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Navigating norms of masculinity: Tactical gender performances among gay men in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, heteronormative presumptions relating to masculinity dictate that men should be engaged in or actively pursuing heterosexual relationships. For many gay men, fears of social rejection, stigma, and legal repercussion combine to prevent them from being open about their sexuality. This article examines social and legal pressures experienced by gay men in Dar es Salaam and the ways they navigate their daily lives to avoid detection and act in instances where they fail to adhere to ascribed norms of masculinity. Our arguments draw on one year of ethnographic research among gay men aged 18 years and above in Dar es Salaam in 2017. Our findings show that gay men are under constant pressure to meet expectations such as having female sexual partners, getting married, and having children, as well as to conform with masculine body styling norms. In trying to navigate between masculine expectations of society and the desire to live freely as men who desire other men, they resort to a range of temporal, spatial and bodily tactics to conceal homosexual practices and identities from family and neighbors. These techniques include socializing, dating, and sometimes marrying women in response to family and societal pressure. They also dress in prescribed ways to conform to heteronormative standards, carefully attending to space and time to identify safe places for being gay, and utilizing mobile phones and social media to build communities of support.

Introduction

On the second Saturday of August 2017, I (first author) interviewed Mchina, a young man who was temporarily living at Bi Jumaa's home in the Kariokoo

section of Dar es Salaam. At the time of research, Bi Jumaa, a 52 -year-old gay man, was providing a home to four other young gay men in the city who had left their family homes for various reasons. For more than fifteen years now, he has been offering refuge to numerous younger gay men with nowhere else to go. They call him Bi, a short form of the word *bibi,* which means grandmother, an honorific title given to older gay men (generally over 40 years) out of respect to their age and the role they play taking care of younger gay men. It had been a week since I had first met Mchina. At the time, he was distraught because a video of him kissing another man on Saturday had gone viral on several WhatsApp groups, Facebook and Instagram. This video was secretly recorded by someone outside the bar where they were hanging out. That person shared the video on social media, where it quickly reached Mchina's wife. His wife was so angry at him when he got home from the bar that he decided to leave her and go straight to Bi Jumaa's for advice.

On the day of the interview, he seemed calm and relieved to finally share his story with someone. He told me he was 32 years old and that despite being gay, using the word *shoga* in Kiswahili, he had also been happily married to a woman for the past four and a half years. His friends called him Mchina in reference to his light skin, short height, and small eyes, which made him look Chinese. In the interview, he told me:

> I was born and raised in Dar es Salaam, and at the age of 14, when most boys of my age started dating girls, I realized that I had a strong sexual attraction to other boys. I started dating boys from my school in secret, and at the age of 17, my brothers started questioning if I am *rijali (*Swahili for straight) or *shoga* (an effeminate gay man) because they had never seen me dating a girl. Rumors about my sex life reached home where my brothers beat me a lot. At 18, they pressured me to date a beautiful girl who had come from the village to visit her aunt. This relationship, which lasted four months, somehow silenced the noise from my brothers, who were continually questioning if I was normal like other boys my age.

> I kept dating other men and having occasional short term sexual relationships with women when I was in my mid-20s. At this age, I was pressured to get married after my younger brother's wedding. My mother recommended that I marry Asha, a young woman who loved me and who had confessed her feelings to my close relatives and my mother. My relatives pressured me to start a relationship with Asha, and I married her six months later.

> I was not entirely happy with this marriage, but one thing was positive about it: everyone stopped questioning my manhood, believing that I am a "real man," but in truth, I still maintained my relationships with other men. I no longer needed to try so hard to prove my manhood to my family and neighbors. One year after our marriage, we had a baby boy, and this added so much joy to our family, even though I am constantly worrying about my son's reaction if he finds out that I am *shoga.*

> Despite my fears, I was able to stay married for four and a half years without my wife doubting my sexuality. It was so tiring to always sneak out of the house, lie

about traveling outside the city or say that I was hanging out with the boys just to be able to meet my boyfriend. When my wife found out that I was *shoga*, she was agitated and told me that she would make sure that the whole world finds out that I am *shoga*.

