PERFORMING IN/VISIBILITY;

Resisting queer erasure in Lagos under the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how queer individuals in Lagos, Nigeria, navigate and resist the erasure imposed by the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA). Despite legislative attempts to render queerness invisible, this study argues that the SSMPA has instead triggered and stimulated various forms of resistance among the queer community, which may not have been possible without the new legislation.

Using interviews, and analysis of digital spaces and historical records, this thesis explores how queer individuals perform in/visibility in response to the expanded legal and social restrictions. The research focuses on the strategies and tactics employed by queer communities in Lagos to negotiate visibility and forge a sense of belonging.

The findings reveal that the SSMPA has mobilized the queer community into using a range of strategies to resist erasure, including overt and covert sociopolitical means. Performative strategies used to challenge dominant narratives include the use use of fashion and body alteration to disrupt gender norms, the use of secret language and innuendo in public, anonymous online accounts, self-disclosure, mass media projects, and taking up physical space. By examining how queer individuals in Lagos negotiate visibility, this research demonstrates the doggedness and agency of the queer community in the face of increasing discriminations. The findings underscore the importance of acknowledging and amplifying the voices of queer individuals, recognizing their agency, and supporting their efforts to create spaces of belonging and inclusion.

This research contributes to the broader scholarly discourse on queer resistance and visibility in restrictive contexts, shedding light on the experiences of queer individuals in Lagos and providing insights into strategies that can empower and uplift marginalized communities.

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INTRODUCTION

While the notion of "getting out of the closet, into the streets has been a central aspect of LGBT identity politics" in Western contexts (Stella 2015, 1827), the same sentiment does not apply to Nigeria, particularly in the aftermath of the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA). The SSMPA is a legislation passed into law which criminalised same-sex marriage in Nigeria and sought to make LGBTQI+ people and queerness invisible in public life.

However, it is undeniable that the law has triggered a form of resistance within the queer community, enabling new avenues of defiance that were not previously feasible. Like Stella, I will be using the term queer[1] as a gender-neutral catch all phrase that captures the diversity of the LGBTQI+ community because my participants are a mixed group, which included both men, women and intersex folks who identify on various parts of the Kinsey scale.[2]

The objective of this thesis is to examine the ways in which queer individuals living in Lagos, have so far survived, resisted, and pushed back against the attempts of erasure since the SSMPA was codified into legisation. The reason I have chosen to study the effects of the SSMPA in Lagos is because Lagos is the largest city in Nigeria with over 20 million residents and it remains the commercial hub of the county. As an urban center, it is also the city with the highest concentration of LGBTQI+ organisations headquarteed in Nigeria and the state with the most visible queer presence. Lagos is also the only state in Nigeria where homosexuality is not a crime. Due to these factors, it made sense to start my inquiry there. Part of the motivation behind this research also stemmed from a personal desire to comprehend the strategies employed by queer individuals who live in Lagos to unpack now they navigate and combat the challenges

[1] "Originally a pejorative term referring to sexual deviants, the term was reclaimed by American and British LGBT activist groups in the 1990s, and popularised in academic literature by queer theory." (Stella 2015, 1822)

[2] The Kinsey scale is a tool that researchers use to determine a subject's sexual orientation based on their answers and experiences on a scale of 0 to 6 - with 0 denoting exclusively heterosexuality and 6 denoting exclusively homosexuality.

posed by the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) within the broader socio-cultural context in Nigeria. The ideas and themes I see relevant to these research are concepts of the tensions in visible and invisible sexual politics in times of heightened political pressures and overt discrimination. Another concept that I find relevant to this research is the Foucauldian concept of power and how it is not only welded from top to bottom. Another concept I find relevant is gender performativity and hegemonic reconstruction as these are important topics to consider when looking at how groups resist discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity within social political structures. The main theoretical lens I will be using will be intersectionality which will help me analyze the way various points of identity intersect to influence how individuals are able to negotiate or resist erasure. Another important lens I will be relying on will be post coloniality and postcolonial theory. I will need those lands to be able to understand the context of the site with which I am studying and the effects of colonization on those sites especially in the ways that colonization has influenced laws culture and moral standards within Nigeria. Another important lens I will be using will be performativity and compulsory heterosexuality. These two are very relevant because the ways in which erasure is attempted is by enforcing queer individuals to succumb to this heteronormativity and it would be important to understand compulsory heterosexuality and the ways that gender is performed as a pathway to understanding how individuals are using strategies to resist these erasures. I'm going to be telling a much bigger story of how marginalized groups are able to organize and find ways of surviving domination. The crux of my argument is that there isn't just one way to resist erasure caused by the same sex marriage prohibition act or other types of legislation. I argue that there is no easy answer to the ways that visibility and invisibility work. The important part of my argument is that both of them work together in tandem achieving different things but headed towards the same goal of ensuring that queer people in Lagos are finding ways to subvert the dominant gender structures. I'm going to be looking at these sites using historical records

and first-person accounts of queer people who live in Lagos. I'm going to be interpreting them using the concepts stated above and these concepts are going to allow me to argue that age, gender, sexuality, class, and education influence the ways in which individuals are able to either use visible or invisible sexual politics in the way that they resist the erasure of the same sex marriage prohibition act. My argument will show that what is happening in Lagos around sexual politics and around the legal and political situation tells us something about the way that individuals construct their identity especially around sexual orientation and gender identity. My argument will show that what is going on in Lagos tells us something about the nature of oppression and how the lives of people are shaped by certain ideas and the influence of global / local discourse.

The structure of the thesis will follow this:

Chapter one serves as an introduction to the thesis topic, setting the stage for the subsequent chapters. It highlights the relevance of the research and the need for scholarly attention to the experiences of queer individuals in Lagos and the methodology used for research.

Chapter two provides the theoretical lens through which the cultural context of Lagos and the experiences of queer individuals are examined. Drawing on concepts such as post coloniality, intersectionality, compulsory heterosexuality, and the politics of visibility and invisibility, this chapter establishes a framework for understanding the complexities of queer existence within a society shaped by historical and cultural influences.

Chapter three delves into the historical aspects of queerness in Nigeria, focusing on the impact of Arabian and British colonial rule, the importation of external ideas, and the subsequent development of contemporary legislation. By analysing the historical trajectory of queerness, this chapter uncovers the forces that have shaped prevailing attitudes, legal frameworks, and social norms surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity in Nigeria.

Chapter four serves as the core analysis, exploring the strategies employed by queer individuals in Lagos to navigate and resist erasure in the aftermath of the SSMPA. It investigates the interplay between visible and invisible politics, highlighting the significance of both approaches for challenging dominant narratives, asserting agency, and fostering community resilience.

I will look at the ways in which cis-heterosexual identities have historically been privileged, including how the SSMPA has delegitimized other identities. The research will then look at how individuals are currently performing outside of those gendered boxes.

Methodology

I conducted online interviews with participants between February and April 2023. Because my participants are in Lagos and I am in Vienna, we decided to do use zoom and jitsi was used as an alternative for those who struggled with poor internet. It was essential to provide flexibility in time and place for the majority of interview participants due to the sensitivity of the topic, some could only make time early in the morning or later in the evening. Lagos also has Nigeria's widest variety of queer people. It is a place where I feel at ease, have wide connections that can snowball and establish contacts outside my circle. It also helps that Lagos is a state where homosexuality is no longer illegal[3]. A total of 17 people were interviewed for this during this time window. Snowballing was used to reach out to potential interviewers through friends, acquaintances, and employees of local organizations. In addition, those I spoke with were gracious enough to introduce me to additional participants within their social circles. The age of interviewees ranged from 22 to 57, and the biggest demographic was gay men. The diversity of my participants included one intersex person, four lesbians, one trans man, 4 trans women and seven gay men. A semi-structured interview model was used to encourage interview participants to lead the conversation to areas of their lives they were comfortable talking about,

[3] When Lagos state transitioned from the Criminal Code to the Criminal Law of Lagos state in 2011, it quietly omitted S.214 which criminalizes sex against the order of nature

and these were loosely structured around the themes I had carved out ahead of time. Despite being a queer woman, I initially had a hard time finding other cis-queer women[4] who were willing to be a part of the process in comparison to gay men. It was only after I made allowances and suggested interview times outside 9 am to 5 pm that women were able to find time in their schedules to be interviewed. Most of my research participants belonged to the 20s to 40s age group with various levels of education ranging from primary school education to master's degrees. The participants came from various socio-economic backgrounds and worked in banks, architectural firms, NGOs, hospitals and in Nollywood. Two were unemployed, one person was still a student in the university and one person is self-employed. I had initially approached individuals who did not identify as activists because I wanted to find out the effects and impact of the SSMPA through their lens. But it quickly became evident that invisible acts of resistance was only one side of the coin. The last three interviewees are current and ex-employees of queer organisations which are part of other overt actions. Those interviews and provided further insights into the complimentary impacts of in/visibility in everyday resistance. Everyone participant was interviewed in English[5] except for one individual who indicated that they were more comfortable expressing themselves in pidgin[6] and another who switched from Hausa to English to emphasize some of their experience in Hausa-dominated Kano before they moved to Lagos.

This study is founded on a meticulous examination and critical evaluation of the existing literature pertaining to the queerness in Africa, incorporating diverse sources such as online searches, academic journals, books, scholarly publications, and participant interviews. The analysis is underpinned by a postcolonial feminist framework that acknowledges the intricate

[4] Gay men and trans women had more timeslots available to be interviewed in a way that cis queer women weren't
[5] English is the official language in Nigeria and with over 250 unique tribes, it remains the common lingua franca
[6] According to Wikipedia, Pidgin is an English-based Creole language spoken as a lingua franca across Nigeria. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigerian_Pidgin

dynamics of power relations and prioritizes the amplification of marginalized communities' lived experiences.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My theoretical approach is based on literature that has emerged around performativity, compulsive heterosexuality, postcolonial studies, and intersectionality. The first part of this chapter introduces intersectionality and the way it informs my way of thinking and analysis before introducing post-coloniality and the ways that historical discourse and colonial-era laws continue to influence the way we look at sexual orientation and gender identity. I will then bring in compulsory heterosexuality and performativity through Adrianne Rich and Butler, as these are important theories to look at in the ways that people are choosing to perform gender, before closing the chapter with an overview of how those theories help us understand the ways in which queer people navigate visibility and invisibility as a result of the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act passing into law. These theories are central to my argument when describing contemporary Lagos and how various identities intersect to influence how people who identify as queer are able to practice various forms of visibility, the problems that arise when they are visible, and why these tensions are important to note.

