Within the growing literature in anthropology and social sciences in general on the topic of migration, especially in Europe, little research has been done on migrants that flee because their sexual orientation is frowned upon or punishable in their country of origin. This paper focuses on these migrants and is part of a thesis on this theme. Migration and the intensified ethnic contacts that flow from it, is one of the biggest challenges facing the contemporary world. Research on this phenomenon thus is significant.

On a meta-theoretical level, this project of crossing issues of migration and/or asylum with issues of lgbti identity is crucial and innovative, because it deconstructs the ethnic-political presuppositions underlying migration and asylum studies, and it deconstructs the individualizing-identity presuppositions of lgbti and, mostly, queer studies. Furthermore, the more conventional literature in lgbti-studies and contemporary queer theory can be read in a critical light when one considers asylum, because gay and lesbians are usually portrayed as established, middle-class nationals and unproblematic citizens of the state. While the method of the thesis is interpretative and analytic, here the author draws from post-modern and post-colonial theory. He leaves theoretical induction out of the picture, in order to downplay the ‘expert-voice’ of the anthropologist. His goal is to make the narratives of homosexual migrants, not the analysis and interpretation of the researcher, the focal point.

Migration and the intensified ethnic contacts that flow from it, is one of the biggest challenges facing the contemporary world. The influence of migration is noticeable both on a local and global level. The flow of migration can be intra –or transnational. Of the former one can refer to the example of what Time has called, with a wink at its past, ‘China’s Short March’ (Powell 2008: 26), referring to the millions of Chinese that move to the dozens of suburbs arising near the country’s mega cities. Of the latter one can think of the approximately 2,2 million Iraqis who have fled their country since the beginning of the war in 2003. The reasons for migration vary, amongst others, from economic, political over religious to ecological. Within scientific literature on migration, one group of migrants has remained nearly unscrutinized in Europe, viz. those who fled or migrated because of their sexual orientation. Particularly those whose sexual orientation is frowned upon or liable to punishment in their country of origin. In this respect, one example is the recent news coverage on an Iranian homosexual who took refuge in the Netherlands, because of the systematic persecution of homosexuals in Iran. (Ford 2008, Vidal 2008: 22)

The research for my thesis will focus on lesbian and gay migrants in a Belgian context. In 2007 188 homosexuals asked for political asylum in Belgium for being prosecuted because of their sexual orientation in their country of origin. Sixty were approved, two third denied. In 2006 there were 33 recognitions en 83 denials. (Commissie voor Binnenlandse Zaken, de Algemene Zaken en het Openbaar ambt. 04.06.2008. Integraal Verslag, 17) This paper is to be seen as a part of and a runner up to that project. In order to outline a general context, I will first focus on the status lgbti-rights in the contemporary world. Furthermore, I will consider theoretical presuppositions and research methods. Later I will discuss some practical, methodological and ethical issues. Next, I will consider matters of positioning and representation and last but not least I will present the narrative of Russell.
Gay rights in the contemporary world

When one looks at the current legal status of LGBTI’s (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) around the world, it does not come as a surprise that these people would flee. (see appendix I) Nevertheless, looking at this map would give only a fragmented view on a macro level, because the situation behind the law can sometimes be radically different. Let us start at home. In 2003 Belgium became the second country in the world to recognize same-sex couples in marriage. Three years later, adoption was allowed as well. Presently there is a recognition and registration for same-sex unions in nineteen countries and fourteen entities. Adoption is possible in nine countries. Concerning legal status, Belgium may seem a heaven on earth for LGBTI’s, but on a social and cultural level, the outlook is different. A large number still face direct or indirect discrimination. Some statistics may elucidate this point. Note in advance that I do not wish to minimize the progress that has been procured by governments and NGO’s. I merely wish to put this progress in perspective, by showing there’s still a long road ahead, socially and culturally. The Social-Economic Council of Flanders reports that one in ten LGBTI’s has ever changed work because of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. ‘One in four has ever experienced negative or hostile attitudes towards LGBTI’s on the workfloor’ [SERV 2005] Young LGBTI’s make up a risk group. In a study by sociologist Hoooghe the support for gay rights of 6,330 fourth grade youngsters from 112 high schools was questioned. (Lefevre 2007: 1) 43.5 percent of Flemish boys and 23.5 percent of girls think negatively of LGBTI’s. Forty-eight percent of the male respondents think gays should not be allowed to protest and 38 percent think they should not be allowed on television. Six in ten youngsters with a Muslim background think LGBTI’s should not have equal rights. Several authors have shown that environmental, amongst other, factors may make young LGBTI’s very susceptible to depression and suicide. (Veyes 2005: 8) (Russell 2003: 1241-1257) The number of suicide attempts by gay boys runs up to 12,4 percent, twice as much as with heterosexual boys. Twenty-five percent of lesbian girls undertook an attempt to suicide, which is a fivefold of the 5.4 percent of heterosexual girls. (Vince 1999)

Over the past decades, anti-discrimination laws have been installed in 49 countries and 33 entities. (See appendix I) Yet again, a bottom-up-perspective shows the situation may vary drastically amongst these countries. Take for instance Poland, where an anti-discrimination law has been added to the Labour code since 2003. Nonetheless, homophobia is part and parcel of everyday life. In a previous article, I investigated how homophobia spread out over Polish society and how it persisted. (Peumans 2007) Starting from Gramsci’s theoretical concepts, I concluded that homophobia takes an important place in the current hegemonic ideology, next to nationalism and the Catholic faith. Within a nationalistic discourse, people with a non-heterosexual orientation function as social signifiers to delimit the in-group from the out-group. A whole apparatus, existing of the Catholic Church, the state and politics, the field of education, parts of the medical sector and the media sustain this hegemony. Lastly, with regard to persecution, LGBTI’s are sentenced to death in seven countries, and they are punished with imprisonment in 76 countries and 6 entities. (See appendix I) Once more, a gap may be distinguished between law and daily practices. It must be borne in mind that I do not wish to endorse the legal status in these countries, but I want to show the variety of ways people express their sexuality in these countries. An illustration of this is North Africa and the Middle East. Although a strict interpretation of the Qur’an and thus governments forbid homosexuality, ethnographic accounts show how prevalent homosexual behaviour is, for instance in bathhouses or Muslim schools. (Patané 2006: 171-202) In Iran, sex change-operations are legal, because the Qur’an does not forbid it. According to estimates ‘there are 150,000 Iranian transsexuals and the country hosts more sex-change operations per year than any country outside Thailand.’ [Ellison 2008: 8] According to Hojatol Islam Muhammad Mehdi Kariminia, the religious cleric responsible for gender reassignment, ‘Islam has a cure for people suffering from this problem. If they want to change their gender, the path is open.’ He says an operation is no more a sin than ‘changing wheat to flour to bread’. [Barford 2008] For some homosexuals this is the only way to live through their sexuality. ‘Sex-change operations are presented as an acceptable alternative – as a way to live within a set of strict gender binaries, as a way to live like others.’ Take Indonesia as another example. Although the country is home to more Muslims than anywhere else in the world, in the past years the topic of homosexuality has been placed on the agenda of Muslim scholars, after being considered as incommensurable with Islam for decades. The
Jakarta Post reports of the Indonesia Conference on Religions and Peace. (Khalik 2008) So-called moderate scholars referred to the al-Hujurat (Qur’an 49:3), which says one of the blessings of human beings is that, ‘all men and women are equal, regardless of their ethnic origin, wealth, social position or even sexual orientation. The essence of Islam is to humanize humans, to respect and dignify them. In the eyes of God, people are valued based on their piety. And talking about piety is God’s prerogative to judge.’ Condemnation of homosexuality was voiced by two so-called conservative Muslim groups, who said it was a sin and they would not consider homosexuals an enemy, but they would make them aware that what they are doing is wrong.’ In other countries, such as Gambia, the status of homosexuals is not open for change or discussion. The Gambian president, Yahya Jammeh, recently declared that he wants to behead every homosexual in his country. (Het Nieuwsblad 2008) One may conclude after reading this short explanation on the current world status of gay rights that it comes not as a surprise then that some lgbt’s seek refuge in another country.

Theoretical presuppositions and research methods.

Concerning the present paper, I would like to take the liberty to adopt a completely different and more experimental approach. While the method of my thesis will be interpretative and analytic, here I will draw from post-modern and post-colonial theory. By working with different theoretical strands on the same topic, I will be better able to see which one fits my project best. By the end of this paper, I expect to conclude that this approach will not be suitable. However, for now, let us take it for granted. Following ‘Writing Women’s Worlds’ of Abu-Lughod, I leave theoretical induction out of the picture for present purposes, in order to downplay the ‘expert-voice’ of the anthropologist. Abu-Lughod uses a narrative ethnography as a critique of ethnographic typification. (Abu-lughod 1993: xvi) Thus, my goal is to make the narratives of lgbt-migrants, not the analysis and interpretation of the researcher, the focal point.

