INTERSECTIONALITY AND COMPLEXITY IN THE REPRESENTATION OF 'QUEER' SEXUALITIES AND GENDERS IN AFRICAN WOMEN'S SHORT FICTION

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

at

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by

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December 2018

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Funded by the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences in collaboration with the South African Humanities Deans Association

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Acknowledgements

I want to thank my supervisor, Dr Lynda Gichanda Spencer, for guiding me through this process. Thank you for putting up with my various neuroses, wading through my long and convoluted sentences, and keeping a sharp eye open for my new 'favourite word' each draft. Without your encouragement and incisive commentary, this project would not have been possible.

Thank you also to Dr Neville Smith for his input in the early stages of this project.

I am also incredibly grateful to the NIHSS and SAHUDA for the funding that allowed me to focus on this thesis. The support of the NIHSS went beyond financial assistance, as they organised multiple workshops and conferences which provided a chance to network and an opportunity to get feedback. Special thanks to the Eastern Cape mentors, Prof. Fred Hendricks, Prof. Kishore Rhaga and Prof. Paul Maylam. And much gratitude to the other NIHSS doctoral candidates for the shared stories, the friendships, and the reminder that we are not alone in this doctoral journey.

I also want to express my gratitude to the three examiners who took the time to read this thesis with such care and attention, and to provide such detailed feedback regarding both the successes and failures of this study. The 'future lives' of this thesis will, I hope, be in productive conversation with their responses.

Thank you also to Prof. Gabeba Baderoon for reading some of this thesis in its early stages, and seeing potential in the work.

I also wish to acknowledge two formative and fundamental influences in my academic journey and research interests: Sisi Maqagi and Prof. Mary West. I don't know if I would have ended up on this path without you.

Throughout my project, I have had the good fortune of the support of many other postgrads and ex-postgrads. To Allissa, Amy, Anne, Karen, Kelly, Sara and Somila from my Postgraduate Research Group: thank you for reading, critiquing and commiserating. To Nancy for believing in me far too much, and Barrington for the lunches and the queer theory discussions. Thabo for the Twitter links. Jakub for the smoke breaks. Nicole for her editing.

Endless thanks must go to the friends outside of my academic circle, for putting up with the ‘I would love to, but I have to work on my PhD’ excuses for the last few years and always being interested in how it’s going. Sanchelle, Pacentia, Shané, Kristine, and Anathi and Nam – thank you for helping to keep me in the world.

Finally, thank you to my family, who had to put up with the ugliest parts of this process, but loved me through all of it.

Abstract

This thesis sets out to contribute to the growing body of knowledge about queer sexualities and genders in Africa by examining their depiction in selected post-2000 African women's short fiction written in English. Post-2000, the short story form has become the primary vehicle for queer representations by African women writers, and is thus an important development in the burgeoning body of queer literature by African writers. Broadly speaking, this literary formation can be defined as anti-homophobic, feminist and politically pragmatic. Using an intersectional lens, this thesis sets out to examine four significant strands in the political work these stories engage in. The chapters are structured around four main points of contention that have particular significance at the intersection of 'queer', 'women' and 'Africa'. Firstly, I examine South African short stories that perform what I call queer conversations with history: imaginatively asserting a queer South African history, writing back against a male-dominated and heterosexist literary canon and, in doing so, contributing to the reimagination of the contemporary South African nation. Secondly, I analyse short stories from Africa that foreground the family, both as social formation and ideology. I examine how these stories 'fracture' this powerful and naturalised heterosexist concept by depicting the tensions and contradictions that queer characters experience in relation to family. Thirdly, I consider short stories from various African contexts that work to reconceptualise queer sexuality in relation to religious discourse in order to challenge homophobic and patriarchal religious authority. Finally, I examine queer, feminist erotic short stories by African women writers that challenges various colonialist, racist, sexist and lesbophobic discourses that have historically stifled the portrayal of sex and erotic experience between women.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examines a selection of short stories by African women writers published post-2000 that depict queer sexualities and genders. Literary scholars such as Brenna Munro and Sally Ann Murray have recently recognised the queer African short story in English by women writers as a significant development in queer literature on the continent. This literary formation is part of a more general movement within literature from Africa that is sympathetic, nuanced, explicit and diverse in its treatment of non-normative sexualities and genders. The body of short stories that I examine here can be defined as anti-homophobic, feminist and politically pragmatic. While queer representations in African short stories have been considered by various scholars, to my knowledge this thesis is the first full-length work to examine this literary formation in depth across various countries in Africa. It focuses on three generally under-examined areas in scholarship on queer literature in Africa: firstly, work by women writers; secondly, the genre of short fiction; and, thirdly, contemporary literature. It also covers many writers and short stories that have not yet received much critical attention, allowing me to make an original contribution. In order to expand the consideration of this literary development I structure my analysis around four highly politicized areas in relation to sexuality and gender. These are: history, the family, religion and sex/eroticism. In doing so, I consider the imaginative literary and political work in which these stories engage.

Munro describes the contemporary situation regarding same-sex sexuality in Africa as "a singular historical moment of heightened politicization" ("States of Emergence" 189). This moment arguably began when then-president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, publicly insulted gays and lesbians in his response to a book stall set up by the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) organisation in 1995 (*South Africa and the Dream* xvii). Several African political leaders have followed suit by making homophobic statements that have brought the issue of homosexuality to the forefront of public discourse.[1] In this period of 'heightened politicization', new anti-homosexuality laws have been passed in some African countries. These laws have often increased the jail time already mandated by colonial-era sodomy laws. As Munro observes in relation to Nigeria's anti-gay laws, these politicians have caused, "in Foucaultian [sic] terms, an incitement to (reverse) discourse [… where] the political urgency created by the rise of homophobia is

[1] Munro mentions Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni (*South Africa and the Dream* xvii). Marc Epprecht also notes Museveni, as well as observing that the "king of Swaziland, the president of Namibia, Kenya, Zambia, […] and leading church officials from around the continent have all publicly attacked homosexuals or equated them with external threats" (*Hungochani* 4). Cheryl Stobie mentions then-president of Namibia, Sam Nujoma; Namibia's Minister of Home Affairs at the time, Jerry Ekandjo; and former presidents of Zambia and Kenya, Frederick Chiluba and Daniel arap Moi ("Reading Bisexualities" 36).

provoking both the consolidation of Western-style gay and lesbian identities and a refusal of homophobia on the part of writers, artists, musicians, and activists of all sexualities" ("States of Emergence" 188). Within this context, writing about queer sexualities and genders in Africa is a highly politicized act. The refusal of homophobia, which Munro identifies, is apparent in the short stories discussed in this thesis.

The discourse surrounding queer sexualities and genders in Africa is not only informed by political and economic difficulties that make demonizing homosexuality politically pragmatic, but also by intensely politicized relations between Africa and the West. While anti-gay laws and homophobic political rhetoric have real and damaging effects on queer people living in African countries, the broader narrative of Africa as homophobic in contrast to a progressive, enlightened West reinforces reductive colonial narratives about Africa (Epprecht, *Hungochani* 5).[2] As Keguro Macharia notes: "Homophobia in Africa is a problem" but does not require "special interventions that reconsolidate old, ongoing and boring oppositions between a progressive west and an atavistic Africa" ("Homophobia in Africa"). This oppositional narrative ignores the homophobic and transphobic attitudes of some politicians in the West, the colonial legacy that has contributed to the current climate in Africa, and the influence of Christian conservatives based in the United States of America in inflaming anti-gay sentiment.[3] More importantly, it overlooks the African organisations that advocate for lesbian, gay and transgender rights and the African countries that have supported gay rights, repealed anti-gay laws and entrenched sexual and gender rights in their constitutions.[4] Furthermore, this narrative disregards the complex ways in which African people live, and conceive of, sexualities and genders; often in ways that cannot be accurately accounted for within Western frameworks. To return to Macharia: "Homophobia in Africa is not a single story" ("Homophobia in Africa").

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[2] A 2014/2015 Afrobarometer survey of 33 African countries found Africa to be generally intolerant of homosexuality, with 78% of respondents saying they would dislike having homosexual neighbours (Dulani et al 2). Nevertheless, this survey concluded that not all of Africa was homophobic as majorities in Cape Verde, South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique said they would not mind having homosexual neighbours (2).

[3] See Kapya John Kaoma's *Colonizing African Values: How the U.S. Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa.*

[4] African activist groups include "LEGABIBO in Botswanan, GALESWA in Swaziland, Sister Namibia and the Rainbow Project in Namibia", as well as GALZ, which "openly provides counselling, legal, and other support services to men and women struggling with issues of sexuality, and promotes a politics in Zimbabwe that would embrace sexual orientation as a human right" (Epprecht, *Hungochani* 7). In 1991, Lesotho and Ethiopia "supported the principle of expanding gay rights internationally in order to enrich democracy in the region" (6). In 2015, Mozambique decriminalised homosexuality (Nkosi). Rwanda recently "decided *not* to pass a proposed antigay bill" (Munro, *South Africa and the Dream* xvii; emphasis in original). South Africa has not only legalised same-sex unions, but its "1996 constitution was the first in the world to ban discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation" (vii). The complexity of the laws in Africa relating to queer genders and sexualities is outlined in *State-Sponsored Homophobia: A World Survey of Sexual Orientation Laws: Criminalization, Protection ad Recognition* by the International Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association and Aengus Carroll. This annual report covers all the continents and provides country-by-country summaries of their laws regarding sexualities.

In order to navigate this complexity in the African context, I first need to problematize the terms I use to delineate the scope of this study. In the first section of this chapter, I problematize 'African' and 'queer' and how they make meaning in relation to one another. I also problematize and define 'genders' and 'sexualities'. I then outline how intersectionality and queer theory inform my analysis. Next, I provide an overview of the development of queer literature in Africa and how the short story has recently emerged as a primary vehicle for queer literary representations by African women. This is followed by a discussion of the genre of the short story. I consider the genre's development in Africa, its lack of critical consideration and what makes it a suitable form for queer narratives. Finally, I provide a brief chapter outline.

1.2 Queer Africa? Problematizing Terms

In her introduction to *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction*, Pumla Dineo Gqola addresses the contentiousness and contradictions of 'queer', and what it might mean in relation to 'Africa'. She asserts:

> One of the implied questions in this volume that is sometimes directly addressed, and obliquely gestured towards at other times, is the exact meaning of 'queer' when it rubs up against 'Africa'. The stories themselves show the very many ways in which being queer in Africa, a queer Africa and queering Africa are not the same thing across time, borders, and internal boundaries, even as we read 'queer' as always concerned with identity and a deliberate perspective in/on the world. (1)

Similarly, a study such as mine, must ask what 'queer' and 'African' might mean, especially in relation to each other. This section sets out to problematize these terms, as well as to explain how I will be using them in this thesis.

In problematizing both 'queer' and 'African', it is useful to begin with the oft-cited adage, 'Homosexuality is un-African'. The assertion that homosexuality is a Western import intends, as Kari Mugo argues, "to maintain the notion of the 'untainted African' in pre-colonial Africa". Ironically, the contemporary claims of African political leaders echo those of eighteenth and nineteenth century white British colonizers. While the sexuality of African people has often been conceptualised as 'deviant' and excessive by colonial forces, it has also been conceptualised as overwhelmingly heterosexual. Neville Hoad points to Sir Richard Burton, who, in an essay in his translation of *A Thousand and One Nights,* published in 1886, describes "a Sotadic zone in which climate is seen to facilitate pathological love" (11). He exempts only two regions from "encouraging same-sex erotic practices": Northern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa (10-11). This claim goes back even further, Hoad asserts, to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-80). The construction of a heterosexual Africa is bound up with the colonizing imperative

and the deeply problematic colonial assumption that African people "possessed no history, or […] were uniformly childlike and incapable of sophisticated thoughts and emotions" (Epprecht, *Hungochani* 5). The claim that African sexuality is uniformly heterosexual plays into this reductive narrative of Africa as the 'Dark Continent'. According to Epprecht, the idea of a heterosexual Africa was a means of justifying British colonization through the noble cause of protecting the 'innocence' of Africa from perverse influences such as the Portuguese and the Arabs. Furthermore, if African society was by its nature heterosexual then "Westernization or 'detribalization' would only undermine customary restraints upon African perversity" and this justified the British in not spending money on "providing Africans with schools and well-paying jobs" (17).

A number of ethnographic works have been produced with the intention to show that, despite assertions by African leaders, same-sex practices do exist in Africa today and existed in some form or another long before colonization. African writers and public figures have also asserted that they are both queer and African. For example, in an online article, Kari Mugo asserts: "I am Kenyan. I am a lesbian, I am part of our culture, part of our society, and gay rights are at the forefront of my mind". As important as these kinds of statements are in claiming a place for queer Africans and challenging the notion that same-sex practices are alien to Africa, 'Homosexuality is un-African' requires interrogation on a deeper level. Firstly, it is worth noting that 'homosexuality' and its connotations have their roots outside of Africa. As Marc Epprecht observes, "the word homosexuality, notably, suggests a clarity arising from a specific history of scientific enquiry, social relations, and political struggle that did not historically exist in Africa" (*Heterosexual Africa* 8). Therefore, the term cannot unproblematically be applied to all forms of same-sex sexuality. At the same time, it has been usefully appropriated by some same-sex-loving African people. Stella Nyanzi asserts that many of her research participants had claimed 'homosexuality', "[c]ontrary to arguments in the literature that the label […] is loaded with historical baggage, Westernised, stigmatised, disparaged and shunned by same-sex-loving individuals living outside Europe and America" ("Dismantling Reified African Culture" 958). Therefore, 'homosexuality' signifies in multiple ways in the African context.

Secondly, the 'Homosexuality is un-African' adage requires that the question be asked: if something can be 'un-African', what precisely is 'African'? Inherent in the adage is an essentialised assumption about what 'African' means. In this case, the implication is that 'Africa' can be defined as 'heterosexual'. This points to the way 'African' has often been employed as a descriptor that implies homogeneity and erases the complexity of the continent and its people. 'African' has also been defined through notions of 'the primitive' and cultural purity, both in colonial discourses attempting to justify the imperial project and in contemporary discourses attempting to reclaim an

identity and culture from colonial erasure. Underlying these kinds of discourses is an assumption of 'African authenticity'; the idea that "there is a single definition of *African*" (Adichie, "African Authenticity" 43; emphasis in original). In the assertion that 'Homosexuality is un-African' lies the assumption that there is an 'authentic' African sexuality; in this case defined by what it is not.

It should be noted that an essentialised definition of 'the West' is no more accurate than an essentialised definition of 'Africa'. However, due to the West's dominance in the global imaginary, and in constructing narratives of and on Africa, its complexities do not tend to be erased in the same manner as those of Africa.

Many African scholars writing about sexuality have critiqued the notion of 'African authenticity' in their quest to counter reductive narratives about African sexualities. Gaurav Desai notes that any culture, including 'African' culture, encompasses a multitude of individuals and manifests itself in multiple and mutable ways. He argues that "no 'culture' is so monolithic, so homogenous, as to be fully recuperable within a singular sexual, aesthetic, moral or epistemic order", that it "always exceeds the limits it seeks to set for itself" (736). Zethu Matebeni and Jabu Pereira assert that Africa is "a rich, diverse and dynamic continent" (7). The idea of dynamism is important in unsettling any reification of pre-colonial society. Nmachika Nwokeabia foregrounds the changing nature of African sexualities. She argues that to deem "sexual identities or expressions that do not conform absolutely to models available in precolonial African societies" as "foreign, aberrant, or insufficiently African" is to accede to a problematic ethnocentric way of reading African sexualities (371). What comes across clearly from these writers is the fact that Africa cannot be reduced to a single, homogenous entity and that what it means to be 'African' is multiple, complex and ever-changing. It is worth noting at this point that I concur with Susan Andrade's objection to the formulation of Africa as "a cluster of countries south of the Sahara" and "the racially based separation of Sub-Saharan from North African literature" (3). However, due to the logistical difficulties I had at the beginning of this research with sourcing North African short stories by women dealing with queer themes, none are included in this thesis. There are stories from East, West and Southern Africa, but the spread of stories is far from representative of the complexity of the continent. The focus on stories originally written in English is another limitation to the scope of the project.

While this insistence on complexity and heterogeneity might suggest that 'Africa' or 'African' might be too broad a term to apply, it is still a useful and necessary one. Sylvia Tamale uses 'African' "politically to call attention to some of the commonalities and shared historical legacies inscribed in cultures and sexualities within the region by forces such as colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, globalisation and fundamentalism" ("Introduction" 1). Certainly, the

similarities in the homophobic rhetoric and laws in countries across Africa, such as Zimbabwe, Kenya and Nigeria, suggest that it is politically useful to explore these contexts in relation to each other. The fact that 'African' is an identity construct does not undermine the social realities that this construction and its attendant narratives engender. Following Tamale, by using the category 'African', I not only aim to consider potential similarities across the literature that it groups together, but I also remain open to the ways in which this literature, in emerging from such a diverse context, unsettles and challenges the stability of the term used to describe it.

