Quietly Queer: Queer Women and Their Quest for Decent Work in Urban Kenya

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Queer women and their attempt to redefine and construct decent work in their community

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AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

This research thesis has been submitted in fulfillment of requirements for the Master of Arts in African Studies. This thesis comes with a short documentary which was sent separately to the supervisor.

Signed: Hodo Hassan

INTRODUCTION

Despite it being volatile, Kenya´s economy has shown high growth rates in the last few decades. However, this economic growth does not exactly translate into positive reduction in youth unemployment and poverty rates. Instead, underemployment and unemployment are both a prevalent phenomenon for the Kenyan youth. For example, 40% of the Kenyan population in 2019 were jobless and 85% of those unemployed were under the age of 35.[1] This situation is not exactly unique to Kenya. In fact, it is a global epidemic which has become the forefront of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as seen in Goal 8 which outlines the importance of creating decent jobs for young people. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines decent jobs as dignity, equality, fairer income and safe working conditions. According to ILO, decent work puts women, men and youth at the center of development, and gives them a voice in what they do.[2] For ILO, access to decent work is indispensable for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Despite the effort to make more jobs decent, most jobs available to youth in Kenya provide a meager paycheck and are often below the minimum wage. Such jobs do not offer an opportunity for a career progression nor a pathway to improve their livelihood. Due to the unreliable nature of a lot of jobs, compensation and the job itself is never guaranteed. Life changing opportunities are hard to come by, and often demand long hours and hard labour. To escape this reality, many youth in Kenya abandon formal employment all together and seek multiple informal positions to sustain themselves. In essence, formal employment in Kenya is treading water; despite the country's booming economy, the increase in the proportion of decent jobs compared to the number of eligible workers is quite negligible. This phenomenon presents a conundrum; lack of decent jobs has a significant detrimental impact not only on individuals, but also on the economic, social and development prospects of Kenya at large. Youth become more discouraged and dissatisfied which in return increases crime rates and social discontent. Faced with limited options, fierce competition, and, in some circumstances, extra personal vulnerabilities (such as destitute backgrounds and bad health), the majority of Kenya's young people rely on the work and self-employment alternatives provided by the informal sector.

Whilst youth unemployment is rampant across Kenya, gender disparity is a defining factor. The majority of unemployed youth are female and are mainly involved in the informal sector. This

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[1] Stephanie Cantor, 2019. Designing meaningful employment for Kenyan youth. LSE Blogs.

[2] The ILO's Decent Work Agenda., 2015. What is Decent Work? YouTube Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZpyJwevPqc

disappointing reality has its roots in the uneven and slow growth of decent work opportunities.[3] Women experience systematic barriers which may hinder their access to decent jobs. Various political and cultural factors such as discriminatory policies, prejudiced norms and values act as an obstacle for young women in Kenya when seeking jobs. Furthermore, disparities in educational access between male and female children contribute to the current gender discrepancies among youth in both labour force participation and employment. Access to decent jobs characterised by stable and good working conditions has remained a challenge to the majority of young women in Kenya. This struggle is more intensified for queer women who have trouble finding any job, let alone a decent one. Queer women face discrimination not only when seeking employment but also housing and health care. Thus, they are forced to engage in vulnerable and precarious types of employment which are far removed from the definition of decent jobs. Furthermore, the recent COVID-19 pandemic presented a tremendous challenge, which led to the re-evaluation of the concept of decent work. The pandemic has given rise to greater economic insecurity and inequality, adversely affecting the ability of people to find decent work to support a decent life; this disproportionately affects queer women.

Queer does not always imply a ferocious opposition. Being queer in Kenya entails manipulating the legal arenas and making use of the ambiguity of normative frameworks in order to make a living and seek place for dissent in the rigors of everyday life, rather than outright defiance of limiting gender and sexual normativity. To protect their family and themselves, women are quietly queer. In which case, what does queer life look like for those who are masculine-representing and cannot be quietly queer? How do queer women express their queerness while navigating the workforce, striving for urban success, and meeting familial and cultural expectations? Against this backdrop, this thesis disentangles the various dimensions of the lived experiences of queer women in the Kenyan labour market. The research question in this thesis looks at ‘how do queer women redefine and construct decent work in their community.’ It will begin by examining the historical and political overview of the current context in which queer women navigate the labour market. The theoretical framework will then follow. The methodologies employed to carry out this research will then be outlined. Finally, it will investigate the aforementioned themes by examining the respondents' narratives through a short documentary. Subsequently, there will be a conclusion that reflects on the documentary and its findings.

[3] INCLUDE Platform, Hodo Hassan., 2021. Protected, equal and secure - what is a decent job according to Kenyan youth?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ACADEMIC DEBATE

Before delving into queer women's experiences, it's critical to grasp the concept of "decent work" and its provenance. Globalisation has generated many economic opportunities throughout the years, but it has also contributed greatly to "social inequalities and personal insecurity" (ILO, 2001a, p. 28).[4] With technological advancements and shorter distances between people, labour markets have grown much more competitive. Competitiveness breeds employment insecurity and, eventually, poverty. The concept of decent work emerged as an institutional response to the labour market's deterioration. In September 2015, during the United Nations General Assembly, decent work and the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda (job creation, social protection, workplace rights, and social dialogue) were incorporated into the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defined a decent job as dignity, equality, fairer income and safe working conditions. According to ILO, decent work puts women, men and youth at the center of development, and gives them a voice in what they do.[5] The G20, G7, EU, African Union, and other international and regional groups have all issued statements and action plans emphasizing the importance of decent work in economic development as well as recovery.

According to Juan Somavá, the ILO's decent work approach is people-centered, and the concept is not defined in terms of any fixed norm or economic level because it varies between nations.[6] People all across the world have their own definition of decency, which varies depending on their society and context. This was especially clear in INCLUDE Platform's webinar series on 'What and when is a job decent according to youth in Africa?'.[7] This webinar dissected the official ILO definition of decent work and reflected on how it resonates with youth's own interpretation of the concept. It was clear from this that a universal definition of a decent job does not account for local and heterogeneous realities. Against this backdropped, this thesis explores queer women's own interpretation of the concept and whether it reflects their realities.

There is a great deal of research in the economic literature on youth unemployment, its nature, challenges, causes and consequences. Numerous studies have explored youth unemployment

[4] International Labour Organization (2001a). Perspectives on Decent Work: Statements by the ILO Director-General, January. Geneva: International Labour Office.
[5] ibid
[6] ibid
[7] INCLUDE Platform, 2021. '*What and when is a job decent according to youth in Africa?'* Synthesis Report.

in Kenya and attempted to provide an explanation as to why it's rampant across the country. There are a number of approaches, and they can be divided into categories that are analysed from a microeconomic or macroeconomic point of view. From a macroeconomic point of view, youth unemployment can be understood if we look at the characteristics of youth labour markets. Such characteristics include the size of the youth labour force, youth wages and aggregate demand.[8] The same way aggregate demands impact overall unemployment it affects youth unemployment. Generally, a decline in aggregate demands leads to a decline in the demand for labour and thus for youth. Various studies have outlined why fluctuations in aggregate demand disproportionately impacts youth. Since youth are more vulnerable to layoffs as they have more unstable contracts, they find themselves in precarious situations. During times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, firms react by firing younger employees and freezing their hiring process, again affecting youth disproportionately. Thus, youth unemployment is particularly sensitive to aggregate demand fluctuations.[9] Whilst this is a dilemma for all youth, young females in Kenya are disproportionately affected by aggregate demand.