Practical, methodological and ethical issues

The first question one might ask him –or herself when reading the previous paragraphs is: Where do you find gay migrants? In September 2007 I met Joost from a Flemish organization called WISH (Werkgroup Internationale Solidariteit Holebi’s - Workgroup International Solidarity Holebi’s) on an international congress ‘Sexual Diversity – European Community’ in Ghent. WISH is one of the dozens of lgbt-organisations in Antwerp and part of het Roze Huis (the Pink House). In its leaflet, the group states the following: ‘WISH permanently focuses the attention on these problems (of lgbti’s) through organising letter-writing activities, debating and demonstrating. Our volunteers aim at creating more sensibility to gay rights issues among the Flemish gay people that live in relatively favourable conditions. WISH is also concerned with the needs and problems faced by asylum seekers. Letter writing actions are a powerful weapon to put pressure upon governments to free prisoners, drop charges and show more respect for rights of all humans...Debates are organised in order to draw the attention on delicate issues, to provoke discussions and to exchange points of view. The yearly Belgian Lesbian and Gay Pride (BLGP) in May and other gay festivals such as the one in Antwerp in September are perfect occasions to reach more people and attract new members.’

Although he is not the official chairman of the organisation, most of the members consider Joost the driving force behind it, which makes him my so-called gatekeeper. Apart from this, he has now become a mediator and even a mentor to some issues. I started the participant observation on the 30th of March 2008. From March up to and including May I wanted to ‘write myself into the field’ (to quote the ineluctable Clifford Geertz). Each last Sunday of the month, WISH organises a WISH-day, which entails a psychosocial activity for its members. For example: In March we watched a film (Before Night Falls by Julian Schnabel) and in April visited an exhibition on the Red Star Line at the MAS in Antwerp. For me these activities are crucial, because they are specifically organised for asylum seekers and refugees. My goal is to be an attendant at the activities as much as possible with a view to get acquainted with the participants, to build up rapport and eventually to ask some of them to participate in my research. On the 9th of April, I participated in a general meeting of the organisation. My aim was twofold: to inform the members more on what my research is about, in order to gain their general permission and to learn more about the organisation’s operation and objectives. The day afterwards I participated in what Joost labelled one of the core businesses of WISH: the intake interview. This interview is a means of preparing the asylum seeker for
the real interview with the CGVS (Commissariaat Generaal voor Vluchtelingen en Staatslozen - Commission General of Refugees and Displaced persons)

Building up trust and the search for participants

Some of the migrants who frequent WISH dealt with physical and/or mental violence before coming to Belgium. Before starting my fieldwork, I thought it would not be easy to build up trust with people who’ve been through such endurance and to ask them to relive their past by telling it to me in an interview.

Various methods were adopted to gain trust: participate in each activity of WISH, make an effort and show commitment to the organisation and its members, keep a low profile, be polite, be open about my research as much as possible and provide enough explanation when needed. Apart from these, I tried to search for communalities. One way to do this is by humour. Take this instance from my first day of fieldwork: After the movie, we went downstairs for the ‘small talk’-part of the afternoon. The café was packed, especially older people enjoying a cigarette, a coffee, a glass of wine, ... I looked at one of the dozens of folders which were spread out on a table.

Joost offered me some flyers of WISH. With a bit of pride Mirza showed me his picture on one of the folders and an interview in ‘De Magneet’, the magazine of the Roze Huis. ‘Wow, you’re a local celebrity,’ I smiled at him. ‘I’ll read it at home.’ Eventually we all went to sit at one of the tables. I sat next to Mirza, Muijbur and Joost. A folder titled ‘Hot Nude Yoga’ drew my attention. I asked Muijbur: ‘What’s this? He took the folder, but put it down quickly, feeling embarrassed when he noticed there were half-naked men on the inside.’ The next time I saw Muijbur was on the 10th of April 2008. He had come to WISH to do his in-take interview, in order to be better prepared for his second interview at the CGVS. He had brought a friend for moral support, who had fled because his religion, namely Hinduism, is not tolerated in Bangladesh. While we were waiting for Joost to arrive, guys in their forties, fifties or sixties carrying yoga mats entered the café. Muijbur wondered what the mats were for, to which Ben replied there was a yoga initiation upstairs. ‘Oh, yes, I remember that word from somewhere...’ ‘From that folder we saw last time, Hot Nude Yoga,’ I finished his sentenced. ‘Oh, yes! Hot Nude Yoga,’ Muijbur laughed bashfully. Ben looked puzzled, so I explained what ‘Hot Nude Yoga’ stood for. While looking at the (in my opinion at least) unattractive men, I finished my clarification by hoping ‘They wouldn’t be doing Hot Nude Yoga tonight’, to which everybody burst out laughing.’

After a while, my approach seemed to be seminal. A turning point seemed our visit to the Lesbian and Gay Pride in Brussels on the 17th of May 2008. After walking through Brussels in the pride parade, waving banners with slogans, carrying banners with catchphrases, playing a whistle and being ‘out and proud’, we all went to a Brazilian café near the Kolenmarkt. From a personal perspective, it was the first time I did not feel inhibited in the presence of the other members of WISH. We just had fun: drinking mojitos, dancing to samba, dancehall and r&b, taking pictures together with the local (heterosexual) Brazilian hunk. After this day, my relationships with some of the participants seemed to have changed and strengthened further. Two examples may illustrate this. Russell approached me to ask whether he could participate in my project. We have exchanged e-mail addresses and now he sends me e-mails to ask how my exams are doing. Another example is Amzir, who asked me twice to join him to the Shouf Shouf-soirée. On the 3rd of August 2008 I received the following message from him: ‘Friends r like an underwear...always gives u comfort... Good friends r like a Condom...always protect u... Best Friends r like a Viagra...always bring u up when u r down... wishing u a very Happy FRIENDSHIP Day xxx Amzir’ All this to say that trust is building up.

Ethical issues and methods of payment

As far as ethics is concerned, the following issues have emerged during the course of my research. First, there is the possibility of role conflict between my role as an active member of WISH and a researcher. This problem was most pressing when I took part in the in-take interview. Being present as a member of WISH, I wanted to learn how the interview went so I could assist in this on following occasions. Being there as a researcher I wanted to know the story of Muijbur. Therefore, I decided not to take notes during the whole interview. Another problem was the possible effects of the interviews on the participants. As I mentioned before, some of these stories are descriptions of intense and in the worst case, horrifying experiences. I resolved to make sure my participants knew that they could stop the interview or their participation at all times and
when they didn’t want to answer a question, they were entirely entitled to do so.

With regard to methods of payment, in the beginning I was on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, just giving money to someone after he or she told you about such personal experiences seemed kind of ... cheap. On the other hand, most of the people who came to WISH had no or a low income, so I expected money would be welcome. In the end, I concluded this dilemma was foolish. I think the participants would feel insulted instead of grateful if I gave them money. After all, some of them were becoming acquaintances or friends. My promoter told me I should give chocolate, because it’s a neutral and nice present, which I found quite silly. Therefore I decided to give a personal gift. For example, for Russell I bought a book on ‘Young European Fashion Designers’, because he works in the fashion industry. Just before publishing this article, I let Russell read it. I realized I had made a mistake about the methods of payment, when he replied to me: ‘And i must say that offering money to an Immigrant is not a shame for me cause two things important for an Immigrant is first money and a Lawyer without this you can not make it. I have had to do all types of jobs to stay alive in America it would have to work in the black i would have more rights than i have here for 22years in Europa is not easy.’ (Russell, 03.04.2009)

Matters of positioning and representation

The problematic of the observer, remarkably underanalyzed in the revisionist anthropological currents of which I spoke earlier. This silence is thunderous, for me at least. Look at the many pages of very brilliantly sophisticated argument in the works of the metatheoretical scholars, and you will begin perhaps to note how someone, an authoritative, explorative, elegant, learned voice, speaks and analyzes, amasses evidence, theorizes, speculates about everything – expect itself. Who speaks? For what and to whom? [Said 1989: 212]

In his article 'Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors’, Edward Said notes how the question of representation is often neglected in anthropological research. In order to build further upon my theoretical – post-modern and post-colonial- assumptions and to enhance the reflexivity of my research, I will turn to questions of positioning and representation. I reflected on this elaborately in my logbook, and will reproduce and rewrite some excerpts here.

First I would like to refer to what Abu-Lughod has coined ‘the politics of place in anthropological theory’, by which she argues that ‘anthropological writing a Middle East shapes of its own, fashioned out of conventions, standards of relevance, imaginative and political concerns, and zones of prestige.’ [Abu-Lughod 1989: 278] Although she refers to the Middle East, this quote may be applicable to any anthropological research in general, and especially to my research, since most the participants come from a non-western context, or the ‘Orient.’ On a personal level the interest in this topic, is related to my own homosexuality and a shared concern for the social, legal, ... situation of lgbti’s in the world, which stems from my previous education of Political Sciences and the political home I grew up in. These are the political concerns Abu-Lughod is talking about. Because it is most likely to be the first European research on this topic and one of the few world-wide, prestige is also playing a role – although this has to be taken with a grain of salt when you’re a student. Another reason has to do with academic politics (as Rabinow has named it), for within the Flemish anthropological tradition little has been done on this topic. Furthermore, I might add, this research is necessary to defamiliarize our own society, as has been argued by Davies elsewhere. (Davies, 2007) When we continue with one of the central propositions from Said’s Orientalism, namely ‘that there is no discipline, no structure of knowledge, no institution or epistemology that can or has ever stood free of the various socio-cultural, historical, and political formation that give epochs their peculiar individuality’ [Said, 1989 211], then my topic seems to be part of a new zone of theorizing to which anthropologist start to focus themselves, namely human rights. Keeping in mind what Said mentioned, it is no surprise that I investigate this as well. As a future anthropologist who grew up in a liberal democracy and a society in which the individual is central, I am almost obsessed with human rights, if I may put it in such strong words. From a broader perspective it is understandable that when someone is being socialized in this particular context, he or she will look at, observe and eventually judge other parts of the world from this perspective. In other words, ‘anthropological representations bear as much on the representer’s world as on who or what is represented.’[Said 1989: 224] Said not only said knowledge is situated with a certain
context, but it is connected with and embedded within relationships of power or empire, as he termed it. ‘The swathe the United States cuts through the world is considerable ... and is heavily dependent on cultural discourse, on the knowledge industry, on the production of text and textuality...’, in general, ‘...On our culture.’ [Saïd 1989: 215] This may constitute a problem for anthropological research: ‘the relationship between anthropology as an ongoing enterprise, and, on the other hand, empire as an ongoing concern.’ [Saïd 1989: 217] I notice this too, when I apply his findings to my topic. For instance, Said said the media play a part in this. When homosexual refugees appear in media coverage, they mostly are from Iran, although homosexuals from all kinds of parts of the world come to Belgium. In other words, a country with geo-political significance. The choice for my topic was, apart from other reasons, imbued by this coverage. In my opinion, this example seems to confirm Said’s findings. This has consequences for the anthropological enterprise. Take representation of Muslims for example. When I publish a picture of two gay teenagers being hanged in Iran or by means of my research try to make people aware of the situation of lgbti’s worldwide, this can be considered to be positive on the one hand, in my view at least, because such stories can be heard or these migrants will get a ‘voice’, but on the other hand it may lead to a demonization of Muslims, this can be grain on the mill of certain policies or the agenda of political parties. All the aforementioned should be kept in mind when conducting an anthropological study on this issue.