In this thesis, I examine fiction written by African women writers. There is some critique of the appellation of such qualifiers to 'writer', when 'writer' without qualifiers implies white, male and situated in the West. Aminatta Forna, for example, rails against being labelled as an 'African' writer in her article "Don't Judge a Book by its Author". However, it is difficult to provide critical attention to what has historically been a much denigrated and neglected group of writers without a label under which to group them.[5] The use of such a category necessarily raises questions about how it is delineated. This brings me back to the issue of defining 'African'. Does it pertain to geographical location or the adoption of specific cultural practices, a common ethos (as Tamale describes), or a particular racial identity? In the identification of writers, it is geography that is the most contentious issue. In order to be considered 'African', does one have to born on the continent? Live on the continent? Have ancestors from the continent? The colonial history of the continent as well as the increasingly globalized contemporary world make these fraught questions to attempt to answer. Rather than attempting to provide a narrow delineation of 'African', I have selected writers who either identify as African themselves or have been identified as such by the media, publishers and editors. Where these writers live, what they look like, and other biographical characteristics might challenge or complicate the label of 'African', as might their depiction of 'African' characters.

Although, as I have outlined above, it has been demonstrated that same-sex practices are not alien to the African continent, the labels applied to these practices are often problematic. 'Lesbian' and 'homosexual', for example, are not ahistorical and denote more than genital contact between people of the same sex. I have already discussed the historical specificity of the word 'homosexuality'. The term 'lesbian' has a similar genealogy. Jack Halberstam outlines how "within a Foucauldian history of sexuality, 'lesbian' constitutes a term for same-sex desire

[5] In his introduction to *The New Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories* (2003), David Leavitt addresses the issues of the labels attributed to writers. His concern is not with the appellation of 'African', but with that of 'gay'. His response to the question as to whether he considers himself a gay writer is that "the question is irrelevant" because as long as the culture he lives in sees him as a gay writer he is "stuck with the label" (xxviii). He also discusses how his sexual identity is seen to "subsume all aspects of [his] identity" (xxviii), so that he is always seen as a 'gay writer', rather than as a 'Jewish writer', even though it is an equally important aspect of his identity

produced in the mid to late twentieth century within the highly politicized context of the rise of feminism and the development of what Foucault calls a homosexual 'reverse discourse'; if this is so, then 'lesbian' cannot be the transhistorical label for all same-sex activity between women" (Female Masculinity 51). Within contemporary critique in the African context, terms such as 'lesbian' have both been appropriated as a means of asserting a claim to desire, as well as rejected as incompatible with certain forms and expressions of sexuality.

The term I have chosen to delineate the scope of my study is a contested one, both in the West and in Africa, but it also provides certain advantages. 'Queer' emerged as a derogatory slur in post-World War II America but, since the late 1960s and 1970s, has been used as a positive identity label, and "as a marker of pride", initially by "activists in the gay liberation movement" (Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa* 12). Today, it is often used as an umbrella term for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA). This usage is related but distinct from the more theoretical use of queer, which aims to unsettle the homosexual/heterosexual binary and all kinds of norms, including those propagated by lesbian and gay individuals. Melissa Wilcox points out that "many activists have complained that the term queer has lost its radical implications, becoming instead simply a way of saying 'LGBT' or even 'gay and lesbian' while using fewer syllables" (229). However, as I discuss further in the next section when I discuss queer theory, 'queer' still potentially offers productive theoretical possibilities not covered by 'gay' or 'lesbian'.

For now, suffice it to say that I retain queer as an umbrella word because it offers space for the discussion of sexualities and genders that do not conform to those covered under LGBTQIA or that "cannot be adequately translated into European languages" (Osinubi, "Queer Prolepsis" xv). This might be critiqued by someone like Epprecht, who remains unconvinced that 'queer' has been embraced by Africans and Africanists (*Heterosexual Africa* 14), although even Epprecht notes the increasing number of proponents 'queer' has among those whom he calls "African lgbti" (13). Nevertheless, a number of African scholars have been using and critically engaging with 'queer' in recent years. Olumide Popoola, for example, explains that she chooses to use 'queer' instead of 'gay' or 'lesbian in "an attempt to question all forms of normative notions in this context" (56). The use of 'queer' by African scholars often works to challenge and critique norms surrounding 'queer' itself, such as when Nyanzi asks us to 'queer Queer Africa' in her essay entitled "Queering Queer Africa".

The queer short story in Africa has also been framed as such by the two *Queer Africa* collections, indicating the potential of 'queer' and 'Africa' as categorisations under which to productively collect and explore contemporary literature. Asante Mtenje observes that

> [t]he title suggests the editors' and publisher's strategic decision to flag fictional representations of a variety of different African sexualities under a rebelliously provocative conceptual collective term. While 'queer' is not regarded by some as appropriate terminology in an African context, the word does have the undeniable value of insisting that African sexualities can be and are queer, in the sense of refusing the heterosexual norms that designate certain sexualities inappropriate and deviant, and also in asserting a political identitarian stance which links queer sexuality to disruptive potential in unsettling habits of gender, political obedience, traditional behaviours, and the like. Queerness, in other words, confounds, whether through explicit subversion or by being difficult to categorise. (268)

Mtenje's analysis here posits the value of the term 'queer' for such a project, even as she notes its problematics. However, the choice of queer for the title of a book project, necessarily informed by the economics of the publishing industry and the reading market, also raises questions about the ways in which 'queer' has come to have market-value due to its signification of 'controversy', especially when brought into conversation with 'Africa'. This is yet another tension that animates the intersection of these two terms, hinting at the complex relationships that exist between representation, market forces, neo-colonisation and the construction of genders and sexualities. In turn, these shape my own choice of the term, 'queer'. Although my intention is to mobilise the valuable functions of the term, I am aware that I am not free from the contradictions that shape the term's apparent usefulness. This thesis tries to suggest that the writers of the stories analysed here are negotiating similar difficulty dynamics in their representations of sexualities and genders.

While I use 'queer' to refer to both non-normative sexualities and genders, I use a variety of terms in my discussions of individual stories. These choices are informed by the descriptors the stories themselves employ. Many of the stories do not use any specific terminology to describe sexualities and genders or, if they do, these are derogatory appellations applied by other characters that do not adequately capture these sexualities and genders. In these cases, for the most part, I attempt to use descriptions that are not normally associated with identity, such as female or male same-sex sexuality, behavioural bisexuality (which Stobie, writing from the South African context, uses to distinguish between bisexual identity, and bisexual behaviour that is not necessarily identified as such (*Somewhere in the Double Rainbow* 19)), and gender nonconformity. I acknowledge that these come with their own connotations and the potential to erase identities. My use of 'queer' serves as a reminder of the constructed nature of all such categorisations and of the constant slippages that occur at the intersection of language and the material realities of what it attempts to describe. The existence of these slippages destabilises any assumptions of an essential 'queer Africa'. As Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi argues, the "very possibility of the queer within the projected new community counters any purist claims to identity" as "[q]ueer itineraries trace the

very limits of the foundation conceits on which narratives of inviolate communities are consolidated" ("Queer Prolepsis" ix).

It is also necessary to briefly outline how I use 'sexuality' and 'gender' as analytical categories in this thesis. Henrietta Moore, drawing from Michel Foucault, notes that these are relatively recent concepts and cultural forms, having emerged in the last two hundred years (2). Feminist and queer theorists have questioned the naturalization of these concepts, as well as the reductive conflation of biological sex, gender and sexuality. "Gender's far from self-evident relation to sexed bodies was the subject of much earlier scholarship" (2) and Western scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s endorsed "the analytical separation of gender and sexuality" (4). As useful as this separation might be, it has its limitations. As Moore notes, "recent ethnographic research has [… suggested] a rather specific set of interconnections between gender and sexuality" (5). The ways in which gender and sexuality are related to one another are complex and context-specific, and the boundaries between them unclear, as the notion of 'eroticized genders' suggests (6). These complications do not suggest that these categories should be conflated again, but that the sometimes necessary theoretical (or political) separation of the concepts should not blind us to the complex ways in which they interact.

As Mumbi Machera observes, "[s]exuality is a complex term with a multifaceted meaning" (157). Following Saskia Wieringa and Horacio Sívori, I eschew both "an essentialist understanding of sexuality as purely determined by biological processes" and a "deterministic approach that understands the social construction of sexuality as disembodied discourse, a mere effect of cultural conventions" (8). I understand sexuality as having to do with the sex act, desire and arousal, but also being "more than sex" (Steyn and Van Zyl 4). To quote Tamale, sexuality encompasses "a wide array of complex elements, including sexual knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours, as well as procreation, sexual orientation, and personal/interpersonal sexual relations" ("Exploring the Contours" 151). As is apparent in this definition, while sexuality is often conceptualised in relation to the gender of the object of desire or to sexual orientation, this is far from all that constitutes a person's sexuality. In this thesis, I follow Tamale's use of "sexualities in the plural in recognition of the complex structures within which sexuality is constructed and in recognition of its pluralistic articulations" ("Introduction" 2).

'Gender' is as complex a concept as 'sexuality'. Broadly speaking, I use it to refer to the social, cultural and performative differences that determine whether a person is read as a 'man', a 'woman', or as 'failing' to fit into one of these categories. These include appearance, dress, mannerisms, temperament and social roles. While anatomical features might play a role in gender, gender and sex are different. Sex refers to the anatomical and genetic differences between males

and females. The standard Western gender system is a binary one, where the categories 'man' and 'woman' are linked to the traits of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. As J. Jack Halberstam and others have amply demonstrated, 'man' and woman' are decidedly lacking in the face of "community productions of alternative genderings" (*Female Masculinity* 17). While gender is often seen as a kind of 'common sense' notion, and 'deviance' from normative gender performances is easily identified, very "few people actually match any given community standards for male or female" (20). "At the same time, because the definitional boundaries of male and female are so elastic, there are very few people in any given public space who are completely unreadable in terms of their gender" (20). While gender might be understood as a construct or as performative, it does have material effects, such as how societies are structured and people are treated. In this thesis, I frequently refer to 'genders' as a means of highlighting the limitations of a binary construction of gender and to emphasise the multiplicity of 'alternative genderings' that exist.

I have chosen to focus on 'women' writers in this thesis, despite the fact that 'woman' is a troubled category from a queer perspective. I have chosen to focus on women-authored works because I agree with Faith Mkwesha, who considers it "important to acknowledge the difference between women writers and male, a difference that emanates from different positioning in society, biology, visions, desires and passions" (2). My choice is informed by a history of feminist interventions into literary criticism that have foregrounded women writers who, due to a patriarchal history, have been excluded from the literary world or not taken seriously as authors. 'Woman' becomes an important category due to the ways in which it has been used to construct social and literary hierarchies. It is worth noting that the category of 'woman', like the category of 'African' is always complicated and its usefulness depends on the ways in which it shapes the experiences of those who are identified as such. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí further complicates the category from an African perspective, by arguing that such a category "simply did not exist in Yorubaland prior to its sustained contact with the West" (x). I have categorised writers as 'women writers' because it is still a term in use, and have done so based on the writers' self-identifications, as well as how they are identified by others. This categorisation does not mean to suggest that they are defined by their gender, only that this is an important analytical category for this particular study.

1.3 Intersectional and Queer Approaches

The terms defined above point to the various social categories that are pertinent to my analysis and to the stories I am discussing. The title of this thesis brings together three categories – 'queer', 'African', 'woman' – which encompass, most notably, the categories of sexuality, gender, race and nationality, which themselves are always-already shaped by systemic heterosexism, sexism, racism

and (neo)colonialism. These various interrelationships are reflected in the characters and settings of the stories, as well as shaping the contexts from which these narratives emerge and thus their political import. In contemporary feminist scholarship, analysis of the interrelations of power, social categories and the complexities they produce is known as intersectionality. This term is generally attributed to African American civil rights advocate, Kimberlé Crenshaw.

While Crenshaw is credited with 'coining' the word 'intersectionality' in her 1989 essay, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" and expanding on it in "Mapping the Margins" in 1991, as Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge point out, intersectional work was being done long before this. They discuss various African American, Chicana, Latina, Native American and Asian-American women whose social movements were "at the forefront of raising claims about the interconnectedness of race, class, gender, and sexuality" (71) as early as the 1970s. Hill Collins and Bilge do not address the ways in which women involved in anti-colonial movements in other countries, such as those in Africa, were engaged in similar kinds of activism. All of these lineages trace back to movements by women of colour, likely because they were the most vulnerable to multiple forms of intersecting power systems and thus most likely to foreground the necessity to consider them all. This remains true today, as Hill Collins and Bilge explain in their discussion of cyberfeminism and the use black feminists make of the term intersectionality, often leading to calls for 'unity' from white feminists in ways that erase the importance of considering the category of race. Therefore, intersectionality is an apt choice of theoretical framework for this study, considering the colonial legacy of the category of race and the history of anti-colonial movements that attempted to deny the importance of gender.

Lisa Bowleg describes intersectionality as

> a theoretical framework that posits that multiple social categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status) intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect multiple interlocking systems of privilege and oppression at the macro, social-structural level (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism). (1267)

Although this theory emerged out of the praxis of feminist and anti-racist activism and, in academia, has largely been used as an analytic tool in the social sciences, like feminism more broadly it offers a useful lens through which to analyse textual representations that are concerned with social inequalities. Unlike early strains of white, Western feminism, it offers a reminder of the inadequacy of single analytical categories and, consequently, a caution against narrow readings of fiction.

Three of the core ideas of intersectionality that Collins and Bilge outline provide useful prompts in my consideration of the short stories in this thesis. These are 'context', 'relationality' and 'complexity'. Hill Collins and Bilge argue that using "intersectionality as an analytic tool

means contextualizing one's arguments, primarily by being aware that particular historical, intellectual, and political contexts shape what we think and do" (28) and, I would add, the type of literature we produce. In this thesis, I attempt to contextualise the stories I analyse in various ways in order to read them more productively. At the same time, I am aware that my own position within the South African academy necessarily shapes the ways in which I read. Relationality means rejecting "*either/or* binary thinking" and rather embracing "a *both/and* frame" (27; emphasis in original). There are numerous ways in which the stories discussed in this study offer moments that are most productively read through the both/and frame and which problematize binary thinking. I try to pay close attention to these moments of seeming contradiction. Both of these ideas contribute to the issue of complexity,[6] which Hill Collins and Bilge foreground as the subject of intersectionality. Literary fiction provides a productive space in which to explore complexity. To quote Hoad: "In fiction, one can find an archive for the complex lived and felt experience of never completely determining social abstractions" (22).

Today, African feminist scholars working on sexualities often refer to the importance of intersectionality. Tamale emphasises "the plurality and complexities of African sexualities" ("Introduction" 5) and notes that "[o]ne of the biggest challenges of our times is how to confront the complexities of intersecting oppressions" (4). Zanele Muholi, writing about lesbian rape in South African townships, asserts that the lived realities of these women "are still overwhelmingly dominated by a set of intersecting raced, classed and heterogendered politics that blur the lines between our apartheid past and our new constitutional democracy" ("Thinking Through Lesbian Rape" 117). Steyn and van Zyl observe that, while intersectionality has been extensively applied "in much postcolonial, feminist and 'race' theorisation […], until recently relatively little has been done to particularise and de-essentialise sexualities beyond the well-established line of writing on gender and homo/hetero sexualities" (9).

Along with the growing popularity of the term intersectionality, come critiques. These are not rejections of the idea that we should be "thinking about social reality as multidimensional, lived identities as intertwined and systems of oppression as meshed and mutually constitutive" (May 96). Rather, they question the limitations inherent in the metaphor of the 'intersection' – with its overly simplistic connotations of things meeting in the middle of crossroads – and how intersectionality has been used and theorized. Moore provides a succinct description of these limitations:

[6] For more on the issue of complexity and intersectionality see "The Complexity of Intersectionality" by Leslie McCall and "'Speaking into the Void?' Intersectionality Critiques and Epistemic Backlash" by Vivian M. May.

> in specifying axes of difference as analytic categories and/or differentiating frameworks of analysis, intersectionality disassembles lived experience into a series of entities that it later seeks to reassemble. In part, this is a consequence of a desire to explain and/or analyse forms of articulation between axes of difference. But even the notion of articulation as an analytic device can often imply a mechanisation or formalisation inappropriate for capturing the dynamic overdeterminations of difference in people's lives. One might even argue that the very notion of difference undercuts the thrust of intersectional analysis, since much of the time it is not the differences between gender, race, sexuality, class, ethnicity that confound us, but their overdetermined similarities, the way they resonate with and manifest as variants of each other. What is clear is that a commitment to an analytic distinction between gender and sexuality compounds rather than assists with the resolution of difficulties in this domain. It is perhaps in the nature of academic endeavour that we find categories easier to deal with than relations – especially if the nature and character of those relations require specification anew in each historical context. In short, intersectionality is an essential grounding for analysis, but it also requires careful theorisation. (11)

Like Moore, Ashley Currier and Thérèse Migraine-George note the importance of an intersectional perspective while cautioning against simplistic theorisations of the interrelationships intersectionality seeks to describe. They use the term 'assemblages', drawn from Jasbir Puar, to describe "dynamic forms of intersectionality" (296). Currier and Migraine-George note that intersectional theorization "has even, at times, resolidified 'other' – that is, 'ethnic' and 'queer' – identities as necessarily 'intersectional' in contrast to white, heterosexual identities assumed to be central and homogeneous" (285). In order to try to avoid this, I foreground race whenever speaking of white characters. Other theorists offer different ways of thinking about intersectionality that attempt to avoid the 'pop-bead' or 'additive' approach of some intersectional analyses. One such metaphor is the notion of 'curdling'. This, contrary "to the 'logic of purity', which approaches multiplicity as fragmentable" suggests that "the social world is complex and heterogenous and each person is multiple, nonfragmented, embodied" (Lugones 463 qtd. in May 101). Anne Garry expands the metaphor of the intersection in order to explore new ways of trying to imagine the complexities intersectional analysis takes as its subject.

