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A Postcolonial Analysis on the Politics of the LGBTQ Movement in Colombo, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

LGBTQ issues have been mainstreamed in media and academic literature, especially in countries of the Commonwealth of Nations, where homosexuality has been said to be criminalized through the commonly known "sodomy laws". This has fueled an international social movement, led by Western human rights organizations, with cultural, political and economic goals seeking to advance LGBTQ rights globally. However, research on these issues in Sri Lanka remains limited. This study seeks to overcome this gap by exploring the LGBTQ movement in its capital, Colombo, conducting a series of interviews to LGBTQ leaders, activists and active members of the community. The study uses social movement theory (with the concepts of grievances, collective identity and strategy) and postcolonial theory. Hence, the following research question is answered: *How is the politics of the LGBTQ movement expressed in postcolonial Sri Lanka?* Findings indicate that the movement's grievances are connected to the country's colonial history, as well as to the human rights discourse. Additionally, collective 'identity', a complex concept in Sri Lanka, was found to be "hybrid" among activists, and was contested by activists themselves. Lastly, it was found that there is an insinuation of concern in terms of mimicry in the strategies and a suggestion to decolonize from Western models of activism.

Key words: LGBTQ, LGBTQ activism, Sri Lanka, social movement theory, grievances, collective identity, strategy, postcolonial theory.

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ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ILGA	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Association
LBT	Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (or Queer)
MSM	Men who have Sex with Men
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WSG	Women's Support Group

1. INTRODUCTION

> For over 135 years, the LGBTIQA community has been marginalized and discriminated against due to archaic British Laws that were introduced in 1883, which our Governments have clung on to for over 70 years of independence in order to vilify and marginalize our community. Meanwhile, the UK and 35 other Commonwealth Countries have moved to remove these laws. As recently as weeks ago, our neighbor India decriminalized consensual same sex relationships, freeing over 200 million LGBTIQA persons from under the yoke of British Colonial laws. We ask, why not Sri Lanka?
>
> "*Butterflies for Democracy*" protest (Equal Ground, 2018)

This statement was made by Sri Lankan LGBTQ non-governmental organization (NGO) Equal Ground in late December 2018 during the political turmoil shaking the country[1], after President Maithripala Sirisena referred to LGBTQ people as "butterflies", which the community took as a slur. This was turned it into an opportunity for the movement to advocate for civil and political rights through the protest "Butterflies for Democracy".

The Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement is young, yet dynamic and dazzling. It emerged in the late 90s in line with the international efforts against HIV/AIDS. The movement is formed by an active pool of social movement organizations, based on diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), class, ethnicity, religion, and language. However, despite the movement's vibrant nature, literature on LGBTQ issues in Sri Lanka remains under-explored. Research in English mainly focuses on the analysis of Section 365 and 365A of the Sri Lankan Penal Code, commonly referred to as "sodomy laws", which criminalize consensual same-sex sexual acts (Baudh, 2013; Lennox and Waites, 2013; Prateek, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2016). This often entails the retrieving of testimonies of discrimination, violence and abuses experienced by LGBTQ people in the country, and the endeavors put in place to combat them under the human rights framework.

LGBTQ activists have been often cited on media articles or reports from NGOs to discuss issues impacting the lives of LGBTQ people, such as the initial stages of the gay life in Sri Lanka (BBC, 2005) or the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among the LGBTQ community in the country (UNDP, 2013). However, they have done so through the eyes of Western epistemologies, paying attention to specific aspects of LGBTQ narratives such as human rights violations or politics of visibility (i.e. Pride marches or the act of "coming out"). In this sense, there are currently no studies that

[1] Known as the 2018 Sri Lankan constitutional crisis, President Maithripala Sirisena appointed Mahinda Rajapaksa (former President of the country) as Prime Minister by the end of October, but he did so without formally dismissing the current Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe. This resulted in the country having two Prime Ministers simultaneously.

directly target Sri Lankan activists as objects of inquiry to discuss their own views about the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement itself. Therefore, this thesis seeks to address this gap in research and investigates LGBTQ activism from within, by grasping on the inputs of those who directly carry it out.

1.1. Research Question

Through this thesis, I inquire about the construction and development of the present-day Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement based on the views of its collective actors: LGBTQ leaders, activists and active members of the community. Against existing Western academic literature on LGBTQ issues in Sri Lanka, I do so by identifying and analyzing dynamics that echoes discussions on postcolonial dynamics. Therefore, I seek to answer the following research question:

How is the politics of the LGBTQ movement expressed in postcolonial Sri Lanka?

To answer this question, I draw on concepts from social movement theory to structure the politics under which the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement is developed: the formation of grievances, the building of collective identity, and the choices of strategies used by the movement (Jenkins, 1983; Johnston et al., 1994; Buechler, 1995; Haug, 2013). These concepts will be further elaborated on in the thesis. Hence, three sub-questions have been formulated:

1. *What is the role of colonialism in the movement's grievance formation?*
2. *To what extent is the movement's collective identity influenced by the West?*
3. *How do the movement's strategies seek to decolonize?*

The purpose of this thesis is not to focus on the actual claims[2] of the LGBTQ movement. Instead, it seeks to explore and analyze how it has been formed and carried out, and how such process evokes postcolonial discussions. The acronym "LGBTQ" is used interchangeably with the term "queer" throughout the thesis, as it is often used in research as an umbrella term that encompasses all SOGI that do not fall within the heterosexual or cisgender labels (New York University, n.d.).

[2] These currently include the repeal or revision of Sections 365 and 365A on the Sri Lankan Penal Code (which criminalizes homosexuality – see section 2.2), the establishment of anti-discrimination acts and the overall goal of combating homophobia.

By conducting this study, I aim to make two significant contributions. First, I add up to an academic repositorium on LGBTQ social movements in the Commonwealth of Nations, which share a history of criminalization of same sex sexual acts, imposed during the British administration. Second, I reveal ideological and organizational features of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement based on the inputs of its collective actors. Hence, I understand Sri Lanka as a 'postcolonial state', not only in the sense of being a new nation-state emerged after the Second World War period (as part of the global South), but as a complex political, cultural and economic unit entangled in long and ongoing decolonization processes since independence (Carter, 2010).

1.2. Thesis Outline

Having stated the research question and sub-questions, I continue by providing a historical background of the LGBTQ movement in the country and a brief overview of the LGBTQ scene in Sri Lanka, in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, I situate LGBTQ movements within the social movement theory and provide a review on LGBTQ movements in the global South through the lens of postcolonial theory. Chapter 4 explains the methodological features of the study. In Chapter 5, I present the analysis of the study based on the proposed analytical model. Lastly, in Chapter 6, I conclude by summarizing the findings of the study and by suggesting possible future research areas.

2. BACKGROUND: THE RISE OF THE LGBTQ SRI LANKANS

It is estimated that around 20% of the Sri Lankan population identifies with one of the letters of the LGBTQ acronym (Equal Ground, 2017a). Yet, a Victorian-era law, which criminalizes consensual same-sex sexual acts, has remained since colonization. To a large extent, this has resulted in having a society that silences, rejects or denies the existence or rights of people who identify outside of the heterosexual label.

This section is divided into three parts. Firstly, it introduces the early stages and development of the LGBTQ activism in Sri Lanka. As this study focuses on the present-day LGBTQ movement, this section accounts for a brief documentation of the movement's history as well. Secondly, it provides an overview of the sodomy laws imposed by the British ruling. Lastly, it presents some cultural aspects and societal attitudes that impact the lives of LGBTQ people in the country.

2.1. Genesis and Development of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ Movement

The LGBTQ movement in Sri Lanka is often cited to be born in 1995 with *Companions on a Journey* (COJ), the first gay group of the country, funded by the Dutch government (Prateek, 2014; Laurent, 2005). The main purpose of the group, which became the leading organization for gay rights, was to decriminalize homosexuality. Sherman de Rose, its founder, is said to be the first person to publicly identify as gay in Sri Lanka (Samath, 2009). As a result, death threats, assaults and boycotts were common, including the day in which COJ's establishment was announced (Laurent, 2005). By 2005, COJ became a safe place for the gay community, screening queer films and providing access to gay literature and information about HIV/AIDS, playing a key role in the HIV/AIDS prevention strategy with both governmental and non-governmental bodies (BBC, 2005). Indeed, the first National Consultation Meeting on Men who have Sex with Men (MSM), HIV and sexual health took place in 2009, opening the first sexually transmitted infections drop-in center through COJ (UNDP, 2013). The organization was eventually dissolved in 2011 after allegations of mismanagement of funds and embezzlement (LH and IP (gay men: risk) Sri Lanka CG v. The Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2015).

In parallel, the *Women's Support Group* (WSG) emerged as an autonomous body within COJ. It was the first and only group advocating for the needs, claims and rights of, and providing a space for, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (LBT) women (Laurent, 2005). In 1999, WSG called for the

first lesbian conference, but the event was canceled after The Island, a national newspaper, published an article calling for the rape of the women attending (WSG, 2011). The organization dissolved in 2010. According to Wijesiriwardena (2017), there are currently no queer women-focused organizations in Sri Lanka.

Lastly, *Equal Ground* (EG), perhaps the most visible LGBTQ organization in the country, was created in 2004 by Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, a renowned international human rights activist. The organization's motto goes beyond gay issues by seeking to advocate for the human and political rights of "all sexual orientations and gender identities: human rights for everyone". Its website provides images, resources and information about LGBTQ rights and issues, including publications in English, Sinhalese and Tamil (Equal Ground, n.d.). In 2005, EG launched the first Colombo Pride, which the organization eventually expanded with a varied range of artistic performances (Equal Ground, 2006). Currently, EG is a well-known NGO participating in national and international fora, including the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association[3] (ILGA) and the Commonwealth Equality Network[4]. It provides a wide range of services and implements various projects in Colombo and throughout the island.

The early stages of these organizations met a period in which ethno-nationalist politics were strongly present in Sri Lanka. Between 2005 and 2015, the island was ruled by Mahinda Rajapaksa, a man who has been pointed out as a strong opposer for LGBTQ rights. This resulted in having LGBTQ organizations facing "strict surveillance and government-backed homophobic media reporting" (Chandimal, 2016). According to Mangala Samaraweera (2014), a former member of the Parliament, the country was subsumed into a "black hole of intolerance, hypocrisy and despair" after Rajapaksa tried to discredit him using Sections 365 and 365A. Extremist Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalist groups like *Sinhale* or *Bodu Bala Sena* also contributed to this environment, as they have persistently disagreed with granting rights to LGBTQ people, or directly threatened or attacked LGBTQ organizations, especially via social media (Tamil Guardian, 2016; Walko, 2016). At the present time, many LGBTQ groups and organizations have started to bloom, contributing to a wider and dynamic movement. The following list is not exhaustive, and it arbitrarily excludes LGBTQ groups and organizations whose main language of operation is Sinhalese

[3] ILGA is a worldwide federation of non-governmental organizations and groups advocations for LGBTQ rights.
[4] The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN) is a group of civil society associations from the Commonwealth of Nations to combat inequality on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity (TCEN, 2019).

and/or Tamil: the National Transgender Network[5] (NTN), Venasa Transgender Network[6], Young Out Here, the Community Welfare Development Fund[7] (CWDF) and Chathra[8]. Other organizations support LGBTQ issues, including the Human Rights Commission, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies and Women and Media Collective[9], among others.

It is worth mentioning that the LGBTQ movement is not only diverse in the pool of institutions and organizations that comprise it, but also in terms of the identity of its collective actors. Aspects such as ethnicity, religion and language need to be acknowledged in order to understand their influence in the configuration of the movement. Sri Lanka is the home of different ethnic groups, including Sinhalese (74,9%), Sri Lanka Tamil (11,1%), Indian Tamil (4,1%), Sri Lanka Moor (9,2%), Burgher (0,1%), and others including Malay, Sri Lankan Chetty and Bharatha (0.7%) (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012a). This multiplicity has been the root of cultural, social and political differences. The civil war between the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (commonly known as Tamil Tigers) emerged as a result of political disputes between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamil, the latter seeking to create an independent Tamil state. The war was ended by the Sri Lankan military, who defeated the insurgent group in 2009. The country is still recovering, although clashes between both ethnic groups remain today.

