not yet occupied by any queer women as far as I could tell in my research, as a culture of silence among queer women within NGO spaces was still the norm.

One exception of course, was Rebel, who, as a self-identified man whom was quite a bit older than many other queer women, was able to take up space as an older masculine presenting person. This status in age as well as masculinity allowed Rebel to be seen and recognized by NGO leaders, and from my observations, also positioned Rebel as a leader among other queer women. I believe these factors contributed to the fact that while Rebel was living an economically precarious life, he

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was able to "come out," at least through the HRAC documentary, as well as during his time with me – to speak about issues that affected him. Despite this, I was surprised to witness during one of the first trainings I attended with him, that Rebel was also silent during NGO trainings. I was able to speak out during meetings as I was able to occupy this masculinized space through my whiteness and therefore assumed experience as an expert on any issue I spoke about, and my authority was so well trusted due to my status as an *obruni* U.S. academic, that I was once asked to be the founder of the first lesbian organization in Ghana. It was an offer I politely declined, amazed that there was no problematizing of my foreignness/whiteness. For instance, I thought that individuals should be more critical of my taking a leading role of the first lesbian organization in Ghana, as it would have appeared as neo-colonial as it assumed that Ghanaian queer women would not be able to lead themselves, and my leading a lesbian organization would have perpetuated an association with northern influence. At the time of this research, efforts to include queer women and or sisters in paid positions in NGOs were growing, but unfortunately, no queer women were included in leadership positions, and, as mentioned by Rebel, there was no organization which solely focused on this group's needs. Every member of the NGO and or the LGBT community member that I had spoken to, acknowledged this phenomenon, and most people had found it to be a problem.

### 2.4 Female Same-Sex Acts and the Law in Ghana

This problem of the lack of leadership positions, participation, and organizations specifically for queer women was a topic of discussion between me and NGO workers and leaders. During these conversations with NGO workers, the conclusion was that the queer women in the community did not have the same risks as the men, and that queer women did not need HIV interventions. "They don't come to the events" and "we don't know why" exclaimed on NGO worker from HRAC. "They don't have the same needs as the men" was the conclusion of the NGO worker. These statements

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indicated that the lack of attendance of queer women was tied to a different set of needs between men and women. The discursive conclusion by NGO workers was due in part to the different needs of queer women within the community, as well as the lack of information regarding the needs of working-class queer women in Ghana, including information about intimate partner violence, the ways in which queer women were affected by HIV, the lack of information regarding the criminality of female same-sex sexual acts, and the domination of space and organizational decisions by non-heteronormative male leaders in the NGO community.

In addition, there seemed to be confusion, even for lawyers and legal advocates who worked for human rights NGOs, over whether queer women were criminalized under the current criminal code in Ghana. This showed evidence that many people throughout the wider public as well as NGOs had the false impression that female same-sex practices were not criminalized. And oftentimes it was vague and or unclear how women to women intimacy and "sex" was criminalized:

> There is no law, I haven't heard of any law for now. What I've learned [is] that if you see two of them having sex, even with that, it's the man. That is when it's an offense, and the law can deal with that. Apart from that, nothing else stops anyone from doing anything. – Mary, interview in Jamestown 2015

This quote by Mary shows us that she did not believe that female same-sex practices were criminalized, and that "even with that, it's the man," implies that the main concern of criminalization of same-sex practices was with practices between two men, as she explains that "that is when it's an offense." Mary's statement highlighted the wider misunderstanding and or vagueness regarding the level of criminality of female same-sex acts in Accra, which lead to many misinterpretations of the level of violence or attempts at blackmailing that individual queer women might have faced. Through

remnants of the British colonial Criminal Law Amendment of 1885,[20] the penal code section 145 defined sodomy as the act of "carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature" or the permitting of a "male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature" (Human Rights Watch 2008, p. 19). The code focuses primarily on the act of a "male person," and the law was vague regarding female same-sex acts.

This law, while not explicitly defining female same-sex acts as criminal, criminalizes any sex that is supposedly "un-natural." Therefore, female same-sex practices were conflated with homosexuality both in discourse, law, and in policing practices, as many police officers and citizens made their own interpretation of female same-sex and its criminality. With this, there was a wide spread belief that sex between females was not considered sex, and so there were common formulations that pointed to or suggested this widespread notion. At this intersection, female same-sex practices were simultaneously invisibilized and criminalized. The assumption that lesbian sex was impossible perpetuated the idea that it is therefore outside of the law, and not an at-risk practice for exposure to HIV, while the category of lesbian carried with it the assumption of a purely homosexual lifestyle, one influenced by the western notion of the category which assumed that individual lesbians would never have a male partner (Wekker 1999; Hemmings 2007). However, due to the ways in which the term was used in Accra by some individuals, as well as to the ways in which sexual relationships between women do not always lead to a fixed identity, those considered within the category of lesbian may also have sexual relationships with men. Some of these relationships may have fulfilled erotic desires or were a way to relieve women of social pressures to get married and have children. These relationships in general highlighted the importance of complicating sexual identities or categories to talk about or to deliver HIV intervention and education.

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[20] The penal codes were directly adopted from the anti-sodomy law in India, Section 377 (Human Rights Watch 2008, p. 19).

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According to discussions I had with different female born persons in the Southern Ghanaian context, another structural barrier for queer women to participate in NGO spaces was the pressure of reproductive labor. In Southern Ghana, working-class queer women's social networks and social pressures were centered around reproductive labor, and hence, receiving judgement based on their relationship to these obligations was common, both structurally and discursively. As Miracle and I sat at a local bar where she worked as a manager, she highlighted the barriers to LGBT NGO spaces for women like herself, a single working woman with pressures to have a family. When I asked her why women were not organizing in NGO spaces, she replied, "When you have the power and the money, then you can get to that level, but when you're coming from the grassroots level, you will not get anywhere." Miracle's description implied that the lower you were positioned in the class structure, the more vulnerable you were to attacks regarding "coming out" as LGBT both outside and in NGO spaces. Because many of the individual female born persons I spoke to in Accra were working-class, it was important for them to remain tied to their families and other forms of social support, as these effects of poverty and access to and or lack of access to resources can be mediated through one's family ties, which provide mutual care, housing, child care, and social sustenance. Both Serena Dankwa and Astrid Bochow highlight that the notion of age and respecting one's elders are the highest priority in Southern Ghana, and that the notion of talking about one's sexual life and or the erotic with elders is a social taboo (Dankwa 2009; Bochow 2007). Typically, this notion of discretion in relationships with one's elder family members implied that female born persons in same-sex relationships had to disguise and or cloak their relationships, and or their participation in NGO activities around sexuality and or gender. The combination of social pressures upon women to perform their age and class expected duties were explicit in Miracle's explanation of the pressures from family to fulfill rites of

passage.  Miracle highlighted this as we further discussed the compounded pressures for women to come into LGBT NGO spaces in Accra:

> … the family all have this saying, have you forgotten you are a woman?  Have you forgotten you need to get married? Have you forgotten you're are going to have kids?

Miracle's statement showed that women were expected to get married and to produce children. The weight of these two rites of passage were discussed via many conversations with women who identified with *supi* practices, and or lesbian political spaces, and or the subjectivity of lesbian.  In addition to the ways in which the category of lesbian invisibilized specific issues regarding HIV and female same-sex sexuality, the rites of passage for women were specifically tied to the understanding that being female and or a woman in Ghana was related to giving birth. More particularly, as feminist scholars have taken up the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics, they have also made note that the body was and is an object of biopolitical power and also a site through which power is resisted (Foucault 1978, p. 83; Grosz 1989; Nyanzi 2011).  By this I mean that the body that is central to reproduction, or the female body, is regulated socially, in terms of its capacities.  The centrality of reproduction and the pressures upon the female body in Ghana, have been documented by Akosua Adomako Ampofo, who explains that children are highlighted as the utmost form of wealth and accomplishment, and "prolific" child bearing is celebrated as a "continuity of the lineage," which is a woman's responsibility (2001). The complex reality for many women in Ghana was that NGO participation could be perceived as one acknowledging status as a lesbian and had the ability to elicit backlash from family members, employers, neighbors, or church members – which are central components to an individuals' everyday life and social well-being.  In other words, an individual's social standing is dependent on their "network of kin, friends, and acquaintances" and being able to extend one's network is highly socially valuable (Clark 1994; Manuh 1995; Gyekye 2002; Miescher 2005; Oppong 1981, 2006; Salm & Falola 2002 in Fair et al 2009). More particularly, as women's bodies are the central

site of social reproduction, they are reproducers of the family, and a high value placed on fertility is central to socialization in Southern Ghana (Adamoko Ampofo 2001), this is also particularly relevant in Ga social systems, through which motherhood is a rite of passage, and there is considerable value and power attached to fertility (Odamtten 2012). In this vein, one's ability to be a part of an NGO could extend one's social value through NGO spaces and could provide mitigation against attacks upon "lesbian" gatherings, but simultaneously had the potential to deflate one's social value in other areas of life. This is shown through the conversation with Miracle, who explained that the social value of reproducing a family was much higher than the social value be a part of an NGO.

These multifarious misconceptions and invisibilities of the needs of queer women also contribute to a culture of silence and ambivalence towards NGO spaces. There were several individuals who did not participate in NGO trainings and events and did not respond to any requests for interviews and or meetings during my research, and instead remained silent. Rebel explained to me that this lack of interest or rejection was because "people are scared" of the repercussions of talking to me as a researcher. People such as Rebel, who were comfortable taking on leadership work and making themselves visible through grass-roots documentaries were exceptional. While structural issues such as class and education were prevalent, these were compounded by gendered and age differences.

*2.6 Conclusion*

In this chapter I outlined how NGOs focusing on sexual health and human rights in Accra were interested in extending their inclusivity, but also providing services to "lesbians" or women within Accra. As a part of this focus, NGOs inevitably relied on a category of the lesbian to provide services, and in the case of an attack on a so called "lesbian party," becoming a subject of violence may be associated with the category of lesbian. Due to NGO structures to include the new key

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population of the lesbian in their services, organizations came to rely on the technologies of recognition and confession through which individuals would identify as lesbian and offer confessions or stories of violence for queer women to become legible subjects to receive NGO services. However, except for the "cultural labor" of individuals such as Rebel who participated in a documentary on LGBT issues, in response to this desire for confessions, there was a culture of silence among queer women. This culture of silence was due to many factors, including that discretion regarding sexuality was a norm within the context, but also that NGOs were not properly attuned to the needs of queer women, mostly due to a history of funding HIV and MSM focused interventions. This silence was also due to structural barriers in Ghanaian society for queer women, including economic precarity, a lack of education, and compounding factors that affected women's gendered realities in Accra such as reproducing the family. With these barriers already in place for queer women, it was essential that NGOs were sensitive to these issues, but even more particularly, that they were able to address queer women's issues effectively and directly in spaces and ways that were safe for queer women.

**Chapter 3:  *A Nyaanyo* Counter public**



*Figure 1: A meme used as a profile pic by an anonymous WhatsApp group member.*

During one of our nights at the local spot in Osu just down the road from the tro-tro station, Rebel's childhood friend and fellow NGO training attendee who also lived in the area, Lady, was invited by Rebel to join us. We again sat around the white plastic table under the large tree across from the container bar, Malibu, a neighborhood place in which people like Rebel and Lady felt comfortable talking about themselves, at least to each other, and with me. This space was chosen most likely due to its familiarity and predictability for both Lady and Rebel, as it was just down the street from their homes. A popular hiplife[21] song played in the background as Lady arrived, and with face framed in

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[21] Hiplife is a musical form which combines Ghanaian cultural and historical musical forms with hip hop (Shipley 2013).

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long black hair, she gave me an energetic handshake (which did not include the masculine snap at the end). She met me with excited eyes and a warm smile and shared that Rebel had described me as wanting to "meet the lesbians." Judging by her talkativeness, I assumed she was excited by the idea, as she followed with a slew of questions about me and defied Southern Ghanaian logics that people in Accra did not speak directly regarding sexuality. "Are you *top* or *bottom*?" she asked me, with excitement. Her question was inquiring as to what sort of erotic performance and or role I would have within a same-sex relationship. The *top*, as I was later to learn, was the dominant of the two in female same-sex practices, while the *bottom* was the less dominant. This was a familiar vocabulary for me, as it was used in queer circles in the Euro-American context, as terminology used to understand the roles within erotic relationships. Personally, I recognized that my own erotic desire and performance was based on whom I am with and was relational. I replied, with this in mind, "it depends on the person." She excitedly agreed and went on to explain to me that she and I, quite clearly, according to this "depending on the person" were *stemmes*, or those who were able to be both a *top* and a *bottom*.

As Lady continued to share the details of her intimate world, she shared that she was in the middle of a "love triangle," which was clearly painful for her – although she was able to make light and fun of this hard situation. She described her triangle as involving two individuals who were self-labeled as *toms*, and the struggle was that she had plans to "dump" one and move on to the other. She admitted that these *toms*, and therefore typically the *tops*, fulfilled their roles in the relationship by being able to offer care in the form of money for her to visit the salon to get her hair done, and money for food and drink. It seemed to Lady, that this sort of arrangement and the financial benefits were worth her own emotional strife of "going back and forth" between the two. This way of prioritizing economic benefits of relationships reflected the economic precarity of Lady's situation as a trader who struggled to make her own income in the informal market in Accra, and the way in which financial support is tied to intimacy in the context. Conversations like this one with Lady and Rebel, in which

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working-class queer women told me about their desires, subjectivities, hardships with intimacy, while also revealing the related economic constraints and pressures, was common throughout my time in Accra, in contrast to the discourses and knowledge shared about human rights in NGO spaces. I suggest that this intimate world of relations and emotions expressed by this group of queer women were a part of an affective economy. In my use of affective economy, I am referring to Sarah Ahmed's concept, in which the author suggests that feelings are produced as "effects of circulation" through a "sociality of emotion" (2004a; 2004b). This sociality of emotion, the author argues, "align individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space" (2004b, p 118). Although both Lady and Rebel participated in NGOs spaces and were extremely supportive of NGOs efforts, time with them also revealed that there was a stark contrast between these queer women's everyday lives, social networks and social space, and NGO spaces and trainings. In this chapter I show how in these moments that I shared with individuals like Lady and Rebel, I came to understand that this affective economy among queer women was the basis for a *nyaanyo* counter public. This counter public existed through interactions between working-class queer women in physical spaces including the bar 15 Kilos, and queer women's homes. In addition, the use of the mobile phone application, WhatsApp, also existed as a part of this *nyaanyo* counter public. The application is a form of social media used on phones for free and is widely used throughout Accra for free texting, phone calls, and to form chat groups from one mobile phone to the other and was embedded in queer women's everyday lives as a form of communication between each other, as well as between myself and the group.

In my conversations with individuals like the one with Lady above, queer women were also referring to their "erotic subjectivity" (Allen 2012, p. 329). In my use of "erotic subjectivity," I follow anthropologist Jafari Allen's concept, which builds on Audre Lorde's use of the term erotic as a "a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives" (1984, p. 57 in Allen 2012). According to

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Allen, through this use of Lorde's understanding of the erotic, the concept is not just about sexual desires, but also social desires, and one that is used as a framework to add depth to individuals' experiences (2012). Conceptually, this definition of the erotic helps to highlight the interwoven complexity of experience beyond the sexual. In unraveling this complexity, Allen defines the concept of "erotic subjectivity" as "an alternate way of knowing," one's desires, through a lived and embodied experience, as well as an "intersubjective" experience, one that is a way of sharing the self and therefore political (2012, p. 327). Following this use of the term, I conceptualize the ways in which Lady and Rebel were expressing their erotic subjectivity, which, I argue, was an interconnection and intersubjective experience of desire, self-making, and the affective dimensions of their embodiment. This embodiment was shaped by their being perceived as cisgender women and required discretion regarding non-normative desires. This also included dealing with the intersectional pressures for those perceived to be cisgendered women, including the expectation to reproduce the heteronormative family form through giving birth and getting married, and the compounding effects of economic constraints that were a part of Lady and Rebel's positioning as informal workers and traders in a neoliberal post-colonial context. In my use of the concept of "erotic subjectivity," as an alternative way of knowing, I make use of the term, *nyaanyo,* the Ga term which literally means, "friend," which is used by queer women to refer to each other in a discrete way. This term, *nyaanyo,* used by queer women, expressed an alternative way of knowing through an embodied experience of discretion.

In this chapter, I unpack erotic subjectivity as informed by this embodied *nyaanyo* way of knowing, and more particularly, how this erotic subjectivity was a performance (Dankwa 2009). In her research in Southern Ghana, Serena Dankwa understands the erotic as a practice and performance (2009), adding to this, I follow Judith Butler's work which analyzes the ways in which worlds materialize through the "repetition of norms," and the ways in which "boundary, fixity and surface" are produced through norms (1993, p. 9). Butler also iterates that these norms are constructed through

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discourse (1993 p. 9 - 20). Following Butler's understanding of how worlds and norms materialize, I suggest queer women performed erotic subjectivity through the practice of new norms and discourses within a *nyaanyo* counter public. My use of counter public builds on Habermas' concept of the public sphere but is in reference to and expansion upon Nancy Fraser's articulation of counter publics. In addition, I follow Allen's definition, as a way in which individuals may create "new forms of affective and erotic relations and rules of public and private engagement" from which "new choices and new politics" are created (2012, p. 329). This is also influenced by Jose Munoz's concept of "counter public performance," a useful framework from which to examine the ways in which minority subjects who are "disempowered" in "representational" hierarchies were able to dis-identify with heteronormativity (1999, p. 25). These counter public performances of erotic subjectivity by queer women as minority subjects were possible in *a nyaanyo* counter public, as they offered/engendered spaces, moments, and discourses that were determined and created by queer women.

To expand further upon Allen and Munoz's conceptions of counter public, it is important to underscore that affective and erotic relations within a *nyaanyo* counter public were highly relational and existed as a part of an "affective economy" (Ahmed 2004a, p. 8). While Ahmed uses the concept of affective economy to suggest how specific emotions such as fear, and hate are circulated to construct the norms of the nation and thus, create boundaries and norms around citizenship, I suggest that this also occurs through *nyaanyo* counter publics through a "sociality of emotion" and a relationality among queer women that is based on their experience of discretion in a primarily heteronormative public sphere. Hegemonic norms operated in the wider public, in which case I rely on the term as described by anthropologist Rudolph Gaudio, in the author's ethnography on gender transgressive "*yan daudu*" individuals in Northern Nigeria (2009). Gaudio conceptualizes the public sphere as operating through hegemonic norms that regulated people's participation in the imagined national public sphere, and that the public sphere operated through discourse and ideologies (ibid). In Southern Ghana, the

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material effects of this "wider public" enabled the attacks on lesbian parties in places like Jamestown and promoted a general culture of discretion and indirection regarding female same-sex practices in the wider, substantially Christian influenced Ghanaian public and a mediatized homophobia.

In the last part of this chapter, I demonstrate that a part of this *nyaanyo* counter public among queer women existed on WhatsApp through what Tom Boellstorff defines as a "virtual world" in which culture is realized through the internet (2008, p. 18). This virtual world of WhatsApp was a space of "meaning-making" and "new forms of culture and selfhood" (ibid) that could be shaped within the virtual. I propose that these new forms of culture and selfhood within these closed groups, occurred through the performance of erotic subjectivity on the application. In framing the ways in which WhatsApp was a part of a *nyaanyo* counter public, my understanding of the material world (the physical world in which people live), and the virtual world (the experiences, expressions, and performance of the erotic that occur online) were not entirely separate spheres, but the two overlapped. This meant that queer women were connected through their material networks and their WhatsApp groups and connections were also based on these same networks. My research relied heavily on my WhatsApp phone contacts, messages, and my participating in WhatsApp groups, as it was a significant space through which I could be in contact with both Lady and Rebel, and to arrange our hangouts and meetings in person. This highlights Christine Hine's point, that there is not a clear distinction between material or physical space and virtual space (2015). I follow Hine in her thinking that the internet is "embedded, embodied, and every day" (ibid, p. 55), which is confirmed and influenced by Tom Boellstorff's articulation that online subjectivities have the possibility to create offline subjectivities, as well as digital media scholar Van Doorn's suggestion that virtual spaces can affirm material realities (Van Doorn 2011; Boellstorff 2008). Therefore, I argue that individuals' material worlds were connected to and reflected on WhatsApp through online subjectivities, and that the performance of embodiment in the virtual, blurred the lines between and informed offline

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subjectivities. This space to challenge notions of personhood through this virtual world of WhatsApp shows us the significance of communication technologies which offered a platform for connection and expression, and a way for individuals to attempt to determine and make real their erotic and social desires. WhatsApp also unveils the ways in which, based on their in-person connections, how queer women created social belonging beyond their material spaces through communicating with memes and texts virtually. The type of social belonging that can extend beyond one's material world through WhatsApp is quite vital for queer women in Ghana, as it provides a means of communication and performance beyond the surveillance of the highly Christianized and heteronormative public sphere and professionalized NGO spaces.