In this study, I hope that the complexity of the literature and its representations of the kinds of relationships that intersectionality attempts to unpack will unsettle simplistic applications of intersectional analysis. The idea of intersectionality leads me to consider interrelationships, not only between social categories, but also texts and discourses. In the different chapters in this thesis, I foreground various relationships. I examine inter- and intra-textual relationships in South African women's short fiction in chapter two. Chapter three focuses on the relationship between family and the individual. I consider the often-contentious relationship between queer sexualities and genders and the construction of the patriarchal, heteronormative family. Chapter four looks at authors who actively engage with religious discourses through their stories. I argue that these stories participate in a process of reconceptualization. Chapter five explores how sex acts, and their

depictions, are shaped by a complex set of intersecting power relations and discourses. My employment of intersectionality reflects Hill Collins and Bilge's observation that "intersectionality as an analytic tool is difficult, precisely because intersectionality itself is complex" and "complicates things" (29). Therefore, I consider various types of intersections in ways that I hope destabilise neat categorisations and reductive readings of the stories at hand.

Queer theory offers a useful perspective that can function to unsettle the potential solidification of the categories that intersectional analysis tends to rely on due to its anti-essentialist approach. Momin Rahman, theorizing gay Muslim identities, outlines the productivity of aligning queer and intersectional approaches. He notes that queer theory "is focused on the uncertainties of identity categories" (951-952). According to him, it "has presented an epistemological challenge to 'universalizing' or 'minoritizing' ways of thinking about sexuality and gender" and worked to draw attention to "the dynamic of inclusion or exclusion necessary to arrive at dominant identity categories" (951-952). This aligns in some ways with intersectionality which, although it draws on identity categories in its approach to analysis, problematizes universal applications of them by interrogating how they interrelate. Rahman argues that "[q]ueer intersectional Muslim subjects remind us that there are only *possible* selves, never true selves" (954; emphasis in original). He proposes that "intersectionality is inevitably disruptively queer" and that "queer must be analytically intersectional" (956). I try to apply this in my analytical approach.

Stobie provides a brief outline of queer theory, noting that it "resists binarisms of gender and sexuality, such as male/female, masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual", "is not based on identity politics or an 'ethnic' model, as gay and lesbian studies are" and "maintains that all identities, including sexual identities, are constructed relationally" (*Somewhere in the Double Rainbow* 16). In Stobie's interpretation, queer theory "posits fluid spaces of possibility" and "attempts to disrupt dominant discourses by means of performativity, the performance of self-conscious, stylised acts which expose the social structuring of gender and sexuality" (16). This focus on the constructed nature of identities offers possibilities for an analysis of African genders and sexualities in literature, where Western identifications are not necessarily accurate or are in the process of being appropriated and reconfigured. It can serve as a reminder to constantly question the taken-for-granted and to think about genders and sexualities more expansively. This potential emerges when I consider the queer possibilities of stories that depict ostensibly heterosexual characters, such as in "Mrs Pringle's Bed" by Zoë Wicomb in chapter two and "Chebor's Light" by Nancy Lindah Ilamwenya in chapter three. Queer theory's scepticism of binaries is also important to this thesis which, as I have already mentioned, attempts to pay particular attention to the possibilities of contradictions.

It is also necessary to note the ways in which queer theory has been problematised. For one, although queer theory "has the potential to be inclusive of race, ethnicity and sexuality (Stobie, *Somewhere in the Double Rainbow* 17), this potential has not always been realised in practice. Judith Butler notes how 'queer' "has marked a predominantly white movement that has not fully addressed the way in which 'queer' plays – or fails to play – with non-white communities" (*Bodies That Matter* 174). In other words, queer theory has not always been intersectional in its application. Epprecht observes that despite "recent efforts to globalize queer theory, it remains heavily dependent on Western empirical evidence and reference by Western theoretical frameworks" (*Heterosexual Africa* 14). And yet, as Epprecht's own discussion of the deficiencies of 'queer' and 'queer theory' demonstrates, engaging with alternative sexualities and genders in academia necessitates engaging with this strand of theory, even if only to reject it. The body of literature I analyse has been framed by other literary critics as queer[7] and, in the case of the *Queer Africa* anthologies, by its editors. Therefore, I agree with Osinubi when he states that the "relevant question in 2016 is less about the applicability of queer and more about the already-existing applications of queer in Africanist research" ("Queer Prolepsis" xiv). This includes 'queering queer' in Africa, to rephrase Nyanzi, by applying queer theory's anti-essentialism to itself.

Queer theory, as defined here, has often drawn criticism for seemingly promoting a postmodern gender theory that ignores the very real effects that categorisations have on the material lives of people and appears to undercut the political power of mobilisation around identities. However, feminist queer theorist, Judith Butler, shows how queer theory does not necessarily mean rejecting identity politics, only constantly reconsidering identifications in order to ensure that they are not solidifying the power structures they were meant to undermine. While acknowledging the uses that identity categories serve, she remains critical of how to ensure that "the instrumental uses of 'identity' do not become regulatory imperatives" ("Imitation" 309). I have tried to apply this to my use of terms like 'queer' and 'African' in this thesis. Halberstam, another well-known queer theorist, rejects "a pluralistic world of infinite diversity" without labels (*Female Masculinity* 19), arguing instead for more comprehensive taxonomies to usefully describe the genders and sexualities that already exist. Some possibilities of taxonomies drawn African languages emerge in a few of the stories analysed here.

In this thesis, both intersectionality and queer theory influence my analysis of the representation of queer genders and sexualities in African women's short fiction. My intersectional approach involves considering and analysing the intersections depicted in these stories. I examine how the genders and sexualities of the queer characters might be shown to be shaped by various

[7] For example: Stobie, Munro, Lindsey Green-Simms, Sally Ann Murray.

factors. I use the work of queer theorists where relevant in order to unpack these portrayals of queer genders and sexualities, and also to problematize rigid and essentialist notions of the categories that nevertheless have profound impacts on the characters' lives. The stories that I analyse, while they can be read to challenge essentialism in various ways, do not necessarily take an anti-essentialist stance. Their politics might more accurately be described as feminist, anti-homophobic and pragmatic, rather than queer. Despite this, queer theory still provides a useful lens for examining these stories' contribution to the broadening of the representational landscape of sexualities and genders in Africa. Both intersectionality and queer theory, in my estimation, demand a recognition of complexity, a complexity that is apparent to different degrees in the short stories under analysis.

The theory for this study is drawn from a wide range of theorists from different times, locations and disciplines. Most significant are scholars and writers whose work might tentatively be classified as feminist, intersectional and/or queer. It is worth noting that these kinds of categorisations are, firstly, not uncomplicatedly distinct from each other, and are in no way adequate to describe the complex contours of each of these theorist's bodies of work. A brief overview of Lorde's work, for example, reveals a contentious relationship with white feminism for its racism and womanism for its silences/exclusions on lesbian sexuality. Her work both has resonances with so-called queer theory, and yet sits uncomfortably in relation to its poststructralist elements and highly theoretical, often jaron-heavy style. The theorists used here thus represent a range of approaches to issues of gender and sexuality. Apart from Lorde, they include Gloria Steinem (white North American feminist whose work rose to prominence in the 1960s), Elleke Boehmer (white South African literary scholar), Pumla Gqola (black feminist South African scholar and activist), Judith Butler (white North American feminist and queer theorist) and Jack Halberstam (white North American queer theorist).

1.4 Developments in Queer African Literature by Women Writers

Broadly speaking, the depiction of queer sexualities and genders in African fiction as having shifted from an "outburst of silence" (Dunton 445) in colonial times to a contemporary burgeoning of diverse engagement with the subject. Epprecht's outline of this development in *Heterosexual Africa* can be summarised into four stages. The first is a complete absence of representation in the earliest published African literature, which was deeply informed by Christian and colonial discourses and values. The nationalist literature of the 1960s and 1970s, the second stage, occasionally includes homosexuality, but generally as a means of exploring the alienating effects of colonisation. Homosexuality is framed as an import from the West. These kinds of portrayals

are the subject of Daniel Vignal's and Chris Dunton's ground-breaking essays published in the 1980s. This new kind of literary criticism aligns with the third stage emerging in the 80s, where there is a distinct movement towards more sympathetic treatment of same-sex sexuality. This came to fruition in the 1990s, most notably in South Africa with the end of apartheid and the enshrinement of sexual minority rights in the constitution. The fourth stage was sparked by a series of homophobic statements by African political leaders, beginning with Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe in 1995, and the attempts by many African countries to reinforce or introduce punitive legislation against homosexuality. The response to this development by activists, scholars and writers, along with a recent global mainstreaming of LGBTQIA representation, has arguably contributed to creating a post-2000 queer African literary landscape that is appears to be increasingly bold and diverse.

In a 2016 article, Naminata Diabate provides a more streamlined account of the 'development' of representations of queer genders and sexualities, although it follows the same basic trajectory as Epprecht's. She proposes a "three-generational grouping of literary texts" (50). The first grouping of novels, from the 1960s-1970s, "associate[s] homosexuality with foreignness and deploy[s] oblique narrative strategies in order to tackle the subject" (51). The second grouping of novels, published between 1980 and the 1990s, "[relies] less on the trope of homosexuality as racial contamination" but "rejoin[s] the first generation in deploying oblique narrative strategies […] albeit to a lesser extent" (51). The third generation emerges in the 2000s. This new generation employs a queer aesthetic and the portrayal of a profusion of nonconforming genders and nonnormative sexualities. Unlike in earlier texts, queer sexualities, acts or relationships are now more fully characterized and are recognised as a subject worthy of exploration in and of itself, rather than simply a narrative tool for the exploration of other themes. These works also often have a political motivation, such as making same-sex desire visible.

A number of literary scholars have focused on the 2000s as a distinct moment in queer representation in Africa. In a 2011 article, Stobie argues that post-2000 fiction demonstrates what she calls 'postcolonial pomosexuality', which reflects "a more varied spectrum of sexuality – not necessarily viewed as a prime marker of identity – as well as greater awareness of gender issues, a consciousness of postcolonialism and an exciting experimentation with form in the fictional narration, which also visualises a future that can countenance new forms of gender performance and sexuality" ("Postcolonial Pomosexuality" 335). Although Green-Simms and Unoma Azuah are writing about gay-themed Nollywood films, not literature, they also identify post-2000 as a period where portrayals of gay and lesbian characters and scenarios are increasingly numerous. They identify the influence of international gay rights organizations and the increasing ease of

access to gay-themed American television shows as possible causes (48). Another significant contributing factor to the increasing number of queer representations are the possibilities provided by the internet. As Doseline Kiguru observes: "The post-2000 African literary scene has also seen tremendous development in the literary publishing scene, aided by the availability of the digital publishing platform" (11).

It is notable that these various 'mappings' of queer African literature are chronological, and are thus invariably tied to assumptions about progress and development. Certainly, my own tendency has been to see a kind of literary 'trajectory' being mapped out. Queer theory on time, such as Halberstam's, however, poblematises such conceptualisations. These kinds of accounts of literature also rely on the notion of 'canon', which is itself tied to 'straight', colonial and patriarchal histories of inclusion and exclusion. While this study tries to include short stories that are outside of the cluster of narratives that are most often analysed in relation to the themes at hand, its main concern is with delving in-depth into the stories that fit under the post-2000 grouping. Defining the contours of this grouping, I hope, will make clearer what is still absent in terms of both representation and conceptualisation, which work that reimagines the canon might be able to fill.

Even seen in developmental terms, queer representation in African literature is far more complex and contradictory than a brief summary can do justice. Apart from the idiosyncrasies of individual writers, this literary history is also complicated by trends along national, cultural and linguistic lines. One notable complication is the effect of diasporic experience on exiled African writers, which Epprecht argues led to a counter-strand of African writing during the 60s and 70s that was more sympathetic to same-sex sexuality. Significant to my study is the way in which gender plays into this literary history, both on the level of the gender of the writer and the queer sexualities depicted. As noted by Epprecht and others, works by women dealing with same-sex sexuality in Africa emerged later than those by men and with much less frequency. Female same-sex desires were rarely portrayed at all or were alluded to in far more oblique ways than male same-sex sexuality. This trend was likely influenced by the marginal position to which women writers were relegated in the African literary canon, and a general reticence on the part of early African women writers to openly explore female sexuality, even within a heterosexual context. In addition, Epprecht observes that the "idea of an African woman choosing to get her sexual satisfaction with another woman […] was in many ways far more threatening to hegemonic masculinity than acknowledging situational male-male sex" (*Heterosexual Africa* 143). This is not to say that there is no literary precedent for the growing body of work by African women writers that overtly includes queer characters.

Chantal Zabus provides the broad strokes of a history of the representation of same-sex sexuality in African women's fiction. I focus here on literature in English, since it is the subject of this study. There is, however, a rich field of possibilities in other literary traditions. Francophone literature has been examined through a queer lens, with somewhat disparate perspectives emerging. Diabate argues that Francophone literature has lagged behind Anglophone literature in regards to queer representation, but Munro argues that "Francophone African writing of the lesbian has taken different directions, with diasporic writers such as Calixthe Beyala (Cameroon–France) and Frieda Ekotto (Cameroon–United States) producing controversial, experimental novels that challenge taboos of multiple kinds" ("States of Emergence" 189) in contrast to a more politically pragmatic trend in Anglophone literature.

The first women's texts to perform what Zabus calls "implicit 'queer' gesturing" were published in the 1970s, most notably *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), by Ghanaian author Ama Ata Aidoo, which depicted unreciprocated female same-sex desire and linked it to Western imperialism. While many, including Dunton, have considered the complexities of Aidoo's novel and the way in which the narrative provides a more sympathetic portrayal of same-sex sexuality than most of the time, it still clearly fits into the trends of this period. The next significant development, according to Zabus, occurred in the 1990s, heralded by Unoma Azuah's 2005 article "The Emerging Lesbian Voice in Nigerian Feminist Literature" about her own work and the work of Lola Shoneyin, Temilola Abioye and Promise Okekwe, predominantly in the short story form and published in newspapers. These representations are sympathetic to lesbianism, but marked by caution and inconsistencies, which Azuah attributes to "the authors' dread of homophobia" (139). Zabus's outline points to post-2000 as the next era of queer fiction by African women by examining Helen Oyeyemi's novel, *White is for Witching* (2009). In doing so, she misses what has since been identified as one of the most significant developments in queer representation by African women writers (gestured towards in Azuah's article) in the post-2000 period: the extensive use of the short story form for the increasingly bold and varied depiction of queer sexualities.

To my knowledge, Munro's 2017 article, "States of Emergence: Writing African Female Same-Sex Sexuality", is the first to observe that the "Anglophone writing of African women who desire women […] is primarily unfolding in the short story" (186). It is not that there is no queer writing by male authors in the form of the short story – see Somalian author Diriye Osman's *Fairytales for Lost Children* (2013) – just that queer representation by women writers that has received critical attention has predominantly taken place in the short story and not in the novel, while there are plenty of well-studied novels by male authors on this subject. Other scholars have begun to consider the short story as the site of queer emergence more generally, such as Asante

Mtenje's discussion of 'othered sexualities, othered textualities' in four short stories from various African countries, and Sally Ann Murray's 2018 article on "Queerying Examples of Contemporary South African Short Fiction". While the short story has emerged as an important queer genre more generally, overt depictions of queer male sexuality and nonconforming genders by male writers have an established presence in the novel form, especially in South Africa.

While Munro focuses on narratives concerned with female same-sex sexuality, the short story is also the form in which African women writers explore a range of queer sexualities and genders. Lesbian/female same-sex sexuality is most common. As Munro observes, the queer importance of the short story is apparent in the oeuvre of Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose most overt and interesting depictions of queer sexualities appear in the short story form ("States of Emergence" 200).[8] The short story trend in African women's representation of queer sexualities has only recently become clear, although there are hints in earlier critical reviews besides Azuah's, such as Cheryl Stobie's "Postcolonial Pomosexuality", where the only queer South African literature from a black, female perspective that she can identify is housed in the short story form.[9] My own research into queer short stories by African women writers was sparked not by an awareness of this trend, but rather an attempt to break new ground regarding the oft-under-researched areas of, firstly, women's writing on the subject of queer sexualities and genders and, secondly, the short story genre in Africa. The variety and number of short stories by women which deal with queer sexualities and genders has expanded almost exponentially over the three years of my research.

After the burst of short stories that Azuah identifies in the 90s, women's narrative treatment of queer sexualities and their use of the short story form for this purpose subsided for a period. The resurgence in this trend arguably pivots around Ugandan author Monica Arac de Nyeko's "Jambula Tree", which provides a nuanced and poetic rendering of female same-sex desire. It famously won the Caine Prize in 2007, making it one of the most well-known queer short stories by an African writer. A number of short stories by women that portray queer characters came out around the same time, such as "The Glass Pecker" by Lindiwe Nkutha (the only queer story in the anthology *180º: New Fiction by South African Women Writers* (2005)), the many queer stories in South African author Jane Bennet's collection *Porcupine* (2008) and *Open: An Erotic Anthology by South African*

[8] These short stories are: "The Shivering", "Jumping Monkey Hill" and "The Monday of Last Week", all found in Adichie's short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck,* and "Apollo". *Americanah* (2013) contains a few minor queer characters but, as Munro notes, these depictions are limited and tend to tie queer sexuality to the West ("States of Emergence" 200).