Intersectionality

> *"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."* (Lorde 1984, 138).

According to many theorists, intersectionality refers to the interconnectedness of social identities including race, gender, class, and sexual orientation as well as the ways in which these identities interact and overlap to create particular experiences of privilege and oppression. (Crenshaw 1989) The concept of intersectionality encourages people to consider how various social factors, such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, geography, age, and disability, interact to shape individual people. As a result of these encounters, interdependent

forms of privilege and oppression moulded by racism, homophobia, ableism, and patriarchy are produced. (Hankivsky 2014) These interactions happen in a setting of linked systems and power hierarchies. The concept of intersectionality – which acknowledges that different identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination are interconnected and cannot be understood in isolation from one another – offers us a way of thinking about social inequality (Davis, 2008). Critical race theory gave birth to the idea of intersectionality, which has now been developed further to include a variety of social identities and power relationships than initially proposed. Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989[7], intersectionality recognizes that individuals are made up of multiple social identities that intersect, resulting in unique experiences of privilege and oppression. Intersectionality draws our attention to how social factors like age, race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and religion, connect to influence how individuals experience the world. As a lens, intersectionality pays attention to how power structures functions are organised, which affects how people encounter various privileges or discrimination. It further recognizes that systems of oppression are not experienced uniformly but rather shaped by the intersection of multiple identities and social locations.

Although intersectionality is widely credited to Kimberly Crenshaw, the concept itself was often spoken about and can be tracked to Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech, "Ain't I A Woman," where Truth addressed the interconnected experiences of being a woman, being black, and how enduring the hardships of slavery create a unique kind of struggle. Various other literature, like the black feminist statement, detailed how the encounter of sexual, racial, and class oppression was felt all at once in daily lives, that it would be challenging to distinguish between them because of racial-sexual oppression, which is neither racial nor sexual in nature. (“The Combahee River Collective Statement” 1977). Alma Garcia also detailed how Chicana

[7] The term “intersectionality” was first used by Kimberlé Crenshaw within a law journal to explain the limitations of concentrating only on one axis of feminist theory, antiracist politics, or antidiscrimination law when looking at oppressions or solutions to discrimination.(Crenshaw 1989)

feminists were already shaping the racial, gendered, and classed forces that shaped their experiences as women of colour from the 1970s – 1980s in America. (Garcia 1989). While Kimberlé Crenshaw is widely credited with coining the term "intersectionality" and popularizing its usage in academic and activist circles, it is important to acknowledge that the concept of intersecting identities and their impact on social experiences predates her work. Several earlier theorists and activists discussed similar ideas, albeit using different terminology and frameworks.

In this thesis, I am using an intersectional lens to understand how different identification axes, such as gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, age, education, location, and class, play a role in shaping people's experiences. Intersectionality acknowledges that identity is multifaceted and not separate or linear. (Springate 2016) Because intersectionality challenges the traditional notion of understanding social issues in isolation and acknowledges that various forms of discrimination and privilege are interconnected, it is useful for this thesis as I try to understand how various social identities intersect to either create new issues which will otherwise stay hidden. Emphasis will be paid on how people's experiences are not solely shaped by a single aspect of their identity but rather by the interplay between multiple dimensions of their social identity.

In my research, the importance of intersectionality stems from its capacity to offer a holistic and nuanced comprehension of social identities and power dynamics. In contexts like Nigeria, where deep-rooted biases and discrimination against individuals who deviate from the perceived norm in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression coexist with patriarchal structures, it becomes crucial to examine and analyse the intricate connections between these identities, prejudices, and their impact on how queer individuals manage and navigate visibility. And by using intersectionality as a framework for my research, I am able to unpack systems of oppression, privilege, and marginalization from the moment of designing

the research to analysing the data. Intersectionality as a lens nudges me to approach a more holistic understanding of social identities and power dynamics.

Post coloniality

In addition to intersectionality, I will be to using post-coloniality to look at the historical, social, political, and cultural legacies of colonization and how they affect my research site in order to better comprehend the contemporary setting in which I am working.

According to Arif Dirlik, postcoloniality can be understood as a "description of the global condition following the era of colonialism, encompassing the epistemological and psychological orientations that have emerged from those circumstances." (Dirlik 2010, 332) Considering the enduring influence of colonial legacies on laws, customs, and ideas surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity within the research site, it also becomes imperative to employ a postcolonial framework for comprehensive understanding.

It is crucial to distinguish and employ both postcolonial theory and postcolonial sexual politics, as they address distinct aspects of analysis. Postcolonial theory underscores the manner in which colonialism has engendered systems of domination and oppression. On the other hand, postcolonial sexual politics delves into the intersections between these structures of domination and oppression with regard to gender and sexuality. By utilizing both frameworks, a comprehensive understanding can be achieved, encompassing the broader dynamics of colonial legacies alongside the specific dynamics of gender and sexuality within postcolonial contexts.

Drawing upon postcolonial theory, which offers an analytical lens for examining the ongoing impacts of colonialism and imperialism on contemporary international politics and culture as defined by theorists like Gandhi (2020)[8], I will approach postcoloniality within this research.

[8] Leela Gandhi's book, "Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction," stands out due to its emphasis on the particular historical, material, and cultural circumstances that shape postcolonial theory. It also strives to outline the ethical potentials of postcolonial theory as a framework for peacefully coexisting with and understanding cultural differences.

In incorporating the scholarship of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, specifically "Can the Subaltern Speak", I will emphasize the significance of positionality to avoid the potential pitfall of subjugating marginalized groups under study by representing their perspectives solely through a Western lens. Spivak argues that postcolonial theory often reproduces Eurocentric and universalizing discourses it seeks to challenge, neglecting the material and political realities of the colonized world. Instead, she proposes a more nuanced and self-reflexive approach to postcolonial theory that acknowledges its limitations and engages with the complexities and diversities of the colonized world (Spivak 1999). This approach will enable me to conduct my research sensitively and ethically, prioritizing the voices of the interview participants in my analysis. I also adopt Spivak's insight that a dominant class or element in one context may find themselves among the marginalized in another, leading to potential ambiguities and contradictions. This realization holds particular relevance in the context of my research, which examines the construction of the category of 'Lagos queer.'

Another theorist that informs my way of thinking in approaching this research is the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Like Spivak, Mohanty's work points to treating the subject of inquiry – in this case, the Lagos queer – not a homogeneous group (Mohanty 1984). I may successfully examine the varied members of the queer community while acknowledging that no single category or term can be used to describe the entire group by adopting a postcolonial perspective. This approach will contribute to shaping my positionality and ensure that my analysis does not solely rely on Western notions of the gay rights movement, which often prioritize educated individuals as the epitome of liberation. Simultaneously, it avoids diminishing the significance of alternative forms of visibility within the Nigerian queer space by considering them as inferior, subjugated, victimized, or uneducated.

To navigate the intricate complexities surrounding class, religion, age, sexual orientation, and gender expression, my methodology will therefore integrate both an intersectional and

postcolonial framework. This combined approach will enable me to closely examine the distinctive nuances experienced by different groups and their diverse perceptions of visibility and invisibility within contemporary Lagos. Instead, I aim to utilize these tools to adopt a more inclusive and nuanced approach that considers the multifaceted nature of identities, power dynamics, and cultural contexts within the Nigerian queer community.

Compulsory Heterosexuality

In understanding the issues relevant to my research, another theory I will need to use closely is Compulsory Heterosexuality. Although it is not the main subject of this investigation, I think it is a crucial part of understanding how queer people have been marginalized and forced to conform to cisgender[9] heteronormative standards.

According to Adrianne Rich, compulsory heterosexuality is a system of power relations that shapes gender roles, family structures, social expectations and sexual desire. (Rich 1980) Compulsory heterosexuality, far from being matter of individual choice, is instead a cultural and social norm that is enforced through a range of social institutions and practices where minorities[10] compelled to conform to uniform standards of morality. This denies individuals the opportunity to explore their own desires and identities, instead forcing everyone into predefined roles and boxes that are geared towards the male gaze and dominance of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity has been defined as "a complex set of structures, institutions, relations, and actions that promote and produce heterosexuality as the natural, self-evident, desirable, privileged, and necessary way of being." (Cameron and Kulick 2006, 55) Other theorists also note that heteronormativity is a social and cultural norm that positions heterosexuality is the only normal or natural form of sexual desire and expression. (Ingraham 2005) According to

[9] According to Oxford dictionary, cisgender refers to a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex registered for them at birth; not transgender

[10] for Rich, this was specifically lesbian women.

Ingraham, heteronormativity is a pervasive and strong force in modern society that influences not just societal structures and practices but also individual behaviour and attitudes. In "Language and the Market Society," Gerlinde Mautner highlights that heteronormativity is sustained through discourses that stigmatize homosexuality as abnormal or deviant while elevating heterosexuality as the preferred norm. Numerous scholarly works have demonstrated that this devaluation of LGBTQI+ identities and the normalization of heterosexuality contribute to a power imbalance, further marginalizing queer individuals. Consequently, this systematic discrimination perpetuates a situation where LGBTQ+ people are subjected to ongoing discrimination. (Mautner 2010) Stevi Jackson has also tried to examine how heterosexuality fits into a larger gender hierarchy, by supporting long-standing conventions and disparities based on both gender and sexual orientation. Her research has looked at the perks of heterosexuality as the dominant sexual orientation and how this has historically supported gender inequity. By examining the complex relationships between sexuality and power, Jackson argued that by encouraging heterosexuality as the commonly accepted social standard, marginalization and stigmatization of other sexual orientations is to be expected. (Jackson 2004).

Performativity

Another important theory useful for unpacking the issues of visibility is Judith Butler's gender performativity. Butler conceptualizes gender as a social role that individuals perform or adopt, which is then validated and accepted by society. According to Butler, gender is not a fixed entity but an ongoing performance that acquires new significance through each iteration and is specific to the context or site in which the performance occurs. Butler's perspective challenges the rigid and universal understandings of gender, as it emphasizes the fluidity and instability of gender. By rejecting notions of absolutes and essentialism, Butler perceives gender as transient, changeable, contingent, and enacted. (Butler 2006)

Butler's theory of performativity provides a valuable framework for understanding how queer individuals in Lagos navigate, contest, and transcend societal gender norms within the context of their queer identities. By incorporating Butler's concept of performativity, my analytical chapter will explore the intricate ways in which queer Lagosians explore and express the multifaceted nature of their gender. The focus will be on uncovering how certain aspects of their identity become visible or invisible through their performative acts.