Another major contributor to youth unemployment in Kenya is the size of the youth cohort; the more youth entering the labour market, the higher the number of jobs that need to be created. In 2013, the ILO conducted research on 'Understanding the drivers of youth labour market in Kenya'.[10] The study demonstrated that Kenya's population is growing rapidly; according to UN World Population Prospects (UNDESA, 2011), the youth population will reach 17.9 million by 2050, which is double the figure of 2011. This is compelling evidence that the government needs to urgently create employment in order to benefit from the youth bulge phenomena. Despite the growing youth population, youth in Kenya are underrepresented in the labour market. As such, the youth employment-to-population ratio is less than half the adult employment rate and of the lowest youth employment rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. This placed Kenya among the countries with the biggest disparities between adults and youth, with the employment gap between them reaching 43 percent in 2011.[11] The study accentuated the particular struggles that young Kenyan women are exposed to in the workforce and demonstrated that they're disproportionately affected by the low employment-to-population ratios; the gender gap in employment participation in Kenya is the highest across SSA.

Whilst this obvious intuition has been explored in several studies, there is no agreement on how important youth cohort size is when determining youth unemployment.[12] Some studies see aggregate demand factors to be more crucial than demographic ones. For some, in the presence of aggregate demand the size of the youth cohort is insignificant.[13] In addition to

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[8] O'Higgins, N. 2001. *Youth unemployment and employment policy*: A global perspective (Geneva, ILO).
[9] Tanveer Choudhry, M., Marelli, E. and Signorelli, M. (2012), "Youth unemployment rate and impact of financial crises", *International Journal of Manpower*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 76-95.
[10] Verónica Escudero Elva López Mourelo, ILO Research Paper No.8., 2013. *Understanding the drivers of youth labor market in Kenya*
[11] ibid
[12] Perugini, C.; Signorelli, M. 2010. "Youth labour market performance in European regions", in Economic Change and Restructuring, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 151–185.
[13] Korenman, S.; Neumark, D. 1997. Cohort crowding and youth labour markets: A cross-national analysis, NBER Working Paper No. 6031. (Cambridge, MA, National Bureau of Economic Research).

aggregate demand and cohort size, employment protection and wages are key components of youth unemployment. According to macroeconomic approaches, increasing wages negatively impact youth unemployment as it increases the incentives of firms to hire their adult counterparts. Again, this problem is exacerbated for young women as they're already confronted with issues pertaining to the gender pay gap.

On the other hand, the microeconomic perspective outlines the specific characteristics of youth that affect their access to decent jobs. In recent years, the influence of gender, race and sexuality differences on the labour market have been widely acknowledged and studied. However, one particular characteristic, namely human capital endowment, seems to be a prime determinant of the labour market success. Those who advocate for the human capital theory assert that having more experience and the appropriate education makes you more apt to succeed when it comes to accessing decent job opportunities.[14] Young girls in particular are disproportionately disadvantaged as they are deprived of access to education and reproductive autonomy. With that being said, educational attainment is not the only direct measurement of human capital, as there are other key components which young people often lack. Knowledge acquired through formal education is not always sufficient for firms who require transferable skills that are necessary for a productive workplace.[15] Additionally, familial connections, status and network also influences a young person's employment prospects.[16]

In addition, there is various research that addresses the gendered aspect of decent jobs in Kenya and across the globe. For example, the ILO published a report ´Gender equality at the heart of decent work´ in 2009, to address sex discrimination in the world of work and illustrated their interventions across regions.[17] Furthermore, barriers women face when it comes to accessing jobs have been examined by numerous scholars. For example, Ercan, et al (2010) pointed out that domestic chores and childcare responsibilities hinder a lot of women from finding employment and participating in the labour market.[18] Others have argued that migration, urbanisation, traditional norms and values have restricted women and prevented them from finding formal employment. Unplanned pregnancies and early marriages stop young women from accessing decent jobs in the formal sector.[19] Maternity presents a lot of women with additional tasks and challenges, which reduces the chances of them getting a decent job; thus, lacking a decent income to sustain themselves and their children. Rosemary Atieno (2006) outlined the importance of education for women and how it contributes to the overall socio-economic development through improved child health, decreased fertility rates, and higher

[14] Becker, G.S. 1975. Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis (New York, NY, National Bureau of Economic Research.

[15] *Luciano Mauro* and *Gaetano Carmeci., 2003.* Long run growth and investment in education: Does unemployment matter?*Journal of Macroeconomics*, vol. 25, issue 1, 123-137

[16] Verhaeghe, P.; Li, Y.; Van de Putte, B. 2012. "Socio-economic and ethnic inequalities in social capital from the family among labour market entrants", in European Sociological Review.
[17] International Labour Conference, 98th Session, 2009. *Gender equality at the heart of decent work.* Report VI
[18] Ercan, H, A., Hosgor, G. & Yılmaz, O. (2010)., *Factors that Affect Women's Labor Force Participation and Suggestions for Provincial Employment and Vocational Education Boards: Ankara, Gaziantep and Konya*
[19] Sara Elder and Sriani Kring, *Young and female - a double strike? Gender analysis of school-to-work transition surveys in 32 developing countries* Publication Series

labour productivity.[20] However, while education is useful for women and does equip them with the necessary skills, it still does not guarantee jobs in the formal sector because cultural and social practices could still hinder women from securing such jobs. Most studies have shown that patriarchal norms act as a barrier and hinder women's chances of landing a decent job. Social propriety and familial concern for women's safety confine a lot of women to their homes and limit their participation in the labour market.

Whilst there is a plethora of research explaining issues pertaining to youth unemployment and the gendered aspect of such phenomena, there is little research on the experiences of queer women when seeking decent job opportunities in Kenya, and in Africa in general. A research that somewhat addresses these issues is the ILO's 2016 'Discrimination at work on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (PRIDE Project)'.[21] This research addressed the struggles of LGBT people within employment across a number of countries, including South Africa, and explored good practices that promote inclusivity within the workplace. Queer people often experience exclusion, discrimination and harassment from the labour force namely because of preconceptions of how women and men are supposed to behave and appear as well as perceived non-conformity within the heteronormativity.[22] Women who deviate from the supposed ideals of a female experience immense harassment and discrimination. The study exposed the horrific experiences that lesbian, gay and bisexual workers are exposed to within the labour market. For example, women in the study spoke of accounts where they were asked to 'prove' their femininity or masculinity in order to feel valued and accepted at the workplace.