He showed me a text message from the wife saying, 'I am upset that you were cheating on me with another man, not a woman. What makes the matter worse is that you are a "woman" in that relationship'.

Mchina's story resonates with those shared by others in Dar es Salaam. It highlights common experiences reported by men who fail to conform consistently to norms of masculinity associated with sexual preference, marriage, and reproduction. Such experiences and pressures are significantly higher among *mashoga* (sing. *shoga*) in comparison with those men who adhere to masculine conventions and generally do not express or display their desire for other men in public despite engaging in same sex practices. Such men generally referred to as *mabasha* (sing. *basha*), find it easier to pass a straight, or *rijali,* because they follow conventional male fashion norms and grooming practices. In Dar es Salaam, such men are said to be the 'man' in the relationship, are presumed to fulfill active/penetrative sexual roles, and are much less derided for their sexual preferences than are more feminine presenting, presumably passive/penetrated *mashoga*. What is at stake is the intersection of sexual practices and gender norms. The gender non-conformity of *mashoga* is much more disruptive than are the homosexual practices of *mabasha*. Mashoga's failure to stick to the prescribed gender script often results in ridicule, abandonment, and social exclusion, as well as emotional and physical abuse.

Contemporary conventional gender norms have been historically shaped, with pre-colonial and colonial experiences informing Tanzania's political and social context, including family structure and what defines a man (Ilife 1979, Ivaska 2011). Especially laws and religious norms introduced during the colonial era encouraged exclusive heterosexual relationships, and following independence, these norms continued to be embraced by the state in Tanzania (Moen et al. 2014a). Today, both legal and social structures, especially immediate and extended family members, pressure men to conform to conventional gender norms in most public and domestic spaces. Despite the entrenchment of social and legal norms relating to gender and sexuality in Dar es Salaam, until relatively recently, homosexual practices, if not explicitly gay identities, have been widely tolerated in the city and more generally along the Swahili coast (Amory 1994, Nyoni 2013).

In the mid-2000s, the government even began to provide technical and legal support to NGOs providing HIV and other health services to men who have sex with men (MSM) in the country. This pragmatic approach to treating HIV, documented by Moyer and Igonya (2018) in neighboring Kenya,

soon came to an end in Tanzania following a change in national leadership. Dar es Salaam, like many African cities, has recently experienced an increase in verbal and physical attacks on gender non-conforming men who are presumed to be gay (Mkhize 2010, Moyer & Igonya 2016). Despite a history of tolerance, Tanzania has recently witnessed a tremendous rise of homophobic legislation, policing, social exclusion, public stigmatization, and hate speech across the country under the new government, which took office in October 2015. In 2016 the Tanzania state's support of NGOs working with men who have sex with men (MSM) had dwindled, and the state began initiating homophobic actions towards people, primarily men, they could identify as homosexual. These actions involved the arresting and publishing of names of men presumed to be gay in the newspapers, the closing down of drop-in centers and some NGOs that provide HIV services to MSM, and instances of state representatives directing hate speech towards homosexual men via various media platforms. Amid these increased verbal and physical attacks directed towards gay men, Tanzania has also experienced a massive spread of the use of digital technologies, including smartphones and social media platforms like WhatsApp Groups, Facebook, and Instagram. These technologies are channeled to circulate homophobic practices, including the outing of 'known homosexuals' by the state and freelancers like those who outed Mchina. They are also used by gay men in Tanzania to organize against homophobia, build community, and to navigate city spaces that are becoming increasingly hostile to gender non-conforming men and public displays of homosexuality.