Within this concept of performativity, I will be looking at how queer visibility is produced and constructed in public spaces by specifically bringing in Beverly Skeggs's work on how queerness is highly visible in public space because an exception to heteronormative norms and how this visibility is shaped by socio-cultural processes and power relations. (Skeggs et al. 2004) And finally, I will be looking at the politics of visibility and invisibility.

In/visibility

Visibility and invisibility are important components of this research, and looking at the effects and impacts of the SSMPA. Visibility refers to the state or condition of being seen, noticed, or recognized. Visibility can involve the ability of something or someone to be observed, acknowledged, or made evident to others. In the context of this research, visibility is one of the ways in which research participants have chosen to be seen, noticed, observed, acknowledged, or recognized in their queerness.

Various theorists have explored various ways in which visibility and invisibility shape the experiences and opportunities of women and marginalized groups. In writing about power, politics, queering and passing, it has been argued that visibility is a site of power dynamics and regulation. (Butler 2011) While acknowledging the risks of self-revelatory actions, Audrey Lorde argues for the importance of visibility by being seen, heard and resisting silence. (Lorde 1984). Although Butler critiques the notion that visibility alone can be equated with liberation

or empowerment – as it often reinforces normative and binary frameworks – she instead suggests challenging the politics of visibility and proposes that marginalized communities should not solely seek recognition within existing norms and structures but should also contest and transform those norms that form dominant discourses. For Butler, the politics of visibility involves resisting and challenging dominant norms while recognizing and navigating the inherent risks involved. It requires a critical examination of how visibility operates within power structures and an exploration of alternative modes of expression and identity that go beyond prescribed categories. Books like Trap Door have also looked at the contradictions of how trans visibility has been touted as a marker of liberal society while also leading to the suppression of trans rights and increased trans violence. (Tourmaline, Stanley, and Burton 2017) Francesca Stella has also written about the politics of in/visibility, emphasizing how marginalized groups selectively choose when, where, and how to be visible. Stella argues against an exclusive emphasis on overt visibility eventually risks disregarding other forms of inequalities. According to Scott's research, overt uprisings are not all that often, do not always take place when and where they are expected, and frequently have little impact. The resistance of marginalized groups is not found in overt collective defiance or in complete compliance but in the grey territory between the two with small, subtle acts. (Scott 1990) And it is within these small acts of rebellion that a reconsideration of how queer Nigerians perform visibility in response to the SSMPA is proposed. My research will examine the inherent tensions between covert and overt visible practices, the intricate negotiations involved in the performance of gender and sexuality, the intersecting identities that influence and shape these performances, and the historical factors that continue to shape these discourses and practices.

In conclusion, this chapter provides the theories I have found useful and pulls together to provide a way of looking at queer visibility in Lagos. Ultimately, by incorporating the insights of intersectionality, post-coloniality, compulsory heterosexuality, and performativity as

articulated by theorists such as Crenshaw, Spivak, Mohanty, Rich, Mautner, and Butler, a toolkit emerges in this chapter that helps to examine the challenges at hand and analyse the data – with the required nuance – in a manner that sheds light on the impact of the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) on queer individuals in Lagos. This interdisciplinary approach will allow for a deeper understanding of how in/visibility is negotiated in subsequent chapters.

The objective of borrowing from all these theories and arguments is to try to understand and delve deeper into the construction, regulation, and negotiation of gender within various spaces, shedding light on how queer individuals in Lagos conform to, challenge, or resist prevailing gender norms through their performances. By adopting performativity as a theoretical lens, the research aims to unravel the complexities and dynamics of queer individuals in Lagos, as well as the agency and strategies they deploy to navigate societal expectations. My analysis will contribute to a richer understanding of how gender is enacted, contested, and transformed within the unique context of queer experiences in Lagos and shed light on existing tensions and the ways in which individuals perform gender expectations. This will ultimately contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how queer people in Lagos are employing both visible and invisible tactics to navigate gender after the codification of the SSMPA.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To provide a contextual backdrop and gain insights into the research site, this chapter will delve into the history of Nigeria and examine surviving records that shed light on the understanding and navigation of queerness or non-heterosexual inclinations. The objective is to comprehend how these historical narratives have shaped present-day perspectives on gender and sexuality, influenced by cultural norms, religious teachings, and legal frameworks which seeks to render queerness invisible.

In the initial sections, the chapter will explore the documentation of diverse sexual orientations and genders, investigating how these identities were conceptualized, perceived, and the forms of visibility or invisibility that existed. Subsequently, attention will turn to the impacts of Arabian and British colonization, analysing how these external forces affected existing norms and introduced new regulations and behaviours within the country. This exploration will shed light on the transformations in the discourse surrounding sexual orientation and gender identities, as well as the enduring legacies of colonial influence. The chapter will then explore how discourse led to criminalization, and how current laws expressly seeks to criminalize visibility politics for people who are queer.

By connecting these historical dots, the chapter will illuminate historical timelines crucial to understanding contemporary Lagos and why queer resistance and the ways it manifests should be paid attention t.

Precolonial history of queerness in Nigeria

Scholars and anthropologists have constantly highlighted the limitations of relying on colonial accounts as accurate representation of cultural histories (Murray and Roscoe 2001, xi). They

argue that colonial-era writers often downplayed or disregarded the presence and importance of same-sex desire in the few documented instances of homosexuality. Instead, care should be taken to not that colonial accounts lacked objectivity and were instead influenced by the prejudices of the colonial powers when they represented indigenous cultures and practices.

These critiques that caution against uncritically accepting colonial accounts as the sole sources of information about pre-colonial cultures instead encourage an engagement with diverse sources of knowledge, such as oral traditions, indigenous perspectives, and alternative historical records, as more authentic sources of cultural practices and identities.

Nigeria, a nation in West Africa, is renowned for its cultural diversity. It is home to over 250 ethnic groups, each of which has its own unique customs, beliefs, language, and worldview. Nigeria was home to thriving and sophisticated cultures before the invasion of European colonial powers in the late 19th century. The kingdoms and societies existing before colonisation were characterized by a wide variety of governmental systems, social structures, and religious traditions. The Benin Kingdom, the Oyo Empire, and the Hausa-Fulani Empires were only a few of the notable kingdoms and empires that rose and fell in Nigeria during the pre-colonial period. These empires had distinctive cultural traditions, which included particular views and behaviours relating to human sexuality. It is within this historical context of pre-existing beliefs, cultures and sexual politics that I aim to explore the topic of homosexuality.

The precolonial history of homosexuality in Nigeria has been a subject of scholarly investigation, revealing that same-sex relationships existed in indigenous Nigerian societies long before the influence of European colonialism. However, this has been challenging to do with so few texts specifically dedicated to sexuality during the colonial project.

Theorists have identified how colonialism influenced gender and sexual subjectivity through significant disruption, increased stigmatizing, imposition of colonial heteronormativity norms and through law. (Rao 2012)

According to anthropologists, one of the main reasons Nigerian culture was successfully demonised, replaced and forced into extinction was because many cultures relied on the preservation and transmission of oral history. For example, the Yoruba people of southern Nigeria transmitted cultural norms and values orally through poetry and songs. (Ajibade 2013) And even after the introduction of written scripts, oral traditions were the primary means by which history, myths, legends, and other forms of cultural knowledge was passed down from one generation to the next. Knowledge, histories, and traditions were often expected to be kept alive through songs, dances, dramatization, and other forms of cultural expression. Elders and other community members with knowledge of the community's history and traditions passed down this knowledge to younger generations through oral storytelling and other means.

Because written texts was introduced to Nigeria and at the same time colonial ideas and Abrahamic religions were handed down, it is therefore no surprise that surviving literature that does mention sexualities represented homosexuality as deviant and wrong. But we can,, however, deduct from the introduction of criminalization that it wasn't an unknown practice.

As has been documented by anthropologists and historians, existing beyond gender binaries and heterosexuality is not new. A quick look into Yorùbá indigenous religious ritual practices confirms that homosexuality and lesbianism are not colonial importations. (Ajibade 2013) Instead, they were practices known and tolerated – if not accepted in various cultures.

German explorer Heinrich Barth was one of the few to document homosexuality in Nigeria. Barth noted that homosexuality[11] was "quite common" among the aristocratic class in Bornu and that it was considered a normal and accepted part of their culture. (Barth 2011) He observed that many men in Bornu had "boy wives" who lived with them and served as both sexual partners and domestic companions. Barth described the relationships between these men and their boy wives as being similar to those between husbands and wives and noted that they were often marked by love, loyalty, and mutual devotion.

Few British colonial officials and Christian missionaries also documented what they termed as barbaric sexual practices within the local communities they resided in or took exhibitions to. Richard F. Burton wrote about the practice of man-man “marriages” among the Yoruba in 1863, Arthur J. Evans wrote about same-sex relationships among the Nupe in 1897, and Reverend H.D. Griswold wrote about woman-woman “marriages “among the Igbo in 1938. It's important to note that because these practices were documented during the colonial period by British colonial officials and Christian missionaries, they were often viewed as "deviant" by the colonizers. As a result, some of the accounts of female same-sex marriage in Igbo culture may have been influenced by the biases and assumptions of the colonial observers and the ways they dismissed or diminished these relationships to non-marriages. Nevertheless, existing evidence implies that different Nigerian cultures at the time were aware of and accepted these practices.

Eventually, the late 19th century saw a turnaround, with "Books like Boy Wives and Female Husbands" explicitly seeking to correct the assumption that diverse gender and sexual identity was alien to the African societies and culture was published to provide snapshots of histories, experiences, and realities.