In the previous chapter, I argued that despite the prominence of various gendered experiences among queer men, NGOs including CEPERG and HRAC were dominated by professionalized cisgendered and male passing people. Although requests for working-class queer women to participate in the meetings and a genuine interest among queer women to be involved in NGO activities was a reason for their attendance, many opted out of participating outwardly or vocally, even when individually asked to do so. There seemed to be many aspects of life that were left out of NGO spaces, which became clear to me when I spent time with queer women, and they would disclose to each other or myself the personal issues they were facing. While individual queer women did not explicitly find NGO spaces a problem, I show that NGO spaces and trainings did miss out on the need to address queer women's issues in specific ways. Because these NGO spaces relied on the discourse of human rights and HIV interventionism from which their funding came, they were reliant on technologies of recognition and confession and therefore hyper interested in stories of violence and discrimination among queer women. This exaggerated focus left out the importance of understanding how queer women are affected by the criminal code, HIV, and in general, their embodied experiences. While persons like Rebel and Lady perceived NGO meetings and trainings as

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very important, I put forth that they faced specific frictions regarding the differences between working-class queer women's everyday realities and NGO norms. Also, my own positioning was also complicated when it came to understanding the gaps and or silences between queer women's realities and the NGO spaces. As an outsider, I was considered an expert on gender and sexuality by NGOs, and NGOs requested that I notify them with any information on discrimination and violence that occurred among queer women. I was also considered a simultaneous expert outsider on lesbian issues and a lesbian insider by queer women, and they used their time with me as a space to communicate intimate issues. However, my connection to NGOs as well as my being an *obruni* or a white foreigner, was also a part, I assume, of the ambivalence and culture of silence among the group, as many queer women opted out of research with me and may have been afraid of sharing their stories and or of becoming visible through spending time with me. My being an outsider may also have been the reason why queer women did not share with me many instances of violence and discrimination during my research for fear of embarrassment, or possibly because they did not see the benefits of participation in the research. Thus, my positioning as the outsider and the expert may have been simultaneously beneficial yet limiting. Due to most of my time spent in person with Rebel, I have considerably more to share about his everyday life, concerns, reflections, and desires. This is reflected in the last part of this chapter, in which I share the connections between Rebel's everyday world and our conversations, and the ways in which he expressed himself on WhatsApp.

### 3. 1 Nyaanyo, Emotions, and Tacit forms of Knowledge

I came across the term *nyaanyo* nearly towards the end of my 8 months of ethnographic research in 2015, after attending various cisgender male dominated NGO events in which queer women were silent. Before hearing the term, my assumption was that individuals were only using *supi* and lesbian to refer to themselves. The term came up a day before the first training that had been

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organized exclusively for non-heteronormative women. I was involved in the organization of this training, because of spending my time in the offices of CEPERG, where Michael, who, as one of the volunteers of CEPERG had kindly taken me under his wing at the organization. Michael had recently gone through a training for those working at the intersection of sexuality and human rights funded by a Nigerian organization, The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS), based in Lagos. Ghanaian activists' including Michael engaged with TIERS through their connections to NGOs working on HIV prevention as well as LGBT human rights issues and were trained through a TIERS initiative as "fellows," and were asked to propose an innovative project which would further the cause of LGBT issues in Ghana. Michael, along with Dana, whom Michael had identified as one of the women within the LGBT community, along with two others, were some of these fellows. The group had also applied for funding for the first training exclusively for "the women" within the community. Michael had asked for my assistance in writing the proposal and we had struggled with defining what we meant by the "women" in the community. In the end we had settled on "LGBTIQ" and *supi* or women who have sex with women. Because the usual NGO spaces which focused on human rights and sexual health among non-heteronormative persons in Accra were not typically centered around localized discourses and issues reflecting the needs of non-heteronormative women, the proposal was accepted, and TIERS funded the event. The event was a training that centered on queer women directly and was an opportunity to learn more specifically about what was important to the group.

A day before the training, Michael sent me an email containing the power point slides he had put together with the guidance of Dana, which were made to show to the attendees who were a group of about 30 non-heteronormative women. I was shocked to discover that the first power point slide referred to the group as "*nyaanyo* women," a term I had not heard before. I immediately asked Michael what the term meant, and he described that this was the way to refer to "lesbian women." Upset that I had missed this reference for many months, and doubting my ethnographic abilities, I immediately

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sent a message through WhatsApp to my closest informants: Patricia, Obaara, Lady, and Rebel, to clarify if they used the term. The general response was that *nyaanyo* was a term used by queer women to refer to each other, and a same-sex lover. Similar to *saso*, a term meaning "peer," a security term created by queer men used to describe themselves; *nyaanyo* was a genderless term which means "friends," and had been adopted by non-heteronormative women to refer to each other discretely. Michael clarified the importance of this term and its discreteness to me over WhatsApp that same evening he sent the email, explaining that *nyaanyo* was a term that was created and used, "because *supi* is a term which has become known to the wider public." It seemed that my friends, however, had not given the term *nyaanyo* as much importance as Michael had, and chose, at least in my presence, to refer to themselves as lesbians or one of the sub-categories of the term in the Southern Ghanaian context: *toms, studs, stemmes, femmes,* or men. Probably because I did not speak Ga or Twi, and because of the emphasis on English terminologies in NGO spaces, I had not heard this coded term before.

Serena Dankwa confirms the use of *supi* in the wider public in her research on female same-sex practices in Southern Ghana, in which she explains that the term has become derogatory since the 1990s (2009). Because *nyaanyo* was used as a security term in place of *supi* and lesbian, I argue that, at the time of this research, *nyaanyo* was similar to the previous use of *supi* in that it was a part of a tacit knowledge system for same-sex bonds which did not necessarily rely on a fixed identity. I also found that *nyaanyo* was different from *supi*, in that it was a common term appropriated by queer women which has been used for community protection in more recent years. This resignification of *nyaanyo* was a further example of Tsing's concept of friction in that it was a response to some of the more negatively perceived effects of globalizing processes which construct technologies of recognition, and in this way, *nyaanyo* shows the ways in which queer women were forced to respond to complex impacts of a neoliberal transnational governmentality (2005). I thus understand the use of the term *nyaanyo* as a recent response to political discourses that have stigmatized "*supi,*" and as a response to the impact of

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the law against "carnal knowledge" that discursively and materially prohibits sex outside of heterosexual norms in Ghana's public sphere. Given that the law and the popular discourses it generated, especially among religious leaders, had stigmatized the "*supi*" term, queer women had moved to other ways of referring to each other as a mechanism of protection to mediatized homophobic discourses and their material impacts. This contrasts with the English terms that individuals used with me, an outsider and volunteer with NGOs.

To further elaborate on the context of female same-sex intimacy in Ghana, Dankwa articulates that in Southern Ghana, discretion through indirection or the "practice of not directly addressing sensitive issues, sexual or other" is typically the social norm (2009, p. 194). Dankwa formulates this conclusion based on her fieldwork and previous scholarship on Southern Ghanaian norms, referring to Kwesi Yankah's work on indirection as considered a valuable skill for eloquent speaking, in that it requires the ability to "address ambiguous issues, such as sexual transgressions, without naming them" (Yankah 1995, p. 51 in Dankwa, 2009, p. 194). In other words, this practice and performance of the erotic that occurs through indirection is a practice of discretion, or as Dankwa calls it, through a social network among women that exists as a "silent trade" (2009). This is due most especially to age hierarches which demand respect in front of one's elders in the form of silence regarding sexuality in "inter-generational communication" (ibid). At the same time, this discretion is also connected to a Southern Ghanaian culture of relaxedness when it comes to erotic relationships that exist beyond traditional marriage, and the two create a space for each other (ibid). Dankwa further shows how the practice and performance of the erotic is therefore based on a tacit knowledge system, a form of knowing which exists due to the shared discretion that is experienced by those practicing perceived to be female same-sex relationships. I view *nyaanyo* counter publics as similar spaces and moments informed by a tacit knowledge system of discretion in which erotic subjectivities were performed.

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A comparable knowledge system existing between those who are perceived to practice female same-sex desire is also explored by Gloria Wekker in her ethnography of female same-sex intimacy among Surinamese migrants in the Netherlands (2006). Wekker explains that these knowledge systems challenge the biopolitical definitions of sexuality as contained within a fixed identity (Foucault 1978), and the Euro-centric dichotomy of "coming out" versus being in the closet, which are understandings of sexuality and identity that do not always play out in clear ways in non-western contexts. In the Southern Ghanaian context, *nyaanyo*, as a new term, tells us a few things about the current context of discretion, space, and the concept of the public for those perceived to be female who practice same-sex relations. In response to the technologies of recognition and confession of NGOs and the wider public, I argue that *nyaanyo* was a part of a culture of silence. This culture of silence was also a way of space making, which contained within it a form of knowledge and information about queer women's realities. It is in this way that silence "spoke" as a part of the experience of discretion, as shown in the meme used in a WhatsApp group, shown at the beginning of this chapter (see Figure 1).

Because *nyaanyo* literally means "friend," but is used to refer to oneself or to one's same-sex lover, it was a form of indirection useful for negotiating discretion within inter-generational settings and the wider public sphere. Many of the working-class women I knew, through the invocation of *nyaanyo*, would conceal their same-sex relationships with other women, while fulfilling socially expected rites of passage which included getting married to a man and giving birth, or, in other words, belonging to the heterosexual family form. Through these shared experiences of discretion, navigating relationships, inter-generational sociality, economic precarity, and erotic subjectivity, an affective economy was formed among these queer women. In my use of affective economy, I am referring to Sarah Ahmed's (2004a; 2004b) term, to draw attention to the affective bonds and forms of communication that existed among queer women through their shared experiences. This affective economy was an essential yet tacit form of belonging which existed within and among my core

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research participants, as it was based on a relationality between queer women or a "sociality of emotion" (ibid). This form of affective economy became apparent to me over time and seemed to be connected to the notion of discretion, as it was something I picked up on in the communication among queer women in different spaces. This nuanced perspective was highlighted through the examples I show below, which provide an understanding of the ways in which an affective economy through shared experience existed between queer women.

For example, for many queer women I knew, intimacy with other queer women was informed by the principle of discretion. This was a shared experience among the research participants and included negotiating the heterosexual family form through a performance of social obligations through marriage and family. For instance, Dana was an example of someone who lived both as a wife within a perceived heterosexual family and was also involved in organizing a training for queer women. It was Dana who joined Michael to co-write a grant to apply for funding from TIERS for the first Courageous Sisters meeting, and it was Dana who, after arriving late from taking care of her home and preparing breakfast for her *saso* husband, helped to facilitate the first Courageous Sisters meeting. This organizing effort by Dana, to me, was surprising, as when I first met her in the beginning of my research at a funeral, she was struggling with her need to have a baby to give herself and her girlfriend[22] more privacy. She shared with me that she was very much in love with her girlfriend, and showed me pictures of the two together, but that she was planning on marrying a "gay" man in order to "give birth." She informed me that the pressures from her family were too much and that she was also ready to have a child, and the act of having the child would help to provide further discretion for her same-sex relationship with her girlfriend. As Dana expressed it, "Me I need to give birth, I am ready for a baby." She concluded that she had chosen this man, because he was a *saso* and understood her

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[22] Girlfriend is an English term which referred to an ongoing same-sex relationship and one's lover.

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lifestyle with her partner, that he was kind, and that he could provide. Dana's predicament was not an uncommon one, as many individuals expressed that the pressure to give birth was tied to their belonging in various social spheres, especially in their immediate family. This is confirmed by scholarly work that highlights the social norms around femininity or femaleness in Accra, including the notion that female-ness is associated with "physically strong entrepreneurial women able to cater for their children through their own industriousness" (Dankwa 2009). According to Dankwa's work on femininity in Accra, giving birth ideally should happen through heterosexual marriage, however, motherhood comes with its own form of social respectability (ibid). Furthermore, the cosmology that informs Ga kinship, considers motherhood as a rite of passage, as well as a source of knowledge and power (Odamtten 2012, p. 116)

After months of research and after receiving several marriage proposals myself from *saso* "men," I came to understand that this formation of family between queer women and men was not uncommon, and was, to me, a way of negotiating heterosexual pressures through discretion. These queer marriages, so to speak, served as a way to accommodate each other's queerness while prioritizing one's kinship relationships through the performance of heteronormative social obligations. They were an example of a strategy that exists among non-normative persons through maneuvering and subverting heteronormative pressures that are a part of one's material reality (Boellstorff, 2005; Cho, 2006; Manalansan; Stella, 2007; Wekker, 2006 in Engelbretsen 2009). This reality for queer persons in Ghana challenged dichotomous notions of homosexual and heterosexual, and or the notion of a specific fixed sexuality based on sexual orientation, the label "lesbian" and even "homosexuality" that refer to a fixed identity and sexual orientation that are commensurate with a lifestyle which only includes same-sex relationships and or practices. While I follow anthropologist Naisargi Dave (2012) in acknowledging the agency of those individuals who did identify with the term lesbian, I came to understand that any pre-conceived notions I may have had of fixed identities and lifestyles were

embedded in globalized hegemonic notions of sexuality which are related to the rise in particular neoliberal technologies of recognition in the 1990s, and are a part of an essentializing, universalizing conception of female same-sex sexuality, and quite often a form of neocolonialism.[23] These assumptions were also rooted in what Gloria Wekker critiques as Western conceptions of the purity of the category of lesbian which has influenced Euro-American identity politics around female same-sex sexuality, and included doubts about individual "authenticity," or rather, doubts about queer women's relationship to erotic self-determination and politicizing their queerness (1999). It also highlighted the stark differences between my own experience and that of working-class queer women in Ghana, and the ways in which, due to material and cultural realities in a neoliberal and post-colonial context, Ghanaian working -class queer women were more directly embedded in and reliant on their family and social networks for their material survival. This also included what seemed to be an intense desire and pride in having children which challenged dominant Euro-centric conceptions that lesbianism does not coincide with motherhood. This predicament has been explored by scholars who engage with the notion of authenticity and visibility among lesbians as in accordance with specific contexts (Nartova 2004; Oswald and Voronkov 2004 in Stella 2014, p. 106), problematizing a specific ethnocentric notion that all female same-sex eroticism manifests as a Euro-centric, visible, "out of the closet" lifestyle (Stella 2014; Manalansan 1997, 2002, 2003), and further challenging the separation of lesbianism from motherhood.

In another encounter, Rebel told me about an interaction he had with his elderly Christian Presbyterian mother regarding his intimate world. "She asked me, when are you going to stop this?" Rebel explained, referring to his mother's simultaneous awareness and condemnation of what she

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[23] Gloria Wekker deconstructs assumptions derived in European and Euro-American culture which fixates particular forms and ways of being in regard to sexuality which are deemed appropriate and or backwards and includes this perspective in analyzing the ways in which globalized lesbian culture is presumed to be the end point in regard to female same-sex practices in various cultures (Wekker 1999).

perceived to be Rebel's same-sex practices. Other individuals found spaces outside of the home to have their relationships. For instance, Lady and one of her *tom* lovers, Betina, disguised themselves as best friends within their family structures and would have vacation getaways which included booking hotel rooms together in order to have space for intimacy. These getaways required extra income, and Lady typically would retreat with the more financially well off of her romantic interests on these occasions. She was always very excited to share these hotel moments with me via WhatsApp, sharing pictures of her feet intertwined with another's on the hotel bed. I also heard examples through hearsay, that many working-class queer women would stop "doing those things," referring to female same-sex intimacy, and eventually change their dress (if they were dressing as *tom*) and or their behavior or practices to get married and have a family. It was most difficult for *toms*, or masculine women or trans men (as many identified in different ways), who were also a part of the category of lesbian, to be discrete about their gender non-conformity, and typically, their *tom-ness* was a source of friction in public spaces, bars, and at home. Because queer women were impacted by this invisibilization and silence differently, they had to navigate differently Southern Ghanaian norms of femininity and masculinity and norms around speaking and visibility, and how these were embedded in different publics. In the rest of this chapter, I explain through descriptions of time spent with queer women in spaces like 15 Kilos, their homes, and through WhatsApp, how and where a *nyaanyo* counter public existed.

### 3.2 A Nyaanyo Counter public

While many public arenas in Accra required discretion from queer women in the form of invisibility and silence, there was also a *nyaanyo* counter public created through spaces in which people were able to gather and affirm each other. Just a month after meeting Lady, I joined her, and what would become my core group of friends while in Accra, at 15 Kilos in Jamestown. The group included

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Rebel, Patricia, and Obaara. Lady told me in our first meeting that 15 Kilos was a significant spot where, "we can see many of them there," referring to queer people. In the midst of the predominately Ga part of Accra, Jamestown, 15 Kilos was the hang out spot were many queer persons spent their weekend nights, and the group of core friends shared by Lady spent their time and extra money drinking, if they were able. It was this space inside and around 15 Kilos, that was considered simultaneously indiscrete in wider public discourses, and was the place-to-be for queer women in central Accra, to meet others, and to be-in-the-know. It gradually became clear that this container bar was an important space for queer women to meet each other to perform aspects of their erotic subjectivities, typically not accepted by the wider public. While queerness or non-normative sexualities were not explicitly visible to onlookers and queer persons, non-normative performative behavior and gender non-conformance were. Francesca Stella documents this phenomenon in the Russian context, suggesting that visibility of non-heteronormativity among perceived female persons is particularly complicated (Stella 2014). Individuals used the bar and the neighboring surroundings to re-affirm their erotic selves through being recognized as non-normative by other queer persons. The context of 15 Kilos was also a specific space in which it was normal for non-heteronormative persons to be present, if not dominating the bar and the surrounding streets, which made the space vital to those queer persons whom spent time there. The bar was able to operate as a friendly space for homosociality within the neighborhood, as it was owned by a *saso* who was able to create a form of community tolerance for the non-normative queer expressions in the neighborhood due to his father's powerful decision-making role as a Ga chief in Jamestown.

This evening at 15 Kilos was more energetic and vibrant than most, and felt like a street party, or a parade, in which *toms* challenged the cars passing through to a dance, showing off their Azonto dancing skills. This dance was not necessarily masculine or feminine, but it was a way in which *toms* could show themselves to others in the space. This way of being seen was a part of one's erotic life, a

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way of forming connections, belonging, but also to find and spend time with lovers. While 15 Kilos was a physical space in which individuals would affirm, practice, and perform erotic subjectivities, people also asserted their relationship to lesbian sub-categories during conversations at the bar. Lady, Rebel, and Patricia, during some of our nights out together, would affirm their use of the categories *stemme* and *tom* in relationship to others, but they also inquired about my own and suggested other queer women for me to meet up with. Because individuals knew that I would be interested in knowing, they oftentimes would share the information about themselves or others with me freely. It was clear that in these ways, it was a homosocial space to not only "meet others," but also a space in which one's embodied experience could be a discursively shared experience. For instance, one evening in front of the overflowing 15 Kilos container bar, I stood next to Patricia, who used the category of *tom*. To describe herself, Patricia made a point of indicating other people whom she knew and called *toms* who were at that time dancing in the street. It was this way of seeing other *toms* and showing me that she knew other *toms*, that Patricia was able to also re-affirm her own masculinity and indirectly assert that she also belonged to the category. This space in which individual toms could affirm themselves was particularly important, I noticed, due to the ways in which such notions of what U.S. scholar Jack Halberstam names "female masculinity" are typically received as a sign of "misidentification and maladjustment" and as a "longing to be and to have power that is just out of reach" (1998, p. 9). I also found this to be a space in which Rebel also found it important to reaffirm his manhood and or *tomness*. Because much of my time was spent with Rebel, I had several opportunities to also speak with him. On another more direct occasion, as we began to drink the beer Rebel had ordered for us, I asked Rebel again about his role as a man. He asserted to me that he was a *tom*, which was another term he used for being a man, while puffing on a Marlboro cigarette we were sharing. Our times were often spent like this, sharing cigarettes, while watching people dance. These were the moments in which Rebel would talk about himself and describe what he thought I would like to know as a researcher on

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the topic. It was through this process that he also shared with me his frustrations with the ways in which his current lover, Marie, was not visiting Rebel at his home nor at 15 Kilos. Rebel had explained that the two were very active on WhatsApp through messaging, but that he had not seen Marie in person in weeks. The relationship's lack of materiality over time had become a big disappointment for Rebel.

