

Pride (Or Not) in Peace Processes

Queer Youth Marginalisation, Resistance and Participation in Peacebuilding in
Kenya

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Abstract

This essay explores queer youth marginalisation, resistance, and participation in peacebuilding in Kenya. It begins by examining the construction of queer narratives, myths, and misconceptions about queer identities through historical events such as colonisation, the introduction of the Penal Code, and the interweaving of the state and religion. The work then turns to the experiences of queer youth, calling to attention the marginalisation and social exclusion of queer youth in different aspects of society. It further looks at the contributions of queer youth in peacebuilding and examines their participation within the framework of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS). I argue that queer people have always existed in Kenya and that by virtue of their existence, must be included in peacebuilding. I suggest that peacebuilding scholars and practitioners must consider the needs and agency of queer youth in decision-making. This essay adopts a decolonial and intersectional approach to draw attention to the unique experiences of queer youth in peacebuilding in Kenya and the barriers they face in participating in decision-making. I conclude with recommendations for policymakers aimed at informing the formulation of the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security, and other peacebuilding processes in Kenya.

Keywords; queer, youth, peacebuilding, decolonial, intersectionality, UNSCR 2250, YPS, Kenya

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I dedicate this essay to all my queer siblings in Kenya who have lost their lives because of homophobic violence and the failure of the state to protect them. I hope that this essay contributes to positively changing the experiences of queer people in Kenya.

One day, we shall be free.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
Table of Contents	5
1. Introduction	7
1.1 Background; Queer Identities and Peacebuilding in Kenya.....	8
1.2 Context.....	10
2. Queer Presence in Kenya	13
2.1 History of Queer Identities in Kenya.....	15
2.2 Influence of Colonisation on Queer Identities in Kenya	15
2.3 Religion and The State	16
3. Marginalisation and Social Exclusion of Queer Youth in Kenya	19
3.1 Legal Framework and Criminalization.....	20
3.2 Social Exclusion and Discrimination	21
3.3 Intersectionality and Compounded Marginalisation	22
4. Participation of Queer Youth in Peacebuilding	25
4.1 Understanding the Advocacy Space in Kenya.....	26
5. Implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda	30
5.1 Global Implementation	31
5.2 Regional Implementation.....	32
5.3 National Implementation in Kenya	33
5.4 In Other Parts of the Continent; National Implementation of YPS.....	35
6. Building Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies with and For Queer Youth in Kenya	37
7. Conclusion	39
References	42

List of Abbreviations

ACHPR - African Commission on Human and People's Rights

AU – African Union

DRC - Democratic Republic of Congo

KCYPS - Kenya Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security

KFS - Kenya Feminists Society

ICGLR - International Conference on the Great Lakes Region

LBQ - Lesbian Bisexual Queer

LGBTQ - Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer

NAP - National Action Plan

PFFA - Pwani Feminists Future Alliance

SGM - Sexual and Gender Minorities

UN – United Nations

UNSCR - United Nations Security Council Resolution

YPS - Youth, Peace, and Security

1. Introduction

‘Queerness is African because Africans are Queer.’ – Dr Uju Anya

I have never doubted my African-ness. I was born in Kenya, to Kenyan parents. My heritage and citizenship are not up for debate. Yet, so often, my identity as a Kenyan, and African is contested based on my sexual orientation. By denying mine and the existence of other queer individuals in Kenya and the consequent upholding of discriminatory laws such as Section 162 of the Penal Code, I am at risk of being subjected to marginalisation and violence by the state and society.

The experiences of queer Kenyans are not completely different from other queer Africans. Many African countries continue to uphold colonial laws that ignore and erase the existence of queer people and their contributions to society. This has made queer identities invisible in many aspects of society including in peacebuilding.¹ Without recognition, the agency of queer identities is suppressed or ignored, thus increasing their vulnerabilities to marginalisation and violence. The violence against queer identities in Kenya is not only a cause and consequence of their invisibility but also their hypervisibility.

However, queerness is not homogenous. Our experiences and contributions intersect with class, ethnicity, ability, legal status, gender expression and other axes thereby dictating our subjection to marginalisation. These experiences also determine which rights we can enjoy and the extent to which we can enjoy these rights.

‘We are reduced to a single narrative, you could be brilliant, but the focus is on your sexuality and whom you have sex with.’ – Afrika

Peacebuilding scholars have increasingly acknowledged the need to investigate the intersection of peacebuilding and gender in the African context. However, many of the studies deploy a binary definition of gender by focusing on cis-heterosexual women, often older, leaving out the experiences of young queer individuals. This essay is concerned with how queer narratives and perceptions are constructed in Kenya. It considers the influence of colonisation in

¹ Peacebuilding, in this context refers to the processes aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict in non-violent ways. It refers to transformative approaches that dismantle systems of injustice to create an environment that fosters sustainable peace.

Kenya on queer identities and the erasure of their existence and contributions to pre- and post-colonial Kenya. The essay then focuses on the experiences of queer youth, investigating their access to basic needs and rights, their subjection to violence by the state and the communities they live in and how they resist systems of oppression. I argue that queer people have always existed in Kenya and that by virtue of their existence, must be included in peacebuilding processes. I suggest that peacebuilding scholars and practitioners must consider the unique experiences of queer youth in decision-making. This essay aims to deploy a decolonial and intersectional approach to draw attention to the unique experiences of queer youth in Kenya in peacebuilding within the framework of UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security.

1.1 Background; Queer Identities and Peacebuilding in Kenya

Kenya's sociopolitical landscape is a product of colonialism, which brought forth the introduction of anti-LGBTQ laws and norms that continue to affect the lives of queer individuals today. The Penal Code in Kenya like Britain's Buggery Act of 1533 was adopted during British colonial power. Section 162 (a) of the Penal Code made 'carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature,' punishable hence criminalising same-sex activities. (Kenya Law, 2012). Although the Kenya High Court's justification for its decision to uphold these laws in 2019, was that the Penal Code applies to all Kenyans, LGBTQ identifying or not, the law limits the enjoyment of rights to human dignity, security, privacy, and health of queer individuals in Kenya (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Where the law defines the crime only as engaging in same-sex acts, its interpretation and application today also 'criminalise' gender expressions that exist outside heteronormativity. I argue that this repulsion to any behaviour that exists outside heteronormativity stems from entrenched patriarchy and extended colonial legacy that polices black bodies and equates heteronormativity to respectability. Any individual that defies heteronormativity in their sexual and gender expression is likely to be charged under this law on suspicion of engaging in same-sex acts.

Section 162(c) further prohibits, 'a male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature,'. I argue that the specificity in male persons in this law is rooted in perceived masculinities and the Eurocentric idea of maleness. The policing of bodies and sexuality is not only seen in queer bodies. To understand the dominant discourse on sexuality in Kenya,

we must situate violence against queer bodies in the wider context of colonisation and the violence against black bodies. After all, 'It is the racist, who creates the inferiorised.' (Fanon, 1952).

Post-colonial Kenya has been marked by a lot of progressive constitutional changes including the adoption of a new Constitution in 2010. The Constitution of Kenya guarantees all Kenyan citizens (whether by birth or by acquisition) fundamental rights and freedoms outlined in chapter 4 of The Bill of Rights. Citizenship has been contested by some feminists for its inability to cater to the socio-economic needs of marginalised groups by upholding hegemonic discourse (Zyl, 2009). As in the case of Kenya, although queer identities may be lawful citizens, their rights such as the right to security, education, health and life, particularly for visibly queer Kenyans are limited based on their sexual orientation and gender expression. To the question of whether constitutional freedom, particularly human rights is sufficient for the freedom of marginalised groups such as queer identities, Xavier Livermon, underscores that constitutional freedom does not automatically translate to cultural and social freedom. (Livermon, 2012). Queer Kenyans often lack a sense of belonging even though legally they are citizens. This explains the 'othering' of queer Kenyan citizens and homophobic incidents in communities that have led to violent attacks and even worse deaths of queer individuals. The denial of the existence of queer identities in Kenya and 'othering' in communities perpetuates the notions that queer Kenyans are not human or citizen enough, therefore are not warranted fundamental rights including the right to participate in peacebuilding.

Despite these challenges, queer individuals have continued to shape and contribute to the development of Kenyan society in various ways. As the LGBTQ rights movement continues to grow both locally and globally, so are the interests in understanding and addressing the unique experiences and needs of queer identities, particularly in the context of peacebuilding.