[9] Stobie mentions Jane Bennet's short story collection *Porcupine*, Nkutha's short story "The Glass Pecker" and *Open: An Erotic Anthology by African Women Writers,* a collection of erotic short stories edited by Karin Schimke.

Women Writers (2008) edited by Karin Schimke, and the three stories with queer characters in Adichie's collection, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (first published in 2009).

The 2010s saw the publication of an even greater number of queer short stories by African women. The two *Queer Africa* anthologies, edited by Makhosazana Xaba and Karen Martin, which bring together queer short stories by African authors from across the continent, are one notable contribution. *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction* was published in 2013, followed by *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* in 2017, both containing about a fifty-fifty split between male and female authors. Several female authors also published collections representing queer subjects alongside other themes during this time, indicating a growing concern for queer issues in women's literature. These include Motswana author Wame Molefhe (*Go Tell the Sun* (2011)) and Nigerian author Chinelo Okparanta (*Happiness, Like Water* (2013)). *Running and Other Stories* (2013), by Xaba (a South African writer), pays considerable attention to same-sex sexuality. *Not Yet Uhuru* (2013), by Dolar Vasani (born in Uganda but brought up in various countries), is a collection of 'lesbian erotica'. Another significant development during this time has been the increased use of the internet for the publication and dissemination of queer short stories by African women. These include stories by both established and upcoming women writers. For example, Adichie's "Apollo" was published online in *The New Yorker* in 2015, while Nigerian author Davina Owombre's main body of work appears in online magazines such as *Pithead Chapel* and *Litro*, and Yaa Gyasi's short story "Inscape" also appears online.

Firstly, it is worth noting that the body of literature outlined above is dominated by South African authors. The *Queer Africa* anthologies were edited and published in South Africa, although they include stories by writers from other African countries. The structure of my study reflects this predominance, with three out of the four chapters containing South African stories, and the second chapter being solely about South African short stories. This also reflects my own positionality as a South African scholar, which necessarily inflects how I engage with work from the continent. My research, despite attempting to engage with African literature more broadly, plays into a general trend in the study of queer sexualities and genders in African literature, where much of the scholarship comes from South Africa and analyses South African literature. Nwokeabia, for example, rationalises her focus on Nigerian writers who depict same-sex sexualities as drawing "attention to representations of same-sex desire outside of its usual locus of study – in Southern Africa generally, and South Africa specifically, where anti-homophobic laws make discussions of homosexuality in Africa vary in content and tone that may not be permissible in other countries with stricter laws" (366-367). At the same time, my discussion of the queer South African short story by women writers fills a gap in the scholarship. Most of the critical attention paid to the queer

short story by women has looked at stories from Uganda ("Jambula Tree" and Beatrice Lamwaka's "Chief of the Home") and Nigeria (especially those by Okparanta and Adichie). In contrast, queer South African scholarship has tended to focus on the novel, although Sally Ann Murray's recent article indicates that this is changing. Where queer short stories are analysed, they are generally discussed alongside other types of media.[10] In fact, most of the discussion of lesbian representation by women in South Africa has centred around the photography of Zanele Muholi. While Munro and others have done important work exploring the queer short story by women in the African context, the full range of this literary development has not yet been explored. This thesis hopes to contribute in this regard.

The second important trend in the body of short stories discussed above is its general feminist sensibility and its political pragmatism. Munro observes this in the Nigerian short stories she discusses in "States of Emergence" and this observation can be extended to the queer African short story in English more generally. As Munro explains, "this literary formation is […] shaped by feminist politics: the desire for women to be able to make sexual choices freely, to exist outside the institution of marriage, and to have worth without being mothers" (192). Furthermore, many of these stories emphasise the category of gender as it intersects with sexuality and shapes how queer men and women experience things differently. Both Stobie and Nwokeabia, writing of queer literature in Africa more generally, observe the importance of gender in representations by women writers. Stobie observes that South African women writers "tend to present gender issues more fully" ("Postcolonial Pomosexuality" 344) than their male counterparts. While gender issues are more fully realised in women's writing, sexuality has often been a more problematic subject. Nwokeabia, comparing Unoma Azuah's and Jude Dibia's novels, argues that women writers still struggle more than male writers to depict queer sexuality because, for women, "sexuality cannot necessarily fully emerge […] because its conditions of possibility are contested by precisely the heteropatriarchal structures that it is supposed to dismantle" (368).[11] To write about (queer) female sexuality necessarily requires a feminist engagement with patriarchy, because the two are intimately entwined.

Although I use the term 'queer' in this study and speak of 'queer' literature, in its politics much of the literature discussed here could more accurately be described as 'feminist' than as 'queer' in a certain sense. What I mean here might be best explained by discussing the 'political

[10] See Stephanie Selvick's discussion of Xaba's "Inside" (analysed in chapter five) alongside a performance piece and photography.

[11] "Heteropatriarchy: how society is structured patriarchally through gender relations, and subtended on heteronormativity. […] Homophobia is one of the most important ways in which sexism is maintained through policing ideologies of the 'proper' man and the 'proper' woman and their relation to each other" (Van Zyl, "Shaping Sexualities" 38).

pragmatism' of which Munro speaks ("States of Emergence" 190). Munro makes a distinction between the Francophone and Anglophone African literature of lesbian themes. While Francophone women writers have produced "controversial, experimental novels that challenge taboos of multiple kinds", for example by portraying incest, the Anglophone short fiction that Munro examines "depict less scandalous and more legible forms of same-sex sexuality, no actual sex, and write within the realist tradition" (189-190). This Francophone literature could easily be labelled 'queer', in the sense of being non-normative and transgressive, as it upsets easy identity categories and straightforward assumptions about what kinds of sexuality are morally or socially acceptable. My subject in this study is stories in English that fit into the more feminist, politically pragmatic mould. It is worth noting that the selection of stories I discuss transgress some boundaries that the stories Munro discusses do not. For example, there are plenty of stories discussed in the chapters that follow that depict 'actual sex'. In fact, chapter five specifically analyses erotica, although I focus on erotica that has a distinctly feminist politics and does not explore the more 'troubling' aspects of sex and sexuality.

Finally, it is worth noting the trends that Osinubi sees in the literary formation at hand here. In "The Promise of Lesbians in African Literary History", Osinubi observes that the domination of the short story genre has produced a number of effects: "(1) an emphasis on depictions connecting Africa and outer-continental locations in Europe and the United States; (2) the predominance of twenty-first-century perspectives; and, (3) the focus on private affective attachments or failed solidarities between individuals" (673). The body of work discussed in this study certainly bears out these observations, although there are of course some exceptions. However, I would not attribute these solely or necessarily to the format of the short story and would like to add the following considerations as contributing factors to these trends: (1) the fact that most published African writers whose work is readily available are diasporic subjects due to the continued inequalities in global literary production; (2) the fact that writers generally write from a contemporary perspective, even when they, like the writers in chapter two, engage in a 'conversation' with historical perspectives; and, (3) that there has been a shift in African literature away from the overtly political to more intimate representations of the personal since independence and that these 'private attachments' often reflect broader political concerns.

1.5 Why the Short Story?

The short story is a difficult genre to define. According to Michael Chapman, this is evident in the "fact that criticism has not formulated any unique theory of the short-story genre according to which we might understand its unique kind of experience or the unique way it imitates and creates

experience" (xi). The most obvious defining mark of the short story is its length. It is too short to be published in a volume on its own (it normally does not exceed 20 000 words (Quinn 387)) and is therefore distinct from the novella or novel (Baldick 236). One effect of this is that its "brevity and elusiveness challenge its audience to 'complete' its suggestion and to seek coherence even when the experience, or the style, signals dislocation" (xiii). The short story also generally focuses on a single event and/or effect and a small number of characters (two or three) (Baldick 236; Chapman, xi; Quinn 387). However, the short story form has been subject to numerous experiments, just like the novel or the poem, and varies considerably in its effects, even though these are constrained by length.

The short story as we know it today, which might also be termed the modern short story, developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the West (Baldick 236; Chapman xi; Quinn 387). The African short story, despite being influenced by this tradition, has often been defined by its link to the "oral tradition in Africa and the folk tale in particular" (Chapman xi). Helon Habila regards this as a fallacy. His refusal to equate the African short story with the African folk tale goes some way towards clarifying the nature of the short story. He asserts that the folk tale "is episodic; it often uses *deus ex machina* to extricate characters from sticky situations; it is didactic; and it mostly uses faeries and animal characters" (xiii; emphasis in original). This stands in contrast to the realist tendencies of early short stories, the often 'unfinished' sense to the modern short story, the equivocal epiphanies central to the short stories of the likes of James Joyce and Raymond Carver, and other characteristics of the short story form in its contemporary iterations. While African short stories may contain folkloric elements or oral narrative devices, they have also been influenced by literary traditions from outside the continent. Now that the form is established on the continent, contemporary short story writers also draw from the African short story canon.

I have already mentioned that part of my motivation for choosing to concentrate on the short story form is its general lack of recognition, particularly in the African context. Habila, for example, notes the "sad but undeniable fact that [historically] the short story has always taken second place to the novel in Africa" (ix). He advances a number of reasons why this is so, including the fact that post-colonial African writers saw the novel as the best form for creating "an alternative narrative to colonialist denigration of African culture and history" (ix). This is not to say that African writers have not produced short stories but, when they did, "the critical establishment weren't paying them as much attention as they were to novels" (x). This critical neglect might be attributed, as F. Odun Balogun argues, to the difficulty of publishing short stories in the traditional press, and to "the fact that the genre […] is a 'paradoxical form' patronized by both beginners and accomplished writers" (qtd. in Habila x).

Despite the short story's historical disadvantage in Africa, two factors have recently improved both the standing and the ease of distribution of the African short story. The first is the internet, which came to urban Africa in the 1990s, bringing with it a new means of publishing which actually favoured the short story rather than the novel (Habila xi).[12] The second factor is the Caine Prize for African Writing, which was established in the year 2000 (xi). Nick Elam, introducing the 2009 collection of Caine Prize shortlisted stories, argues that, "the very existence of the Caine Prize, and the profile it has acquired, has been a key stimulus" (7) to the production, dissemination and critical consideration of 'the African short story'. Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell suggest that there is a distinction to be made between the continued "critical and popular neglect" of the short story form in the West and the manner in which "the short story has been keenly used by postcolonial writers and critically endorsed by literary awards such as the Caine Prize, established in 2000" (4). I would like to foreground the fact that this critical endorsement only happened in 2000, around the time of the emergence of the body of short stories I discuss in this thesis.

The notion that the novel occupies pride of place within the African literary canon because of its efficacy in creating a counter-narrative to colonialism can be used to explain why the short story form has become so popular for housing queer narratives. Since anti-colonial nationalist narratives have tended to reject homosexuality as a sign of Western contamination, it seems unsurprising that a queer counter-narrative has surfaced in a genre less burdened by nationalist expectations. It is also, then, unsurprising that it has been taken up by women writers for this purpose, considering, as Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell observe, that women's writing "sits awkwardly in relation to the political action of nation-building" and that women's "paradoxical and ambiguous place within colonial and postcolonial society renders their lives suitable subject matter for the short story" (7). As a shorter, less time-consuming form to produce, the short story, as Munro observes, "lends itself to trying out ideas" ("States of Emergence" 189), including those that may break with literary conventions. It is also a 'portable' genre, with the potential to reach readers in unorthodox ways. The online space allows, as Shola Adenekan and Helen Cousins argue, for a break from the ideological agendas of others and the possibility of representing taboo topics in new ways; queer sexuality being one such topic in the African context (204). Basically, the argument is that, as a more marginal genre that is easier to publish, the short story becomes a useful place "to openly confront difficult subjects that powerfully affect

[12] See "African Short Stories and the Online Writing Space" by Shola Adenekan and Helen Cousins for a more in-depth discussion of the impact of the internet on African literature and the role and form of the short story.

marginalized groups within a culture", particularly for "female-writers – both queer and straight" (Jonet 152).[13]

That being said, it is worth returning to the role of the Caine Prize in the African short story's growing global visibility. The Caine Prize has garnered criticism for pandering to Western audiences in various ways, including in relation to 'queerness'. Some critics have accused the Caine Prize of favouring queer narratives as part of its 'Caine aesthetic'. "Love on Trial", the 2012 winner by Stanley Kenani, which deals with homosexuality in the African context, has been thoroughly excoriated by critics as a piece of agenda-writing with little literary merit. Ken Junior Lipenga discusses both these winners and these issues in his article "Sex Outlaws: Challenges to Homophobia in Kenani's 'Love on Trial' and Arac de Nyeko's 'Jambula Tree'". It is worth noting here that Chinelo Okparanta's "America", which is a lesbian love-story, an exposé of the environmental crisis in the Niger Delta and a meditation on the ambiguities of emigration, was shortlisted for the prize in 2013 (it can be found in Okparanta's short story collection *Happiness, Like Water*), and Arinze Ifeakandu's "God's Children Are Little Broken Things" was shortlisted in 2017. Osinubi notes that Jackie Kay, who was the chair for the judges of the Caine Prize in 2014, "praised the increasing attention to LGBTI histories" ("Queer Prolepsis" xii). This links back to my discussion of the choice of the title *Queer Africa* for Xaba and Martin's anthology. Here, we might see the popularising of the African short story, and the queer African short story, as imbricated in broader political power relations. This could explain the emerging popularity of this form for this subject matter. From this perspective, the particular presence of the queer representation in the short story form is less the product of its marginality in relation to nation-building narratives, and more to do with its particular place in the neo-liberal, global literary marketplace.

I would suggest that the particular literary formation discussed in this thesis emerges out of a complex negotiation of all of these forces; negotiated differently by each individual writer. I want to avoid suggesting that the queer African short story is necessarily radical or intrinsically progressive, or that the short story is an inherently subversive form. Rather, I see the writers discussed in this thesis as mobilising certain aspects of this form, and the current possibilities for its publication and distribution, in a variety of ways, for a different reasons, including pragmatic ones.

The short story offers certain possibilities for the emergence of queer narratives. It is worth noting, of course, that other forms also have benefits and that no particular form is inherently

[13] Murray also observes the queer potential of the short story form in "Queerying Examples of Contemporary South African Short Fiction".

'queer'. Poetry's reliance on poetic techniques and the connotations attached to words provides possibilities for nuanced explorations of queer desires that defy rigid categorisation. Despite this, poetry in Africa has not yet been recognised as a particularly 'queer' form, although Azuah's article does touch on poetry (her own). The South African literary scene has a growing number of black women poets exploring queer themes. Significant collections include Xaba's *these hands* (2005) and *Tongues of their Mothers* (2008), Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia* (2017), Vangile Gantsho's *red cotton* (2018) and Danai Mupotsa's *feeling and ugly* (2018). These works certainly warrant more scholarly attention, along with poetry in general. The novel remains the most discussed literary form in relation to queer subjects. Zabus focuses on the novel in *Out in Africa* due to what she calls the novel's "capacity for dialogic amplification and its polyphonic aesthetics, which can comfortably host the homoerotic dimension of African societies". Osinubi, while acknowledging the importance of the short story form in the development of lesbian narratives in Africa, sees the publication of Okparanta's novel, *Under the Udala Trees* (2015), as an important step in restarting what he sees as a stalled conversation on female same-sex sexuality, through the inclusion of Nigerian history and overt political themes ("The Promise of Lesbians").

In contrast, Mtenje foregrounds the short story form's potential in contrast to what she sees as the limitations of conventional forms of the novel:

> Short fiction is aptly in tune with contemporary sensibility and experience; it is a flexible form, appropriately disjunctive and capable of dialogic contradiction; open to experimentation in terms of shape, ideas and voice. For this reason, the short story seems able to take risks with shape and form; it can be bolder in its brief, sudden forays into forbidden or reviled territories on the peripheries of polite society. This is in comparison with the well-worn conventions of gradual, developing narrative burden that still often mark long-form novelistic prose, where expectations of believable depth, logical plot arcs and the protagonist's eventual reconciliation into the status quo often still hold sway, despite many newer novelistic innovations. (227)

Munro makes a similar argument, foregrounding the short story's potential for avoiding "the conventional temporalities of the realist novel, favouring fragments of time over epic historical sweeps, and avoiding the production of endings that draw all the possibilities of the plot to a close" ("States of Emergence" 189). For Munro, the "as-yet-to-be determined nature of queer African lives suits the temporalities of the short story" (189). As I will show, many of the short stories discussed in this study take advantage of the 'unfinished' nature of the form. Stories often end ambiguously or on a moment filled with potential that has not yet crystalized. Furthermore, while Zabus's observation about the polyphonic nature of the novel and its benefits is completely valid, I would suggest that the short story form can offer a similar effect, as the different voices of individual short stories come together in chorus in collections, anthologies and short story cycles.

Certainly, analysing this body of African short stories in English provides both the benefit and the challenge of an array of diverse narrative voices, concerns, styles and subjects.