These moments and narratives highlighted to me a "discursive arena" in which a "recasting of needs and identities" was a part of a *nyaanyo* counter public among queer women (Fraser 1990). Within these discursive arenas, individuals performed their gendered and erotic roles in relation to others through discourse – which was one important aspect of individuals' erotic subjectivities. These narratives included sharing perspectives, emotions, and one's relationship to globalized lesbian sub-categories, for example: *tom, stud, femme, stemme, top* and *bottom.* As a part of these *nyaanyo* counter publics, the sub-categories *tom* and *femme* were particularly resonant as a part of a universalized or global lesbian culture. However, these categories had their own significations in Accra and operated in different ways, as they were a part of what Kwame Appiah (1997) calls a "rooted cosmopolitanism", and what Achille Mbembe (2007) defines as "afropolitanism" while also operating through a *nyaanyo* cultural logic in Ghana. Appiah uses rooted cosmopolitanism to describe the ways in which individuals are connected to their local contexts, while aspiring to and becoming a part of transnational and global flows of capital (1997). This form of rooted cosmopolitanism is a way to explain how individuals are a part of and intertwined with local, transnational, and global flows of communication and knowledge. Furthermore, Achille Mbembe defines afropolitanism as "a way of being in the world" and is a concept that moves towards an "integral transformation of identity politics," which are a part of local and global processes (2007, p. 30). In the Ghanaian neoliberal context, anthropologist Jessie Shipley uses the concept of "afro-cosmopolitan subjectivity" to explain the ways in which subjectivities are constructed in the post-colonial sub-Saharan African context in relation to processes of neoliberal

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globalization (2009, p. 634). The evidence of the use of a variety of sub-categories, in fact, tells us a more complex story about erotic subjectivity that can be seen as a part of this afro-cosmopolitan subjectivity.

For instance, I came to understand that while there was a use of globalized lesbian sub-categories, I also came to understand how these categories were highly reliant on relationality and a rigidity in terms of gender roles. For example, through the research, I came to find that t*om* as a term was used to describe the *top* or more sexually and relationally dominant of two perceived women in an intimate relationship. One friend, Emi, told me that her masculinity as a *tom* was considered "soft" by other *toms* because she would show her "emotions," and refrained from being firm and violent with her *femme* girlfriend. These "soft emotions," that Emi referred to, were assumed to be feminine – and included an idea of crying, feeling deeply, expressing empathy, talking about one's emotions, and showing affection. Those that were considered "hard emotions" were more aligned with *tomness* or being a man. These included expressing power and control, anger, and using violence, for example. Therefore, in various instances, this *tom*-ness also relied on a form or replication of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), from which toughness, dominance, control, money earning, assertiveness, (sometimes) violence, and having numerous partners were typically described as ways of being the man, according to those *toms* I spoke with. This also demonstrates the existence of a hegemonic femininity (Schippers 2007), or *femme,* as described above, which is formed in relation to *tom*-ness. For instance, the financial roles of *toms* were apparent in the ways in which they cared for *femmes* through spending money and paying extra expenses. As a part of a counter public narrative, it became clear that *tom* was an example of a term used within *nyaanyo* counter publics which had a specific set of intimate gendered meanings by those within them (Fraser 1990).

The concept or gendered performance of *tom* is also a part of other studies, for example, by anthropologist Evelyn Blackwood, who writes about "*tombois*" in West Sumatra (Blackwood 1999),

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and the term is described by Halberstam as an "extended childhood period of female masculinity," (1998, p. 5). In Accra, *tom* was described as a form of masculinity reliant on the performance of subjectivity through "dressing tom" or dressing as a tomboy – or wearing clothes seen as boys' clothing: larger t-shirts, jeans, shorts, tennis shoes, men's sandals, or ball caps, for example. This implied that consumption and money were intertwined with the performance of *tom*. This *tom*ness, was also typically rooted in a relationship which included two roles: the dominant (*top* or *tom*) and less dominant (*bottom* or *femme*). *Toms* were perceived to be female at birth, who were beyond adolescence, but could also include those who have "yet to give birth." Its association with not yet giving birth highlights how the term itself described not only a masculinity that was considered female, but also a distance and dis-association from a perceived heteronormative social duty, the act of birthing a child.

While *tom, femme*, and *stemme* were subcategories that were part of globalized lesbian culture that exists in various forms in different contexts, at the same time, they operated within and followed localized norms of discretion through a *nyaanyo* counter public. By this, I mean that these categories were only known by and used in spaces in which they would be accepted and understood and where there would be no social penalties for openly identifying with them. In this way, these sub-categories were counter public performances, as they were forms of and the development of new discursive arenas of queer women as a minority group (Fraser 1990; Munoz 1999). These sub-categories were not only part of a counter public space but were also a part of a "situational gender," a concept used by Dankwa (2013), which explains the ways in which intimacy and relationships are "performed" (ibid), or rather, how gender performance is situational, according to one's relation to another. As a part of this relational gender, a *tom* identified person was responsible for "taking care of" (through literal emotional care and financial care) and making the *femme* "feel like a woman," as it was shared with me in conversation with *femmes*. However, despite these sub-categories, queer women had other nuanced interpretations in relation to the terminology. There were many instances, including the

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conversation between Lady and I in the opening vignette, in which queer women would assert that their erotic subjectivity was based on situational gender, and therefore depended on the person. There were also outright refusals of these categorizations. For example, Miracle, a young 30-something hotel worker, told me that she was very open to any category, and saw herself as "no label":

> I don't care.  I have dated *toms* before, I have dated *femmes*, I have dated *stemmes*.  The *stemmes,* they are like, not a *femme*, not a *tom*, they can dress a *femme*, they can be *down* [*bottom*], they can be *top*, but they are just in between.  I am a *no label*.  I date toms, and *femmes*, and *stemmes*, so I am *no size*.

Through the reading of Miracle's statement, there was a more nuanced, and relational understanding of the ways in which some queer women related to categories and formed relationships with others.  Her statement of being a "no label," and also "no size" refuses sub-categories which may have positioned her within a relationship. This example highlights the nuances of individual's lives, suggesting a need to resituate our understanding of the complexity of erotic subjectivities as situationally performative (Dankwa 2013). This nuance shows how different individuals position themselves within larger universalized categories. These discussions, like the one I had above with Miracle about how she views herself in terms of identity were important moments in which queer women articulated their erotic subjectivity and their relationship to sub-categories, or a lack thereof. Among queer women, this process was common and was important to them – and oftentimes related to many other dimensions of their lives.

While these moments of discussion and hanging out existed in spaces like 15 Kilos and other social spots, it was also in the rare moments in which individuals had exclusive access to their own spaces that they were able to relate to each other and bond. Not many queer women I knew had spaces such as this, as the cost of renting a small spot depended on economic standing, and this was difficult to maintain if one was working in the informal labor market. For instance, Patricia was a petty trader

who sold goods in the Osu part of Accra. Her business allowed her to rent a very small two room apartment on the northern side of Osu, where she was able to have a small kitchen and a small bedroom with just room enough for her bed. Inside, she had a flat screen television that she had posted to the wall. One day, after receiving an invitation over WhatsApp from both Lady and Rebel, the three of us visited Patricia and Obaara at the small apartment. As we entered, Patricia greeted me by declaring, "Welcome to my little ghetto!" with a laugh. We all sat on the mattress in the bedroom as she started the program for the day: numerous episodes of the U.S. based television program, "Empire." As we chatted, watched the show, and ate groundnut soup, Lady announced that she admired Cookie, one of the main characters, who was a cunning African American business woman. Patricia, who also related to the category of *tom*, agreed that Cookie was inspiring. The relation to this character was not surprising, as Lady and Patricia were petty traders who aspired to have financial success, and, also both persons aspired to male versions of success. These typical notions of money earning were not segregated by gender in Southern Ghana (Clark 1994). It was in moments like this that queer women's complex relationship to subjectivity and economic success became apparent, as they felt free to relate to each other and express their aspirations and representations that they aimed for.

However, the pressures of maintaining one's economic independence to construct these spaces in the city was also a part of the emotional landscape of individuals and a common thread among the group. I propose that in Accra, queer women were aspiring to a specific form of afro-cosmopolitan desire (Shipley 2009, p. 647; Thalen 2011). In addition to the authors concept of "afro-cosmopolitan subjectivity" to explain the ways in which subjectivities are constructed in the post-colonial sub-Saharan African context, Shipley also suggests that this subjectivity includes a form of political agency that exists within hiplife and hip-hop culture in Ghana that is defined by individual ideas of success in the neoliberal context (2009 in Thalen 2011). I use this articulation of political

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agency to call attention to the ways in which, as hip, urban queer women who used and referred to themselves as part of a global lesbian sub-culture, individuals were simultaneously local and global, and related to categories as well as visions of entrepreneurial success in the city, amidst a mostly informal market in which individuals were left to their own ingenuity for survival. In the case of working-class queer women, the gap between their material precarity and what can be seen as their afro-cosmopolitan desires was a part of an emotional landscape for individuals, and erotic subjectivities were informed by the embodied experiences of this precarity and the emotions that came with it.

This emotional landscape, or affective economy, to come back to Sarah Ahmed's (2004a; 2004b) term, became even more evident through the use of the free smart phone application, WhatsApp. The shared sociality of emotion of queer women based on the shared experience of discretion within a generally heteronormative public sphere was evident on this platform. WhatsApp was a closed space through which emotions and expressions that were unregulated by the public sphere could be circulated, and friendships and intimacy could be established and nurtured. Throughout the research, I used the platform as a vital tool for connecting to individuals, establishing friendships, and as a form of connection among queer women. Through adding phone numbers on WhatsApp, and joining WhatsApp groups, I noticed that the application not only helped to form and solidify friendships, but it was also a social media technology which was a particular space created for and by queer women to communicate and explore themselves. In this way, WhatsApp was an extension of an affective economy, and a way of connecting through embodied experiences. While not a foolproof or completely utopian space, the use of WhatsApp nonetheless enabled the enactment of discretion in relation to the wider public and was un-regulated by NGO spaces, and was an important part of a *nyaanyo* counter public.

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To access the internet via relatively cheap smartphones, one had to purchase small amounts of pay-as-you-go "mobile money," making it affordable for purchase through mobile money vendors. It was common for those who were informal laborers, including Lady, Rebel, and Patricia to have smart phones with fairly consistent access to the internet, and thus – to the WhatsApp application. Once downloaded, it was used to make phone calls, send texts, and form WhatsApp groups with real life acquaintances (see figure 2). Interestingly, while the liberalization of the media in Ghana in the 1990s allowed for mainstream platforms for Christian leaders to demonize same-sex sexuality, this same liberalization opened access to technologies such as the internet to more users, enabling the use and dissemination of information, knowledge, and production of the self through the internet on a large scale (Avle 2016; Dankwa 2009). The accessibility of smart phones and downloadable applications has increasingly changed in recent years in the country, also changing the ways in which individuals socialize. Because the purchase of smart phones was fairly affordable, owning one was a significant way to bridge the material gap between one's informal precarity and fulfilling one's aspirations to live up to the ideals of afro-cosmopolitan desires to be a part of local and global processes. Smart phones were widely accessible at any market in town, and the plethora of mobile money vendors in the urban center of Accra was nearly as thick as the many Christian churches and posters advertising Christian events.
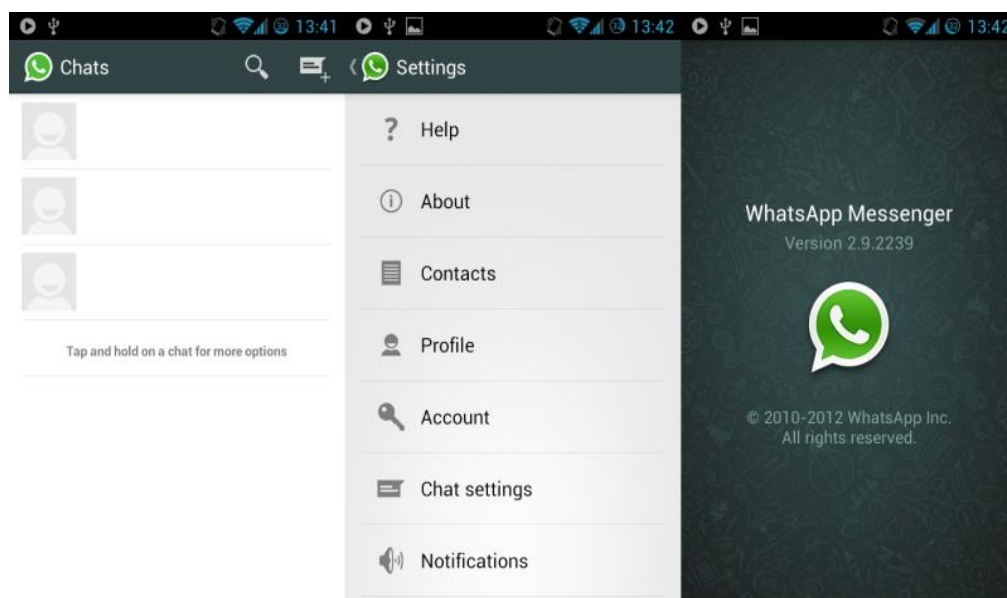
*Figure 2: An example of the WhatsApp application interface.*

### 3.3 A Nyaanyo Counter public on WhatsApp

While at the time of this research, many of my core research participants were ambivalent about WhatsApp as a significant space, it was nonetheless used by many queer women in Accra and was embedded in queer women's everyday lives. I argue that it existed as a space created through an affective economy that was relationality experienced between queer women. Through this social network affective dimensions of queer women's lives circulated among them, outside of and beyond NGO discourses and spaces that relied on human rights and sexual health discourses, and the effects of technologies of recognition and confession which pressured individuals to "come out." WhatsApp existed as a part of a *nyaanyo* counter public which enabled the reconfiguration of communication, the articulation of subjectivities, and the circulation of emotions among queer women who were marginalized in the wider public. WhatsApp was a virtual space that was closed to other publics and existed as a form of a sub-altern counter public, as defined by Nancy Fraser. Fraser explains that sub-altern counter publics have a "dual character" in that they "function as spaces of withdrawal" as much

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as they are discursive arenas in response to exclusions within other publics (Fraser 1990). As "spaces of withdrawal," these counter publics existed as operating through "enclaves" as suggested by Christine Squires, that were "signified by the utilization of spaces and discourses that are hidden from the view of the dominant public and the state" (2002, p. 458). Online mediums have been analyzed by feminist scholar Desiree Lewis and others as providing queer women with "platforms" for counter publics, through the production of messages "about how dominant discourses of gender and sexuality restrict their options and choices and limit the people they would like to be" (Lewis, Shewarega Hussen, & van Vuuren 2013, p. 56). These virtual *nyaanyo* counter publics were enclaves in that they were still operating through a form of discretion towards mainstream society in which individuals could explore and express aspects of their lives that moved beyond the regulatory norms of NGO spaces, and therefore enabled a transcendence of spaces that "reinforce their silence," (Lewis et al 2013, p. 47) while not necessarily a direct political reaction to NGOs.

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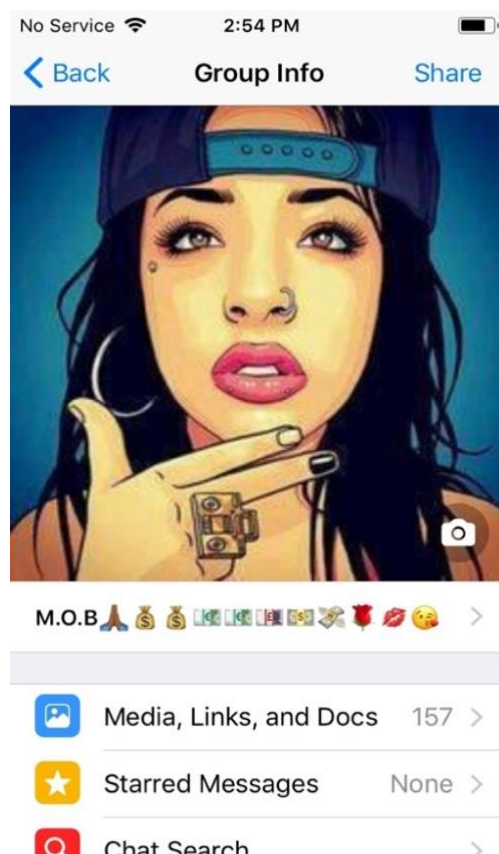
*Figure 3: The group picture for the M.O.B. (Money over bitches) WhatsApp group.*

"Money over Bitches" or M.O.B., was a WhatsApp group formed and administered by Lady, who invited me to join the group a week after our meeting in person. The small group was made up of Lady's friends and reflected her social circle in her material world, as the members included the core group who often socialized at 15 Kilos together, including: Rebel, Patricia, Obaraa, and up to 20 other individuals. The group seemed to be a way for Lady to solidify her friendships and affective bonds she made in her everyday life and was also a way for me to get to know the group in ways in which they did not always share directly with me in conversation. Of course, the performances of erotic subjectivity that occurred in the virtual world of WhatsApp were informed by Lady's material world and moved across and between the material and the virtual and allowed queer women to form *nyaanyo* counter publics that transcended wider public social norms. In this way, the distinction

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between the material element of queer women's lives was blurred with the virtual (Boellstorff 2013; Hine 2015; Van Doorn 2011).

Reflecting Lady's interests as a young Christian queer Ghanaian woman and entrepreneur, the group's cover image (see Figure 2 above) was that of a younger woman of color, and the image and the group's title were followed by emoji symbols: two hands folded in prayer, money symbols, and symbols of love including kisses and roses. The feel of the group was that of a relaxed atmosphere, and one that included daily morning greetings followed by a series of jokes and texts, the announcement of birthdays of group members, and the sharing of memes.[24]  A large part of the affective atmosphere of the group included flirting and humor, a performative act of virtual friendship and care.  Assertive, talkative, and self-assured, as the group administer Lady performed this humor while also sharing informative and affirming messages tailored especially for queer women and their erotic desires and spirituality. For instance, she constantly and consistently posted memes and texts about anything from "how to finger well" to positive Christian messages.  Queer women used texts and especially memes to communicate on the platform, and, I suggest, as a form of social bonding (Sinanan & McDonald 2018) that occurred through a performance of the erotic self, in which individuals used virtual objects to "script and re-script themselves" (Lewis et al 2013, p. 56). These memes were also a part of an affective economy as "signs" that circulated between queer women, which carried meaning and the emotions of queer women (Ahmed 2004b, p. 120).  These circulation of memes as signs is also embedded in the political and historical context of queer women's lives.  For example, the use of memes allowed for the ability to "address ambiguous issues, such as sexual

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[24] An Internet meme is a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission (Davidson, P. 2012, p. 122).

transgressions, without naming them," at least not explicitly (Yankah 1995, p. 51 in Dankwa, 2009, p. 194). In other words, memes were a way of speaking while being discrete.

Communications scholar Limor Shifman's work on memes in digital culture shows us that memes are essentially a form of "intertextual" relation (2014), and a "new arena of bottom-up expression" which is a mixture of "pop culture, politics, and participation" (ibid, p. 4). Through this intertextual relation, Shifman's work also shows that memes are reflective of social norms and mindsets and work as a form of communication and intimacy (ibid). The significance of the memes as they are used in the group is that they are a form of transition from discretion through indirection regarding one's subjectivity, in that they are not verbal speech, but that they are still "speech acts" (Grundligh 2018). Through analyzing memes and images as virtual "speech acts," of queer women in WhatsApp groups, I am following L. Grundligh in the notion that memes are a process of signification, in that they become messages and are a form of non-verbal speech (ibid, p. 150) and provided a way in which, most especially, indirectly, individuals can communicate the various elements of their gendered and sexual experiences (Van Doorn 2011). It's in this way that memes as a form of communication are operating within a *nyaanyo* form of knowledge and information about queer women's realities. This is important considering that these norms around speaking about sexual matters were typically ordered by gender and age and were also present in the cisgender male dominated professionalized NGO spaces, in which speaking was taken very seriously and was expected to be done in a professional manner. Following this, I argue that rather than only performing gendered and sexualized embodiment and an affective relationality through memes, individuals shared their embodied erotic subjectivity and its multiplicity through closed WhatsApp groups. M.O.B. also appeared to be a space in which new forms of communication appeared through sharing memes about relationship issues like the ones shown in figures 4 and 5. In the rest of this chapter, I show how

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Lady, as the administrator of the M.O.B. WhatsApp group, guided the group in posts and the use of memes and texts.