Generally, recent studies have been more attentive to the experiences of queer people in Kenya. For example, Kevin Mwachiro's groundbreaking publication of Invisible: Stories from Kenya's Queer Community (2013) gave prominence to issues concerning the queer community in Kenya.[23] Mwachiro collected a number of stories which highlight the experiences of queer people and burst the myth that homosexuality is a foreign or Western practice. One of the chapters in the book, "Turkanas can't be Gay', demonstrates the supposed Kenyan believe that those who are far removed from urban cities, which are often saturated with western influence, are not homosexuals. The book provides a comprehensive picture of the lives of the Kenyan queer community.[24] Additionally, in 2020 the University of Minnesota published their research on 'Rights of LGBTQI+ Citizens and Non-Citizens in Kenya', which delved deep into the pervasive human-rights issues that queer people in the country are subjected to. The paper calls for the Kenyan government to take a decisive action against the violations based on gender identity and sexual orientation and comply with its obligation under the ICCPR. It displayed the discrimination that LGBTQI+ people face when seeking housing, healthcare, and employment in Kenya. It exposed the experiences of LGBTQI+ refugees who have additional vulnerabilities that

[20] Rosemary Atieno., 2006. *Female participation in the labour market: The case of the informal sector in Kenya.* Institute for Development Studies University of Nairobi.
[21] International Labour Organisation., 2016. Discrimination at work on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity: Results of the ILO's PRIDE Project.
[22] ibid
[23] Mwachiro, Kevin., 2013. Invisible: stories from Kenya's queer community. Issue: 8.
[24] ibid

derive mainly from the policies that limit their freedom of movement, their insecure status, and delay in accessing appropriate legal protection and documentation.[25]

With that being said, there is limited research on queer women in Kenya and the possible barriers they face when seeking decent employment. There is also a lack of research on how queer women perceive the official definition of decent jobs and whether it reflects their reality. Essentially, existing literature fails to highlight the intersectional barriers queer women in Kenya face when accessing decent jobs. This thesis attempts to fill this void. Using a gendered lens, this paper will uncover how young queer women between the ages of 18 and 35 in Kenya, particularly Nairobi, view the official ILO definition of decent work and the extent to which it reflects their realities. Furthermore, due to the unprecedented nature of COVID-19, this paper will also assess how queer women maneuver the challenges that came with the pandemic.

QUEERNESS IN KENYA: BACKGROUND CONTEXT

In order to understand the current context of queer women and the challenges they face, it's important to unpack the historical background. Theories or practices concerned with contemporary international development, such as the 'Leave No One Behind' agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals, are emphasising the importance of identity-based discrimination and its role in perpetuating lack of development and poverty. As such, there is a prevalent interest from the international community in supporting queer people, especially women in African countries, as the need to learn about their realities in a different context becomes more pivotal. Across Africa, there is a contemporary trend of growing homophobia as the discourse around homosexuality becomes more acrimonious. This is due to the intersection of sexual panic and a distorted notion that perceives homosexuality as a foreign import and a neocolonial imposition which is determined to destroy the social and moral foundation of African society. This discourse can be traced back to colonial times, as European colonial powers eradicated aspects of Africa's history to validate their civilising mission. During pre-colonial Africa, sexuality was highly complex; the organisation of sexuality, gender and reproduction were nothing like the rigid structures of today's Africa. Thus, it is important to not romanticize the notion of sexuality in this era as unbridled and unrestricted.

When exploring the discourse surrounding queerness in Kenya, it is crucial to first address the term that is used unreflectively when speaking about homosexuality. Although we've briefly reflected on the ubiquitous myth surrounding the claim that homosexuality is 'un-African,' it is worth noting that the concept of homosexuality, not the act, may indeed be a foreign one and thus new to Africa. Michael Foucault indicated in his pioneering study of sexuality in the Western world, The History of Sexuality (1978), that the social construction of homosexual identity is a recent Western concept; this is due to its one of a kind formulation of male-to-male sexual

[25] University of Minnesota Law School Human Rights Litigation and International Advocacy Clinic & Human Rights Center., 2020. Rights of LGBTQI+ Citizens and Non-Citizens in Kenya.

interaction that "assumes a lifelong predisposition."[26] This is a foreign concept in Africa because the issue of same-sex desire is highly intricate and has not been historically recognised as an identity. According to Summers C (1995), while there is not a name alluding to a specific category called 'homosexuality', the behavior that is commonly attributed to this term has always existed, and is traceable to pre-colonial periods.[27] For him, this is because Africans preferred to speak of such emotions and acts rather than putting people in specific categories; he sees this tendency to categorise people as one that is inextricably rooted in colonial rule. Murray and Roscoe (1998) share Summers' observation and argue that the only thing missing from the pre-colonial African same-sex patterns is a lifestyle and an identity in which homosexual relationships are paramount and not based on a sexual behavior.[28] They assert that it is the Western model of homosexuality that is bent on defining individuals solely on the basis of their sexual object choice. Against this backdrop, it's clear that homosexuality is consistent with pre-colonial traditions in Africa and is certainly not a colonial import.

Moral sexual panics are said to be a political construct. Over the years, African political leaders have regurgitated colonial stereotypes and used moral sexual panics to marginalise the queer community. They use moral sexual panic as a form of political manipulation in order to deflect economic hardships and uphold oppressive postcolonial regimes. Such leaders have publicly condemned homosexuality; for example, the ex-president of Kenya, Daniel arap Moi stated that 'homosexuality is against African norms and traditions.'[29] Similarly, the current president of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, has on many occasions referred to the discourse surrounding homosexuality as 'a non-issue' and 'not of interest' to Kenya's development. This odd appeal by African leaders to criminalise homosexuality and police masculinity has detrimental effects on queer people and hinders their ability to access services such as health, employment and education. In light of this, this thesis will explore the challenges queer women encounter when seeking employment in a country where its political leaders denounce their identity.

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[26] Yee, N. (2003) Catching the Phoenix: The Social Construction of Homosexuality. [Online] Available from: http://www.nickyee.com/ponder/social_construction.html

[27] Summers C (I1995) The Gay and Lesbion Literary Heritoge:A Reoder's Companion to the Writers and their Works, from Antiquity to the Present New York. Henry Holt.

[28] Murray S and Roscoe W (1998) Bay-Wives and Femole Husbands: Studies of Africon Homosexualities, New York: St Martin's Press.