1.6 Chapter Outline

Each of the four core chapters of this thesis focuses on an issue and its treatment by women writers in the literary formation under discussion. These issues are: history, the family, religion and the representation of the erotic. The chapters are not structured in the same way throughout, and contain different numbers of stories by different numbers of authors. Chapter two discusses six stories by two authors, and is divided according to author, with sub-sections divided by story. Chapter three analyses four stories, each by a different author, each within its own section. Chapter four is divided into three sections according to theme and covers six stories. The first two sections are each split into two sub-sections according to author. The first two sections explore two stories by different authors, while the third examines two stories by the same author. Chapter five is split into three thematic sections, covering five stories in total, with each divided into sub-sections by story. This lack of symmetry reflects the diversity of the range of stories covered and the difficulties in neatly mapping their concerns within the conventions of a thesis. One structuring principle that remains consistent throughout the chapters, however, is that the final section of each chapter covers a story, or stories, that is significantly different from the others. The analyses in these sections are meant to provide an alternative way of addressing the stories that have come before, in an attempt to complicate the modes of reading employed and the conceptualisation of the issues at hand.

Chapter two considers the significance of queer revisionary writing. I focus on three South African writers – Makhosazana Xaba, Rozena Maart and Zoë Wicomb – who engage in queer conversations with official and literary history in ways that have implications for the imagination of the 'new', post-apartheid South African nation. They do so through interlinked short stories, most notably in the short story cycle; a genre with particular significance in South Africa. The South African milieu offers a rich context for the consideration of this kind of queer writing due to the plethora of historical revisions that went into the creation of the 'rainbow nation'. Significantly, the official reimagining of the nation included rather than excluded gay and lesbian people. As Munro observes, the "gay or lesbian person became a kind of stock minor character in the pageant of nationhood, embodying the arrival of a radically new social order and symbolically mediating conflicts over race and class" ("Queer Family Romance" 398). Gay rights were not always central to nation-building, but rather "flickered on and off in public consciousness, sometimes registering as an urgent issue and sometimes as a ubiquitous mundanity, within a contentious public sphere that was in the process of being remade" (398). In the stories I discuss here, queer characters

become central to a literary revision of history. In this chapter, I examine how these various 'queer conversations' with history play out and what potential effect they might have in the literary reimagination of the South African nation.

In the third chapter, I move away from the South African context and analyse four stories from different African contexts where homosexuality is legislated against: Zimbabwe (the story is set in 1970s Rhodesia), Botswana, Uganda and Kenya. The authors are Annie Holmes, Wame Molefhe, Beatrice Lamwaka and Nancy Lindah Ilamwenya. I analyse these stories' depiction of 'the family' which, like history, has often played an integral role in shaping the nation. While this link informs the politics of the stories I discuss, my focus is more on the interpersonal import of the family in relation to queer sexualities and genders. I examine how this diverse selection of stories explores these fraught relationships and the various tensions and possibilities that they might contain. I move from analysing portrayals of the damaging ways in which heteronormative families can restrictively shape the lives of queer people through the promise of belonging, to a consideration of more recuperative stories that delve into the reparative possibilities both of alternative modes of belonging modelled by queer characters and offered by alternative family arrangements.

In the fourth chapter, I consider stories which explore the influence of religion on the conceptualisation of sexualities. The Abrahamic religions – by which I mean Christianity and Islam, (although Judaism is technically included in this category, it is not pertinent to my analysis) – have a history of repressive and pathologizing constructions of queer sexualities and women's sexualities. They also have a contentious history in Africa, considering their colonial ties. In this chapter, I examine stories from a variety of African contexts (Nigeria, Kenya, Somalia and South Africa) that contain queer characters who grapple with the tensions between their own sexual desires and Christian and Muslim understandings of those desires. Furthermore, I look at the ways in which these stories can be seen to work to reconceptualise queer sexualities in ways that challenge homophobic religious discourses, even as some of them appropriate religious concepts in this reconceptualising process. Ultimately, I frame the sensibility of these writers within the possibilities for queer sexualities that have been theorised in African religious traditions.

In the fifth chapter, I turn to another contentious issue: the depiction of the erotic. I examine a selection of queer, feminist erotica by writers with roots in South Africa, Kenya and Uganda. This analysis concentrates on erotica that aligns with the feminist aims of creating egalitarian portrayals of sex; a project that is complicated not only by the gendered history of sexual representation where women have been violently objectified, but also the erasure and objectification of lesbian sex, and racist, colonial depictions of black female sexuality as

hypersexual and animalistic. My aim in this chapter is to consider the ways in which the authors under discussion (Xaba, Suzy Bell, Tiffany Kagure Mugo, Sarah Lotz and Vasani) navigate this fraught terrain and to assess the successes and (productive) failures of their experiments in writing queer, feminist African erotica. In doing so, I look at three different formulations of the erotic that have different political implications. These are the erotic as ordinary, the erotic as liberatory, and the 'exotic erotic'.

Finally, in the conclusion, I focus on the broad political work that these stories perform. I consider the ways in which they challenge overt political discourses about queer sexualities and genders that are pronounced by political leaders and legislated into legitimacy. Alongside their critique of homophobic discourses and institutions, collectively they offer what I call, drawing from Munro, a reparative political pragmatism. I argue that this is apparent in their humanization of queer characters, and their exploration of the personal, the intimate and the specific through the short story form.

Chapter 2: Queer Conversations with History and Writing the 'New' Nation in South African Short Stories

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines three short story collections by South African women writers: Makhosazana Xaba's *Running and Other Stories*, Rozena Maart's *Rosa's District Six*, and Zoë Wicomb's *The One That Got Away*. Each of these collections can be understood as engaging in queer conversations with official and/or literary history that insist on the inclusion of multiple queer voices and perspectives and thus challenge a single, static conceptualisation of history. This chapter endeavours to unpack these queer conversations and their significance in writing the 'new' South African nation.

Apart from *Running*, Xaba has published two collections of poetry: *these hands* (2005) and *Tongues of their Mothers* (2008). She is also the co-editor of *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction* (2013), *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* (2017) and *Proudly Malawian: Life Stories from Lesbian and Gender-Nonconforming Individuals* (2016). She has a Masters in Creative Writing from Wits and has a history in nursing and gender and political activism, and was part of the armed branch of the ANC during apartheid. Maart is "a writer, intellectual and cultural critic" (Crowe 44) who was politicized by the Black-Consciousness movement. Born in South Africa, she now works in the United States. Apart from Rosa's District Six, she has also published a novel, The Writing Circle (2007), which deals with the effects of rape on a group of women in post-apartheid South Africa. Wicomb was born in 1948 and raised in the Western Cape. She lives in both South Africa and the United Kingdom. Apart from her two short story cycles, she has also published three novels: *David's Story, Playing in the Light* and *October*. She identifies as a black feminist, and cites both feminism and the Black Consciousness Movement as essential for her liberation and for giving her the space to speak and write (Hunter, "Zoë Wicomb" 88).

In queer writing there is often, as Gqola observes, an "important insistence on claiming history as always already also queer" ("Introduction" 4). This kind of queer revisionism might entail writing queer lives and experiences into history or re-examining a historical moment through "a lens that asks what a queer experience might have looked like in that moment" (4) in response to the ways in which history tends to be constructed as a single, monolithic heteronormative narrative. I draw on Adrienne Rich's definition of 're-vision' as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering a text from a new critical direction" ("When We Dead Awaken" 18). Revisionism of this sort is a significant trend in queer South African artistic production. In *Queer Africa*, the short stories "Pinch" by Martin Hatchuel, "Poisoned Grief" by Emil Rorke and "A Boy

is a Boy is a…" by Barbara Adair rewrite white South African history as queer. Therefore, this chapter focuses solely on South African authors, despite the fact that the thesis examines stories from across Africa.

I begin by discussing Xaba's queer conversation with literary history, as she 'revisions' Can Themba's classic short story, "The Suit" in "*The Suit* Continued: The Other Side" and "Behind *The Suit*". In doing so, she writes queer lives into a heterosexist[14] and patriarchal history. Next, I analyse Maart's short story cycle, *Rosa's District Six*; focusing on "No Rosa, No District Six", "The Bracelet" and "Ai, Gadija". I examine how Maart's short story cycle explores and expands the queer history of District Six through the depiction of a variety of queer characters. Finally, I read two stories from Wicomb's *The One That Got Away* through a queer lens. Read together, I argue that "Disgrace" and "Mrs Pringle's Bed" provide a useful starting point for considering the potential of a queer reading of the short story cycle as a whole. Furthermore, the stories focus on the transitional moment in South African history, in ways that foreground how 'queerness' might inform the imagination of a 'new' nation.

2.1.1 'History', 'Conversation' and the Short Story Cycle: Defining Terms

In different ways, and to varying degrees, each of these short story collections engage with both official history and literary history. By official history I mean historical record produced by a dominant group and, at least before postmodernist interventions, often constituting an unchallenged and biased grand narrative. Jean-François Lyotard brought the term 'grand narrative' to prominence in 1979 in his influential book, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Stuart Sim explains that grand narratives are "theories that claim to be able to explain everything, and to resist any attempt to change their form" (8). Lyotard argues that, in the postmodern era, "[t]he grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (37). By literary history I mean canonical literary works that, taken together, reveal the historical development of the literary form. This is not to assume that this history is complete, or has any claim to the 'truth', as canon is formed through its on exclusionary practices. I also use this phrase to indicate how literature written in a particular time can serve as a record of the past through its fictional representation of a historical moment. Within postmodernist thought, the difference between official and literary history is not discrete.

[14] "Heterosexism is to homophobia as Eurocentrism is to racism or androcentrism is to sexism. Rather than an active bigotry it is the passive acceptance of a conceit, that is, that exclusive, reproduction-oriented sex is the ideal, the norm, the nature, and the proper function of human sexuality. In its crudest form, heterosexism renders non-reproduction-oriented sex inconceivable or blameworthy" (Epprecht, "The Unsaying" 648).

As Linda Hutcheon observes, history is rethought "as a human construct" (16) rather than the immutable truth about past events. However, "in arguing that *history* does not exist except as text, it does not stupidly and 'gleefully' deny that the *past* existed, but only that its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality" (16; emphasis in original). In this formulation, history and literature are both understood as texts, although with different conventions. History, for example, is expected to aim for an accurate account of real events, while literature can be entirely invented. In engaging in queer revisionism, the authors discussed in this chapter should not be seen as searching "for transcendent timeless meaning" (19). I do not read them as insisting that there is a queer past that can somehow be brought to light. Rather, they might productively be understood as engaging in "a re-evaluation of and a dialogue with the past in the light of the present" (19). That is, from the context of post-2000 South Africa and the emergence of discourse around LGBTQIA rights, these writers engage in an imaginative conversation with the past.

In discussing the way in which Xaba, Maart and Wicomb engage with history, I use the term 'conversation' rather than 'dialogue' because these writers, whose collections contain interlinked short stories, do not simply engage in a back-and-forth dialogue between two 'texts', but rather set up multiple intertextual relationships. 'Conversation' also suggests an opening up of texts and, in postmodernist fashion, the idea that "to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is […] to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (Hutcheon 110). In the context of this chapter, then, 'conversation' should be understood as ongoing and dynamic, and to suggest that the works of these authors are part of a broader conversation taking place within and beyond the literary landscape about the nature of the post-apartheid South African nation. By 'post-apartheid', I mean the period beginning after the 1994 democratic elections and continuing up to the present. Nevertheless, the effects of the apartheid regime can still be felt in post-1994 South Africa. The fact that the writers examined in this chapter engage with the history of apartheid South Africa indicates that there is no clean break between the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. Anette Horn observes in relation to the post-apartheid novel, specifically Wicomb's Playing in the Light, that the, "'post' in post-Apartheid […] does not indicate a clean break with the past, but rather looks at stories that cut across such boundaries" (129). The short stories examined in this chapter can be understood as 'post-apartheid' writing in the same sense.

Apart from the queer conversations with history in which Xaba, Maart and Wicomb participate, their collections also share a formal aspect. Each includes stories that are not just discrete and self-contained narratives but are linked to other stories in the collection. Like queer revisionism, the use of interlinked short stories is a significant trend in South African literature. In

her doctoral study, Susan Marais discusses the importance of the genre of the short story cycle in South African post-apartheid fiction. As Marais outlines, the short story cycle can be defined in different ways and even the term 'short story cycle' is contested. Nonetheless, according to Jennifer Joan Smith, the short story cycle is, "at its most basic, a collection of stories that are simultaneously interrelated and autonomous" (1). According to James Nagel, "in the short-story cycle each component work must stand alone (with a beginning, middle, and end) yet be enriched in the context of the interrelated stories" (15). In other words, while each story can be read as a distinct unit, it is linked to the rest of the stories in the collection in some way. Most commonly, the stories are interlinked by shared settings, characters and recurring themes and motifs. Marais argues that "in South Africa in the contemporary period, the short fiction cycle form has emerged as especially appropriate to a rendering of the tensions and possibilities inherent in a multifarious and ruptured society in the process of attempting to transform itself into a unified but culturally diverse democracy" (14). Consequently, this form lends itself to the theme of the transition between the apartheid and post-apartheid nation. Furthermore, as each story provides a different angle through which events might be interpreted, the form provides an apt means of challenging totalizing narratives, such as those of history and nation.

2.1.2 The Intimate Relationship Between History and Nation

History and nation-building are intricately bound together. As Anne McClintock, observes, all nationalisms "are invented" ("No Longer in a Future Heaven" 104), and history is one of the mechanisms through which this invention is achieved. In writing a new nation, a new history also needs to be written. In the case of South Africa, the white Afrikaans nationalist history has been revised, with much more focus being placed on the history of apartheid and anti-apartheid struggle. This official revision of history still remains distinctly patriarchal. In McClintock's words, "[a]ll nationalisms are gendered" (104) and most "have been singularly unenthusiastic about granting gender conflict as fundamental a role in history as class or race conflict" (122). McClintock, Elleke Boehmer, Susan Andrade and Meg Samuelson have all argued that, in African nationalist history and literature, women's active role in the struggle for independence has been erased, and they have been subsumed within the idealized, symbolic role of 'Mother of the Nation'. In a 1990 interview, Wicomb observes that in South Africa gender issues have been "*suppressed* by the national liberation struggle" due to the assertion that gender has to be "put on the back boiler" until racial discrimination has been addressed (Hunter, "Zoë Wiomb" 90; emphasis in original).[15] Despite

[15] In her interview with Eva Hunter, Wicomb observes: "I think that men do get away with an awful lot in South Africa precisely because if you are involved with the national liberation struggle then gender, they say, has to be put on the back-boiler. The idea is that it is subsumed by the national liberation struggle; I prefer to think of it as *suppressed* by

feminist work in the post-apartheid era, such as the stories I discuss here, to reclaim women's *her*stories, the place of women in the 'new' nation remains tenuous. As Gabeba Baderoon points out, "activists who call attention to sexual violence have been accused of undermining the post-apartheid nation" (80), despite a new constitution that is supposed to protect its citizens from gender discrimination.

Along with being gendered, the construction of the nation is bound up with ideas of sexuality: "Then, as now, nation and citizenship were largely premised within normative parameters of masculinity and heterosexuality" (Alexander and Mohanty xiii-xiv). Indeed, queer sexuality is generally seen as a threat to the post-colonial nation and cast in opposition to it (Wieringa and Sívori 11). While South Africa's conceptualisation of nation is not immune to this tendency, its construction, especially in the early years of transition from apartheid to post-apartheid, is rather more complex. As Munro points out, the "question of gay rights was an element in many narratives in the 'transitional' public culture from which [the new South African] constitution was forged" (*South Africa and the Dream* vii), leading to the inclusion of the right to protection from discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. I discuss the relationship between multiracial rainbow nationalism and the rainbow iconography of queer culture in more depth in my discussion of Wicomb's work in the final section of this chapter.

Part of the work of including queer sexualities in the narrative of the 'new' South Africa has been done by fiction. For example, Munro shows how revisions of gay prison narratives illustrate the importance of imagining or claiming a queer history in order to shape the conceptualisation of the 'new' nation. Munro argues that "claiming an authentic presence within 'struggle' history is very much at stake" (48) in countering the original homophobic stance of the ANC and insisting on a place in the 'new' nation for queer people. Although protected in the constitution, queer female sexuality was largely excluded from the early conversation, due to women's exclusion from the nationalist narrative and to the more general silence surrounding female sexuality. It is only fairly recently that a broad range of South African woman writers have begun to write about queer sexuality in bold and innovative ways and to enact the kind of queer revisionism previously only enacted by male writers. Despite this queer revision of the anti-apartheid struggle and the inclusion of gay rights within the discourse of the freedoms of the 'new'

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the national liberation struggle. And I think it is a mistake, a misreading of feminism, because surely the discourse of feminism ought to inform the national liberation struggle. Also I find much of the so-called political discourse doesn't take into account what women are actually saying, and even female commentators on women's issues in South Africa talk about how important it is that we sort out the racial thing first. When you actually look at the accounts of black women themselves when they talk about their political struggle it is always a gendered thing. […] In that sense you could say that the national liberation struggle is not listening to black women and that black women themselves feel pressured into saying our oppression, our sexual oppression, is not important. This does seem to me an odd notion of democracy" (90).

South Africa, more than twenty years later, homophobic attitudes still permeate the nation and violence such as 'curative'/'corrective' rape[16] is extremely prevalent. Thus, the impetus for continued engagement with homophobic histories remains.

