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Abstract

Contemporary migrants are described as 'connected migrants', as they maintain multiple connections using digital and social media. This paper explores how this leads to processes of cosmopolitanism and/or encapsulation in a particular group, voluntary gay migrants in Belgium, focusing on the intersection between ethno-cultural and sexual identifications and connections. Drawing on in-depth interviews, the cosmopolitan outlook of the participants becomes clear, as their national and ethno-cultural connections are relatively weak while they identify more strongly with cosmopolitan LGBTQ culture. However, while more salient, sexuality is not all-defining either, bespeaking their rather privileged position as a group of migrants who are self-dependent and not strongly encapsulated in ethno-cultural nor sexual communities, neither minority identity causing excessive stigmatization. As a consequence, they use digital and social media to simultaneously connect to different social spheres, although most do manage their self-presentation to avoid the clash or 'collapse' of different social contexts online.

Key words

sexuality - intersectionality - migration - cosmopolitanism - encapsulation - social media – ethno-cultural identity

Complicating cosmopolitanism

Ethno-cultural and sexual connections among gay migrants

‘Connectivity’ is one of the main buzzwords in contemporary media studies, while ‘cosmopolitanism’ occupies a similar position in research on migration and diaspora. Thanks to digital and social media, so the story goes, people – in particular migrants – communicate and connect across national boundaries; thanks to migration and transnational connections, their outlook becomes cosmopolitan in encompassing the broader world. While both tendencies are undeniable, one could wonder: are all people connected, all the time, to all their social spheres? And is their ensuing outlook necessarily open to the world at large, as the concept of cosmopolitanism suggests?

This paper addresses these issues in relation to a particular group of migrants, LGBTQs (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer people), which allows to explore the intersection between ethno-cultural and sexual identifications and connections. Focusing on one subgroup of LGBTQs, gay men,¹ this paper asks: To what degree do gay migrants connect with their family and country of origin, and do they use digital and social media to do so? To what degree are they cosmopolitans by looking beyond the boundaries of their country of origin and ethno-cultural community? And to what degree are processes of encapsulation at work, creating inward-looking communities around shared identities? These questions are first explored theoretically, and subsequently addressed in empirical research drawing on in-depth interviews with gay migrants.

Migration, media and cosmopolitanism

Considering contemporary migrants as part of a transnational 'diaspora' (Brah, 1996), the issue of transnational connections comes up. Media and communication, in particular, are instrumental in establishing and maintaining such connections, initially electronic media like radio and television, and increasingly digital technologies such as the internet and social media (Georgiou, 2006; Oiarzabal and Reips, 2012). Digital and social media have heightened the ease of transnational connections to an unprecedented level, which led to the figure of the 'connected migrant' (Diminescu & Loveluck, 2014) who builds mediated relationships with the host country while maintaining ties with the country of origin, in the process bridging the distance from those left behind.

These transnational, mediated connections may contribute to a cosmopolitan outlook. To Nedelcu (2012), technologically mediated 'co-presence' leads to a new, transnational habitus among migrants. In her research on highly educated Romanian migrants in Toronto, she identifies 'global players' who identify less with a specific culture or group and more with a cosmopolitan way of being. However, she cautions against generalization as many migrants face difficulties to freely connect digitally with their home country because of political issues, legal status or computer literacy. Similarly, Nessi and Guedes Bailey (2014) study the internet use of self-proclaimed mobile and wealthy cosmopolitans of Mexican origin. Drawing on Craig Calhoun, they conceptualize cosmopolitans as 'citizens of the world', while based on André Janssens work they define 'cosmopolitan capital' as the expression of global openness and

engagement, which depends on economic capital, knowledge of other cultures, and transnational social connections. As Nessi and Guedes Bailey indicate, this is quite a departure from the general focus in diaspora literature on the underprivileged 'other', a view confirmed by Jansson (2016) who notes how the role of media for privileged, professional migrants is under-researched. In his writing, he explores the media uses of 'elite cosmopolitans' working for the UN, emphasizing the connection of cosmopolitan skills and values (such as language skills and the ability to deal with cultural difference) to high levels of education. However, cosmopolitanism is not limited to such elites; quite oppositely, as Georgiou and Silverstone (2006) point out, regular diasporic communities are equally cosmopolitans, "of a different kind to the high-flying, jet-setting cosmopolitans in control of global capitalism" (p. 45).

