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LGBTI organisations navigating imperial contexts: the Kaleidoscope Trust, the Commonwealth and the need for a decolonizing, intersectional politics.

Abstract

This article presents the first sustained social analysis of the Kaleidoscope Trust, the UK's leading social movement organization on LGBTI issues internationally, and its engagement with the Commonwealth – particularly through forming The Commonwealth Equality Network, comprising national NGOs. A contribution is made to sociological and critical analysis of transnational LGBTI movements, through argument for a new analytical framework combining the sociology of human rights with a decolonizing, intersectional approach – beyond the division between optimistic theories extending Western LGBTI progressive politics, or pessimistic postcolonial queer analyses. To investigate organizations' strategies leading to the Malta 2015 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the research utilizes sources of data including event observation and website sources, initiating analysis of online environments. The analysis deploys social movement theory to examine how and why Kaleidoscope selected the Commonwealth as a political opportunity structure to engage through strategies of framing and articulation of human rights. Invention of The Commonwealth Equality Network, shaped online and offline by imperial relations between core and periphery, is analysed via transnational public sphere and critical theories and argued to indicate a significant restructuring of global queer politics. It is contended that a consistently decolonizing and intersectional articulation of human rights is needed.

Keywords: decolonizing, imperialism, intersectionality, LGBTI, movements, networks, queer

Since its formation in 2011, the Kaleidoscope Trust has emerged in the United Kingdom (UK) as the leading institutional actor working internationally on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) human rights. In particular Kaleidoscope as a non-governmental organization (NGO) has been pivotal in defining and developing the Commonwealth as an inter-governmental structure to be engaged by LGBTI social movements. A particularly interesting development has been Kaleidoscope's leading role in creating The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN) as a transnational network of national LGBTI NGOs, to lobby the Commonwealth. This has implied engagement with one of the world's most conservative international governmental organisations, still shaped by imperialism - with a Secretariat remaining in London and the British monarch remaining Head of the Commonwealth. This implies an urgent need for analysis, through sociology and critical theory, of present negotiations of the social power relations forged by imperialism.

This article provides the first sustained analysis of the Kaleidoscope Trust as a crucial organization, and relatedly of the creation of The Commonwealth Equality Network as an organization institutionalizing a transnational social network - focusing on the process through which these have engaged with the Commonwealth. This is thus far missing from literatures on LGBTI NGOs and social movements in sociology, politics, social movement studies and gender & sexuality studies. Focusing on the period leading to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta in November 2015, it is argued that the Commonwealth has increasing importance in LGBTI human rights politics (while Kaleidoscope defines itself with an LGBT focus, increasingly its activity (eg. Kaleidoscope Trust 2015b), like The Commonwealth Equality Network (2015) adopts an LGBTI frame including 'intersex', so this frame is used here).

Following Melucci (1996), 'A social movement [...] designates that form of collective action which (i) invokes solidarity, (ii) makes manifest a conflict and (iii) entails a breach of the limits of compatibility of the system within which the action takes place' (p. 28) and 'consists of diversified and utonomous units' (p.113). Whereas 'A communication and exchange network keeps the separate quasiautonomous cells in contact' (Melucci, 1996, 113; cf. Castells, 1996). Rather than assume a single global LGBTI movement, for analytical purposes we will refer to LGBTI movements, which allows for multiple LGBTI movements (eg. national or regional), articulated differently with other movements and geo-political structures. The focus however is on the non-governmental organisations (NGOs: Crowson et al, 2009), loosely describable as 'social movement organisations' (Zald and Ash, 1966), but here conceptualized as 'organisations' to highlight analytical distinctions from 'movements', even where there are some overlapping practices. For the present analysis, LGBTI movements and organisations are approached as sharing many normative goals including human rights related to sex, gender and sexuality (often also 'equality' in these respects); but sociological analysis here focuses on differences between LGBTI movements and organisations in selections of context (including framing in relation to 'political opportunity structure': Snow et al, 1986; Kitschelt, 1986) to pursue these goals, and in 'articulation' processes (Hall, 1986) in relation to other movements and to institutions.

LGBTI NGOs, then, are substantial vessels braving the choppy seas of global sexual politics (Corrêa et al, 2008) - whether a ramshackle old pirate ship like ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), or a nippy new cruiser, increasingly polished, like Kaleidoscope. They provide anchors to embed movements and networks; while some have a key strategic role in navigating routes to connect national groups. With a lot of frantic queer activity hidden below decks, they simultaneously hoist flags to represent movement claims.

The article proceeds as follows. First a 'Theoretical Framework' section develops a distinctive approach in dialogue with existing literatures on transnational LGBTI movements. Second, a 'Methodology' section relates the aim to research methods including analysis of various online sources and observation. Sections three and four provide an original analytic account of

Kaleidoscope's development and strategy. Section five explains the emergence of The Commonwealth Equality Network, exploring hierarchies via engagement with theorists of global civil society and transnational public spheres, including Fraser (2010) and Keucheyan (2013). Section six turns to the latest developments at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta during November 2015. Finally the article concludes by defining a distinctive position.