In this article, we analyze how gender non-conforming men in Dar es Salaam navigate social and spatial contexts in their daily lives to minimize confrontation, to contribute to the theorization of gender and sexuality in contemporary urban African contexts (Nyeck and Epprecht 2013:3). Drawing on ethnographic research conducted among young men working in the streets and other interstitial spaces of Dar es Salaam (Moyer 2004a) has elsewhere employed the concept of navigation to theorize the ways young Tanzanian men engaging in illegal activities minimize and circumvent confrontation with police and other state actors to achieve happiness in their day to day lives, as well as the possibility to continue earning a living (see also, Moyer 2004b, Moyer and Fast 2018). We employ Vigh's (2009) theorization of social navigation to make sense of the ways that gender non-conforming gay men in Dar es Salaam navigate social and spatial contexts in their daily lives to minimize confrontation, reduce the likelihood of being outed, and pass as straight in public spaces in the city, as well as in some domestic spaces. We use this theory to expound the way gay men in Dar es Salaam organize themselves to act in relation to social pressures they experience related to their failure to conform to gender and sexual norms. Vigh's

theorization is especially useful in that it acknowledges that socio-spatial environments are not static and that successful navigation requires considered action in a shifting social field. While using this theory, we acknowledge that although the social environment is in movement, individuals do not always react to these movements instantly or at the same pace with the social environment. The decisions participants made to take action to respond to or limit exposure to homophobia were shaped by socio economic position as well as the experience that comes with age. Such actions included moving houses to avoid confrontation with neighbors, sustained engagement in online spaces, and getting married or finding temporary female partners to hide their homosexuality. For one to be able to take action at the same pace as that of the social environment, one needs to be in a social position that can support or absorb the new changes. While we agree with Vigh's approach in general, we find that much of the literature on social navigation focuses on those who live marginalized lives in urban spaces. Because we conducted research with diversely positioned homosexual men with different class backgrounds and varying ages, we gained insights into the ways that an individual's shifting positionality interacted with the shifting social field that Vigh describes so clearly. This was especially important during the time of our research because the political terrain enfolding the social field was unstable. In this period of extreme unpredictability, those who had the knowledge and the resources to act quickly were in a much better position to respond to emerging forms of homophobia, to move house, shift online identities, and materially entice female partners to date and marry them.

Methods

The material for this paper was collected during one year of ethnographic research, conducted by the first author in Dar es salaam from January to December 2017, with a focus on gay men aged 18 to 60 years. The category of gay men was defined from the outset as an inclusive category meant to include a wide range of same sex sexual practices and identities among men in Dar es Salaam. Although the term *magay* is commonly used in Dar es Salaam, it does not easily map on to the English term, nor do the attendant identity politics. With the assistance of three research assistants from different parts of the city, who fit within this artificial category of gay men, the first author, a Tanzanian woman who identifies as heterosexual, was able to gain access to diverse groups of other gay men in the city and collect data using participant observation, informal conversations, and in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with 13 gay men who agreed to be interviewed after being approached during participant observation and

informal conversations. In selecting people for interviews, an effort was made to include older and younger men, *mashoga* and *mabasha*, and men living in different neighborhoods.

Most of the observations and informal interviews were conducted in the Kinondoni, Sinza, Upanga, Buguruni, Ilala, Kurasini and Mbezi Beach sections of the city, specifically in bars and *vijiweni* (street corners or hang out spots) where open homosexual flirtations and practices among men are highly tolerated by both owners, managers and regulars in those spaces. This high level of tolerance was mostly shaped by commercial reasons where bar owners reported that they allowed gay men to come to their bars with the belief that they attracted male customers who had expectations of getting a sexual partner for the night. Interviews were formally pre-arranged to provide opportunities to collect in-depth background information from informants and to ask clarifying questions related to matters raised during informal conversations and observations.