[29] HOAD, N.W. (2007) African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I will now contextualise the research by discussing the theoretical framework that was used to fully grasp the data collected in the field. A number of theoretical frameworks have been useful in understanding how young queer women in Nairobi navigate the workforce. Using identity theories rooted in philosophy, I will examine how identity concerns obstruct queer women's ability to find decent work. For example, Michel Foucault's notion of identity is one that is especially relevant to this research. According to him, identity is a political concept that is necessary for the power methods that control human beings.[30] Identities are thus contingent and dynamic, they are formed by historically inherited modes of behavior, beliefs, and norms. Foucault asserts that sexuality is not a natural fact or feature of humanity but a socially constructed category of experience which has social, cultural, and historical, rather than biological origins.[31] This is not to say that Foucault dismissed any biological factor, but rather that he emphasized the importance of institutions and discourses in the creation of sexuality. He demonstrates that gender identity does not emerge automatically and necessarily from a biological sex. In her extensively acclaimed book Gender Trouble, Judith Butler (1990), also embraces this line of thought. Human cultural representations of the body as a necessary and natural ground for gender-identity, according to Butler, serves a normative purpose in the power/knowledge approach that forces individuals into two opposing gender-categories.[32] In essence, it serves as a key tool in the preservation of the dominant heterosexual matrix. This is seen in many African countries, where governments and organisations actively marginalize queer people in order to promote the prevailing heterosexual matrix.

Furthermore, a feminist theoretical lens would considerably contribute to this research and understanding the underlying systems that reinforce gendered divisions and impede queer women in the workforce. First wave feminism was concerned with issues pertaining to gender equality. The concept that gender is a social construction based on the assigned sex at birth is at the heart of feminist thought. Feminism has evolved over time to incorporate different forms of identity oppression. Diverse groups, such as women of color, transgender persons, and homosexual and non-masculine boys and men, are becoming included in modern feminism.[33] Feminists strive to deconstruct the hegemonic binary, which states that a 'normal' man who exhibits masculine characteristics, is sexually dominating, and is attracted to people who possess female genitalia, display feminine behaviors, and are sexually submissive.[34] Furthermore, feminism establishes a conceptual and activist framework for queer theory by

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[30] Halperin, David M. "Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and the History of Sexuality." *Representations*, no. 63, 1998, pp. 93–120. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2902919.
[31] Johanna Oksala., 2004. Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience. Hypatia Vol. 19, No. 4 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 99-121
[32] Butler, J. (1999). Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity (Rev ed.). New York, NY: Routledge
[33] Julie Gedro and Robert C. Mizzi., 2014. Feminist Theory and Queer Theory: Implications for HRD Research and Practice. Reprints and permissions: SAGE.
[34] Marinucci, M. (2010). Feminism is queer. London, England: Zed Books.

questioning assumptions about identity whilst bringing private prejudices, inequities, limits, and stereotypes into the public domain. Sexual minorities have had to fight against heteromasculine acts of bias and marginalisation in the same way that women have had to fight against categories that relegate them to second-class status in theory, practice, society, politics, and economy.[35] As such, queer and feminist theory are spokes of the same epistemological wheel and connected in many ways.[36] Separating the two theoretical orientations merely breaks down inclusion and reduces the possibility of genuine change. Both feminist and queer theory inform this research as they expose strong and power-packed labour systems, which are mostly founded on heteromasculinist ideals. While these theories are helpful in understanding the realities of queer women in Nairobi, it was critical for me to grasp their local sense of gender, identity, and sexuality rather than imposing my own western categorisations.

Gender, identity and sexuality all play an important role in the lives of the young women in this study, as the documentary will show. Their masculinity and feminine expressions not only influence their employment and access to opportunities, but also provide them a sense of being-in-the-world as they establish themselves in society through various social venues. The participants pointed to the highly entrenched character of heteromasculinity within the workforce, where many of the oppressive attitudes and practices associated are carried out in ways that are not conscious; much of the oppression occurs without conscious intent.[37] That being said, in an effort to be more progressive, there has been a recent trend toward diversity and inclusivity in the labour market. However, there have been problematic trends of exclusion even under this guise of inclusion and diversity. “Structural discrimination functions through everyday activities of individuals,” according to Freedman (2002), and “discriminatory practices originate in our beliefs about gender.‘[38] Biases exist on both a conscious and unconscious level, manifesting themselves in visible forms such as income discrepancies between men and women, as well as the number of men in high-ranking positions. Queer women are at the bottom of the totem pole, despite the fact that this impacts all women. In order to transform the status quo and develop truly inclusive and merit-based practices and policies, it is critical to bring such preconceptions about gender expression, sexual orientation, and gender identity to light (perhaps through feminist and queer theories that mutually inform each other). It is these theoretical ideas that have served as the foundation for the debates in this thesis.

The research took an interdisciplinary approach, both methodologically and theoretically, which means it frequently draws on paradigms and theories that cross disciplines and concentrates on a variety of disciplines.[39] Researching queer women in Nairobi and the Kenyan labour force necessitated the application of a variety of theories from gender studies, politics, to feminist and queer theories. Interdisciplinary studies, it is claimed, better portray the complexity and

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[35] de Lauretis, T. (1991). Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities. Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, 3(2), iii-xviii.
[36] Gedro, J. (2010). The lavender ceiling atop the global closet. Human Resource Development Review, 9, 385-404.
[37] Bierema, L. L. (2009). Critiquing human resource development’s dominant masculine rationality and evaluating its impact. Human Resource Development Review, 8, 68-96.
[38] Freedman, E. (2002). No turning back. New York, NY: Ballantine Books. p. 167/168
[39] Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2006) The disciplinary, interdisciplinary and global dimensions of African studies, International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity, 1:2, 195-220

indivisibility of real life more than traditional fields.[40] Queer women's issues are multifaceted and complex, therefore comprehending them demands the application of sophisticated and interdisciplinary theories that overlap and incorporate concepts from numerous academic fields. In addition, when seeking to comprehend the realities of queer women in the Kenyan workforce, Crenshaw's intersectionality theory proves useful. In essence, intersectionality recognizes that race issues intersect with other categories such as class and gender, and that one cannot fully comprehend racial or class discrimination without taking into account how these categories intersect with other categories that each contribute to our identity and how we perceive the world around us.[41] The process of looking for work is gendered, and it can make a big difference in whether or not you receive a decent job. As a result, it would be impossible to capture the realities of queer women and effect real change unless we understood how the various theories intersect.

I will now discuss my position in this research as a feminist and a close stranger. In the 1970s, feminist anthropological research encouraged women to study other women in order to have women's stories presented by other women who were better positioned to reflect women's experiences and represent previously silenced voices.[42] This line of thought was widely criticised for its inability to provide an objective account of reality. Many experts, on the other hand, responded that it is nearly impossible to assume that objective research is even possible. Against this backdrop, I feel that my position as a feminist and a close stranger (born in Nairobi and raised in Somalia) permitted this research to take shape precisely because of, rather than in spite of, my proximity. As a result, I was able to develop trust, and we always had something in common to discuss during the interviews, making our interactions seamless. This was quite helpful because establishing trust in a virtual setting was a hurdle I didn't know how to overcome at first. Considering my position as a straight privileged black woman now residing in the west, I was nevertheless very careful not to go outside of boundaries. Being a close stranger and an insider researcher has its own disadvantages because there may be room for assumptions and a know-it-all attitude. In the absence of a shared cultural experience, an outsider may be ideally positioned to access creative ‘hegemonic discourse,' according to McCurdy and Uldum (2013), but an insider's position may include taken-for-granted views.[43] However, as previously stated, remaining fully objective is nearly impossible, and to some extent, being a close stranger provided new perspectives to the research that would not have been possible otherwise.