[11] Barth saw homosexuality as homoerotic sexual relationships between men

Despite these barriers to written documentation, many practices have survived to date. Gender crossing homosexuality is visible and present in the Bori cult from northern Nigeria, where the 'yan daudu' (plural) or 'dan daudu' (singular) communities in Northern Nigeria belong to. (Ajibade 2013) Yan Daudu, which roughly translates to 'man of Daudu', was a reference to Prince Daudu, a handsome and wealthy prince who kept the company of men and acted like a woman. Dan Daudu would be similar to the slang 'friends of Dorothy' in the US context of homosexual slang. Yan Saudi is now a subculture of males who dress, act, and perform femininity in public or private lives, who may or may not be gay. Yan Saudi is often stereotyped as effeminate or "gay" men, but in reality, they are a diverse group of individuals who occupy a complex space in society for their ability to fit outside the gender binary by either temporarily or permanently taking on feminine roles including accepting only male lovers. Many people who are called yan daudu may dress in traditional women's clothing or wear makeup and feminine hairstyles, but their gender expression and sexual orientation have been known to vary widely. (Gaudio 2009)

Apart from Yan Saudi from the north, Nwando Achebe's research highlights the existence of same-sex relationships among the Igbo people, often observed during the "menu" masquerade tradition where men cross-dressed and engaged in same-sex encounters as part of ceremonial activities (Achebe, 2003). Jeremy Marre also documents one of the most famous cases of gender nonconformity in Igbo land by documenting the case of Area Scatter who had gone into the wilderness for seven months and seven days and had reappeared transformed into a woman. (Marre and Charlton 1985) Although Marre misgenders Area Scatter multiple times in his book, there are surviving videos and documentaries where she explains that she had been reborn as a woman during her time in the wilderness and will only appear thus in public. It is also a testament to the strong preservation of cultural histories in Igbo land and retained acceptance of diversities that accepted and celebrated Area Scatter as a woman and a performer fit for

entertaining royalty in the 80s. Documentaries show area scatter performing at the chief's palace and appearing regularly with a recurrent band on NTV during the popular music show Ukonu's Club. Although we can only now speculate about Area Scatter's sexuality, what is certain is that Area Scatter was a respected member of society and was not criminalized for blurring and crossing preconceived gender lines.

In other regions of the country, Eghosa E. Osaghae's research on the Benin Kingdom reveals the existence of same-sex relationships within palace life, where male attendants engaged in intimate relationships with the king, associated with power and authority (Osaghae, 1998).

Furthermore, the Yoruba people, one of Nigeria's largest ethnic groups from western Nigeria, there also existed instances of same-sex relationships and gender non-conformity. The Yoruba recognized the "yan aguda" or "agbalagba ara" to refer to women who engaged in same-sex relationships. These relationships were often understood within specific cultural contexts, with certain ceremonies and rituals providing avenues for the expression of same-sex desire. Also, within Ifa mythology from the Yoruba people, Òrùnmìlà was fabled to be born without bones inside his body because he was the product of a traditionally unsanctioned union. His parents, Òfurufú-ko-sefeyinti and Láárúfín, were both females who slept together, which led to Láárúfín subsequently giving birth to Òrùnmìlà. (Ajibade 2013) Babatunde Lawal has also explored the Yoruba context of "Ewa," a historical term used to describe same-sex relationships believed to be manifestations of deities or ancestors, accepted as part of religious worship and cultural practices (Lawal, 2013).

These examples of diverse gender expression and sexual acts in the pre-colonial Nigerian context challenge the assumption that heterosexuality within strict gender binaries was the sole standard within traditional Nigerian societies and that other non-heteronormative expressions

are foreign imports. However, it is clear that precolonial societies exhibited some fluidity in accommodating various traditions and activities outside of gender binaries and heterosexuality.

However, it is important to note that Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa tribes may have had more accepting attitudes towards diverse sexual expressions, while many other tribes displayed varying degrees of intolerance or disapproval. For example, Efik societies in south-eastern Nigeria generally held more conservative views on same-sex relationships, associating them with witchcraft or taboo practices. In these societies, same-sex desires and relationships were often viewed as disruptive to social order and were met with skepticism or condemnation. (Kugle, 2010)

It is clear by digging into the pre-colonial history of Nigeria; it is easy to see that diverse sexual orientation and gender identity were not a foreign import but a known part of indigenous Nigerian cultures within many tribes, including the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba tribes. Now having established that, we will now look at Arabian colonization and how Islamic attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity were assimilated into northern Nigeria.

Despite the fact that the 'yan Daudi had faced continuous discrimination and persecution from both state and non-state actors for at least a few decades, their vulnerability increased with the implementation of Sharia. (Gaudio 2009)

Arabian colonization

The introduction of Islam to Nigeria predates British colonialism. The roots of Islam in Nigeria can be traced all the way back to the 11th century through Arab and Berber traders, who were primarily traversing the Sahara Desert. These established trade networks extended into West Africa, and the trade routes connected regions such as North Africa, the Sahel, and the Saharan

oases with Nigeria. As trade flourished, Muslim communities emerged in prominent cities like Kano, Katsina, Zaria, and Gobir, becoming important hubs of Islamic learning, commerce, and governance. Muslim traders and scholars contributed to the development of these centers, fostering the growth of Islamic practices and institutions, and facilitating the exchange of goods, ideas, and, importantly, religious beliefs. (Ali 2002) The spread of Islam did not just stop at the urban centres. Over time, Islam spread to other ethnic groups and regions throughout the country. As Muslim communities interacted with local populations, cultural syncretism occurred, blending Islamic teachings with pre-existing traditions and customs. Although European-style colonization did not occur with Arabian expansion culture, military conquest, and the spread of Islam into Nigeria, Arabian influences had a significant impact on the regions and territories they controlled.

A lot of those influences can be seen in the use of Arabic script and calligraphy in the northern region, Islamic dress code, festivals and celebrations, Islamic architecture and education, naming conventions, legal and moral frameworks. Flowing gowns, Qur'anic memorization and study of Islamic sciences, choice of Muslim/Islamic names became core features within the Hausa cultural systems.

However, the most impactful influence seems to be on the religious and moral framework in Hausa-Fulani-dominated northern Nigeria. Islamic teachings and principles found in the Qur'an and Hadiths were introduced into local laws, and this shaped norms and practices related to marriage, family, and sexual conduct. Sharia law, the Islamic legal framework, was used to regulate and oversee aspects of family law, inheritance, law enforcement, and dispute resolution. Its impact can be felt from the consumption of foods and alcohol, marriage practices, to many aspects of sexual orientation and gender expression. Arabian colonization thus influenced gender roles and relationships, especially as Islamic teachings on cultural norms emphasized gender segregation, modesty, further and prescribed gender roles within the family

and community. This subsequently influenced social expectations and behavior regarding gender, and sexuality, promoted the idea of sexual relations only within the context of marriage, and emphasized abstinence outside of marriage and heterosexual relationships.

The negative Islamic views and attitudes towards homosexuality influenced the existing perceptions and social attitudes towards homosexuality in those regions where the Bori cult and yan Daudu were already a known and established fabric of the society. (Gaudio 2009) Attitudes moved from acceptance to tolerance and, finally criminalization. The Shariah law[12] prescribes strict punishments for sodomy ranging from the public lashing of 100 strokes with a cane or death by stoning, depending on the marital circumstance of the individuals.

British Colonization

Just like Arabian influences, the arrival of European colonial powers significantly influenced societal perceptions of homosexuality in Nigeria. Colonial administrations imposed their own moral values and legal systems, which contributed to the transformation of attitudes towards same-sex relationships. Hakeem Onapajo's research highlights the role of British colonialism in the introduction of anti-homosexuality laws, such as the Criminal Code Act of 1916 and the Penal Code of Northern Nigeria, which criminalized same-sex sexual activities (Onapajo, 2015).

The Criminal Code Act of Nigeria enacted in 1916 during the colonial period was the first law to codify the criminalization of homosexuality. The law was modelled after the British Criminal Code and included provisions that made "unnatural offenses," punishable by up to 14 years in prison. The same provisions were later adopted into the Nigerian Criminal and Penal Code in

[12] Which currently applies to 12 states in northern Nigeria,

1959 when Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule. Subsequent laws criminalizing homosexuality can either be directly traced to this initial law, or subsequent laws which use the same language, and framing. Laws which criminalised sex "against the order of nature" started to spring up in every state law that was enacted[13] around Nigeria and became embedded in the constitution as well as other legislation that fell under the received English Laws.

Apart from laws, British attitudes also influenced the discourse around sexual orientation and gender identity. "Colonial discourse constructed colonies as sexually permissive societies that were simultaneously childlike in their need of control; this dichotomy was understood as the colonies offering opportunities for sexual 'adventure'." (Meghani and Saeed 2019, 297) As part of the colonial project, the British erased local cultures and imposed their own cultural, social and moral codes on the population. Diverse gender identity practices were frowned upon including laws which criminalised a host of activities including disorderliness, truancy, idleness, vagrancy, and impersonation. People who did not conform to gender roles[14] were particularly targeted by the laws criminalising impersonation.

Colonial legislation, combined with the influence of Western religious ideologies, can thus be said to have directly reinforced negative attitudes and stigmatization of LGBTQ+ individuals in Nigerian society.

The Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act

In January 2014, Nigeria's president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan signed the same sex Marriage Prohibition Act into law. The law specifically makes same-sex marriage, civil unions,

[13] All states in Nigeria enact local laws. Southern states which didn't adopt the Penal Code adopted the Criminal Code

[14] Particularly transgender people

witnessing or officiating same-sex marriages, public displays of love, and participating in or sponsoring events that advance LGBTQI+ rights illegal. For those who broke the law, it specified sentences of 7, 10, and 14 years in prison.