Furthermore, Sri Lanka is also diverse in terms of religious affiliations: Buddhism accounts for 70% of the population, being the main religion in the country and having been granted constitutional privileges. Other religions include Hinduism (12,6%), Islam (9,7%) and Christianism (7,4%) (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012b). Tensions between the majority Buddhist and minority religions have been evidenced with anti-Muslim violence for over two decades, with riots in cities like Kandy and Ampara targeting mosques and Muslim-owned businesses (Crabtree, 2014; The Nation, 2018)[10].

[5] NTN was created to ensure that the health and rights of transgender people are granted in Sri Lanka.
[6] The Venasa Transgender Network was created in 2015 and provide legal and health support, as well as social well-being, to LGBTQ people, especially transgender persons (Astraea Foundation, 2019).
[7] CWDF aims at providing immediate support for LGBTQ people in need. CWDF was created in 2018 "out of a joint effort by queer activists and an educational advocacy group" (PlanetRomeo Foundation, 2018).
[8] The movement also recently initiated the "LGBT Partnership Forum", which creates a safe space where LGBT(Q) activists and organizations are represented, and share resources and support each other with the constant exchange of information (through email lists, WhatsApp group, etc.) and the decision making processes [Malindu, Nuwan, Ishka, Ravi].
[9] Women and Media Collective was formed by a group of feminists in 1984, and it seeks to "explore ideological and practical issues of concern to women in Sri Lanka" (Women and Media Collective, 2017).
[10] By the time this thesis is being written, Sri Lanka suffered one of the deadliest religion-related attacks of its history. In April 2019, during Easter celebrations, three churches and three luxury hotels were simultaneously bombed by terrorist suicide attackers in Colombo, Batticaloa and Negombo. This left a death toll of more than 250 people, and more than 500 injured (Ethirajan, 2019).

2.2. Sri Lanka's Legal Landscape: "Sodomy Laws"

The Sri Lankan laws more frequently said to be linked with human rights violations of LGBTQ people are Sections 365 and 365A[11] of the Sri Lankan Penal Code (Equal Ground, 2013) (see Figure 1). Generally, the content of these two Sections is similar to that of the Penal Code of other former British colonies, including India.

Section 365 states: "penetration is sufficient or necessary to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence" (ibid: 4). The term "carnal" has been equated to something unnatural/against the order of nature, in the sense that the natural essence of sexual intercourses refers exclusively to the possibility of conception of human beings. For Section 365A, the term "gross indecency" has not yet been defined. Using their interpretative powers, courts can enforce the law based on whatever they consider sexually "unnatural" or "indecent" (ibid). Although only two people have been arrested under the "gross indecency" provision as of today, these laws are often used to threaten LGBTQ people.

In addition to Sections 365 and 365A, other provisions of the Penal Code have been used to intimidate or harass LGBTQ individuals. Section 352 and 353[12] related to "abduction" as an action used against lesbian women who run away from their homes with their partners. According to Equal Ground (ibid), this is attributed to a traditional practice of controlling the lives of women to follow sociocultural beliefs.

[11] Original text of Section 365 and 365A of the Sri Lankan Penal Code. "***365****: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be punished with fine and where the offence is committed by a person over eighteen years of age in respect of any person under sixteen years of age shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term not less than ten years and not exceeding twenty years and with fine and shall also be ordered to pay compensation of an amount - determined by court to the person in respect of whom the offence was committed for injuries caused to such person.* ***365A****: Any person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any person of, any act of gross indecency with another person, shall be guilty of an offence, and shall be punished with imprisonment of either description, for a term which may extend to two years or with fine or with both and where the offence is committed by a person over eighteen years of age in respect of any person under sixteen years of age shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term not less than ten years and not exceeding twenty years and with fine and shall also be ordered to pay compensation of an amount determined by court to the person in respect of whom the offence was committed for the injuries caused to such person"* (ILO, 2007).

[12] "***352****. Whoever takes or entices any minor under fourteen years of age if a male, or sixteen years of age is a female, or any person of unsound mind, out of the keeping of the lawful guardian or such minor or person of unsound mind, without the consent of such guardian, is said to "kidnap such minor or person from lawful guardianship.* ***353****. Whoever by force compels, or by any deceitful means, or by abuse of authority or any other means of compulsion, induces any person to go from any place, is said to "abduct" that person."* (ILO, 2007).

Figure 1. Legal Procedures to Convict Individuals through Sections 365/365A

Section	*Offence*	*Arrest with warrant?*	*Bailable/Not Bailable*	*Punishment*
365	Unnatural Offences (carnal intercourse against the order of the nature)	Officer may arrest without a warrant	Not Bailable	Imprisonment (…) for 10 years and fine, whipping in addition
365A	Act of Gross Indecency	Officer may arrest without a warrant	Not Bailable	Imprisonment of up to 2 years, or fine, or both, whipping in addition

Source: Equal Ground (2013)

Lastly, the *Vagrants Ordinance*[13], which criminalizes people behaving in a 'riotous, disorderly manner', 'common prostitutes' who act in an 'indecent manner' (ibid), is used against transgender people. A 2006 study in Colombo and surrounding areas found that "some police officers harass, assault, and extort money or sexual favors from gay/transgendered men" (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights & Labor, 2006 cited in Nichols, 2010).

2.3. Societal Attitudes towards LGBTQ People

Allegations of stigma, discrimination and/or abuses experienced by LGBTQ people are inherently linked to the sociocultural features of the Sri Lankan society. Women take the greatest burden. According to a study carried out by the Asian Development Bank (1999: 16), Sri Lanka holds onto "patriarchal values that influence gender relations" in the country. Unequal gender relations result in women seen as "dependent wives", and in male control over female sexuality with a high incidence of "rape, incest, sexual harassment and domestic violence" (ibid). This is somehow contradictory, as Sri Lankan society enjoyed relatively sexually liberal traditions prior to the colonization, such as polyandry under the Kandy law[14]. In terms of LGBTQ identities, masculine lesbian and bisexual women, and gay and bisexual men whose gender expression is feminine, may be "singled out for abuse and discrimination" (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Thus, a match between the person's sex assigned at birth and gender expression needs to be clear, or at least "convincing" (ibid). This, however, provides no guarantee that treatment would be more or less

[13] Vagrants Ordinance. *Every person behaving in a riotous or disorderly manner in any public street or highway shall be liable to a fine (...). 3. (1) (b) every common prostitute wandering in the public street or highway, or any place of public resort and behaving in a riotous or indecent manner; (...) shall be deemed an idle disorderly person within the true intent and meaning of this Ordinance, and shall be liable upon the first conviction to be imprisoned, with or without hard labour, for any term not exceeding fourteen days, or to a fine not exceeding ten rupees.* (Vagrants Ordinance, 1842).

[14] Known as *eka-ge-kema*, which translates in "eating in one table", women could have several husbands of the same family. This practice was banned by the British in 1859 (Dissanayake, 2019).

abusive (ibid: 10). Sri Lankan society considers homosexuality as an "illness", and as a "foreign" or "Western" imported behavior contrary to the national culture (ibid). In 2015, current member of the Parliament Nalinda Jayatissa stood against LGBTQ rights arguing that such 'unnatural feelings' emerge after stressful situations and that same-sex marriage is unnatural and "against the evolution of human beings" (Karunanayake, 2016). Current President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena blocked the proposal to repeal Sections 365 and 365A in 2017 (Pothmulla, 2017; Wipulasena, 2018). Due to this social intolerance, LGBTQ people find it difficult to come to terms with their own sexuality. Therefore, it is common that people get married and have a regular (heterosexual) life because it is perceived as easier than coming out (BBC, 2005).

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical discussion for this study is divided into four sections. The first section defines social movements in general terms, introducing the concepts of grievances, collective identity and strategy. The second section describes the LGBTQ movement as a social movement, broadly describing the nature of its existence and common goals. The third section presents a combination of theoretical and empirical scholarship in the advancement of LGBTQ movements in the global South and introduces concepts of postcolonial theory. Lastly, the fourth section proposes an analytical model to interpret the data collected in the exploration of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement.

3.1. Defining Social Movements

Social movements are not just collective, but a sum of individual actors that interact with each other to achieve certain goals. A movement is formed by "diversified and autonomous units (…), (connected) by a communication and exchange network that keeps them in contact to each other" (Melucci, 1996: 113). Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of the concept of social movement is provided by Diani (1992: 13), who states that a social movement is a "network of informal interactions between plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity". These interactions between this set of collective actors are necessary for transforming opinions and beliefs into action. In this sense, the movement needs a set of shared beliefs and solidarity, also described as a "common sense of belongingness", a shared identity that fosters solidarity among collective actors. In turn, collective action emerges to counter conflictual issues, as social movements get involved in problematic relations with other actors (institutions, countermovement, etc.) to advance social change. This is relevant within movements where collective action aims at advancing political change, and particularly important when the movement is exclusively or primarily oriented towards cultural or personal change (Diani, 1992). Based on this definition[15], three elements can be extracted

[15] Diani (1992) also proposed another element in the definition of social movements: "Action which primarily occurs outside the institutional sphere and the routine procedures of social life". It discusses the institutionalized and/or non-institutionalized nature and behavior of social movements, and how social movements are distinguished from political movements. This aspect has been intentionally left out of the theoretical framework due to its relevance to the overall aim of the thesis.

to form a theoretical understanding of social movements: individual actors share a *collective identity* (shared beliefs and solidarity), grounded on a series of *grievances* (conflictual relations), which the movement seeks to counteract through different *strategies* (collective action).

As stated earlier (see section on Research Question), these concepts are used in the proposed research sub-questions in order to contribute to the structuring of the analytical framework of this study. I continue by providing a brief definition of these terms, in no particular or causal order.

Grievances, as defined by Rennick (2015: 64), are "real or perceived causes of complaint, and especially of injustice". They are a fundamental pillar in the formation and development of a social movement. It is the individual, as part of the collective, who experiences grievances that are shared by the group, which they seek to address through the movement and achieve their resolution (Johnston et al., 1994). Grievances become the ideological basis for mobilization, as they, combined with a sense of injustice and its negative psychological effects, are jointly shared and experienced by certain groups/classes/populations (ibid). Grievances are adopted by individuals through interpersonal interactions, media discourse (which helps to identify grievances' originators), experiential knowledge and popular wisdom (which contributes to the emotional burden of such grievances) (Gamson, 1992; Klandermans, 2001; Rennick, 2015).

Grievances both contribute and are part of the collective identity of social movements, as the definition of one's identity is central to assess people's likelihood to become involved in collective action to counteract those grievances (Melucci, 1988 cited in Buechler, 1995). As stated by Haug (2013), individuals who become collective actors need to move beyond interpersonal networks and follow a sense of collective identity. Along with 'grievances', a sense of collective identity becomes the main socio-psychological force for mobilization, having (shared) inequalities and injustices as the materialization of the individual's discontent (Johnston et al., 1994). Collective identity is understood both as a matter of self (individual) and as an external (movement's ideology) definition. This means that collective actors must identify as part of a broader movement while, simultaneously be perceived as such (by individuals within the movement itself, opponents and/or external observers) (Diani, 1992).

Posterior to having shared grievances in place, and after the development of a collective identity, collective action comes into place. Strategy, as defined by Jenkins (1981: 135), is "the blueprint of activities with regard to the mobilization of resources and the series of collective actions that

movements designate as necessary for bringing about desired social changes", including protests, campaigns, events and other forms of activities with communicative intentions. This includes how the movement articulates its efforts with political institutions and bodies, as well as the identification of potential allies and opposers (Rennick, 2015). However, it is not just about these collective actions; strategy in social movements also refers to the decisions made in relation to the external actors. Therefore, such decisions are connected to the movement's "cultural and political context, past experiences and historical memory, (…) by the manner in which claims, and goals are understood" (ibid: 75).