The research was conducted in Swahili, the most widely spoken language in Dar es Salaam. Both authors are bi-lingual in English and Swahili, with the first author being a native Swahili speaker. Recorded interviews and conversations were transcribed and translated to English, followed by thematic coding and analysis. Research participants spoke Swahili as a first language. Several Swahili words related to sexual practices and identities that were commonly used in discussions do not easily translate to English. Whenever we quote such words, we will use the Swahili terms and give a brief explanation of what these words meant in that particular context. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. With permission from research participants, observations were recorded in a notebook during and following periods of participant observation in bars, homes, and *vijiweni*. Considering the sensitivity of this research, observing the participants' confidentiality has been very important. No legal names were mentioned during recorded interviews, and all names used in this article are pseudonyms.

Findings

Navigating family and societal pressures

Like people everywhere, gay men in Dar es Salaam experience pressure from family and society to perform gender following a set of conventional norms. As stated above and seen in Mchina's story, such pressures are higher among *mashoga* than *mabasha*, who behaved like 'normal men' most of the time. Although most adolescent boys and young men are encouraged to engage in heterosexual relationships, get married, and eventually have children, this is experienced as exceptionally negative by men who are sexually

attracted to men. Research participants reported that their parents started pressuring them in early adolescence when neighbors gossiped about their sexuality. This was especially the case when they engaged in same sex sexual acts with someone from the immediate area. Others, like Mchina, reported an increase in pressure when they failed to show signs of being a *mwanaume wa kawaida*, or a normal man, the term used by most research participants to refer to heterosexual masculinity. Although they also experienced some pressure from male peers who were interested in dating girls, these pressures were comparatively less than those put on them by adults and older male siblings. In responding to these pressures, they began to develop and learn tactics to hide their sexual desires and practices at a young age.

Secrecy around matters concerning sexuality in Dar es Salaam is common, also among heterosexuals. Generally, matters concerning sex and sexuality, especially outside of the bounds of heterosexual marriage, are kept private. In many cases, such secrecy is linked to eroticism and pleasure (Moyer 2004b, Thompson 2019). However, we would argue that unlike heterosexual people in Tanzania who may conceal sexual engagements that challenge norms of monogamy, gay men must maintain a high level of secrecy around their sexuality to avoid shame and stigma directed toward them, as well as toward their family members (Thompson 2015, Herdt 1997). For most of our participants, keeping their sexuality secret was extremely important. Most had experienced instances when neighbors or others around them found out they were gay and began harassing them and their family members. Yet, no matter how much they tried to keep their sexuality a private affair to protect their families, in most cases, their families also pressured them to be 'normal men,' thereby compounding the problem and forcing them to develop ways to navigate various spaces. These techniques included intermittently dating women and even having children with those women. Although some made this choice because they genuinely desired to be parents, many also did so to convince their family, neighbors, and wider society that they were not gay. Others asked female friends to 'play their girlfriends' at family events and other times where they would be expected to show their families or neighbors that they were in heterosexual relationships.

Hussein, 31, asked his female friend Anisa to be his date for his cousin's wedding. From experiences at previous family gatherings, he knew that his relatives would be asking about his dating life or future wedding plans. Anisa agreed on the condition that he would buy her a new dress, shoes and pay for her Uber to the wedding. Like Hussein, several other research participants reported that they often brought female friends to family gatherings and would invite them to sleep over at their homes to make the neighbors or family members believe that they were heterosexual. Providing

evidence that they were dating women was a necessary, if somewhat expensive, tactic used to counter rumors among family members, close relatives, and neighbors. Getting women to agree to participate in such performances often required serious financial investments, as the case of Hussein and Anisa demonstrates. Obviously, not all gay men could afford such investments.

For Hussein and most other gay men, being able to convincingly perform *rijali* masculinity, or straightness, when with family was important because it minimized instances of *unyanyapaa* or stigma. Although they had no desire to be in a sexual relationship with a female partner, they felt compelled to show people around them that they were adhering to norms of *rijali* masculinity.