It is impossible to comprehend the passage of the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act without understanding Nigeria's colonial past and the influence of Islam and Christianity. Despite gaining its independence in 1960, Nigeria, had retained and updated almost all its laws from Britain. Those colonial-era laws made same-sex sexual behaviour illegal. And except for the states that have implemented tougher penalties in accordance with Sharia Law these rules criminalizing same-sex conduct, they were in effect throughout Nigeria by 2014. However, colonial legacies can be traced to why and how new laws were introduced were further introduced. (Olookoba and Mahmud 2014)

The campaign for tougher national laws to target diverse sexual orientation and gender identities started to snowball in the early 2000s in Nigeria. This development was influenced by circumstances like the legalization of same-sex marriage in countries like Canada, the Netherlands, Mexico, and Belgium. This brought a wave of conservative religious movements that passionately and openly opposed homosexuality both under the Christian and Islamic banners. Religious organizations claimed that same-sex relationships violated their moral precepts and endangered the social fabric of the country. Evangelicals from the West descended not only into Nigeria, but also to other African nations in an attempt to rally opposition to any sort of legalization. (Olookoba and Mahmud 2014)

The Nigerian government had initially made attempts in 2006 to pass legislation criminalizing not just same-sex conduct, but other sweeping actions like cohabiting, failure to report homosexuality and sexual orientation itself. The proposed law was met with strong internal and international opposition which made it difficult to codify under that administration. However,

the legislation was revived and considerably amended in 2011, including sections that made it unlawful to publicly express support for LGBTQ+ rights or same-sex couples in any way. This version of the law also experienced delays and opposition. Eventually, the National Assembly enacted the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act in 2013, which was signed into law by President Goodluck Jonathan in January 2014. The law states that anybody found guilty of engaging of marrying someone of the same gender would face punishments of up to 14 years in prison. The registration of LGBT clubs, societies, and organizations is likewise prohibited with 10 years imprisonment. Public show of same-sex affection and advocacy for LGBTQI+ rights could also expect to face 10 years in prison. (Omoteye and Akinlade 2016)

The enactment of the SSMPA had profound effects on the LGBTQ+ community, as it not only criminalized same-sex marriage but also hindered efforts to challenge prevailing norms. By outlawing various activities such as advocacy, organization registration, and the holding of gatherings, including events resembling pride celebrations, the law fostered an environment of hostility towards LGBTQ+ individuals. Importantly, this marked a significant moment in Nigerian history, as it was the first instance of the government openly attempting to render queerness invisible.

The significance of colonization on queerness

It has been documented that colonialism originated as a fundamentally political and economic endeavour driven by competition among European governments and companies for land, resources, and labour. However, as time passed, European elites began to justify colonialism through anthropological frameworks, emphasizing the presumed natural and desirable outcome of their own racial and cultural superiority. Influenced by theories of racial and cultural evolution propagated by northern European scientists, many Britons perceived colonization as a moral duty. Criminalization by state power, racialization and essentialization of African

sexualities, sublimation of procreation and reproductive aspects of sexuality, and the misrepresentation of non-heteronormative sexualities was the norm. (Ndjio 2012) This perspective was captured by Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem on 'the white man's burden' as the responsibility of white man cure the savage half devil half child people introduce them to intellectual culture and knowledge. These same theories also shaped the British officials' approach to the peoples they colonized. Officials sought to identify and emphasize racial, cultural, and linguistic distinctions among these populations, leading them to classify and rank each 'tribe' and language according to perceived levels of 'civilization.' What counted as 'civilized' were those traits and practices that British observers saw as similar to their own. (Gaudio 2009) This then directly affected how sexual orientation was perceived as "images and their accompanying texts are ideology-laden and consequently become entrenched in the battle for visibility against heteronormativity." (Ayodele Onanuga 2022, 1)

It is clear that Christianity has wielded considerable influence in shaping societal attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity in Nigeria. Traditional interpretations of religious texts have often cast diverse sexual orientations and gender identities as morally or religiously problematic. As a result, official doctrines and teachings within these religious traditions have played a pivotal role in shaping prevailing attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity.

Many of the religious institutions have historically reinforced heteronormativity, which promotes a binary understanding of gender and highlights heterosexual relationships as the normative standard. This emphasis on heteronormativity has limited visibility and acceptance for individuals who identify as queer and consequently have frequently experienced marginalization and stigmatization due to the teachings and beliefs propagated by these religious institutions.

Gaudio has also documented how Islamic reform movements have grown more powerful and have made life more difficult for gender and sexual minorities. A few decades after independence and in a bit to retain power after the civil war, Northern Nigerian politicians channelled their concerns about their power in a future independent into nationalist discourse. Due to their lengthier exposure to British colonization, southern Nigerians were overrepresented in the civil service and had higher levels of English proficiency. The British and Southerners were the targets of nationalist discourses in the North who saw them as partners with the conquerors. These discourses covered up internal conflicts within the North's political elite while oversimplifying the cultural, linguistic, and theological complexity of both regions. The escalating Northern nationalism was influenced by gender and sexuality, frequently in connection with the perceived problems of prostitution and homosexuality. Northern laws were changed as a result of concerns about these moral issues and sharia law was introduced and adopted into many states. (Gaudio 2009)

The impact of these religious doctrines on attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity cannot be overemphasized as it has resulted in a reduced acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities both within religious communities and the broader Nigerian society. The grip that religious doctrine has in society can be traced to the barriers to inclusion that currently exists in Nigerian societal spheres.

The enduring influence of colonization, encompassing the dissemination and hegemony of cultural systems rooted in the Victorian era, continues to exert profound effects on Nigeria. This impact can be observed in various aspects of society, including the food we consume the way we dress, our religion, and the way we handle conflict, as well as the transformation of cultural norms and moral orientations, which have been influenced to align with Western paradigms.

The goal of this chapter is to give adequate context to the specific realities which has led to criminalization and contemporary attitudes in regards to sexual orientation and gender identity in my site of study. By tracing the ramifications of colonialism and how it has retained its influence in the realm of sexual politics, it gives us a firm foundation to understand the driving force that seeks to make queerness invisible, and how queer individuals are engaging in visible and invisible politics – while performing outside of these prevailing social norms – to resist heteronormativity.

EVERYDAY RESISTANCE AND IN/VISIBILITY

Visible and invisible sexual politics pertain to the mechanisms through which power is exerted and upheld within a society in relation to sexuality and gender. In this analytical chapter, I will focus in the ways in which queer individuals living in Lagos have reported ways in which they negotiate the boundaries of visibility and invisibility[15]. The chapter will look at the ways visibility has worked out or not worked out for interview respondents, and the benefits and disadvantages they have experienced as a result of engaging in visibility politics and intersecting factors that compound the effects of engaging in this kind of politics. Rather than engaging in successes, failure, and in/effectiveness of visibility politics – which has been done previously by various theorists – my focus will be on the lived experiences of interview participants and how both groups have successfully navigated the restrictions that have come into effect as a result of the law. I will acknowledge those strengths and weaknesses, but ultimately the chapter will unpack the conditions that allows individuals to achieve visibility and I will argue about why these forms of resistance are important. The analytical chapter will take readers along to try to understand and reflect on the ways that criminalisation has affected contemporary expressions of sexual orientation and gender identity while arguing that criminalisation has not succeeded in rendering queerness invisible but has instead stimulated different kinds of resistance through visible and invisible political acts.

Visible and invisible politics looks at the ways in which power is negociated, applied and sustained in society. Visible politics are those that are overt and easily observable, such as

[15] The social, cultural, and political aspects that surround a person's or group's visibility or lack thereof in society are referred to as the politics of visibility. It includes all of the interactions between marginalization, privilege, and power that decide who is seen, acknowledged, and represented and who is made invisible or excluded.

elections, protests, and formal decision-making processes. Invisible politics, on the other hand, are those that are hidden or less visible, such as the ways in which power is negotiated behind closed doors or the informal networks that exist within organizations.

Visible sexual politics encompass readily observable manifestations such as laws and policies that regulate sexual behaviour and dictate gender roles. These are tangible structures that shape societal expectations and norms. In contrast, invisible sexual politics encompass more covert or obscured dynamics, such as cultural norms and values that influence the formation of sexual identities and practices. These less visible forces operate through implicit societal beliefs, socialization processes, and interpersonal interactions.

The politics of visibility involve struggles for recognition, representation, and proportionate visibility in the context of marginalized populations. It acknowledges that visibility may be used to challenge institutional injustices, stereotypes, and dominant narratives while also serving as a form of empowerment. Visibility has the power to significantly influence societal views, public opinion, and policy. Through the presentation of opposing perspectives and the humanization of disenfranchised communities, it can undermine prevalent preconceptions and prejudices. In order to foster deeper comprehension, empathy, and social change, visibility can also elevate the perspectives and experiences of individuals who have previously been marginalized or silenced.

But the politics of visibility often bring up challenging questions. In some instances, dominant power structures may selectively grant or restrict visibility, which can result in the tokenization of minority identities. Additionally, in environments where prejudice and discrimination are still prevalent, being visible might put people at risk of backlash, discrimination, and injury.

In order to develop a better understanding of power dynamics within Lagos and how queer people are navigating it, it is important to unpack the existing tensions visibility and invisibility for queer people. By examining both the explicit and concealed manifestations of power, tracing

the way they are performed and sustained in everyday interactions, we can achieve a better understanding of ways queer individuals are resisting the SSMPA. Recognizing and analysing both visible and invisible sexual politics in this chapter will thus allow for a comprehensive understanding of the intricate power dynamics at play in shaping individual experiences and broader societal constructs related to sexuality and gender. Therefore, the first part of this chapter will detail the ways that queer Lagosians have reportedly engaged with invisible politics, while the second part will unpack manifestations of politics from the individuals who were involved in the processes or outputs.

To do that, I would like to bring in the work of theorists who have argued about the invisible actions of everyday life which forms part of larger resistance. “Everyday resistance”, as a form of protest, revolves around the actions and behaviours individuals engage in on a daily basis. It is widely considered to be the most common response to oppression. This particular form of resistance operates subtly, aiming to undermine authority within contexts that are often concealed or obscured. Everyday resistance is characterized by its dispersed, quiet, seemingly invisible, and covert nature. It seeks to challenge and redistribute authority over resources and power. “The acts of resistance carried out as part of everyday resistance are typically perceived as relatively safe and do not require extensive formal organization.” (Scott 1989) Small acts like blurring gender norms can be seen as subtle acts of protest. Rejection of gendered performance “is often read as ‘resistance’ because the power of the dominant ideology and the daily practice of that ideology forces.” (Blackwood 2005, 501) It is also relevant her to bring in De Certeau, and his idea of "walking in the city" which has also been investigated by theorists as a metaphor for how people move through and engage with urban areas. According to De Certeau, “people alter and appropriate cities through their routine behaviors, leaving their own imprints and stories despite the prevailing urban design and architecture, opening doors for resistance and unique expression within the confines of prevailing discourses.” (Certeau and

Certeau 2013) Bringing in these ideas will help us in looking at the way in which gender transgression has been used by individuals who see themselves as different from those within gendered systems. In this situation, I am borrowing gendered transgression from Evelyn Blackwood to mean identities that go beyond the dominant, binary norms of male-female that are accepted in societies (Blackwood 2005).