Cosmopolitanism is generally defined in opposition to nationalism, but the connection is not straightforward. For instance, Calhoun (2008) notes how cosmopolitanism is connected to issues of inequality, which explain why ethnically unmarked national identities are accessible mainly to elites, while others need and reproduce ethnic or national distinctions. At the same time, cosmopolitanism does not exclude national identifications, as expressed in Appiah's (1997) notion of 'rooted cosmopolitanism'. Belonging remains important and 'both/and' identities have become pervasive. To Calhoun it is an illusion "to imagine citizenship of the world as simply freedom of belonging to more sectional groupings" (p. 442). In a similar vein, Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic (2011) do not consider cosmopolitanism and the maintenance of ethnic or national ties as irreconcilable, nor do they consider rootedness and openness in oppositional terms. Christensen and Jansson (2015) concur:

cosmopolitanism is not necessarily opposed to encapsulation or withdrawal in (ethno-cultural or national) communities, but both are intertwined. Christensen (2012) also draws attention to the persistent importance of place, rootedness and locality in cosmopolitan experiences.

While much has been written on cosmopolitanism in the past decade, the focus is mostly on theory. Glick-Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic (2011) state that we need more empirical research on concrete social practices, avoiding methodological nationalism. They argue that research on migration tends to focus on certain 'national', ethno-cultural diasporas, drawing on a concept of fixed cultural difference (see also Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002). For instance, a lot of empirical research on diasporas is interested in the ways ethnically defined groups of migrants integrate by 'bridging' with the host society rather than only 'bonding' with the home country (e.g. Peeters & D'Haenens, 2005; Elias & Lemish, 2008). While valid in offering insight in the multiple connections and allegiances of migrants, these approaches tend to assume the centrality of ethnic and national identifications, in the process threatening to essentialize culture and ethnicity and to reify ethnic communities (Ogan, 2001; Tsagarousianou, 2001).

As a way out of the assumed primacy of ethno-cultural and national bonds, this paper draws on the framework of intersectionality. Initially formulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to address the multidimensionality of Black women's subordination, intersectionality was developed mostly within feminist studies to address the interplay of different axes of social division. Beside offering an analytical tool to explore how race, gender, class and other social divisions work together, intersectionality also offers a model to think

about the multiplicity and interplay of identities (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Rather than adding up sources of oppression, intersectional analyses are interested in the way different sources of marginalization interact in specific social locations, as well as in intersections of power and privilege (Choo, 2010). In this paper, intersectionality is used as a tool to explore the relative importance of and interconnections between different identifications.

Ethnicity, sexuality and media use

While national and ethno-cultural connections inevitably remain key in discussions on cosmopolitanism, this paper aims to change the focus by zooming in on a particular intersection, that between ethnicity and sexuality. If research on migration and diaspora tends to assume the primacy of ethnic and (trans-)national connections, in the process threatening to reify ethnicity, research on sexuality tends to primarily focus on gender and sexuality as defining axes of identification. As Epstein (1998) points out, the conceptualisation of gay identity in the 1970s was strongly essentialist, developing a sort of 'ethnic identification' with a reified category of gay men. Increasingly, however, social constructionist approaches have questioned the homogeneity and stability of gay identities, queer theory in particular stressing the fluidity of sexual identities and their intersection with other social categories (Gamson & Moon, 2004; Sullivan, 2003).

The intersection between ethno-cultural and sexual identities is mostly discussed in the context of non-Western countries or migrants grappling with Western sexual identity categories. As noted by Altman (2002), Western sexual identities have globally spread over the past decades, and while they are presented as markers of modernity, many criticize the neo-colonial tendency to

impose Western models worldwide. Parallel to that, the 'whiteness' of queer identities is increasingly questioned and the intersections of race, ethnicity and sexuality are addressed in queer studies (Sullivan, 2003).