Theoretical Framework: Between LGBTI Human Rights and Postcolonial Queer Analysis

Engagements with the Commonwealth, as will be demonstrated, have become a new central focus of activism in 'global queer politics' which contests the privileged status of heterosexuality, including associated forms of gender and sexuality (Waites, 2009). These engagements can only be analysed by moving beyond a rather reductive division in the theory of sexual politics concerning transnational LGBTI movements. This can be described, indicatively, as the division between a progressive analysis of LGBTI identity politics, and a postcolonial queer analysis – both combining sociological and normative elements.

On the one hand, necessarily simplifying, there are those including many from the gay liberation generation in western societies, who can be termed the 'LGBT progressives'. These have remained broadly positive and optimistic about the potential of a discourse of individual rights including sexual rights, in association with 'coming out' and LGBT identity-formation, to progressively extend, predominantly from western societies into new contexts. This approach tends to imply an elective affinity between individual rights and social processes of 'individualization', both viewed as emerging more in Western societies, with individual sexual rights recommended to the world (Weeks, 2007, 107-134; 199-224). Examples are often founders of western lesbian and gay studies, such as Dennis Altman who affirmed human rights (2001, 122-130) in a context of globalization understood as intensification of interconnectedness, shaped by US power (2001, 122-130); and Ken Plummer who has also highlighted globalization and endorsed human rights (2003, 117-138). While these authors note negative as well as positive effects of globalization, and some localizing rather than universalizing social tendencies, their normative advocacy of human rights remains somewhat analytically detached from such sociological observations, and hence there is a lack of sociological analysis of processes shaping discourses of human rights, and their reception (cf. Hynes et al, 2012). Hence extending human rights tends to be offered as a somewhat insufficient normative solution to complex social problems.

On the other hand are those who can loosely be characterized as 'postcolonial queers'. In this more pessimistic approach, the association of western LGBTI identity politics with conceptions of human rights brings problems for non-western cultures, due to the social power relations through which rights are selectively mobilised, and sometimes also due to the culturally specific content of

rights discourses. The most prominent example is Jasbir Puar, author of *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, and originator of the concept homonationalism (Puar, 2007). Other examples are Massad's (2007) critique of the 'Gay International', or the work of Haritaworn and colleagues which for example critically developed Crenshaw's (1989) well known 'intersectionality' theory to address sexuality (Erel et al, 2008)(in the present article intersectionality is used in its broad sense of addressing multiple inequalities rather than more specific conceptualisations from Crenshaw). There are other variations, such as Rahman (2014) on 'homocolonialism', and impressive work of Rahul Rao problematising culturally essentialist western mappings of 'The Locations of Homophobia' (Rao, 2014). A problem arising is that the sometimes necessary conceptual vocabularies of neo-imperialism, neo-colonialism and/or racism, 'southern theory', 'postcolonial' or 'decolonizing'/'decolonial' approaches (cf. Bhambra 2014, esp. 117-139) often seem too dichotomizing or insufficiently multidimensional to represent situations of more subtle power relations. In wider literature, Bhambra's argument draws on the decolonial thought of Maldonado-Torres and others to counter 'coloniality in lived experience', yet proposes 'connected sociologies' (2014, 131, 141-156) as an approach positively addressing ongoing transnational linkages.

Generally the first grouping has under-theorised how human rights can be co-opted into political projects, particularly sexual nationalisms but also transnational discourses (Stella et al, 2015). In contrast those of the 'postcolonial queer' approach have tended to insufficiently affirm human rights; while rightly identifying human rights as a specific discourse, many in this grouping have struggled to come to terms with the necessity of universal discourses (Butler, Laclau and Zizek, 2000). So the task is to develop analysis of important new empirical contexts via a distinct theoretical framework which avoids the reductivism of these two approaches.

The sociology of human rights presents a way to develop this distinct theoretical framework (Woodiwiss, 2005; Waites, 2010; Hynes et al, 2012). In the present approach there is an assumption, following Corrêa et al (2008, p.151), of the 'indispensability' as well as 'insufficiency' of human rights. The focus moves onto how, where and by whom human rights are being selectively claimed, particularly by using a sociology of human rights deploying discourse theories (Woodiwiss, 2005) to examine how human rights are articulated with other discourses in specific institutional contexts (Waites, 2010) – and especially postcolonial contexts (Said, 1978; Bhambra, 2014).

A further original contribution is identification of a significant new phenomenon in LGBTI politics whereby a particular nationally-based NGO, Kaleidoscope Trust, can lead formation of a significant new transnational network, The Commonwealth Equality Network – particularly online. This will be analysed to show how in post-imperial contexts, diverse membership from North and South with formal equalities can conceal subtly persistent hierarchies. This is analysed through critical engagement with literatures on global civil society (Kaldor, 2003) and transnationalisation of public spheres (Fraser, 2014). While the

internet and online communication have become crucial for LGBTI transnational organizing, in what some following the 'computerization of society' (Lyotard, 1984: 7) have called 'the information age' (Melucci 1996; Castells 1996), it is important to take into account the restricted, structured and hierarchical forms of transnational online communications. This enables development of more socially-structured understandings of transnational social movements and networks, shaped by imperialism's legacies.