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[40] ibid, 4
[41] Crenshaw, K. W. (2006). Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color. *Kvinder, Køn &Amp; Forskning*, (2-3).
[42] Lewin, Ellen, and William L. Leap. 1996. ‘’Introduction.’’ In Out in the Field: Reflections of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists, edited by Ellen Lewin and William L. Leap, 1-28. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
[43] McCurdy, Patrick, and Julie Uldam. "Connecting participant observation positions: Toward a reflexive framework for studying social movements." Field Methods 26, no. 1 (2014): 40-55

NAVIGATING METHODOLOGY

I will now provide a summary of the methodology employed to collect data in this research, as well as the procedure that went along with it. Due to a number of setbacks, I only began collecting data on February 28, 2021; the research lasted four months, from February to June. I was able to illustrate the perspectives of queer women in the Kenyan workforce using interviews, casual phone calls, text messages, and social media studies. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this research was primarily virtual and lacked any ‘field' research. Despite this, the research utilized visual recording as a means of amplifying the perspectives of Nairobi's queer women. I will first outline how I went about collecting the data and what methodology I employed. I will explain why ethnography was especially appropriate for a research that explores the intersection between queer identities and youth employment. I will then elaborate on the various methodological challenges that accompany doing an ethnography during a pandemic, and how that allowed my research to take a certain shape. Additionally, I will reflect on my position in the ‘field’ as a researcher, navigating both virtual proximity and space; I'll discuss the value of visual ethnography and how it helped me navigate the virtual world. When describing the methodology, I will make use of anecdotes to explain how the data was acquired. Furthermore, I'll go into more detail about why I decided to make a documentary and the process that went along with it. Finally, I'll discuss the ethical difficulties that arose during this research and how they were addressed.

DATA COLLECTION AND REFLECTIONS

It was 7am Dutch time, on a very cold Monday, when I met Lexy (a 30 year old transgender woman). Despite the Monday morning blues, the call started with laughter and warm conversations. After several attempts to set up a zoom call, we finally managed to meet. Lexy was a very busy woman hence the difficulty in arranging the interview. “My phone broke, and I’ve realised how useless I am without it.” She explained why I couldn't reach her for a few days as we debated the influence and dependence of technology on our life. We spoke about everything from our favorite songs to our desired holiday destinations. Our casual conversation went on for 30 minutes before we started the interview. She was extremely outgoing and pleasant to talk to; it almost felt like talking to an old friend. I was worried that doing my interviews on zoom would erase and substitute in-person exchanges. However, it was here that I realised that zoom was at best complementing rather than substituting these valuable in-person interactions. It nearly felt like we were having a face-to-face chat, disguising the considerable distance between us. Lexy would share some of her favorite songs with me over a cup of tea during our breaks, and it was here that we would communicate personal anecdotes about our lives. Zoom provided us with a degree of ease and closeness that I had not expected.

It was evident from this brief reflection of my first encounter with Lexy (30 years old), which I wrote in between pauses of our initial zoom chat, that conducting research in this manner would not only be novel, but also dynamic. Although I had my doubts about using multimedia platforms for my research, this interview unexpectedly unveiled the various layers of Lexy's story. It was at this moment of my research that I reached what they would describe as 'rich points'; as explained by Marte (2018), 'moments of dissonance and impasse through which we question our project design, our methods, our locations, and our very presence in particular 'fields''.[44] I was able to overcome my doubts about doing ethnography during a pandemic. Accepting that this research would not take the form of a standard ethnography and would not follow a clear-cut design was crucial in utilizing such "rich moments" in my research. Upon reflection, I came to the conclusion that conducting an ethnography to gain further insight into issues pertaining to queer women and employment in Kenya was the most appropriate methodology.

Since technology, social media and visual information is pervasive in today's world, I thought it would be appropriate to make use of such information and conduct a visual ethnography. According to Sarah Pink, the same way images are inextricably embedded in our personal identities, daily life, culture, as well as history and space, ethnographic research is also interlinked with visual images and socio-cultural representations.[45] Producing my short documentary and discussing it became a crucial part of my ethnographic knowledge. For Bank, incorporating videos or images in the collection of data or creation of research provides the ethnographer with an opportunity to get a new insight into their study which would have not been possible otherwise. The process of developing and editing the final documentary revealed more information that I had neglected previously. Over the course of two months, I was able to conduct interviews with all of my participants through Zoom. I ensured that I recorded the videos, with the consent of the participants. These videos, as well as others I obtained directly from Nairobi, were combined to construct the final documentary.

I initiated the process of finding participants by contacting a number of organisations that worked on the ground with queer people, women in particular. After an arduous process of composing emails and making phone calls, I received a contact in Nigeria from a colleague at my internship. I pursued a long chain of contacts from there, which eventually led me to five female participants in Nairobi, ranging in age from 26 to 36. Having a diverse pool of participants was highly crucial for the research in order to capture the experiences of queer women in Kenya. As a result, three of the informants were lesbians, one was transgender, and one was non-gender conforming, male-representing. Despite the challenges, obtaining participants was considerably easier than expected, especially given that this study was looking at a fairly sensitive topic in Kenya. I began texting the informants and getting to know them individually before setting up an interview. It was critical for me to get to know them on a basic level before inviting them to participate in the interview, to ensure that they were both comfortable and appropriate for the research. We mainly texted over WhatsApp, but some preferred to have phone conversations. For example, Lexy (30 years old) would phone me

[44] Marte, Lidia. 2018. *"'Rich Points' and 'Deep-Hanging Out'."* Anthropology News website, April 5, 2018. DOI: 10.1111/AN.815
[45] Pink, S. (2007). *Doing visual ethnography* (Second Edition ed.). SAGE Publications, Ltd https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9780857025029

every few days because she couldn't text, owing to her hectic job schedule. After a few weeks of texting my informants, I began the interview process.

During the months of fieldwork, interacting with the participants necessitated being knowledgeable of all the social media sites they used (primarily WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram). Even after the data collection procedure was completed, I continued to follow their social media posts in order to gain a better insight of their viewpoints and way of life. This was especially important in this research as it was deprived of face-to-face encounters. Each participant's social media activity was gathered in the form of screen recordings and screenshots, which were subsequently turned into PDF documents. The use of screen recordings was fascinating as it allowed me to capture text messages, social media posts, and videos all in one screen recording. In essence, keeping track of their social media activities and capturing them with screen recordings brought a new dimension to my research, making my ‘’field enquiries more accessible, and ‘thicker’ in Greetz’s sense’’(Crawford et al. 1992, p.6). The strain of conducting ethnographic research virtually pushed the research beyond its original limitations, resulting in it being richer and more in-depth.