There is also an emerging field of queer diaspora research, which aims both to question the heterosexism of diaspora research and to analyze transnational connections within queer cultures (Fortier, 2002). This literature draws attention to the connections between migration (moving out) and emancipation (coming out), stating that queer migrants often have to "get out in order to come out" (Fortier, 2002: 190). Queer migration research also draws attention to the variable meanings of sexual labels such as 'gay' and 'lesbian' in communities of color and immigrant communities (Manalansan, 2006: 229). According to Luibhéid (2008), queer migration scholarship sees sexuality as constructed within multiple, intersecting relations of power, while refusing to treat queer migrants as discretely bounded groups to merely add on to existing sexuality or migration scholarship.

Although the importance of digital and social media in diasporic contexts is widely researched (as discussed above), their particular role for diasporic LGBTQs has hardly been addressed to date. Nevertheless, from its early days the internet was seen as particularly promising for sexual minorities and more recently, social media have started to take up a central position as a tool for LGBTQ users to construct, disclose but also to negotiate and manage their sexual identities, and to create groups and collective identities (Cooper & Dzara, 2010; Drushel, 2010).

As LGBTQs are not equally out across different social contexts, which because of the affordances of social media such as Facebook tend to be

confronted with each other or ‘collapse’ (boyd, 2011), they need to actively manage their self-presentation and visibility online. Fox and Warber (2015) discuss how LGBTQ self-presentation on Facebook strongly correlates with outness: the more out people are, the more openly they communicate about their sexual selves online. In a similar study, Owens (2017) distinguishes between three groups of gay college students: those who are out and proud, using Facebook to actively come out; those who are out but discreet, only indirectly coming out online; and those who are Facebook closeted, actively monitoring and controlling information. Duguay (2016) discusses the strategies used by LGBTQs to avoid ‘context collisions’ or the unintentional connection of different social contexts online: tailoring performances, which implies hiding or being ambiguous about one’s sexual identity; and separating audiences, for instance through privacy settings, selective ‘friending’, and separating audiences across different social media.

While valuable, most of this research on LGBTQ media use has a major shortcoming in focusing primarily on ethnic majority respondents without a migration background. Only occasionally are intersections with ethnicity and migration explored, for instance in Boston’s (2015) study of Polish immigrants in the UK who seek same-sex relationships with black locals online, McPhail and Fisher’s (2015) research on the use of social media among LGBTQ expatriates as a means of acculturation, and Shield’s (2017) study on gay immigrants’ use of geosocial dating apps.

Beyond these few studies, very little is known about social media uses among LGBTQ migrants, apart from some occasional observations in the context of writing on diasporic media use. For instance, Madianou and Miller (2012)

observed how some of their gay informants in the Philippines used different social networking sites or different profiles within the same site to keep relatives separate from their gay friends. Similarly, Christensen (2012) discusses how one of her participants, a Turkish young man living in Sweden, uses Facebook to form different groups, remaining discreet about his sexual identity in family circles and diasporic networks, while being more open to other contacts. Based on this limited evidence, it seems that non-Western and diasporic LGBTQs can experience tensions at the intersection of their different identifications, which may be reflected in their uses of social media.

Researching gay migrants' media use in Belgium

Based on the literature discussed above, this paper aims to explore the relative importance as well as the mutual shaping of ethno-cultural and sexual identifications among gay migrants living in Belgium, focusing in particular on issues of cosmopolitanism and encapsulation. Which of these social identities is more salient? How do ethno-cultural identifications intersect and interact with sexual identifications? And how does all of this affect the digital connectivity of gay migrants, knowing how important digital and social media are to sexual minorities?