The intersection of queer youth and peacebuilding in Kenya is an important area of study, as it sheds light on the often-overlooked experiences and contributions of a marginalised group within the broader framework of peace and security. By exploring the historical presence of queer identities in Kenya, the challenges queer youth face in contemporary society, and their role in peacebuilding, this essay seeks to build a comprehensive understanding of the unique dynamics at play.

In recent years, the recognition of young people's role in building and maintaining peace, has increased, evidenced by the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda in December 2015. This resolution highlights the importance of engaging youth in decision-making processes and peacebuilding initiatives as well as acknowledges their agency and leadership in achieving peace and security (UN Security Council, 2015). However, the specific experiences and challenges faced by queer youth in Kenya have not been sufficiently explored within this broader context, leaving a crucial gap in our understanding of the barriers they face and the opportunities for their meaningful inclusion.

This essay aims to address this gap and advocate for the recognition and inclusion of queer youth in peacebuilding and decision-making in Kenya. By debunking the myth of queerness as a Western ideology, examining the marginalisation and social exclusion of queer youth, and highlighting the importance of their inclusion in peacebuilding efforts, this essay will provide valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers, civil society organisations, and international agencies working to promote peace and security in Kenya. This essay aims to inform the development of the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security in Kenya

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the topic, the essay will utilize various sources of information, including existing literature, interviews with five self-identified queer youths, 1 funder, and my experiences in peacebuilding. Through the analysis of these sources, the essay will identify the processes of marginalisation of queer youth and offer a nuanced understanding of the intersection of queer youth, peacebuilding, and decision-making in Kenya.

1.2 Context

1.2.1 Violence Against Queer Identities in Kenya

Queer identities face higher risks of violence, ranging from physical assaults, and verbal assaults to homicide. This can be attributed to deep-rooted stigma, discrimination, and lack of legal protections for queer Kenyans. These are some of the cases of queer individuals who died in recent years, because of homophobic violence.

Sheila Lumumba was found dead at their home in Karatina on 22 April 2022. The post-mortem reports showed that they were sexually assaulted and stabbed severely. (Wepukhulu & Madegwa, 2022)

Joash Mosoti was strangled to death in his house in Bamburi, Mombasa County on 11 May 2021. Joash was a human rights activist. (Defenders Coalition, 2022)

Sheila Kawira Mwirichia, a known LGBTQ activist and artist was found dead in her house on 3 November 2020 after she was reported missing for a few weeks. (Kimuyu, 2020)

Chriton "Trinidad" Atuhwera, LGBTQ activist and refugee, on 12 April 2021, succumbed to burns after there was a fire attack on Block 13 in Kakuma Refugee Camp where a group of queer refugees live. (UNHCR, 2021)

Even though Kenya provides asylum to individuals fleeing because of their sexual orientation or gender expression, queer refugees are subjected to extreme violence in Kakuma Refugee Camp. According to (UNHCR, 2021), there are about 1,000 LGBTQ refugees in the camps. Because of their legal status, and the limitations on employment for refugees, among other intersecting axes, queer refugees live in precarious conditions and are often subjected to violence within the camps.

The lack of legal protection and access to redress, societal prejudice, and inadequate response from authorities exacerbate the issue. Without legal protection, queer identities and organisations are faced with great challenges in seeking justice and publicly advocating for their rights. These are just a few examples of cases of deaths reported in the news. Besides reports from the media and LGBTQ organisations, there is limited data on the violence against queer identities in Kenya. Joyce Achieng, the Director of Pwani Feminists Future Alliance (PFFA), a queer feminist organisation based in Mombasa noted that the lack of statistical evidence is a major obstacle to their advocacy for the protection of queer women. She added that, even within advocacy spaces, they are always asked to present data on the claims made in their work. The documentation of these experiences is not an easy task. There are limited financial resources to collect data on the experiences of queer individuals across all aspects. It is even more difficult to document the violent experiences of queer identities as many wish to remain anonymous or would rather not report for fear of retaliation or harassment by the police.

‘Queer women wanapigwa, wapi data?’ - Joyce Achieng, Pwani Feminist Future Alliance

Loosely translated as, ‘Where is the data that queer women are subjected to violence.’

1.2.2 Situating my Epistemic Knowledge as a Young Peacebuilder in Kenya

In writing this essay, I choose to situate my work in my own experiences as a young queer Kenyan peacebuilder whose sexual orientation does not constitute the public and professional identity. In the past six years of frontline human rights activism, community organizing, and peacebuilding advocacy, I have never been referred to as a ‘queer activist’ or a ‘queer peacebuilder.’ I have never been invited to decision-making spaces because of my queerness even though the protection and inclusion of queer youths in peacebuilding has been a part of my advocacy focus. This position, coupled with my socioeconomic status, education qualifications as a university graduate and prestigious professional experiences have accorded me privileges that many queer youths in Kenya do not enjoy.

I, therefore, undertake this study as a personal journey to understand queerness from my reality and the perspectives of other queer youth in Kenya, experiences so similar yet different from my own. I use the term queer to refer to individuals’ expressions outside the heteronormative framework, which, in most cases, refers to their sexuality and sexual orientation, but may not always mean so. I do this to include the experiences of queer individuals who may not necessarily engage in same-sex acts. In some instances, I use LGBTQ and queer interchangeably, depending on context and the preferred identity of the subjects of my writing.

I draw on the experiences of 5 queer youth activists, four of them based in Kenya and work in the following organisations: Galck+, Kisumu Feminists Society (KFS), Pwani Feminists Future Alliance (PFFA), and Rainbow Circles Africa. One of the queer youths interviewed is from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The queer activists and organisations were selected because of their significant contributions to queer advocacy spaces. Although the queer activists in Kenya are geographically based in the major towns of Kenya; Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa, their experiences reflect a national perspective as they work in national networks. Galck+ is an umbrella body for LGBTQ organisations in Kenya that draws its membership from across the country. The funder interviewed, LGBTQ Funding Circle is based in the UK, and funds LGBTQ

youth activists in the Geopolitical South including in Kenya. Before my interviews, each of them signed a consent form and was furnished with an information sheet that detailed the study including the risks of participation. The interviewees are all identified by their preferred naming in the essay as follows; Kim for Kivenzi Muange from Galck+, Afrika from KFS, Joyce from PFFA, Alex from LGBTQ Funding Circle, Dina from DRC and 'A Representative of Rainbow Circles Africa.'

The study draws a comparison from Nigeria and DRC as they are the only African countries that have developed a National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security, launched in 2021 and 2022 respectively.

Many of the readings and references are by African literature and scholars like Professor Sylvia Tamale and Dr Stella Nyanzi, as I seek to not only challenge the perceptions of queerness as white but also as an act of resistance to the narratives that young Africans can only be practitioners, victims, or beneficiaries and not producers of knowledge in peacebuilding. As part of reclaiming my identity and decolonizing youth peacebuilding, I seek to draw attention to African studies, the varied experiences of being young and queer in Kenya, and the importance of including queer youth in peacebuilding.

My interests are in influencing what is happening in Kenya now in the peacebuilding space, which is the process of developing the Kenya National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security. I ask the following: What voices are being deliberately excluded in these processes? Can the understanding of the experiences of queer youth shape our strategies for the inclusion of minoritized groups in peacebuilding? What are queer youth's contributions to peacebuilding and how can these be further developed? And what can be done to increase the participation of queer youth in peacebuilding, particularly in this policy process? These and more questions have been the source of my curiosity throughout writing this paper and have been explored in the next chapters.

2. Queer Presence in Kenya

Queerness as un-African and a Western ideology is a common misconception disproven by historical accounts of diverse sexualities and gender expressions in pre-colonial Kenya. What was historically un-African is the labelling of same-sex relationships as 'queer' and 'LGBTI' as there were ethnic names for queer individuals such as 'Shoga' in Swahili (Chitando & Mateveke, 2017).