### 3.4 Memes and Texts

For Lady, her erotic subjectivity was a part of maneuvering the individuated neoliberal market system as an entrepreneur and petty trader, but also was a way of reasserting herself as a queer woman and a Presbyterian Christian who claimed agency in a context in which a heteronormative and Christianized mediatized public sphere disseminated moral discourses condemning her desires. Lady expressed herself through aesthetics and discourses within her material world, through using and referring to herself through lesbian sub-categories, wearing up to date fashion, frequently changing her hairstyles and piercings, purchasing mobile phones and mobile money, watching the American television series Empire, and going to 15 Kilos, but also through her WhatsApp group. Through the groups' theme of "Money Over Bitches," I came to understand more clearly Lady's erotic subjectivity as it was expressed on WhatsApp, but also those of the group members. While Lady herself did not see the WhatsApp group at the time as an important or political space, I argue that Lady's use of a particular aesthetic through WhatsApp through memes as signs which circulated affective dimensions of being a queer woman, were a part of a performance of her erotic subjectivity, which was entangled with the prioritization of "money" over "bitches" or lovers, per se, through her chosen title and emojis of the WhatsApp group. According to gender scholar Akosua Adomako Ampofo, it is quite common for individuals in Southern Ghana to expect "material gain" from sexual relationships (Adomako Ampofo 1995; Ankomah & Ford 1993; Anarfi & Fayorsey 1995; Assimeng 1981 in Adomako Ampofo 2006), and it is typical that women are traditionally "industrious and independent income earners" in the informal sector (Adomako Ampofo 2006). In this context, Lady's predicament highlighted that care was a part of her relationship with money, and this was evident during our conversations in actual

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life, as she would occasionally pulled out her cell phone to check her WhatsApp messages from both *toms* and laugh off what was a stressful situation for her. Through her WhatsApp group, there was an opportunity for Lady to perform her material reality: her moving back and forth between two *toms* as lovers, and the emotional strife that came with this. Lady's performance on the virtual platform was a response to her material experience, and a way of moving between and blurring of the two, using the space to communicate her material world conundrums and social positioning. Perhaps through her creation of the WhatsApp group she created an opportunity to reconcile with this emotional strife, and to highlight her toughness and cunningness as a self-proclaimed entrepreneur, used slang words like "bitches," in reference to lovers.

Beyond her use of the group's title and theme, Lady performed multiple aspects of her erotic subjectivity in the WhatsApp group through the sharing of memes, including constructing herself as a sexpert within the group. Here, I am referring to anthropologist Shanti Parikh's use of the concept of sexpert in her ethnography on love among young people in Uganda to explain the "emergence of a cast of 'sexperts'" as individuals who "privilege, though not completely, individual desires and pleasures over the historically kin-based web of social relationships" (2015, p. 39). In the Southern Ghanaian context (as well as in various other contexts) the heterosexual family form and Christian discourses construct women's fertility and ability to reproduce with being a good woman (Asamoah-Gyadu 2007), Lady was an example of the emergence of individuality in relation to sexuality, and the disruption of these constructions of a good Christian woman. Lady's interest in "talking about sex," reclaiming her narrative as a lesbian, and re-constructing narratives around norms regarding sexuality and identity in Accra were a part of this. According to Shanti Parikh's definition, sexperts offer a form of instruction on how to create a "desired norm" (2015) of sexual pleasure. I propose that Lady was a sexpert, and this can be seen as a part of her afro-cosmopolitanism self – or rather the effect of her navigation of a precarious economic environment through the implementation of her

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entrepreneurship (Shipley 2009, p. 647). This is a form of "political agency" as articled by Shipley, which can be seen as existing as a form of entrepreneurial desire beyond the limits of the Ghanaian state, and as a form of aspiration of accumulation that is a part of global capital, and therefore, simultaneously local and global (2009, p. 634). This ingenuity Lady possessed, tapped into the typically unspoken knowledge that a woman's ability to give pleasure sexually, was a key to successful relationships (see Awusabo-Asare et al, 1993; Pereira 2003 in Fiaveh et al 2014).

In the M.O.B. WhatsApp group Lady would share memes to perform and generate meaning around her subjectivity, but also to speak directly through imagery about her desires. For example, amid a series of jokes and playfulness, Lady showed to the group a meme (see figure 4) of eight different female same-sex sexual positions. This meme asked, "what sex position are you?" inquiring about those in the group and their erotic preferences, similarly to the question of "are you a top or a bottom?" Lady asked upon meeting me the first time in person at the Malibu bar. The group responded, including a text by one of Lady's friends (see figures 5 and 6) which reads, "Lady answer first." Jokingly, Lady's lover, a *tom* who was also a member of the group, used the eye ball emojis to respond to this. This was an emoji that was frequently used when individuals were expressing humor but also shock in response to others. To finish the joke, Lady responded, "all," and a friend replies, "I see." The sharing of the meme and the responses that followed, for me, were a clear reflection of Lady's playfulness and desire to transgress norms regarding talking directly about sexuality, which were appreciated in the group. At the same time, it was easy for Lady to share this meme in the context of the closed WhatsApp group, as it was a space that she could control and regulate.

*Figure 4: An example of a meme shared by Lady on the M.O.B. WhatsApp group.*
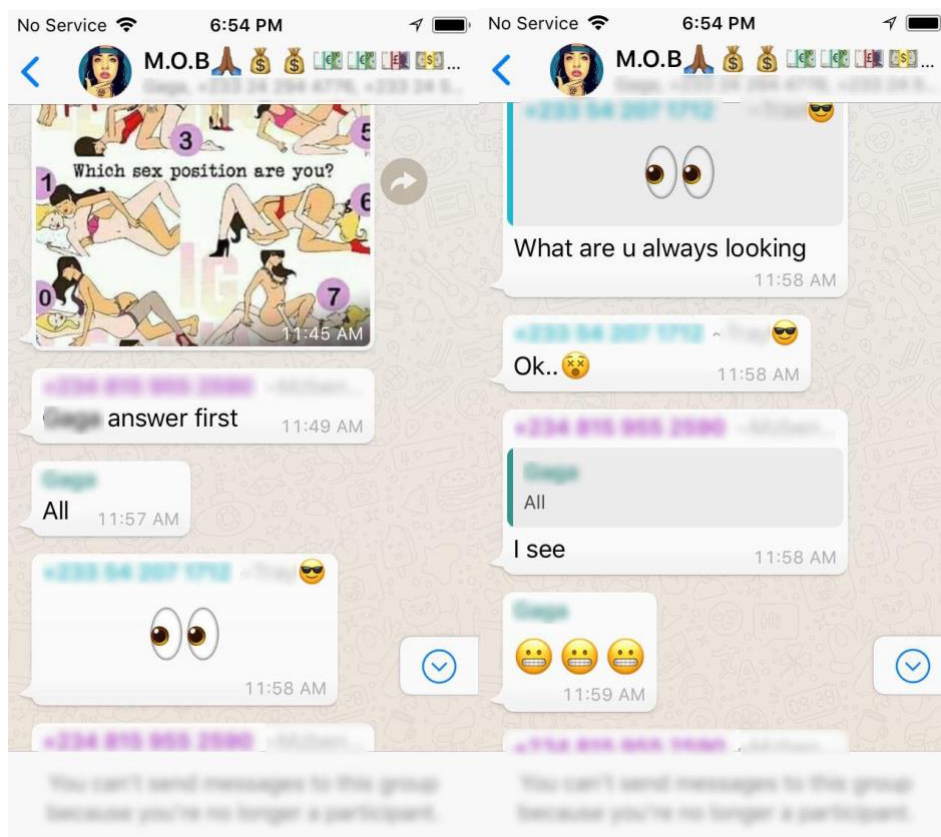
In her material world, Lady's relationship with two *toms* who were providing her with money had become emotionally distressing, and she attempted to combat this with her own economic independence through her petty trading business, in which she sold dildos she had shipped in from the UK to her friends in Accra.  In the wider public, as well as in NGO spaces, selling sex toys would not be considered respectable. Thus, she was able to use the WhatsApp group as a platform for selling her dildos, and in the process, normalized the consumption of sex toys within her group.  Lady, for instance, would occasionally post pictures of the stock that had arrived, including a purple dildo with clitoral stimulation (see figure 7). The sharing of the dildos was usually met with little acknowledgement or shock.  At one point in time, Rebel responded that he was interested in a large black dildo and harness, and Lady replied that she would look into it.  I argue that this was an attempt to create new norms in the WhatsApp group, fulfilling Lady's need to make money, and was therefore a way for Lady to perform her erotic subjectivity. At the same time, the circulation of images of dildos confirmed the groups erotic subjectivities and their queer sexual practices outside of heteronormative publics.

*Figure 7: An example of a picture of a dildo shared by Lady on the M.O.B. WhatsApp group.*

It is through Lady's sharing of and selling of dildos, but also instructional memes regarding sexual pleasure that she made spaces for talking about sexual pleasure openly. The importance of this sharing is that it is an expression of queer sexual pleasure which occurred outside of mainstream society's expectations of proper female conduct and male dominated NGO spaces that focused on bio medicalized discourses of "risk" and violence against lesbians, and historically, HIV risks for men who have sex with men. Rohit K. Dasgupta suggests that the ways in which visuals in particular are used by minority groups through digital platforms, "generate meaning because of their history and context" (2018, p. 198). In this way, we can read the sharing of the meme above as a sign, a form of communication that gives meaning as it is used in the context of the affective realities of queer women's lives, creating a way of speaking that allows women to claim moral authority. It was in these ways, that these WhatsApp groups became *nyaanyo* counter publics through a discursive performance.

The WhatsApp group existed as a form of an affective economy among the group, through which the social conundrum of being both queer but also Christian were relationally acknowledged.

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The group provided a sense of belonging based on this affective economy and was affirming of all the multiple aspects of one's subjectivity. This experience of belonging for queer women on WhatsApp was also possible due to the control that queer women had over their WhatsApp groups, which enabled their ability to explore, express, perform – to form affective bonds and relationships – but also to be affectively networked in relation to each other. This affective economy created a form of solidarity based on shared secrets and a shared deviance, offering a network through which individuals could revel in their difference from a respectable society free from feelings of shame. This was a unique feature of WhatsApp as a platform in comparison with other social media applications or formats. The capacity to control sociality within WhatsApp has been identified by Jolynna Sinanan in their digital ethnographic work based on the platform as it is used among Trinidadians. Sinanan argues that WhatsApp is significant in that it allows individuals to filter or control their social connectivity through administered groups (2018). I found that this was also the case for the queer women whom I knew in Ghana and was a response to a need to carve out a controlled space within a context in which mediatized homophobic discourses and a complex arrangement of NGOization influence the discursive and physical marginalization of queer women and their agency regarding their use of space.

For example, the group served as a virtual world in which members were reminded of their relationship to Christianity, confirming their positionality as both queer women and Christians – which for most of the group's members, except for Obaara whom was Muslim, was intertwined with their erotic subjectivity. These Christian affirmations asserted that queer women were good people, despite Christian moral discourses that condemned "*supi supi* lesbianism" in the wider public. This virtual world of performing one's erotic subjectivity as inclusive of Christianity and affirming others in response to wider publics which shamed and condemned same-sex practices as un-Christian was an example of the group confirming "true-selfhood," (Boellstorff 2008). It is also useful to consider Michel Foucault's concept of "technologies of the self" (1978; 1993; 1998), or the "forms of techne

turned inward to shape selfhood," (ibid). These technologies of the self, I argue, were able to change

and shape selfhood both in queer women's material worlds as well as in the virtual world of WhatsApp.

The application therefore created a "virtual world" that was a space of "meaning-making" and "new

forms of culture and selfhood" that could be shaped within the virtual, giving individuals the ability

to perform a virtual erotic subjectivity (Boellstorff 2008, p. 18). This is similar to work about the ways

in which Ghanaian youth use internet cafes to surf the internet, form friendships in online spaces, and

craft new "lifestyles" through the digital realm (Fair et al 2009). Similarly, WhatsApp was a closed

platform that gave rise to discourses from which queer women could re-invent and re-write their erotic

subjectivities.

This reiteration of the "true-selfhood" on WhatsApp contrasted with the complexity of Lady's

positionality in her material world. It was over drinks one evening in Osu that Lady unhappily said to

me that she had been chosen to be a priestess of the Ga tradition, a role she had reluctantly inherited

from her grandmother, who was also a Ga priestess – and, according to Lady, a lesbian.  Because Ga

priestesses were able to hold autonomous spaces that were outside of the emphasis on maternity and

motherhood in Ga society, and are thereby able to gain power despite not having children (Kilson

1972, p. 174), these priestesses are assumed to be synonymous with same-sex practices, and sometimes

with lesbianism. The impacts of both colonization and Christian missionary work have created the

widespread Christian belief that the Ga religion is deviant compared to Christianity. As an individual

who took pride in her Christian Presbyterian faith, Lady did not feel comfortable with the news that

she was to become a Ga priestess, a process that was not an individual's choice.  For Lady, being a

Christian was ultimately a more solidified and important identity and way of life than her relationship

to her Ga identity, and she had feelings that an overlap of both being a lesbian and a Ga priestess

would create a double stigma for her. Her worry was not unfounded. Using the WhatsApp platform

as a way to reach individuals who were simultaneously dealing with the pressures of Christianized

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discourses which condemned their erotic lives, Lady seemed to recognize this shared affective queer experience and thus, the need for a sort of relational WhatsApp worshiping space. She would consistently post Christian affirmations. One example of this is a message of encouragement she posted to the group:

> never get disappointed when things happened beyond ur expectations. Remember that the greatest glory in life is rising when u fall. Be strong and have faith. Sometimes life doesn't give u what u want; not because u don't deserve it, but because u deserve better. No matter how many times u break down, there should always be a little voice inside u that says, NO, u're not done yet! Be strong, keep hope alive.

It was through these kinds of posts that Lady, confirmed her own and others', "true-selfhood," reasserting that queer women could also be Christian, that they had the ability to "be strong" and "have faith," connecting the hardships of being a queer woman to the ultimate "glory." In response to such posts, individuals would sometimes move on to other subjects, or if the message hit them strongly, would respond with prayer emojis and "amen." This reflected their affective economy, through which emotions were circulating among queer women through the shared reality of feeling outside of or not belonging to Christian spaces in their entirety in the material world. Through WhatsApp, individuals were able to affirm and celebrate both their Christian and erotic selves simultaneously. In research on the role of e-technologies in rural Kenya, Brenda Nyandiko Sanya shows that mobile phones circulate knowledge, from "bottom up" approaches, and offer individuals a "space to share and discuss information and create communities that are supportive" (2013, p. 16), and the mobile phone itself is a space for potential "self-description, mapping of person, social and bodily realities and as an imaginative resource in quotidian and unexpected discourses about female agency" (ibid). I propose that the use of the mobile application to assert Christian affirmations are an example of agency as it is understood by Saba Mahmood (2001). Mahmood suggests that we think of agency as a "capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (ibid, p. 203), which may or may not include individual relationships with hegemonic historical

systems, like Islam and Christianity (2001). This understanding of agency helps to think through the way in which Christian affirmations of queer women can very well be a source of power for individuals through a relationship with a Christian god, despite the religious condemnation of their sexual practices and the gendered oppression that exists in these same Christian discourses.

In thinking through agency in this way, this was a profoundly counter public experience, as this construction of political agency through a Christian identity shows a "widening of discursive contestation" (Fraser 1990, p. 67) in response to dominant Christianized publics which condemn non-heteronormative sexualities. I recognize that Christianity was an important part of Lady's erotic subjectivity, and that Lady's discourse of "being strong" and "having faith" despite heartbreak, confusion, and disappointment reconstructed an enduring individual who was in relationship with faith and God. This juncture of overlapping both religious and queer constructions of erotic subjectivity was a part of the pluralism that queer women were negotiating in their context, in which religion was just as important to them as their erotic and emotional desires and may not be separated. These identity confirmations of Christian selves of queer women also challenged typical liberal assumptions that religion and queer identities and sexualities are not lived realities (Puar 2007), and particularly are in tune with queer African studies scholar, S.N. Nyeck's concern that "spaces of recognition and belonging" in African contexts must also include an exploration of what "culture and religion have to offer in the understanding of sexuality in Africa" (2016, p. 102). Thus, through expressing and confirming belonging within the WhatsApp group, a profound counter discourse was created from the affective economy among queer women, through which the sharing of affirmations and declaring themselves in relationship to a Christian god was central.

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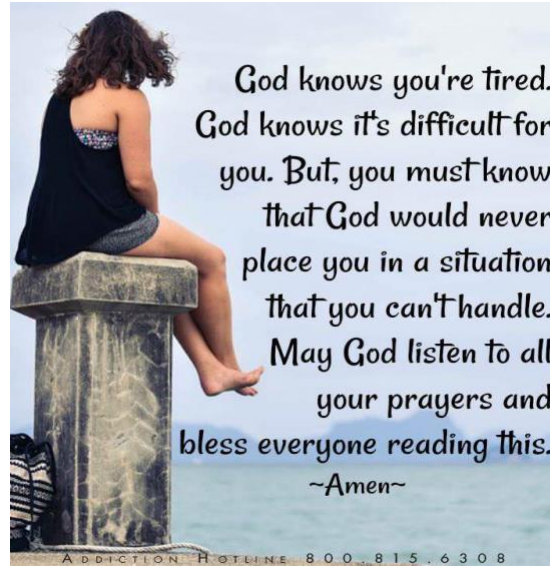
*Figure 8: A meme shared by Lady as an example of her creating a normalized practice of Christian spirituality among the WhatsApp group.*

Lady provided several memes which affirmed this complex identity, including the one shown in figure 8. The meme, with an apparently white woman staring out over the water in contemplation, states, "God knows you're tired. God knows it's difficult for you," confirming, through imagery and text that queer women may still have a relationship with "God." Although there was no response to this meme immediately, I suggest it communicated the emotions of navigating the marginalization of one's identity, the economic precarity as a queer woman, and a relationship with God. However, I argue, as the group's moderator, Lady reclaimed her own narrative as a Presbyterian Christian who was also a potential Ga Priestess and self-identifying lesbian *stemme* who loved to talk about good sex. In this way, she reclaimed her agency and complexity and her sense of self as a moral person. It was through the development of this group platform where Lady's lived experience could be seen to have had the right afro-cosmopolitan audience and medium, which accepted, encouraged, and celebrated the complexity of being both a queer woman and also a Presbyterian Christian. While there was no direct response to this meme, it was later shared in the group again by Rebel. It's in this way, that the

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circulation of memes as signs were a part of counter discourses which reclaim the simultaneity of being queer and Christian.

*3.5 Heartbreak*



*Figure 9: A meme shared by Afia.*

The affective dimensions of queer women's lives were expressed through WhatsApp, as the application became a channel to deal with the emotions that came along with heartbreak and relationship confusion that occurred in queer women's material life. The application offered a virtual space in which feelings of loss, betrayal, disappointment, and moments of loneliness were communicated that otherwise one would not be able to express in material interactions due to the culture of discretion regarding sexual matters. This affective economy, through which emotions created a social space on WhatsApp was circulated through memes that contained these particular feelings. For example, the text accompanying the WhatsApp profile picture (see figure 9) of one interviewee, Afia, stated, "Go for someone whose not only proud and glad to have you, but will also

take every risk and effort just to be with you." It was a pre-made meme that was taken from elsewhere, with a black background and white lettering – simple and clear – that expressed a failure and a lesson learned about intimacy with a recent girlfriend. I knew that the meme was an expression of a breakup, as I had met Afia for the first time just a few weeks before the pictures became her profile picture, and her recent breakup with a live-in girlfriend of a few years was the center of our conversation. Afia and this girlfriend were still sharing a room together. I asked Afia how she felt about continuing to live with her partner, and she said that it was difficult – trying, emotional – but that she was able to make it work. Housing and stability took precedence over individual emotions and the disconnection of intimacy. Afia, unable to communicate about her intimate relationship, emotions and disappointments with her parents who were members of a local Presbyterian Church, used WhatsApp to express her sadness of the loss. Afia's parents had no idea that her roommate was also a love interest, as it was assumed she was only a friend. Her WhatsApp profile picture highlighted the ways in which individuals used memes to express their emotional stresses related to relationships that may struggle within the realm of discreteness. These memes as they were used for these types of expressions, were therefore objects through which feelings appeared (Ahmed 2004b, p. 120).

*figure 10: A meme shared by Patricia.*

As a part of this affective economy, the meme 'Better Days Ahead" (see figure 10) was used as a profile picture by Patricia, during a time when I was aware that she was losing her rental property or her "little ghetto," and would have to move from her small home into her girlfriend/wife Obaara's home with their shared son. This meme circulated the emotions of disappointment Patricia had with the loss of her rental. A very independent individual, Patricia was disappointed that she would no longer be able to host small gatherings in her two-room rental. Her small rental was the center of her social life, and the center of a life for her group of friends – and Patricia's center for her performance of an erotic subjectivity. The loss of the place meant that Patricia would move into a new family compound in which the rules and the space and its meanings must be negotiated with the extended family members of their girlfriend/wife, regardless of the family's openness and acceptance of their relationship. To me, the "better days ahead" image alluded to a sense of afro-cosmopolitan optimism or form of agency in the face of Patricia taking a huge loss in her petty trading business, and therefore, losing her rental due to being unable to make the payments. These complex layers of individual's erotic

subjectivities and their entanglement with economic aspirations were embedded in WhatsApp expressions. I show in the following example, how Rebel engaged with his erotic subjectivity, emotions and what can be seen as afro-cosmopolitan aspirations, through the use of WhatsApp as a virtual space. Because I spent a considerable amount of time with Rebel, as he was my closest informant, this following section goes further in depth to the connections between Rebel's material world, and his expressions or performativity on WhatsApp.