3.2. LGBTQ Movements as Social Movements

Having shed light on the general aspects of social movements, it is possible to present a brief overview of the conceptualization of LGBTQ movements. Melucci (1996, cited in Ford, 2013: 2) provides a definition of 'new' social movements, which pursue "identity politics and universalistic concerns", where individuals' need for self-realization and aspects of their daily lives become the primary goals. Under the definition of new social movements, individuals seek more post-materialistic values, aiming to challenge socially shared meanings and ways to define and interpret reality, instead of advocating for material resources, such as an uneven distribution of power and/or economic goods (Inglehart, 1990 cited in Buechler, 1995; Diani, 1992).

As argued by Debnath (2015: 45), the LGBTQ movement is placed under the umbrella of new social movements, as it mainly focuses on "human rights, cultural (…) issues, rather than economic or class-based issues"[16]. Based on Melucci's ideas, new social movements are not only active in the public sphere, with the deployment of protests and mobilizations, but also in the domain of cultural production. In this sense, the LGBTQ movement advocates for the rights of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual and Transgenders (as well as those who identify as Questioning or Queer and other non-conforming gender identities). Originated after the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969, it has cultural ("challenging dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity, homophobia, and (…) heteronormativity" and political goals ("changing laws and policies in order to gain new rights, benefits, and protections from harm") in the civil and political spheres (Bern-

[16] I acknowledge the difficulty of placing LGBTQ movements under either "traditional" or "new" social movements. For the purpose of this study, I focus on Debnath's (2015: 45) approach on situating LGBTQ movements under new social movements, as it primarily addresses "social, psychological, sexual rights and/or demands", rather than economic rights/demands.

stein, 2002: 536). Hence, LGBTQ movements "reflect a notion of collective identity, in which individual and group identities merge and empowered individuals become an important site of political strategy and action" (Russell et al., 2010). To a larger extent, the movement also seeks to fight against poverty, as LGBTQ people are more likely to experience "food insecurity, housing instability, low wage-earning potential, and unemployment and under-employment" than their heterosexual peers (Social Justice Sexuality, 2018: 4).

3.3. LGBTQ Movements in the Global South through Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism refers to the "contestation of colonial dominance and the legacies of colonialism" (Loomba, 2015: 33). This contestation is rooted in one of the most visible facts in universal history: 84,6% of the global land surface was colonized by the Europeans. The subsequent three-century wave of 'new nations' (post-independence states) generated social, political and cultural behaviors that, for postcolonial theorists, reflect the living legacies of colonial and often resembles colonial-like dynamics. This is named by Quijano (2007: 170) as 'coloniality of power', "the most general form of domination in the world today".

Barry (1995: 193-195) presents several characteristics[17] for a postcolonial theorization, extracted from both academic and literary work. This is a non-exclusive and non-hierarchical categorization. When undertaking a postcolonial analysis, researchers need to refer to those political and cultural aspects that scholars have analyzed and contested to explain social phenomena in nations with histories of colonialism. The first characteristic refers to that of an "awareness of representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral 'Other'". This critique is rooted in Edward Said's book "Orientalism" (1978), whereby there is a universalism of the European (the West) that highlights its superiority and prevalence over whatever that is not (the East). This is what Said calls the practice of 'orientalism', where the West portrays the East as 'the Other', inferior to the West. The second characteristic relates to language. According to Barry (1995), several postcolonial scholars perceive that the imposed language by the colonizer is "tainted", and writing in it signifies a kind of consent, an agreement in continuing colonial structures, similar colonial-like power dynamics. The third characteristic refers to the postcolonial identity. Identity in former colonies is perceived as "doubled, hybrid or unstable", the mixing of the Western and Eastern culture.

[17] Barry (1995) includes one more dimension for postcolonial criticism: an emphasis on cross-cultural interactions. This mostly pertains to cultural materialism and knowledge production, which will not be considered in this thesis due to relevance.

Homi K. Bhabha in his book "The Location of Culture" (1994), drawing on Edward Said, understands hybridity as the process through new cultures emerge from multiculturalism (Parsons and Harding, 2011). But the concept does not only account for simplified identities (such as "Eurasians" or "British-Anglo Indians), but also include complexities in race, language, culture and religion that shape the postcolonial identity (Singh, 2009).

Postcolonialism has been applied to the analysis of various subjects, including LGBTQ issues. Indeed, it has been argued that "gay rights" have been globalized (or universalized) due to the widespread work of *The Gay International,* a term quoted by Massad (2002: 361). This concept refers to the labor carried out by mainly ILGA and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), dominated by "white Western males" with the aim to "defend the rights of gays and lesbians" internationally. Literature shows that LGBTQ activism in the global South, from its very emergence and development throughout post-modern history so far, resembles features of the LGBTQ movement in the global North, operating under similar social and cultural models that took place in the United States and Europe (Ford, 2013). This realization becomes a point of reference to analyze LGBTQ movements using postcolonial theory.

Bringing into conversation social movement theory with postcolonial theory, the following subsections review how postcolonial dynamics are manifest and have been documented in global South's LGBTQ movements in terms of grievance formation, the construction of collective identities and the strategizing of collective actions.

3.3.1. Grievances: Colonialism and Human Rights Discourse

In LGBTQ movements in South Asia and Africa, grievances have been connected to their history of British-imposed sodomy laws. International initiatives then seek to link the human rights discourse with this criminalization (Baudh, 2013). This has resulted in, for instance, the development of The Yogyakarta Principles, a guide that seeks the application of the international human rights law in the protection of people based on their SOGI. Under Chapter 6, "Right to Privacy", this document recommends that "all laws that criminalize consensual sexual activity among persons of the same sex who are over the age of consent (…)" are repealed (The Yogyakarta Principles, 2006: 14). Although these laws are not generally enforced, they are often used by the police to intimidate members of the LGBTQ community. In Bangladesh, the sodomy law is used to "harass MSM" (ibid: 290). In Sri Lanka, where the law was made gender-neutral in 1995 (previously only

applicable to men), there have been cases in which the police cite the law to bribe transgender people, asking them for sexual favors or money to avoid conviction (ibid: 292). In India, there is a more ample registry of human rights violations through the enforcement of the sodomy laws (see PUCL-K, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2002). In Malaysia, a Muslim-majority state, sodomy laws go together with the application of *sharia*[18] laws in targeting sexual minorities (Shah, 2013).

Grievances in LGBTQ movements in the global South (but also in the global North) have been associated with feelings and/or a sense of homophobia. Homophobia is articulated with human rights violations, discrimination, violence and stigma. Thus, movements intend to advance social, political and cultural change through the mainstream human rights discourse (Serrato and López, 2018). Indeed, activists in the global South are encouraged to continuously document human rights violations as means to advance policy development (Quesada, 2013). In a study on the LGBTQ movement in Brazil, Pereira (2017) notices a shift in the framing of grievances from a "public health" dimension (due to HIV/AIDS international efforts) to a "homophobia" framing. Such framing occurs due to a "rights and citizenship" normative principle, derived from the combat against forms of discrimination and violence, turning victimization into the core of LGBTQ claims (ibid). Homophobia, then, has been marked by global LGBTQ human rights organizations as "one of the greatest social problems of our time" (Durban-Albrecht, 2017: 168).

3.3.2. LGBTQ Identities: Local vs. Unlocal

Buechler (1995) argues that the development of a collective identity (as well as group interests) in new social movements is recognized as 'fragile' and often problematized, instead of assuming it as structurally determined. This is the case for the LGBTQ movements in the global South from various perspectives. Dragging histories of colonialism, collective identity is contested by virtue of Western understandings of what it means to identify under a 'non-heterosexual' label. In many postcolonial states, particularly those that belonged to the British empire, homosexuality has been portrayed as an 'un-local' identity, a colonial imposition (Bajaha, n.d.). This is what Long (2005) calls "backlash (around sexuality)", where (sexual minority's) "rights" are seen as 'invaders', while also being in opposition to those countries' traditions and culture. For instance, in Namibia,

[18] *Sharia* is one of the terms used to refer to Islamic law. It refers to "God's divine law as contained in the Quran and the sayings and doings of Muhammad" (The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, n.d.). A great amount of literature has been written about the connection between *sharia* and the advancement of LGBTQ rights in Muslim-majority states, and how *sharia* allows or not same-sex sexual acts (see Ali, 2006).

political parties have framed same-sex relations as "Western, un-African, and un-Christian" (Currier, 2011: 443). In fact, the use of the terminology "LGBT(Q)" translated into difficulties in the campaigns of local LGBTQ social movement organizations, as the usage of Western identities was perceived as "cultural, racial and national inauthenticity" of sexual and gender diversity activists (ibid: 458). In India, Section 377 (similar to Section 365 of the Penal Code in Sri Lanka) was usually "invoked by Hindu nationalists as supporting traditional Indian values" (Waites, 2010: 974). Similar reactions have been registered in Jamaica, Egypt and Zimbabwe, either based on nationalist or religious speeches (Long, 2005).

Identity is also contested amongst members of the LGBTQ community itself, based on the essentialist behavior of the global LGBTQ activism. In her analysis of the ILGA report called "State-sponsored homophobia", which provides an overview of the countries where homosexuality is criminalized and the extent to which countries have granted LGBTQ rights, Ali (2017) concludes that colonial-like power dynamics are ingrained within the international development work. She argues that development initiatives and projects draw on Western epistemologies by portraying countries as "homophobic" and picturing them as "pre-modern, barbaric, savage, and un-liberated" under the human rights framework (ibid: 3). As seen in the section on *3.3.1. Grievances: Colonialism and Human Rights Discourse* in this thesis, this representation of LGBTQ activism results in the universalization of constructions of narratives of people's sexualities, having the West as the point of reference. This ends up becoming a tool "to affirm difference as distance" between Western and non-Western states (ibid: 3). In this sense, Spivak (2005: 1) considers that the "metropolitan definition of homosexuality should not be imposed upon the heterogeneous histories of homosexuality in the periphery". Similarly, Gross (2013: 99) points out that "the gay rights slogan seems to entail a uniform conception of both sexuality and rights, an understanding that both 'gay' and 'rights' are or should be identically conceived everywhere". Hence, there is a sense of universality in the motto "gay rights are human rights" in all three concepts: 'gay', 'rights' and 'human', forcing us to think in a globalized way (ibid). As Dutta (2012: 113) argues in his analysis of India's multi-identarian society, "(these) liberal discourses of equal rights visibilises some LGBT subjects as deserving citizens, (while) entrench(ing) or reiterat(ing) extant social stigma against lower class/caste groups and subject positions". According to this author, this further underpins the problematic notion of 'homonormativity', whereby the LGBTQ movement mainly

gives recognition and visibility to "elite queers into nationality, citizenship and sociocultural respectability" (ibid). Therefore, an essentialized notion of "gayness" become dominant, ascribing with power dynamics, while other notions, depicted as local and non-Western, are suppressed or demoted (Lind, 2011).

Another issue in relation to the human rights framework refers to the prolongation of seeing the world under dichotomic identities: occident/orient, civilized/uncivilized; where the concepts of "Self" and "Other" are incorporated, and similarities and differences are constantly enacted through the process of Othering (Kapoor, 2004; Belizário, 2016). This categorization, or ambivalence (as explained by Bhabha, 1994) is criticized by Massad (2002), who states that the Gay International has been responsible for 'heterosexualizing' the world, in the sense that it is forcing it to think within the rigidity of the Western binarity (heterosexual/homosexual). Through the lens of postcolonial theory, this is known as hybridity, the process through which cultural meanings are translated or "iterated" through by the "Other". It is a source of domination based on disproval: "the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority" (Bhabha 1994: 112). Furthermore, this Othering is also hierarchical, which results in having global South's LGBTQ movements seeing the North as the example to follow. For instance, in analyzing the legal dispute to repeal the sodomy law in Singapore, Chang (2014: 312) found that West was constantly remarked as the "archetype of inevitable progress", while Singapore was portrayed as "backwards and under-developed". Similarly, after most Latin American countries have decriminalized homosexuality and promoted protection acts in favor of the LGBTQ community, the region has been described as the most 'gay-friendly' after Europe, fostering ideals of social and economic development (The Economist, 2015).