Methodology

The aim of this research is to provide a case study of Kaleidoscope's relationships with the Commonwealth, including its role in formation of The Commonwealth Equality Network, and hence to generate new social theory-informed analysis of transnational LGBTI organisations and movements. This is not an attempt at an empirically comprehensive study of Kaleidoscope. The research arises from a view that LGBTI NGO engagements with the Commonwealth constitute a highly significant structural development in global queer politics.

The research design involved methods of primary data-collection to obtain sources concerning Kaleidoscope and the Commonwealth Equality Network, with respect to engagements with the Commonwealth. This was supplemented by some primary material on the Commonwealth and other organisations mentioned. Given a particular interest in the manner in which organisations externally project themselves, communicate and interact, many of the sources are from online. This involved a comprehensive chronological reading through of all articles on Kaleidoscope's website (where news items are maintained) in early 2015, supplemented by checking back on specific webpages in November 2015. Emails from Kaleidoscope to individuals on its email list were also filed from 2013 as potential data. Sources range from videos to organization websites, personal activist websites, organizational reports, and official documents of the Commonwealth.

Observation data is also used from a seminar organised by Kaleidoscope Trust with The Commonwealth Equality Network, which had been advertised on Kaleidoscope's website; here I decided in advance not to ask questions so remained an observer during the formal panel, which offers the only data. This provided an opportunity to observe interaction between NGOs and activists; field notes were taken. This event occurred in the run up to the CHOGM in Malta. Since it was not possible to attend the CHOGM, Twitter was used to follow, via the Commonwealth Foundation (@commonwealthorg), The Commonwealth Equality Network (@CWEquality) and Kaleidoscope Trust (@Kaleidoscope_T), and those retweeted; also Youtube videos and articles circulated.

It should be noted that I have previously collaborated with Kaleidoscope (Glasgow Human Rights Network, 2014). However being a participant in social movements as an activist sociologist should not prohibit research, so long as such relationships are reflected upon.

Looking into the Kaleidoscope.

The Kaleidoscope Trust was formed in 2011 to work on LGBT human rights in the context of a stubborn disinterest in most international issues from Stonewall, the UK's most prominent lesbian, gay and bisexual organization (transgender later). As previously discussed in a comparative analysis of four organisations, this occurred in the same year as formation of the Human Dignity Trust and the Peter Tatchell Foundation. Kaleidoscope Trust therefore emerged as part of a wider step-change in UK organizing - 'the new London-based transnational politics of LGBT human rights' (Waites, 2016). Relative to organisations which had set sail internationally, UK NGOs were late to leave port.

A video of Stonewall's 25th anniversary founders dinner in 2014 records figures from the leadership discussing past choices. This shows board member Matthew Parris, a former Conservative MP, saying 'stay out of abroad'; 'there are other people doing that and our concentration has always been on our own country' (Stonewall, 2014). It is thus clear that the possibility of taking on international issues had been debated and rejected. However actress Olivette Cole Wilson, who is black, expressed a different view:

> …can I say the opposite; […] I think that Stonewall can do a lot to sort of shine a beacon abroad (Stonewall, 2014).

In Parris' comments we see the conservatism of Stonewall's approach internationally; yet the Chief Executive Ben Summerskill (2003-2014), of Labour, bears central responsibility for this failure.

In the absence of Stonewall's international engagement, most global issues had thus not been systematically addressed by institutionalised UK LGBT organizing, notwithstanding interventions by activist Peter Tatchell and direct action group Outrage! This was a remarkable vacuum, given human rights abuses including the Anti-Homosexuality Bill proposing the death penalty in Uganda from 2009 (Lennox and Waites, 2013; Waites, 2016). It also contrasted with the development of international LGBT organisations including the International Gay Association (later ILGA) from 1978 and the US-based International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) from 1990.

Kaleidoscope was conceived by Lance Price to fill this vacuum. Price had worked for Prime Minister Tony Blair and the Labour Party in government, from 1998 to 2001. Emerging from the classic UK politician's education in Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) at Oxford, and BBC journalism, Price became special adviser to Director of Communications Alastair Campbell until 2000, then Director of Communications until 2001. After that he describes himself as a 'Writer, Commentator, Broadcaster' (Price, 2015), and in 2005 he published *The Spin Doctor's Diary* (Price, 2005). Price became exceptionally well-connected among political elites around Westminster; however seems not to have had a background in LGBT activism.

As Price puts it: 'I founded the Kaleidoscope Trust to help uphold the human rights of LGBT people globally, and became its first Executive Director' (Price, 2015). Kaleidoscope was launched at the UK parliament, support by political party leaders: Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron; Labour's Ed Miliband; and Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg. Its founding statement proposed to 'promote diversity and respect for all regardless of sexual orientation', with a somewhat secondary mention of 'gender identity' (Kaleidoscope Trust, 2011, p.3).