The word 'homosexuality' was introduced in the West to control social relations implying the deviance of individuals who engaged in same-sex relations (Msibi, 2011). However, in contemporary Kenya, individuals that exist outside of heteronormativity, especially among the younger generation identify themselves as queer or LGBTQ while others prefer to not label themselves. Decolonial thinking makes it essential to delink our notions of queerness and affirm those who do not wish to be assimilated into labels. (Mignolo, 2011). Debunking the misconceptions of queerness calls for decolonising through reclaiming our traditional languages and articulating the nuances of existing outside heteronormativity and non-gender conforming in Africa (Nyanzi, 2014). Embracing the diversity of African languages and tongues is critical in reclaiming queer identities in Africa. (Matebeni, 2014).

Queer individuals are often wrongly perceived as threatening the traditional family structure, social and 'natural' order, or even national security, despite no evidence supporting these claims. This argument stems from myopic imaginings of a homogenous African-ness and pedestrian oblivion to pluralities within African sexualities (Nyanzi, 2013).

Whether queerness is a lifestyle choice or not, is not a determinant of human dignity. Every individual must be able to make their own choices on their sexual and gender expression if they do not cause harm to another individual. The idea that queer individuals can be "cured" or "corrected," is an excuse to control and dominate queer bodies. The construction of bodies by patriarchy and other intersecting axes such as gender, class, race, socio-economic status, and social norms determine which bodies are worth protecting, including whether these bodies have the right to exist. According to the Galck+ report, *Shame is not Cure*, queer identities are subjected to physical, emotional, and sexual violence aimed at correcting their homosexuality, often perpetuated by their family members with the help of religious leaders. Queer Kenyans are often threatened with violence, loss of social ties and financial support to seek conversion therapy which results to harm and stigma (Galck+, 2022). The social disapproval and pressure to appear or perform heteronormatively negatively impact the mental health and well-being of visibly queer identities, often forcing them to mask their gender expressions to protect themselves. (Human Rights Watch, 2011)

Unfortunately, individuals subjected to conversion therapy, including 'corrective rape' or sexual violence cannot access justice due to the legal barriers that criminalise same-sex acts. The control and policing of queer bodies through the law drives homophobia and is part of the state's desire to maintain power and uphold the hegemonic discourse of heterosexuality.

2.1 History of Queer Identities in Kenya

To better understand the present-day experiences of queer youth in Kenya, it is critical to investigate the historical context in which queer identities emerged and evolved. The major challenge in the dominant discourse of homosexuality is the universalisation of queer identities. Africa is not homophobic, queerness is not un-African because there is no one way to be queer or African, and in fact, these misconceptions are driven by political self-interests rooted in harmful socio-cultural misconceptions of a homogenous African culture and identity (Chitando & Mateveke, 2017).

Some cultural practices and forms of gender expression in Africa have been misinterpreted or overlooked by historians and scholars, leading to a limited understanding of LGBTQ identities in African history. The erasure of queer identities in pre-colonial Kenya is largely due to heteronormative and colonial perspectives that ignore evidence of expression, sexuality, and identities. Many African societies have been influenced by religious beliefs that condemn LGBTQ identities, resulting in the concealment and denial of their existence in historical narratives. The limited availability of historical records, colonial forms of education, and knowledge production have made it difficult to uncover the diverse expressions of gender and sexuality that existed in pre-colonial Africa.

Queer people have been in existence and continue to exist, why do you want to attack people you live with, go to church with, go to mosque with? Why do you want to attack people you have been in the community with? – Kim, Galck+

2.2 Influence of Colonisation on Queer Identities in Kenya

The British Colonial Rule brought about the implementation of British laws and legal structures in Kenya. Murray and Roscoe argue that homosexuality was not introduced in Africa by the Europeans. Rather, 'they introduced intolerance of homosexuality, systems of surveillance

and regulation for suppressing it. Only when native people began to forget that same-sex patterns were ever a part of their culture did homosexuality become truly stigmatized.’ (1998).

The Penal Code that imposes systems of surveillance through anti-LGBTQ laws contributed to the erasure of LGBTQ identities. Additionally, these laws reshaped Kenya’s social norms, and cultural values hence why many Kenyans falsely believe that queerness is un-African. The police service in Kenya is one of the sectors that still uphold the colonial legacy in its operations, often manifested through the harassment and violence against queer Kenyans. For example, some police officers in Kenya target, arrest, and abuse individuals based on their sexual orientation. They solicit bribes in exchange for not charging queer individuals in court for breaking the law as stated in the Penal Code. According to Kim, some police officers provide redress to queer individuals subjected to violence. However, they do this, under the ‘radar’ as security actors cannot be publicly perceived to support homosexuality in Kenya. Kim mentioned that Galck+ has done significant work in building relationships with government officials to support their work with queer individuals in Kenya. Although not all police officers respect the rights of queer identities, Kim believes that those who do play a significant role, especially during these difficult times of public homophobic rhetoric by state officials.

The experiences of individuals who are visibly queer often include inadequate access to essential public services in various aspects of their lives. Legal and normative frameworks in Kenya are also highly influenced by social norms and inadequate public awareness of queer identities. This has contributed to internalized oppression amongst queer Kenyans where individuals must suppress their queer identities or mask themselves to conform to societal norms and avoid the consequences of being openly queer. For example, there is limited visibility and representation of queer Kenyans in the media, politics, and other sectors of society. This is not because no queer Kenyans are occupying these positions but rather due to the invisibility that queer Kenyans are subjected to, for the sake of their socio-economic safety.

2.3 Religion and The State

In Kenya, religion plays a significant role in legislation and state governance. Religious groups are major stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of laws in Kenya. Many religious leaders have championed against decriminalisation of same-sex and equality for queer Kenyans.

The argument by these religious leaders, primarily from the two main faiths i.e. Christianity and Islam is that homosexuality is sinful, contradicts religious teachings and therefore must be criminalised.

It is rather contradictory for religious leaders to claim homosexuality as un-African and foreign while deploying the use of foreign faiths to validate this argument. Kenyans, and by extension, African communities did not practice Islam until the arrival of the Arab merchants to the Swahili Coast in the 8th century and Christianity until colonisation by the British. Even though the Constitution of Kenya states that there is no state religion thereby religious discourses cannot be used to discriminate against individuals, religious narratives on homosexuality remain a major obstacle towards legal and social protection of queer individuals in Kenya.

Some politicians and government officials use religious beliefs as a moral justification for opposing LGBTQ rights and maintaining discriminatory laws. In February 2013, during a live debate on Capital FM Kenya, the current President, William Ruto referred to homosexuals as dogs. He has publicly declared that homosexuals are not welcome in Kenyan society citing that homosexuality is against religious beliefs. The late former President Daniel Arap Moi, based on his ideas of religion and African culture also publicly condemned homosexuality during his rule (Arcus Foundation, 2022).

The current administration has deliberately used religion as a tool to reinforce the notion that LGBTQ individuals are not entitled to the same rights as other Kenyans. In 2023, during International Women's Day, the President publicly declared his stance against homosexuality and urged religious leaders to intervene in the matter to ensure that homosexuality does not continue to spread in society. The Deputy President referred to the Supreme Court ruling on the registration of LGBTQ organisations as demonic (MUENI et al., 2023).

The lack of separation between religion and state governance perpetuates discriminatory policies and attitudes toward queer identities. This overlap in state and religion can also be seen in other aspects of governance such as the socioeconomic policies that underlie Ruto's manifesto. With most Kenyans belonging to the Christian faith, religion was a tactic to build voter trust by creating a sense of shared beliefs. The administration's use of religion is a political tool for the mobilization of voters and a weapon of violence against some citizens. Through homophobic

remarks, the administration normalizes violence against queer identities and fails in its constitutional mandate to protect every citizen of Kenya. The State is therefore not only complicit in the violence against queer identities in Kenya but also through its legal framework and application of the law avoids accountability. The administration creates an environment for both queer invisibility and hypervisibility. I borrow the ideas of queer visibility from Xavier Livermon to suggest that the participation of queer identities in peacebuilding must transcend visibility and recognition by the state and aim to subvert societal notions of gender conformity through destabilizing heteronormativity and creating possibilities for the freedom of queer identities to expand beyond legal and political rights based on citizenship to include socio-cultural rights and belonging (Livermon, 2012).