3.3.3. Strategies: Actions to Decolonize

The term "decolonization" can be understood in various ways. This thesis uses two approaches: one approach refers to decolonization as a "rupture with the colonial past and a dismantling of colonialist infrastructures, ideologies, and practices" (Currier, 2011: 446). This refers to the *undoing* of the residues of the colonial ruling, i.e. through the repeal of sodomy laws. The other approach is that of "sexual decolonization". This concept refers to the restructuring of epistemological constructions of SOGI in postindependence states in ways that uplift autochthonous expressions over foreign ones (ibid). Considering the use of postcolonial theory in this thesis, I expand

the latter definition by not only accounting for the revision of SOGI expressions, but also including the processes through which they are claimed within (LGBTQ) social movements in the global South.

As explained earlier, global South's LGBTQ movements focus on the repeal of sodomy laws, as they reaffirm and perpetuate "the heterosexist and homophobic legacy of colonialism in the present" (ibid: 447). Literature shows that once decriminalization occurs, LGBTQ movements mirror initiatives emerged in the North, usually with the labels of "equality" and "liberation", concepts that originated in the West (Waites, 2005: 123-131). Indeed, Bhabha (1994) examines the process of mimicry, arguing that former colonizers articulate sophisticated strategies to preserve their economic, political and cultural endurance through that process, and the 'colonized' imitate those features (Singh, 2009). For instance, Pride marches were born after the Stonewall riots occurred and were rapidly replicated geographically. In this vein, Bennett (2017) analyzes how Pride marches in India and South Africa have been discursively constructed, seen as a progressive sign on the road towards accepting sexual minorities, and mimicking semiotic symbols, using rainbow flags and the human rights discourse. Such discourse has thus enabled certain goals to be prioritized, such as the legalization of same-sex unions or adoption, being these at the top of the LGBTQ agenda. This is, perhaps, more noticeable in Latin American countries, where judicial bodies have emitted assimilationist pro-LGBTQ rights acts, including the approval of equal marriage, and inclusion and anti-discrimination policies (Bernstein, 2008). Similarly, the act of "coming out" became one of the main narratives of the LGBTQ movement. Following Moussawi (2015: 599), this might be problematic since the use of such strategy in non-White, non-middle class and non-Western contexts could be and have been usually associated with the apparent natural developmental pathway of "modernity", putting queer people of color in a place of ability to "step out of the shadows" of their repressive cultures.

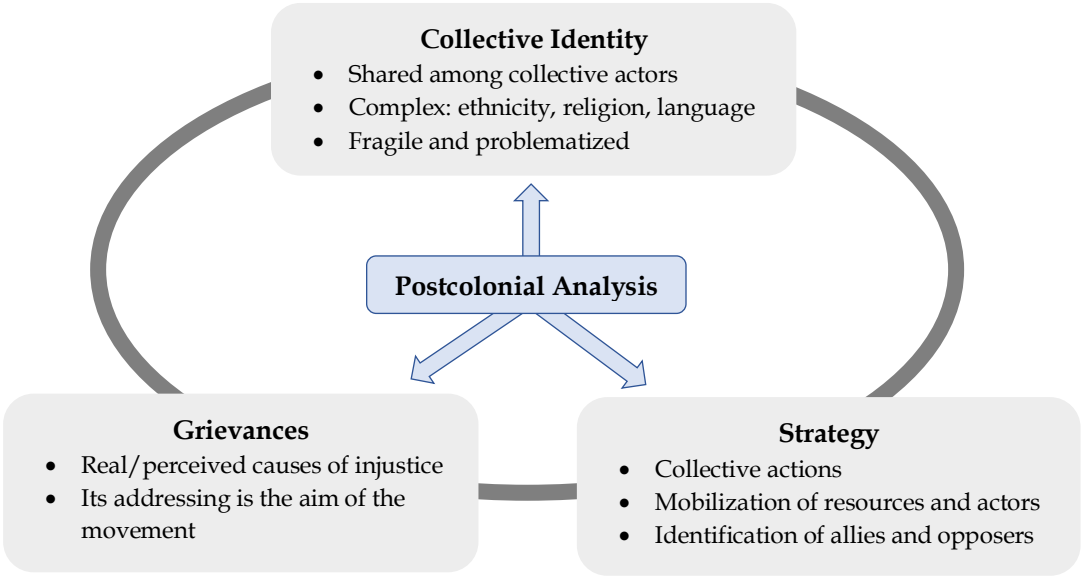
Another pivotal matter, linked to the transnational nature of the LGBTQ movement, is the NGO-ization of social movements in the global South. This process involves the encouragement of grassroot organizations to "institutionalize and professionalize their agendas" in order to receive international assistance (Lind, 2007: 53). In the realm of LGBTQ rights, Paternotte (2016: 388) discusses the Europeanization of LGBT movements. By studying ILGA, he found that it sought the "NGO-ization, institutionalization and professionalism". This institutionalization could have a

"negative normative undertone" by turning "vibrant movements into rigid hierarchical organizations" (Seippel, 2001: 123).

3.4. Analytical Framework

In the previous section, I have provided theoretical and empirical evidence on how features of global South's LGBTQ movements have been analyzed through a postcolonial lens. Now, I introduce the following analytical framework (Figure 2) in order to conduct a postcolonial analysis on how the politics of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement using the concepts of grievance, collective identity and strategy, from social movement theory.

Figure 2. Analytical Framework



4. METHODOLOGY

In this Chapter, I present the methodological choices of this thesis, including the philosophical worldview, research design, data sampling, collection and analysis, as well as the limitations and ethical considerations of the study.

4.1. Philosophical Worldview: Critical Constructivism

Bearing in mind that I seek to explore how the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement is developed by the subjective understandings of the participants of the study, I observe knowledge as socially constructed. These meanings are "varied and multiple", relying on the participant's non-neutral views (Creswell, 2007). Nevertheless, this thesis uses postcolonial theory, which is concerned with the "unpacking of knowledge/power nexus, and the sustenance of relations of power, hierarchy and domination" (Tan, 2017). As a result, a social constructivist standpoint is not sufficient, as "power is manifested as relationships in a social network" (Usher and Edwards, 1994: 89). Hence, this thesis adheres to a *critical constructivist worldview*, where knowers are "historical and social subjects", coming from "'somewhere' which is located in a particular time frame", embedded in political, social, cultural and economic contexts of knowledge construction (Kincheloe, 2005: 2).

4.2. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design. A single-case study was identified as most suitable to address the proposed research question and sub-questions, as it "involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e. a setting, a context)" (Creswell, 2007: 73). The 'issue' to be explored is the present-day LGBTQ movement in Colombo, as it is a "particular phenomenon bounded to time and place" (Yin, 2009). I understand it as the *bound case* to analyze, and its individual collective actors as *units* of analysis. Therefore, I intend to provide a "thick description" of this issue, a (rich) description that enables researchers to get a sense of what it is like to experience a setting from the perspective of the natural actors in that setting (Engel and Schutt, 2009).

4.3. Sampling

The participants of this study are collective actors of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement: LGBTQ leaders, activists and active members of the community. All interviewees have either led, organized, participated or promoted an LGBTQ-focused initiative or activity.

The participants were identified using purposive sampling through a snowball technique. This method is particularly useful in "hard-to-find/hard-to-reach" populations (Schutt, 2017: 75). Considering that homosexuality in Sri Lanka is said to be illegal, LGBTQ people fall under this categorization. With no open and public LGBTQ spaces available (such as bars or clubs), I used two mechanisms to reach out participants. First, I contacted (pro-)LGBTQ organizations through social media or institutional websites. Second, I used a mobile application called *Grindr*[19], popular among gay men in Colombo, with the aim of expanding the pool of participants to gather the inputs of individual, occasional or voluntary activists and/or active members of the movement. I used this application considering that it has been widely used as a "participant recruitment tool" in both quantitative and qualitative research, particularly MSM issues, allowing access to a more diverse pool of participants in features and backgrounds (Koc, 2016).

4.4. Data Collection

Data collection was undertaken during November and December 2018 in Colombo. Considering that case studies allow for the use of multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007: 73), this thesis uses two: semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The use of each of these sources are combined with secondary data and are further explained in this section.

It is worth mentioning that, during my stay in Sri Lanka, two major events occurred. First, in a landmark judgment, India decriminalized homosexuality (Mukherjee, 2018; Safi, 2018). This lighted the flames of hope for the decriminalization of sodomy laws in Sri Lanka and energized the movement in general, with the setting up of press conferences and forums. The second event was the public protest emerged after the "butterfly" comment made by President Maithripala Sirisena against LGBTQ people (as per the quote in the Introduction of this study). I believe that

[19] *Grindr* is a location-based, networking and online dating mobile application for queer people, mostly gay, bi and transgender people globally (Grindr, n.d.). Each person creates a customizable profile, allowing the possibility to write a brief text that usually describes the reasons for being a Grindr user (i.e. the type of interaction they seek to find). The text on the profile created by me clearly stated the purpose of my use of the app ("To conduct research on LGBTQ issues in Sri Lanka"). I re-emphasized this whenever any interaction arose.

these events strengthened the relevance of this research and fostered the willingness of activists to engage as participants in this study.

4.4.1. Semi-structured Interviews and Interviewing Process

The main data collection method used was semi-structured interviews. A total of 16 interviews were conducted (see Annex 1). After carrying out two 'test interviews', it was determined that two questionnaires were needed, as the word "activist" was understood as a label under which participants may not identify with. Hence, I created one questionnaire for "activists" (whose main occupation is activism, such as leaders and/or members of LGBTQ organizations) and one questionnaire for "active members of the LGBTQ community" (for those who often participate as contributors in various activists and events of the movement, and often self-identified as individual, occasional or voluntary activists) (see Annex 2).

The interviews were conducted in English and lasted between thirty minutes and an hour, most of them taking place in cafes that were popular among English-speaking Sri Lankans and expatriates in order to enable a more relaxed interaction. All interviews were one-on-one to allow participants to elaborate as much as they wished without the intervention of a third person. Only one interview involved two participants simultaneously (a couple). All interviews were audio-recorded (following the participant's consent – see section 4.7) with the purpose of creating a transcript (see section 4.5).

4.4.2. Participant Observation

According to Bogdewic (1999), participant observation acknowledges the context in which social interactions take place, the complex and interrelated nature of social relations, and the logical line through which events occurred. I started the observation phase almost as soon as I arrived at Colombo, in July 2018. I assumed the role of an *overt observer*, defined by Schutt (2017) as a someone who does not participate in group activities, but publicly discloses his/her identity as researcher. Thus, I acted as an overt observer during the first public protest of the LGBTQ community in the country ("Butterfly for Democracy" - see Introduction) in order to get insights of the movement's organization and interactions, and to access potential participants. I also attended a queer theatrical production which depicted interesting understandings of what it means to be a Sri Lankan queer man. Lastly, encouraged by some participants, I attended a 'gay party', held

only once a month, where I gained an understanding on how LGBTQ people interact in a safe space, while also being able to recruit participants.

4.5. Data Analysis

In the process of "preparing and organizing the data" (Creswell, 2007: 148), I conducted the analysis both during and after the interviews. Almost immediately after being conducted, I fully transcribed each recording in order to include as many reflections, questions and thoughts as possible (ibid). As the interviews were carried out in public places, some recordings suffered from distortion due to background noise or low volume. I overcame this by using two computer programs[20] that helped solve these issues. Hence, the quality of the recordings remained optimal for the creation of transcripts.