As a final note, I’d like to remark that, by leaving out the topic of homosexuality, Säid did exactly those things which he fought against. Leaving out such topics makes any analysis of power, knowledge and context incomplete, as has been shown extensively by authors such as Boone or Aldrich. One of the reasons for leaving out such topics, is given by Said in ‘Orientalism’: ‘Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise and threat ... is not the province of my analysis here, alas, despite its frequently noted appearance.’ [Said 1979: 188] On this point, Boone noted ‘Orientalism’ takes place within ‘a remarkably heterosexual interpretative structure.’ [Boone 1995: 90] Without any further ado then, let us turn to the narrative of Russell.

### The story of Russell

As far as my results are concerned, for various reasons, I will publish on one migrant only, namely Russell. Because of the limited space of a paper and my objective to adopt an in-depth focus in order to gain a detailed result, it seems more suitable to tell one story. The semi-structured interview with Russell, which took place on the 3rd of July 2008 in a public library in Antwerp. I chose to publish his story, since he constitutes an exception to the other migrants, in that he originates from a Western country - if I may still use the dichotomy Western/non-Western- namely the United States. A novice to the topic of lgbti’s might wonder: Isn’t the United States the country of ‘Will & Grace’? A sitcom which revolved around the lives of a gay man and his heterosexual female flatmate and which drew an audience of 16 million viewers during its hey-day. Isn’t it the country where the movie ‘Brokeback Mountain’, about two gay cowboys in the Wyoming of the 1950’s, won dozens of awards and was a box-office hit? Or isn’t this the country where lgbti’s are allowed to marry in some states like Massachusetts? The answer to these questions is a triple ‘yes’. But the United States is also the country of the (in)famous ‘religious belt’. It is also the country where, according to some authors like Sam Harris in ‘Letter to a Christian Nation’, fundamentalist religious groups have determined the political agenda during the presidency of George W. Bush. The United States, too, is the country where marriage has been exclusively reserved to man and woman in more than twenty states, as has been voted by referendum in 2004. The United States is also the country which has called upon a cultural relativist stance to defend its non-implementation of UN instruments to combat discrimination of lgbti’s, while the past fifty years it has always held a universalistic position on other topics, like women’s or children’s rights. (Holning Lau 2004)

First I will talk about an instance were we visited an exhibition on immigration and next I will turn to the interview I had with Russell.

On April 27th 2008, we visited the MAS (National Naval Museum) in the harbour of Antwerp, to see the exhibition on the Red Star Line. Joost told me WISH had gained free entrance to the exhibition because he had explained to the museum what WISH is about. Normally, people who earn money, have to pay when we visit something during a WISH-day, but people who don’t have enough money, don’t have to pay and WISH stands in
for them. It happens that some people don’t show up because – Joost figures - they don’t have the money to pay for the train or the activity and feel ashamed to talk about this. This would explain the absence of some members today.

While we were leaving the great hall of central station, Russell told me he was looking forward to seeing this exhibition. ‘When I suggested it at the last meeting we could go there. I didn’t expect us to go this soon,’ he laughed. ‘I thought we’d go in a couple of months or so. I’m gonna see it in May with my class of Nederlands.’ I wanted to ask him why he chose this exhibition for a paper he had to write for his Dutch classes, but there was a burst of laughter from the others when Joost wanted to cross the street while the light was still red. ‘You should give the example, Joost,’ someone remarked.

At the beginning of the exhibition we all watched a giant hypospanorama, showing Antwerp and the regions around the city anno 1913. Everybody was trying to figure out what was situated where. ‘Can you tell me which way the ships went?’ Russell asked me. ‘Let me see,’ I turned around, looking at the other side of the panorama, in direction of the source of the Schelde. ‘What am I doing,’ I blushed, ‘that’s the wrong side of course. Well, a part of it flows through Holland, so they went that way.’ I was looking at the other maps to see whether they had the Schelde drawn on it, to show Russell how it flowed. ‘They don’t have rivers on it, I’m sorry.’ We were looking at maps showing the migration of Europe to America and how the immigrants spread over different parts of the Northern American continent. We talked about the history of the US. ‘So where did the Dutch and the Belgian go then?’ I agreed it was a bit stupid these were not featured on the map, but they were a very small proportion of course. 140 000 Belgians compared to 5,5 million Germans. Russell told me about the war between the Spanish and the French, the Declaration of Independence, then pointed to the map and said: ‘But there are so many names and places that sound Dutch in the US, like in New Jersey you have Hoboken.’ ‘And New York used to be called New Amsterdam,’ I complemented, ‘Cause it was founded by the Dutch.’ ‘You know, in South Carolina, where I come from,’ pointing at the spot on the map, ‘You still have a German, a French, an Irish, a Spanish and a Dutch part. Wim, when I came to Belgium, I heard all these Dutch words and I recognised them, because my mother spoke them. We speak a dialect that has similarities to Dutch.’ I was flabbergasted: ‘What? Now? Do they still speak that?’ I realised how little I knew about contemporary America, apart from what I read in the newspaper and see on tv. ‘I didn’t know that. I knew about the Pennsylvania Dutch of the Amish, but this I never heard about. So can you say something to me in your dialect?’ ‘Yeah, sure like, ‘dinges’, ‘things’,’ Russell answered. ‘Like people in my family would say ‘Pass me that dinges’ while he raised his arm.

We entered the next room of the exhibition. On one side there was a huge model of a ship and on the other side pictures of central station, hotels, Kammenstraat, etcetera. Russell went straight to the ship, while he gasped, ‘Look at that, Wim, it’s beautiful.’ I on the other hand, was still impressed by the Dutch-speaking inhabitants of South Carolina. ‘Wow, I never heard they still spoke Dutch there.’ ‘And what’s more,’ Russell continued, ‘When I was a kid, we used to learn this dance with ‘klomps’. You know, we call it clogs in the US.’ ‘Klompen?!’ I laughed incredulously. ‘Yeah, really, it was with steps and everything.’ I asked whether it was in group or alone. ‘Depending, sometimes alone and then the boys and girls separate,’ he recounted enthusiastically. I thought it was a good moment to ask why he chose this topic for his paper. ‘Well, I’m still working on that paper, it’s not finished. However, I read about it in the newspaper some while ago and I found it very fascinating. I immediately thought about using it in Nederlands class.’ We returned our gaze to the other pieces of the exhibition. Looking at the pictures, Russell asked himself: ‘You know, there used to be a café somewhere, where they had a drink before they...’ ‘...before they left on the boat?’ I finished his sentence. Russell continued: ‘It would be nice to go back to that place to see it, but I don’t know where it is.’ I read the notice board next to the pictures. ‘Only names of hotels... Hotel du Luxembourg, Hotel Westphalen, Hotel Warschau,...’ ‘Hm, what’s that about the Kammenstraat? There used to be a bureau?’ ‘Yeah, the agency of the Red Star Line.’ ‘Wow, can you imagine that?’ His eyes stared at the picture of the Central Station. ‘Oh Wim, you know, when I first came to Belgium, I remember entering the central station for the first time, thinking it looked the same as the station in Chicago, only smaller. It was so beautiful.’ While he told me this, he re-enacted his feelings of that moment by opening his eyes wide in amazement. As we entered the biggest exposition hall of the building, I asked him if Chicago was a nice city. ‘Yes, a very nice city. You know, they say it’s the only city in America where people don’t have an accent.
When you go to New York, California or the South, you can hear their different accent. However, in Chicago you don’t. So when I went to school there, I really had to do my best not to let them hear my Southern accent.” Now, when I’m with Jay, I do speak more Southern of course.