Body styling and masculinity

One afternoon in September 2017, Abdi, a 23-year-old gay man, showed up at an outdoor hangout spot with a new haircut, dyed in purple and blonde highlights. Omari, Bi Jumaa, and Hussein, who were sitting there with me, stared at his new look with shock. Omari asked him, '*Hujapigiwa shangwe mtaani?*' The word *shangwe* means to be happy, but he employed the colloquial usage to indicate the homophobic statements that were commonly directed towards men in the streets who failed to present as *rijali*. Basically, he had asked Abdi if he had not yet been harassed for walking around in public with his new look. At first, I thought they were teasing him, exaggerating the association between homophobia and Abdi's haircut, which was a much loved style among men his age in Dar es Salaam, especially young celebrities. However, Bi Jumaa, the oldest in the group, was genuinely concerned and clearly not happy with Abdi's look, saying that the hair color in combination with his (badly) bleached skin, pierced ears and nose, trimmed eyebrows and polished nails were too feminine. To drive home his point, Bi Jumaa reminded everyone of a story about a 23-year-old friend of theirs who a few months previously had been beaten by presumably straight men in the streets for dressing in a feminine way.

Sticking to the conventional norms of *rijali* body styling and fashion in public is one of the main things that gay men do to conceal their sexual identities. They attempt to pass as 'normal men' by wearing dark colors, regular fitting clothes, and following masculine grooming techniques. Clothes with skinny and slim fits, bright colors, and refined grooming were associated with femininity. Among those we interviewed, it was generally considered an unacceptable risk to style their bodies in feminine ways in public, and those who did so were seen to be inviting discriminatory acts.

Several research participants reported being beaten or bullied because of wearing feminine clothes in public. Omari, a 29-year-old gay man said:

> 'I cannot wear skinny jeans because I will start drawing everyone's attention, especially the neighbors and people in my street. The next thing that they will do is start investigating if I am *shoga* or not.'

Recalling his childhood, he continued:

> 'My brother started doubting me because of color preferences. He always told me that a man could not wear anything pink or apply lotion all over his body because it is a women's thing. I never stopped, and my brother started spying on me and found out that I am *shoga*.'

Omari's examples demonstrate that gay men in Dar es Salaam learn to style their bodies according to the context. Although some like Abdi persists and style their bodies femininely despite the everyday policing, learning context specific body styling techniques remains crucial. They learn this from negative experiences with family, neighbors and strangers on the streets, but they also learn it from one another. Importantly, they routinely policed one another, making sure they avoided the trouble that might be caused by displaying their femininity in the streets. As much as they liked fashioning their bodies in a feminine manner, they did it in specific contexts, like when meeting their sexual partners in private spaces or at gatherings exclusive to gay men. Most of the effeminate gay men in our study liked wearing lip gloss, lipstick, nail polish, and trimming their eyebrows. They understood that displaying femininity was a manifestation of sexual preferences, and in private spaces, they would do it with much pleasure. At one party attended by the first author, which was exclusively for gay men and their close friends, Omari shared, 'I wish we would have parties like this everyday so that I can wear my crop top and my red lipstick'.' The pleasures that come with styling their bodies was one of the reasons behind Abdi and other younger men in the city persisting with unacceptable dressing codes despite their bodies being policed continuously.

For most *mashoga* we interviewed, getting a chance to embrace their femininity through body styling was pleasurable. Once they were dressed femininely, however, they had to think before moving about the city, relying on taxis or private transport to avoid confrontations in the streets or public transport. In cases when they could not organize a taxi or private transport, they would wear masculine clothes and change after reaching the party or their partner's home. Such hiding tactics helped them to avoid drawing attention and to conceal sexual identities, which might lead to homophobic acts being directed at them or to them being arrested. Once again, we see that the ability to pass as *rijali*, or otherwise avoid conflict in public could also depend on financial investment, as taxis are not cheap in Dar es Salaam, and private cars are considered a luxury to most.