Following this, I proceeded with the data analysis using NVivo. I often read entire transcripts several times, analyzing details, commonalities and differences, before jumping into establishing any categories (Agar, 1980). Subsequently, I carried out an initial coding process with the purpose of broadly structuring the findings. This exercise allowed the identification of the themes that were more heavily emphasized by the participants. Later, I conducted a second coding process that more accurately aligned with the theoretical discussion of this study (Creswell, 2007).

4.6. Limitations

It can be noted that some references used in this study belong to an academic scholarship of Western theoretical perspectives. As Ford (2013) argues, studies on social movements in the global South use models that originated in the North, that may not be applicable to the South. Nevertheless, due to the focus of this study, this is balanced by a heavy use of theoretical and empirical research from the global South.

In relation to the sampling, two important limitations are worth mentioning. First, there might be an overreliance on key informants in identifying potential participants (Schutt, 2017). This cannot be ignored considering their own ideological approaches on social change. Key informants may direct the researcher only towards certain activists with whom they share opinions, while inten-

[20] I used *InqScribe*, a transcription software that facilitated the lengthy task of transcribing the interviews. This software allowed me to reproduce recordings multiple times. This was particularly helpful as I am not an English native speaker. Furthermore, I also used *Audacity*, a professional audio software with a volume-increase feature that does not affect the quality of recordings.

tionally disregarding others based on personal or political differences. This was overcome by ensuring *multivocality*, embracing a multiplicity of voices to "attend to viewpoints that diverge with those of the majority or with the author" (Tracy, 2010: 844). I achieved this by explicitly asking participants to introduce me to activists with whom they have differences, either strategically or ideologically. In fact, I was encouraged by the participants themselves to interview not only the most visible faces of the movement, but to account for a wider and more diverse sample to get insights from varied voices.

Second, there is a sample skewness toward cisgender gay males: 75% of participants were males, of which 56% identified as "gay" or "bisexual" and 50% identified as "cisgender". In Sri Lanka, such preponderance seems to be rather evident not only through the lens with which social claims of the LGBTQ people are made, but also within the organizational aspects of the movement (Wijesiriwardena, 2017). In this vein, it is worth mentioning that the advocacy role of LBT women remains relatively quiet or unspoken (Wijewardene, 2018). Hence, the very fact that I, a cisgender gay man, undertakes this study, maintains this dynamic.

Another limitation refers to that of language barriers. Although a fair amount of written material is available in English, it must be acknowledged that Sinhalese and Tamil are official languages. Due to time and resource limitations, this thesis gathers inputs from English-speaking participants only. As stated later in this thesis, further studies need to be conducted in order to explore the perceptions of Sinhalese and Tamil-speaking activists as well (see section on 6.2).

4.7. Ethical Considerations

4.7.1. Reflectivity and Positionality

A fundamental ethical consideration refers to that of trust building. It cannot be ignored that having a foreign man inquiring about a highly sensitive issue may put both key informants and participants in a vulnerable position, or myself as well. As the interviews were conducted in English and coming from a European university, I was identified as a 'Western(ized) researcher', which could have entailed or perpetuated unequal social and political power relations (Sultana, 2007). Eventually, my disclosed identity as a global South's gay man facilitated interactions and enabled relationality. It allowed for what Tillmann-Healy (2003, cited in Tracy, 2010: 844) calls "radical reciprocity", a kind of participant collaboration that implicates a shift from "studying them to studying us".

4.7.2. Data Management

A one-page survey was built to gather anagraphic data accounting for the participants' SOGI, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and other aspects of their identity (see Annex 1). Considering the sensitive nature of this study, this material has been electronically secured and password-protected following the principle of confidentiality (Creswell, 2007). All names of the participants were pseudonymized, irrespective of how outspoken they are or how public their work is, to minimize any risk that may affect their safety.

Regarding informed consent, an interview consent form was signed by 15 of the 16 participants (one participant decided to consent orally only). The form included a clear and concise paragraph explaining the research's purpose and the conditions of the interview, which I further expanded on during the interview.

5. ANALYSIS

Drawing on the proposed analytical framework, this Chapter is divided into three sections. These sections also correspond to the proposed research sub-questions. The first section explores the grievance formation of the movement and its connection with the sodomy laws and the human rights discourse. The second section presents discussions around the contestation of collective identity(ies) as a response to a Western(ized) view on LGBTQ activism. The third section provides an account of the movement's strategies to decolonize from and beyond the sodomy laws.

5.1. Forming Grievances

Based on the inputs of the participants in this study, grievance formation among LGBTQ activists in Sri Lanka is intrinsically connected to the colonial-imposed criminalization of same-sex sexual acts. Firstly, there is acknowledgement of the views on sexuality prior to colonization and secondly, there is an articulation of the struggles of the movement's members with and around the unresolved revocation of the sodomy laws, tying it to the human rights discourse.

5.1.1. Grievances and Sodomy Laws

As stated earlier in this document, Sri Lanka enjoyed a relatively sexually liberal pre-colonial society. However, negative associations and views on 'diverse' sexualities (homosexuality) is often cited to be rooted in the sodomy laws. As mentioned by a participant:

> It's not about an 'LGBT issue' we have in this country. It's about the whole cultural tradition issue that we didn't have. This was imposed by the British in the colonial era, which we're saying now that is our tradition.
>
> [Shanaka]

The term "LGBT issue" that this interviewee uses refers to the general discontent among Sri Lankan society and politicians when discussing whatever is seen as non-heterosexual, and the efforts made by activists to advance LGBTQ rights in the country. Any topic that touches upon LGBTQ matters is labelled ("LGBTQ issue") and criticized as such, often referring to it in derogatory terms, demoting homosexuality as 'unnatural' and evoking to a traditional culture that does not include LGBTQ people. This further connects to Long's (2005) "backlash", not just on LGBTQ activism, but same sex 'behaviors' in the global South. As in other countries in the global South, Sri Lanka has also experienced a rejection towards non-heterosexual behaviors as it is argued that it is contrary the national culture, especially by Sinhalese Buddhist politicians (Human Rights

Watch, 2016). Activists argue that in fact, it is the apathy towards queer people what has been imported and normalized in post-independence Sri Lanka.

This "backlash" on LGBTQ activism include not only societal attitudes, but also the maintenance of the sodomy laws. Some participants considered that the very existence of these laws constitutes as a grievance *per se*:

> (…) You lived in world where it's a law, but it's not a practiced law, and it's simply a hold-over from the colonial times and 'no one really believes it', but that moment really struck me as "oh, it does matter", and it really hit upon that you didn't actually have any rights, that you weren't considered a citizen of full rights.
>
> [Tharindu]

This participant connects the criminalization of same-sex sexual acts as a denial of "full rights", forming one of the main grievances of the LGBTQ movement in Sri Lanka: the association between the existence of a colonial-era imposed law with the enjoyment of full rights, (the analysis on rights will be made in the following sub-section), and, as such, one of the source of injustices (grievances) among LGBTQ people.

Many academic and media sources have stated the sodomy laws are not being enforced, which results in having LGBTQ Sri Lankans thinking the same (as per this last quote). However, there is evidence of the opposite. One of the participants stated that, in 2016, there was a case of two gay men who were actually charged with Section 365A for having sex in the back of a van:

> The Supreme Court, although they said that the State has no business in people's bedroom, at the current state of the legislature, there is nothing that they can do but uphold the law and constitution to grant a fine and imprisonment, (...), but they also said that they would… put the sentence aside.
>
> [Ishka]

In addition to confirming that the sodomy laws have been actually enforced, this quote also denotes a 'dilemma' experienced by the Sri Lankan state: on the one hand, there appears to be willingness from the public sphere to allow for more sexually 'liberalized' institutions and maintain sexual acts as a matter of private concern; on the other hand, however, they (courts) ultimately enforce the law. This inconsistency, along with the documentation of abuses towards queer people throughout the criminal justice system, particularly against the trans community, has entrenched the claims of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement, making the decriminalization of the

sodomy laws its top priority [Malindu, Ishka, Dilhan]. In line with this, another activist acknowledges that such abuses often occur simply at the expense of a lack of knowledge about the sodomy laws among LGBTQ people themselves:

> (LGBTQ) people, they don't know the law right now, so police take advantage of that, and by the time the lawyer or someone who knows the law well enough (arrives), it's too late. The injustice has already happened.
>
> [Heshan]

Activists, especially those in the formal sphere, seek to advocate for the repeal of the law or a law review. Nevertheless, the way in which such legal change should occur is questioned by another activist:

> I spoke to a young law student, and (…) his approach was to say: "remove all titles, so gender, nondiscrimination on the grounds of gender, race, remove all of that. Just citizenship becomes the only one". For me that was problematic because it erases the systemic violence against different groups, including women and Tamil communities and Muslim communities, and we are a part of that struggle.
>
> [Dilhan]

Indeed, there were two submissions for a law review in Sri Lanka: one that accounted for the inclusion of nondiscrimination on the basis of SOGI, and one with "no titles". In this vein, such 'problematic' questioning, as posited by this activist, recognizes what the human rights discourse defends: a universalist approach which does not account for the inescapable plurality of the Sri Lankan society. Therefore, grievance formation, and its associations with the country's colonial history, rather than being a monolithic set of claims, becomes mutable, as it varies amongst social groups of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ community. This will be further analyzed in section 5.2.

5.1.2. Grievances and the Human Rights Discourse: Rights and Homophobia

Now I analyze how these grievances have been framed using the human rights discourse. One of the main reasons why Sri Lankan LGBTQ activists engage in collective action is based in at least two interrelated concepts: on the one hand, a sense of *injustice*, due to the grievances experienced by them or other members of the community; on the other hand, the idea of perceiving themselves as *citizens* with less rights than the majority. Accounting for such injustices, Avanthi, a transgender activist, framed her motivation to engage in activism in this sense: "*When my parents knew that I was a trans person they asked me to leave home. Becoming a trans(gender) person in Sri Lanka is an insultation to the families*". Although this thesis does not examine such struggles (see Equal Ground, 2011), the personal experiences of this participant can be shared among other activists

as well. When asked about their struggles as activists, as opposed to as (queer) individuals, interviewees found it difficult to separate their grievances as individuals from the activist work that they carry out. Other activists 'diminished' the importance of their own personal grievances by labelling it as "the usual" (referring, perhaps, to school bullying or generalized stigma) as, I assumed, they preferred not to deepen into it. Instead, they framed struggles in relation to the (either factual or perceived) injustices experienced by other LGBTQ people. This activist ties such grievances with claims of citizenship when asked about his motivations:

> Injustice. I find it quite unacceptable that there are people in this country who are treated as second class citizens. They aren't an invisible community. And most of the time when they (promote) some kind of injustice, they don't have the opportunity to seek any (help) from that injustice.
>
> [Malindu]

The connection between grievances and injustices with the concept of "citizenship" can be tied to Pereira's (2017) reading on the framing under which LGBTQ movements in the global South currently operate: the "rights and citizenship" normative principle. As stated by Laurent (2005: 166), "the language of "right" is a cultural construct imported from "the West"".