In sociological theory terms what is manifest is that the formation of Kaleidoscope needs conceptualization with the sociology of elites (Hartmann, 2007). Here C. Wright Mills conception of *The Power Elite* is crucial, drawing on Weber's *Class, Status and Party* to emphasise how forms of political organization embody power irreducible to other aspects of stratification, often related to patterns of education - such as at Oxbridge (Mills, 1956; Weber, 1922; Waites, 2015). In fairness, Price's book *Where Power Lies: Prime Ministers v The Media* challenged close relationships between press owners and politicians (Price 2010). Nevertheless a sociological concern remains about membership of a self-selected grouping originating in the British political elite, disproportionately white and male, and implications for attitudes in the post-colonial context.

The Kaleidoscope Trust focused on lobbying and international dialogue. But what was missing initially – particularly on its website – was any clear indication of how the organization would engage with the LGBT movements internationally, existing international NGOs like ILGA or IGLHRC, or national organisations (Lennox and Waites, 2013, p.39). This contrasted with practices of state and regional representation in ILGA. It was understandable and legitimate in light of the organisation's small initial size – with only two full time paid staff including Assistant Director Alistair Stewart until 2014. But it was significant that there were no specified consultations with existing NGOs on the website. This reflected limited engagements, relative to the SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) email list, the most important conduit for global SOGI activism (ARC-International 2015). There was little expressed sense of accountability to the wider UK or global LGBTI movements. Hence Kaleidoscope emerged with a problematic vantage point from the former imperial metropolis, initially providing limited signalling to other queer vessels, and a somewhat faulty telescope for seeing afar.

Kaleidoscope's Changing Focus

From the bi-annual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth, Australia in 2011, the Commonwealth became a growing focus for Kaleidoscope, increasingly identified as an institution that the group could address to achieve its aims. In the terms of social movement theory, the Commonwealth was identified as a 'political opportunity structure', originally defined by Kitschelt (1986, p.58) as a configuration of 'resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization'. To this end Kaleidoscope deployed framing strategies to achieve 'frame alignment' (Snow et al, 1986), particularly

by using and conjoining human rights and the Commonwealth as frames. The volume *The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State* emphasised that movements formulate demands in relation to forms of national government, and this is an important insight for analysing engagements with international governance (Tremblay, Paternotte, Johnson, 2011; Kollman and Waites, 2011; Lennox and Waites, 2013).

However there has been nothing inherent in the Commonwealth to make it a vehicle for human rights. When the modern Commonwealth was created in 1949 it did not have human rights as a focus. The *Singapore Declaration,* mentioned equal rights only in respects such as 'race, colour, creed or political belief' (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1971); only in the *Harare Declaration* did 'fundamental human rights' emerge (Commonwealth Heads of Government, 1991). The Charter of the Commonwealth became a more elaborated statement of purpose, placing human rights second only to democracy (Commonwealth, 2013); yet without institutional mechanisms for monitoring human rights; nor mention of sexual orientation or gender identity. Hence representation of the Commonwealth as a political opportunity structure was itself an outcome of framing led by British LGBT campaigners (Waites, 2015).

Why did the Commonwealth become appealing to Kaleidoscope as a political opportunity structure? There are several factors. First, the context of financial constraints. Kaleidoscope was a new organization with limited funds. It faced a global panorama of human rights issues across states, so using inter-governmental organisations had enormous appeal. Actions in Europe were advancing through ILGA-Europe. The obvious wider international organization involving the UK with a potential human rights focus was the Commonwealth.

Further factors coincided. In 2007, the first LGBT activist engagement with the CHOGM People's Forum was made by Sexual Minorities Uganda. The Human Rights Watch (2008) report *This Alien Legacy* highlighted imperial criminalisation. Furthermore around the 2009 CHOGM in Trinidad and Tobago, issues were raised by Peter Tatchell - engaging with (then) Head of Human Rights in the Commonwealth, Purna Sen, who achieved a significant statement against discrimination on any grounds (University of Glasgow 2014). Sen established an opening in the political opportunity structure. In 2011 Tatchell also obtained a positive statement from Secretary General Kamalesh Sharma (Lennox and Waites, 2013). All these developments highlighted the Commonwealth as a potential focus.

However at the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Colombo, LGBTI issues did not reach the People's Forum. This was due largely to Sri Lankan government avoidance of human rights. Therefore it was especially the prospect of the Malta 2015 CHOGM - within the European Union – that fully animated Kaleidoscope.

The introduction of the Commonwealth and human rights together needs to be understood as a framing process in which Kaleidoscope played a key role. This involved 'articulation' of these two concepts together, in terms conceptualised by

Laclau and Mouffe (1985), and Hall (1986)(Author, 2010). This occurred notably in the Kaleidoscope report *Speaking Out: the rights of LGBTI citizens from across the Commonwealth*, introduced by Sen, highlighting continuing criminalisation (Kaleidosope Trust 2014; Waites, 2016). Here the analytical distinction between organization and movement is crucial in discerning organisation's strategic framing. Sen's role as Chair of Kaleidoscope by 2014 also illustrated a dynamic interplay with Commonwealth elites (Waites, 2015).