To answer these questions, this paper draws on a set of in-depth interviews with eleven male voluntary migrants living in Belgium, which offers an interesting context for such research as it is one of the most liberal countries world-wide in relation to LGBTQ rights (Borghs & Eeckhout, 2009). The interviewees have very different national and cultural backgrounds, coming from ten different countries across the world: Cuba, Norway, Palestine, Peru, the

Philippines, Poland, Romania (2), Syria, Togo and Vietnam. This implies that there are underlying cultural and racial dimensions to their accounts, which are important but cannot be adequately discussed in the context of this paper. Instead, I will focus on their significant similarities: all chose to move to Belgium for studies, work or love, live in the country legally (which allows them to travel freely, including to their country of origin), and all have a rather elevated educational and economic capital which makes them akin to the 'elite' migrants discussed above and which puts them in a privileged class position. To avoid methodological nationalism by considering them primarily through the lens of nationality, the analysis will focus on their feelings and practices of connection and belonging to different ethno-cultural and sexual communities, which implies that other key dimensions such as race and class will not be addressed in-depth.

The interviews were conducted in 2013 and 2014, in the context of a broader research project on the intersections between sexuality and ethnicity among LGBTQs with a migration background in Belgium. The participants were recruited using a broad, open call for participation spread through social media as well as associations geared towards LGBTQs in general and LGBTQs with a migration background in particular. A total of 35 people participated, of whom 11 were second generation migrants, 10 forced migrants, and 14 voluntary migrants. Most participants were male, only 6 women participating, among which 3 voluntary migrants. In this paper, only the male voluntary migrants will be discussed, as the female participants – which have a different profile – will be extensively discussed elsewhere. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in the language the participants were most comfortable with (Dutch, French or English) and included questions on ethno-cultural and sexual

identifications as well as media use. All interviews were fully transcribed and analysed using NVivo to inductively identify patterns and discourses. For the sake of anonymity, all participant names were changed to an alias of their choice.

Before moving to a discussion of the research findings, it is worth pointing out that it was not my initial aim to focus on this sub-population of LGBTQs; my aim was primarily to study forced migrants as well as second generation LGBTQs (including women and transgender people), two groups that are generally identified as experiencing tensions between ethnic and sexual identifications. However, quite a large number of gay male voluntary migrants wanted to participate in the research, and they proved to be a distinctive group: as a relatively privileged group they tended to have stable legal and economic statuses, which differentiated them from forced migrants, while not experiencing as much social control from their respective ethno-cultural communities as the second generation participants. The consequences of these particularities will be discussed in the analysis.

Ethno-cultural and sexual ties

Using the common sense definition of 'citizens of the world', most voluntary migrants who participated in this research can be qualified as 'cosmopolitans', as they have the economic and educational capital allowing them to travel and connect to the broader world. As a consequence, connections to their country of origin – defined as 'bonding' above – tend to be rather loose; while most can and occasionally do travel back, keeping in touch with family and friends, these bonds tend to loosen over the years. This is most clearly the case with Radwan from Syria, who moved to Belgium well before the civil war and

has been away for over ten years, stating: “I don’t see myself as a Syrian. I’m a citizen of the world.”

Parallel to that, these men generally do not seek out the company of people from their country of origin in Belgium. For instance, Matteo from Romania says: “I’m not a big fan of communities of Romanians. Just because I’m Romanian, it doesn’t mean I will get along with other Romanians.” While this is partly because they feel comfortable in a community of Belgians and other voluntary migrants from around the world, this is also related to social control, in particular for Kossi from Togo: “Living in Belgium, I have more freedom in relation to life in general. But of course there’s people for whom the family is very important, and who care for me, who interfere in my personal life.”

As a consequence, ties to their country of origin tend not to be very strong among the voluntary migrants interviewed for this project. Matteo from Romania says: “To be honest, sometimes you also feel disconnected from your own country, after you left for a long time.” However, nor are their connections to Belgians – defined as bridging above – very strong. Felipe from Peru puts it this way: “I’m in a twilight zone, because after ten years you only have contact with your closest friends and your family. I have started to forget how to say things, even when Spanish is my mother tongue, there are things I don’t know how to say. (...) So wherever I go, I don’t belong to a place.”