Identities within and outside spaces of HIV interventions

Many gay men in Dar es Salaam perform different genders and sexualities in different spaces and times to avoid homophobic acts being directed at them. One man may perform his gayness when he is with friends or his homosexuality with the health care providers and also perform *rijali* masculinity at work, church, or mosque. In places where they were accepted, feminine and masculine identifying gay men enacted different performances to heighten their gendered differences, even while sticking to fairly conventional scripts of masculinity and femininity (cf., Reid 2007).

The English term gay and *shoga*, for example, were commonly used among effeminate identifying gay men. *Basha* performativity included assuming the so-called 'incentive role', or penetrative sexual position during sex and providing material support like money or housing to their effeminate sexual partners. Men who embraced and effectively performed this role were referred to as *basha,* but also more easily passed as *rijali* in public. Another example is the public health category, men who have sex with men (MSM), used to describe homosexual behavior rather than an identity (Boellstorff, 2011). Most *mashoga* also used this term as a marker of shared identity outside HIV intervention spaces, often as a term presumed to be unknown to the wider public; this term was not generally used among *mabasha* outside HIV intervention spaces. Perhaps because they were less likely to experience discrimination, *mabasha* did not need a code word to hide in public. Twenty-three-year-old Ali told us:

> 'When I go to the NGO for health services, I usually say openly that I am *shoga* because it is safe. Also, openly saying that I am *shoga* or sometimes MSM is the only thing that makes me eligible to access service from the interventions. I get quality services there, unlike going to public or private hospitals where they will kick me out if I disclose my identity.'

Ali's statement shows that employing particular terms, gay or MSM, opens doors to some health services, such as those offered by NGOs, while it may close the doors to services offered in public health care settings. Getting access to health services offered by interventions targeting MSM is only possible if one is willing to identify as gay, *shoga*, or MSM (Lorway et al.2011). Seeking such advantages, in some contexts, *mabasha* might identify as gay or MSM.

HIV interventions also shape the way gay men behave in public spaces, for example, by insisting on a 'typical' masculine dress code for gay men invited to attend seminars and workshops. Such invitations always came with a message telling gay men to dress like normal men. Taking part in organizing some of these workshops when doing fieldwork at an NGO providing HIV services to MSM in Dar es Salaam provided an opportunity to listen to discussions around the invitation of participants. In one planning

meeting, referring to Abdi, the young man reprimanded by Bi Jumaa for his refusal to embrace *rijali* norms in public, an outreach officer said, 'We cannot invite Abdi because his dressing style can put us in trouble with our hosts.' Because NGOs providing services to MSM in Dar es Salaam had come under state scrutiny, most were concerned about drawing undue attention to their meetings, prompting them to insist that attendees of their workshops, which were normally held in hotels or public conference halls, to dress 'smart casual' to avoid drawing negative attention.

Digital technology: a door to online spaces for interaction

Recent years have witnessed an increase in access to digital technology among Tanzanians. This increase has been attributed to the availability of affordable smartphones and improved telecommunication technology in the country. As a marketing strategy, several telecommunication companies also provide free data to access Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Tanzania has about 23 Million internet users with access to social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and Dar es Salaam accounts for 30% of all social media users (internetworldstat, 2019). Digital technology, especially access to the internet and smartphones, has simplified the lives of gay men, primarily because it helps them create online spaces for interaction and venting their frustrations with the political system and homophobia in general. These new spaces enable them to meet partners, new gay friends, and vent out when attacked by the state without exposing themselves physically to the authority and other users of these platforms. Alongside facilitating connections, these online spaces are also often used to facilitate the formation of online kin networks of physical and emotional support and to mediate a sense of community belonging. During my interaction with a Facebook group that was exclusive to gay men, I observed members fundraising for funerals, a sick member, medical help, and rent for a member who was really stuck.