Kaleidoscope increasingly engaged with the Royal Commonwealth Society on LGBTI issues from 2013 (also appointing Anthony Oluoch (2015) from Kenya).

The Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games became a key focus. Kaleidoscope partnered with Scotland's Equality Network, Pride Glasgow and Glasgow Human Rights Network to organise the LGBTI Human Rights in the Commonwealth conference, involving the Scottish government. This generated the *LGBTI Human Rights in the Commonwealth Conference Statement* advocating human rights in the Commonwealth irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status (available with videoed proceedings on the conference website) (Glasgow Human Rights Network, 2014). One speaker was Silvan Agius, Policy Coordinator for Human Rights for the Malta government. Agius was already designated to have a role organizing the CHOGM, including the People's Forum. Hence his networking with Kaleidoscope contributed to forming transnational networks for agenda-setting (CHOGM Malta 2015).

The Commonwealth Equality Network: Inventing or Colonizing Transnational Public Dialogue?

It was during 2014, in the context of the conference, that Kaleidoscope took the initiative in creation of a Commonwealth LGBTI Association. Initially Kaleidoscope created a Google group 'Commonwealth LGBTI Association' in which contacts from certain national LGBTI groups were included, but the list was not advertised (I was allowed to join briefly). The Association developed into a formalized entity with a Governing Group, and was renamed The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN)(after this, by July 2015 I had been removed from the mailing list due to not representing an organization). This all occurred through engagement with the Royal Commonwealth Society in London and was led for Kaleidoscope by Alistair Stewart; also with Doughty Street Chambers, a civil liberties legal practice (Orozco, 2015). Orozco comments: 'the concept of a network started with Rosana Caldera of Equal Ground, Sri Lanka and Lance Price former Executive Director of Kaleidoscope Trust' (Orozco 2015); but it seems that most of the formative activity was led by Kaleidoscope, with legal researcher Alex Cisneros who joined the board (Cisneros, 2015). The impetus was to create the first formal international LGBT organization with a Commonwealth focus. The Association has however not yet obtained accreditation to the Commonwealth Secretariat due to a requirement to exist for two years prior.

The impossibility of gaining membership except as an organization presents a limit for researchers; it is not possible to access or quote group emails. Significantly the entry criteria give the group's email list a different character from other transnational activist lists. For the SOGI global list, administered by ARC-International (2015), in principle any individual activist can join if nominated by a member; and the Euro-queer list is open to all (Euro-queer 2015).

In 2015 with Price moving aside, Kaleidoscope appointed Dr. Felicity Daly as Executive Director. Dr. Daly had fifteen years of experience in international development and human rights. This suggested the organization articulating its work more with wider development and rights agendas (Kaleidoscope, 2015a).

Following from this, let us consider the Kaleidoscope Trust's seminar 'LGBTI Rights in the Commonwealth', organised with The Commonwealth Equality Network on 14 October 2015, at offices of Baker and Mackenzie law firm in the City of London (Kaleidoscope Trust, 2015c). This public event followed several days of conferencing behind closed doors with approximately 10 international activists. These events were clearly intended as forerunners of the CHOGM, ostensibly to debate objectives and strategy - though probably also to achieve legitimacy through visible consultation, even where a core strategy might have been conceived in advance. Those international activists invited to speak were Caleb Orozco, founder and President of UNIBAM (United Belize Advocacy Movement, 2015); Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, founder and Executive Director of Equal Ground (2015) in Sri Lanka; Joleen Mataele, transgender founder of Tonga Leitis Association (2015), previously of Global Action on Trans* Equality; Mark Greg of Malta Gay Rights Movement (2015); and Ifeanyi Orazulike (2015) from Nigeria, Chair of The Commonwealth Equality Network (also Project Manager for Alliance Rights Nigeria). The chair was Philippa Drew from Kaleidoscope, formerly of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Certain points of interest can be noted. The Commonwealth Equality Network (2015) had its new website launched at the start of this London event, which might indicate of where TCEN is felt to originate. However there was not an articulation of continuous strategies deploying the experience of those southern activists who had initiated LGBT lobbying of the Commonwealth People's Forums: Sexual Minorities Uganda in 2007, then Caribbean activists in 2009.

Regarding those five international activists speaking, background research on their NGO websites indicates all came from small organisations, and mostly from relatively small states in both population and geography, except Nigeria. Flamer-Caldera, Orozco and Mataele all spoke of having to start an organization alone, and the struggles involved, with a lack of social support and financial resources. Quoting from field notes: Flamer-Caldera who founded Equal Ground in 2004 mentioned initially working 'from my bedroom'; Mataele mentioned a long period with 'no core funding'. Orozco spoke of being a 'pioneer' in litigation. Greg commented that the Malta movement was largely a board of 7-8 individuals, until at least 2011. Orazulike emphasized the lack of resources of small LGBT NGOs. In the plush offices of Baker and Mackenzie this created a

striking contrast between resources that UK and non-UK organisations can mobilise.