Religious and state leaders in Kenya are the primary sources of misinformation on queer identities in Kenya. After the Supreme Court Ruling, religious leaders organized protests and made strong statements demanding the removal of the Supreme Court judges and increased legal restrictions against LGBTQ (Mwai et al., 2023). Attributing the successes of the state to God also implies that the failures by the state are due to defiance of God. The low-hanging fruit, in this case, is queer identities, accused of this defiance resulting in unfortunate events in the country. I sustain that queerness is a political football, distracting Kenyan citizens from the economic crises and the state's failure to protect citizens against the high cost of living, food insecurity, and political instability in the country.

The policing of queer Kenyans is a deliberate attempt to maintain patriarchal and religious structures. It is strongly linked to Eurocentric moral views on sex and sexuality. The defiance of these views therefore challenges the power of religious and state leaders predominantly male. Homophobia is a tool for sexism and maintains the position of men in society. (Msibi, 2011)

On the other hand, some religious leaders and organisations have emerged as advocates for LGBTQ rights. The Late Archbishop and Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu was vocal about the rights of LGBTQ people in Africa (Religion News Service, 2021) One of his most popular statements about LGBTQ inclusion was:

'I would not worship a God who is homophobic. I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say, 'Sorry, I would much rather go to the other place.'

During the World Social Forum in Kenya in 2007, Tutu expressed his disappointment in Africa's focus on sexualities at a time when the continent was grappling with deeper social injustices (Rhodes University, 2013). Religious leaders are major players in challenging traditional interpretations of religious texts and encouraging their congregants to embrace equality, social justice, and inclusion. The work by Arcus Foundation in Kenya through research and advocacy with faith-based organisations in Kenya that affirm queer identities has been instrumental in promoting the inclusion of LGBTQ individuals in Kenya. (Arcus Foundation, 2022)

3. Marginalisation and Social Exclusion of Queer Youth in Kenya

Due to the criminalization of homosexuality in Kenya and the unwillingness of the state to protect queer Kenyans, young people who are visibly queer in their expression or performance are subjected to marginalisation and social exclusion from society including in accessing social services. This is an area of concern, as it has been widely documented that such exclusion and discrimination can have adverse effects on the mental health, well-being, and overall quality of life of queer youth in Kenya.

Due to the social stigma and discrimination, visibly queer youth have significant challenges in accessing healthcare, education, and employment, and worse still are subjected to physical and emotional violence by members of their families, communities, and strangers. This can have lasting impacts on the health and well-being of queer youth.

It is important to note that different groups of queer youth are subjected to intersecting forms of marginalisation due to their biological sex, social status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other forms of axes. This can compound their experience and the impact of violence. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes how different forms of oppression and discrimination, including race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, can intersect to create unique and compounded experiences of marginalisation for individuals. Further in this section, I draw inspiration from the two main categories of intersectionality by Kimberley Crenshaw; structural and political intersectionality to draw attention to the nuances of queer youth experiences in Kenya (Crenshaw, 1991).

3.1 Legal Framework and Criminalization

Homophobia is a form of gendered violence, perpetrated by the state through its discriminatory laws as a means of asserting power over minoritized genders. Homophobia in Kenya is rooted in patriarchy that seeks to use sexuality as a tool of oppression. 'Sexuality is intricately linked with the exercise of power.' (Foucault, 1980). Sexuality is a critical tool for maintaining patriarchy in society. Therefore, behaviours that exist outside heteronormativity present a significant challenge to the masculine power within African sexual relations as they disrupt social order (Tamale, 2007).

The criminalisation of same-sex acts in Kenya violates the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of Kenya. Article 27(1) provides that 'every person is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit from the law (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Article 27(2) also provides that 'equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and fundamental freedoms'(Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Therefore, every Kenyan, including queer Kenyans is entitled to equal protection and enjoyment of all fundamental freedoms. However, as is in the case of Kenya, queer identities are denied their fundamental freedoms including but not limited to; the right to equal opportunities, non-discrimination, security, right to life, and right not to be subjected to any form of violence among many others.

In 2016, three LGBTQ advocates filed a petition in court to repeal section 162 of the Penal Code. In 2019, the Court upheld the anti-homosexuality acts. The State contended that 'declaring this law unconstitutional would have a drastic impact on cultural, religious, social policy and legislative functions in Kenya, describing homosexuality as despicable and insulting to traditional morality.' The state also used religion to justify its decision stating that the Penal Code recognises God as the sole moral authority, further protecting the right of two adults of the opposite sex as provided for in Article 45 of the Constitution (KELIN Kenya, 2019).

The challenges in the decriminalisation of homosexuality remain a great threat to the safety and well-being of queer youth in Kenya. These challenges influence the state's engagement with queer youth either through interpersonal relationships such as the police and queer youth or at the policy level which is the state and queer youth organisations and activists. The (il)legalities of queerness in Kenya is core to the social exclusion and discrimination in Kenya.

3.2 Social Exclusion and Discrimination

Queer youth, who are visibly queer or perceived to be queer, especially those with lower income have reduced access to healthcare because of the negative treatment by medical professionals in hospitals. Health professionals in public hospitals have been reported to breach doctor-patient confidentiality by revealing the orientation of queer individuals or making derogatory and homophobic comments about queer patients. Queer individuals who are HIV positive are subjected to stigma and discrimination, especially in public health facilities. In avoiding this violence, some LGBTQ people opt to manage their HIV condition through nutrition which ultimately contributes to the deterioration of their health (Oliech, 2017).

In 2023, the Ministry of Education in Kenya initiated a campaign against any form of LGBTQ information or acts in schools. This followed the Supreme Court ruling but was not the first instance of harassment of queer youth in schools. In 2022, the former Minister of Education stated that gay and lesbian students will not be allowed in boarding schools and should instead only attend day schools closer to homes, where their behaviour can be 'monitored' by their parents to avoid spreading homosexuality in school. This unconstitutional and discriminatory decision led to students being expelled from school, merely on suspicions of being queer. Although feminists and LGBTQ advocates in Kenya protested this decision, students who identify or are presumed to be queer are at higher risk of violence and discrimination in learning institutions (Wepukhulu, 2022).

The different forms of discrimination queer youth are subjected to may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and shame ultimately affecting their mental health and wellbeing. Foucault (1978) contends that the perception that certain sexualities are deviant was due to the normative ideologies and universality of sexual practices. This idea of deviance can contribute to queer individuals' internalized oppression against themselves, particularly where those in power influence their perceptions of themselves. Additionally, the Minority Stress Model is a validated conceptual model that can explain the impact of discrimination on Sexual and Gender Minorities (SGM). It contends that consistent anti-SGM prejudice, stigma, and discrimination increase the risk of mental health challenges and diminish their psychological and social well-being (Hatzenbuehler PhD & Pachankis, 2016).

Article 27 of the Constitution of Kenya provides that no one will be discriminated against on any ground, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language, or birth. However, queer individuals face discrimination in employment either through harassment at workplaces or denial of employment opportunities for those who self-identify or are presumed to be queer. Section 5(3) of the Employment Act of Kenya provides that ‘no employer shall discriminate directly or indirectly, against an employee or prospective employee or harass an employee or prospective employee on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability, pregnancy, mental status, or HIV status (Employment Act of Kenya, n.d.). The Kenya Human Rights Commission (2011) reported the case of an employer who dismissed a young lesbian from employment after they found out she was a lesbian on Facebook. Her dismissal was referred to as gross misconduct. The responses from the interviews conducted also reiterated the concerns that many LGBTQ youth have about employment. Alex noted that many young people in the Geopolitical South work precarious jobs due to their level of education or due to the stigma and discrimination within the workforce. Joyce also mentioned that queer youth often must choose between their livelihoods or identities to survive, hence why many visibly queer youths are often unemployed in Kenya.

The stigma that queer individuals experience from their families and community members poses significant threats to their safety and well-being. The lack of legal protection leads to the justification of violence against queer individuals. Queer individuals are in some instances subjected to mob violence and physical and verbal abuse in communities. In Mombasa recently, Muslim clerics led hundreds of residents including children in a public protest calling for the government to kick out queer people out of society. They also publicly called for violence against anyone who identifies as LGBTQ in Mombasa. This violence and hate are being passed on to the younger people in Kenya where a child, assumedly younger than 10 years old publicly states that they will cut off their heads and slaughter LGBTQ people like animals (Mwangi, 2023).