We see that with pride parades being the symbolic and public use of urban landscapes by LGBT groups as a form of resistance and a way to challenge heterosexuality as the prevailing norm. (Fraser 1999) According to Stella, the importance placed on visibility assumes that political tactics can easily and be transported and translated across cultures and contexts. (Stella 2015, 1827) Stella questions if these politics of visibility are relevant for other national and local contexts and argues that small invisible acts may be more effective in practice. This chapter will explore both visible and invisible forms of resistance by examining the following:

Anonymous Gay Accounts (AGA)

In the past decades, many individuals primary source of news and information was from the mainstream media. However, the situation has changed significantly as a result of the rapid growth of the internet and how first person accounts have affected how news is broken, shared and engaged with. The internet has opened up fresh channels for the dissemination and availability to contrasting and diverse viewpoints that were otherwise not present in mainstream news. And while mainstream media frequently supplied the dominant paradigm for understanding and interpreting social changes, the development of digital platforms is challenging that dominance by enabling diverse sources of information - from blogs, podcasts, tweets and vlogs - to reach audiences with various points of view. In the past, news media was a key site through which people came to understand social change, changing morals and policies. (Rhode 1995) The internet currently facilitates rapid dissemination of information

and the sharing of experiences that rivals the narrow narratives that used to be presented by mainstream media. The ability to disseminate information to millions at the click of a button has enabled the amplification of marginalized voices to grow at a very quick pace. Alternative points of view have thus gained prominence, providing space for dialogue that challenges previous understanding of social changes. The expanded access to discourse and opposing opinions has the potential to promote a more comprehensive and complicated awareness of social shifts. (Mendes 2015)

Due to the stigmatization of homosexuality and the perception of same-sex relationships as conflicting with Nigerian values, numerous queer individuals are reluctant to openly disclose their affiliation with the LGBTQI+ community. As a result, online platforms have become a means for individuals to connect and identify with the community. The online space is an important space for constructing, negotiating, and performing visibility and resistance. Theorists have argued that "normative approaches to sexuality suggest that the regulation of sexuality takes place in multiple locations, including the family, the school, church and the media. During moments of moral panic, the media, for instance, becomes an important site of social control." (Ligaga 2020, 8)

With the growing use of the internet, many Nigerians found a middle ground with anonymous gay accounts (AGA). Interviewees detailed how they used Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook pages and blogs to document the random and ordinary lives they lead as LGBTQI+ community members. Individuals use anonymous accounts to make friends, meet lovers, access health information, and share safety tips. When asked what it felt like to be visible and invisible, Ekaete[16] responded thus:

[16] All names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

"I spent more than 3 months trying to register on naijalez[17] but they couldn't verify me. The day they did, I commented on every post and slid into every DM[18]. I was just so happy be among my people and talk about my life without any filters…thrilled that I could be seen, but at the same time I was shielded because no one uses their real names."

This was echoed by other participants who felt no need to be political and just wanted community. Comfort, a 37 year old bank employee who was also active on naijalez remembers the space as barely political. When asked about the SSMPA she had this to say

"I don't remember one person talking about the law on naijalez. It was almost like we all wanted to escape reality. We talked more about international LGBT shows than we did about what was going on."

But other interview participants acknowledged that being invisibile online was part of their activism and ways of resistance. They deliberately used AGA as a tool to speak up about discrimination and push back on negative LGBTQI+ stereotypes. Emeka was one person who ran a now inactive twitter account @LagosGay.

*"On that account I could say anything and do anything. Living my best gay life and sharing my adventures was good. When the handle got attention and gained many followers it made me bolder. Some people made burner accounts because they could not follow me on their main handle. I used to get so my di*k pics but I didn't catch cruise. I was too busy sharing tips on where to get tested for HIV,*

[17] Naijalez.com in a website for queer women that requires verification to ensure safety of users. Non registered members can read post but cannot post comments, like or engage further
[18] Sliding into DMs in this context refers to when you contact other users. DM means direct message

which areas were dangerous for kito[19] and which police stations they will cut your head.[20]"

This is in line with other research, which shows that the "digital world has become a space where Nigerian queers attempt to exist true to their self-identities and take charge of the narratives about their existence." (Onanuga 2021, 1) Onanuga further argues that "the Nigerian queer community has appropriated digital media in liberalizing and propagating support for homosexuality and that these digital constructs contribute to civic engagement for marginalized groups while also constituting outreach to non-queers".(Onanuga 2021, 2) Onanuga notes that the online spaces are necessary for many Nigerian queers who cannot physically isolate themselves from intolerance and violent acts, thus the closet continues to be a useful tool for keeping their sexual orientation and gender identity secret.

It is important to mention that while existing anonymously was a tactic for some, the notion of existing visibly was also expressed when rejecting anonymity and invisibility as the only valid option. This is also reflected by Vincent Desmond, who argues that while Nigerians had previously relied on AGA as the main way to signal queer existence "safely, more recently, they have been ditched entirely, with the growing community choosing to put a face to queer voices regardless of the consequences." (Desmond 2019, 1)

In exploring the role of backlash and consequences, at least two of the interviewees expressed a desire for more visibility but could not because of their partners and their relationships. For Adunni, a graphic designer who uses cartoon characters to document her life with her partner online, AGA is a viable alternative for her to make her relationship visible.

[19] Kito refers to blackmail and extortion of queer people.
[20] The metaphor cur your head refers to extortion during negotiations

"…I see them [other LGBTQI+ creators who are not anonymous], and I wish that I was more visible. Yeah, I could be more visible, but I tone it down because of my partner. My partners cannot be out because of her job, so I am always careful."

For Hassana, a medical doctor who has been in a long-term relationship, being visible as a queer person would have been preferable, it was not an option because of her partner. The possible risks for backlash her partner would face was the main reason she started a restricted Instagram account.

And while people expressed fear as parts of the reasons why they were cautious, two of the interview participants who have since revealed their identities on their AGA identified anger as the driving force. Emeka who now writes for multiple newspapers and who has appeared in documentaries explained it this way.

"…And my God I have a lot of anger. I feel like I am still alive because I have so much anger inside me. I haven't killed myself because I am too angry at the world that makes it so that I feel like I need to kill myself…"

Funmi a 43year old who started out with an AGA but has since discarded her anonymity when she started working in one the queer NGOs in Lagos described her motivations as:

"I am angry, I have been angry for a long time. Every conversation around homophobic people always leads me to anger. Cos why am I even having this discussion [about queer people's right to life] with you…that drove me, [to change the account to my government name] it is always anger."

I have tried to understand these actions and motivations in the social context of the interview participants as both Funmi and Emeka are very educated and upwardly mobile. Neither of them faced any backlash due to the way their class privilege isolates them from consequences in a way that Dayo, an intersex person living in the outskirts of Lagos would have faced. When I

asked Dayo if they had ever considered disclosing their identity to anyone, his answer was telling.

> *"I am uncomfortable being seen with people who are very gay. Now that I am older I am less afraid of what can happen to me because my body is different. I feel safer these days. But I don't have shege money and people have died for less. See, Money does go a long way in protecting people. Money shields you to some extent and the people who are very gay have that money while me I don't."*

The way I choose to analyse this is by bringing in Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality and how individual's identities can compound or elevate the privileges or discriminations that they face. In Dayo's case, while age was a positive factor that increased a feeling of safety. However, the fact that he lives in Badagry and is not wealthy, the potential risks suddenly compounded.

Language, fashion and performance.

> *"At first glance, the idea of invisibility as resistance may seem counterintuitive, since the choice to remain invisible may collude with, rather than challenge, the marginalisation of non-heteronormative sexualities, and leave the heterosexual majority unmoved or unaware." (Stella 2015, 1841)*

Apart from AGA, the use of concealed language in public was also identified as a tactic of daily resistance. Interview participants talked about how they used community known slangs, innuendos and other terms that only insiders could decipher. This is a particularly interesting strategy as heterosexuality itself is oftentimes conversations about queerness can be masked with other information within group settings. Scott has written about this in their work and has noted that marginalized groups do not often have the luxury of direct confrontation, so other

subtle acts like language and naming have been used to challenge gender norms. Minority groups have found ways of getting their message across by employing techniques that disguise the message while somehow staying hidden in plain sight by exploring the language of ambiguities, loopholes, and silences. (Scott 1990) During our interview, Bukar talked about this as a regular tactic he and other queer persons use in public.

> *"So if I say something like 'wa ne yana da ido' no straight person understand the hidden meaning. A queer person would immediately know that the person in question is queer. There are phrases that someone will say 'don Allah ina so inyi harka da kai'. A regular a person understands harka to mean business. But a queer person would immediately clock that I want to have sex with you. Because harka is not a problematic word and means business, it goes under the radar. So we have our language that is personal to us that the society doesn't know of and is excluded from."*

In talking about this, Bukar was proud of the ways he could subvert and assert his queerness in public in a way that only other queer people could near or notice. This can be compared to ideas written by Allen, who talked about the joys of speaking out loud – which allows people to savor the sweetness of the present – precisely because queer people know too well of suffering. (Allen 2021) Another example was provided by Estelle, a 29 year old trans woman, where she explained how girls like her played with language

> *"Someone can walk into the bar and maybe, you will just hear '…She misplaced her certificate'. That's what we say so that other people will not understand what we're talking about. It just means that the person does not have a birth certificate that coincidence with their gender and they are part of the trans community."*

However, this speaking in concealed ways should not be confused with silence in the ways that dominant groups are not uttered. While we can acknowledge that heterosexuality is sustained by a silence about itself, not daring to speak its own name, for in so doing, it makes evident what it keeps hidden, as the only one form of sexuality. (Jackson 2004) Even where queerness conceals itself, it is easy to view the context of these masks as another form of everyday resistance instead of being a practice that sustains the closet (Seidman 2004) as a result of criminalization. By engaging in small, minute and subversive acts of resistance in their everyday lives, queer individuals find ways to challenge the dominant narratives within Nigerian society. Given that certain actions have the ability to both challenge and uphold prevailing social norms, the concepts of accommodation and resistance become intertwined in intricate ways. Through further reflection of the context with which individuals are subverting existing language to introduce queer discussions, resistance is achieved. “The power of the “unseen” community lies in its ability to cohere outside the system of observation which seeks to patrol it. So the “injokes,” the “secret” codes, the iconography of dress, movement, and speech which can be read by those within the community, but escape the interpretative power of those external to it, can create another expressive language which cannot be translated by those who are not familiar with the meanings of this intimate tongue.” (Phelan 1993, 97). To further analyse this, I would like to return to the work of De Certeau who noted the relevance of routine activities – which may initially appear unimportant or mundane – as locations of agency and resistance. He criticizes the idea that power only arises from top-down and makes the case for an appreciation of people's capacity for creativity and subversion in influencing their own lives and circumstances. The examples above further shows us the creative ways queer people choose to resist erasure and invisibility as a result of the SSMPA as they carve out pathways for themselves within the dominant society.