Relatedly, the format and scope of the event is of interest. Certainly this was publicly advertised, and there was considerable time for questions. However it seemed clear the five invited speakers from different states had been briefed to speak on their national movement, and their own personal experiences. In sociological terms this prior framing and structuring seemed significant; as was the absence of NGOs from states with more developed movements – Uganda, Canada or India for example, which might have spoken more to issues of transnational strategy that were hardly discussed. In particular while the history of imperial criminalization was briefly acknowledged background, there was no mention at all of how the context of colonialism and/or post-colonial power relations might have other implications for contemporary movement strategy or discourse – the present Commonwealth was thus approached as detached from colonial history. There was also no mention of intersectionality or conceptual focus on multiple inequalities (Waites, 2015). This all suggests that analyzing The Commonwealth Equality Network's external activity, as both organization and network, requires appreciation of the internally leading and agenda-setting role of Kaleidoscope within TCEN. While many normative human rights goals are shared, internal inequalities shape external framing strategies which centre the Commonwealth while lacking a decolonizing, postcolonial strategy.

How might social and political theories assist in analysis? Two bodies of literature provide starting points. The first is work on 'global civil society', particularly by Kaldor (2003), with accounts of activist, neoliberal and postmodern interpretations of global civil society. The second body of work is on the transnationalisation of public spheres by Nancy Fraser, developed as a critique of Habermas' (1989) understanding of the public sphere (Fraser, 2010; Fraser et al and Nash, 2014). These can be considered in the context of works on 'the information age' and the internet's potential for democratising transnational dialogues (Castells, 1996), contemplating 'the planetary society' as 'a unified social space' (Melucci, 1996, p.8). But the focus must be on how a more critical approach (Keucheyan, 2013) examining post-colonial power relations (Bhambra, 2014) reveals ongoing hierarchies.

One can see an obvious resonance between Kaldor's 'activist version' and the development of new LGBTI movements, networks, organisations and forms of online engagement. However, particularly for a sociologist, there is a striking need for more detailed empirical attention to the structured forms and channels of discourse. This reflects the need for, a *sociology* of global civil society, which Kaldor points to when emphasizing need 'to talk about civil society not as an ideal but as a living reality' (Kaldor, 2003, p.24). Yet surely when one moves from a national to global or transnational realm, the premise of shared accessible public space for dialogue becomes even more problematic, and hence the question of whether electronic forms of communication can be similarly conceived as open spaces becomes crucial. The answer of course is that most cannot.

The example of The Commonwealth Equality Network demonstrates this well. It was Kaleidoscope that started this grouping as an email list, thus deciding initial membership and acting as a gatekeeper. The effect was the creation of a significant new online forum, to exist alongside existing email networks – most notably the global SOGI and Euro-Queer email lists. This implied some circumventing of key southern activist intellectuals who might be on the SOGI list: such as Sonia Corrêa in Latin America, where radical articulations of human rights with southern theorizing have been developed (Corrêa et al, 2008); and the US anti-imperialist Scott Long (Human Rights Watch, 2008). This therefore amounted to a quiet but significant shift of power in global queer politics, in social networks, and in ideology and relationships to critical movement intellectuals. Keucheyan's (2013) acute analysis developing a global 'geography of critical thinking' (pp.10; 20-24) deploys materialist attention to technology to incisively reveal how new media and communications on occasion 'abruptly altered the conditions of production of critical theories' (p.17); this helps analyse 'internet sites', some of which 'perform the role of intellectual counter-society' (p.22), in the context of North/South power relations. Hence we discern that while many southern national LGBTI organisations and movement leaders are drawn into new transnational networks in which they have a voice, there is some simultaneous sidelining of existing networks and movements in which decolonizing discourses and structural southern theorising are favoured.

Reflecting on Fraser's work, we find the abstractions of social and political theory struggling to connect with the empirical actualities of discourse online. Fraser (2010) has been preoccupied by Habermas' suggested need for an overarching authority to ensure regulation of fair communication; hence she is sceptical of the extent that internet activity implies the emergence of public spheres. But what she underestimates is the way empirical examples show much transnational online political discourse is highly structured, often in defined group spaces with gatekeeping and moral regulation.

Useful to consider is Michael Warner's concept 'counterpublics', for conceptualising how queer communities create realms of high quality dialogue outside the mainstream (Warner 2002). Might The Commonwealth Equality Network's be a transnational counterpublic? However the role of elites in creating this shows the limitations of the public/counterpublic dichotomy.

Overall, focusing on the accessed 'offline' activity of TCEN, it seems that Kaleidoscope and TCEN have focused on involving states with less developed LGBT movements. Their organizing seems to have limited better quality transnational public dialogues informed by postcolonial power relations, yielding a strategy of Commonwealth engagement somewhat divergent from the more contextual approaches of many southern LGBTI movements such as Sexual Minorities Uganda (Lennox and Waites, 2013).