Similarly, these injustices are connected to the concept of "homophobia", mentioned by 43% of the interviewees in this study, often in several occasions. As a result, the association of such word and its translation into abuses becomes one of the main reasons to engage in the movement, as well as one of the main issues to address:

> There is (…) some understanding (that) there's a set of common achievements that could be made: decriminalization, non-discrimination, and other things in the legal and political space, and (…) the wider goal of combating social homophobia and queerphobia.
>
> [Amal]

Hence, some of the interviewees have adopted what I call the 'human rights lingo', the use of homophobia (or queerphobia) which serves to keep fostering pro-LGBTQ international development initiatives. Evoking Quesada (2013) and Drummond Veado (2019), such framing demands for the retrieving and documenting of LGBTQ 'victims', whose narratives follow a Westernized construal of LGBTQ activism through the use of this 'lingo'. This is not to suggest that queer people are not being discriminated against or abused (see reports from Equal Ground (2011) or Human Rights Watch (2016)), but it is undeniable that the language used to frame those griev-

ances, as well as the very existence of those human rights reports, aligns with Western epistemologies. Therefore, grievances of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement should be analyzed and understood considering Durban-Albrecht's (2017: 161) "postcolonial homophobia", a concept concerned with the consequences of the Western influence in the "discovery, regulation, management, control, govern and/or liberation" of (homo)sexuality in postcolonial nations. In this sense, framing the movement's grievances through the use of "homophobia", (and constantly referring to opponents of the movement as 'homophobic') results in a Euro-American exceptionalism that produces more "foreign intervention rather than less, which is detrimental to same-sex desiring postcolonial people as well as their heterosexual counterparts" (ibid: 172). As a result, the adoption of the 'lingo' used by global LGBTQ human rights organizations creates a vicious circle that fails to provide a holistic understanding of Sri Lanka's history as a postcolonial state: on the one hand, the prevalence of a law imposed by a colonial power, while, on the other hand, a Euro-American activism model that seeks to dismantle this law through the human rights discourse, turning homophobia and the pursue of rights into a sophisticated tactic to maintain its hegemony.

5.2. Reviewing Collective Identity

The findings gathered in this section comprises critical inputs of how the Sri Lankan queer identity is contested amongst participants in the study. It touches upon issues related to the various aspects of the Sri Lankan identity (ethnicity, religion, language) and their impact in the formation of collective identity of the movement.

5.2.1. Contestation of Sri Lankan LGBTQ Identities

Based on the previous section, the grievances of LGBTQ-identified people are sufficiently strong to consolidate a Sri Lankan 'LGBTQ community'. Without it, the movement would simply not exist. However, having discussions about the 'LGBTQ community' as a uniform term would be a monumental mistake. The queer identity needs to be reviewed considering the plural character of what a Sri Lankan person is. It is diverse in ethnicity, class, religion and language. In this regard, a universalist approach on the formation and performance of the LGBTQ movement can be problematic to the extent to which it could 'silence' some voices within the community itself. This was portrayed by this activist:

> They have tried to (…) force a sense of homogeneity on the queer community, and this has come at the cost of a lot of (...) voices being left out completely. And (…) that (…) has become sort of a norm, (…) it's streamlining the process, but streamlining comes at a massive cost, I think.
>
> [Nuwan]

This activist refers to the LGBTQ activist community, whose main actors are predominantly Sinhalese or Burgher (68% of participants in this study). As seen earlier, the Sinhalese population represent the majority of the country, while Burghers are considered an elite. I resemble this homogeneity with the essentialist behavior under which the LGBTQ movement in the global South currently operate. This problematic feature results in what Gamson (1995) refers to as a paradox in the queer politics and the construction of the collective identity: essentialized identities (the queer) constitutes the basis of cultural oppression (the Sri Lankan identity), but it is required to defy institutional oppression. However, at the same time, deconstructing one's identity is necessary to make visible and defy cultural-based subjugation.

According to some participants in this study, this has come at the cost of not only putting the queer identity at the very top, but a 'specific' queer identity instead. Based on the pool of interviewees in this study, it can be noted that is cisgendered-, sexually-, and ethnically- biased. There has been a de facto cisgender gay man prevalence in the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement. As stated by another participant:

> I have, too often, been asked to speak at events or go out and do work. When I ask who else is on that panel, is there to be interviewed or discuss where we are, we are still looking at cisgender gay men, and always, almost imperatively, from the English-speaking classes.
>
> [Tharindu]

This can be placed in one of Bernstein's (2005, cited in Wulff et al., 2015: 5) analytical dimensions of identity, one in which activists "work to challenge stigmatized identities, receive recognition for new identities, and/or deconstruct oppressive social categories". Indeed, this revision of identities comes with rivalries and power conflicts among activists, and between members of the movement as well (Rennick, 2015: 61), also connected to various identity markers such as class and gender.

5.2.2. *Postcolonial Identity: The Role of 'Privilege'*

The belonging to a specific class (speaking English), gender (male identified as a cisgender) and ethnicity (being Sinhalese or Burgher) provide activists with a certain 'privilege'. In this sense, it is worth analyzing how participants have framed their own privilege and how such framing connects to postcolonial discussions. Some activists portray this privilege as a driver to engage in the LGBTQ movement, while others are critical on its effects in the movement (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Portrayal of the Role of 'Privilege'

Instrumentalized for Activism	*Contested/Problematized*
I come from a privileged family background, from an income background, my profession gives me privilege, my income gives me privilege, my education gives me privilege... I know I come from a privileged position, but (I use) that privilege in order to advance the situation for people like me, and others who don't have the same opportunities as I do. [Malindu]	Just because I can speak English, I can go that level right away. Whereas if you are from anywhere else and you don't have access to English, then (you are cut off) of certain players. [Nuwan]
I'm a person of considerable privilege, I'm Sinhala Buddhist, so I belong to an ethnic majority in my country, educated, I am middle class, I've had opportunities, so I think part of that privilege is also finding how I can work to share some of that space and some of that power in a way that dismantles structures that keep out other people, that excludes other people. [Nadeesha]	I'm also very, more privileged that some because on class, I come from a middle-class family, terms on geography I'm in an urban center, I speak English, I look a particular way, so certain doors open to me that some of my colleagues don't have. [Dilhan]

Source: the author based on the inputs of participants

One of the most noticeable associations that can be extracted from these quotes is the connection between the English language (colonial-imposed) and the perception of privilege (elite), which ultimately implies a hierarchization that translates in the recognition of the West as 'superior'. Drawing on Barry's (1995) contribution on language in postcolonial theory, the very act of speaking English provides a certain status within the LGBTQ community. Thus, privilege, as connected with the language of the colonizer, becomes not only a colonial residue, but a marker of distinction between collective actors within the movement. This is not necessarily a negative or counterproductive feature of the movement, considering that activists have used such privilege for the benefit of the LGBTQ community, but it does posit discussions around the role of language into

the movement. In this sense, these activists embody the hybrid nature of their postcolonial identities (Bhabha, 1994; Barry, 1995; Singh, 2009): on the one hand, the associations with the West (and colonialism) through the use of language, reinforced by their social class, and, on the other hand, working for and on behalf of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ community, embracing their Sri Lankan identity as well. Two participants (interviewed simultaneously) described this:

> Sithara: (…) there's a class difference even in the community. So, we need bridge that gap. So that's why... the political party I'm thinking about. We want to have people from different demographics.
>
> Pawani: The same way whether you speak English or not.
>
> Sithara: Yes, because in Sri Lanka is a big problem because certain crowd speaks English, and they call themselves like "posh" people (…)

This quote evokes Dutta's (2012) 'homonormativity', where recognition and visibility is given to 'powerful queers' within the LGBTQ community. According to Chang (2014: 323), the occurrence and hierarchization of the "gay identity over cultural identity becomes itself neocolonial", with the embracing and continuous use of the model of individual identity that is based on Western liberalism. In this sense, this participant is concerned about how the movement is depicted in consideration of the activists' identities, also suggesting discussions about representation. This further illustrates the hybrid nature of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ activists:

> LGBT rights are always shaped by looking at her. The cisgender-looking, white-looking women by other women who doesn't represent the majority of this country, (…), and have an American citizenship. Those are the things people invoke... They say: "this is pretty much foreign, look at her".
>
> [Gayan]

This activist refers to a very visible queer woman of Burgher ethnicity, which this participant implied to be very 'Westernized'. This woman was also interviewed for this study. She stated that these questionings about how she represents the movement are common, primarily coming from the gay (male) community in Colombo. In that sense, she portrays these claims under the above-mentioned 'homonormativity' (of the cisgender gay male), stating that such finger-pointing is not only based on her ethnicity, but also on her gender:

> We do get a lot of criticism from people within the community. I'm sure you must have heard quite a few of it, yeah? Umm... and that's (…) because I'm a woman running this organization, and the guys can't stand it. "How dare she?"
>
> [Ishka]

In addition to evoking discussions about the "hybrid" nature of the identities of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ activists, there are intra-movement dynamics that resemble the common premise employed by 'opponents of homosexuality' in the global South, by depicting an activist's Western-like identity to illustrate how society and the high public sphere (might) continue to put homosexuality, and not LGBTQ oppression, as a colonial import, alien to the Sri Lankan national (Waites 2010; Currier 2011). This further suggests that, within the Sri Lankan LGBTQ community itself, there are similar "backlashes" (Long, 2005) among activists themselves.

5.3. (Re)defining Strategies

This section analyzes how Western epistemologies on political and cultural features of LGBTQ activism affect the strategic and ideological characteristics of LGBTQ movement in Sri Lanka.

5.3.1. Critiques to Western-based/-like Activism

> When you take the global LGBT movement, we have moved forward leaving our weakest behind, so there's a critique for the global movement. Who is the LGBTQ community now? Which part? How global is it? Where (are) the power dynamics, the structure? What is fueling this privatization of needs? It's liberal capitalism. For me, that's a general sort of concern and critique.
>
> [Dilhan]

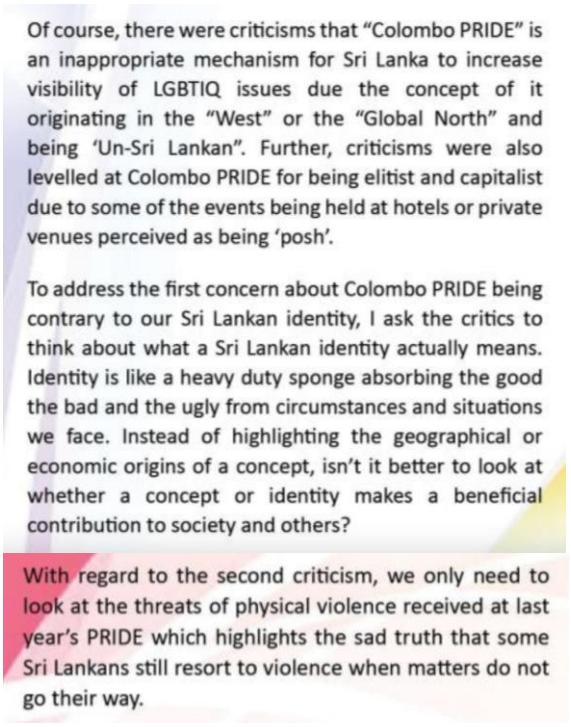
Although this thesis mainly draws on discussions around how LGBTQ activism in the global South resembles West-born *cultural* features, this quote shows that there is a concern among Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement that pertains liberal capitalism. Following the understanding of new social movements provided in the theoretical background, this will not be explored in this thesis (see section 3.2). Nonetheless, this is worth mentioning as it accounts for the ideological diversity of the movement.

That being said, this quote was mentioned by a participant as a warning sign of how liberal activism, in terms of power dynamics has shaped the LGBTQ movements in the global South, and how that suggests challenges in "leaving the weakest behind". This includes Sri Lanka:

> (…) the legacy of the past two decades of the LGBT activism is pretty much liberal-oriented, partly because of the war. In the war, the nationalist and populist nationalism is quite attractive for the majority, they prefer it. So, the challenge for us, when we work, (is), how do we encounter this populist nationalism when you have a liberal discourse when it comes to LGBT rights (amongst) activists?
>
> [Gayan]

This participant illustrates the inconsistency posited by the clash between the country's history with the advancement of activism using ideas that have originated in the West. This quote also suggests that strategies for collective action (through liberal discourse) might involve activities which have not been fully translated or adapted into the national context. To a large extent, this criticism has been directed towards the NGO Equal Ground (EG), which has deployed strategies, such as Pride marches in Colombo, well known worldwide. EG has attempted to address such criticism through the organization's main magazine (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Equal Ground addressing Critiques of Western-based Activism



Of course, there were criticisms that "Colombo PRIDE" is an inappropriate mechanism for Sri Lanka to increase visibility of LGBTIQ issues due the concept of it originating in the "West" or the "Global North" and being 'Un-Sri Lankan". Further, criticisms were also levelled at Colombo PRIDE for being elitist and capitalist due to some of the events being held at hotels or private venues perceived as being 'posh'.