*3. 6 Letting Motherfuckers Know: WhatsApp with Masculinity?*



*Figure 11: Rebel's temporary WhatsApp profile pic, also used by Patricia at a separate time.*

*It's a meme from the U.S. TV show, "Empire."*

A few months after our first meeting, I noticed one of Rebel's memes used as his WhatsApp profile picture, "*Be Humble but Let Motherfuckers Know*" (see figure 11) was an image produced for the U.S. based television show, "Empire," in which an African American male breadwinner created his

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capitalist empire through producing music. An avid watcher of the show at his fellow friend and *tom*,

Patricia's small "ghetto" apartment, Rebel and Patricia both identified with the main character. Rebel

was similarly the primary provider in his family, as a mother, father, and daughter, and was also

interested in accumulating wealth through his small trading business. The WhatsApp image posted as

Rebel's profile picture was a faceless one of this U.S. based character – with only a glimpse of a suit,

and the white character's hand holding a cocktail glass. The image suggested a middle to upper class

white aesthetic of masculinity – one in which a suit and a cocktail glass were needed materials. The

two items also elicited an image of control and wealth, and a slight posturing of readiness. The words

were clear: to create an empire, humility was important, but don't let anyone cross you – especially

the "*motherfuckers*".

As an expression, this imagery highlighted the ways in which a white U.S. hegemonic

masculinity is particularly related to financial success, leadership, and emotional control. Because this

show from which the meme was produced was based on an African American male hegemonic

masculinity, it's also important here to recognize that U.S. hegemonic masculinity is typically defined

by whiteness, and historically has been an ideal masculinity that African American men have been

prohibited from achieving. The link between Rebel's material world of navigating multiple positions

and his relationship to that of a man shows us why he may find the meme particularly relatable,

considering that he was also from a marginalized position. Through the meme, Rebel was performing

as a man, but also an entrepreneur, both which were interwoven realities of Rebel's erotic subjectivity

that he had expressed to me in his material world.

Similar to Lady, Rebel also understood himself as an entrepreneur dealing with economic

precarity and was able to perform his erotic subjectivity in its relation to this on the WhatsApp group,

through meme sharing. I knew from the worries that Rebel had shared with me that those

"motherfuckers" could have been a virtual expression of the dishonesty and deceit involved in running

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one's own trading business as Rebel did in his actual world, and was often frustrated by, and the discomforts of relying on individual payments and loans to make ends meet. This meme expressed frustrations with building a successful informal business in a competitive informal urban market in Accra. As a part of this economic precarity, Rebel was always busy developing new ways to make money, as several times during our time together, Rebel mentioned different informal and formal business ideas: a food stand next to his mother's house to grill and sell chicken, a barber shop in the neighborhood, and perhaps even becoming a local politician. The need for Rebel to create his own work and to solidify income as the only parent paying for his two sons' school fees placed pressure on him to create a small but steadily growing business to ensure his future, and the future of his children, as well as to take care of his aging mother.

This sort of pressure to create a healthy income was also associated with masculinity in Rebel's use of the meme. Gracia Clark confirms that money and wealth are associated with both the male and female in Southern Ghana and that these things are not only within the realm of the masculine (2001). Stephen Miescher, however, suggests that the role of the "big man," or the elder man who is financially well off and also shares his wealth with others, is explicitly an expression of hegemonic masculinity, which has been particularly identified in Ghanaian Presbyterian Christian expressions and or representations of masculinity (Miescher 2005). Because Rebel was perceived by many around him as a woman but identified himself as a man, I suspect he was aspiring to accumulate wealth through a "big man" cultural role.

Rebel's performance of being a "big man," as referred to by Miescher was a part of Rebel asserting his "changing notion of personhood" (Boellstorff 2008) in both the material and the virtual world. I argue, that through the WhatsApp platform, using memes like the one above, Rebel could perform his masculinity, a reality of his own embodiment which was not necessarily widely recognized in his immediate surroundings. Rebel creates meaning through the image and performed and

therefore made real his embodied reality through the virtual space (Van Doorn 2011). This virtual communication is particularly important, because Rebel had multiple roles, including that of being a *tom* within the lesbian community, as well as a marginalized man. Through the sharing of the meme, Rebel expressed the way he wanted to be seen as a man in relation to others. This was as someone who was typically seen as female or a woman through his relationships to others as a sister, mother, female peer, and lesbian. These elements created considerable conflict between Rebel's social positioning and his embodiment as a *tom* and a man. By those in his immediate neighborhood, he was known endearingly as "Mamma Rebel," for those in the NGO networks, he was identified as a lesbian and a transgender person. This plurality of positioning for Rebel came with navigating the wider public norms of what a man and or a woman should be, as Rebel seemed to be struggling with the "complex relations of attachment and rejection to categories" (Warren 1997 in Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) that occurred through his masculinity. This complexity came from the relations of attachment and rejection to categories of emotions that were considered both masculine and feminine. For instance, part of Rebel's conundrum was that he felt "soft," another term used to describe someone who is nice and female within the *nyaanyo* counter public, as many toms described emotions and "softness" as unmanly, which meant that to be a "tom" or a man in the *nyaanyo* counter public, one needed to be tough. It's through his use of the meme, Rebel non-verbally communicates his particular affective reality, including frustrations, and simultaneously asserts his agency within a WhatsApp group of queer women.

During my time spent with Rebel, he grew frustrated with more intimate connections with women, and updated me regularly on the instability of his love life. Rebel's interest in this as a topic was also the norm among others who were a part of this research, as the confusion and anxiety as well as elation and excitement that came from creating and sustaining relationships was a considerably popular topic and was embedded in the affective relations on WhatsApp. Rebel's WhatsApp profile

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image, and other WhatsApp profile images that I viewed throughout my time in Accra, seemed to be a considerable space for figuring out each participant's relation to others through an affective economy. It was perhaps through the visual of the "let motherfuckers know" meme that Rebel was able to circulate and communicate via textual references, emotional frustrations, indirectly. This ability to communicate this way shows that as a counter public space, WhatsApp allows for expression, exploration, and affirmation and affective relationality in its complex forms, creating new forms of culture and selfhood that transfer from the material to the virtual and back again.

### *3.7 Conclusion*

In this chapter I have shown, through ethnographic accounts of *nyaanyo* counter publics, that these are alternative spaces created by queer women and a potent force for performing erotic subjectivity through different spaces, including 15 Kilos, homes, bars, and most importantly, WhatsApp as a virtual space. I have shown how, in these various spaces, how queer women are articulating specific categories in relation to their erotic subjectivities and are creating homosocial spaces regardless of familial expectations and the heteronormative Christianized public sphere. I suggest that within these *nyaanyo* counter publics, queer women are articulating an afro-cosmopolitan agency, through which they take up global and transnational notions while also remaining rooted in local logics. In WhatsApp, more explicitly, queer women were articulating a more complex sense of self, and socially constructing spaces based on their lived realities from the bottom up, which were to a great extent, economically precarious. These spaces, operating through discretion, and an affective economy, were articulating afro-cosmopolitan aesthetics and desires through memes, while also communicating "sexpert" knowledge, transgressing typical notions of how a good Christian Ghanaian woman should be in the wider public, but also how queer women should respond to NGO spaces as victims of violence. Using the virtual space of WhatsApp, queer women shared a more nuanced,

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complex, pluralistic or multiple self in a neoliberal context where, given the changing and ever-increasing economic inequality, NGOization, and transnationalism and globalization, gender and sexuality are particularly potent sites of power. Through the sharing of memes and development of WhatsApp groups, queer women take control over the scripting of their selves, and their lives in this complicated context, in which their very ability to articulate their desires and identities in relation to their erotic selves, as well as navigating economic and emotional obstacles are their main concern. In the following chapter, I show how these *nyaanyo* counter publics that are created by queer women both in virtual and material worlds, meet up with NGO spaces.

# Chapter 4: Finding Empowerment? The Making of the Courageous Sisters



*Figure 12: The first image used for the Courageous Sisters WhatsApp group in 2015.*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the first "The Courageous Sisters" training was targeted explicitly at queer women, and was the first, as far as I was told, of its kind. The training occurred towards the end of my research in 2015 in Accra, but I was involved from its inception. Michael, a cisgendered male who volunteered with CEPERG, along with George, also a cisgendered male (who was formerly employed with CEPERG and looking for work in the field of HIV and MSM services), and Dana, a woman from the community, made up a group of fellows who put together a proposal to fund and facilitate the Courageous Sisters meeting. At the beginning of my research, Michael had invited me to help with putting together the proposal for the training, for "the LBT Women, to include Women who have Sex with Women (WSW), and women in *supi* relationships," which at the time, was the best we could come up with in terms of summarizing the group. The proposal was successful, and Michael and the other two fellows were awarded funding from the Nigerian organization, The

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Initiative for Equality Rights, or TIERS. According to their website, TIERS works to "protect and promote the human rights of sexual minorities nationally and regionally" (TIERS 2018). As a West African regional organization, TIERS funded the Courageous Sisters training, if Michael and the fellows showed proof of the interest of queer women. To do this, and to begin the process of involving queer women in the training outside of his immediate NGO circle, Michael created a WhatsApp group that he also named, "The Courageous Sisters" (CS). The term, "sister" is a kinship-based term that Michael and the rest of the fellows used to refer to those who are perceived to be female born persons. The term sister, despite its gendered connotations, was a common reference used by those whom I imagined to be the "brothers" - male identified NGO leaders and volunteers who wanted to include women in their work, to refer to queer women. While this term assumes a gendered and sex identification as female, there were participants in the meeting whom identified as male and or female to male transgender who also used the term as a way to refer to themselves, and fellow "sisters." The WhatsApp group that Michael had created for the "sisters," he had hoped, would be the ground from which "the women in the LGBT community can direct their own course and create their own group," as he described to me. Through WhatsApp, I notified those I thought would be interested, adding Rebel, Lady, Patricia, and a few others. Some clearly responded (Rebel and Lady) that they would be coming to the training, others said nothing at all, and a few others from the group eventually came.

Because this training focused on the empowerment of queer women in an NGO space sponsored by TIERS, this was a moment in which NGO and donor logics regarding sexual health, human rights, and in general, gender and sexuality, were presented to queer women specifically. However, the training itself still followed the typical format, through which experts or professionals in the community who worked with NGOs would deliver or provide training and education to subjects. Michael's well-intentioned agenda as an NGO professional and cisgendered male, was to provide a platform and empowerment for queer women through "human rights" based information

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for the "sisters," but it continued to rely on this hierarchy of knowledge as outlined in Chapter 2. The NGO spaces I had typically witnessed were male-dominated and professionalized in that they relied on discourses of human rights and sexual health (and therefore required a certain amount of knowledge on these topics to participate), ignored queer women's nuanced needs, and were focused on queer women "coming out" with stories of victimhood and violence to participate. Through this experience, and through my understanding that those queer women who were my primary research participants were interested in this type of event, I assisted Michael through providing resources in the form of training guides on sexuality and empowerment, as well as providing him with WhatsApp contacts that I had acquired during my time in Accra. Also, because I had come to understand that in contrast to regulatory NGO discourses and practices, a *nyaanyo* counter public existed among queer women that allowed for the performance of multi-faceted erotic subjectivities and created a means for individuals to circulate their own discourses and understandings of morality, pleasure, and desire, I wanted to translate this in order to make the training more meaningful for those attending. With this in mind, I had suggested to Michael to review the handbook, "Rights and Desire: A Facilitator's Manual to Health Sexuality," produced by Breakthrough, an Indian based organization from New Delhi. I suggested the manual in order to create a more positive conversation about desire, pleasure, and power among queer women, as the organization suggested: "Our sexuality should be a place of pleasure, joy, intimacy and respect but is instead, often a place of abuse, ignorance, disease and violence" (Ahmed & Menon 2006, p. 5). This intervention, on my part, was due to my experiences with queer women, in which their interests and discussions were mainly around intimacy, pleasure and figuring out relationships, rather than the typical NGO focus of violence or victimhood.

In this chapter, I aim to show how in this first Courageous Sisters training is an "encounter across difference" between the NGO logics and norms and the *nyaanyo* counter public (Tsing 2005, p. 6). This encounter is a frictional one – in that it is a specific moment that logics of supposed NGO

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empowerment, human rights, and sexual health speak to and are taken up by queer women. In her discussion of friction, Tsing argues that encounters are either compromising or empowering (Tsing 2005, p. 6). However, I show that this encounter is unpredictable, and complicated, and is both compromising and empowering. To further analyze the complexity of the moment, I argue the training is also an assemblage of transnational, global, and culturally specific meanings. In my use of assemblage, I am following the concept as it is used by Clarke et al in their analysis of the ways in which policy "moves" in different contexts and moments (2015), and Higgins and Larner's (2017) use of the term in their analysis of neoliberal assemblages. Clarke et al suggest that it is useful to use assemblage as an analytic of how "meanings are materialized in practices, in settings, in the ordering of things and in how such conditions shape the possibilities of thinking and acting" (2015, p. 47). Higgins and Larner suggest that assemblage is useful to think through power and agency in neoliberal contexts, in such a way as to re-think agency in terms of encompassing multiple forms of power and enabling a more nuanced approach in which "agency and power is distributed in different and context-dependent ways that cannot always be predicted in advance" (2017, p. 9). In thinking through the way in which this training was an assemblage of meanings, and power, but also agency - I show that it was a part of a process of "self- and world-making" (Allen 2012, p. 334) for queer women, and the attendance and participation in the meeting was a means for them to "condition new choices and new politics" (ibid, p. 329), which, I argue, was also in line with their erotic subjectivities.

On the other hand, I also acknowledge the compromising aspect of the encounter between the *nyaanyo* counter public and the NGO regulatory space. The CS training, because it was centered on providing education about individual sexual health and human rights, lent itself as a possible source of empowerment for the "sisters," but not necessarily in the ways in which they struggled due to their socio-economic conditions as informal petty traders. The sort of empowerment offered through the training was in line with a liberal discourse on human rights-based information. The approach, as it

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was used by Michael, sought to also educate and articulate individual identities in relation to sexuality, and used a universalized LGBT acronym to articulate the needs of queer women. While many queer women were already taking up these subjectivities in *nyaanyo* counter publics, I argue that this articulation of empowerment through individualized identity-based discourses and human rights is simultaneously empowering and limiting. Also, while these NGO logics of empowerment and human rights are not necessarily addressing institutional and structural changes that are needed, they are nonetheless translated and transformed by queer women to fulfill their desires for a new politics. Using the idea of friction, I am acknowledging that the outcome of the training, which evolved into the registering of the first queer women's organization in Ghana, "The Courageous Sisters," and subsequent empowerment trainings, is the productive, and not entirely resistant nor predictable result of the encounter between the two worlds.

To contextualize the use of this empowerment discourse and also the complex assemblage of meanings within the training, it is important to understand the use of the term empowerment and its multi-faceted origins. Scholars at the intersection of gender and development have argued that empowerment as a term has been de-politicized within the development industry and taken up as an "elastic" term since the 1990s, which has since become devoid of meaning (Batliwala 2007; Cornwall & Eade, 2011 in Cornwall 2016). However, the term originates from feminist consciousness-raising and collective based action in the 1980s and 1990s, which was used in various contexts to challenge and change power relations (Batliwala, 1993, 2007; Cornwall 2016); and the concept of empowerment is given its meaning through the radical confrontation of structural "gender inequalities" (ibid). This more social justice-oriented meaning of the term, according to the authors, implied that empowerment was more about "recognizing inequalities in power, asserting the right to have rights and acting to press for and bring about structural change in favour of equality" (Batliwala, 1993; Kabeer, 1994; Rowlands, 1997; Sen, 1997 in Cornwall 2016). Furthermore, Srilatha Batliwala called for a more

particular analysis of power when referring to empowerment, as 'control over material assets, intellectual resources, and ideology' (1994, p. 130 in Cornwall 2016, p. 343).

The term empowerment in the Ghanaian context, was given popularity through women's empowerment initiatives carried out by organizations, activists, and researchers in Ghana following the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Bejing (Manuh & Anyodoho 2015). The use of the term by women's initiatives challenged gender inequalities and inspired the writing of the Ghanaian Women's Manifesto, which critiques larger systems of power such as economic inequality, similar to Batliwala's definition of the term (Hodžič 2014). The term as it is used in the Ghanaian context is articulated by Ghana feminist scholars Takyiwaa Manuh and Nana Akua Anyidoho (2015) who cite Jo Rowlands' (1997) definition of empowerment more specifically as a "process of change of acquiring power from a position of disempowerment" (ibid), and that the "typology that encompasses the different kinds of power sought through the process of empowerment," includes the "capacity to act on divisions (power to)," the "power of collective action (power with)," and the "power of confidence or self-esteem (power within)" (p. 20). Sylvia Bawa points out, however, that in the Ghanaian post-colonial context, notions of empowerment are not separate from Christian or religious theologies regarding prosperity and well-being (2017, p. 6). As shown in the previous chapter, in *nyaanyo* counter publics, the notion of well-being and a relationship with a Christian god was a part of queer women's erotic subjectivity, and therefore, sense of well-being.

In the context of the Courageous Sisters training, the notion of empowerment is also embedded within a larger post-colonial context of anti-colonial struggles for human rights, as well as Christian or religious theologies. Due to the facilitators' experiences in the NGO context, I also argue that the training is informed by the global response to HIV and programs, and more particularly, the result of Global Fund initiatives in the region. Anthropologist Vinh-Kim Nguyen suggests that these responses rely on notions of 'self-help" and "empowerment" of directly affected communities, which

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are concepts which have originated in Euro-American social movements (2008, p. 127). Thus, the facilitators are following NGO logics which center on experts providing education and empowerment to NGO subjects, which is in line with NGOization through HIV interventions, and which assumes an already dis-empowered subject. The notion of empowerment must also be contextualized through understandings of intersubjectivity in the Southern Ghanaian context. According to scholar Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, a notion of power through intersubjective harmony and stability is a Ghanaian cosmological conception (2013), and the desire for harmony is a "traditional relish for the values of community stability and harmony" which also is in line with "non-confrontational approaches" to issues of human rights (ibid, p. vi). With all these particular meanings circulating in the context, the understanding and complexity of the origins of supposed universalized conceptions of power, empowerment, and human rights is quite literately, an assemblage, or an example of how "conditions shape the possibilities of thinking and acting" (Clarke et al 2015, p. 47).

The aim of this chapter is to contextualize the training as an encounter in which this assemblage of meanings and forms of power and empowerment occurred. Within this encounter existed processes of translation from the participants, me as a researcher, and the facilitators. My use of translation is taken from the framework as it is used by Clarke et al (2015) as well as Tsing (2005) to conceptualize the fluid and dynamic ways in which social events occur, and the ways in which "meaning (or set of meanings) move from one linguistic or cultural context to another" (Clarke et al 2015, p. 35), and are constantly transformed, translated, distorted and modified (Lendvai & Stubbs 2009, p. 676; Tsing 2005). Therefore, this concept has relevance in the CS training space, as individuals and the group translate meanings of terms, categories, and frameworks that guide the space. It is possible to say that through this process of translation, the formation of the CS NGO and WhatsApp group becomes a "hybrid form", to use Sadia Hodžić's term in her reflection on Ghanaian women's NGOs as "assemblages of different movements and organizations formed by coalitions and

collective" (2014).  Hodžić's use of the term is in reference to feminist NGOs balancing between collective movement making and professionalization and bureaucratization.  This "'hybrid' or 'interstitial' space" is also articulated by Lendvai and Stubbs, as a space in which 'blurring and merging of distinctions' occurs (Czarniawaska & Mazza 2003 in Lendvai & Stubbs 2009) and is in line with Elissa Helms suggestion that there are both negative and positive effects of feminist influences on NGO spaces (2014, p. 22).  Helms further calls for a more precise critique of NGOization that engages with the "various forms of NGOs" and the different ways in which missions and motivations, organization and relationships with "donors and the state," often take place (ibid, p. 46). Similarly, the CS NGO must be conceptualized with this complexity in mind.

Within this complex space of the CS NGO and WhatsApp group, I show that it becomes a form of a "self-help group" that is administered by Lady. In my use of self-help, I am referring to Nguyen's (2013) use of the term to describe a group that provides empowerment through "specific techniques for presenting one's self," which include "talking about one's self and examining one's self" (p. 450). Nguyen further makes note that this form of empowerment comes from a particular moment in time and is a part of a Western philosophy that "focused on how individuals could live an ethical life, comply with religious morality and come to know and act on the world" (ibid, p. 445). These techniques of self-help are taken up by queer women in order to perform their erotic subjectivities and to address their desires to create "self-making strategies," (Allen 2012, p. 335).