The Malta CHOGM

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting People's Forum in Malta, from 23rd to 26th November 2015, brought together civil society representatives with the theme of 'What makes societies resilient'? Just ahead of the CHOGM, Kaleidoscope published an updated report: *Speaking Out 2015* (Kaleidoscope Trust, 2015b). Following Kaleidoscope's engagement with organizers including Silvan Agius, for the first time there were two LGBTI themed sessions.

The first session was titled 'LGBTI Policy Dialogue. Resilient societies: Security of all people in their diversity'; this was to 'discuss and explore good practices in building non-violent societies'. The session was notably chaired by a British government figure, Baroness Verma, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Department for International Development, who described it as 'full to the brim' (Commonwealth Foundation, 2015a; 2015b). The second session was 'Commonwealth LGBTI Perspectives. Resilient societies are inclusive societies celebrating diversity'. This involved speakers 'on the major challenges LGBTI communities and organizations are facing in their national contexts and how these challenges link to the broader Commonwealth context' (ibid). Of six speakers, two from TCEN had participated in the earlier Kaleidoscope event; Orozco, and Mataele, who sang the Westlife standard 'You Raise Me Up' wearing a dress seemingly comprised of fluorescent feather boas - thus deploying some western semiotics to occupy physical and online spaces, with visceral effect (Royal Commonwealth Society, 2015). Others included Helena Dalli, Minister in the Malta government, and Ruth Baldacchino, Co-Secretary General of ILGA (Commonwealth Foundation and CHOGM Malta, 2015; Commonwealth Foundation, 2015). The Maltese government was able to highlight Malta's world-leading status as the first state with gender identity in its constitution; and its *Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act*, from April 2015, including intersex issues (Malta, 2015).   TCEN reported via Twitter (24-25 November) having a number of delegates (Orozco, 2015).

The Malta Declaration on Governance for Resilience which emerged from the People's Forum foregrounded 'previously unheard voices' and 'diversity', and included a section 'LGBTI and Resilient Societies: Resilience is Security for all People in all of their Diversity' (points 30-33):

30. Criminalisation, violence, discrimination and exclusion faced by LGBTI people hinders the resilience of societies. Inclusive societies are stronger, more innovative and therefore more resilient. Commonwealth civil society must forge stronger links across sectoral interests – LGBTI, union, disability, women and faith movements, indigenous people and ageing populations. People in all of their diversity embody multiple identities, face intersecting oppressions and suffer from the same structural and institutional threats to civil society space.

31. A number of Commonwealth governments require encouragement to engage with LGBTI civil societies [...]. There is a role in sharing good

national policy [...] to protect the lives of people who experience violence [...].

32. The Commonwealth has a role in assisting the transition of knowledge from national to the intergovernmental and between states, and to facilitate a dialogue to safeguard lives which respects the cross cutting nature of LGBTI issues as they intersect with gender, race, faith, ethnicity, disability, and age.

33. We call on Commonwealth leaders to follow the example of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, the Organisation of American States and the UN Human Rights Council, and condemn violence on any and all grounds and we call on Commonwealth Governments to effectively build on the work of the CPF 2015 to ensure that this work remains active in the Commonwealth agenda. Furthermore, Commonwealth leaders and institutions must make concrete efforts to prevent acts of violence and harassment committed against individuals because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. (Commonwealth People's Forum Malta, 2015)

This section of the People's Forum, focused on violence, was groundbreaking and appears to have been a result of the work by actors including Agius, TCEN and Kaleidoscope Trust, which hailed it as 'Fantastic' in a tweet (27 November). Two references to intersectionality answered calls for this (Waites, 2015).

However the central Heads of Government Meeting showed no sign of being influenced by this. The LGBTI issue was omitted from their agenda. Although UK Prime Minister David Cameron raised the issue, neither their Leader's Statement nor Communiqué contained any mention of LGBTI issues (Commonwealth Heads of Government, 2015a; 2015b).

Nevertheless, the political effects of LGBTI activism in relation to the CHOGM must be measured by wider criteria than simply overt governmental change. Visibility has always been a central strategy in queer politics. Engagements through mainstream media, social media and events have been significant for symbolic contestation.

There was also a key development suggesting the Commonwealth approach might change. The impressive Rt Hon Patricia Scotland, a former Attorney General in the UK, was appointed Secretary-General. In Malta she 'said she would "absolutely" be talking to member states about LGBT rights' (Leftly, 2015). With the UK hosting the next CHOGM in 2018, lobbying by LGBTI NGOs - and the UK government - will increase. The 2015 achievement was to fully deploy the People's Forum to lobby governments; but this is only one factor shaping Head of Government action.