To address the first concern about Colombo PRIDE being contrary to our Sri Lankan identity, I ask the critics to think about what a Sri Lankan identity actually means. Identity is like a heavy duty sponge absorbing the good the bad and the ugly from circumstances and situations we face. Instead of highlighting the geographical or economic origins of a concept, isn't it better to look at whether a concept or identity makes a beneficial contribution to society and others?

With regard to the second criticism, we only need to look at the threats of physical violence received at last year's PRIDE which highlights the sad truth that some Sri Lankans still resort to violence when matters do not go their way.

Extracted from *Equality* magazine, by Equal Ground (2017b)

Though this thesis does not account for an analysis of how Pride marches have been structured, it is possible to identify certain elements that drawn on concepts from postcolonial theory. There is an insinuation of *mimicry* on the use of Pride marches. Not only they originated in the West (geographically), but they also resemble Western ideals of what it means to be an LGBTQ person: queers need to be "visible" in the quest for "equal rights". The use of this strategy can be linked to Gray's (2009) critique on LGBTQ activism in the United States, where LGBTQ issues were portrayed through the lens of "the politics of visibility", in which heteronormativity is defied by the 'outness' of the queer. This is what Darwich and Maikey (2011) have called the "hegemony of the

LGBT activism", in which issues such as "homophobia, coming out, visibility and pride" have shaped the demands and values of the LGBTQ communities globally, which has been mainstreamed by the Gay International (Massad, 2002). The Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement has adopted these politics of visibility as well. In this sense, there is a critique on the use of Western semiotic symbols, such as rainbow flags, and the human right discourse, in the Pride marches in Colombo. Additionally, the extent to which LGBTQ rights through politics of visibility is seen as a "beneficial contribution to society and others" (in Figure 4), connected to the risk of adopting assimilationist struggles (Bernstein, 2008), further consolidates the Western cultural epistemologies as the model to follow, the developmental path towards modernity and progress (Moussawi, 2015; Chang, 2014). This mimicry, carrying it out through the human rights discourse, draws on Quijano's (2007) coloniality of power, in relation to the Eurocentrism of culture, and how modernity and rationality have been construed in the West and adopted in the global South.

In the same vein, interviewees also brought up the issue of how the LGBTQ movement, in general, is centralized in Colombo, the capital and main urban center. This thesis has stressed such concern as a limitation as well (see section 4.6):

> I think the movement should be spread all over the country. We need to be stronger... We work based on Colombo, so the person who really needs the rights have to walk into Colombo city. I think the movement failed that Colombo is the convenient city and safe city. But I think now, step by step, we are walking towards other cities as well. But that also, not to rural areas. Very few, down south, and also based on Jaffna city.
>
> [Avanthi]

-

> One of the issues, and this happens with every social issue in Sri Lanka, is that is very Colombo-centered, because (…) a lot of these organizations are based in Colombo (…). (T)hat affects their activism and what they think is important, and that changes very rapidly when you go outside of Colombo, and I think for poor people especially, their (needs) outside of Colombo are very different.
>
> [Amal]

This centralization of the movement in Colombo might potentially perpetuate colonial structures, a *de facto* binarism within the LGBTQ movement in Sri Lanka: center/periphery, urban/rural. This fosters the emergence of claims for the diversification of strategies of the movement to include rural areas. Following Gray (2009), the centralization of the LGBTQ movement in the urban centers, as it has happened also in other countries of the global North, 'invisibilizes' the struggles and/or claims of queer people in rural areas. This is of great importance not only considering

that Sri Lanka is one of the least urbanized countries in the world, having only 18.4% of Sri Lanka's population living in urban centers (World Bank, 2019), but also due to uncertainty on how changes and advancements in the LGBTQ social and political arena might be perceived by, or impact, the wellbeing of LGBTQ people in rural areas. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that initiatives have attempted to decentralize the movement from Colombo, some taking place in rural areas[21], and others in cities such as Jaffna and Kandy[22].

Another issue that has been brought up by several interviewees is that of the heavy reliance on foreign supporters on the movement. Indeed, the dependence on foreign money could be perceived as facilitating the advancement of claims of the movement, while parallelly becoming a big obstructer in the development of a grassroot LGBTQ movement [Gayan]. As seen in other countries of the global South, most of the allies of the LGBTQ activism in Sri Lanka are embassies and non-governmental organizations from United States and/or Europe:

> I think generally some of the (international non-governmental organizations that support the movement are organizations), like Amnesty (International), specially the more human rights ones, Human Rights Watch, for example. Also, the diplomatic community, especially the North American and Western embassies.
>
> [Amal]

Tied to this, several interviewees stressed their concern about the Sri Lankan LGBTQ agenda to be 'dictated' by the influence of Western funds. As an activist stated: "*I think it's from where the money comes, a global north influence to mandate what is supposed to be fulfilled*" [Dilhan]. Indeed, an activist argues that such influence prevents the development of a locally based Sri Lankan movement:

> (…) All these major organizations are dependent on foreign money and it's a pretty important that (they) have no ideological leadership that provides ideological basis for the movement, locally (grass)rooted movement (…).
>
> [Gayan]

This Westernization of the movement through the donor-driven model results in the emergence of a disjunctive that activists seek to overcome: on the one hand, they acknowledge that resources are in Western hands. On the other hand, they seek to develop a locally based movement that, in

[21] Equal Ground have conducted tailor-made trainings to members of community-based organizations in rural areas about a variety of topics, including "gender ender and patriarchy, gender-based violence, sexuality, gender identity, human rights, HIV/AIDS prevention methodologies, sexual and reproductive health, counseling, project management, etc." (Equal Ground, n.d.).

[22] CWDF received a grant in 2018 by PlanetRomeo Foundation to "develop communities and activism in these two provinces" (Jaffna and Kandy), organizing gatherings and training community coordinators to strengthen the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement nationally (PlanetRomeo Foundation, 2018).

their words, truly speaks to the needs of the community. This links to Lind's (2007) critique on the NGO-ization of social movements in the global South, which has resulted in the institutionalization of grassroot initiatives (Paternotte, 2016; Seippel, 2001). This problematic issue is better illustrated by these activists:

> I think we've been really unable to find models of activism outside of the donor-driven model and the idea of organizing through donors and organization, with registered boards and you know, panels, and all of this... I think we haven't been able to see beyond that. And in some ways, it is a trap, and in some ways, the LGBT movement needs the resources that every other struggle in some way has.
>
> [Dilhan]

-

> There are organizations that are totally dependent on foreign money so every time they have meet operational costs, so that keep on, you know. So, their strategies and everything are pretty much aligned with what the West or the donors are...
>
> [Gayan]

Indeed, there are initiatives that have emerged as a reaction against a liberal approach on activism. Some activists have argued that organizations such as CWDF or Chathra have been working on an ideological basis that keeps distance of a liberal-oriented discourses within the movement [Gayan, Nuwan]. However, drawing on the disjunctive presented earlier, they have too appealed on receiving funds from foreign sources (see PlanetRomeo Foundation, 2018).

5.3.2. Decolonizing: Beyond Sections 365 and 365A

As stated earlier, global South's LGBTQ movements with sodomy laws still in place have made decriminalization their main goal. This includes Sri Lanka. However, some activists argued that the movement needs to decolonize itself, not just in the sense of decriminalizing homosexuality by the repeal of the colonial-imposed legislation, but also in the strategies used (or yet to be used):

> I would like to say the queer community (should) decolonize itself (…) Even if we become decriminalized, I am pretty sure that the next step would be marriage equality, even though we think we're far ahead. I'm sure that will be the next conversation… (…) marriage itself is a very new idea, and we shouldn't limit ourselves to (do) things that have already been done, and I think that decolonization in that perspective is very important.
>
> [Nuwan]

In this regard, some participants advocate for a decolonization from the system that have also been imposed around the advocacy of rights in LGBTQ movements globally. In other words, a suggestion to re-structure LGBTQ activism.

> To make a movement that really speaks to the needs of everyone, (…) and doesn't use the language that we have inherited from Western movements of LGBTQ movements (…) I think that's important…
>
> [Tharindu]

This quote draws on Bernstein's (2008) thoughts on assimilationism, the "language" of having countries in the global South turning, for instance, equal marriage and/or adoption into the top themes for the advancement of LGBTQ rights after decriminalization occurs. In the same line, this participant draws on the liberal activism, earlier developed, to illustrate that the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement needs to find ways to better articulate itself:

> I think it's really important for us to hold space for our activism in a way that we can really articulate it in our terms. We need to develop our own articulation, our own language. I'm very wary about adopting more neoliberal or liberal ways of doing LGBT activism, (…) that doesn't allow us to really make connections with other things that are happening in our context. I just think that we should really resist that.
>
> [Nadeesha]

This decolonization would allow for a LGBTQ movement that is 'truly Sri Lankan', with its complexities, diversities, contexts and history. Drawing on Currier's (2011) approach on sexual decolonization, (see section 3.3.3), there is a suggestion by the participants of the study to think about and develop "indigenous ways", not only in terms of SOGI expressions, but also in the ways that activism is carried out, over foreign ones.

One of the ways to exercise this decolonizing process is to enable discussions with counterparts in countries of the global South:

> One thing I thought for a long time (is that) the South-South dialogue hasn't happened. It has not informed our activism, and we need to ask that question. What has been informed our activism? What about organizing, our (…) organized activism doesn't allow for that South-South dialogue?
>
> [Dilhan]

The extent to which these dialogues are articulated and how they draw on (or not) on postcolonial dynamics is a separate research topic. However, the very establishment of these dialogues would allow for the exchange of practices and cooperation in a more horizontal fashion, seeing each

other as 'peers', as opposed to the top-down dynamic that is present in the donor-driven model for international cooperation in the advancement of LGBTQ rights. In this regard, one of the most noticeable opportunities for the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement to do so is the recent landmark of decriminalization of homosexuality in India, which was pointed out by some participants as well [Ishka, Amal]. Indeed, several LGBTQ organizations in Colombo celebrated this and organized events to discuss the issue, to translate it into the Sri Lankan context. However, this was, in part, distorted by the constitutional crisis of the country in October 2018. In any case, the decriminalization of homosexuality in India provided an excellent platform for Sri Lankan activists to allow for the South-South dialogue to occur. In this way, Barry's (1995: 196) reading on postcolonial literature can be translated into this scenario: the LGBTQ movement in Sri Lanka would not just *adopt* European models in unquestioned acceptance, but eventually lean towards the *adapt*ation of such forms into the country's context (the colonial subject matter), in order to eventually become autonomous *adepts* of (LGBTQ) activism, where "there is cultural independence without reference to European norms". In this sense, becoming adepts translates into a broader, more comprehensive decolonization process in the creation of strategies of the LGBTQ movement, but also in the construction of its own ideological core.