2.2 Queering Can Themba's "The Suit"

In this section, I examine how Xaba's short stories – "Behind *The Suit*" and "*The Suit* Continued: The Other Side"[17] – engage in a queer conversation with Can Themba's "The Suit" and its revisions, particularly in relation to the intersection between gender and (queer) sexuality. "Behind *The Suit*" and "*The Suit* Continued: The Other Side" frame *Running and Other Stories* (2013), Xaba's first short story collection. While the collection as a whole cannot be classified as a short story cycle, these two framing stories are interlinked, as both write back to Themba's short story and thus share characters, setting and a literary antecedent. In addition, they can be read in conversation with the "Suit" revisions by Siphiwo Mahala ("The Suit Continued" and "The Lost Suit") and Zukiswa Wanner ("The Dress That Fed the Suit"). Therefore, Xaba's stories do form part of a group of short stories that are both "interrelated and autonomous" (J. Smith 1) and might be viewed as functioning similarly to the short story cycle. As I will discuss, this web of post-apartheid short stories engages in a conversation with Themba's original stories by responding to various gaps in the narrative, as well as providing feminist and queer revisions that explore the intersections of gender, sexuality and race. First, I discuss the broader conversation between the various "Suit" stories, before focusing in on Xaba's queer contribution.

To my knowledge, two articles have been published that discuss Xaba's "Suit" stories. Stobie's "Re-Tailoring Can Themba's 'The Suit'" examines the various revisions of "The Suit", specifically Xaba's stories and the queer temporalities they depict. She concludes that Xaba's stories "critique hetero-patriarchy; they queer marriage, procreation, Sophiatown, black communities and the South African nation" (86-87). While our arguments run parallel in many regards, as they are both concerned with the queer literary revisionism of Xaba's stories, we read the stories through different but related lenses. My reading foregrounds the stories' 'conversation' with official history and the literary canon, while hers, along with a focus on queer temporalities, provides an important discussion of the characters' 'instrumental bisexuality'. The second article is Sally Ann Murray's "Queerying Examples of Contemporary South African Short Fiction". This article contains a brief section entitled "Queering the Canon" in which Murray uses Xaba's "Suit"

[16]I use Gqola's formulation of this phrase here from *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, as it brings together both commonly used descriptions of this violent act and problematizes the implications of the 'deviant' or 'diseased' nature of lesbianism inherent in these terms.

[17] The italicization of *The Suit* in the titles of Xaba's stories is found in the source text.

stories as an example of how "queer rewritings of canonical stories" work to queer time (13). Her discussion aligns with my own focus on the South African literary canon, but she does not examine Wanner's short story. Her conclusion that Xaba's stories "hint at the existence of othered lives, and an othered literary archive", thereby "queerying, in story form, the archive as always-unfinished potential in formation" (14), resonates with my own use of the notion of conversation for describing the ongoing literary engagement with both official and literary histories. My analysis here is therefore in conversation with Stobie's and Murray's articles. What my own argument adds to the discussion is its situation of Xaba's work within a queer revisionary trend among contemporary South African women writers.

The type of revisionary conversation enacted between the "Suit" stories is usefully understood through John Thieme's notion of 'con-texts'. He uses the term to refer to "a body of postcolonial works that take a classic English text as a departure point, supposedly as a strategy for contesting the authority of the canon of English literature" (1). Here, Xaba, Mahala and Wanner write back not to a classic English text, but a classic South African text written in English. Although the 'con-text' is often read as oppositional to the 'pre-text', "the influence of the 'original' [can] seldom be seen as simply adversarial – or, at the opposite extreme, complicitous" (2). Xaba and Wanner, and, more ambiguously, Mahala, can be seen to, in some ways, challenge the patriarchal authority of Themba's text and, by association, that of the South African literary canon. They seem to write back to the oeuvre of the Drum writers and Protest Literature. Themba wrote many stories for *Drum* although Ndebele identifies the majority of his work as Protest Literature (145). "The Suit", published after the end of the 'Drum Decade', reflects elements of both traditions. "The Suit" was first published not in *Drum*, but in *The Classic*. Xaba is also responding to a heterosexist literary history. However, these authors are not simply oppositional. All three writers weave references to the oppressive system of apartheid into the personal struggles of their characters, just as Themba does in "The Suit". In writing back to "The Suit", these stories also affirm the literary history of black South African writing and its political importance.

2.2.1 The Broader Conversation

The 1963 short story, "The Suit", by *Drum* journalist and township intellectual, Can Themba, is a South African classic. Its continued influence is apparent in its adaptation to film and stage, as well as in the recent spate of post-2000 short stories written in response to it. These include the 1994 adaptation to the stage by Barney Simon and Mothobi Mutloatse; its French adaptation to the stage by Marie-Helene Estienne and Peter Brook, which debuted in 1999 in Paris before touring the

world; the 2016 version, starring Siyabonga Mtwala at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg and the short film adaptation written and directed by Jarryd Coetzee which premiered in 2016.

"The Suit" is the story of a married couple, Philemon and Matilda, living in Sophiatown.[18] Their seemingly happy marriage is disrupted when Philemon discovers Matilda in bed with another man. Philemon's revenge is to force his wife to treat the suit left behind by her lover as a guest; humiliating her to the point where she commits suicide. Sally Ann Murray sees in this a "disturbing narrative logic" resting on "the agonistic matrimonial dyad of heteronormativity, gendered in the familiar, and unequal dynamic of (cuckolded thus righteous) husband, and (cheating thus punishable) wife" (13). Stobie, however, suggests that this misogyny is "not authorially endorsed, but criticised, as Themba provides us with a clear view of Matilda's abject humiliation and her horror at Philemon's 'evil'" ("Re-Tailoring The Suit" 80). I would argue that this authorial criticism is muted by a focus on the spectacular aspects of Matilda's humiliation, and a lack of consideration for the interiority of the characters. This is particularly the case for Matilda. Despite the narrative's sympathy for her, she remains inscrutable to Philemon and to the reader. The story's disturbing and compelling narrative, gaps in character motivation, and the inscrutability of the female character all offer opportunities for revision, of which Mahala, Wanner and Xaba have made ample use.

The first of the constellation of stories written in response to "The Suit" is "The Suit Continued" by Siphiwo Mahala. It answers the question of what happened to Matilda's lover after he jumped out of the window, leaving his suit behind. Just as "The Suit" is Themba's most influential story, so is "The Suit Continued" Mahala's "most celebrated short story to date" (Mahala 240). Not only has it "been published about six times" (240), but it is also the story that directly sparked the imaginations of both Zukiswa Wanner and Xaba, leading them to write their own "Suit" stories. Mahala met Wanner in March 2007 and, in response to "The Suit Continued", she wrote "The Dress that Fed the Suit", told from Matilda's perspective (240). Mahala followed this up with "The Lost Suit". Like Wanner, Xaba was inspired to write her responses after coming across "The Suit Continued", penning "*The Suit* Continued: The Other Side" and "Behind *The Suit*" in quick succession (Xaba, *Running* 155). These stories perform a queer revision of both Themba's original and Mahala's 'sequel'; the first providing Matilda's perspective as a lesbian woman and the second telling a queer version of Philemon's story through the eyes of his male

[18] "Sophiatown was established as a freehold area in the early 20th century, as one of two spaces in Johannesburg where Africans could own land. During the 1940s and 1950s Sophiatown was both fractured by poverty and functioned as a site of political activism and cultural production. It is eponymous with the development of black urban culture across South Africa during this period. Together with its surrounding environment, it was subject to the apartheid state's policy of forced removals after the Group Areas Act of 1951, which reconfigured urban space in Johannesburg's Western Areas." (Erlank and Morgan 2). As a white suburb after forced removals it was renamed Triomf under apartheid, but, desegregated quickly after 1990 and, in 2006, was once again named Sophiatown (2).

lover. Although Xaba only read "The Dress That Fed the Suit" and "The Lost Suit" after writing her own stories, she does mention them in the afterword to *Running*. There is an explicit conversation going on between these contemporary South African writers, alongside their engagement with South African literary history. It is notable that all the sequels to "The Suit" are written in the first person, suggesting that each author found a need to respond to Themba's limited third person, with only occasional glimpses into the characters' minds, with a more intimate, interior perspective.

Stylistically, Mahala's two stories pay direct homage to the *Drum* stories. They are written in a hard-boiled, fast-paced style that recalls the *Drum* writers, as does their focus on shebeen life, gorgeous "glamour girls" (Matshikiza x) and fast-living men with "swaggering confidence" (ix). "The Suit Continued" tells the story of Terence (Matilda's lover), after he leaps out of her window in his underwear, and his attempts to keep the truth from his wife. This story ends in the same place as "The Suit" – with Matilda's death. "The Lost Suit" has a more tangential relation to Themba's original. It is the story of Stompie, Terence's brother, whose philandering ways are revealed when he tries to seduce a woman at a shebeen and wakes up naked in a graveyard. It turns out that the woman was a ghost. The performance of patriarchal masculinity and misogyny enacted by the men in Mahala's stories is so hyperbolic that it has the potential to act as "a parody or exposure of the norm" (Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* 4). In this way, Carolyn Meads argues, "Mahala expertly undermines [Terence and Stompie's] first-person narrations, exposing their narcissism and mistreatment of women". Despite the potential for reading Mahala's stories as satirical critiques of misogyny, they are still ultimately about men and narrated by men, with women serving as one-dimensional props – the beautiful ghost; the jealous, scheming wife; the suicidal lover – to the men's adventures. Alongside such depictions of women, Stobie identifies the "stereotyped 'humour' […] combined with the reference to the mutual support of brothers" as working "in opposition to any implied social criticism" ("Re-Tailoring The Suit" 81). Like Stobie, I remain sceptical of the story's success as a gender-critical revision but note its importance for opening up the 'Suit' conversation.

The absence of women's perspectives in both "The Suit" and Mahala's stories is addressed in Wanner's "The Dress That Fed the Suit", which is written in the form of Matilda's suicide letter to Philemon, explaining why she had the affair. Initially published elsewhere, Mahala brings together his own stories and Wanner's in his collection. Wamuwi Mbao calls the inclusion of this story "a surprising moment of literary hospitality". Even if Mahala's stories fail to successfully satirise misogyny, his juxtaposition of them with Wanner's story ensures that this misogyny does not go unquestioned. "The Dress That Fed the Suit" provides Matilda with a voice and reclaims

her as a sexual subject, explaining that she had an affair out of sexual curiosity and a desire for sexual pleasure. The story also performs an intersectional critique of black women's position in South Africa in the 1950s. For example, Matilda notes of South Africa at the time: "Where the black man is oppressed, but the black woman even more so because she cannot own or rent property" (Wanner 27). Wanner not only inserts a critique of black life under apartheid into the story, as Themba and Mahala do, but notes how black women are triply dispossessed due to the intersection of race, gender and class.

Like Wanner in "The Dress That Fed the Suit", Xaba provides insight into Matilda's character in "*The Suit* Continued: The Other Side". As Stobie observes, unlike "Themba's Matilda, who is merely shown in reaction to Philemon's actions, her own motivations being opaque, this version of the character displays interiority and subjectivity" ("Re-Tailoring The Suit" 85). While Wanner writes Matilda as heterosexual, Xaba 'queers' the story, imagining that Matilda's motivations stem from her love and desire for another woman; Gladys. The story tells of how Matilda and Gladys fall in love. At first there is equilibrium in her and Philemon's marriage, as he is revealed to be gay. Tensions arise when Matilda seduces Terence with the goal of getting pregnant so she and Gladys can move away to Durban together and have a family. Philemon exacts his punishment with the suit and Gladys becomes distant. The story ends before Matilda's suicide, but the narrative implies that it is Gladys announcing she is leaving rather than the suit humiliation that finally leaves Matilda without hope.

In "Behind *The Suit*", Xaba fleshes out Philemon's character through the eyes of his male lover. Although written before Xaba read "The Dress that Fed the Suit", this story is also in the form of a letter (Xaba, *Running* 155). It is signed off by an entirely new character, Mondliwesizwe Mbatha, who was Philemon's lover. He is a journalist, writing from his deathbed to his daughter in order to give her the "bones" (1) of his life story. This includes the story of the suit, for which he admits providing the idea in a moment that was meant to expose Philemon's hypocrisy. It is through providing a queer backstory for these characters that Xaba creates "more complex individuals, with credible motivations for their actions", as well as writing against "patriarchal heteronormativity and its consequent misogyny" (Xaba and Du Preez 139).[19] Her queer, feminist project is not simply about giving Matilda a (queer) voice, but about imagining the complexities of both the characters in "The Suit" – making Matilda more than merely a passive receptacle for humiliation, and Philemon more than a passive-aggressive misogynist.

[19] "Heteronormativity is the institutionalisation of exclusive heterosexuality in society. Based on the assumption that there are only two sexes and that each has predetermined gender roles, it pervades all social attitudes, but is particularly visible in 'family' and 'kinship' ideologies. Heteronormativity constructs oppositional binaries – for example woman/man, homosexual/heterosexual – and is embedded in discourses which create punitive rules for non-conformity to hegemonic norms of heterosexual identity" (Steyn and Van Zyl 3).

2.2.2 Xaba's Queer Contribution

Both of Xaba's stories are retrospective. Although the action is set in 1950s Sophiatown, the narrators are looking back at this time and place. This sets up a complex relationship between past and present. South African urban space in the 1950s is (re)imagined as queer and, at the same time, "the remembered city provide[s] a literary 'district' into which queer possibilities [can] be written or read" (Munro, *South Africa and the Dream* 105) in the post-apartheid present. In the "border-crossing world" of Sophiatown, Munro, writing about queer urban culture in the work of Richard Rive and Rozena Maart, imagines that a "'drag queen' might be accepted […] with 'no questions asked'" (107). While Xaba uses this 'literary district' as a space to write 'queer possibilities', her stories depict these 'queer cultures' as not fully integrated into or accepted in Sophiatown. Xaba describes the queer side of Sophiatown as "a smaller Sophiatown inside the bigger Sophiatown" (*Running* 143). Even though the queer community is integrated into the space, it remains unacknowledged and subsumed by a 'bigger' heteronormative community. Gladys and Matilda have to move away from Sophiatown if they want to live somewhere "their relationship could be open – or […] less closed] (144), a move that is foreclosed by the breakdown of their relationship due to heteronormative pressures. Mondli's move to London is celebrated not only as an escape from "the cruelty of the police" but also "the unforgiving Sophiatownians" (8). Together, these moments show that Sophiatown is far from being a utopian space for queer black people. Xaba's stories thus provide a critical revision of black urban history and literature, one that celebrates its vitality, insists on it being always-already queer and critiques the entrenched patriarchal, misogynistic and homophobic discourses of the time.

"*The Suit* Continued: The Other Side" is a direct response to Mahala's "The Suit Continued". As the title suggests, Xaba's story tells the 'other side' of Terence's story. It opens in much the same way as "The Suit Continued", with Matilda explaining how her side of the story has been ignored and how she has been vilified by the narratives that have come before hers. Just as Mahala includes Themba as a character within his story so that Terence can critique his narrative – and blurring the lines between fact and fiction, as Themba often did in his own writing – Xaba in turn includes Mahala as a character. Matilda acknowledges that Mahala "is the only one who seems able to think out of the box", but then goes on to critique the fact that Mahala "took Terence's side, because even in his eyes and mind I was the devil herself" (139). Here, Xaba makes clear the importance of the literary antecedents to her own work, even as she goes on to challenge some of the assumptions and representational gaps in this canon.

Xaba's narrative mirrors Mahala's in other ways. After the meta-level introduction, Matilda narrates "the beginning" (140). This beginning is a woman: Gladys. Like Mahala, Xaba begins with a meeting that sparks desire between two characters that will unspool the narrative to its tragic end. However, while in Mahala's narrative this meeting is between Matilda and Terence, in Xaba's story the meeting and the desire is between two women. Notably, Matilda's desire in "The Suit Continued" is never articulated and is framed entirely through Terence's assumptions. He 'knows' she is attracted to him because he "was looking good" and he sees her as just one of "many women who couldn't wait to jump into bed with [him]" (Mahala 17). In contrast, Matilda's voice provides the narrative in Xaba's story and both her desire and her pleasure are described. In Xaba's version, it is not the humiliation of feeding the suit that leads to Matilda's suicide, but Gladys's abandonment. While Themba and Mahala's stories end with male perspectives of Matilda's death, Xaba's ends at the moment of Gladys's departure, the colour of her skirt – black – enveloping Matilda's being (*Running* 153). The story thus ends with Matilda's anguish rather than a man's anguish. By having a woman inflict this pain, the story insists on women as agents in each other's lives. Xaba provides a queer corrective to Terence's heteronormative assumptions by loosely mirroring Mahala's narrative structure. Matilda's story displaces male, heterosexual desire and inserts same-sex desire between women into this revision.