Due to the fear of not having enough data during fieldwork, I was always looking for novel approaches to comprehend my informant's perspectives and experiences, despite the fact I was not in Nairobi. I was aware that it would take more than the ordinary interviews to develop a final video which had layers and a profound viewpoint. As such, I utilised photovoice methodology to overcome this challenge. Photovoice is a visual research methodology that places cameras in the hands of participants to assist the researcher in documenting, reflecting on, and communicating problems of concern, thus introducing more dimension into the research. Since its conception in the early 1990s by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris, photovoice methodology has grown in popularity over the last two decades.[46] Photovoice is often utilized as a participatory action research approach with underprivileged communities that have been marginalised in the political sphere. Participants reflect on and articulate their community's concerns using ethnographic methodologies that blend photography, critical discussion, and experience knowledge to express their culture, highlight societal problems, and inspire social change.[47] By means of photovoice, my participants were able to shoot a "Day in the Life" vlog, which not only offered me material for the final video, but also gave me further understanding of their perspectives and daily life. An essential element of the photovoice approach was its ability to empower participants, as it recognizes the relevance of their expertise and perspective, which is not fully realised from the outside. Having the participants’ input and little control over the content they were producing caused a lot of ambiguity about what the ultimate result would be. That being said, it aided me in navigating the difficulties of distance and proximity.

My internship made a big contribution to the process of collecting data. As a research assistant, I led the delivery of a weekly webinar series that examines how young people in ten African countries, including Kenya, interpret the ILO's decent work definition. It aims to deconstruct the

[46] Wang C, Burris MA. Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*. 1997;24(3):369-387.
[47] Carlson ED, Engebretson J, Chamberlain RM. Photovoice as a Social Process of Critical Consciousness. *Qualitative Health Research*. 2006;16(6):836-852.

official ILO definition of decent employment and consider how it aligns with their personal interpretation of the concept. I secured diverse input by carrying out extensive research and engaging with NGOS as well as Government organisations that work on the ground and specialise in youth development. Moreover, using a number of social media platforms such as Twitters, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram, I interfaced with young people; the use of social media platforms was beneficial for connecting with young people, as it allowed me to understand their interests and priorities, which then informed the webinars. Following each webinar, I also produced a news item that collated the webinar's findings. I coordinated with the communications team to ensure that these news articles, as well as an edited short video summarizing the webinar, are published. Whilst the objective of the webinar series was to bring effective and meaningful youth participation to the discussion, it still failed to enhance and represent the voices of the more marginalised and vulnerable groups in the labour market, such as queer women. The organization of these webinars piqued my curiosity in focusing on queer women's experiences in particular. My initial batch of data came from the Kenyan webinar. This webinar provided me with a comprehensive picture of the Kenyan context and its labour market. The general view was that the ILO's definition of a decent work does not represent different and local realities; there are numerous obstacles that impede adolescents in their decent employment search, which is compounded for women. In summary, the webinar series was a vital part of my data gathering process, influencing my research and inspiring my desire to focus specifically on queer women.

DOING AN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

‘That day, I woke up tired of being locked away in this closet and went to work ready to reveal my secret.’ For a long time, Annabell kept her identity hidden and claimed to be a heterosexual woman at work in order to get along with her coworkers. Hearing her experience opened my eyes to the privileges that come with being a straight woman in the workforce, particularly in the Western world. I never woke up any day with the intention of concealing my identity in order to make my life at work more bearable; it does not ever cross my mind. I went into the field with a heavy heart and a sympathetic feeling towards the experiences of Kenyan queer women, which only grew worse after this interview. However, the unexpected findings made in the first and second interview were somewhat surprising and flagged the need to reexamine my preconceived opinions of what queer women experience in Nairobi. ‘But that day simply opened a bag of worms and reinforced why I had kept my identity hidden all this time. After a few weeks, I realised that news had spread and everyone knew I was the lesbian working in the pharmacy. Customers and coworkers both regarded me differently. I eventually became concerned about my own and my family's safety, as I encountered threats. Despite my negative experience, I am more fortunate than the male-representing queer women who do not even go as far as getting a job.' This was the second interview I had and it was very early on in my data collection. I spoke to Annabell through WhatsApp on a number of occasions before setting up the interview. I was enthusiastic going into the interview, but I was still unsure about how the interview would go because I sensed a somewhat closed off energy from Annabell in our earlier chats. I was still pessimistic about carrying out an ethnography during a pandemic. Annabell,

contrary to my expectations, was open about her experiences, whether it was pleasant or negative. This helped me realize the difference between texting and speaking with someone via zoom. The two-and-a-half-hour interview was filled with rich stories about Annabell's experience as a queer woman merely trying to make a livelihood in Nairobi. It exposed me to the variations in struggles that queer women face when both looking for and maintaining a decent job.

From this collection of field notes from my time with Annabell (36 years old), it is obvious that zoom may still offer space for narratives to unfold, grow, and sometimes significantly change over time. Since this was my second interview, I was still figuring out how to conduct ethnography during a pandemic while also seeking to engage my informants through meaningful interactions. As such, the question that lies at the heart of this research, is how to conduct ethnography during a pandemic on something that remains largely unspoken. The initial form of anthropological ethnography emphasised the importance of the researcher being physically present and participating in the culture being explored. In the case of internet ethnography, data is often gathered digitally without face-to-face interactions. The questions that arise here are: does an ethnographer require the physical presence of its subject in order for it to be an authentic ethnographic study? Or is the assumption that the presence of an ethnographer is crucial an outdated one? For some, perhaps this simply indicates a false or somewhat distorted notion of personhood in a postmodern world. According to Mark Poster (1990), postmodernity disperses and de-centers identities, blurring the boundaries between machines and humans. It was important for this study to consider that, with the existence of portable computers, mobile phones, and social media, electronic virtuality is deeply immersed in actuality in a more active and dispersed way than we ever imagined; which has now been exacerbated with the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. This poses both a methodological and theoretical issue: do we understand what happens online in the context of the normal lives (offline) of people who we interact with online? Or do we simply focus on what is presented to us online, without accounting for the reality on the ground? Since everything is virtual, the cultures are not objects that can be touched or seen in reality, possibly leading to misinterpretation on the ethnographer's behalf. I had to think critically about these discourses because the usage of various platforms like social media, WhatsApp, and Zoom, became vital in order to communicate with the informants.

My research exposed me to the potential and importance of visual ethnography in the study of culture and society.[48] The application of visual ethnography helped to solve some of the issues that derived from the COVID-19 pandemic. Film ethnography allows the researcher to display intricate networks of images through which a range of ambiguous cultural constructions and resonances can be comprehended.[49] As such, opting for a documentary was the most appropriate way to display the results of this research. This became more evident as time passed; I found that, unlike the shaky footage that I received from the participants, my field notes never truly gave me a sense of what queer women experience in the workforce. I therefore thought that a documentary would provide a better anthropological understanding of

[48] Jacknis, Ira. “Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Bali: Their Use of Photography and Film.” *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1988, pp. 160–177. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/656349. Accessed 6 July 2021.
[49] ibid

knowledge in the context of queer women and the labour market. In addition, the use of visual ethnography and photovoice aided this research greatly in gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of marginalized people in another culture, allowing Western audiences to observe life through the eyes of non-European insiders.[50] This was especially relevant to this research because the discourse surrounding homosexuality is typically exclusive to the Western world, and thus there was a desperate need to explore the African context. From the empirical data presented in the documentary, it is evident that most of the insights I gained would not have been possible if I had just conducted formal interviews, using a standardised method of asking informants the same set of questions.