3.3 Intersectionality and Compounded Marginalisation

First, in looking at structural intersectionality, I locate queer youth at the intersection of queerness and socio-economic class. Society is more tolerant of middle-class queer youth

because of their social status. These queer youth can also experience increased safety because of the neighbourhoods they live in, and their social networks. Additionally, they may have access to private healthcare services. Whereas in lower-income families, and within slums, or refugee camps, queer youth are at risk of being targeted first during incidences of violence such as in the case of electoral violence. I also draw attention to other intersecting identities such as legal status that make the experiences of young queer refugees different from other queer youth of a lower socio-economic class. Young queer refugees must wait on their resettlement cases to escape the violent situations they are in at Kakuma Camp. These processes often take a long time, sometimes even years. Out of an estimated 1,000 refugees at Kakuma Refugee Camp, only 235 have been resettled since 2019. (UNHCR, 2021)

When speaking to Afrika, she highlighted the challenges experienced by queer youth from low-income families. In polarized communities where violence is so common, queer youth are hesitant to participate in peacebuilding for fear of being attacked. At this time in Kenya marked by increased homophobic violent attacks, queer individuals with financial access have the choice to leave their homes and seek refuge in other safer towns, or countries. This is not a possibility for many queer youths of lower socio-economic status. She noted that even when it comes to seeking asylum, it is middle-class queer youth with access to international networks who can get these opportunities. Although queer youth of lower socioeconomic status may want to seek refuge elsewhere out of fear of homophobic attacks, they often do not have the means to.

‘What about people who don’t want to die, but don’t have the means to get out.’ - Afrika

Second, through political intersectionality, I observe how the politics of queer identities and youth populations have further marginalised the experiences of queer youth. I note that the experiences of queer women vary from queer men and non-binary individuals due to the politicization of women as a category. In queer advocacy in Kenya, many queer individuals who participate in peacebuilding, are older queer activists. As a result of their years of advocacy, which have made significant contributions to the movement, they retain powers amongst themselves, leaving the younger queer folks within the movement with little to no influence. Afrika observes that within queer advocacy spaces, discrimination based on age and experience is common. Opportunities to contribute to peacebuilding, especially globally are often reserved for the

'elders' in the movement. Consequently, youth is a politicized category in Kenya and within the advocacy space. There is significant talk about increasing youth participation in peacebuilding yet there is very limited political will and resources directed towards youth peacebuilding. Within this shrunk youth civic space, queer youth are often left at the margins, their agency forgotten, and their contributions overlooked. A representative from Rainbow Circles Africa noted that there are very limited opportunities for meaningful youth engagement in peacebuilding, especially within policy and decision-making spaces, and it is likely that queer youth will be deliberately or otherwise left out.

'Being young in Kenya is already hard. It is all about survival of the fittest at this point.'

Rainbow Circles Africa

Queer youth are invisible in societal processes whether that be at the local, county, or national level. The dehumanisation of queer youth has led to their limited presence or complete erasure in important peacebuilding processes. The state's refusal to acknowledge the existence and agency of queer individuals contributes to the exclusion of queer youth in peacebuilding. Queer youth due to fear of discrimination or violence shy away from these processes especially those that include direct engagement with the state. Joyce also noted that queer youth have become apathetic to peacebuilding because they lack trust in the processes and have no faith that they will transform their lives. For example, during elections, Joyce noted that many queer youths did not vote. The prevalent feeling was that it did not matter who got into power, their rights would not be protected, and therefore did not feel motivated to participate. Joyce expressed that although it is indeed true that peacebuilding processes are often discriminatory, it is not always the case, and as such queer youth need to work towards taking up space.

In my study, I locate queer youth at the intersection of biological sex and gender norms to call to attention the varying queer experiences. Gay men, who do not conform to societal standards of masculinity in their expressions whether that be dressing, speech or relationships are considered subordinate to men who exhibit hegemonic masculinities even if sometimes they may be queer. For example, feminine-presenting men are at higher risks of violence as compared to masculine-presenting men who may pass for cis heterosexual men. Masculine-presenting queer women are also targeted more than feminine-presenting queer women who in many cases

pass for cis-heterosexual women. It is these notions of a real man or woman that fuel transphobia and sexual violence as corrective rape (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The gender nonconformity of visibly queer identities poses threats to their lives. Afrika shared that in public spaces, masculine presenting women are often ridiculed and asked questions such as, 'Are you a girl or a boy?' Joyce also noted that although women are at risk of gender-based violence, the target is higher for LBQ women. It is also rather unfortunate that LBQ women cannot pursue justice, because the police are also discriminatory against queer identities in Kenya. The violence against queer women is not taken seriously both by the public and security holders.

'I can use my penis to change her,' - a common assault on LBQ women shared by Joyce

Achieng

Gender-Based Violence programming in Kenya must be cognizant of the compounded marginalisation that LBQ women are subjected to in Kenya and develop interventions that are intersectional and do not further deny queer women in Kenya justice. Despite this, queer youth continue to organize and advocate for their rights but so often at the margins of mainstream peacebuilding processes. They often engage in education, empowerment, and activism that target queer issues only, and very rarely do they interact with other stakeholders in Kenya.

4. Participation of Queer Youth in Peacebuilding

Queer youth in Kenya often join or establish LGBTQ and human rights groups to advocate for their rights and create safe spaces for their community. These organisations often focus on raising awareness about LGBTQ issues, addressing discrimination and violence, and promoting inclusivity and acceptance in society. Rainbow Circles Africa is a queer youth-led organization that promotes the safety and well-being of young queer Africans, especially in Kenya by increasing their access to information and mental health services. Some of their strategies for peacebuilding include digital advocacy, participatory research on emerging social issues, and storytelling. A representative of the organization noted that they have never been part of mainstream peacebuilding processes, as they often organize within queer networks and spaces. This is because of the fear of discrimination and stigma and the lack of information on these processes. She added that queer youth already struggle within existing societal spaces,

dominantly homophobic, hence in their work, feel the need to curate spaces that are affirming and safe for their members.

While collecting data for this study, I observed that these queer youth, who are significantly influential within queer advocacy, had limited knowledge of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda. Out of all interviewees, only one of them, Kim noted that they had heard about YPS in passing in school as they are an undergraduate student of International Relations. The queer youth also noted that they have not done any advocacy work within the realms of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda. The participation of queer youth in peacebuilding is critical in building a more inclusive, diverse, and peaceful society in Kenya. Some of the key barriers to their engagement include lack of access to mainstream peacebuilding spaces, fear of discrimination, inadequate funding, and lack of technical knowledge of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda. While these are significant barriers to engagement, their participation can lead to increased impact in peacebuilding and empowerment programs. The participation of queer youth in peacebuilding within the framework of Youth, Peace, and Security is almost invisible in Kenya. I, therefore, argue that queer youth are already participating in peacebuilding within the confines of queer organizing but are not adequately included in mainstream peacebuilding processes, particularly in the national implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda in Kenya.

4.1 Understanding the Advocacy Space in Kenya

The evolution of the advocacy space in Kenya is significant with diverse stakeholders taking part in shaping the country's policies and public discourse. This has resulted in various institutions that advance social, economic, and political development. LGBTQ rights organisations are among these institutions that have aimed at promoting the rights and well-being of sexual and gender minorities in Kenya. LGBTQ organisations face significant challenges and exclusion from mainstream advocacy spaces. The main stakeholders in the advocacy space in Kenya are civil society, social movements, media, and public discourse.

Kenya has a vibrant civil society with numerous organisations advocating for human rights and other interlinked social issues. These organisations play a critical role in voicing community concerns and influencing policy making. The lack of recognition of LGBTQ rights organisations in

Kenya limits the impact of their advocacy. In 2012, the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC), was denied registration by the NGO Board on the basis that its proposed names contravene sections 162, 163, and 165 of the Penal Code which criminalises same-sex acts. The NGO challenged the Board's decision in the High Court, based on violation of Articles 27 and 36 of the Constitution of Kenya on the right against discrimination and the right to freedom of association respectively. The High Court in its decision ordered the NGO Board to register it within 30 days but this decision was appealed by the Board at the Court of Appeal. In February 2023, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the High Court stating that limiting the registration of the NGO based on the sexual orientation of applicants was unconstitutional (Murimi, 2023). The legal restrictions on queer organisations limit the resources that they can access to effectively participate in peacebuilding and advocacy. Without formal registrations, it is challenging to operate and receive donor funding from mainstream donors.