At 52 years of age, Bi Jumaa could reflect on gay socialities in Dar es Salaam before and after the coming of digital technologies. According to him, technology is helping gay men to remain invisible. He says that in the past, gay men relied on shared body signals to make their sexual identity known, to find sexual partners, and to meet other gay men in the city. These signals included the piercing of ears, wearing makeup, bleaching skin, and wearing feminine clothes. He emphasizes that this was not just about linking them with the sexual partners, but also crucial for linking them to other gay men socially and for the creation of a support system amongst them. Bi Jumaa said that when he was in his 20 s (circa late 1980s/early 1990s),

mabasha identified themselves by piercing their left ears and wearing a tiny earring, *mashoga* would pierce both ears.

During fieldwork, we noticed that several *mashoga* above 35 years had pierced ears, but they rarely wore earrings, suggesting that the bodily practice that had been common when they were younger had become less popular. Bi Jumaa believed that in this era where bodily techniques to broadcast one's identity was no longer considered safe, technology enabled gay men such as himself to escape the risks associated with it. Today it is possible to meet potential partners through dating sites, Facebook groups, Instagram, and WhatsApp groups, all accessible via mobile phones. Younger participants said that they had met several partners through Facebook and dating sites. Although they occasionally employed bodily techniques in performative ways, especially in private places or at the few bars that tolerated them, in general, this was not considered an important way of meeting potential sexual partners. The younger participants agreed that technology helped them to limit their visibility because they could connect to potential partners in secret and avoid drawing people's attention in their neighborhoods or at public hangout spots. While mobile technology is widely available in Dar es Salaam, phones, especially smartphones, are expensive. This again illustrates the ways that economic position shapes individuals' ability to navigate the shifting social and political field in which they live.

Discussion and conclusion

Connel and James (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity acknowledges the presence of multiple forms of masculinities on the one hand, but only one dominant form of masculinity on the other. Through having one idealized form of masculinity that all men are expected or aspire to attain, society polices men to encourage them to adhere to it. Taking the concept of *rijali* masculinity in Dar es Salaam as an example, we could argue that this mode of hegemonic masculinity encompasses, amongst other things, the expectation that men will desire women sexually, and that they will eventually get married and have children to fulfill kinship obligations (Ilife 1979). Our research also shows that *rijali* masculinity also involves dressing and styling one's body in ways that conform to conventional gender norms, and that being able to provide economically for one's family and loved ones is a crucial aspect of successful masculinity. This dominant mode of masculinity does not sanction men desiring other men, though kin and kith may look the other way if this sexual preference is not flaunted and men can pass as *rijali*.

Societal norms lead to stigma towards gay men, and this stigma is compounded by the increasing criminalization of homosexuality in Tanzania. Yet, even within the context of strict societal norms, gay men in the city still find

ways to live as men who desire other men in private, while embracing heterosexual norms in the public domain and elsewhere. At the family level, they perform their best *rijali* masculinity, often becoming involved with female partners, some of whom are aware of and actively take part in the performance. Mchina's story from the introduction is a good example of a gay man who began experiencing pressure to perform *rijali* masculinity in childhood. When his family started doubting his sexuality, specifically, his mother did everything she could to encourage him to get married. Research in neighboring Kenya suggests that mothers can be blamed for a son's homosexuality and that they may also be socially excluded (Igonya 2017). This may be one of the reasons that mothers pressure sons to conform to gender norms, but we might also interpret such actions by mothers as caring acts, meant to protect their sons from discrimination.

Similarly, the family and household of a young man may help further the *rijali* performances of gay sons, actively concealing their sexuality from potential brides and their families. Mchina's case proves that in time, the wife and her family may also participate in this performance of respectable *rijali* masculinity, especially when the man in question is meeting economic obligations. In the end, Mchina was only separated from his wife for three months. When I met him in December 2018, he told me that he was back together with his wife. Following his mother's efforts to take him to church for prayers to cast out the 'spirit of homosexuality,' he was able to convince his wife that he was no longer *shoga* and that he would never go back to that behavior. Although we might expect Mchina to be bitter about the pressure to conceal his *shoga* side in the context of his day to day life, we must remember that he stated he was happiest when able to successfully pass as *rijali*, while enjoying sex with men in secret. He valued the respect this role earned him from his family and his neighbors, and he enjoyed being a family man. Although we might be ambivalent about his choice, he did not seem to be.