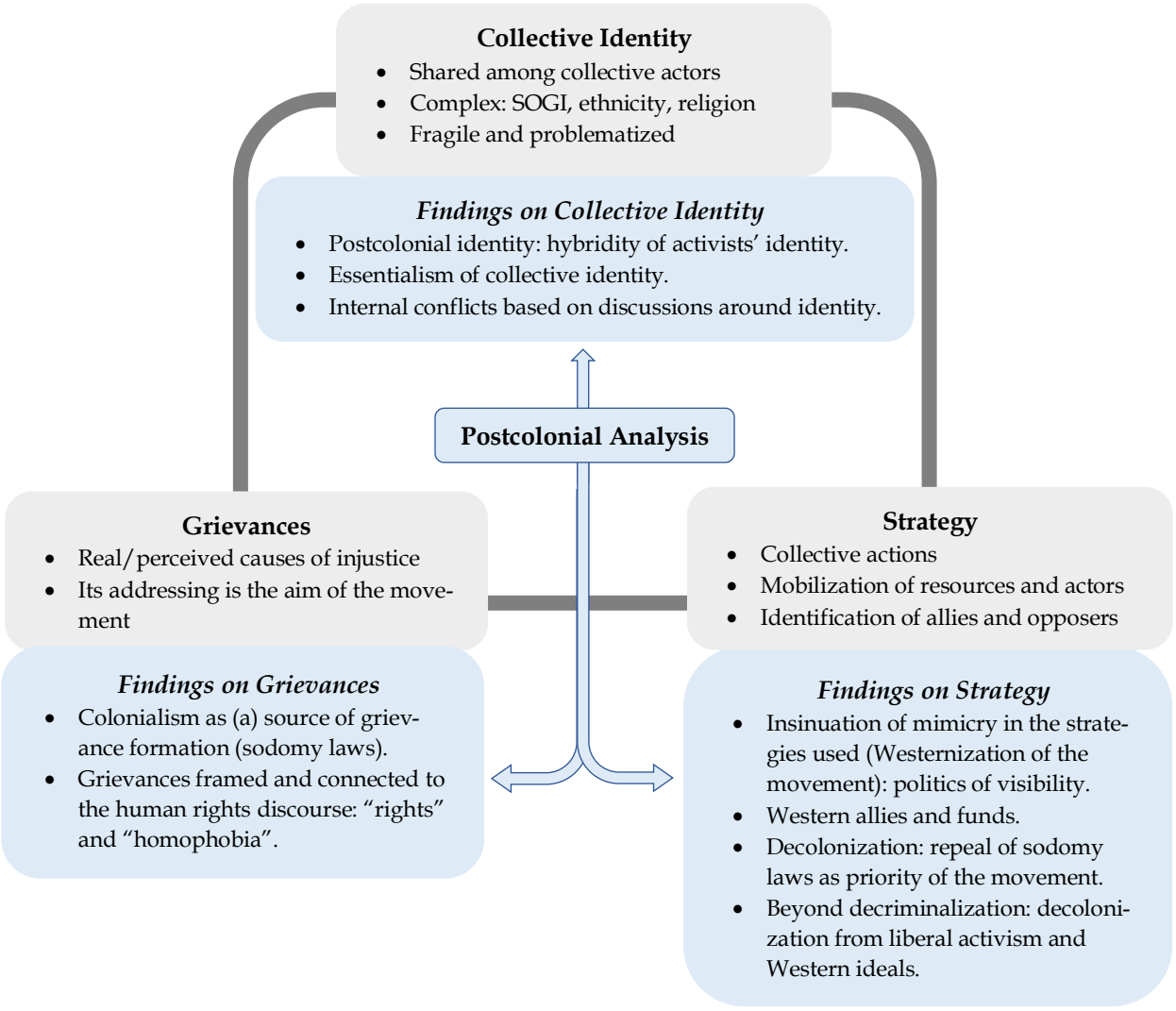
6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This Chapter gathers the main findings of this study to answer the main research question through the three proposed sub-questions. The section also presents suggestions for further research in the LGBTQ movement in Sri Lanka.

6.1. Summary of Findings

This thesis is focused on answering the research question: "*How is the politics of the LGBTQ movement expressed in postcolonial Sri Lanka*". To facilitate this, three sub-questions were created. Drawing on the proposed analytical framework, Figure 5 shows a summary of these findings.

Figure 5. Summary of Findings



For the first sub-question, "*What is the role of colonialism in the movement's grievance formation?*", findings show that LGBTQ leaders, activists and members of the community have shaped the movement's grievances around the existence (and enforcement) of the sodomy laws. Colonialism thus plays a key role in how the movement's injustices are framed. These injustices are, in turn, shaped through the human rights discourse (rights and homophobia), mainstreamed by the Gay International, under which social movement organizations document and report human rights violations. Portraying LGBTQ people as "victims" entrenches the idea of a de facto "Othering", where some activists see the West as the model to follow, and the seeking and advancement of LGBTQ rights as the process towards modernity and progress.

For the second sub-question, "*To what extent is the movement's collective identity influenced by the West?*", findings show that identity in Sri Lanka comprises several aspects (class -linked to privilege-, gender, language, location, race and ethnicity, and, in this case study, SOGI). This has been contested amongst activists themselves, generating internal politics in the movement. Thus, identity in Sri Lanka is "hybrid", as there is a clash between a Western concept ("LGBTQ") and what it means to be an "LGBTQ Sri Lankan". These internal dynamics are also linked to the insinuation of the presence of an essentialist view of the LGBTQ identity that does not account for the diversity of the Sri Lankan identity.

Lastly, for the third sub-question, "*How do the movement's strategies seek to decolonize?*", findings show that there are suggestions for the movement to decolonize. Activists stressed the need to advocate not only for the decolonization through decriminalization of Sections 365 and 365A, but also in the tactics used in the sense of being cautious about the mirroring of assimilationist strategies (mimicry) carried out in Western countries (i.e. marriage equality or adoption), which might not respond to the needs of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ community. This critique also extended to the centralization of the movement's activities in Colombo, the Pride march and the movement's allies and supporters (mainly funders from the global North).

In conclusion, and answering the main research question, "*How is the politics of the LGBTQ movement expressed in postcolonial Sri Lanka*", the present-day, Colombo-centralized LGBTQ movement in postcolonial Sri Lanka is articulated in constant ideological, organizational and practical problematizations. The movement drags the remains of a colonial history that impacts the LGBTQ community today in the form of political and societal conflict, and it is being challenged by the

work of leaders, activists and allies. It does so by drawing on Western epistemologies and notions based on the language of the human rights discourse and an essentialist understanding of the 'LGBTQ subject' that needs to account for the plurality of the Sri Lankan identity. The collective actors of the movement portray a sort of decolonization that not only accounts for the decriminalization of homosexuality, but one that enables the enactment of a truly local, grassrooted LGBTQ movement that responds to the needs of its collective under its own terms.

Moving beyond the main research question, I would like to make one last contribution. Despite the fact that this study conducted a postcolonial analysis, it is important to acknowledge that the presence of postcolonial dynamics is just one of many factors to be accounted for in the analysis of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement, or any other social movement. As a way to conclude this section, I dare to introduce one last quote by an activist who labels the 'LGBTQ issue' as a "brown problem", one emerging from and to be solved by the Sri Lankan themselves:

> People talk about colonial laws, but I don't think we should 'Britishized' ourselves against the white person. These are brown problems also. We have had multiple opportunities to sort this out and we haven't, and we failed ourselves, and we need acknowledging that this is not about a Victorian law issue, this is national issue, and we need to see it as such.
>
> [Dilhan]

Through this statement, this participant brings up a bridge between the recognition of the colonial history and the political and social reality of Sri Lanka today, a call to name the LGBTQ issue a "national issue" too. He echoes Bhabha (1994), as he proposes a re-thought view on postcoloniality, one in which discussions around geography, culture and identity are seen as opportunities for the construction and constant definition and redefinition of identities. Consequently, the postcolonial analysis of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ movement becomes a possibility of improvement, an invitation for enrichment, which LGBTQ leaders, activists and active members of the community can benefit from. This serves the purpose of determining which epistemological constructions are valid for their activism, to ascertain what grievance framing speaks to the intersectional nature of its members' injustices, to produce an ontological definition of what it means to be a "queer Sri Lankan"; and to generate new, creative and autochthonous ways to carry out activism.

6.2. Suggestions for Further Research

As the LGBTQ movement in Sri Lanka is currently under-researched, there are a number of academic opportunities to be explored. A primary opportunity, which also connects to the limitations presented in this thesis, is to expand on the diversity of identities within the movement. In other words, to gather the inputs from not only activists from Sinhalese, Burgher ethnicity, English-speakers, Buddhist and residents of urban centers, but also Tamils and other ethnic groups with their own languages, Muslims and Christians, residents of rural areas, and undoubtedly, to include the voices of more transgender and queer women. This will not only enrichen the research, but also account for an intersectional approach in a post-independence nation like Sri Lanka.

Another potential approach would be to conduct a more detailed study on how the current strategies used by the movement (such as the Pride march, but not limited to it) are perceived by other members of the LGBTQ community, and to what extent they are effective in bringing change in social normal and societal attitudes. This will not only allow for an academic assessment of a Western-born cultural feature of the queer movement that has been extensively explored in academia but will also provide inputs for activists themselves in the effectiveness of their own strategies in the country.

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ANNEX 1. List of Participants

#	*Participant*[23]	*Sex assigned at birth*	*Sexual orientation*	*Gender Identity*	*Ethnicity*	*Religious Affiliation*
1	Indika	Male	Bisexual, gay, pansexual	Cisgender	Burgher	NA
2	Tharindu	Male	Gay	Cisgender	Sinhalese	NA
3	Ishka	Woman	Lesbian	Cisgender	Burgher	No religious affiliation
4	Heshan	Male	Gay	Androgyne	Maldivian	Humanist
5	Sahan	Male	Pansexual	Queer	Mixed	No religious affiliation
6	Amal	Male	Gay	Cisgender	Sinhalese	No religious affiliation
7	Gayan	Male	Gay	NA	Sri Lankan Tamil	NA
8	Sithara	Woman	Lesbian	Queer	Sinhalese	Spiritual
9	Pawani	Woman	Lesbian	Queer	Sinhalese	Spiritual
10	Shanaka	Male	Gay	Genderqueer or gender fluid	Burgher	No religious affiliation
11	Dilhan	Male	Bisexual	Queer	Burgher	NA
12	Avanthi	NA	NA	Transgender	NA	NA
13	Ravi	Male	Questioning or Unsure	Androgyne	Sinhalese	Christian/ Catholic
14	Malindu	Male	Gay	Cisgender	Sinhalese	Buddhist/ Christian/ Catholic
15	Nuwan	Male	Gay	Genderqueer or gender fluid	Indian Tamil	Atheist/ Shaivism
16	Nadeesha	Woman	Pansexual	Cisgender	Sinhalese	Buddhist

[23] The dates in which the interviews took place have been intentionally excluded to reduce the likelihood of traceability.

ANNEX 2. Questionnaires

Questionnaire for LGBTQ leaders and activists

1. Please tell me who are you and what do you do in terms of LGBTQ activism.
2. How do you carry out this activism? Have you worked with other LGBTQ or pro-LGBTQ activists? If so, what did you do together? If not, what are the reasons why?
3. What motivates you to work/carry out actions in favor of LGBTQ issues?
4. What struggles have you personally experienced as an LGBTQ activist?
5. What are your thoughts on the LGBTQ movement in the country?
6. In your opinion, what actors (people/institutions/organizations) facilitate the work of LGBTQ activists/leaders/active LGBTQ members? Who obstructs it? How?
7. In your opinion, what opportunities does the LGBTQ movement have to advance change in the country?
8. Do you think there is a relation or correspondence between the work/efforts done by individual activists or leaders and the formal type of activism carried out by you?
9. JUNCTURE: In what way(s) do you think the current political crisis affects the LGBTQ movement in the country?
10. Anything else you would like to add?
11. Is there anyone else I can speak to?

Questionnaire for individual, occasional and/or voluntary activists, and/or active members of the community

1. Please tell me who are you and what do you do.
2. How do you carry out your activism/actions/acts of resistance? Have you worked with (other) LGBTQ activists? If so, what did you do together?
3. What motivates you to work/carry out pro-LGBTQ actions?
4. What struggles have you experienced as an (individual, occasional and/or voluntary activists or) active member of the LGBTQ movement?
5. What are your thoughts on the LGBTQ movement in the country?
6. In your opinion, what actors (people/institutions/organizations) facilitate the work of LGBTQ activists/leaders/active LGBTQ members? Who obstructs it? How?
7. In your opinion, what opportunities does the LGBTQ movement have to advance change in the country?
8. Do you think there is a relation or correspondence between the activism/actions/resistance that you carry out yourself and the more formal type of activism (carried out by i.e. local/international NGOs)?
9. JUNCTURE: In what way(s) do you think that the current political crisis affects the LGBTQ movement in the country?
10. Anything else you would like to add?
11. Is there anyone else I can speak to?