Another strategy that individuals have discussed using is body modification and fashion. This point was echoed accross board as interview participants identified their body and performance as one of the prominent ways in which their sexual orientation and gender identity is presented. A good number of the interview participants disclosed that their gender performativity for included body modification like tattoos, hairstyles, and piercings. While others said they adopted – or opted out of fashion with the goal of conforming or subverting traditional gender roles. Ola, the oldest interviewee who identifies as a transman, a lot of his time, money and energy is invested into subverting gender roles. This is how he sees it:

> *"Yes, the way I dress is what shows the kind of man I am. So therefore… I spend a lot of money so that people will not tell me I am not a man or that I am not a rich man. I dress the way I want to be addressed, even if that means spending all my money on expensive clothes. When I enter anywhere, they dobale[21]. They greet me. But if I don't dress in the best agbada, ah, no one will take me serious."*

While clothes are an important tool for Ola it was not the same 4 Hannah. Hannah described the way she expressed herself to rely heavily on body modifications. During the interviews she showed me her extended tattoo collection I was very proud of the way it made her stand out in the crowd. When I asked her about any consequences of being covered in tattoos, she only connected it to the physical pain she went through when getting her first tattoo.

> *"I'm not gonna lie my first tattoo was very painful and I cried but I really like the way it looked and I felt like I owned my body my body was mine. So when I had money I paid for another one and I still cried but not as much as the first time. As you can see [my arms] I am well inked and my skin shows what I want it to show. It gives me a sense of control yes. I have about 42 [tattoos]…various*

[21] Postrate on the floor in greeting

*sizes. All the money I have spent can buy a Mercedes or a house. But this body is my first main house. I am not a woman, I now identify as a tortoise cos this sh*t is expensive."*

Maya also explained how she used certain gender performances and took advantage of existing gender roles to let her queerness out once in a while.

"I am feminine presenting so many times I [and my queerness] just slip under the radar and it is a privilege for me I know. Privilege in the fact that nobody accosts me even if I kiss a girl at a club. But there is also another side. Even though it is irritating to be sexualised as a lesbian once in a while, no one will bat an eye except if you are a gay man."

Selected Disclosure/Coming out

The concepts of being "closeted" and "coming out"[22] of said closet regarding one's sexual identity are modern. These ideas came into being through the social construction of public sexual identities in late 19th- and early 20th-century states in Europe and North America. Due to government regulations and criminal laws, the concealment of one's gender identity and sexual orientation has grown in an effort to challenge social assumptions. (Page 2020) As individuals within the LGBTQ+ community began openly disclosing their sexual orientation to their families, workplaces, and within the political sphere, popular culture began to

[22] The phrase "coming out" was created by gay communities as a means of enhancing individual identification, individual pride, and community prominence. By the 1970s, the revolutionary vocabulary of homosexual liberation had changed into an identity-based discourse that placed an emphasis on personal expression and mental wellness. (Page 2020)

acknowledge and recognize the existence of homosexuality. This marked a significant shift in challenging the notion of a public sphere exclusively defined by heterosexuality.

The emergence of openly gay individuals in various social domains disrupted the prevailing understanding of public spaces as inherently heterosexual. The concept of a public realm that was once assumed to be exclusively heterosexual was called into question and contested. This shift in cultural perception and recognition of homosexuality challenged the dominant heteronormative narratives and brought visibility to diverse sexual orientations within the public sphere. (Seidman 2004)

I initially struggled with if this belonged in visible or invisible forms of resistance. This is because participants discussed how they disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity to loved ones, but didn't necessarily consider themselves to have 'come out of the closet' in the traditional sense of it. One of the participants Sani explained it best:

> *"For the most part, individuals don't 'come out' of their own accord, they are usually outted by people who feel like they have gone too far in their social expression. An yi musu garwa[23] and when that happens, then they had to walk that walk. Some of us come out, but most of us are outted."*

This controlled disclosure of sexuality to selected loved ones was a theme for most of the interview participants. Participants acknowledged that they had disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity to individuals, but they did not consider themselves to be out of the closet because the knowledge of their queerness was still not in the public realm. From the interviews it seemed that people connected coming out of the closet would public disclosure on the news on social media or within their social circles in a gathering. Disclosure to friends,

[23] This translates to "The have been uncorked'

siblings, other queer people was not perceived as coming out. Maya, who doesn't consider herself out of the closet described how she disclosed her sexuality to her sister.

> *"I just blurted out '...Doyin was not my friend, she was my girlfriend. When I was going around with Bisi she was not my friend she was my girlfriend. And I had a huge crush on Hanna…'*
> *Her eyes kept getting bigger and bigger. I guess she sort of knew but she never thought I would say it…or she never thought I would go into details. We talked about everything and my whole queer history before she finally admitted that she had an inkling"*

In her work on visibility, Sedgwick concentrated on how society's perceptions and beliefs about sexual orientation and gender identity influenced if individuals hid or disclosed their identities in the 'closet'. Sedgwick noted that the closet was not just a literal room where people felt a need to hide secrets, but also a symbolic construction that has a significant impact on how society views and talks about sexuality and gender. Sedgwick also suggests that depending on the context, the closet can function as either a tool of oppression or a site of resistance. Sedgwick's analysis emphasizes the complex interplay between personal experience, societal norms, and the closet by recognizing the impact that societal knowledge and perceptions have on our understanding of sexuality and gender. By exploring the epistemology of the closet, Sedgwick sheds light on the struggles, negotiations, and potential for resistance that arise from the tension between personal identity and societal expectations.

In the case of the individuals I interviewed, it is not clear to me how they conceptualize the closet, or if the closet looks different in the public and private sphere. However, what came through is that some participants were disclosing their sexual orientation and gender identity in ways that are distinctly different from others. However, process of negotiating disclosure

including the factors that shape identities are unique to each societal contexts. Social norms, such as social views, household dynamics, and community norms, as well as personal privileges, do influence how people perceive their reality. Therefore, acknowledging the interplay between cultural norms, social expectations can add tensions that cannot be immediately resolved is necessary to better comprehend the fluidity and diversity of sexualities. This understanding helps us move away from fixed and universal notions of identity and instead appreciate the dynamic and context-specific nature of these identities. (Blackwood 2005)

Here, it is important to examine the participants in the group who for various reasons had not disclose their queerness. Arinola, who comes across as masculine of center[24] narrated how she never had to come out of the closet.

> *"I present as me, it is the world that ascribes masculinity to the ways that I am most comfortable in. So I am a woman, but I don't act the way the average woman is expected to act in Nigerian society. I don't use make up, I don't catwalk, I don't wear dresses or skirts, I don't even care about my appearance the way society expects. I don't ask, I take. I don't talk like a woman, I am assertive. And to some people this is not acceptable female behaviour"*

When I asked if she performs femininity, her response was telling.

> *"It is the first thing that people see, it is the first assumption. I am used to being visible, I am used to other people feeling like my presence makes their queerness visible. I don't think I have ever been in a situation where I was straight. People see me and assume I am queer, so I act queer. I have never seen a reason to pretend to be straight except if I am in government offices…people think this is*

[24] Masculine of Center: is a label used to describe a queer woman whose gender presentation is masculine

a woman who wants to act like a man. And this happens usually with men in positions of authority. When I get into situations like that, it is not like I perform femininity, but I definitely tone myself down so they won't feel the need to exert their authority."

For people like Arinola, the performance of gender is fluid but in the opposite way that others with body modification and fashion play with gender presentations to subvert gender expectations. When she puts on a performance, it is usually to fit into expected stereotypes in a bid to avoid repercussions or negative outcomes.

Books and written materials

Stevi Jackson notes that human understanding of sexuality is often influenced by dominant cultural narratives and institutions, such as religion, recorded history, science, the media, and other external factors which work to construct and reinforce certain forms of sexual desire and expression as "normal" or "natural." And rather than viewing sexuality as a purely individual or biological aspect of human experience, Jackson argues that understandings of sexuality are deeply intertwined with social power relations, cultural values and beliefs, and historical processes of social change. And because books and recorded history form part of our understanding of sexuality and social change, I will be looking at the ways in which LGBTQI+ people wrote or were written about and presented in written texts as manifestations of visible politics. I argue that these visible politics are just as important as invisible politics and they work hand in hand to compliment one another.

At the time the SSMPA was being discussed as a bill in parliament, 3 books explicitly talked about LGBTQI+ people. The Bible, Qur'an, and Walking with Shadows by Jude Dibia. The two religious texts dominated conversations and people's views on sexual orientation and gender identity. Therefore, the teachings on sexuality were used heavily to justify

discrimination against LGBT individuals, and to base the law off the disapproval of those two books.

Given these factors, very few Nigerians authors or publishers felt compelled to produce any content addressing the issue of sexual orientation or gender identity hidden to avoid discrimination, harassment, or arrest. As a result, homosexuality was not very visible in books or other literature in Nigeria, except for the little-known book by Jude Dibia which was first published in Sweden where the author had immigrated to and had a cult following within the queer community. The book was the first positive representation of homosexuality where the protagonist did not suffer some ills due to his sexuality. Naturally queer people flocked to it because they saw themselves written in the story of Adrian and connected with Jude Dibia as a queer author. However, since 2014, at least 20 books have been written, edited, and published by LGBTQI+ people documenting the homosexual existence through fiction, memoirs, poetry, anthologies, and various other collections. The most recognizable being Freshwater by Akwaeke Emezi, We Are Flowers by Derrick Austin, Lives of Great Men by Chike Frankie Edozien, Blessed Bodies by Unoma Azuah, Embracing My Shadow by Sifa Asani Gowon, Under the Udala Trees by Chinelo Okparanta, She Called Me Woman - Edited Chitra Nagarajan, Swallow - Ayodele Olafintuade, Vagabonds! by Eloghosa Esunde, The Death of Vivek Oji by Akwaeke Emezi, Love Offers No Safety Edited by Olumide Makajuola, When We Speak of Nothing by Olumide Popoola, These Words Expose Us: An Anthology - Edited by Tade Ipadeola and Speak No Evil by Uzodinma Iweala. All of the books depict the lives of lesbian, bisexual and queer women, and some of them winning national acclaim and included in reading lists, school libraries and curricula. In looking at this new trend of LGBTQI+ stories, gender and class played a role in the choice of material that was published. Women's sexuality which is usually dismissed in patriarchal societies was produced little or no controversy at all. Class

played a role because all the books published were in some way financed by queer people of means or in positions of power.