The conversation now turned more to his family and their history. ‘My grandfather fought in the world war and he always said: ‘Go to Europe’. That’s one thing I don’t understand about Americans is that they never go abroad. They always travel in the US.’ ‘I read about that, only 1% percent of Americans travel abroad’ ‘Yeah, like my mother, who is from Native American descent, has never been on an airplane. She says like ‘God gave you feet, so you must use them to walk and travel’ I thought about an article of Keith Basso on Western Apache Indians and how they are connected to the soil they live on. I contrasted this with a thought on how many times most Americans move places. So I curiously asked him: ‘Has your mother always lived on the same place then or has she moved around a lot’ ‘No, well, no, she always lived on the place where her father lived, and his father, and so on.’ He told me he was from African, French, native American, Spanish and Chinese background. His family had spend thousands of dollars to let draw up a genealogy of their family. Especially his aunt who passed away last year was taken up with this. ‘It wasn’t an easy task, because they didn’t keep records of black people in those days.’ ‘My grandfather used to be a...how do you pronounce this...a genealogist and he made up...how do you say that?’ I gesticulated the form of a family tree. ‘A family tree’ Russell said. ‘Yes, and yesterday I was looking at my family tree in the old documents of my grandfather and it turned out my father’s grandparents were half-cousin.’ “My grandparents discovered they were cousins too after the research was done. You know, for them marrying your first, second, third, fourth and fifth cousin would be a disaster, but luckily they were sixth, seventh or eight!”

Next we walked past small and big portraits of all kinds. Looking at a picture of a small girl holding a passenger’s ticket, Russell wondered what might have happened to her. Then there was a picture of a long line of deck chairs and in front an original one had been placed. Russell stared dreamily at the view, saying, ‘I can just imagine sitting on one of those chairs.’ Then he laughed: ‘Well, I don’t think that would be the place were I would sit. This is probably first class.’ Another picture showed three women, two boys and a man.

‘Look at those clothes,’ Russell said. We tried to figure out how they were related to each other. ‘Well, they’re obviously the children of that woman and that man. But who’s mother would she be?’ I pointed at the old lady. ‘She’s probably the mother of the woman. And that’s the sister of the woman. Don’t you think she looks a bit angry? Likes she’s not happy with all this. Blaming her son-in-law for wanting to move his whole family to the US to start a business.’ Russell laughed. Another wall displayed all kinds of objects from the ships. In the background, there were pictures of the rooms the objects were taken from: Fine silver cutlery from the first class and in the next box the simple utensils of the lower decks. Russell looked at the ladies in the pictures. ‘Now these are first-class. Look how sophisticated. The hats and the gloves, ...’ It wasn’t a surprise he looked at these clothing details, because he’s involved in fashion industry as an employee sometimes and he studied fashion. An older man and woman were looking into another box, were a menu was displayed. ‘Is that a menu? I wonder what they were eating then.’ Russell said. ‘But I can’t read because I forgot my glasses.’ I tried to read it, but the older man was standing in front of me. ‘That boy wants to look inside,’ his wife prodded. ‘Oh, sorry,’ the man said with an Antwerp accent. ‘No problem,’ I said.

‘Don’t read it too long, or you’ll get hungry,’ the woman joked.

‘You’re right, I’m getting hungry already. They ate Norwegian sardines.’ I replied. ‘Oh, sardines!’

‘And then they could chose all kinds of grilled meat and there was a cold buffet.’ We walked past other boxes that featured old calendars. ‘Is that an Indian on that calendar?’ ‘Yes, it is.’ ‘And he’s pointing the direction to the European.’ ‘Yeah, to show him where the gold is, probably.’ Russell said he felt sad, but also happy to learn all this. Another picture showed a swimming pool on the ship.

‘I thought we were decadent, but they were too!’

‘Yes,’ Russell laughed, ‘that’s were it all started.’

We watched a picture of smiling men who were part of the orchestra. ‘Can you imagine,’ Russell asked, ‘to be a musician and you just want to be on that ship. That’s all you think about, to be able to play on that ship.’

On July 3rd 2008, I interviewed Russell. In order to stay true to the post-colonial spirit, I wrote it out verbatim and I left out my questions whenever possible, to enhance the flow of reading and to make sure the interviewee remained the focal point. Also,
I only punt my intermissions in italics, because I think reading 20 pages in italics is a painful stretch. Note that Russell sometimes uses other grammatical structures or words than in American English. He then speaks what he calles Patois.

'I came to Europe in 1988. I came to Europe... first I, uhm... My first stop was in England. I lived in England; I think it was three weeks, four weeks. Another American friend joined me in England and then we decided to go to Nederlands. (Dutch for: the Netherlands) We just wanted to see Nederlands. We wanted to get out of England because it was so... Ja... It was a bit rough. A bit rough and a bit openly racist, really openly racist. So for me, I was like... I started to have this culture shock, because one of the reasons of wanting to come to Europe was, because that's the first thing you hear in America as an American the first thing people always tell you is 'Go to Europe for culture, for art, for everything' and Europeans they looove black people. So I got there, in England and the first thing I started to hear was a man would not let me in a restaurant. Because I checked in and stayed in this hotel, it was like a private home hotel and with my bags and everything there. Then I wanted to go into – 'cause I was staying in Bayswater, that was the name, I'll never forget it, it was Bayswater – I wanted to go like into, you know, the centre of London, because I wanted to eat because it was sorta late. The first thing that happened was this guy at this restaurant said, 'Huh, we don't let no jitterbugs in here.' I was like 'Ooooh', really, really shocked and at first when he said 'jitterbug' I thought like: 'Jitterbug? What are you talking about?' Yes, I was very shocked. Then I was very reluctant to go to other places to eat. For some strange reason I met this black guy, that was young, that happened to be gay. And this guy said: 'Oh, I see you're having problems, oh, but I can tell you, you can go here and there's another place there...’ And I just immediately figured that well this guy must be gay, he happened to be young and he happened to be...well, I found out later, he was homeless. He was young. I guess, can I say 16, 17 at that time? I guess 16, 17. I guess, maybe could've been a little bit younger or a little bit older. But it was someone who was very sweet, very kind. Started to tell me 'Oh, you can go here and you can go there'. I don't know, because it has been so many years, I don't know if at that moment I realized he was homeless, or was it later did I realize he was homeless. And I remember after knowing him for one or two days I started telling 'Oh, you can come and stay at my hotel', because I had found out he was a black sleeping on the street. I said: 'Oh no, you can’t...’ Oh, yes, now I understand, it was in March and it was not so cold, but still, it can be pretty cool in the night times in London in March.’

'How old were you at that time?’ I asked Russell. ‘At that time, I would imagine that I was 29, 29, yes. I was 29 years old. So this homeless became a friend of mine,’ Russell laughed. ‘So I would buy him something to eat or tell him he could come and stay... It was no sex, you know, I see that he was young, maybe had been through a lot of problems. So I was not interested, he was not interested, you know, you become friends. You’re foreign, he’s a little bit foreign, you’re both in London and it’s a strange place for me because it’s my first time being in Europe.’

‘Oh my god, the only thing I could think of was’, he said in a dramatic fashion, 'I gotta get out of London, I gotta get out of here, these people are crazy’ I thought. My goodness, nobody warned me! You know, because in America, people always tell you: ‘go to Europe, Europe, Europeans are more civilizing...and more...’ So, well, boom, it was a bit of a culture shock. I was truly interested in having the experience of knowing what it’s like to be an artist and living in Europe. I was determined, well, this is not so good in London, then let’s move on. While I was there for those weeks that I was there - because Jay didn’t come until later – I started meeting these other black gays, because this guy had showed me a club to go to.... I forget the name of it, but I started going to these clubs, because you know, you want to meet people and everything. And people would say: ‘Oh, you’re American, but what do you want to do here? I don’t think you want to live here’ Because at that time, we did not have gay marriage, gay rights was still a bit lacking there in England. I wanted to find out about art. I started going to museums, you know, you want to go to museums. You want to know something about the history, you want to see all these things, you get yourself a library card, and you start to go...you know, you just want to see if it’s really true what Americans always tell you that Europeans is supposed to be number one in culture.’

‘Was your sexuality an element that played in that decision to come to Europe?’ I asked him. ‘Yes, because growing up in South Carolina, you have gay bars, and when you grow up you really find out you can go out. But at that time it was 35, 45 minutes away from where I live. And really to be gay...Because in America...In America it’s always that religion...And I’m from South
It’s called Upcountry. People there is a little bit more mixed. A little bit more...mixed. A little bit more progressive.

When I grew up and graduated from high school, I went away to school. My other brothers and sisters they went to school in South Carolina, but I wanted to go away, because I was gay and I thought ‘Oh, yeah, I can go to one of the fashion institutes here or colleges or whatever, but I really wanted to go away. And I remember when I first finished high school I went to a college in my state. It was like four hours from where I live. I had like a little bit of a shock on campus, because, yeah, well, you could say I was out, but not really out-out. And this guy start to knock on my door and I was like ‘Ooh, my gosh!’ First it was a big school, I met professors that were gay and I know. And even when I was first at that school, you don’t know when you first go to school, you don’t know. And even when I was first at that school, I met professors that were gay and I was like ‘Ooh, my gosh!’ First it was a big shock for me, I had to leave that school, because I couldn’t take it.