LGBTQ organisations and activists have been part of social movements, advocating for recognition and equal rights. However, they often face resistance and exclusion within the movements. Joyce shared that in some cases, where they are included, their participation is tokenistic, and their contributions are not taken seriously. She also added that there have been cases of sexual harassment where more established mainstream movement organizers solicit sexual favours in exchange for their inclusion in different fora. LGBTQ organisations have also questioned the silence of human rights organisations whenever there is a crackdown on LGBTQ rights in Kenya. Social movements claiming to be pro-human rights but do not include the voices of queer identities contribute to the discriminatory public discourse on homosexuality in Kenya.

Organisations like Amnesty International, have been at the fore of advocating for the recognition and protection of queer identities in Kenya. Kim from Galck+ noted during our interview that Amnesty International provides legal and social support to different LGBTQ organisations and has also publicly expressed its solidarity with queer identities in Kenya. Allyships and intersectional civil society work are critical in educating the public on homosexuality and the rights of queer identities in Kenya.

The media plays an important role in influencing public opinion and framing policy debates in Kenya. While some media outlets have helped to raise awareness about LGBTQ rights

and issues, many others perpetuate negative stereotypes, stigmatization, and discrimination against LGBTQ individuals through misinformation and disinformation about homosexuality. This uneven media representation makes it difficult for LGBTQ organisations to fully participate in public discourse and advocate for their rights.

The legal environment in Kenya has been a major obstacle to the participation of LGBTQ organisations in the advocacy space. The Penal Code reinforces societal prejudice and creates uncertainties and insecurity for LGBTQ organisations. Moreover, LGBTQ groups often face difficulties in registering their organisations, accessing funding, and participating in policy making processes. Many LGBTQ organisations in Kenya rely on support from international donors and partners to carry out their advocacy work. However, the reliance on external funding often leads to the questioning of their autonomy by the state and in some instances perpetuates notions of homosexuality as an agenda sponsored by the West. Additionally, international funding sometimes comes with specific priorities, which may not always align with the needs of the LGBTQ community in Kenya.

4.1.1 Queer Rights Advocacy in Kenya

The queer rights movement in Kenya became more visible in the 1990s with the emergence of various LGBTQ organisations. These groups have made significant contributions to raising public awareness of queer identities and rights in Kenya. Some of the pioneering organisations in this advocacy include the Gay Kenya Trust, the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission and the Kenya Human Rights Commission.

The rise of digital activism has opened new avenues for queer rights advocacy in Kenya. Social media platforms have provided a space for LGBTQ activists to raise awareness, share stories, and engage with a broader audience. Organisations such as Galck+, Kenya Feminist Society, Pwani Feminists Future Alliance, and Rainbow Alliance Africa primarily use social media for their advocacy. Social media platforms have created avenues for connections, collaborations, and learning for LGBTQ organisations both locally and globally. Digital activism has the potential to challenge social and gender stereotypes and increase public awareness of LGBTQ issues in Kenya. Afrika noted that while social media still presents security challenges for queer identities in Kenya, the risks are lesser than in-person organizing and advocacy work. Their reach is also

significantly higher, and their operational costs are reduced which makes their work more sustainable.

She also noted the need for intergenerational queer advocacy to bridge the gap between older and younger queer activists and expand the civic space for queer advocacy. She added that queer organisations are all working for the same goal, hence recognizing the positionalities and privileges within different queer youth groups is essential in fostering collaboration within the queer advocacy space in Kenya.

4.1.2 Youth Social Movements

Youth social movements and youth-led advocacy in Kenya have been instrumental in shaping the country's social, economic, and political landscape. Youth movements continue to emerge as a platform for young people to engage in discussions, express their opinions and advocate for social change.

Young Kenyans actively engage in the liberation struggle. They were part of anti-colonial movements including the famous Mau Mau Rebellion that reclaimed the land and rights of Kenya in the colonial period. Young people remained active in post-colonial Kenya through numerous movements, many of which were situated in universities in the late 1980s and early 1990s, advocating for multi-party democracy (Amutabi, 2002).

Today, Kenya has one of the most vibrant youth-led social movements in Africa primarily engaged in community dialogue, public education, mutual aid, and local empowerment. Kenyan youth are innovative in their strategies to tackle social challenges including using digital tools, art, culture, social mobilization, and street theatre among other creative tactics to create social change.

When it comes to youth social movements engaging in policy discussions at the local and national levels, there is little presence and recognition for queer youth organisations. This phenomenon is not new as in my review of literature on youth social movements pre- and post-colonial independence, I found no explicit mention of queer people's participation. It is my observation that most of the youth social movements do not explicitly work with queer youth as a category of their own but rather through general participation where it is predominantly youth who are not visibly queer who participate. Additionally, I observed that many queer youth

organisations only focus on LGBTQ rights or Sexual Reproductive Health Rights. This is not to suggest the lack of participation of queer youth in social movements but rather to point to the gaps in evidence of queer individuals' contribution to social change, both in policy and programming.

Some youth movements recognise the importance of addressing multiple, interconnected forms of oppression and marginalisation. They often strive to create inclusive spaces that accommodate diverse identities such as gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, in their advocacy efforts. ISIRIKA, a youth-led movement I founded in 2021 creates inclusive spaces for the participation of queer and cis-heterosexual youth to collaborate and advocate for the social issues they care about.

5. Implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda

Before the adoption of the UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security, young people were perceived primarily as victims or perpetrators of conflict or beneficiaries of peacebuilding projects, and rarely as agents of peace. This is despite evidence of the role of young people in building peace at the community level, in learning institutions, and across all sectors of society. The YPS agenda recognises the agency of young people, challenges negative stereotypes of young people, and promotes their meaningful engagement in decision-making.

There have been significant milestones in the implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda following the adoption of UNSCR 2250 in 2015. Some of these include 1) the release of the Missing Peace report; Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security (2018) that provided an in-depth analysis of the contributions of young people to peace and security and highlighted the need for an evidence-based, inclusive, and participatory approach to youth engagement and called for greater investment in youth-led peacebuilding initiatives.

2) In 2019, the Security Council convened a briefing on the implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda. For the first time since the adoption of UNSCR 2250, young people were invited as briefers to report to the council on the impact of the adoption of UNSCR 2250 on young people's lives. Alongside the UN Youth Envoy Jayathma Wickramanayake and Afghan Youth Activist Sofia Ramyar, I highlighted the need to protect the rights of young women and

sexual minorities, human rights defenders, and peacebuilders at the Security Council Briefing (Muganda, 2019)

Unfortunately, despite the reports of violence against queer youth, there have been no concrete actions taken by the Security Council to hold accountable Member States that continue to violate the rights of queer youth and as a result, fall short of their mandate to implement the YPS agenda. The Security Council has been complicit in addressing matters on the protection of LGBTQ individuals in repressive states. The first ever LGBTQ-specific meeting took place in 2015 focusing on the persecution of LGBTQ individuals by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, recently announced that the US as a permanent member of the Security Council will integrate LGBTQ rights into the Security Council's work. Specifically, through regular review of the status of LGBTQ people in conflict zones (Security Council Report, 2023). It can be assumed that following the US's strong stance on this matter at the Security Council, Member states that have criminalised homosexuality will be pressured to take protective measures for LGBTQ individuals, but it is still too early to tell. It is worth observing how these provisions will cut across all Security Council's work including the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda in the future.

5.1 Global Implementation

The YPS Agenda, primarily anchored on the UN Security Council Resolutions 2250, 2419, and 2535, emphasizes the need for inclusive participation of all youth in peacebuilding activities. While these resolutions do not explicitly mention queer youth, the push for inclusivity should naturally extend to them.

Although the protection of queer youth and their participation in formal YPS spaces is still wanting, queer youth have always been at the front of peacebuilding efforts globally. Queer youth have been vocal about their experiences in peace processes. Some of these challenges include the tokenization of queer youth, where their contributions are limited to queer-focused issues ignoring their expertise in different topics. Queer youth experience discrimination in global advocacy spaces, including in accessing financing for their peacebuilding work. (Search for Common Ground et al., 2022) Financing for youth peacebuilding is a challenge for many youth-

led organisations, however, queer youth organisations' experiences are compounded due to the security and legal barriers to doing their work.