One participant explicitly calls himself cosmopolitan, Mateusz from Poland, describing an experience watching Polish news reports about riots abroad:

And they say: “Polish tourist could be saved”, or something like that. And I thought: how ridiculous. Or like: “No Polish people are dead.” And I

thought: how ridiculous it is for me. I don't care if it's like a Polish person that I don't know died or not, I'm more interested if someone of my family or my friends, international friends, died or not. (...) So then I thought: OK, maybe my perspective is becoming more cosmopolitan or something, because I don't care about it being Polish.

Mateusz clearly addresses his connection with 'the Other' here, discussed by Christensen and Jansson (2015) as a distinctive feature of cosmopolitanism. While other participants do not use the term themselves, they are clearly cosmopolitan in the sense of 'citizen of the world': they do not strongly bond with their country of origin nor are they encapsulated in their ethno-cultural community in Belgium. However, most do not 'bridge' very strongly with Belgians either, instead feeling part of an international community. Hence, it is important to note that cosmopolitanism does not necessarily entail a great openness towards the local culture. For instance, while most of the participants had lived in Belgium for several years, many were not fluent in the official Belgian languages, French or Dutch.

If national and ethno-cultural identifications are not particularly salient for this group of men, the question remains to what degree sexuality is a salient source of identification. To start, it's worth noting that most participants feel comfortable with the 'Western' term gay (or it's French-language equivalent 'homosexuel'), although quite a few question sexual labels as such, which is related to their cultural background in countries where identifying as gay is not socially desirable. Esteban from Cuba says: "I'm gay in the sense that I love having sex with men, but that does not define anything in my personality or

behavior. So I prefer not to be labeled.” Still, none of the participants question the centrality of their sexual orientation to their identity. For instance, when asked whether his sexuality is important, Radwan from Syria answers:

“Certainly. It formed me, because I always know I was that way. I believe you look at life from a different perspective.”

While clearly more prominent in their self-definition, sexuality is not all-defining to these participants, who do not want to be reduced to their sexual orientation. For instance, Felipe from Peru says: “I think my sexuality is important to a certain level, but there are other more important things”, and Tuyen from Vietnam says: “It's just one part of me, there's still so many things.” Contrary to the forced migrants interviewed for this project, sexuality was not the main reason for the voluntary migrants to leave their country of origin, although most recount how it was easier to explore their sexuality elsewhere, often first in another city and then abroad.

Unsurprisingly, then, very few feel they belong to a LGBTQ ‘community’. Mateusz from Poland: “I wouldn't say I feel part of gay community to be honest. It's more that I have gay friends, I have some gay networks, but it doesn't feel like any kind of community.” They tend to have a balanced mix of gay and straight friends, and to distance themselves from the ‘gay scene’ (gay bars, clubs, saunas etc.). Thus, Felipe from Peru says he’s not attracted to gay bars:

Maybe in Peru, I was, but it was just a way or place to meet your friends. It was a place where you can be hidden and protected and be gay and safe. But here, in Belgium, you don't need such place anymore. I don't need to go to a gay place just to feel gay, or to meet with someone and hold hands, I can do it everywhere, I can do it in the streets.

So while sexuality on the whole seems to be more salient and important than ethno-cultural identity to the voluntary migrants interviewed in this project, they did not feel strongly encapsulated in a tight gay community either.

Cosmopolitan connections?

Having explored the participants' ethno-cultural identifications in relation to their sexuality, the question remains: what is the role of digital and social media in establishing, maintaining and managing these connections? Corresponding to the broader literature on digital diasporas discussed above, digital media are the main way in which participants remain informed and keep in touch. Most use the internet to follow news from their country of origin, but not very assiduously. Felipe doesn't even follow the news from Peru anymore: "It doesn't make any sense now. I know more about the politics here in Belgium." But in line with their limited 'bridging' connection to Belgium, rather than closely following the Belgian news, most participants are oriented towards international news sources such as BBC World and CNN, bespeaking their cosmopolitan outlook.