I come from Upcountry. South Carolina is split into several sections. The section where I’m from is called Upcountry. It’s called Upcountry. People there is a little bit more mixed. A little bit more progressive. Tend to be een beetje (Dutch for: a little bit) progressive. You will find mixed marriages or there Upcountry, on the coast, you still have African people that speak their native language from Sierra Leone. There on the coast you don’t see too many people mixing. In the neighbourhood that I’m from I always knew that I had some European blood, I always knew I had African blood, I always knew I had some Chinese blood, I always knew I had Native American Indian blood, ... But there on the coast people is always like ‘Ha, you’re black, you there, you stay there’ You have to remember, South Carolina was not integrated until 1972, 73, 74? All the schools, it was separated, so I always went to segregated school until 1969. I remember my parents sending us to an all-white school. For me, I find myself more integrated than other people in South Carolina, because my father was in the United States Navy, so when I was a child he always told us: (takes on a strict voice) ‘If anybody asks you anything, you an American, you’re an American just like they are. I don’t want to hear this thing about colour or anything. You born, you’re raised here, you’re an American. I don’t want anything you thinking you’re black or Indian. If they ask you anything, you’re an American. On your birth certificate, it says you’re American. You’re born in the USA, that’s what you are.’ It was like that. Because in my neighbourhood, when you’re a young child, you play with other white kids, you shop in the same little country store. All blacks and whites shop there. But when you went downtown Anderson. When you left that country, that community, well I guess, in Nederlands (Dutch for: Dutch) you would call it a village. When you went into a big city. Oh, whites would drink from a fountain here and blacks from a fountain there. And there was a door that white people went through and a door black people went through. That’s how it was. In ‘69 my parents entered us into this all white school. In the beginning, it was rough, because the kids there, they didn’t want you there. Some of the teachers they treated you bad, so... Your lockers, you used to see the word ‘nigger’, you used to see the word written on the back of your books, or whatever, yeah. You paid to go to this school, but that’s just the way that it was. In those days, that’s how it was. And then we came home on a separate bus... Because it used to be...We went to this black school called Riverside elementary and Riverside high school and it was way across town. But when my mother paid for us to go to this white school, this black bus had to take us to this white school, see what I’m talking ‘bout? We still could not ride on the same bus, with the white kids. I remember we had this white kids, this white family that lived in the flat from our house, I guess maybe, hm, I dunno, I guess it’s twenty houses, maybe thirty houses, I don’t know how you’d say it. This white family was always friendly to my mother, my father. My mother’s family, my father’s family was always sweet ‘n kind to ‘m. I remember the black bus would stop and we would get off and I remember this family had two sons, one was named Jesse and the other one I forget. And I remember these white kids on that white bus that was behind the black school bus that we got off and when they got off, we had to use the same road. And these children would shout. Jesse and I forget the other son, ‘cause he was the oldest boy...’ He takes on a children’s voice: ‘Oh, Jesse and whatever-his-name, you gotta walk home with the niggers, you got to walk home with the niggers’ these
white kids would say. Jesse and this boy never said anything to us and held their head down and they walk maybe a little bit faster or a little bit slower or whatever to get home, because they had to pass our house. When you lived in that neighbourhood, white people didn’t bother you, they didn’t say anything to you, because we lived right next door to them. As I grew up, I found out that some of those white people in my neighbourhood, they was related to my mother and related to my father, from way down the line. Because I remember when I was a little boy, I used to say to my mother and my father, I used to always say: ‘Who is this white man?’ This was at my father’s house, my father’s father’s house. When I was a little boy, because, you know start to be two or three years old, you see things, you know, you see the difference. And I would say: ‘Why every time we go there, that ol’ ‘whi’ man with that beard is in there and why does he always kiss me’ And my mother would say (he re-enacts his mother): ‘If you don’t shut your mouth, you have to shut your mouth, that’s your grandfather. You have to shut your mouth.’

Russell burst out laughing: ‘Later I found out that all these people they is related.’

‘It was too much to handle with that gay thing. Because I went to high school and at that time I really didn’t know anybody that was gay, so there I was – boom!- all of a sudden in college and there I was having to deal with this, so I couldn’t deal with it, so I had to get up and leave. Yes, I left, I didn’t even go that semester, I didn’t wanna go. And that semester that I left school, that was when I really was able to go my first time to a gay bar. The first time to a gay bar! You know, because I started meeting these other students out of high school. You know, when you go to South Carolina there, there’s a gay bar there that’s called the Castle, it was more of an integrated bar. It was like 1976 then. During that semester it was really when I found out what it’s like...You get your first boyfriend, yes, yes... Then you start to feel yourself a little bit more relaxed. Now I can go on to school. And from there, that was when I decided to go to school in Chicago, because I had met all these black gays and white gay peoples at university. Some were studying there in South Carolina, some were also going to other schools... And I said: ‘Ooh, wouldn’t it be better for me to study in Chicago? Then I can do whatever I want to. Yeah, I had family that lived there, but yeah, Chicago is sooo big, you know. And I remember, ooh, that was when it started to be really nice. It was not in my hometown. I didn’t have to worry about uncles, aunts, grandfathers, you know, I didn’t have to worry about anything! Yes, that was why I was really able to’, he laughs, ‘come out! I studied there at the Art school in Chicago.’

‘I came home, finally coming back to South Carolina and lived, had a job, was working for one of the same companies that Ruben works for now. I worked there, oh, a couple o’ years. Then I remember saying: ‘Ooh, living here in South Carolina is still ‘Ooh’’ People would say: ‘Russell, we don’t recognize you anymore. You went to school and you came back. It was like I came back from Chicago more out, you know, more... When you lived in South Carolina, everything was a little bit, you try not to, you cover up... But once you live in Chicago and open your mind, you see all these people, gay people, straight people, heterosexual people, all ..., then you really start to open up. So when I came back everybody was like ‘What happened to Russell?! He went to Chicago and it’s like’, he burst out laughing, ‘he popped out!’ ‘Yes, it had a great effect on me. It had a great effect on me, to live in Chicago. I had a roommate that was white, his name was David, and he was studying art. I was studying fashion. We used to go out, because at that time, I still was not 21 years old. I remember when I was there studying in Chicago I was not 21 years old and you could not get into the bars in the city, but when you went to the suburbs on the weekends, Thursday night, Friday night,... On the weekends we’d go to the suburbs, because there 18 to get in and they’d stamp your hand with a stamp ‘Beer, wine or whatever’.... Oh, I remember David and I used to go there, oh my god, it was fabulous’, he laughs, ‘Yes, it was fabulous. Yes, yes, it was really good.’