Funding queer youth activism requires radical, innovative, and thoughtful strategies rooted in the unwavering belief that the lives and rights of queer identities should not be dictated by authoritarian governments. The LGBTQ Funding Circle, founded by Alex Farrow is a great example of such strategies. The Funding Circle is a network of LGBTQ activists, organizers, and allies aimed at fighting discrimination through networking, solidarity, sharing strategies for LGBTQ organizing, and providing unrestricted core funding for LGBTQ youth activists to campaign and organize their communities. Alex leverages his experience of running the funding circle to advocate for additional funding and funding models that are accessible for LGBTQ youth, particularly those in countries that have criminalised homosexuality.

'Funders need to be braver, if you hide behind legal frameworks that deny LGBTQ organizers access to resources based on their registration status, then your systems uphold the status quo.' - Alex Farrow

The YPS agenda is a unique opportunity to deepen LGBTQ+ engagement beyond peace and security (Aveta, 2022). YPS is an opportunity to dismantle barriers that hinder the participation of young people in civic and peace processes. These barriers may be based on age but also intersect with sexuality and gender identity, socioeconomic status, race, and ableism among others. While pushing for a global implementation of the YPS agenda, it is therefore imperative to not lose sight of the various ways in which these axes interplay at the regional and national level particularly where homosexuality is criminalised.

5.2 Regional Implementation

At the continental level, Africa, through the African Union and its agencies has been at the fore of increasing youth participation in peace processes before the adoption of the YPS agenda in 2015. For example, the African Youth Charter adopted in 2006 recognises the role of youth in promoting peace and security in Africa. The charter also provides for every young person the 'right to inter alia non-discrimination, protection of private life and participation in peace processes' (African Union, 2006). The African Union Peace and Security Council convened its first

open session on Youth, Peace, and Security in November 2018 where it called for Member States to develop National Action Plans and address barriers to youth participation in peace processes. The Council tasked the Commission with conducting a study on the role of young people in Africa in promoting peace and security. (African Union, 2018).

The guarantee of these fundamental freedoms for all African youth is only in theory. The African Union has continuously denied the identities of queer Africans and has deliberately excluded queer youth in policy and practice. In 2015, when the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) granted observer status to the Coalition of African Lesbians, a South African NGO, the AU Executive Council directed ACPHR to retract this decision citing that it was against African values, identity, and good tradition. (African Union, 2015). ACHPR, an independent body mandated to uphold human rights due to political pressure from the AU withdrew its decision. In a more recent decision, ACHPR denied observer status to three NGOs, Human Rights First Rwanda, Alternative Côte d'Ivoire, and Synergía – Initiatives for Human Rights on the same basis. (Eye Witness News, 2023).

The political instrumentalisation of sexuality and gender identities is a major obstacle to the participation and inclusion of queer identities in Africa. Coupled with ageism, queer youth in Africa bear a bigger brunt when it comes to exclusion from peace processes. The denial of the existence of queer Africans, the continued legacy of colonial powers and interests, and the link between religious fundamentalism and member states continue to hinder the inclusion of queer youth in peacebuilding. The African Union is complicit in the violence that queer youth are subjected to by adopting policies such as the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace, and Security, Bujumbura Declaration on Youth, Peace, and Security in Africa that do not acknowledge their presence and the security challenges they face.

5.3 National Implementation in Kenya

In March 2023, Kenya through the Ministry of Youth and Sports committed to the development of the National Action Plan, officially kicking off the process of national implementation of the YPS agenda in Kenya. The process is primarily state-led and in conjunction with a multi-sectoral committee that will include the National Youth Council, International Conference on the Great

Lakes Region (ICGLR) Youth Forum, Finland Embassy, UN Agencies, and National Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security. (Nyanza Daily, 2023)

There is no explicit mention of the representation of minoritized groups in this process. In my advocacy experience, the inclusion of minoritized youth groups such as refugees, youth with disabilities, and rural youth in national policy processes in Kenya is so often an afterthought and where done is limited and tokenized. With a shrunk civic space for youth participation in Kenya, it is highly unlikely that marginalised youth groups will be meaningfully engaged in this process. Therefore, to think that queer youth groups will be deliberately included in this national process is not only wishful thinking but unimaginable.

However, this is not to say that the inclusion of queer youth in the development of the national action plan is impossible but rather it will take strategic partnerships, political will, allyship, continuous advocacy, and leveraging on collective organizing in existing peacebuilding networks such as the Kenya Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security to make it happen. It calls for working with queer youth in existing policy spaces to ensure that the agency and needs of queer youth are included in this process.

‘If there is one queer person there, there will be space for more.’ - Rainbow Circles Africa

5.3.1 Kenya Coalition on Youth Peace and Security

In 2022, while working in New York, I began thinking of how to organize young peacebuilders in Kenya to push for national implementation of the YPS agenda. As an activist, I envisioned a network of grassroots activists collectively shaping the youth agenda in Kenya. Building power through education and organizing while leveraging the YPS agenda as a tool for accountability on how the state engaged with young people in Kenya. It is then that I began consulting with colleagues in different organisations at the local, national, and even global levels on how to initiate the national coalition on youth, peace, and security. I met with different peacebuilders, civil society organisations, and UN agencies collecting views on how to effectively push this agenda forward in Kenya.

While I recognise that there were similar efforts to initiate a national YPS network by other leaders, I believe that it is important to credit my efforts and those of my youth

organization, ISIRIKA for taking leadership, concretizing these efforts, and mobilizing individuals and organisations in the initial formation of the Kenya Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security. The Kenya Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security is a network of over 100 youth-led organisations from over 20 counties in Kenya and the numbers are growing. My intersectional identity makes it even more important for this attribution because it is evidence of the importance of recognizing the agency and expertise of queer youth in peacebuilding. I recognise that by publicly documenting my identity concerning this national network and process, I risk losing the legitimacy of my leadership for this network and credit for my work. However, this is no bigger challenge than the violence many queer youths are subjected to, and their erasure in decision-making in Kenya.

The diversity of the Kenya Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security membership is still wanting. Beyond the binaries, we are lacking the representation of not just queer youth, but also youth with disabilities, refugee youth, youth from rural counties, and youth from other minoritized groups. The Kenya Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security is currently the only youth-led civil society network of YPS actors in Kenya therefore the responsibility to be inclusive is not only necessary but must be a priority.

5.4 In Other Parts of the Continent; National Implementation of YPS

The Nigeria National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security launched on 1st November 2021 by then President Muhammadu Buhari lays out a national framework for the implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda. The plan details actions in each of the five pillars of the YPS Agenda to be implemented by the different stakeholders in Nigeria. One of the focuses of the NAP is developing and implementing gender-sensitive and youth-focused strategies to counter violent extremism and radicalization. (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development & UNFPA, 2021) In my analyses, there is limited context and interpretation of gender sensitivity. There was also no mention of queer youth, their participation in peacebuilding, protection, and prevention of targeted violence. This is despite the significant contributions by queer youth in advocacy and civic movements including in the EndSARs protests of 2020. Queer Nigerian youth are subjected to systemic violence because of discriminatory laws such as the Same-Sex Marriage

Prohibition Act, which prohibits LGBTQ Nigerians from marrying and criminalises any affiliations and association by queer individuals (C.J., 2020).

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security was developed by the government to empower youth and promote their participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts. Although the NAP aims to integrate gender perspectives and inclusivity in peacebuilding efforts, in my analyses, the definition of gender is binary and has no mention of minoritized genders. Due to the criminalization of homosexuality in DRC, queer youth organisations in DRC remain invisible in the NAP and the national peacebuilding advocacy space. This is despite the stigma and discrimination that they face in the society. Speaking with Dina² from DRC who was involved in the development of the DRC NAP, she shared that LGBTQ youth were not explicitly included or mentioned in the document because of the legal restrictions on queer identities. However, in the anonymous survey that was disseminated to all young people in DRC for input into the document, LGBTQ youth likely participated in the survey. It is therefore difficult to assess the extent of queer youth participation in the NAP process in DRC.

Both Nigeria and DRC National Action Plans emphasize the need for gender sensitivity and inclusivity, with a binary interpretation to highlight the roles of young men and women in peace processes. The absence of explicit mention of queer agency, exclusion of minoritized genders, and queer youth organisations in the process, may have been systemic or unintentional due to the continued invisibility and discrimination of queer youth in policy and advocacy spaces in both Nigeria and DRC.