The big risk which was not raised or addressed anywhere, however, is of the Commonwealth becoming identified with what after Puar's (2007) 'homonationalism' can be called 'homointernationalism', or what Rahman (2014)

has called 'homocolonialism'; that is, human rights for homosexuals becoming associated with international or transnational projects favouring particular societies located in the history of imperialisms. This is an obvious risk, when one considers the anti-western form of anti-homosexuality in many African states. Hence more explicitly decolonizing framings would have been advisable. In 2014 Kaleidoscope had been drawn by partnership to use such framings in the LGBTI Human Rights in the Commonwealth conference statement, which foregrounded 'the historical responsibility of the British empire' for criminalization, also endorsing rights in relation to 'racism and religion' (Glasgow Human Rights Network, 2014); yet its later letter to the Secretary-General (Waites, 2016) and the People's Forum statement did not maintain this decolonizing model of articulation. Paradoxically it seems organisations believe one cannot talk about imperialism in the Commonwealth, when both the history of criminalisation and sometimes neo-colonial economic relations through which LGBT culture can be privileged, call for precisely this.

Within TCEN, there appear to be remaining hierarchies, with Kaleidoscope playing a leading role. The problematic effect of this is that LGBTI human rights-claims are insufficiently framed through decolonizing discourses. The risk remains that efforts to deploy the Commonwealth may generate reaction.

Conclusion

This analysis has contributed to sociology and the study of transnational gender and sexuality movements by providing the first sustained examination of Kaleidoscope Trust, and of TCEN, focusing on their engagements with the Commonwealth. The article has offered new analysis of their formation involving social elites; and, using social movement theory, of how and why the organisation Kaleidoscope identified the Commonwealth as a political opportunity structure and sought to engage this using human rights framing. Analysis of the Malta CHOGM has argued that activist engagements for human rights and visibility were significant. Overall the analysis suggests these developments have implied a significant restructuring of power in the global LGBTI movement along old and new routes and channels, developed from maps inherited from the navigators of imperialism, though now with more reciprocal journeying as southern voices have come to speak in Europe.

Returning to the debate between LGBTI progressives and postcolonial queers, the analysis indicates that Massad's (2007) characterisation of the Gay International doesn't capture southern LGBTI movements' involvement. However the progressive view of Weeks (2007), Plummer (2003) and others, with a normative emphasis on human rights, is inadequate to capture how movements engage in selective framing and rights-claiming (Lennox and Waites, 2013) and how articulating human rights with the Commonwealth can generate 'homointernationalism', a new concept developed via reference to Puar's postcolonial queer analysis and Rahman's (2014) 'homocolonialism'.

Similarly, the most significant division found in transnational LGBTI activist discourse is between those who endorse LGBTI human rights primarily with reference to a normative universalism that can lack social contextualisation, and those who more systematically deploy framing (Lennox and Waites, 2013) especially by articulating human rights via intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Erel et al , 2008) and postcolonial/decolonizing politics (Said, 1978). Meanwhile, postcolonial 'connected sociologies' (Bhambra, 2014) lead us to attend to the creation of new social movement networks along old imperial lines, including online, and activist engagement with Commonwealth governance. What emerges from research is not that the South is simply excluded; rather, many southern LGBTI movements are becoming part of TCEN, which somewhat embodies a 'global' transnational movement from both North and South. Yet those southern LGBTI collective actions, movements and intellectuals which articulate with more decolonizing and structural analyses appear sidelined.

To interpret this we partly need old vocabularies. Wallerstein's (1974) World Systems Analysis offers concepts of 'core' and 'periphery' (Keucheyan, 2013, 151-153). This helps us to grasp how London-based UK LGBT activism has suddenly been able to take the initiative and create a significant new transnational network, in a manner that many Commonwealth institutional elites have interests in reciprocating. The Kaleidoscope Trust, as a new cruiser entering the deep oceans and dangerous passages of sexual politics, has been making insufficient reference to alternative maps, particularly from earlier transnational explorers who pioneered North/South collaborative strategies (eg. Corrêa's network Sexuality Policy Watch, or ARC-International)(Lennox and Waites, 2013: 38). While Kaleidoscope advocates a decolonization of law, and facilitates funding to enable southern activists to speak, it could do more to engage with critical decolonizing politics and strategies (Keucheyan, 2014, 20-24)

However the mutual support and many shared human rights objectives between UK and international activists do need to be recognised. While the language invoked by many postcolonial queer theorists, of homonationalism (Puar, 2007), the 'gay international' (Massad, 2007) or neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism (Erel et al, 2008), has sensitized us to power relations, it is insufficient to capture this. It is thus high time for critical postcolonial queer theory to come to terms with human rights (Corrêa et al, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2008) and with the North/South alliances central in transnational LGBTI movements.

This enables the debate to move on to more productive analysis about how to claim human rights. The analysis here has suggested sociological reasons that decolonizing framing is not happening, due to the forms, structures and boundaries of new organisations and networks. The significant implication is that the socio-political strategies being pursued by a transnational North/South alliance of LGBTI activists via the Commonwealth have the potential to lead to anti-colonial, anti-imperialist reaction. Much more could be done to systematically foreground southern leadership, and advance a consistently decolonizing and intersectional strategy (Waites, 2016) – particularly to avert any backlash against Commonwealth homointernationalism.

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