So I went back to South Carolina, worked there a couple of years and finally I moved to Seattle. Moved there in the 80’s: ‘82-‘83, something like that I moved there and that’s were I met Jay, that finally came to London the same time I did. I left Seattle, Washington in November 1987. The following spring I came to Europe. First I was in London, then Amsterdam, went to Paris, Germany, all these places. Then I decided to stay in Paris. I was more interested in fashion. If you wanna be in fashion, where you gonna be? Paris is gonna be the place. Also, one time I wanted to go to Italy and live, but I really wanted to be in Paris, so I stayed in Paris. I guess it was a year later, Jay said ‘Oh, I think it’s better you come here. It’s close to Paris, you can always travel back and forth. So I decided to come here for a visit, I think it was in 1988. And that following year, I moved to Antwerpen and I’ve been in Antwerpen ever since.’
I wondered whether there was a positive trigger that made him come to Europe - because he had an idealized image about it - or whether negative racist experiences played a part in it. ‘For me, I wanted to live here as an artist, because by that time I realized that regardless where you’re gonna go, Americans tell you ‘go to Europe, it’s better and it’s easier there’, but it’s not true. It has nothing to do with that. Maybe it was like that for black Americans who wanted to come to Europe in the twenties or the thirties or the forties or even the fifties or even maybe the sixties, even maybe the seventies. But I think it depends. And because you are into art and you read all these books of these famous black gay writers like James, uh, ja, some of the names I even forgot, because since I read these books it has been so many years. But James Baldwin I know that he was a black American who lived here in Europe for many years and I think he finally settled and lived in Paris. Ja, in those days, yes, in those days, maybe when black people came here it was a bit of a novelty, people maybe was not so so...’ He clicks his fingers and searches for the right words. ‘hm, but I don’t even think so then. I think that the more things change...in politics or in religion or whatever, the more basically things remain the same. I just think that just because one person had a good time, don’t mean that everybody else is gonna have a good time and because you meet somebody that is racist or...it doesn’t mean that all the people is gonna be...see what ‘m talkin’ about? I think that’s part of what you start to learn for yourself. People say ‘Oh, you go there’, people say...Oh, then you start to say: ‘Oh, those people that always telling you do this and do that, do this and do that’, those people just telling lies, they don’t know nothing about nothing. The minute that...the minute that we use that word that ‘we are all civilized’, then for me, it means that none of us is civilized. I wondered whether he also had an image of Europe as a place of different sexual morals and whether people in his surroundings carried that image. I referred to what he said about ‘Oh, they don’t have racism over there and it’s better for blacks’ and asked whether they said the same about homosexuals.’ Russell agreed: ‘Yes, yes, yeah, because some of these people that was telling me ‘go to Europe, go to Europe’, they were gay people. You know, this was people who was very literate, who was professors at universities or professors at high school, people who wrote books, people who like Mia, Angelo, she always used to say ‘Oh, get out of America, go to Europe, go to Europe, go to Europe.’ He started laughing: ‘I came with that same image in my head...’ And then in a more serious tone: ‘But that was not what it was, it didn’t turn out to be that way. I thought that I could me more open, that I could be more free. Because I have this one friend, very close friend, he write books, architecture, he’s a photographer, he writes books on photography and all that. He was my best friend and he always said: ‘Oh yeah, you have to go Europe, you have to go to Europe, you have to live there, ‘cause I lived there. It’s nice, it’s nice, it’s nice. But some of these people, they only lived in Europe...(laughs)...for three weeks or three months! They didn’t live here for twenty years. You see what I’m talkin’ about? They didn’t live here for five years or ten years...They was only coming here periodically. So while they was coming here periodically, to promote a book they was writing or had wrote or whatever, life is totally different, see what ‘m talkin’ about? Life is totally different, because I’ve met even white Americans all over Europe...First when you meet them, the first thing they wanna do is find out what kind of job you got and how much money you making. And if you don’t say ‘Ooh, I got a job’ and ‘I work for this’ and ‘I make this HUGE amount of money’ He claps his hands and makes a sound like firework shooting away. ‘They disappear. They’re not interested. If they’ve given you a telephone number and you call them, they don’t answer.’ He laughs ‘Yes, yes, they will run from you like...Uh. Europeans too little bit like that, little bit, little bit. When they meet you, they want to find out, see where you live, what you got, what you doing. I remember when I used to have a business, I knew more people and now that I don’t have that business, I have that same group of people that I had as friends, that I don’t even see those people anymore. I don’t even hear from those people anymore. Even American people that I did not know, even then I did not know why they was coming around me, but now I know why they was coming around me. They came around me because I had this big business. I was involved in that big business. They saw that gorgeous business and they saw that big car and they used to come around. Even they now don’t even call me so much, because they moved on and they so-called’, he says while making quotation marks with his fingers, ‘have made it. And they got a very wealthy lover and they don’t have so much to do, see what ‘m talkin’ about? But then, I’m still the same person that I used to be. I’m still the same person that I was, when I had the business, absolutely the same person. Yes, well, maybe I’m not as open with people than I
used to be, but I’m still basically the same person. Still basically the same person. Nothing changed. It didn’t change me, because I came because I wanted to learn. I wanted to learn something about art. I wanted to learn something about fashion. I wanted to learn something about food. And I did. I did. I’ve worked in fashion. I’ve worked in art. I’ve been the subject of some famous photographer’s work. I’ve worked in fashion, selling shirts... I did food, I can cook European food, especially Belgian food and French food. I can. I think I always need to...A very good friend of mine, I always say to her: ‘Uh, at least when I go back – one day I want to go back to America – at least I can say, uh, I can do this, I learned this, I learned that. I think that so many people come to Europe because they think they’re gonna get some very very high paying job or that they get to be famous or that they’re gonna have some fabulous life. And I think that...That is not what you...You should go to a place, looking for...I wanted to learn something then...I can speak another language, I’ve learned two more European languages. So I did languages, besides speaking Patois or pidgin English or the King’s English, I learned two more European languages. So I did something, I learned something. I had a great ‘ervaring’ (Dutch for experience) as they say.’ I took the story back to the moment he decided to leave the US. How did his family react to his decision? ‘Uh, for them, they didn’t...’ There is some doubt in his voice ‘...Well, I didn’t think I was gonna be here this long either. I never expected it. You know I gotta go. You know at that time, I gotta get a visa for this – because in those days it was visas. Now all the Europeans, all the people in the Western world really don’t need a visa, you can stay two or three months or whatever, before you had to have a visa for six months. But never I thought twenty years. Never in my life. Never I can image because all those Americans, all those gays that was gays or homosexuals or lesbian and heterosexuals, they’d say: ‘Oh, you go to Europe and you’re gonna last...When Europe finishes with you, you gonna be there and you gonna last maybe three weeks, maybe if you be lucky, if you make it three weeks.’ Some would say ‘Oh yeah, you be back, yeah, you be back after three months. Three months, you be back.’ I’m gonna go and see how it is. How it’s gonna turn out here, how it’s gonna turn out there... And in those days, when I came to Antwerpen in the late 80’s, early 90’s, fashion and music, it was the thing, it was moving. That was one of the reasons I came. ‘Cause Jay said ‘Ooh, come here, ‘cause fashion is starting to really grow and it’s really going and the music is really going’ – ‘cause he was in the music. You gotta come here, you gotta come here, you gotta come here. But like he found out, like I found out...Sometimes it can be a little bit clique-ish. You got this group of this and you got this group of that. And then you gotta be careful if you’re hanging out with that group, if you’re hanging out with the others...yes, it turned out to be like that, but I just think it’s like that everywhere you go. I just think, not only did it turn out to be like that here, that is how life is. People turn things into a clique, they make this one is not welcome and that one is not welcome.

Since he arrived in Antwerpen, Russell had several jobs in the fashion industry. He gave me a number of names of designers and shops he worked for. He also told me he had a fish-shop.I wondered whether he ever went back to the US. ‘No, no, nee, nee, I never went back. Not one time. I’ve travelled to other places in Europe. Spain, Germany, Italy, Portugal... I’ve been all over Europe. For it was always, I was busy... I was doing something else or when it was time to take a vacation (laughs), first thing I thought about was ‘well, let’s go to Spain’, I didn’t really think about ‘Oh, let’s go to America’, you know.’ But he did keep in touch with his family. ‘Oh, yes, my sister, my brother. Well, my oldest sister, she and I would only...We had a big argument years ago and it’s been...We don’t say to much to each other, but my youngest sister and my youngest brother. But from what I always knew, my youngest brother and my youngest sister both was gay. Now my brother don’t say to much about it, but which I know that he still is gay, but maybe he tries not to say to much around my mother, or around the family, because you don’t want people to know, but when you get to be that age and you’re not married and you have no children, ja, alstublieft. (Dutch for yes, please) I’m the type of person, I just come out and tell people. Sure I’m gonna tell it to my mother, I don’t have to tell it to every aunt and uncle, I don’t have to say that. If they ask me...If they was speaking with me on an internet level, then I tell ’m that. But if they gonna say something to me, maybe in a way to degrade me or to dehumanize me, then I’m gonna say: ‘Hey, hey’ I’m the type of person, 9 out of 10 times I will speak up. I used to be one of those people who didn’t say anything and don’t say too much. When I first came here, I was always a person that always speak out. Then there was a part where I didn’t say too much. I got tired of defending my homosexuality or defending the colour of my skin or defending my hair or defending I’m an American. I got tired. Sometimes it depends,
most of the time I would just say ‘Hey, is that important what you’re saying? Do you realize what you just said?’ And you see people looking ‘Ah’ He takes on a look of comprehension. ‘When did I first realize I was gay? I think when I was in the tenth grade. Yeah, when I was in high school in the tenth grade. That was when I really really found out. But...some people would have already put this on me, before I...’ I agreed with him saying I knew the feeling. Russell continued: ‘I think I was in the eight grade, I was already designing clothes, at that age.’ He laughs. ‘It’s so funny because it was the sixties. The sixties was going out and the seventies were coming in and there I was. I love to make this new pants. I love to take clothes and change them. I love to do this. My mother’s very creative. I think my father is very creative too. My mother’s father was a tailor. And there’s uncles on my father’s side that was tailors also, so I think I have this super double dose of creativity. And I remember I used to make these clothes, cut jeans up and do, you know, experiments, tada, what we called tada-jeans or we used to create stricken jeans, with javel and all of this stuff. And then eventually the javel eat a whole in it and we’d make a design. And I remember these pants and I remember this bell-bottom-thing was coming in and I remember these pants was like this...(shows to me what the pants looked like)...but I took and split them on the side from the seem and added a piece of fabric in to make them wider. God, what did I do that for? Because before I used to do these things for summer clothes, but I wore it to school and that was when I started to get this label. They would say ‘Oh, yeah...’ And I remember this one teacher, I never forget her name, Jenny Henderson, I believe is her name. They live not to far from us, they live in the community, they go to the same church. And I remember she was a home-economics-teacher. And she said: ‘You have to leave him alone, he’s comin’ and he’s gonna be in my class, in that class, it was mostly girls. But when I was in that class, some of that other boys wanted to come, because they just wanted to be around those girls, but she wanted me to be in that class, because she said this is going to be a fashion designer, I see it already.’ And she was always mothering me and pushing me to do this and...’

‘[realizing I was gay]...was not easy, because I was always around these people with this religions, saying that you can’t be this or you can’t be that. And don’t do this and don’t do that and you gonna burn’ Again laughter. ‘You gonna burn in hell! This was, yes, this can really...but at first it played a little bit tricks on my mental and psychological well-being, because ...’ He coughs in his hand. ‘Pardon, I think that nobody wants to be ostracized, no one wants to be cast out. Because, like I said, at that age of 13, you start to be called these names, because they have these names in South Carolina that they call you ‘fagot’ and ‘sissy’ and people start to call you these names. And some people start to...don’t want to be friends with you or yeah, I think for me it was very difficult growing up in a Southern family and there we are, not too long integrated with the white kids to go to school, so... But I remember, at that age, already in the 8th grade, I remember seeing other white guys, I knew immediately that they were gay. I noticed...You knew that they were. But I had two black guys in my class and by the time we was in 9th or 10th grade, they were living together.’ He suppresses laughter. ‘They were sleeping together, and I thought it was really strange and I knew that they was gay, but, and they was friends of us, but I never said anything about it, I never said anything to them. When people would call them ‘fagot’ or ‘sissy’ or... I didn’t say anything, they didn’t say anything. But those two was very strong and very intelligent and would fight [...]... I remember Alvin having fights and Martinus, he was this mathematics genius. He was much smarter than I was. I had to work hard to get my grades. I remember people would call them names. I remember other guys in my class, they too would be called names, but... Nobody ever really said anything to each other. We was friends, we’d laugh, we’d talk in groups, we had classes together, but never, people was... I was afraid that if I told Alvin or if I told Martinus, or this white guy, I can’t even remember his name and this face, I remember a face, but I can’t remember the names, some of the names, because it’s been so many years...But nobody would come out and say anything. I think I remember saying something to my friend Monique, Monique Washington I’d said something to her, and I – because she was a girl – and I’m sure maybe she told people. And I had a friend girl named Judy and I told her, because all those white guys and all those black guys who was gay, including myself, we was all friends with that group of people who was a little bit friends and... I told them, but I didn’t dare telling anybody else, I didn’t dare... I just think that people was petrified to death ... I remember at that age we had one black guy, his name was Jack Allen– I never forget this guy – and he was gay, and I remember he used to come to class and he was very creative too and he was really openly...
And can you imagine in the 8th grade openly? For me it’s too, it’s too much. He would come to class and he would have on things that was man and sometimes a bit effeminate or little bit, uh, you know. And he was one of those types who would sit in class and everybody...