It is important to note that the state's leadership in both countries in the national implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda is a major obstacle to the participation and inclusion of queer youth in these processes. Lack of legal protection, stigma, and discrimination ultimately prevent queer youth and their needs out of these processes, and their experiences are completely excluded from the NAP document.

² Dina is a pseudonym for a young peacebuilder from DRC who wished to remain anonymous due to security concerns.

6. Building Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies with and For Queer Youth in Kenya

The struggle by queer identities in Kenya is not just about sexuality. It transcends identity politics and calls for decolonial thinking around patriarchal power and systems of oppression on minoritized groups and wider social injustices in the Kenyan population. The use of violence and religious fundamentalism to impose fear and threaten the existence of queer identities is a continuation of a colonial legacy that has long expired. To build a peaceful, just, and inclusive society, we must look at the experiences of queer youth, not only through their subjection to violence but also through their revolutionary tactics of organizing, advocacy, and peacebuilding in oppressive environments. Because many queer identities have had to survive, they have created stronger communal ties, and mutual aid relationships and understand what it takes to fight injustices.

The participation of queer youth in peacebuilding is essential for building a just and inclusive society in Kenya and can contribute to dismantling harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about queer identities, ultimately changing public discourse on homosexuality in Kenya. This can lead to social cohesion and ensure the rights of all individuals are considered in decision-making in Kenya. By creating opportunities for the participation and meaningful engagement of queer youth in peacebuilding, society can benefit from the experiences, expertise, and knowledge of queer youth. The sexual and gender expression of an individual does not in any way negate their agency and ability to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding. Queer youth are more than just experts in sexuality and sexual reproductive health rights.

Drawing on the responses of queer youth involved in this study, the analysis of existing literature, and my peacebuilding experience, I suggest the following recommendations for increasing the participation of queer youth in peacebuilding in Kenya.

1. Repealing Sections 162, 163, and 165 of the Penal Code that criminalises same-sex acts in Kenya. These anti-LGBTQ laws infringe on the fundamental freedoms of queer youth and pose significant security threats to their existence and well-being by positioning them as targets of state and communal violence. Queer youth need to feel safe in their homes,

communities, schools, and other public spaces to engage in peacebuilding activities meaningfully.

2. Decolonial thinking in designing, implementing, and evaluating youth programming and policy interventions to dismantle power structures and systems of oppression that hinder the participation of minoritized groups such as queer youth in Kenya. Applying a decolonial lens to youth peacebuilding is essential in drawing attention to the complex historical relationship between the state and youth, by understanding the roots of state violence and its use in contemporary society to punish or silence young people in Kenya.
3. Capacity Building for Queer youth in Kenya on the UN Security Resolution 2250 to ensure they are well equipped with the tools to advocate for their inclusion in decision-making in Kenya. The queer youth must be selected from diverse groups to ensure that these spaces don't reproduce systems of inequality amongst queer youth. The design of these capacity-building sessions must ensure the safety, well-being, and protection of identity where necessary for participating queer youth.
4. Increase resourcing for queer youth initiatives and ideas through developing accessible and flexible funding models. Funding for queer youth organisations needs to consider the legal barriers and security risks of queer advocacy in Kenya. Providing queer activists in Kenya with core funding ensures that their work is more sustainable and can respond to emerging threats that they may face in their work.
5. Public awareness campaigns to disrupt gender norms and debunk myths and misconceptions about queer identities in Kenya. Educating communities through dialogues, community gatherings, and integrating queer histories and contemporary experiences into public discourse to challenge negative stereotypes about queerness. By collaborating with queer youth organisations, major stakeholders such as international organisations, civil society, and policymakers can ensure that queer individuals in Kenya reclaim their historical identities, own their narratives, and lead the public discourse on homosexuality.
6. Support existing queer youth networks actively involved in peacebuilding and develop meaningful partnerships with allies in decision-making spaces to ensure queer youth are

included in peacebuilding processes. Queer youth need to be included in the development of the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security as well as in other decision-making spaces.

7. Promote allyship and solidarity within the youth advocacy space, particularly in youth networks such as the Kenya Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security. Allies must be equipped with knowledge of queer rights to ensure that where queer youth are not included, they can draw attention to the unique experiences of queer youth in Kenya.
8. Increase opportunities for all young people to access basic human rights such as education, and employment to expand the space for youth engagement. With more young people in Kenya enjoying access to these fundamental freedoms, there will be less room for competition over minimal resources that pushes queer youth to the margins.
9. Invest in research on queer youth and the different aspects of their experiences. Reliable and sufficient data on queer youth is critical in building evidence that can be useful to strengthen advocacy and influence policy making in Kenya and globally.

7. Conclusion

By tracing the source of homophobia in Kenya to colonial laws, religious fundamentalisms, and state failure to uphold the Constitution of Kenya, this essay disrupts the narratives that queerness is un-African and affirms the presence of queer identities in pre-colonial Kenya before the adoption of the Penal Code. Through exploring the history of queer identities in Africa, the influence of colonisation, and Abrahamic religions, the invisibility and hypervisibility of queer identities, I draw attention to the state's desire for control and power over queer bodies in Kenya. I also underpin the state's refusal to decolonise its systems of governance, particularly its discriminatory legislation.

Further, through public reports and personal testimonies, the essay demonstrates the systemic and structural violence against queer bodies in Kenya. However, through Kimberle's intersectional framework, I argue that queerness in Kenya is not homogenous, and queer youth's intersecting identities determine their experiences and compound their marginalisation. Therefore, even within queerness, there is no single story of what it means to be a queer youth in Kenya, and it is important to take these unique differences into account in peacebuilding.

I challenge notions of queer victimhood by demonstrating the different ways in which queer youth are resisting systems of oppression and participating in peacebuilding processes. These insights have been drawn from analyzing texts on social movements and advocacy in the wider Kenyan socio-political landscape. The participation of queer youth in peacebuilding is often within exclusively queer advocacy spaces making their presence almost invisible in the mainstream peacebuilding process in the framework of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda. I argue that, while there is more to be done to increase queer youth participation in peacebuilding in general, the major challenge lies in including them in decision-making spaces dominated by state presence or led by the state such as in the national implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda.

I call to attention the experiences of queer youth within the framework of Youth, Peace, and Security from the global, regional, and national levels. The perpetuation of violence against queer youth through deliberate exclusion from policy documents and within the broader peace and security discourse at the Security Council and the African Union. The essay foresees an opportunity to increase queer youth participation through the Kenya Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security, a collective for youth peacebuilding organisations. However, it recognises the need to strengthen allyship and create safe spaces for queer youth to discuss, learn and share their experiences. I suggest increasing access to tools, resources, and information for queer youth in Kenya to enhance their capacity to participate in this national policy process. By examining the experiences of DRC and Nigeria and their deliberate exclusion of queer youth's experiences within their National Action Plan on YPS, I underscore legal barriers as the main contributing factor to the inadequate queer youth participation in peacebuilding in Kenya and other African countries. The participation of queer youth in peacebuilding has the potential to provoke discussions on gender equality within the broader frameworks of peace and social justice.

I challenge policymakers to take up the recommendations from this essay and incorporate them into their work to ensure the needs and agency of queer youth are recognised in the Kenya National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security.

There have been moments of writing this paper when I have felt both empowered and disempowered. My position as a queer youth living in Iceland grants me the privilege of safety and the choice to detach to the extent I can from the ongoing violence against queer identities

in Kenya. Yet the pain of hearing firsthand the subjection of violence, and the call for the murder of LGBTQ individuals in Kenya in social and mainstream media has challenged my objectivity in writing this paper. Although the initial intention was to pursue this assignment as a project proposal, it was not feasible to implement such kind of a project at this time in Kenya. I hope to pursue the recommendations of this essay through advocacy to ensure that the knowledge produced can directly influence the development of the National Action Plan on YPS. I have felt a deep sense of gratitude to the queer community for openly welcoming my requests to be part of this process, albeit on short notice. I have learned many lessons on my African history, colonial past, sexualities, gender expression, and peacebuilding, some of which may not have made it to the final document but have shaped my thinking and writing. This essay is one example of how queer youth in Kenya are reclaiming their histories, owning their realities, and resisting oppression to make the full enjoyment of their rights, a reality.

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