I see these self-making strategies as a part of an erotic subjectivity for queer women which is intersubjective.  In this way, the attendees in the training are not subsumed by hegemonic or universalistic processes as is oftentimes implied by Tsing's definition of friction, but these processes are a part of an encounter in which a tension exists between specific cultural logics of non-identarian practices and a reliance on identity politics.  Many scholars have pointed out that it is important to question specific categories that have Euro-Centric origins, and whether they are transferable to

different cultural logics and contexts (Dankwa 2009; Hemmings 2007; Hoad 2009; Massad 2007; Oyewumi 2010; Tamale 2011; Valentine 2007; Wekker 2006). This further relates to the concern that when it comes to the concept of sexuality and sexual practices, as they are translated into Southern contexts, Euro-centric binaries as well as understandings of sexuality as an identity rather than a practice become hegemonic (Wekker 2006), and that discretion and indirection are the norm when it comes to same-sex desire as identified by Dankwa (2009). Feminist Amina Mama rightly points out that the concept of identity politics in the West African context is a more recent phenomenon, in which the notion is typically intertwined with concerns for "material redistribution and justice, and related desires for existential integrity and security" (2001, p. 67), and thus, cannot be assumed to be individualistic. As these categories and discourses are shared in the NGO training, a process of translation is occurring, in which the terminologies, approaches, and discourses are taken up by queer women and utilized as a part of an erotic subjectivity.

In what follows, I show how, through the CS training, the attendees responded to specific prompts from Michael, and, through their participation, articulated a set of specific needs that move beyond NGO discourses, reflecting on how these specific desires are a part of a discourse of power and empowerment. Then, I reflect on an exercise which is presented to the group by Michael, as a process of translation of the Breakthrough manual as a part of the framework of empowerment. I further articulate how this activity emphasizes self- making, pleasure, and therefore, erotic subjectivity, while also a part of a larger friction between localized notions of discretion and the erotic as a practice rather than an identity. In the later part of the chapter, I outline how the CS becomes an NGO founded by Lady and funded by the Centre for Culture and Leisure (COC) the oldest LGBT organization in the Netherlands, which has been "advocating for the rights of lesbian women, gay men, bisexuals and transgender persons (LGBT's) from 1946 on" (COC Netherlands 2018), hence becoming a part of an NGOization process. I show that Lady acts as an intermediary, in the creation

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of the CS NGO.  In my use of the term, intermediary, I am referring to the role of the translator within the process of translation as referred to by Noemi Lendvai and Paul Stubbs (2009).  Lady occupies this role as she is able to locate "'hybrid spaces'" and "knowledge systems" within the *nyaanyo* counter public as a target group for intervention (ibid, p. 678).  Through this hybridity, the CS becomes a space of blurring and merging of both the NGO form and a *nyaanyo* counter public. As a part of this "hybrid form," conversations that occur on the CS WhatsApp space, are spaces in which queer women create a form of a "self-help group" (Nguyen 2013), to address the desires and needs of queer women, with the intention of accessing education and empowerment.

### 4.1 The First Courageous Sisters' Training

The first CS training took place in what had become a fairly regular spot for meetings and trainings of both HRAC and CEPERG, at a local hotel just across from a police station. As a participant and note keeper of the training, I joined a small room of about 30.  Those who attended, included a few of my core research participants such as Lady, Rebel, Patricia and Obaara, a few others whom I had only met once or twice at social gatherings and one-on-one interviews, and the rest of whom I had not met at all.  The conference room was a part of a hotel which had a small outdoor pool, a bar, and a restaurant that served Ghanaian dishes.  The space had been used, I assume, due to safety and security as well as to offer a bit of luxury, as the room was private, carpeted, and air conditioned and the hotel quiet except for its workers.  These luxuries were rare in many of the NGOs, homes, and neighborhood spots in which the people I knew lived and spent their time.

In the room were tables in the shape of a large U which opened to the speaker.  The training began with a prayer, guided by Lady, who was invited by Michael to open the training.  This was not unusual, as many NGO meetings began with a Christian prayer session in English, as religiosity, and more often than not, Christian religiosity, was embedded in the lives of NGO participants, and was

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the primary mode of approaching liberation and community well-being for many of my research participants. Following this, was an introductory question and answer session led by Collins, a self-identified man, *tom*, and transgender, who was dressed in a professional white shirt for the occasion, and who was asked by Michael to assist in facilitating the meeting. Collins, with great enthusiasm, started the training with the following statement and question:

> Today as my fellow sister has given us this very wonderful introduction, I'm here to ask, what are your expectations for today's program, what do you think you would need, what do you think should be done to bring harmony and togetherness in the community?

With this introduction statement was the first explicit opportunity, as far as I knew at the time, for queer women to give feedback as to what their needs were, and what gaps they thought existed between themselves and the rest of the imagined community. I suggest an imagined community here, as I do not assume there was consensus on a community at the time of the training. As mentioned in previous chapters, the mixed group meetings queer women attended did not include such questions specifically for this group. The question, in which Collins also included himself as a "sister," despite his identification as a man and as transgender, is not only about "human rights" and discourses that are typical to the NGO environment, but also asked about "harmony" and "togetherness," words that set a specific tone of community building and connection for the training. As the group went around, individuals raised their hands or explained very earnestly what it was that they wanted to get from this training. Taking advice from each person in the room, the following list was created from the meeting and the group:

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Unity and harmony

"I would like to know
my rights"

Self-confidence to be
bold

sexual health

Impact and building
on low self-esteem

How to
communicate/express

Love amongst each
other
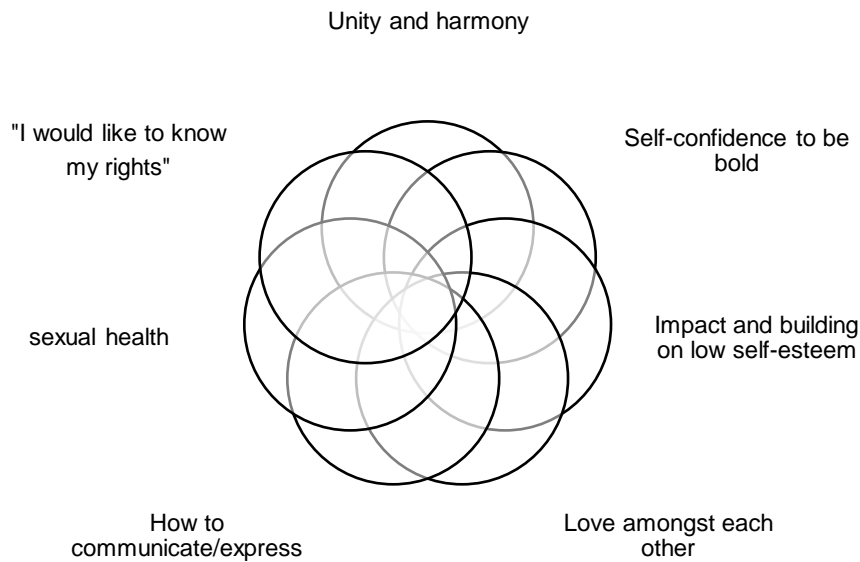
*Figure 13: the desires of the attendees of the Courageous Sisters training in 2015.*

The group established clearly and immediately that the needs of the individuals in the room were to understand their human rights and sexual health – which were in line with typical NGO discourses on the subject. However, a more generalized discourse around social well-being uncovered a definite desire to learn about and to enhance individual and group "self-confidence" and to address the "impact and building on low self-esteem." This discourse of addressing issues of "self-esteem," has been critiqued as a specific phenomenon that has proliferated through development interventionist discourses of empowerment that are oftentimes influenced by neoliberal Euro-American therapeutic origins (Rowlands 1997; Nguyen 2013). At the same time, this issue of self-esteem in post-colonial Ghana, is a way of articulating a desire for individual well-being by queer women. This individualism is articulated in response to combined impacts of large socio-economic disparities, marginalization from families, the need to be discrete regarding one's sexual practices and gender performance, and the effects of criminalization. This response provides information about what feelings of power queer women were interested in acquiring, and how they saw themselves and

the group, and what they felt they could address in the framing provided by the NGO. This moment highlighted how the CS training was also a space in which individuals could translate and articulate empowerment terminology in order to communicate critically important individual feelings of disempowerment, which were un-discussed in other human rights and sexual health focused trainings. This also highlighted issues typically reflected in *nyaanyo* counter public spaces such as WhatsApp, therefore showing that the knowledge within *nyaanyo* counter publics is brought into the CS training space. Sharing these issues of "self-esteem," therefore, was an example of queer women translating their desire for power and self-making.

Other articulated desires for "understanding," "harmony," "unity," "love," and "tolerance," reflected a need for connection within the group of queer women. These desires highlighted an intersubjective understanding of empowerment, as they are about concern within the group for a lack of community. I argue that this intersubjective desire, is inherent in an erotic subjectivity, or the understanding that erotic subjectivities are shared and therefore, political (Allen, p. 327). This notion of collectivity and harmony is also a part of post-colonial Ghanaian empowerment within Christian theologies (Bawa 2017) and the idea of "harmony" is also reflective of Ghanaian cultural norms that are already in line with the value of harmony and stability (Ofori Atiemo 2013). Through both the desire for a new politics, informed by religious and Southern Ghanaian sensibilities, empowerment, but also women's rights, and human rights are all a part of an assemblage of meanings of empowerment, through which the participants desire to access the notion of a cohesive, powerful, and therefore, "harmonious" community made up of queer women.

*4.2 What Does Identity and Pleasure Have to do with it?*

The aspect of empowerment regarding women's sexuality in the context of sub-Saharan Africa has usually been ignored in development and public health frameworks on the subject, as women are

either hyper-sexualized, portrayed in the frame of the victim, and or bio-medicalized with such frameworks (Bakare-Yusuf 2013; Maina Ahlberg and Kulane 2011). We saw tendencies of this in previous chapters, in the ways in which queer women were asked to participate in NGO spaces, as "lesbian victims." On the contrary, identifying pleasure highlights a mode of knowledge production, in which the body creates meaning, and is also critical for understanding and defining how one's erotic subjectivity can be constructed through embodied knowledge and vice versa. This mode of knowledge production through erotic meanings was also essential within *nyaanyo* counter publics. More specifically, as mentioned in the previous chapter, individuals shared knowledge regarding erotic desire through the circulation of memes and conversations on WhatsApp. This is an example of the ways in which difference knowledges are brought into the NGO space as a larger process of translation.

I didn't realize that Michael had taken my advice to refer to the Breakthrough manual until later in the training when I recognized that one of the exercises he invited the CS to do was from the manual. It was entitled, "Our Right to Pleasure," with the objective of being able to "explain what it means to have the right to a healthy, pleasurable and safe sexual experience" (Breakthrough, p. 35). Michael initiated the Breakthrough session in the afternoon portion of the CS training, after lunch had passed. He suggested, while handing out post-it notes, that everyone answer the question of "how do you identify?", and then to also list the "part of your body that when your partner touches you, you get excited." As the exercise begins, the room is filled with a humorous reply of "ohs!" and giggles in response to Michael's request, which seemed to lighten the mood in a pleasurable way. He reminded everyone that they did not have to write their name, and that when they are finished we would mix all the papers together and pull them out one by one. After the exercise was finished, Michael handed back the post-its to everyone, and they received a post-it with another persons' identity and erogenous zone written on it. After these were exchanged, we read back to the room what was written. The group was not intimidated or shy about this exercise, and everyone at least appeared to be comfortable

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sharing their responses, myself included.  In the conclusion, we saw a mixture of categories and their associations with the body, which gave evidence of the ways in which individuals were familiar with such categories. The list of categories and the associated erogenous zones were an example of the multiplicity of responses to such a question.  The answers, although limited to mostly English responses, articulated the assemblage of meanings that exist in *nyaanyo* counter publics to refer to an erotic subjectivity.  Some of the responses, for instance, tell us about the relationality or intersubjectivity of these categories within *nyaanyo* counter publics, while some, may give us information as to the limitations of the use of such categories.  The responses, 21 in total, included:

<div align="center">

Lesbian/Tom – fingers

Stem/lesbian - Between my ass

Bisexual - Ears/lips/clit/breast

Femme- Breasts

Lesbian- Breasts

Transgender - Nipples

Lesbian- Mouth kissing

Bisexual - My palm

Bisexual - Breasts fofofo "breasts"

Lesbian/tom – Fingers, Dick

Lesbian/supi - Nipples and kissing

Lesbian - Clit/vagina

Lesbian/supi - Nipples

Bisexual - Calf

Bisexual - Nipple

</div>

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Bisexual - Breasts

Lesbian - Breasts and clitoris

Bisexual - Nipple

Lesbian/femme - Nipples and deep kissing

Bisexual - Left chest, My ass, When I'm being sucked, When my vagina is being tickled

Lesbian/Queer/Clit/Vagina


This was the first time in my months of research with NGOs and trainings in which individual queer women were given the space to "talk" about themselves, but also about pleasure. It's in this way, that the CS training offered a space in which individual and group understandings of pleasure was a part of learning about rights and empowerment. The reference to highlight sexual pleasure when discussing and working on sexual rights, can offer a "counter-narrative" to "hegemonic discourses" (Bakare-Yusuf 2013; Maina Ahlberg & Kulane 2011) within empowerment or women's rights-based initiatives. The social knowledge that was constructed in the room was a source of power, as they reference many different parts of the body that are a source of pleasure for individuals (Spronk 2014). For instance, as one "lesbian" identified person explained, their finger was also their "dick", which showed that the meaning of sex was created oftentimes through meanings or references to the body, and in this case, through the finger (ibid). This meaning of pleasure, and perhaps sex, was mostly outside of the definition of sex as it was understood in the criminal code in Ghana,– and could be a potent force for creating counter discourses and narratives to the wider public in which women in particular were regulated by moral standards regarding the "'appropriate' ways of expressing sexuality (e.g. not appearing easy and cheap to a man, or too willing to have sex), in keeping one's respect as 'good' and virtuous" (Allman 1996 in Fiaveh et al. 2017, p. 3). This sharing of knowledge that the finger is also a dick, was also a part of providing space and power to individuals to perform aspects of

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their erotic subjectivities. This exercise shows the body has multiple meanings for queer women that boosted their self-esteem, in other words, providing space for the creation of a power within and creating a sense of trust and vulnerability within the group – as individuals shared this intimate information with each other. This discursive moment in the training also reflected the interests and discussions that I saw expressed through the M.O.B. WhatsApp group, in which the sharing of erotic knowledge and pleasure was a part of what I found to be unique and powerful about *nyaanyo* counter publics, and in stark contrast with the topics and emphases of NGO discourses. It's in this way in which the training is a space and moment in which the translation of erotic knowledge around pleasure, met up with the NGO space and was a part of or gave meaning to the term, empowerment.

Also, as a part of this exercise, relating to the use of an identity to refer to one's erotic subjectivity became a central feature. When Michael asked people to state, "how they identify," in response, many people replied with English language terms which described a sexual identity. From the list that is made, two persons lump together lesbian and *supi*, there are many bisexuals, and there was an array of expressions of gendered sub-categories such as *femme* and *tom* and one transgender person. It is in this moment in the training in which articulations of categories show that individuals have engaged with such terms prior to their attending the CS training, and that this is not simply a hegemonic process, but a process of translation of meanings and interpretations of the categories by and with queer women. Also, I argue that the reference to specific categories and identities in the training although limiting, had or has the potential to be empowering for queer women. This use of and reference to categories within NGO spaces as empowering has also been documented by David Valentine in his ethnography on transgender as a category within activist networks in the U.S. (2007). Valentine shows that transgender is useful as a "category of social action and social justice activism" and was also central to debates among activists (Valentine 2007, p. 25). Following the understanding that such categories can be useful for social action, I show that categories used within the CS training

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exercise such as lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, were examples of the ways in which individuals used and articulated so called global categories, that are not only useful for attending such trainings because they are a part of NGO discourses which refer to individual sexual identities and behaviors, but were also a part of the group's empowerment process, as they were inevitably translated and given meaning in the Southern Ghanaian context. As Xavier Livermon explains in reference to similar phenomena in South Africa, "western-derived" terms and local terms come to change meaning in the vernacular, and such terms "take on additional meanings related to local understandings of gender and sexuality" therefore changing the meaning of Western derived terms, as well as the local (Livermon 2012, p. 305).

In the previous chapter I showed how individuals such as Lady, Rebel, and Patricia, for instance, used lesbian sub-categories such as *tom, stemme,* and femme. In the context of the CS training space, these identities could also be a crucial part of how individuals may have understood their personal relationship to larger discourses of human rights, and sexual health. Authors on the subject have confirmed that identity making is also a crucial form of understanding social inequalities (Lewis et al 2013), as well as creating social activism (Valentine 2007). At the same time, the use of certain identity categories outside of NGO spaces could create diminished social power, marginalization, and vulnerability to discrimination, as they are considered to be Western imports in the context. While this exercise evokes a sensibility that was performed in closed *nyaanyo* counter publics, some of these categories themselves are in friction with the larger context in Accra, and the terms may not be used in the wider public.

Interestingly, there appeared in the list at least eight bisexually identified individuals in the room. While many research participants used terms such as *tom, stemme,* and *femme*, in *nyaanyo* counter public spaces, there was no articulation of the category, bisexual as an everyday term. While *stemme* could have been a possible synonym for bisexual, it was not used in the same way. However, it was

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outside of NGO spaces where I was made aware that many queer women had female same-sex partners as well as male sexual partners, sometimes because of their own desire, but also due to social pressures to have a family. The evidence of bisexual as a category and its usage, could have been pointing to the existence of a "sexual middle ground" between dichotomous constructions of sexuality (Hemmings 2007, p. 20), and deconstructs clearly cut boundaries between erotic desire, practice, and categories.[25] This may also highlight the relational aspect of erotic subjectivities as highlighted by scholars on the subject in the West African context (Spronk 2018; Dankwa 2009).

In the afternoon the training focused on a discussion of identity and terms. It was explained by Michael that bisexuality "refers to an emotional affection or sexual attraction to both the same or different sex or gender." When discussing the local terminology, a woman in the room, Sandra, whom I had never met before, explained that it was referred to as "*BBC*," which showed the term had been given its own acronym – or has become a form of a slang word. As the conversation continued, it seemed to arouse a curiosity from a few people in the room, especially one individual, Efiah, with whom I had had one interview before this meeting, and who was a mother of two and also a petty trader who lived in Jamestown. She brought up her issues and interests with the term and its meaning, explaining that:

> I'm getting the meaning as…it means I can be with a *tom*, a lady …. how do I want to be with a woman, or the one who dresses like a *femme,* or if I can't to be with a guy, I want to be with a straight guy… the understanding I'm getting is the same as the pan sexual.

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[25] Claire Hemmings identifies bisexuality as being able to encompass the transgression of Western sexual oppositions seen as limiting or oppressive" (2007, p. 20). Bisexual as a category that is referred to by many of the participants in the training deconstructs the assumptions that the erotic is nameable and fixed (Wekker 2006; Spronk 2018) and highlights a frictional encounter between queer women's everyday realities and the logics or discourses from NGOs.

As it's shown from the quote above, Efiah, responding to Michael's discussion of terms, was figuring out her relationship to the specific term, bisexual, based on her desire for others, which included both men (*toms* and straight men), and women (to include *femmes*). This is an important moment of knowledge making, as through the conversation, Efiah articulates her desires in relation to a category. Efiah's discussion highlighted that there are different understandings of the relationship between one's sexual practices and how they would then refer to a category, and that by blurring the concept of pan sexual with bisexual, she gave evidence that bisexual was a term in which a complex relationship of power is figured out between local terminologies and these fixed terms. Bisexuality is a Western category that refers to a fixed identity related to sexual practices, and individual sexual practices and everyday realities do not always neatly fit within sexual categories derived from English terminologies, as shown by Efiah's inquiry regarding where her desires and practices map on to dichotomies or not. The frequent use of bisexual within the NGO spaces, shows that the category works as a catch all for many individuals who didn't know where they fit otherwise.