"Behind *The Suit*" offers a different queer perspective of the story by providing a more detailed portrait of Philemon through the eyes of his lover, Mondli. Philemon is presented as a complicated, flawed character, who is uncomfortable with Mondli's mother's acceptance of his and Mondli's relationship. This reveals his deep unease with his own sexuality. Read in relation to "*The Suit* Continued: The Other Side", this story highlights the intersection of gender and sexuality by exposing the ways in which masculinity functions in relation to sexuality in contrast to femininity. As is explained by Gladys in "The Other Side", Philemon is accepting of Gladys and Matilda's relationship, but he sees Matilda having sex with other men as a threat. Making Matilda look after the suit is "his defense mechanism" (146). Being cuckolded by another man threatens Philemon's masculinity, described in the original suit story as that "infinitely delicate piece of mechanism" (Themba 39). Since supposedly inadequate performances of gender are often seen as signs of variant sexuality, a threat to Philemon's masculinity also threatens to expose his sexual secret. In Butler's words, "normative sexuality fortifies normative gender" (*Gender Trouble* xi) and if sexuality and gender are interlinked in this manner, then it follows that to 'fail' to perform either a normative sexuality or a normative gender is thus to call the other into question.

If, as Halberstam argues, 'dominant masculinity' is "a naturalized relation between maleness and power" (*Female Masculinity* 2), by asserting power over his wife through forcing

her to look after the suit, Philemon attempts to symbolically reclaim his masculinity. This reinforcement of masculinity in turn serves to protect him from suspicion about his sexuality. Philemon's response should also be considered within the context of 1950s apartheid South Africa and how this regime consolidated the emasculation of African men instigated by colonisation. Writing about gendered and sexualised silences in the construction of the post-apartheid nation, Baderoon explains that the "brutal, sapping experience of colonisation and the violence with which colonial powers met resistance have left a legacy of fragility and brutality in postcolonial states themselves, which manifests itself in specifically gendered ways" (79). According to Desiree Lewis, the 'corrective' to this "masculinized humiliation" is "masculine realization", which "powerfully permeates legacies of nationalist struggle as well as post-colonial reconstruction" ("Gender Myths" 43). Thus, Philemon's misogyny seems to stem from his own precarity as a queer man within his community, as well as his precarity as a black man in 1950s South Africa.

For Butler, "'precarity' designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" ("Performativity, Precarity" ii). From an intersectional standpoint, this notion can help to explain how certain positionalities increase the degree of precarity a person experiences, as certain intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality increase a subject's vulnerability and the likelihood that they will experience violence. Philemon's attempt to reassert agency is meted out on the most vulnerable person he knows: his wife who, as a black woman who desires another woman, is situated at a precarious intersection between race, gender and sexuality. Thus, Xaba's stories reveal how the demands of masculinity can intersect with queer sexuality in extremely damaging ways for men and even more so for the women closest to them.

By portraying the incident with the suit through the eyes of Philemon's lover, rather than Philemon himself, Xaba is able to flesh out Philemon's character while also pointing out that his reaction to Matilda's affair is ultimately "inappropriate, an overreaction and hypocritical" (*Running* 6). Moreover, through the character of Mondli she presents an alternative version of masculinity to that displayed by Philemon, illustrating, as Halberstam points out, that "sexism and misogyny are not necessarily part and parcel of masculinity" (*Female Masculinity* 4). Although Mondli ends up playing a role in the suit incident, it is a truth he is not proud of and one which he finds necessary to confess to his daughter (Xaba, *Running* 5). Unlike Philemon, whose insecurity and fear leads him to cruelty – and, in Xaba's version of the story, suicide – Mondli lives to be eighty years old. His narrative thus offers an alternative to the tragic trajectories of the lives of Philemon and Matilda.

Mondli is an exemplar of the often-ignored fact that the struggle for racial equality and for sexual freedom are linked in the South African context. Mondli's grandfather, for example, is a "proud Zulu man of the Mbatha clan" (1) who dies in the mines digging for gold for the white man (2). This assertion of Zulu identity is a powerful refusal of the notion that homosexuality is 'un-African'. It also challenges normative notions of Zulu masculinity. Jacob Zuma, in a 2006 statement, linked masculinity, traditional Zulu culture and homophobia when "[a]ddressing thousands [he] said in his personal capacity and 'as a man' that same sex marriages were a taboo and should not be tolerated in any normal society" (Seale.). He is quoted as having said: "When I was growing up, unqingili (homosexuals) could not stand in front of me". Later in life, Mondli becomes involved in political activities and, through that comradeship, crosses the sexual border erected by the apartheid government – the colour line – by having sex with a white woman. In the South African laws against miscegenation, the ways in which racial discrimination is bound up with sexual politics are perhaps most overt. Mondli thus defies the apartheid government and their laws on multiple fronts. Mondli's involvement in politics and his sexual orientation means that his character calls to mind the real-life figure of Simon Tseko Nkoli "one of South Africa's most well-known gay men in the 1990s" who "came out to his fellow antiapartheid activists while in Modderbee Prison" (Munro, *South Africa and the Dream* 47). Thus, Xaba can be seen to echo the queer strand of South African struggle history through this fictional representation. That Mondli is able to return to South Africa from his exile in London suggests that he gets to return to the 'new' South Africa where freedom from discrimination – on both racial and sexual fronts – is protected by the law.

Read together, "The Suit" stories enact a conversation that speaks across decades, and between contemporary perspectives. While the stories can be understood on their own, reading them in relation to one another provides new layers of meaning to each story as well as refusing the elevation of a single perspective or experience over another, just like the stories in a short story cycle. All the stories reinforce Themba's explication and critique of the harsh conditions of black lives under apartheid rule and all reveal how the intersection of gender and sexuality further exacerbates this dispossession. Black women's lives are more precarious than black men's in these stories, and their gender shapes the ways in which they can acceptably enact their sexuality. Considering the repressive history of South Africa where black narratives were limited by censorship, lack of resources and the pressing concerns of the anti-apartheid struggle, a return to this literary history – to write in-between its lines the imagined narratives of those who could not write their own stories then – is a way to write a new narrative of the past and, thus, a new vision of the future. John Matshikiza points out that a return to the *Drum* stories, which might include

"The Suit" despite its publication in *The Classic*, represents "more than nostalgia for a bygone age" (xii). He argues that these stories "are a bridge between the past and the present […] an invaluable part of our missing store of memories – without which we are destined to have no future" (xii). Indeed, this observation might be extended to the entirety of the South African literary canon. There are many gaps within this 'store of memories', and Xaba's stories work to imaginatively fill the gaps left by the erasure of queer subjectivities within this literary history. In the next section, I examine how Maart's short story cycle also draws on the ways in which stories can function similarly to memory, in this case in personal ways.

2.3 Performing Nonconforming Genders in *Rosa's District Six*

In this section, I examine how Maart's *Rosa's District Six* (2006)[20] enacts a queer conversation with the history of District Six, the largely coloured[21] area in Cape Town destroyed by forced removals under apartheid. This "literary 'district'" (Munro, *South Africa and the Dream* 105), into which Maart writes queer sexualities and genders, was a vibrant urban enclave, similar in some ways to Sophiatown. Both Xaba and Maart thus set their stories within areas particularly heavy with historical significance in the South African imaginary. Both spaces, although emblematic of the abuses of apartheid due to being the best-known sites of forced removals, also stand in opposition to apartheid South Africa as a whole. Understood as sites of black (Sophiatown) and coloured (District Six) cultural development and spaces in which racial segregation was not a given, these two spaces are often turned to out of nostalgia or as a potential model for what an ideal post-apartheid South Africa might look like. As Crain Soudien observes:

> 'District Six' as a signifier is understood to embody the qualities of tolerance, mutual respect, and respect for difference which, by contrast, 'South Africa', as a counter-signifier, was, and might still be, presumed to be without. […] In these terms, it was an enclave within the wider national context of class oppression and

[20] First published in 2004. Published in 2006 in South Africa.

[21] In South Africa, 'coloured' was established as a category by the Population Registration Act of 1950 (Wicomb, "Shame and Identity" 101). It "alludes to a phenotypically diverse group of people descended from Cape slaves, the indigenous Khoisan population and other people of African and Asian descent who had been assimilated into Cape colonial society by the late nineteenth century" (Adhikari 468). It is highly contested due to its divisive use during apartheid and the legacy of this construction of a race group that was considered inferior to white, but superior to black. Wicomb discusses the ways this term has changed over time in regards to capitalization and qualifiers, but here I follow her usage in "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa" where she writes it without scare quotes, with a small letter and no qualifiers, as I do for black and white. For more detailed discussions of coloured identity see Nancy Morkel's Masters dissertation *Identity and So-called 'Colouredness' in Zoë Wicomb's Fiction* and *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town* edited by Zimitri Erasmus.

> exploitation, racial segregation, religious differentiation and ethnic chauvinism and, indeed, xenophobia. (115).

As a reality, of course, District Six was far more complex, and was still emeshed in the wider national context which it came to signify simplistically in opposition to.

I focus on the stories "No Rosa, No District Six", "The Bracelet", and "Ai, Gadija", which foreground queer sexualities and nonconforming genders in multiple ways. *Rosa's District Six* consists of five, relatively long short stories, each focusing on the life of a different family, and can be classified as a short story cycle. Although the individual stories can stand alone – "No Rosa, No District Six" was first published on its own in a Canadian feminist journal in 1991[22] (Munro, *South Africa and the Dream* 136) – they are linked by recurring characters and the organizing principle that Jennifer Joan Smith describes as "limited locality" (2). Limited locality depends "upon the construction of a restricted geographic terrain to contain and ground the narratives within" (2). In this case, the terrain is District Six. Set in 1970, just as the era of forced removals was reaching its height, *Rosa's District Six* thus exemplifies the ways in which "crises of place and of communities – be they local, regional, or national – permeate the literature and ultimately shape" the form of the short story cycle (J. Smith 2).

While Xaba accesses, and engages with, history through the literary canon, Maart's engagement with history comes from a more personal perspective. The character of Rosa, a precocious eight-year-old, appears in all the stories in the cycle. She acts as a witness to the events of the five stories, recording them in a notebook tied around her neck with her piece of string. Munro reads her as "a version of Maart herself" (*South Africa and the Dream* 137) and the fact that Rosa serves as Maart's stand-in, recording things as they happen, positions Maart as a recorder of history, not just a writer of fiction. In an interview with Roewan Crowe, Maart explains that it was her own experience of the forced removals from District Six that motivated her to write *Rosa's District Six*. She broke out in hives every year on the anniversary of her family's eviction from District Six and found that writing *Rosa's District Six* was the only way she could deal with the trauma:

> I wrote it because my history had written itself inside my body, without my consent, and I had no way of dealing with it in my home. When I was ready to talk about it, there was no one to share the story with because no one around me in Toronto knew anything about District Six. I wrote the first story because I felt trapped by stories that had never left my body. I needed to write it as a way of situating myself in the world. (Crowe 44)

[22] The publication date of "No Rosa, No District Six" – prior to 2000 – technically disqualifies it from this study. However, since it is an integral part of *Rosa's District Six*, first published in 2004, I have to address it here in order to unpack the themes of the rest of the short story cycle.

Here, Maart terms her embodied experiences as both 'history' and 'stories', which resonates with Hutcheon's problematization of clear distinctions between history and literature. Importantly, while Rosa is accused of making things up and having "a lively e mag e nation" (Maart, *Rosa's District Six* 1), most of the stories she tells other characters in the cycle turn out to be accurate. In this way, Maart highlights the manner in which fact and fiction are often indistinguishable, and how fiction can tell truths that might be lost in 'reasonable' (or historical) accounts. Writing these stories is framed as a therapeutic exercise and as a way of shaping the hi*stories* that were written onto her body without her consent. She situates writing as a way of reclaiming agency, of freeing herself by inscribing the stories written on her body onto the page and sharing them with others.

This "situating" of herself "in the world" (Crowe 44) can also be seen as a way of writing personal hi*stories* into the grand narrative of apartheid history. Jessica Murray, referring to Rosa's fraught interactions with her history teacher (Rosa is more interested in Jan van Riebeeck's wife than she is in Van Riebeeck – a feminist revision that reflects that performed by Maart's stories) notes that in "the grand narrative of South Africa's apartheid past, [the] removals have become the subject of history lessons" ("Daring" 56-57). Maart's stories focus on what is left out of these history lessons and thus official history. Her main subject is not the forced removals, but the rich community life of District Six, particularly in relation to the women who live there. These stories refute the patriarchal notion that "the domestic sphere of the home is unimportant and unworthy of being called history" (J. Murray, "Daring" 56). Furthermore, Maart asserts queer sexuality and nonconforming gender as a fundamental part of life in District Six. Maart's concern with these matters can be situated, as Julie Cairnie notes, within a broader "post-Apartheid concern with questions of gender and sexuality" (178). Crain Soudien notes that the "restoration of District Six is the reconnection of a divided past" which "provides old and new struggles against apartheid with a text for legitimacy" (125). I would argue that this legitimacy extends to post-apartheid struggles over issues that were marginalised during the struggle years due to the imperatives of nationalism.

Fiona Zerbst highlights the intersectional nature of the stories in *Rosa's District Six*, claiming that each "story looks at crises of identity, race, class or sexuality in the characters' lives". I extend Zerbst's observation to include intersections between (queer) sexuality and (nonconforming) gender. I concentrate my attention on nonconforming gender in my discussion of how Maart engages with the (sometimes contradictory) queer histories of District Six, as this is an aspect that the few critical works on *Rosa's District Six* have not dealt with. I discuss characters who perform what might be called 'male femininity' and 'female masculinity'. I have grouped these under the term 'gender nonconformity'. This is broader than 'transgender' which "is used as

a self-description for those who do not identify with the gender that is socially ascribed to them, but rather feel that they are actually of another gender in terms of their inner psyche" (Kugle, *Living Out Islam* 16). I use 'gender nonconformity' rather than 'transgender' because the characters, although their gendered behaviours and dress does not conform with normative expectations for male and female bodies, do not indicate a specific identification. My focus is on gender performances rather than on identities.

In her depiction of gender nonconformity, Maart highlights the idea of performance. While this might be read as implying that nonconforming gender is an act, while normative gender is 'natural', I read it instead as reflective of Butler's highly influential theory that gender, rather than essential or even culturally constructed, is performative. Gender performativity is the idea that "what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xv). Although Butler developed the theory of performativity in relation to gender, it can be applied to other aspects of identity, such as race and culture. As Butler argues, in order for gender to be reproduced, it must be performed as "a repetition and a ritual" (xv) and, ultimately, this "iterability of performativity is a theory of agency" (xxv) because this "reproduction of norms […] risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways, thus opening up the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines" ("Performativity, Precarity" i). This is not to say that the subject has complete agency in 'manufacturing' their gender, since, as "gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender to the other (usually within a strictly binary frame) the reproduction of gender is […] always a negotiation with power" (i). Maart can be seen to highlight these normative pressures, even as her characters transgress these norms in multiple ways.

2.3.1 Contradictory Queer Histories in "The Bracelet"

"The Bracelet" engages with a closeted gay history of District Six through the character of Nathaniel, alongside a visible history of cross-dressing or gender nonconformity enacted by so-called 'moffies'. In *Sex in Transition,* Amanda Lock Swarr quotes Simone Heradien who observes the contradictions of this queer history:

> the cross-dressing community in Cape Town, since the early '70s were very out. There was no hiding. If you wanted to walk like that you would walk like that. And you would face people's taunts. It's very strange that was sort-of always out in Cape Town, cross-dressing or transgenderism, but the gay scene was very closeted. (22)

I want to examine how Maart explores these two queer histories in relation to one another by focusing on the character of Matthew, who is a 'moffie', in contrast to Nathaniel. Their relationship

both illuminates and complicates the conventions surrounding queer sexuality and gender nonconformity in the District Six community that Maart reimagines.

"The Bracelet" is the story of Nathaniel, who is married to Carolyn, with whom he has a daughter. It is a marriage in appearance only, as Carolyn is no longer interested in being sexually intimate with him. They live on the upper side of District Six and form part of a group of coloured people who aspire to whiteness. Nathaniel himself is from "the Christian quarter of Salt River, where pockets of the population were fair skinned enough to warrant consideration for a White identity" (Maart, *Rosa's District Six* 164). Carolyn is very eager to distance herself from 'colouredness' and the culture of District Six. She is also very homophobic and attempts to keep her daughter away from her brother, Neville, who is a gender conforming gay man, and his gender nonconforming, or 'moffie', boyfriend, Calvin. The main conflict of the story arises when Nathaniel begins an affair with a 'moffie' named Matthew. Following Neville's discovery of this relationship, he attempts to blackmail Nathaniel into having sex with him, but Nathaniel refuses. Eventually, Nathaniel decides that he is tired of being closeted. He leaves Carolyn and introduces Matthew to his parents. Expecting disapproval, he is surprised to discover that in his youth his father once had a male lover and that, because they were fair-skinned, his father and mother were able to move away from District Six to escape the stigmatization.