When speaking to interview participants, many of them identified with the visibility of queerness in the media and mentioned impact it had on the ways they have chosen to resist erasure. Maya had this to say about Walking with Shadows

> *"The book resonated with me because I am an adult but I too am still hiding in hotel rooms for something that ideally I shouldn't be hiding about. That plot in the story resonated with me a lot…It is just like a year or two that I told my sister and started becoming more visible for myself. But there is still that bit of hiding."*

Estelle, a 29 year old trans woman was particularly influenced by Nagarajan's book. She credits it with being the catalyst that pushed her into leaving home and living her authentic self.

> *"That story represented transness in a way that I approve of. It isn't problematic. Because I know they are like me, there is a way I opened my heart to the story from the very first age. Reading the experience in there, I realized that there is a place in this country for a girl like me. It really changed my life you know, and I will still be hiding as a man if the book was not written."*

The above shows how visible and invisible politics can work hand in hand. The ways in which queer people are able to see themselves reflected in popular culture expands the ways in which they too imagine they can take up space in their lives and this helps individuals in the ways they show up to resist erasure that was codified in the SSMPA. Far from competing for prominence, visible and invisible politics work different ways to achieve the same goal

The big screen: Nollywood movies, and TV series

"Nigerian movies are not only popular and widely watched nationally and internationally; they also constitute a platform for the enactment of contemporary happenings and events. Consequently, through these Nigerian movies, knowledge of the expectations and events in the society are reflected." (Onanuga 2021, 5) As a venue for literary endeavors, Nollywood creates fictional works that reflect society. "In addition to serving as a source of amusement, it serves as a window through which social events are recorded and a repository through which public opinion is formed". (Onanuga 2021, 2) Karin Barber agrees with this position and points out that popular art, which Nollywood falls into, is "unofficial," playful, dynamic, and often serves as a local hub for cultural activity and can speak outside of or even against established structures of power. (Barber 1987) In supporting Barber, Azua and Grimm agreed that Nollywood is by no means populist art, or even an explicitly ideological one, although it is a place where one goes to find critiques of authority; it is also where one finds expressions of deeply conservative views with regards to gender and sexuality. (Green-Simms and Azuah 2012) It makes sense that queer visibility in Nollywood will be an important site to measure LGBTQI+ visibility in an attempt to explore how queer people are represented.

However, this was not reflected in the movies made for the big screen. Lindsey Green-Simms and Unoma Azua noted in their study of gay-themed Nigerian films that "homosexuality seems to be both a taboo and a minor obsession". (Green-Simms and Azuah 2012, 35) Hausa community which is tolerant of diverse gender expressions in men and publicly made space for 'dan daudu' was silent, erased, or provided no neutral or positive portrayal of diver gender expressions in the media. Instead, the movies which had LGBTQI+ people tended to be negative and harmful stereotypes with moralistic storyline meant to objectify and place in the role of the Other. In 2013 just before the SSMPA was passed into law, Grimm and Azua had documented Nollywood representation of LGBTQI+ identities in over 20 movies as negative, with producers

and directors explicitly wanting to condemn what they felt was a growing normalization of the topic. Interviews at the censors board also shows the deliberate efforts of censors made to ensure that the movies with homosexual themes have a 'balanced representation.' A balanced representation to the censors board meant one which "the consequences and immorality of homosexuality are made clear from the beginning." (Green-Simms and Azuah 2012, 34) The researchers found that the censors didn't object to the depiction homosexuality, what they found offensive, was the characters enjoyment of sexual acts. (Green-Simms and Azuah 2012) Although it is unsurprising that traditional Nollywood producers and directors shied away from telling LGBTQI+ stories after the SSMPA became law, queer people found a different way to be visible in this space. From available records, only 9 movies have been made with an explicitly LGBTQI+ character since the SSMPA became law. Those movies are Ífé, Walking with Shadows, We don't live Here Anymore, Hell or High Water, Everything In Between, Veil of Silence, Under the Rainbow, Busted, Braids on a Bald Head, Legends of the Underground, All the colors of the world are between Black and White. Of all 11 movies, eight of them were directed, produced, or funded by LGBTQI+ individuals and organizations with explicitly positive portrayal or LGBTQI+ characters. The outlier being Busted, which was met by backlash, and quickly disappeared from cinemas less that 3 weeks after its first screening. (Nwangwu 2022) In another interesting turn of events, Bisi Alimi who had fled Nigeria over a decade ago returned to Nigeria big screen with a husband in tow in 2018. This time, Alimi was courted by the biggest media houses to provide an exclusive interview and provide insights into the life of a married gay Nigerian. This again points at the way social class, gender and access can be a barrier or a tool that aids visibility of queer individuals in Nigeria. When Bisi Alimi was a student and worked in the NGO sector, he was ostracized and attacked until he fled the country. But now an award winning globally recognized face, what he had to say was suddenly important, and platforms jumped all over themselves to be the first to report it. This clearly

shows the impact of visible and invisible politics in play and underscores my argument. The simple act that he come home to Lagos with a husband caused so much curiosity that he was afforded an invitation for a nuanced conversation on love and same-sex marriage on prime time TV. This shift is partly due to how the SSMPA has instigated conversations around sexual orientation and gender identity from the private into the public sphere.

This chapter attempts to show how people conform to, or blur the lines of gender expectations in their performances based on their contexts. While some people used cumpulsary heterosexuality and the privildege of being a feminine woman to be queer in public without repercautions, others have to perform femninity to avoid consequences of just being themselves as visbly queer people. The chapter also shows how intersecting identities compound to affect the ways individuals can be visible dut to their social class or physical location. And this further butresses my central argument that both visible and invisible gendered politics are important in resisting, negociating or performing expected gender roles.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis emerged from a desire to comprehend the strategies employed by myself and other queer individuals residing in Lagos to survive, resist, and combat the attempts of erasure we have faced in recent years. Initially, my research aimed to explore why individuals adopted either visible or invisible political practices in their lives. However, as I engaged in interviews with participants, it became evident that a broader perspective was necessary. Consequently, my focus shifted to encompass a holistic view of the situation.

Chapter one served as an introduction to the thesis topic, highlighting its relevance and the need for attention. In chapter two, I provided the theoretical framework required to comprehend the cultural context under study, including postcoloniality, intersectionality, compulsory heterosexuality, and the politics of visibility and invisibility. Chapter three delved into the historical aspects of queerness in Nigeria, examining the influence of Arabian and British colonization, the introduction of external ideas, and the subsequent shaping of contemporary laws. Chapter four served to unpack visibility politics, exploring how queer individuals in Lagos navigate and resist erasure enforced by the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA), emphasizing the importance of both visible and invisible politics for successful hegemonic reconstruction.

Through this process of critical inquiry, I hope that my work has in some way addressed a relevant reality and fills a gap in the discourse of sexual orientation and gender identity in Nigeria that will prompt further exploration on the ways individuals perform in/visibility and resist erasure. By gaining a better understanding of how marginalized communities have used varying tactics to negotiate, and resist dominant gender norms and control tactics, we can foster a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary Lagos and the various ways in when sexual politics are changing. Ultimately, I hope this research encourages continued dialogue

and analysis, enabling a more informed and inclusive approach to the experiences of marginalized communities in Nigeria.

APPENDIX

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This is to state that I, _____, agree to participate in the research being conducted by Azeenarh Mohammed of the Gender Studies Department at Central European University. The extent of my involvement in this project will be to participate in one or more interviews with Azeenarh Mohammed, the primary investigator, in which I will be asked to speak about my own life and my experiences. My participation in this project is voluntary, and I know that I may refuse to participate, withdraw at any time, and/or decline to answer any questions without negative consequences.

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is to explore theories of motivation, and the role that class, gender, sexuality, religion, tribe, and location plays in the decision of queer people living in Lagos to 'come out of the closet" or disclose their sexuality. The interviews will be combined with archival and textual research to produce a master's thesis and may potentially be used for future publications.

B. PROCEDURES

This component of the research consists of a series of interviews conducted between the researcher, Azeenarh Mohammed, and the interviewee. The interview(s) will be recorded on the personal cell phone of the researcher and the audio from the interview(s) will remain encrypted within the private care of the researcher for transcription purposes. Written transcripts will be included in the final publication of the research, unless otherwise indicated by the interviewee, and all files of the audio recordings will be erased at the conclusion of the research process. In the resulting papers and publications, the interviewee will not be identified by name, subject except with express written consent. All other care to ensure anonymity will be undertaken, and a pseudonym will be used in place of interviewee's real name.

C. RISKS

There are **minimal risks** anticipated due to participation in this interview. However, the interviewee can withdraw their participation from the interview at any time without prejudice. During the interview, the interviewee may request to stop the recording at any time to discuss or clarify how they wish to respond to a question or topic before

proceeding. If the interviewee chooses to withdraw their participation entirely from the project during the interview, any tape made of that particular interview and any previous interviews will either be given to the participant or destroyed, along with any transcripts made from previous interviews.

If so desired, the researcher will provide the interviewee with copies of the recorded interviews, written transcripts, and any/all related papers and publications written by the researcher.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION (please initial to give consent)

I _____understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time without negative consequences.

I _____ agree to have my interview(s) recorded and used based on the above terms.

I _____ agree to be quoted directly ***OR*** agree to be quoted anonymously in the presentation of the research.

I _____ agree to the release of the transcript(s) of my interview(s) for the purpose of publication

E. INTERVIEWEE'S COMMENTS

Please identify below any desired restrictions related to the collection and publication of information from your interview(s).

I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Interview Name:

_____

Interviewee Signature:

_____Date:_____

Interviewer Signature:

_____Date:_____

Should you have any questions or concerns about this project or your rights as a participant, please contact Azeenarh Mohammed, xeenarh@gmail.com or via telephone on +2348187420122

I WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY OWN RECORDS.

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