*4.3 The Courageous Sisters (CS) Become an NGO*

*Figure 3: The CS logo created in 2017.*

Since I carried out the research in Accra in 2015, Lady and I have stayed in touch over the course of the CS's development and I am also a member of the CS WhatsApp group. I was delighted to learn that in 2017, CS was registered as an NGO by Lady who announced this status to me over WhatsApp with much excitement. Together with Michael (and through his international NGO connections), and with a newer member who also administratively supports the CS, the organization is now connected to the COC of the Netherlands, which contributes funding to the CS through the "Ghana Pride Project," to continue the CS WhatsApp group, and to host "Empowerment Trainings," as Lady explained to me. I was able to visit the COC offices during a stay in Amsterdam in 2017, in which I was able to meet Levits, the Dutch cisgender male presenting international officer in charge of the Ghana Pride Project. It was during our meeting that Levits explained COC's theory of change and articulated that the usual goal set for NGOs in these projects was to eventually raise the capacity

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of some of the members to work on a legal and media advocacy level both in their countries of origin, and to also become advocates for their contexts on a higher level of diplomacy. According to COC's theory of change, the CS NGO was a "grassroots initiative," that was important, but that may not evolve to support other forms of advocacy. In combination with what I knew of the CS as a WhatsApp group, and after reading through the COC's theory of change, I realized that as such a "grassroots initiative," the CS was a hybrid form of an NGO, in that the CS were mostly operated through social media with the exception of occasional empowerment trainings, and an example of the ways in which NGOs take on various forms and have various relationships with different donors and the state (Helms 2014).

As of the writing of this chapter, the group has grown from about 30 members since the CS training, to over 80 members from across Ghana, reaching out to non-urban areas and offering a space for queer persons who may feel isolated. As a member of the group, I have seen it also grow in its methods and the types of information it disseminates. The group's WhatsApp logo (see Figure 3), is in the shape of an S in the colors of the rainbow, with accompanied text that reads, "Courageous Sisters Ghana: Empowering Women Through Love and Unity." From this title, the desire for "empowerment" is clear – a theme which has interpreted and mobilized as a framework by the group. Although not intentionally politicized, the M.O.B. WhatsApp group as it was administered by Lady was an articulation of the desire to reaffirm and create belonging among queer women due to their shared experiences of discretion and erotic subjectivities. To articulate and translate erotic desire to form a new politics in the NGO forum, the discourse that makes the CS legible to donors such as COC, is that of empowerment, and is utilized by the group from the first CS training. This new politics is enacted through the formation of CS as an NGO that is run explicitly by and for queer women, which enables their lived experiences to be translated into trainings that reach a broader audience of queer women. This has become more evident since I have read reports of the first two

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"Empowerment Trainings," hosted by the group in 2017. These reports, emailed to me from Lady with much pride, show that the CS have invited up to 20 persons at a time each time, and state that the trainings were focused on "human rights and health related topics affecting the LBQ women," and that they were targeting "LBQ women who have never participated in any form of LGBTIQ training." From these reports, there are a few discursive tendencies that are interesting. For one, the CS have defined themselves as lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) since my time in Accra, showing that the organization has since moved away from the initial CS training proposal that was written by the group of fellows, me, and Michael, which identified the group as "LBT Women, to include Women who have Sex with Women (WSW), and women in *supi* relationships." The group has since dropped the T for transgender and have adopted Q for queer and have acknowledged bisexual as a category. These categories are legible to donors such as COC, but also give more information as to the types of definitions that the group wants to follow, the types of persons the group wants to address, but also, perhaps the lack of understanding of transgender identities in the group, as I was aware that at least both Rebel and Collins themselves identified as men but were categorized as women in the group. Although individuals who were familiar with NGO settings were familiar with the term queer, until 2017 I had not seen the usage of queer to define the group as the term was only used by myself as far as I knew, from my time during research in 2015. Also, the CS have not chosen to use *WSW*, nor *supi* in reference to individuals in their group, which does not mean that they do not use terms such as *supi* and or *nyaanyo* to reference to each other in their daily lives, but that they do not see these terms as relevant to donors. When I asked Lady about what terms she was using in the CS – she made sure to tell me that "I think we should use English terms." When I asked her why this is the case, she explained that it is the language that everyone in the group understands, as Ga, Twi, and many of the other numerous languages spoken in Ghana may not be known by all the participants, showing there are multiple local reasons for the use of the English in NGO organizing.

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The CS report that Lady sent to me, indicated that the participatory sessions of the training include "Identity and Self-Acceptance," "LBQ Women Health Care," and "Human Rights." These topics and sessions were very much in line with those that were introduced in the first CS training and address the needs and wellbeing of queer women that had not been addressed by NGOs before that. Through explicitly addressing "Identity and Self-acceptance" as a topic, CS as an NGO becomes a way in which erotic subjectivities can be confirmed, performed, supported, and hence, the social desire of queer women might be articulated, and further work on the inter-subjective "harmony" can be supported. This directly utilizes erotic subjectivity as a place through which individuals can be encouraged to legitimize their desires and formulate self-esteem and highlights the potential of specific NGOs to take on elements of social change (Alvarez 2014; Helms 2014). Through addressing "LBQ Women's Health Care" explicitly, CS moves beyond NGO trainings and discourses which relied on queer women's articulation of victims of violence but addresses the actual concerns of non-heteronormative women. It is in this way, that the CS walks the line between an NGO, and a *nyaanyo* counter public. While CS provides services in the NGO format through specific trainings for queer women, it does so through the knowledge of lived experience that is shared among queer women and their erotic subjectivities, which were shared within closed virtual and actual spaces. This empowerment approach by the CS, however, does not come without risks. Lady explained to me in 2017, when I asked how safe she felt running the NGO and the trainings, **"**It's a risk we are taking, when we mobilize, we do it at night and we do our trainings in places that are 'community friendly' we are trying to go along with the law." Although they created an NGO with outside donor funding from the north, Lady's statement highlights that the group is still very much operating within a *nyaanyo* counter public. By this, I mean that the group is very reliant on discretion, including discrete locations and times that are deemed safe. For example, this also included "trying to go along with the law," which means that they do not partake in activities that could be understood as practicing same-sex

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acts.

This need to remain discrete while also remaining informed by the shared experience of erotic subjectivity is what makes the CS NGO a "hybrid form" (Alvarez 1999). As both an NGO as well as a *nyaanyo* counter public, the CS NGO operates through the CS WhatsApp group in a way of maintaining discretion and safe spaces and balancing visibility and vulnerability of their work and subjectivities. Just as WhatsApp was a significant tool in creating a closed space outside of NGO spaces for queer women to express themselves and create a sense of belonging, i.e. their *nyaanyo* counter public, WhatsApp is also an essential tool in organizing the CS's first training and creating a sense of belonging and empowerment within the group in a space which is created by queer women. Within this hybrid formation, I also argue that within this CS WhatsApp group, can also be understood as a "self-help group" (Nguyen 2013, p. 450) which is premised upon the understanding that "people can be 'empowered' to have control of their own lives by working on themselves" (ibid). This formation of a "self-help" group includes offering support from one peer to another in order to "promote health" of those within the group to create empowerment and to create collective healing (ibid). Furthermore, this donor supported digital community provides a space in which the group can approach discussions and tackle issues such as violence and blackmail among queer women. Therefore, the CS WhatsApp group, has become a central feature in the growth of the organization and has become a significant tool for discussions that are important to the group, such as addressing individual and intersubjective issues of self-esteem, violence, isolation and lack of education among the group.

The CS WhatsApp group is active with its many members sharing everyday greetings, random stories and selfies, and, most interestingly, a series of scheduled texting sessions, in which individuals share a series of texts within the group based on information on topics particularly important to the group, and individuals reply to the texts. Although technically administrated by Lady, the group is

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also led by other individuals who propose discussion topics or talks that are clearly important to the group.   One example of such a "talk" includes a conversation about break ups:



*Figure 15: "Time with Yaw" session of "*

*How to Handle a Broken Relationship Devoid of Disgrace, Attacks and Insults."*

The figure above (figure 4) shows a screenshot of "Time with Yaw," a session that appeared in the WhatsApp group for the first time in 2017.   The topic, "How to Handle a Broken Relationship Devoid of Disgrace, Attacks, and Insults," echoes the concerns that many queer women brought up to me during my research that related to relationship issues, and "harmony" and "unity" that were continuously a discourse of concern from the first CS training.  I suggest that this desire for harmony is a particular intersubjective understanding of empowerment, and a desire for connectedness and cohesion within the community as a part of an erotic subjectivity, or the understanding that erotic

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subjectivities are shared and therefore, political (Allen, p. 327). I also argue that this desire for harmony is also embedded with Christian theologies (Bawa 2017) and Ghanaian cultural norms that are already in line with the value of harmony and stability (Ofori Atiemo 2013). Yaw's session addresses the concern for harmony within relationships, while also addressing the need to be intersubjectively connected. This occurred in the CS group and brings into discourse a conversation that wasn't clearly articulated in spaces such as M.O.B., or NGO trainings, providing a form of a "self-help" talk in which members can have access to education to help themselves, but to also inter-subjectively understand and communicate to each other. Yaw also spoke to a clear threat and act of violence that occurs between individuals in same-sex relationships, the issue of blackmail after breakups:
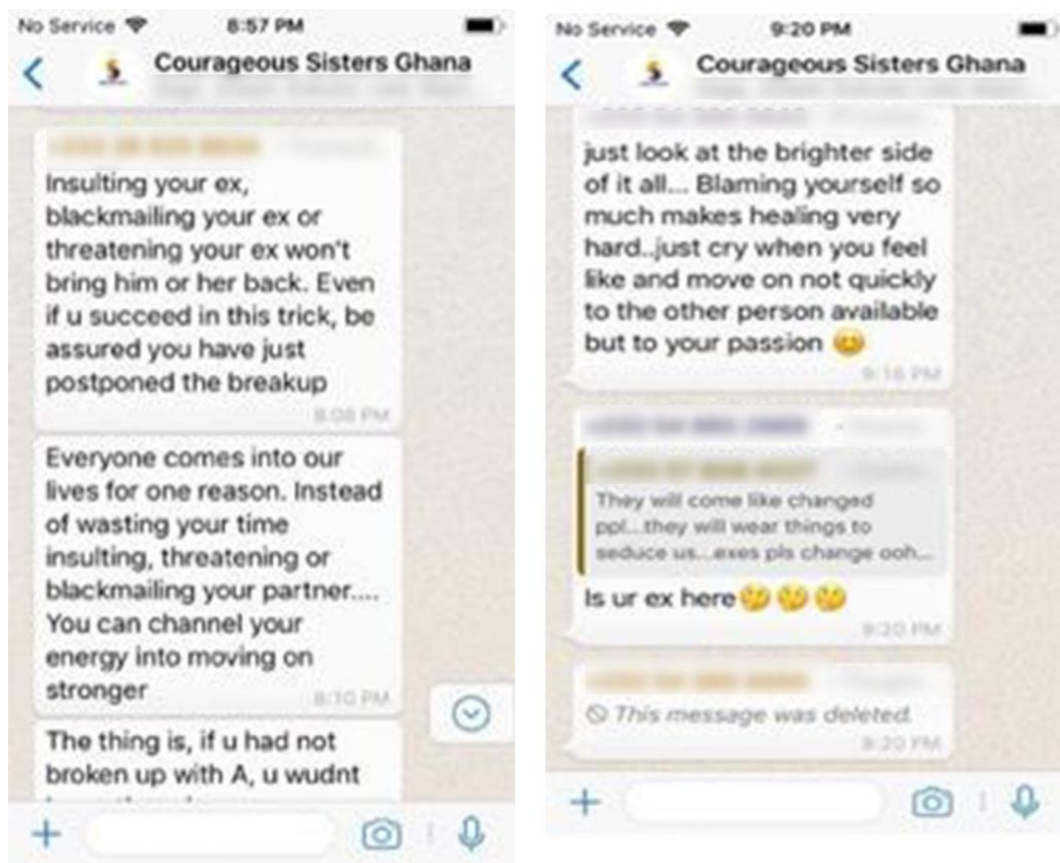


*Figures 16 and 17: "Time with Yaw" discussion.*

With this "Time with Yaw" session, it is the first time that I had heard and understood that blackmail is occurring as a response to breakups. What I find significant about this discussion, and others that occur within the group – is that it highlights the sort of effects of discrimination due to the criminal code that affect the group internally. This shows that specific internal and relational disputes among queer women and between them, are a topic of concern for individuals, but not necessarily something that they want to share in larger groups, or with researchers. This also highlights the effects of criminalization, but also the need for discretion regarding same-sex practices, as they are a ripe field for the growth of power and domination.

In addition, Yaw offered a solution while addressing a central concern – that of healing after a breakup, something that was difficult for individuals to do when they were living in relationships that are deemed immoral by the wider public. This healing, I believe, is a part of what spaces like the CS WhatsApp group can provide for individuals, albeit on a small scale. The fact that it creates a specific dialogue which addresses important issues, while offering "healing" messages is a conversation that did not occur or was not offered within NGO spaces, and was something lacking for those who are unable to address their specific issues of queer relationships in other spaces. This discourse of healing is also in line with a neoliberal individualized and Christianized notion "healing" of the self, which are notoriously embedded in the wider Ghanaian public and which no doubt also informed the lived realities of queer women. While this approach to empowerment lacks an interrogation of structural forms of oppression and socio-economic disparities, I argue that the intentions and pursuit of the CS WhatsApp group, and the NGO were a part of a larger assemblage of meanings and interpretations and approaches of persons like Lady that were not entirely disconnected from challenging socio-economic inequalities.

The CS WhatsApp group would also become a space through which many changes that took

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place following my research in Accra became evident. A significant event in the CS WhatsApp group was the sharing of a report conducted by the Human Rights Watch on "lesbians" in Ghana. The group posted the document, which also included a video in which individuals' faces and identities were blurred. The report was based on "interviews conducted between December 2016 and February 2017 in Accra (Ghana's capital), Tamale (the capital of the northern region of Ghana), Kumasi (the capital of Ashanti region in southern Ghana), and Cape Coast (capital of Central region in southern Ghana) with 114 Ghanaians who self-identify as LGBT" (Human Rights Watch 2018). The report also explicitly told the story of "numerous lesbians threatened with violence, beaten and driven from their family homes after family members learned of their sexual orientation" (ibid). This specific report was another instance in which there was an expectation of queer women to "come out" to share their stories of violence, something that NGOs were specifically interested in documenting.

Because these were not the sort of findings that I would have come across during my research in 2015, based in Accra, I asked the CS WhatsApp group, "is this true, I didn't find these sorts of things happening to people in my research?" Responses came from individuals whom I had never met in person, which included the comment that the individuals who responded to this report "felt empowered since joining the Courageous Sisters," and that this was the reason they were now speaking out. It is therefore clear that the CS WhatsApp group and the CS NGO which has provided "Empowerment Trainings," have enabled a productive force among some queer women to break the silence regarding violence, as they gain self-esteem or the power to share their stories. This is also more evidence of a culture of silence that existed among queer women, both within NGO spaces but also in response to my research at the time. More interestingly, the effects of a group such as CS, is that it is as an organization that opens space for queer women to share their stories, which shows that there is a source of connection and intersubjective power that is occurring within the CS space. This space has the potential to make connections between individual self-esteem and the ability of queer

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women to articulate the realities of their lives and therefore to create the possibility for them to become political actors. However, there are limitations in terms of how individuals can act, due to possible violent responses to "coming out." While the report hid the names and faces of those who shared their stories, this "coming out" through confessional technologies to transnational NGOs such as Human Rights Watch requires the "cultural labor" of individuals, which I argue, includes navigating the possible effects of sharing their stories on the individual level. Once these stories are shared on the individual or "grassroots" level, it is then up to entities such as Human Rights Watch and other advocates working on the state and legal level to then use these stories for advocating for further legal protections, and perhaps, one day – decriminalization of same-sex practices in Ghana. However, the CS group is not working on that level yet.

The NGOization of the CS group has, however, led to the potential for professionalization of some individual members. More recently, Lady had the opportunity to develop her skills through networking in Accra, learning about and developing an NGO, working with COC, and applying for conferences to expand her network throughout the continent. And she has also since applied and was accepted to attend the Pan African International Lesbian and Gay Association's (PAILGA) meeting as a participant representing the CS. Most recently, she asked me to assist in writing the application, in which she applied to present on the work of the Courageous Sisters. The presentation title written on her application reads, "Using Social Media to Engage Lesbians, Bisexuals and Trans Women (LBTW) in Ghana on Sexual Health and Human Rights Empowerment." Lady makes clear in her application that queer women in Ghana have to deal with their vulnerability and shared discretion through a "social media approach." She further writes that during the first training for this group (the CS training), it was "noted that one of the ways to get more LBT women empowered and involved in the LGBT movement is through social networking." Furthermore, Lady highlights that the lessons learned and suggestions for moving forward for the group as well as the larger LGBTIQ+

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movement are the following:

> The LGBTIQ+ movement should utilize social media that is already familiar within the community as a way of reaching or involving hard-to-reach members. There is potential to increase connection between LBT women, but also to increase knowledge on human rights, sexual health, self-esteem, Christian spirituality, and healthy relationships, which is information that will guide them to live health and more empowered lives.

From this statement we can see that Lady has since become not only a "sexpert" as mentioned in the previous chapter, but she is now also presenting herself as an expert on the topic of LGBTIQ+ movement building. It is also through her leadership of the CS, that Lady occupies a role as intermediary, in the act of translation, because she is able to locate "'hybrid spaces'" and "knowledge systems" such as the *nyaanyo* counter public as a target group for empowerment intervention provided to individuals through the CS (ibid, p. 678). Inspired from the first CS training, she has created this translatable platform for queer women within NGO spaces in Accra and beyond, in which queer women can provide feedback and information to the larger network of NGOs regarding the issues that most affect the group. At the same time, she brings information and knowledge to donors, other LGBT activists in Accra and throughout Africa, and furthermore, to me as a researcher. In this way, in walking between worlds, individuals such as Lady can become experts in identifying methodologies as well as significant knowledge regarding how queer women are affected by discretion and criminalization, and the particular topics they would like to address. Because this professionalization and the creation of experts is a part of a complex process of NGOization (Lang 1997), which includes both positive and negative effects (Alvarez 1999; Helms 2014), as well as constructing various NGO forms (Helms 2014) it is also important to acknowledge that the process of creating the CS NGO may carry with it significant changes in the power, hierarchization, the definition of agendas, and so on – as time continues. Although not an issue now due to the relaxedness of the CSO donor, the CS NGO could also become a part of the NGO tendency I found in Accra, of feeling the need to show

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a moral worthiness to donors of the subjects they serve. This NGO tendency could become a reality, should the group become forced to rely on different donor funding, and thus find the need to attract other sources of funding by highlighting their victimhood or worthiness in this way. The other limitation is that of the categories as they are used by queer women to communicate to donors to communicate this worthiness. While LBQ are categories that have shown to be relatable to the participants in the CS group, and are recognizable by donors, it should not be taken for granted that these categories translate to all of those within the *nyaanyo* counter public and represent the multiple positionalities and or primary points of interest for all members. As shown throughout this chapter and the previous chapter, this is a frictional aspect of the formation of an NGO based on gender and sexuality for this group, as a fixed identity category based on one's erotic subjectivity may not be a reality for everyone, nor something that is recognized or seen as positive in the cultural context. However, the potential of the hybrid form of the CS NGO counter public and its WhatsApp form is that it can provide a space that is supported by funding to address the most important issues in queer women's lives more directly, from the perspective of queer women. The making of an NGO from a small group of people addressing their specific needs is a much needed and unique space, and the possibilities are much more nuanced considering that the CS NGO continues to be informed by a *nyaanyo* counter public space as well as the NGO space.

### 4.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, I have shown through ethnographic examples from the first CS training as it was put together by Michael and the other fellows, an encounter between the worlds of the NGO and *nyaanyo* counter public made possible through transnational funding. I showed how the encounter is a frictional one, in that it is the meeting up of NGO discourses of human rights and sexual health with a *nyaanyo* counter public that already existed among queer women. Because this *nyaanyo* counter public

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allowed for the performance of multi-faceted erotic subjectivities and created a means for individuals to circulate their own discourses and understandings of morality, pleasure, and desire, the specific focus of the CS training on queer women's issues was an important one. This CS training shows an assemblage of not only meanings and interpretations of concepts of empowerment and harmony, but also shows the agency of queer women to respond to, analyze, and take up NGO discourses for their benefit. Within this assemblage, queer women translate and create their own meanings regarding pleasure and categories of identity, which is particularly relevant for the self-making and the creation of new politics as a part of their erotic subjectivities. This focus eventually led to the establishment of the CS NGO, and the CS WhatsApp group, which have enabled specific forms of empowerment through confessions regarding violence in the community, as well as the form of self-help groups within the group. Through the act of translation, Lady registered the first queer women's organization in Ghana, and brings together both the NGO format with the *nyaanyo* counter public, forming a hybrid organization that is an assemblage of meanings from both. While Michael's presence has fallen to the background in terms of conducting and organizing trainings, he now assists in professionalizing the group through his established international NGO networks, although from time to time he also joins in conversation with the WhatsApp group conversations with small jokes. Lady was grateful to Michael's involvement, as the CS group has assisted her in becoming a "expert" within the NGO sphere due to her participation, but also her management of the CS trainings, WhatsApp group, and donor relationships. Lady's professionalization may mean that the CS NGO becomes more professionalized itself, operating through different forms of power or hierarchy, but also potentially guided by donors' interest in providing for moral subjects. As a new form of an NGO, at the moment, Lady continues to give space to others through the CS WhatsApp group and invites different queer women to facilitate the empowerment trainings, but this could change as her experiences and skills change. We can see, years after the CS training, impacts and the growth of the CS group as a sphere

for queer women that at the least, begins to address issues of disempowerment within the group, both on an individual level and moving, ideally, to address desires to create communal harmony. Although not without its potential for failures, messiness, and unpredictability, the CS as an NGO has the potential to create spaces that didn't exist before for queer women in closed groups to articulate both their social and political desires, highlighting the productive elements of the frictional encounter between the *nyaanyo* counter public and NGO spaces.

## Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have focused on the lived experiences of queer women, and how they maneuvered specific frictions around sexuality, and in particular, "coming out" in the post-colonial Ghanaian context which is subject to northern international governance through the medium of NGOs. Dominant, Christianized heteronormativity constructed as the norm in the wider public sphere intersects with transnational interventions that center on sexuality, and more specifically, seek to address the needs, rights, and health of Ghanaian queer subjects. Queer women are caught up in a space of friction between what are perceived as local and the global ways of understanding non-normative sexualities, with politicians and religious leaders taking up discourses of "cultural sovereignty" to demonize supposedly foreign sexualities, but also foreign-informed expectations of "coming out" into particular sexuality identity categories.

Organizations such as CEPERG grew on the "wings of HIV," as Kweku characterized it, and are hence imbued with neoliberal logics of recognition and confession that inform their very operation. Because these logics historically rely on bio-medicalized frameworks of sexuality, they act as a form of governance of 'key populations' as 'at risk' targets for intervention, such as MSM. This form of governance is then mapped onto a context in which discretion regarding one's sexuality is the norm, and 'un-natural carnal knowledge' is criminalized. Meanwhile, NGOs such as CEPERG, rely on individuals to "come out," in order to receive their services. As funding and interest from northern donors to take up LGBT issues has grown in recent years, and new coalitions are formed of a largely cisgender male dominated group of activists and NGOs, there was a desire to be inclusive of new key populations such as 'lesbians' in policy, programming, and trainings. Through this inclusion of 'lesbians,' in their work, I argue that NGOs such as CEPERG and HRAC were reliant on showing a particular "moral worthiness" (Ong 2006b, p.504) to donors through "defining and representing

varied categories of human beings according to degrees of economic, biopolitical, and moral worthiness" (ibid). As the inclusion of 'women' or the 'sisters' in their LGBT work was one way of showing this moral worthiness, NGOs relied on technologies of recognition and confession, while constructing the category of lesbian as an 'at risk' category for intervention.

As the research shows, human rights trainings hosted by organizations in which both queer men and women attended, there was a culture of silence among queer women when asked to share their stories of violence, discrimination, and blackmail. Various barriers existed for these working-class queer women in their participation in NGO spaces, including their assumed identities as cisgendered women, their social embeddedness and reliance on kinship and family, their economic precarity as petty traders, and their lack of education and professional training. Meanwhile, NGOs predominately dominated by those perceived to be men and largely informed by a history of HIV intervention funding posit queer women as 'at risk' to violence, while not always providing solutions for queer women, and, at the time of this research, appeared to not fully understand the specific needs of this group, nor the complexity of their realities. This required queer women to maneuver their participation in NGOs through a cultural labor of visibility while they saw no clear benefits of their participation.

As the various chapters have shown, there are nuanced and complex ways in which working-class queer women lived their realities in the context in which discretion regarding sexual matters is typically the norm. Through *a nyaanyo* counter public, queer women carved out spaces and moments through which their erotic subjectivities were performed, confirmed, and enacted in relation to each other, while remaining discrete. This *nyaanyo* counter public was an alternative way of knowing and an inter-subjective form of communication through an embodied experience of discretion. As a part of this *nyaanyo* counter public, homonormative sites like 15 Kilos were important spaces to feel like one was 'in the know' and to perform one's erotic subjectivity in relation to others. These counter publics

were 'new discursive arenas' (Fraser 1990, p. 123), through which queer women articulated a variety of terms which corresponded to erotic desires and gendered roles, such as *tom, femme*, top, bottom, and *stemme,* giving evidence of a relational erotic subjectivity, but also what Serena Dankwa terms a form of "situational gender" (2009). The use of these categories was an example of how individuals were simultaneously rooted in localized conceptions of discretion and situational gender, while also articulating affiliations with transnational and global lesbian sub-categories. At the same time, such a use of these categories as well as working-class women's relation to notions of financial and entrepreneurial achievements in the urban space of Accra, can also be viewed as an afro-cosmopolitan form of identity and agency, given their simultaneous sense of belonging to local, transnational, and global flows of information. These realities of queer women highlight the complexity through which individuals come to articulate and perform their erotic subjectivities outside of NGO spaces.

This *nyaanyo* counter public, both in the material world and the virtual space of WhatsApp, further showed that queer women were not merely victims of violence or marginalization but are agentive subjects through which shared experiences, the power of the erotic and notions of pleasure, and their relationship to Christianity inform their relation to each other and are central to their self-making. We also see the significance of this digital space for queer women, as they were able to communicate the nuances and pain of heartbreak, whether due to the complications and disappointment with intimate relationships or due to the complexity through which they navigate their economic positioning. Through these shared experiences, queer women created social belonging beyond their material realities through an affective economy on the platform, which were expressed through the circulation of memes and texts. Thus, we see the significance of communication technologies as offering platforms for new forms of connection as well as offering a mode for speaking that allowed women to claim moral authority, while affirming Christian and erotic selves simultaneously in a closed and controlled space. This type of social belonging created on the platform

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was a part of but also could extend one's material world, and was a vital tool for queer women in Ghana, as it provided a means of communication and performance beyond the surveillance of the highly Christianized and heteronormative public sphere and professionalized NGO spaces which required those categorized as lesbians to "come out" as victims in order to receive services.

In the final chapter, I showed how the CS training became an assemblage of meanings and interpretations of concepts of empowerment and harmony, while also showing how the significance of pleasure, the power of the erotic, and the creation of a sense of belonging was a mobilizing force through which queer women responded to, analyzed, and translated NGO discourses for their benefit. With the development of the CS NGO as a hybrid form compared to other northern funded NGOs, which included both influences from a *nyaanyo* counter public as well as NGO logics, we see the ways in which processes of power and knowledge were not just top down, but were an example of a frictional process, or "encounters across difference" (Tsing 2005). The CS training was an example of a frictional encounter through which individuals did not passively absorb information, but were agential subjects who transformed, translated, and modified knowledge and made use of it in their lives (Lendvai and Stubbs 2009, p. 676; Tsing 2005).

As the CS continues to operate through trainings as well as in the form of a WhatsApp group, we see the continued importance of digital technologies and spaces as a crucial element of queer women's organizing in the context. The importance of this type of NGO formation was that it created a space through which typically marginalized queer women could address their specific needs and desires. Formerly, no such group had existed in Accra until the CS's formation, marking a pivotal moment in which we see how transnational forms of donor support meet up with an incredibly grassroots working-class queer women's initiative which took their start in discrete digital outreach. The group has the potential to be a site through which those typically targeted by neoliberal NGO

logics as vulnerable victims of violence might frame and control their own agendas within the network of NGOs working on sexual health and human rights in Accra.

*Research Limitations*

Inevitably, this research also had its limitations. The method of participatory observation was limited to a small core group of working-class queer women in urban Accra who were already connected to NGOs, which does not give us a larger sense of the problems, barriers, and lived realities of queer women in the context who are not connected to these organizations, nor does it tell us about the realities of, for instance, middle-class queer women and their interest and or participation in various publics. In addition, because the CS NGO formed after my field visit in 2015, this study does not include participant observation with the CS as an NGO, which could yield further information as to how individual queer women are able to navigate their participation in CS NGO events in a context that encouraged sexual discretion.

*Questions for Further Research*

Given these limitations, there are questions for further research. As NGOs such as CEPERG and HRAC largely targeted less affluent neighborhoods through their interventions, it is safe to assume that the target of their interventions and services were those categorized as economically, biopolitically, and morally worthy through their economic and material vulnerability to incidences of violence as working-class lesbians. This provides us with information about how NGOs and donors understand their work as moral work, through the governing of those categorized as the most vulnerable, poor, and perceived to be female victims of violence. But also, this targeting of less economically well-off populations stresses that those who were working-class were seen as unruly and most in need of being controlled by NGOs various forms of governance, through education about

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their rights and health, and therefore, becoming good and moral subjects that receive NGO services. This form of governance places a burden on those who have the least amount of resources, to "come out" through the biopolitical category of lesbian in order to receive services and shows that 'key populations' for HIV as well as sexual health and human rights interventions are typically seen as being in economically vulnerable groups. This leaves those who are less economically well off and categorized as most vulnerable in the position to maneuver their participation in NGOs, and therefore, in transnational networks of power, while the benefits of their participation with NGOs was uncertain. Given that there are considerable gaps between knowing one's human rights in regard to discrimination based on one's sexuality or gender, and the realization of those rights in legal defense and practice, this is considerably alarming.

In fact, as the research shows, the cultural silences evident among queer women in NGO spaces were due to several broader barriers to NGO participation. For instance, some working-class queer women were reliant on their families and social networks for housing and economic well-being and were navigating discretion as well as heteronormative pressures due to their presumed biological female-ness and the inevitability of their giving birth. In addition, the reliance on social networks, family, and the heteronormative pressures for working-class queer women meant that they did not necessarily have the ability to 'come out' as non-normative to their families and the wider public, which meant that participation in NGO spaces could create further precarity for this group. Also, due to their economic positioning, out of necessity this group prioritized money earning opportunities, including informal trading, which required them to balance income earning with any participation in and time spent with NGOs. Therefore, if NGO participation did not provide immediate financial and professional benefits, it was not necessarily a priority. At the same time, however, it was also those working-class queer women who were the most susceptible to violent attacks in lower income areas of Accra, which meant that this group was most in need of the resources and services that NGOs

could provide in order to help with funds for relocation. Due to the various cultural silences of working-class queer women among NGOs during the beginning of my research, as well as the very real material consequences of NGO participation for those most vulnerable, I have considerable ambivalence about making recommendations to NGOs and transnational donors wanting to reach out to and work with queer women, since many of them may not want to be reached, and it doesn't seem clear that the benefits of participating in NGO trainings and spaces outweighs the risks.

At the same time, the inclusion and focus on those less economically well off as targets for intervention invisibilizes the needs of middle-class and professional groups who may also benefit from services. While I was able to speak with some middle-class queer women during my research, I was not able to use the method of participant observation with this group. However, my impressions were that class made a considerable difference in terms of individual queer women's interest in participating in NGO trainings, as well as access to independent spaces of their own (and thus, a space for same-sex intimacy), income earning, as well as vulnerability to instances of vigilante violence. However, further research comparing class differences among queer women would shed more light on the ways in which class affects one's vulnerability to violence and one's ability to be discrete, which would therefore inform people's relationships to NGO spaces, logics, and discourses. These differences may also give further information as to how class affects one's relationship to social networks, heteronormative pressures, and global sexual identity categories.

*What will Become of the Courageous Sisters?*

Given that the frictional encounter between the *nyaanyo* counter public and the NGO space and logics was productive of the formation of the CS NGO, at least at the time of this research, what are the implications of the ongoing NGO and what effects will it have on the lives of its members, those perceived to be most vulnerable and those who chose to participate in the organization? Judging

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from my ongoing membership in the CS WhatsApp group, it seems that there is interest and ongoing participation, but I no longer have access to the members' real-life interactions. Further research that focuses on the various possibilities that could take place for such a group would give insight into whether and how transnational and global configurations of power and funding affect the workings of the group, and the lives of working-class queer women who make up its members. In fact, there is still much to learn from ongoing research with the CS NGO as an organization that is a 'hybrid' form, and which has multiple dimensions and inspirations. Because CS began as an extension of a network of queer women who were already participating in NGO events and was the outcome of an NGO training, it may be that the CS is already embedded with NGO logics which rely on subjects to 'come out' through various categories and attend 'empowerment trainings,' in order to prove the CS's moral worthiness to donors as a legitimate NGO. As scholars have shown, 'empowerment' as a political framework has the potential to create political movements and NGOs, but the term is also easily instrumentalized (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall & Eade, 2011 in Cornwall 2016). Other than the WhatsApp digital space through which the CS operates to offer self-help and various forms of belonging, does it prove itself to be adequately beneficial, at least enough so for working-class queer women to participate? Can the CS group provide a space that may become a site for a new politics informed by queer women's lived realities? Do their lived realities and activism remain in the confines of the training space and the digital realm, or are the implications of participating in the group much more complicated?

Given that there were already considerable barriers for working-class queer women to participate in NGOs, further research would show if and how silences exist among new members as the CS continues to grow. What type of labor might be required of Lady and the participants to continue the NGO and the trainings - is it cultural, economic, reproductive, or emotional labor? What are the material effects of this labor as well as the participation in this group of working-class queer

women, and is it sustainable for their group to continue?    As time goes on, will those like Lady who volunteer their time continue to provide the unpaid labor needed to continue the CS, or will they be forced to abandon the organization as they seek other paid opportunities, even as their skill sets change through their experience with the CS?  Further research would help us understand the possibilities of grass-roots or bottom up organizations such as the CS to garner sustainability through donor funding, to understand whether and to what extent donors understand these very real barriers and negotiate and transform their policies in order to work with the group, and if the CS are in a position of power to negotiate the way that they do their work.

*What Does the Future Hold for the Courageous Sisters?*

However, as this project did focus on the agency of the research participants, it also illustrates that the effects of northern donor funding as well as NGOs discourses and logics to target specific populations are not entirely hegemonic, nor are they only from the north.  The effects of donor funding and processes of NGOization are negotiated and reflected through a myriad of intersections and experiences and translated to fit individual and group needs and are often met with ambiguity if not perceived to be directly beneficial. As the CS training shows, Nigerian funding bodies such as TIERS were involved in the creation of the CS and, in 2017, a West African activist-led fund dedicated to strengthening and supporting a West African movement for gender diversity and sexual rights, the Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest (ISDAO), was developed.  The establishment of this new West African funding body that I was told was founded by queer women has recently created new opportunities for funding initiatives. The organization's goals include providing support and advancing the rights and safety of LGBTQ people in the West African region (ISDAO 2018).  The organization refers to the use of this acronym with a reflective approach to homogenizing categories, acknowledging that it may not be "exhaustive of the people and communities we represent" (ibid

2018). At the time of writing, the CS had applied for funding through this organization. The implications of this shift towards regional, African donor organizations could change the ways in which NGOs operate in regard to these issues in Ghana and the region, including the workings of CS. Would this funding create an awareness of the needs of those in the region and provide the needed resources and training on how to become more sensitive to the various needs of its members? Will such a funding body eventually create initiatives that are based on economic empowerment as a means of politicization, that are more grounded in knowledge about the activist potential of such groups as CS, with the possibility of creating more effective and context specific interventions that prioritize Southern Ghanaian cultural logics and nuances, and attending to issues of discretion and security in an appropriate manner?

This research further sets the ground to ask whether the CS's grounding in pleasure, belonging, and Christianity, which was central to the *nyaanyo* counter public, and which seemed to create potential for a form of new politics among the group, will continue. Will Lady continue her role as a sexpert in the CS group, as well as in professionalized spaces, or is this something that is reserved for the *nyaanyo* counter public and less direct forms of communication? In the past few months, I have reached out Lady and Michael and the CS WhatsApp group to find out if there is interest in continuing the research project, and if so, what they think should be explored. The response from Lady, Michael, and another CS member, Ebena, stressed that the CS would be most interested in discussing their 'spirituality.' This response, as well as the embeddedness of Christianity in the lives of working-class queer women in the study, shows the potential need for further study on the centrality of religion and 'spirituality,' for queer women in the context, and shows that, as an object of research, the topic would provide further insights into sociality, space, and the ways in which individuals navigate their lives through this driving force.

*Agency, Pleasure, Religion, and Complexity*

This research affirms the importance and relevance of discourses and conceptions of pleasure and intimacy, as well as the centrality of Christianity or religion in queer women's lives. Through a focus on the lived experiences of queer women, this project highlights the "voice" and "practice" of individual "passions and desires" as a central concern (Dankwa 2009), and takes pleasure and agency as central to the project (Tamale 2011a, p. 23-31), contributing to moving beyond development and public health research on women's sexuality in Sub-Saharan Africa, which focuses on women as a category in the frame of the victim, or bio-medicalized within such frameworks (Bakare-Yusuf in Jolly et al 2013; Maina Ahlberg and Kulane 2011). This project has eluded to a much more nuanced and complex understanding of categories of gender, the inter-relational aspects of gender, the complexity of erotic subjectivities, and the agency and emotions of individual queer women which exist beyond the simplification of categories and public health approaches. This also included Christianity as a central motivating factor in individual lives, and as a part of the ways in which queer women experienced their erotic subjectivities, highlighting the crucial element for considering the ways in which religion might help us understand sexuality in the context of Ghana. Therefore, this research gives the perspective of queer women's experiences of religion as also an element of their erotic subjectivity, and therefore is a contribution to literature on sexuality its intersection with religion as a source of belonging and politicization in Sub-Saharan Africa (Nyeck 2016). This research also shows how articulations and expressions within a *nyaanyo* counter public and the CS training demonstrate the importance, power, and meaning of queer women's experiences of pleasure and intimacy and show that these are critical points through which individuals form communities of belonging and therefore have the potential to politicize and articulate their embodied experiences.

*The Significance of Digital Technologies*

The further significance of this research lies in its focus on the performative aspects of queer women's embodied realities on the digital realm of WhatsApp. The newer access to digital technologies since the 1990s in Ghana, allowed for the affordable purchase of smart phones, and access to free applications such as WhatsApp, changing the way in which people communicate, socialize, create shared spaces and express emotions, but also understand and construct themselves through new forms of 'self-and world-making" (Allen 2012, p. 334), from which there is a potential for 'new choices and new politics" (ibid, p. 329). These changes in access to technologies available to individuals despite their working-class status, becomes a central component to understanding tacit or unspoken elements of peoples' lives, and the digital realm, therefore, further complicating and obscuring the notion of the local vs. the global in transnational studies of sexuality and gender. While digital technologies and social media platforms are not completely securitized nor always politically focused, they do offer a way in which individuals can participate in closed, controlled spaces, therefore mitigating the cultural labor of visibility in the formation of politicized organizations. Digital technologies offer new avenues to understand the ways in which knowledge is produced and shared, power is maneuvered, and desire is lived and enacted – despite the various frictional encounters that require individual and collective courage.

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# Glossary

**Akan –** the dominant ethnic group in Central Ghana, Accra and Southern Ghana. The Akan language is Twi.

**Femme** – an erotic sub-category used by individuals whom were perceived to be biologically female and whom considered themselves to be "women' or bottoms in female same sex erotic relationships. Often *femmes* were in erotic relationships with *toms*.

**Ga** - a specific ethnic group southern Ghana, who speak the Ga language, and historically practice the Ga religion.

**Kojo Besia**– a Ga and Twi term which had become derogatory in recent years and describes those perceived to be biologically male whom did not conform to typical forms of masculinity. The term was also used semi-frequently to refer to those perceived to be male with same-sex erotic desires.

**Nyaanyo** – Twi and Ga term, the literal translation is 'friend.' The term was more recently used to refer to others whom also had perceived female to female relationships and was used as a security term in order to be discrete about same-sex relationships.

**Obruni** – a Twi term which literally means 'foreigner,' and is oftentimes associated with foreigners of European descent (Pierre 2012).

**Saso** – a Ga and Twi term which literally means 'peer,' that has more recently been used as a discrete term to refer to fellow queer persons who were also perceived to be male which also may be used to substitute kojo besia. A non-derogatory term.

**Stemme** – an erotic sub-category used by individuals who were perceived to be biologically female and whom described themselves as having qualities of both a *tom* and a *femme,* or either being both a top and a bottom in female same sex relationships. This category was also used by individuals who did not fit into the *tom/femme* dichotomy and was therefore relational.

**Supi** – a Twi-Ga term to describe same sex relationships between women, originally referring to school aged females and their relationships which may or may not been sexual. The term has evolved since the 1990s to refer to female same sex relationships, and sometimes is used derogatorily to describe a woman who was seen as masculine. Typically not used as an identity marker.

**Tom** – an erotic sub-category used by individuals whom were perceived to be biologically female whom identified as the masculine, and or top in female same sex relationships, and whom may also, but not always identify as gender non-conforming, or as a man. A term to describe a form of female masculinity.

**Twi** – the most widely spoken Southern Ghanaian language, the language of the Akan.

**We** – cognatic kin units in the Ga religion.

**Wong** – Ga term for divine being.

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**Wongtse** – Ga religious term for medium.

**Wulumo** – Ga religious term for priest.

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