Men may also be performing *rijali* masculinity by adhering to conventional gender norms associated with fashion and body styling. According to Ivaska (2011), who conducted historical research on gender and fashion in Dar es Salaam, you can tell a lot from someone's dressing style ranging from their choice of color, clothing materials, brands, and fit. Although Ivaska refers primarily to class and gender in his analysis, his research in Dar es Salaam demonstrates how strong the norms surrounding dress are and the extent to which the policing of fashion concerning gendered social norms has long been enfolded in the social politics of daily life in Tanzania. Similarly, Moyer (2004b), highlighted how street youth in Dar es Salaam worked hard to present themselves as respectable middle class youth to avoid the attention of the police in the streets, even when they knew that dressing in disarray might afford them the pity and assistance of NGOs and strangers.

Studies by Hendriks (2016), Hutson (2010), and Siedman (2002) show that it is common for gay men to manipulate their appearances through fashion and body styling to announce their identities, something which had also been common among gay men in Dar es Salaam in the recent past. Following the state crack-down in 2016, however, most gay men have abandoned such practices in an attempt to conceal their identities both from the police and from homophobes emboldened by the new politics of hate. The pressure to conform then, also comes from other gay men. According to Massad (2002), gay men in today's world are encouraged by international organizations to come out of the closet and live openly; this seems to be changing in Dar es Salaam, where NGOs working with gay men fear the reprisal of the state.

Tactically performing multiple identities is a key practice among gay men in the city. They display their best masculine behavior in places where they feel their sexual identities would not be accepted, such as, work, mosque, or church, in order to maintain their means of income, important social ties and a sense of belonging. The tolerance and acceptability of gay men in such spaces shapes the way they display their sexual identity (Kessler and McKenna 1978, Hendriks 2019). In Dar es Salaam, gay men reported only openly identifying as gay in places where they felt accepted, for example, at the homes of close friends, at tolerant hangout spots, or in MSM friendly HIV clinics. They considered spaces where HIV interventions were implemented, such as NGO offices, drop-in centers, seminars, and workshop rooms as safe havens because NGOs trained service providers to treat gay men without stigma.

In the wake of digital technology, there has been a massive increase in the accessibility and use of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, serving diverse ends to its users (see De Bruijn et al. 2009). While many subscribers made use of these platforms to socialize and interact, those targeted by homophobia also utilized new media technologies to engage in strategies of resistance and to form 'counterpublics' (Warner, 2002). In Dar es Salaam, this study's participants used digital technology to create new spaces for interaction, connecting with lovers, venting their tension, and getting social support. Musila (2017) argues that digital technology provides room for creating visibility among hidden communities, but in Tanzania, gay men predominantly utilized social media to conceal their identities from a wider public. While offering a space for invisibility, these platforms are not entirely safe, since they are harnessed to circulate homophobic practices, including the outing of 'known' homosexuals (Awondo et al. 2012, Mattoni 2016). In recent years, gay men have been outed through social media when the state and influential government leaders listed names of the supposedly gay men on their social media pages. In

other incidents, gay men were outed when someone in their circle or a member of a Facebook and WhatsApp group was arrested or lost their phone.

Despite the wide range of navigation techniques available, outcomes are not predictable, nor are all techniques available to everyone. While most of the participants shared that these techniques helped them to survive in the city, they also admitted that at times they did not work. Taking the example of Mchina, he could not keep his secret from his wife for long, however, with the help of his mother, he was able to convince his wife that he would stop having affairs with other men. Having multiple identities, attending to body styling techniques, performing heterosexuality, and taking advantage of the shadows made available through technology helps gay men to survive in the city, but they cannot conceal themselves entirely. When their techniques fail, however, they tend to adapt, finding new techniques to navigate the city's ever shifting social and political landscape.

Acknowledgements

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