He speaks almost in whispers: ‘And I think he did things with guys there, because some of these guys would say things, you know. So how would they know this? They did something with that guy, you know, it’s all teenagers, you know, it’s all high school people, they do things, but me...ne-ver!’ ‘Judy and Monique, they didn’t say anything. They found that it was something normal. People tend to say women is more logical than men. But I don’t think it has anything to do with that, they just said: ‘Oh, yeah, it’s normal’. Because we had girls in our class that was lesbian too, so we just all sorta hung around with each other, but nobody really came out and said anything. If they had a friend that lived in their community, then they told it, you get what I’m talkin’ about? I’m sure that those white guys and those black guys and black girls, they did the same thing too. Somebody that lived really close in their neighbourhood, they told, but I just made sure Judy and Monique didn’t say anybody, ‘cause we lived in the same community. There was other white kids that lived in the same community, went to the same high school, but I didn’t dare tell them. And ah!’ He claps his hands. ‘I remember this other guys’ name, his name was Henry. He used to always hint things to me and he used to go places and he’d say ‘Ooh, he’d been here and he went there with friends’ and, hoh, he was hinting things to me, but ah, oh, every time he said something to me I’d just pretend I didn’t know what he was talking about, but I knew what he was talking about. Because he was trying to see whether he could bring me out or... Well, I think that with all of his white friends, they knew that he was... And the other white guy, I can’t remember his name. They would say things to you about gay things (laughs) and I always tried to pretend: ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about’. Because I was NOT going to come out in high school. Definitely not. And when it was time to go to prom’...now in conspiratorial undertone... ‘all these gay guys, we all went with dates or some came alone.

There’s no way two guys can go to a prom. Maybe today in some states like Boston, Massachusetts or somewhere, but I don’t think so, no, no, no I don’t think ...I really didn’t say anything to my mother until...it was those days (laughs) I was living in Chicago. For her, I don’t think it was really no shock, but with that

religion thing, that was a big thing. That religion thing was a big thing.’

An uncle blamed Russell for the homosexuality of his own son. ‘My uncle called my mother on the telephone (takes on his uncle’s voice): Russell is making my son gay and I’m gonna kill him’ and oh, it was...I never forget...This summer turned out to be one of the worst summers. And I thought: that’s what I get from going home in the summer. If I didn’t go home for the summer and stayed in the city and had a job and worked, then I would not be the blame...[...][...]. Then later Nick started to tell me ‘Oh yes, Russell, I never thought I was gay, but I kissed your best friend and I’m in love with your best friend’ and I thought ‘Oh no! This cannot be true, I’m gonna be the blame and sure enough, I was to blame’ My cousin Nick, the next summer and the next summer, he finished school and went to college. They got him married so fast. And from then on, I did not hear from my cousin Nick. We was not allowed to talk, because his family and my father’s family thought that I was making him... That I...That.’ He bursts out laughing.

‘How can you make someone gay? I just...I don’t think that it’s possible. Hm, I don’t know, maybe you, maybe there’s things that can happen to you when you are a child and it can turn you against women or men or something, but I don’t think that somebody can really really make you gay.’ He brought on a new topic: What are his views towards homosexuality? ‘I think that it’s a natural function. It’s probably one of the most natural things that can happen. If bees, if bees, if they can put a group of bees together and all these male bees are riding each other’s back...If it can happen to bees...And if nine percent of sheep, if you have a farm, if you put two farms together, then 9 percent of the male sheep is gonna be gay. I think it’s logical. I’ve watched male chickens... Because my father’s side of the family that was into farming and also my mother’s mother’s side was into farming. And I remember, when I was young, I saw male chickens, playing with each other, doing things’ that they wasn’t supposed to be doing... I saw male cats, male dogs that was doing things...So for me, I find that it was natural. I think that it’s religion that is telling people that you can’t do this or you can’t do that. It’s poisoning everything with ‘god said’ or ‘the bible said’ or ‘the Qur’an said’ or the ‘Torah said’ or whatever the name of the book is. People is changing it for their own benefit. For some kind of benefit for themselves. Or maybe they’re afraid of something. But I’ve...for me, I find it very natural. Native American Indians used to praise gay men or lesbian women. It
was just until the Europeans came and said ‘Oh, that’s wrong, don’t do that.’ In India, in the South of India, it’s been accepted for thousands of years, then when the Europeans came along... Even in India, they don’t know this thing Shiva which has all these eight arms. When you look at that symbol of Shiva, people say, as with all these historians in India: no one can tell you if before, if it was really a woman or really a man and they just think that it was someone that was transgender. You can’t say whether it’s a man or a woman. Even in African cultures it was accepted, until Europeans and religions started say, and Islam started come along and say ‘You can’t do this’. And now Europeans they start to realize that they have made a great mistake and now they’re telling people ‘you have to accept it’. Once you have said something is bad, once the human mind has heard that something, that this person did this, or that person did that, and it’s wrong, and then the mind hears that ‘Oh, that’s not correct, that person didn’t do that’, the mind still says and tends to believe the first thing the mind has heard. So it’s hard to change once you’ve said...Because that’s just how the mind is...

Russell told me he read ‘thousands of books by gay writers or gay artists or gay architects’: ‘For me, I really do believe, like some Native American Indians believe, that the gay people is something unique for the society and should be listened to and I think that it’s not because you’re gay, you cannot do this or you cannot do that. The minute you say someone cannot do this because she’s a lesbian. We cannot have a lesbian president of the United States of America, then what are you saying? I think that it’s very ignorant to say somebody cannot do this, because he is gay or she is gay, or he is bisexual... I think that, I just think that I find it normal and I think that it’s gonna always be a percentage of people that is gay, that is lesbian, that is bi, that is transsexual or transgender ...[...]... You remember that doctor that did something with that child that was born in America or Canada and they accidentally burned the penis off and than they made him... Well, they burnt the penis off and they tried to tell him that...cut it and tried to make him into a woman. And then when he grew up a girl, as this child start to grow up, he always wanted to play with these things that was very masculine and he felt that he was always very masculine, but they kept saying ‘you’re a girl, you’re a girl’ and finally the parents told him ‘no actually, you’re a boy and we tried to...’ And a few years I saw on television, and this guy he finally killed himself, because this started to be in the news and this really started to come out and that doctor realized and started telling people ‘Oh yeah, you can’t change the sex of the child’. I think that if that person has in their mind that ‘I want to change’, then that’s something totally different. For you to do that, without letting that person grow up and choosing his own sexuality, then I think you make a great mistake and I think that you cannot, a mother or father cannot chose the sexuality of a child. The child is born a man or born a woman. And if the child grows up to be a man that wants to be with a man or if she wants to be with a woman, you just have to let it be. Because scientists are now saying that they can now manipulate the genes and make sure that (laughs) the child will not be gay and I think that is... Ooh, I find that dangerous.’