Fieldwork is the core of ethnography, as the researcher encounters the other and constructs their own ethnographic theory from the lived experience. It is the strategies, difficulties and discoveries in the field that shape the research and its final product. This was especially true in my case, as I was navigating the difficulties of conducting an ethnography during a pandemic. Like many other researchers, I was unprepared to deal with the technical, ethical, and technological advances that come with conducting research in the midst of a pandemic, and I was forced to constantly reassess my research endeavors. Entering the field necessitates prolonged contact with interlocutors, as well as the suspension of one's own ways of thinking, habits, and morality in order to gain access to new worlds of meaning. However, during the pandemic, this was impossible to achieve as the issue of space and proximity became increasingly troublesome. The initial plan for this research allowed for extensive contact between me and the subject. I intended to travel to Nairobi, interact with the informants, and accompany them in their daily tasks. The Dutch government imposed a lockdown in the months running up to fieldwork. I decided to carry on with the ethnographic research, but this time through digital platforms. This meant that I wouldn't be relying on embodied experience or face-to-face contact as much, and that my time with the participants would be limited to two hours of zoom interviews. I chose to employ the photovoice method to compensate for the lack of real-time engagement. I made use of digital platforms (Zoom, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.) that the participants were familiar with and took advantage of the digital ecosystem already in place. Since my research was devoid of any place-based associations, I was able to digitally navigate physical areas using digital platforms. Despite its difficulties, the ethnographic approach gave more room to develop a flexible methodological matrix that can be adapted to a wide range of empirical situations. I was able to adapt my research and use the available digital tools to determine whether the official ILO definition of decent work resonates with queer women and represents their labour market experience.

Although my Wi-Fi was a problem, filming the interview ensured that everything was recorded at all times. I was able to rewind the recordings and reflect on moments and social dynamics that I may have missed in my field notes. I witnessed the relationships between my informants and the world around them through their own ‘Day in the Life' videos. It's difficult to fully appreciate human feelings and dynamics based solely on spoken words, so having the ability to record and then monitor all unsaid moments of conversation using digital tools allowed me to engage in a

[50] Jon Prosser., 1998. Image-based research : a sourcebook for qualitative researchers, Palmers Press.

process of reflexivity once the data was collected. The process of making the video also demonstrated the significance of editing without removing the imperfections and turmoil that show the participants' perspective on life. As someone who strives for perfection, it was difficult for me to edit this work and accept its messy and chaotic nature. Once I embraced the chaos, I realized that “good ethnographic work can and should never be fully orderly,” as Rival and Salazar put it.[51]

MAKING A DOCUMENTARY

Before I even knew what my research topic would be about, I knew I wanted my thesis to have a visual element. I first considered using visual tools as a research method and as a means of disseminating findings to a wider audience during the course's first module, "Researching Africa in the Twenty-First Century." In this module, I encountered scholars like Marsha Berry, who believe that creativity should be embraced as a method in academia (Berry 2017, 12-17). While the general idea of including a visual element in my research was established early on, I had no idea how I would go about creating it (especially given the constraints imposed by COVID-19), whether it would be a film or a documentary, who would edit it, or how I would film it. Overtime, I was able to find solutions or answers to all these questions. I knew exactly what I wanted the end product to look like once I decided on this topic. However, because this was my first time writing a thesis and producing a documentary, I was concerned that my research vision would not be realized. The pandemic's emergence confirmed and intensified all of my fears.

‘Making a documentary will have a huge impact on Nairobi's female queer community.' Lexy said this after I told her about my plans to make a short documentary during our phone conversation today. I am still unsure about how I would go about making this documentary. I must admit, Lexy’s enthusiasm and ideas are encouraging. “People will see what we go through for the first time, and we get the chance to tell our own raw experiences. We’ve been silenced for so long, by society and our own fears; this will give us the chance to overcome that.” These words highlight the distinction between a researcher telling their informant’s story and allowing participants to tell their own stories. There is so much power in telling your own story. When I put myself in their shoes, I realised that no one could convey my experiences as well as I could. This interaction is making me realize how important it is to do this documentary; without the visual element, I would be robbing these women of the opportunity to share their own story. I now put my reservations about doing a documentary to bed; I am willing to give it a shot, even if the end product won't match my original concept.

This brief account of my first phone conversation with Lexy (30 years old) explains how and why I overcame my apprehension about making a documentary. This conversation gave me a different perspective and allowed me to see the value that comes with visual research. This phone conversation was a defining moment in my research because it allowed me to put my worries aside and actually let myself create something I never believed I was capable of. I

[51] Isabelle Rivoal, Noel Salazar., 2013. Contemporary ethnographic practice and the value of serendipity. Social Anthropology, Wiley.

explained the photovoice method to Lexy, and she agreed to co-create with me and involve her work with queer women in the research. I had no idea how far our co-creation would go at the moment, but as time went on, this collaboration became a crucial part of the research. From there, I was able to devise a plan for producing the documentary, one that took into account both the pandemic and the ethical constraints that come with filming participants.

Whilst the photovoice method did help me navigate the difficulties of distance and proximity, it still brought a few challenges. It was certainly not a stroll in the park to ask participants to record themselves. Some were apprehensive, while some were adamantly opposed, and the majority simply didn't know how to go about it. Those who agreed and knew what they were doing struggled as well because they worked full-time and couldn't find the time to undertake anything like this. I made the decision to find someone on the ground who could assist me in helping the volunteers who offered to film the ‘Day in the Life' footage. I made sure that the participant had complete control over how the videos turned out, and that the person I found was solely there to assist them. After a long search, I found someone who was willing to help the participants. This meant that those who did know what they were doing or those who did not have the equipment to record were able to record their videos. I recruited ‘actors' who could represent the participants in the research who did not want their faces to show in the video but still wanted to tell their experience. This was a long and hard process, but it all came together in the end.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

All of the participants in this research volunteered. I developed a relationship with each one of them before including them in the research. Since I am still in contact with them, I have ensured that they see the documentary before publishing or submitting it to my supervisor. Before beginning the research, I obtained a zoom recording of them providing consent as well as a written consent. Some of the participants requested that I leave their names and faces out of the documentary. I replaced them with actors in order to include their stories in the documentary. Others, such as Lexy, were willing to participate in the study without their identities being concealed. Other than the very few individuals who requested anonymity, many others were concerned with having their voices heard. Most of the volunteers who did not want to disclose their identity had not yet told their families, so it was critical for me to avoid exposing them in any manner. Because of the delicate nature of this subject, I constantly double-checked with my informants to make sure they hadn't changed their minds or felt uncomfortable. I removed the names of the participants, including those who granted consent, out of the documentary for their own safety.