Again corresponding to the broader literature on 'connected migrants' discussed above, social media have become the main way to connect, with Facebook as the main outlet. Only two participants are not on Facebook, deliberately resisting it (in their own words), even if they are both out to their friends and family so fear of exposure is not their main motivation. Some participants use Facebook a lot to deliberately connect their different social spheres, including friends and family, but also for information and activism. For instance, when asked what he uses Facebook for, Mateusz from Poland says:

In the very beginning it started as a friend thing, mostly. Then a lot of family members added me as well, so I was making some kind of coming out there, because of posting this stuff. I used it also for the ideas and the new stuff, checking things out. (...) All on the same site, so it's like mixing everything: vacation photos and queer articles.

Rather than avoiding 'context collapse', Mateusz seeks it out, as does Radwan from Syria who combines Muslim and gay posts, connecting to a variety of social circles which are quite distinct in everyday life.

Most participants, however, are more restrained in their use of Facebook and other social media. For instance, some use Facebook mostly to keep in touch with friends and family, i.e. with people they are close to in everyday life. Matteo from Romania says: "I use Facebook, yes, for keeping in touch with friends mostly. I only have people that I know and consider close." Matteo is not too keen on Facebook, preferring face-to-face interaction if possible, but his Facebook use is still in line with the general idea of 'connected migrants'. Others separate audiences, one of the strategies to avoid context collapse as discussed by Duguay (2016). For instance, Felipe uses it mostly to stay in touch with a group of close gay friends in Peru.

Q: So that's a good way to know what they're doing?

Felipe: Exactly.

Q: But you miss all the real life fun...

Felipe: Yes, exactly, but it's either that or nothing...

For Felipe, Facebook acts as a tool for transnational 'co-presence' (Nedelcu,

2012), not to stay in touch with his family but with his gay friends. Tom from Norway uses Facebook mostly professionally, to find and share information: “For news and information, it's great. But for personal things, I don't use it.” Frederick from the Philippines has two accounts, an open, professional one and a restricted, private one where he communicates and chats with friends; to stay in touch with his family, however, he prefers Skype, as do most of the participants, drawing on the affordances of Skype as a tool of one-on-one communication, ideal for ‘bonding’ without the risk of context collapse.

Tuyen from Vietnam, who is not out to his relatives and friends in Vietnam, is most worried about context collapse. He also uses Facebook mostly for friends, but he tries to keep his profile ‘neutral’ and does not post personal things:

Tuyen: Sometimes I am still afraid, like having a party and people starting to tag you...

Q: So you tell them not to?

Tuyen: Normally I will ask them to remove me.

Beside separating audiences, Tuyen clearly tailors his performance online by negotiating the affordance of tagging on Facebook, another strategy discussed by Duguay (2016). Of all the participants, he is the only one who’s ‘Facebook closeted’ in the terms defined by Owens (2017), although many of the others are ‘out but discreet’.

Finally, the separation of audiences also takes place across social media. For most of the participants, chat and dating sites act as a safe and exclusively gay alternative to Facebook. Often, it was their first way to get in touch with gay

people in their home country and a safe way to explore their sexuality, because of the affordance of anonymity. Chatting was a way to feel less alone but also to meet others for sex or relationships. For instance, Matteo from Romania says: “These were the forums where you see other people, you can talk about it and you see you are not alone.” When asked if these sites are still important for him in Belgium, he says : “Well, yes I think. Coming to a new city, making friends, it's good. But it's not the only one. Maybe it's easier here, you just go to a bar, meet people, with friends. So it's not as important as it was back then.” Most clearly, in such uses of chat and dating sites, the participants do not use media to bond with compatriots but to bridge with a broader gay community.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper aimed to explore the relative importance as well as the mutual shaping of ethno-cultural and sexual identifications among gay migrants living in Belgium, focusing in particular on issues of cosmopolitanism and encapsulation. Which of these social identities is more ‘salient’? How do ethno-cultural identifications intersect and interact with sexual identifications? And how does all of this affect the digital connectivity of gay migrants?