I referred to a previous occasion, on which he told me he felt more comfortable being gay now that he joined WISH. ‘Before in America I had been member of many organizations in America, black and white men together, in America you had all these different organizations, but here in Belgium, I think it was in 2005, I saw something about the Roze Huis and there was something special going on there, but then I found out from WISH via Jay. And then you feel a bit like you can breathe, ‘cause you’re not the only... Because sometimes when you go to cafés and bars, it’s not because you go to a café or a bar, that you’re gonna meet people that’s gonna be friendly or not friendly or I think every place has it’s own little clique. ‘Cause I lived here in Antwerpen all those years and sometimes I’ve gone to gay bars and yeah, you can laugh and talk with people, but it’s only people that you see when you go out. And for me, it was always, I didn’t see so many black gays there. But you know that there is ethnic gays, Marokkaans (Dutch for: Moroccan) or Latin-American or whatever, but many times in bars you don’t see so many. Many times I was the only person standing there, I was like ‘Oh, hm’. And sometimes a lot of gay people they’d be like ‘Oh, but are you really gay?’ they would ask me. And sometimes I was like ‘What do you mean: are you really gay?’ I’ve met many European gays, Belgian gays that say ‘Oh, but are you really gay?’ ‘What do you mean, are you really gay?’ Sometimes when you met someone and you was physically interested in that person, they would say: ‘well, prove to me that you are.’ Okay, I was just like...absolutely shocked. Really shocked. I think that Europeans sometimes have in their that ‘Oh, he’s black, he’s gay, but he’s not really gay. He’s not really gay.’ And sometimes gay people, gay Europeans think
Going back to my question on WISH, Russell said: ‘Yes, because, yes...’ In a resigned fashion: ‘I’m always here, I go out, it’s the same routine, you go to a bar or something... But here you go and see a tentoonstelling (Dutch for exhibition) or you go and you see, you view the ecohouse together, you have a drink and a laugh, you get up and leave, you understand what I’m talkin’ about? It’s a way to keep in contact with other people that is like you...that is gay and you...’ He slaps his hands on his thighs. It’s more an activity, because contact is...Contact is...I don’t really see any difference. You know, the guy you saw me talking to Sunday, the one with the glasses, I know this guy for... Uf, maybe since ‘99, ‘98... So that’s the reason we was always...’ He makes a sound with his tongue to his lips which goes like ‘Bibbbbh!’. “Cause he was talking to me saying: ‘Oh, Russell, you want to go to school to study law. Oh Russell, please, you’ve been here 20 years, living here 20 years and living here as an immigrant and your papers are not really in order.” He said: ‘Oh, Russell, if I was you, I would do something...’ But I didn’t want to study fashion again. If I had to study fashion another four years, that is, for me, it’s ‘ooh’. I wanted to study something different. That’s why I wanted to study law. But now I’m having second thoughts because everybody’s like ‘Oh, Russell, please, please, I know you want to do something to help yourself or be interested in something to help yourself or maybe help other people. But I think that you should do something that’s gonna you out of that school really quickly, so that you can be busy with a little bit more of yourself. And yes, in a way, that is correct, and that was also one reason I wanted to see what WISH was about, see how it goes and everything, because it’s better than being not being member of an organization. Because in America I used to be... Of course sometimes I used to work for the Democratic Party. Lobby for gay rights. And they still lobby for this gay rights, because you have many people in the United States thinking that it is not a civil right. For me, I think it is a civil right. I think that all rights are civil rights. Because you had some...What was it? Five people? I believe it was five people. And you at two that was for gay marriages in America and you had two that was not and one that was...She was like, how did she use that thing? She was a liaison for a gay rights group in Chicago years ago. There was a terminology she used. Yes, I am and no I’m not, or something like that. You know, a person that says: maybe yes and maybe no. I don’t like these people. In America people can accept women being gay more than men, ...’

Russell endorses the fact some schools and universities in the United States are giving lessons on black history and gay history. ‘You must educate the people. You must tell ‘m. People should know these things. People should know about black history, people should know about (chuckles) gay history. Why not? It can only benefit you, it can’t hurt you. If you are more aware of something, then maybe you don’t do it. Maybe you don’t treat people badly or if you a little bit more aware,
conscious, oh, I’m treating this person badly or I’m doing the wrong thing. I remember as a small child my father used to say ‘Racism is nothing than ignorance. It’s people that is ignorant. Ignorant of the colour of your skin. Ignorant of... It’s a lack of knowledge. A lack. That you don’t know. It’s better to know than not to know.’ Has the opinion of Americans changed over the past years? ‘No, definitely not. For one state, yes, but I must say that Boston, well, Massachusetts has always been number one. It was the first state in America that banned slavery. It’s always been number one. It’s the first state in America to have a gay appointed bishop. The other states will follow years later or they will never follow. For me, I think, that is what is so wrong with democracy or with that democratic thing in America, when it’s one thing, it should be all at one time, instead of we gotta coach these people until we get them there. We gotta lead him there. I think that if one state has made this decision, then all states should. [...] Those Southern states, they will never change [...] Some of them still have sodomy laws.’

‘ [...] I though that if I moved to Europe and lived in Europe, that it was gonna be over, but I think that you, I think that it’s something I’m gonna have to live with probably the rest of my life. And gays they’re gonna be confronted with all there life [...] You have to be black and gay, I think, it’s worse, I think, that white and gay. I think it’s easy. And I’ve heard so many blacks say that – even those black writers, it’s... I don’t know if you know this writer from Georgia. I read something on the internet, something that he would say he would grow up in Georgia in those days and that he was gay and how, ooh, how horrible it was. I wanted to write him (chuckles) you haven’t seen where I live, just 2,5 hours away from you, it’s just as worse. And, well, I think it’s, well, for me, I feel that it is, because... I always get this from African people. They said: ‘Oh, but it’s easier if you white and you gay’ And I always ask that question: ‘Why do you say that?’ But I see why they say that and I think that it’s most probably easy being white and gay. Because they think ‘Oh’, some black people have that, thinking being gay is a disease. That shocks me too, because they say ‘Oh, that’s a disease only white people have’ That’s what African people have, that it’s in the head? I’ve heard this in Jamaica, in the Carribean Islands say that and I said: ‘What you mean?’ I can imagine that they think this. That to be gay it’s something only white people have. Can you? Uhm. (chuckles) You see... You see what type o’ world we live in! yes, yes... And when you are black and you come out and you tell your family you gay... Yes, you catch hell, you catch hell from the women... I even got... I never forget May 17th, May 17th 2008 in Brussels. Here I was with in my head that here you could march and...yeah, of course in San Francisco, Seattle, people see this, or in New York, Chicago, but they don’t have gay pride in Atlanta, Georgia and they don’t have gay pride in South Carolina, or in yeah, Texas they do something, but all in a recorded area, they’re in one area. And there I was and I get this look from African people and when they see that you are with a group of gay people... I saw this the 17th of May, I saw many African women, African men that was standing around and looking... And when I turned around and look back, they would give you this look...’ He takes his feet together and holds his legs sideways while placing his hands on his knees which are held together. He makes his neck longer, pouts his lips and gives a look of disdain. ‘They look you from head down to your feet and it’s like ‘You are nothing, you are trash...It’s like you have some kind of disease.’ I get this many times. [...] As a human being, you can feel that. I think that all human beings have that feeling. Maybe I’m more sensitive, maybe I’m more intuitive, maybe I can pick up on it more that other people. A friend told me: ‘Oh Russell, you’re being too paranoid, you just being paranoid’ And I said: ‘Nee-nee-nee, your mind, your brain and your heart, it’s like a computer and you walk in a room and you can pick it up’ He snaps his fingers. ‘If you intuitive enough, you can look around and the way people look at you and the way they treat you. In that school (of Dutch class) that I went too, they treated me as if I had...The men, they treated me as if I had a disease, except for three men in that school. And the rest of the people they treated me as if...I had some kind of disease or something. They didn’t want to sit near me or...And even this teacher she would pass things out and when she came to me, she throw it at me...And it was just in me, just boiling on the inside [...] I think I was born to experience the negative.

I asked him what dreams he had for the future. ‘Just finishing that Nederlands. (Dutch for ‘Dutch’) Right now I cannot think of anything else. And I cannot really make any great plans for my life until I finish that Nederlands.’ Does he see a possibility for change for the future of lgbti’s in general? ‘Oh, I hope so. The only way it’s gonna change, it’s gonna be a little bit like well, in Belgium you have more rights than in most
Me coming here thinking I’ve gone to heaven! In this nice house with this beautiful architecture!’ Some doors farther down, he showed me the house, which Van Gogh inhabited for a year. ‘I really felt like an artist living in a European city, when I found out he lived here.’ Looking at a group of Muslim women across the street, he remarked wistfully, but without regret or resentment: ‘This neighbourhood has changed a lot. There were no scarves back then, no different ethnic groups. It was a chic neighbourhood. But things change. People change.’

Conclusion

Just as Abu-Lughod did in ‘Writing Women’s Worlds’, I will not draw any conclusions about the narrative of Russell. This would stand in contrast my original premise, because it would restore the so-called expert-voice of the anthropologist.

However, I would like to make a comparative assessment of the use of post-colonial and post-modern theory for my thesis. Let’s start with tossing some flowers. The matters of positioning and representation, which are at the core of post-colonial theory as conceived by Said, have proven to be very fruitful for the enhancement of the reflexivity of anthropological research. At the same time there is a lot to say for placing the anthropological subject at the core of analysis and giving him/her the opportunity of ‘voice’-expression. As a true child of my time, I adhere to an eclectic theoretical taste, so I’ll make use of these post-colonial notions anyhow.

On the other hand, when reading the works of Abu-Lughod, one can’t help but state that interpretation is always a part of the process: there is a selection in observations, in what is registered and written down or what is not, the subdivision in different chapters, subchapters, etcetera. Also, when you just write down what the participant says, the reader will interpret it according to his own knowledge, norms, values, etc. If the anthropologist doesn’t allude to the structural, historical, … circumstances in which the participant lives or doesn’t give some form of interpretation, doesn’t this bear a risk of making an essentialist, homogenizing and exotic interpretation by the reader possible? This is exactly what Abu-Lughod tries to fight.

In the end then, one might wonder whether post-colonial theory is not only deficient in its use for these purposes, but even based on false premises.
Notes

i With exception to person who has been interviewed, pseudonyms were used. Russell explicitly asked me to use his real name, after he had read the final article: ‘Please if you have not gone to publish please use my real name Charlie Russell Wheaton it much better than Marcus i have a twin cousin named Marcus he might no iam sure he and my familly one day might read your very good work my god (...) And its my comeing out to the world, you have made me feel like i have shead a new skin i have been trying to tell people for years that iam a homo and they just dont get it please use my full real name.’ (Marcus, 03.04.2009) Later he confirmed this through telephone conversation, saying had no reason to be ashamed about anything. It was his story and without his name, it would not have felt like it was real.

ii Entities include: part of a federation, state, province, federal district, any other administrative and/or territorial unit.

iii In Flanders, this unfortunate acronym is commonly used to denote homosexuals, lesbians and bisexuals. Unfortunate, because it rules out transgender and intersexuality, in contrast with the Anglo-Saxon term ‘lgbti’.

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Appendix I. LGBTI-rights in the world