During the research, I reflected extensively on the privileges that come with doing the research this way. The women I reached were certainly privileged enough to partake in a remote research that requires a working phone or computer, with a quality camera, as well as a private/ quiet space to discuss their experiences without feeling unsafe. Because of the nature of this research, women who are not privileged enough to participate are automatically excluded. This made me consider the number of queer women who are in more precarious circumstances and

ways I could reach them. With someone on the ground, I considered whether they could find people from less fortunate backgrounds, but this proved challenging. Because of the pandemic's restrictions, it was difficult to reach the participants I already had, and finding more would have been impossible and time-consuming. I came to terms with the fact that my research could run the risk of being bias since it only focused on a group of queer women who were somewhat privileged.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to showcase, in the broadest possible sense, the experiences of queer women in the Kenyan labour market and whether the definition of what constitutes decent work reflects their realities. In a short documentary, this research sheds light on the stories and experiences of queer women in Kenya. Using digital (virtual) ethnography, the researcher was able to study their culture, community and experiences. The researcher, being a Kenyan born black female, has greatly contributed to the fieldwork. One of the most notable features of this research is its contribution to knowledge production in the contemporary narrative of queer women through visual media. The research uses a variety of media, which is a relatively new field in cultural anthropology that contributes to new types of knowledge. As a result, this research is interdisciplinary because it brings together culture, politics and anthropology through the use of media. This section will reflect on the film and some of the stories of informants.

HOW DO QUEER WOMEN VIEW THE OFFICIAL ILO DEFINITION OF DECENT WORK?

‘’The definition of a decent job by ILO, in my opinion, perfectly describes what I would expect from my dream job. But I can’t say that this definition reflects our realities nor experiences. I can say that security at work is a big issue for most queer women. For example, I recall when I first came out to my coworkers and how quickly word got around to those outside of my workplace. A regular customer became hostile to me a few weeks after I came out. He was a friend of one of my coworkers, and he used to say things like, "She has to be dealt with by a real man like me so that she doesn't disgrace our culture and people." I used to work late nights, but for my own safety, I chose to exclusively work early shifts from then on. On days when I finished late, I would only ride on the motorcycles of men I knew or had previously ridden with. I have a wife and two children, and I don't feel comfortable going to and from work every day.I long for the day when queer women can have decent jobs and feel safe in and out of the workplace”.

Annabell talked about her experience coming out to her coworkers and the hurdles she faced. I started each interview by showing a YouTube video of the ILO's official definition of decent work, then asking if it resonated with them or reflected their experiences. The majority, if not all, of the participants agreed that the definition of a decent work is desirable, but that it is extremely difficult to achieve given the stigmas associated with being queer. Despite what is defined by the ILO as a decent job, queer women undertake jobs that put them in precarious circumstances. As previously stated by Annabell, queer women are confronted with issues concerning security at work since they are more likely to encounter harassment and aggression, which again is detrimental to queer female labour market participation. The stigma that comes with being queer means that many of these women are left without jobs. The scarcity of jobs has coerced many of them to take any job opportunity that comes their way, no matter how indecent it is. Because of this, queer women are mainly exposed to the informal sector. Stable income and employment, including long or medium-term contracts with social security benefits and

opportunities for personal development, is cited among the main career aspirations for the participants. Unfortunately, the informal sector fails to provide either of these. Instead, this sector offers seasonal or temporary employment, hazardous and unstable working conditions, as well as day-labor agreements. Most queer women working in the formal sector keep their identities hidden in order to keep their jobs. After a while, this becomes demeaning.

''Existing as a transgender women in Kenya is hard, let alone finding a job. Most of us struggle with issues relating to identification. Our current identities are not reflected on our identification cards. This brings us a lot of problems when it comes to finding work. Even if we locate a job that is somewhat decent, our qualifications and identification cards still bear our former names. Even if a company claims not to discriminate during the hiring process, it does. Most of us leave education at an early age for various reasons, one of them being the battles we experience with identity and stigma. Thus, formal employment is never an option for us. Even when we establish a business and strive to make a name for ourselves, our families and society will do everything in their power to prevent us from succeeding. For most transgender women, having a decent job is a distant dream. We are last in the food chain."

It's evident from these brief notes from one of my interviews with Lexy that many queer women, especially transgneder women, endure numerous obstacles in order to just make a living. As a result, young queer women have developed a survival attitude, focusing solely on obtaining as much money as possible as quickly as possible in order to stay alive (thus aborting their decent job aspirations). The lack of awareness of the queer struggle in the workplace was highlighted by the participants. This research shed light on the existence of heterogeneity when thinking about decent work for youth. Within youth, there are various factors (i.e. identity, sexuality, gender, class, religion, etc) that play a vital role in the perceived definition of decent jobs, which also plays out across spatial territories and socioeconomic groups.These factors undoubtedly influence policy, implying that a one-size-fits-all strategy will fail to meet the aspirations of all young people. When it comes to providing more quality jobs for young women in Kenya, for example, it is critical to address the more marginalised women rather than treating them as a single group. Even among queer women as a whole, transgender women and masculine portraying women have greater challenges than other groups. As such, it's critical to handle each of these concerns separately and to establish employment opportunities that reflect these variances.

"For the longest I had no church or place that I could belong to. Being queer in Kenya means that you can't be yourself and be part of a community that is not queer. One of my friends suggested I join Minority Women in Action (MWA). I joined, and I've felt like I've found a place to belong to ever since. MWA is a community of queer women. We share our challenges and happiness. MWA provides an escape from the shame and despair of living in a culture that views you as abnormal and unnatural. I feel normal. We help each other, and those of us who own businesses are welcome to come and sell their products to us. Yesterday one of the members was selling trainers, and I decided to buy it from her instead of buying it from the market because I know she will struggle more than the average businessman or woman. We try to help each other as much as possible. I remember one of our members losing her job and

home during COVID-19, so we came together and raised money to at least assist her in finding a place to live."

One of the research participants (anonymous) talked about her experience as a member of MWA, an organisation that supports and fights to abolish prejudice against LBTQI women. The majority, if not all, of the participants mentioned MWA and how they turn to it for community and a sense of belonging. One of the participants currently works for MWA and deals with the daily issues that queer women face in Kenya. I questioned if MWA assists these women with job prospects during the interview, and the informant stated that MWA makes an effort to assist these women, but that they are currently underfunded and hence cannot help them find work. Even if MWA does not provide financial opportunities, it was fascinating to witness how much of an impact they have on these women's lives. It was enough for them to be a part of a community.

Overall, this research has explored the experiences of queer women in the Kenyan labour market. Using ethnography, it assessed the extent to which the official ILO definition of decent job reflects the realities of young queer women in urban Kenya. It's clear from the research conducted that discussions surrounding youth employment and decent jobs omit the lived experiences of queer women. The documentary highlights the various challenges that they face in the Kenyan labour market. To summarise, whilst the definition resonates with the participants in this research, it's far removed from their reality.

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