Considering their degree of ethno-cultural encapsulation by connecting to their home country and to compatriots in Belgium, the participants in this project turn out to be rather disconnected. Although they tend to have good contacts with relatives and friends in their home country, for which they strongly rely on digital media, their sexuality tends to complicate these connections. As for many other LGBTQs, taking a geographic distance actually made it easier for them to come out and explore their sexuality. Moreover, their

connections to the home country tend to weaken after living in Belgium for a longer time. This is even more strongly the case in relation to compatriots living in Belgium, from which they actually keep a distance instead of searching them out for 'bonding'. Partly, this seems to be related to their sexuality, which complicates ethno-cultural connections and distances them from straight compatriots. However, it also seems to be a matter of class: they feel more connected to a higher educated 'elite'.

Indeed, most research participants are rather cosmopolitan, certainly in the sense of 'citizen of the world' (Calhoun, 2008). They came to Belgium for studies, work or love, are economically self-dependent and strongly connected to an international community. This raises the question: if they connect and 'bridge', to whom? Although the participants are well-integrated in Belgian society in terms of education and work, socially they tend to connect with an international community of colleagues and friends. Although some speak good Dutch or French, the two official Belgian languages, most are more fluent in English. They connect with a cosmopolitan community while their ties to Belgium are relatively weak, certainly in cultural terms. So a first point to make is that 'cosmopolitanism' does not necessarily imply a strong 'bridging' openness to local culture.

Secondly, there are definitely processes of encapsulation at work in the group of gay migrants interviewed in this project. Rather than their biological family or ethno-cultural 'home' community, LGBTQ friends act as a 'family of choice' (Weston, 1997). Most participants have an international group of LGBTQ friends, including but not limited to Belgians. While most do not belong to LGBTQ associations nor identify with 'the LGBTQ community', they do belong to

informal LGBTQ-friendly communities of friends and acquaintances. Digital and social media are important in establishing and maintaining these connections, be it Facebook which is used by most, or chat and dating sites and apps which allowed them to explore their sexuality in their home country, which they continue to do in Belgium.

To conclude, it seems that this particular group of gay migrants is culturally cosmopolitan, but sexually rather encapsulated. For these men, sexuality is more salient and important as a source of identification than cultural and national roots, although most do not define themselves strongly in terms of their sexuality. As a rather privileged group, this minority identity does not cause them many troubles nor stigma, so while more salient than their ethno-cultural identity, it is still relatively marginal to their self-identification, in line with broader tendencies in 'post-gay' culture (Ghaziani, 2011), where gay people tend to not solely define themselves in terms of their sexuality.

This, in turn, connects to the notion of intersectionality, which stresses the multidimensionality of identifications. Although they do identify as gay, the participants in this research also identify along a number of other lines, including – but not very prominently – their nationality and country of origin. They are connected migrants as well as connected gay men, but most of all they are connected multidimensional individuals who do not want to be pinned down on any one identity or community. In particular, as signaled in the methodological section, race and class are key dimensions which deserve further discussion. For instance, race was addressed in these interviews as well as those with other LGBTQs with a migration background, and while very few participants experienced blatant racism in Belgium, the participants of African and Middle-

Eastern origin did report xenophobia and exoticism, and (partly as a consequence) identified more strongly along racial lines. The importance of class equally became clearer in the context of the broader project, as the freedom to disconnect from one's ethno-cultural community was absent among the forced migrants (who were forced to disconnect) and second generation participants (who were more reliant on their family and community in Belgium). In that context, the specific, relatively privileged class position of the gay men discussed in this paper becomes even more apparent.

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¹ In this paper, for the sake of precision I use the term 'gay men' to refer to my research participants, as this is the label they most strongly identify with. I do not designate them as 'queer', as they do not use the term themselves. To refer to the broader community of sexual minorities, I use the umbrella term 'LGBTQ'.