'Moffie' is Afrikaans slang for a gay man. Beyers de Vos posits its origins in District Six, noting that it was initially used non-pejoratively to described "drag queens, flamboyant gay men who dressed as women" (24). It has been both "a slur and an embrace" sliding "down the dark linguistic spiral from pejorative to word of empowerment to pejorative and back again" (24). In coloured communities, unlike in the white Afrikaans communities that later appropriated the word, to be a 'moffie' "one must have both same-sex desire and feminine gender" (Swarr, "Moffies, Artists, and Queens" 77). In "The Bracelet", Neville makes the distinction between gay and 'moffie' when he tells Nathaniel that Matthew is not only gay, "he's a moffie… a bloody queen, a big woman" (Maart, *Rosa's District Six* 198). Men who have sex with men, but do not drag as women, such as Nathaniel, are read as 'straight' within the community. Thus, gender performance has a direct link to how sexual identity is constructed. The 'moffies' in Maart's District Six, although recognized as anatomically male, are referred to by feminine names and pronouns, dress in feminine attire, and enact traditionally feminine roles. While Neville makes a distinction between being a gay man and a 'moffie', he also mockingly uses the word to refer to masculine gay men such as Nathaniel who pretend to be happily married but have sex with other men. The word is used both as a means of distinguishing between gender nonconforming and gender-typical gay men and as an umbrella term for both. The slippage here is arguably to do with the fact that

'moffie' refers both to sexuality and gender variance and reveals the ways in which they are often conflated. For the purposes of my discussion, I focus on 'moffie' as a designation for cross-dressing gay men.

According to Diana Adesola Mafe, 'moffie' not only "speaks interchangeably to maleness, […], femininity, and homosexuality" but also 'colouredness' (105). Apparent in the word's connotations, and in Maart's stories, are the ways in which gender, sexuality and race are mutually constitutive in complex ways. Mafe points out that the "link between 'moffie' culture and the coloured community […] posits a direct, if stereotypical, association between mixed race men and homosexuality" (105). With its link to femininity, 'moffie' also relates to the stereotype of coloured people as, among other things, effeminate (Banco 29). In contrast, then, to a historical narrative of black heterosexuality embodied in the phrase 'Homosexuality is un-African', which erases queer lived realities, the historical narrative of colouredness is very open to contemporary queer readings. Mafe points out the tensions in this kind of revisionary project when she observes that "even though contemporary queer approaches can constitute a positive reclamation and reveal another site where the mulatto disrupts hegemonic binaries, the historical reading of the mixed race body, specifically the male mixed race body, as a sexually ambiguous site was hardly a constructive process" (102).

The ways in which gender, sexuality, race and culture are mutually constitutive is also apparent in Maart's depiction of Nathaniel. His performance of masculinity is normative, not only in that it is recognisably 'straight', but also in that it aligns with a performance of whiteness. Having grown up outside District Six, Nathaniel struggles to "learn the masculine mannerisms appropriate to his economic status, education and new place of abode: they all seemed rather conflicting" (Maart, Rosa's District Six 164). It is implied that the District Six coloured performance of masculinity does not align with the masculine performance required by his job at the bank, which he only has because his fair skin approximates an appearance of whiteness. It is not only effeminacy that is tied to coloured identity, but also certain forms of masculinity.

"The Bracelet", in its revision of District Six, explores these tensions. In doing so, it complicates the two distinct histories that have emerged about District Six – the official narrative of the apartheid state that insisted on the space as a "cesspit of evil" and sexual degeneracy (Soudien 118) and the post-apartheid counter-history that posits District Six as a space of "tolerance, mutual respect, and respect for difference" in contrast to the apartheid nation (115).[23] Some of these contradictions are apparent in Munro's analysis of Nathaniel's revelations about his

[23] "Pertinently, the postapartheid reinvention of South Africa as the Rainbow Nation was in synch with the development of queer theory—an auspicious sign for the historical reclamation of queer colouredness. Ironically or perhaps appropriately for the mulatto man, queer desire and performance is both subversive possibility and stereotypical realization" (Mafe 107).

family that he uncovers when he comes out. She observes that "[c]oming out as queer is […] combined with coming out as coloured, even though the coloured community stigmatized Nathaniel's father for his sexual transgression. Racial and sexual secrets are intertwined" (*South Africa and the Dream* 138). Here, Munro highlights the intersection between race and sexuality. The 'coming out' process that Nathaniel goes through, both racially and sexually, is depicted as positive, ending with him, his parents, his daughter, Rosa and Matthew all participating in the goema – a dance that in the stories represents the rich cultural heritage and lust for life of the people of District Six. In contrast, Carolyn, with her desire for whiteness, is shown to lose everything, unable to move towards the belonging and support of the District Six community and trapped within narrowly normative conceptions of sexuality and gender. However, this does not erase Nathaniel's parents' personal history of stigmatization within the District Six community.

Similar contradictions emerge in Maart's portrayal of Matthew. While Nathaniel's queer family history is obscured, as is his own sexuality until he exposes it, 'moffies' are a visible part of the District Six community. They form part of a queer sub-culture, with its own taxonomy and rules, and have claim to certain spaces, such as certain parks and beaches.[24] To use Munro's phrase, the gay men in District Six form part of "a semiclandestine counterpublic" (*South Africa and the Dream* 142). Queer South African history is generally talked about in terms of silences and erasures, but there is a record of queer coloured history. Mafe notes that 'moffie' "drag performances were documented, albeit in a sensationalist manner, by the two leading black South African publications of the 1950s and 1960s, *Drum* and the *Golden City Post*" (105). Maart's depiction of 'moffies' in District Six is thus not about imagining queer possibilities within a history devoid of queer representation. Rather, she revises the sensationalist lens through which such lives were viewed. Although Matthew is not the central character of "The Bracelet", Maart provides an ordinary picture his life – focusing on the details of the contradictions that shape his gender performance.

What is clearly apparent in Maart's depiction of Matthew is that the acceptance of the 'moffie' subculture within District Six is tenuous and very much contingent upon the regulation of gender performance. Matthew, for example, needs to regulate when and where he wears his makeup. Although he can wear makeup to work, he has friends and family who expect him to take off his makeup when he is with them (Maart, *Rosa's District Six* 208). Matthew, and those like him, thus occupy a fragile position in society and must abide by different rules from "gay men who don't wear makeup and dress up in drag" (208). Men like Nathaniel can fit more comfortably into

[24] Nathaniel's wife, Carolyn, describes one park as "the gayest place you could find" (Maart, *Rosa's District Six* 194), while Neville, Carolyn's brother who is also gay, notes that "all gay men go to the same beaches" (198).

District Six society by staying married and 'acting' masculine (and, thus, 'acting' heterosexual), even if everyone knows that they have sex with men. This is not to say that they are safe, as Neville's attempt to blackmail Nathaniel into having sex with him reveals. In different ways, both masculine and feminine gay men have to negotiate very vulnerable positions within their community. Men like Matthew, however, seem to be particularly subject to derogation and the threat of violence.

"The Bracelet" portrays two characters – Nathaniel and his father, Mr Chambers – who might be read as bisexual. It also represents bisexual behaviour by masculine gay men who marry and have children with women, but continue to have sexual relations with men. Maart's story critiques this arrangement, and ultimately has Nathaniel escape this 'subterfuge' in order to live openly. She also depicts a bisexual alternative in the form of Nathaniel's parents. While Mr Chambers loved a man in his youth, he and his wife are shown to have a close, loving relationship. Perhaps most importantly, Mrs Chambers knows about the man he loved. Maart's critique is not directed at bisexual behaviour, then, so much as it is at the wilful deception of a partner.

Butler explains that "we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right" (*Gender Trouble* 190). 'Moffies' can be seen to fall into this group. They are vulnerable to punishment because they do not abide by the rules of the gender binary and, in order to mitigate this vulnerability, they are required to conform to a different set of rules. The acceptability of their gender performance becomes predicated on their use-value in society, as Matthew himself explains:

> People are only okay with moffies because we form part of the entertainment, we play netball, provide fun and laughter, do women's hair. Even for those of us who can't do hair, we have to learn because it earns us favours, and we are left alone, not beaten or humiliated, that often, because we provide a service. (Maart, *Rosa's District Six* 209)

'Moffies' can mitigate violence against themselves by playing a particular role, one which the community finds acceptable. This kind of precarity is also apparent in Swarr's reference to Farid, who "suggests that 'people adore gays' in Coloured townships" but also "explains that, despite the tolerance of many community members, drag queens are targeted by *tsotsis* or *skollies* (gangsters) to be terrorized or even murdered" ("Moffies, Artists, and Queens" 85; emphasis in original). They have to perform an 'acceptable' version of gender nonconformity. Ironically, they must fit into a particular cliché, one that is 'entertaining', non-threatening and useful to heteronormative society. In other words, even gender nonconformity has its own cultural norms. Thus, even a performance of a nonconforming gender, such as the male femininity of the 'moffie', "cannot be isolated from the dynamics of power from which it is wrought" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxv). While the performance of a feminine gender by a biological male might unsettle the gender binary, this

performance is also always functioning within a rigid gender framework, and in relation to the punitive power of heteronormative society. Thus, we cannot read gender nonconformity as radically transgressive in and of itself, just as Maart shows that the existence of a queer counterpublic in District Six does not equate to a utopian space of queer acceptance.

In fact, the gender norms of District Six are challenged most distinctly not by Matthew's enaction of male femininity, but by Nathaniel's refusal to conform to the norms that dictate how he is supposed to relate to Matthew. For one thing, he insists on calling Matthew by his masculine name instead of Miss Mathilde. In doing so, he challenges the ways in which "cross-dressing forced many gay men to give up their masculinity" (De Vos 24) and unsettles the use of feminine gender performance by homosexual men to maintain the gender binary. Furthermore, he takes Matthew to meet his parents – something that is completely against the conventional script of relationships between 'moffies' and masculine gay men. As De Vos notes, "[s]ex with a moffie was acceptable if you were a heterosexual man if it was discreet and kept hidden – if it was only sex. No relationship. No love" (24). By choosing an open relationship with Matthew, Nathaniel thus chooses the most difficult option available – being an openly gay man who is not a 'moffie'. As he asserts, he "will not let anyone treat [him] like a cliché" (Maart, *Rosa's District Six* 209). Through his character, Maart presents a potential reimagining of coloured masculinity, homosexuality and gender nonconformity beyond their contradictory but conjoined histories of celebration, stereotype and silence.

2.3.2 Performing Female Masculinity in "Ai, Gadija"

While the history of District Six includes a narrative about queer male subculture, despite its occlusions and contradictions, a similar narrative about queer female sexuality and gender is absent. Thus, Maart's inclusion of queer female sexuality, in "Rosa's District Six", and female gender nonconformity, in "Ai, Gadija", addresses a gap in the historical narrative of 'queerness' in District Six. Jessica Murray highlights this in her article on "Rosa's District Six". She notes that this article is "motivated by a desire to address the silencing that seems to characterize much of the scholarly engagement with South African works of fiction that depict lesbianism" ("Daring" 52). Munro also addresses this 'silence' by examining how the queer women in "Rosa's District Six" are "not part of a semiclandestine counterpublic in the way that the men are" (*South Africa and the Dream* 142). These two critics are, however, silent on the character of Gairo in "Ai, Gadija", who performs what Halberstam would call female masculinity. In this sub-section, I briefly discuss the portrayal of female same-sex sexuality in "Rosa's District Six" before moving on to address this

silence by exploring Maart's representation of Gairo's gender nonconformity and the significance of this to the 'new' South African nation.

"No Rosa, No District Six" is about a sexual encounter between two well-respected women in the District Six community, Mrs Hood and Auntie Flowers. Auntie Flowers is a 'voet-vrou', or healing woman, and thus has a particularly notable degree of influence in the District Six community. Both women are steeped in the culture of the community. The story is focalized by Rosa and follows her through District Six as she searches for a place to hide to avoid going to school. She ends up hiding in the house of Mrs Hood and Auntie Flowers; moving from the public space of the streets to the semi-private domestic space of the home. Hiding under the bed, she observes Mrs Hood and Auntie Flowers undress and share a bath together. While it is obvious to the contemporary reader that this is a sexual encounter, its focalization through the eyes of a child frees Maart from describing it within those terms. Rosa's perception of the encounter is not shaped by normative scripts about sex and the passage thus offers the reader the chance to see sex between women anew. At the end of the story, once more in public space, Rosa considers inscribing this event, as she does with everything she witnesses, into the public space – "on der wall or behind Ospavat building or in der sand at der park" (Maart, *Rosa's District Six* 1). In the end, though, she concludes that it is "a secret" that needs to be kept (13).

In writing this story into a fictional history of District Six, Maart both acknowledges the important role that silence can play in protecting queer women, even as she tells the story that Rosa does not. Recontextualised in the post-apartheid space, the story takes on a new significance in asserting a history for queer women in District Six that legitimates them in a society in which lesbianism is no longer illegible. This post-apartheid legibility of lesbian sexuality has its contradictions, in that it can serve to make queer women targets of 'corrective'/'curative' rape and other forms of homophobic violence. Thus, while I agree with Jessica Murray that "the race, gender and the geographical location of the lesbian bodies in this short story restrict the relationship options open to these lesbians who live in a society where heterosexual partnering constitutes the norm" ("Daring" 52), I also agree with Munro that Maart "presents this illegibility or untranslatability in a positive light; their [Mrs Hood and Auntie Flowers'] secret, nameless love is a happy one, and the privacy of their sexuality seems to make it more intense" (*South Africa and the Dream* 142). Indeed, because they are "not interpellated into the identity 'lesbian'" (142) by their community, their love and desire is not labelled as perverse or immoral and they do not have to deal with homophobic discrimination. It is, rather, the character of Gairo, who enacts a female masculinity publicly, similarly to the performance of male femininity by the 'moffies', who experiences rape.

This character appears in the story "Ai, Gadija", a complex narrative that follows the experiences of the three daughters of the Ebrahim family, of whom Gairo is the youngest. Rape and its devastating effect on the Ebrahim family is a central concern of the story. The mother, Motchie Gafsa, was raped by the brother of the man she was to marry when she was young, and this man is revealed to have returned to District Six, and to have raped the middle daughter of the family, Galiema. This man is the father of Ganief, a young man who is intimately connected to all three daughters. Believing that Ganief raped Gairo, Gadija, the oldest Ebrahim daughter, has him killed, only to discover her mistake at the end of the story. For most of the story, the facts of the different rapes and affairs are obscured from the reader, just as they are from Gadija, as shame and patriarchal oppression shroud these secrets in silence. While, in the end, the silence is lifted on the identity of Motchie Gafsa and Galiema's rapist, but Gairo's rapist and his accomplice are never identified.

Through writing about multiple women affected by rape within the same narrative, Maart foregrounds the prevalence of sexual violence in South Africa. By writing about it in relation to 1970s District Six, she also asserts a history for the contemporary rape pandemic in the country. The silence surrounding the Ebrahim family's personal history of rape reflects a broader silence surrounding the issue under apartheid, enforced by racist and misogynistic legislation and attitudes. The particular silence surrounding Gairo's rape reflects yet another layer informing reluctance to speak or report about rape – homophobia and transphobia. As Gqola explains in *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, "[q]ueer desire and gender non-conformity were explicitly criminalised and policed in apartheid South Africa, thereby further dissuading gay men and transgender individuals from reporting rape" (14). Murray's reading of Maart's novel, *The Writing Circle* (2008), which also deals with multiple rapes but in a post-apartheid setting, as "using the genre of fiction to respond to the phenomenon of (non-fictional) rape in South Africa" ("She Had Agony" 37) can also be applied to "Ai, Gadija". In the case of "Ai, Gadija", however, a consideration of the past is employed as a lens through which to comment on the present by considering the violently gendered legacy which has shaped it. In my reading here, I focus on Gairo's nonconforming gender performance and how she uses it to respond to the experience of rape and its gendered implications.

While male gender nonconformity has its own taxonomy and culture in District Six, Gairo's gender 'deviance' remains unnamed, in a similar way to how Mrs Hood and Auntie Flowers's sexuality remains outside description. Unlike Mrs Hood and Auntie Flowers' queer sexuality, Gairo's queer performance of gender happens in public. Gairo dresses and acts like a man, plays soccer and spends time with her male peers (Maart, *Rosa's District Six* 127). She is not only accepted by these young men "as one of the boys", but is admired for her skill on the soccer field,

especially by the young children who "were enamoured of her" (127). Although the narrative voice refers to Gairo by feminine pronouns, the children in the story never refer to her as 'Auntie' or 'Missus' and when she is referred to as 'him' "she never correct[s] their sense of gender" (127). Despite being accepted by her close community, and beloved by the children, Gairo appears to be the only person in this space who enacts female masculinity. Her performance of masculinity is also tenuous. She is called 'man-vrou' in a derogatory manner at one point and she has to carefully manage her gender performance. For example, she does not "dress or undress in the boys' toilets, preferring to arrive on the soccer field wearing her uniform under her clothes" (129). Because her performance of masculinity is perceived not to align with her anatomy, it is necessary for her to carefully control the ways in which her body is exposed in order to maintain her position of relative acceptance.

While Motchie Gafsa notes that she will "never have to worry about man problems" with Gairo (118), and despite the fact that Gairo stands on the street corners with her male peers and whistles at the same women they whistle at (127), the direction of her desire remains ambiguous. The closest we get to an insight into Gairo's sexuality is her relationship with Ganief, which is interpreted by some as sexual, or at least romantic. The story thus complicates the equation of gender nonconformity with queer sexuality, a complication that remains unresolved in the narrative. Gairo and Ganief's relationship ends when she learns of his sexual liaisons with her sister and another woman. Although no insight is given into Gairo's thoughts at this moment, she punches Ganief in the face when he opens the door of his car for her, something he had done "every Saturday morning […] for the past two months" (137). This 'chivalrous' and thus 'feminizing' gesture of opening the door, in light of what she now knows, seems to be too much for her, and results in her violent outburst. If she had been engaging in a sexual relationship with Ganief, this moment seems to be a rejection of it, not only because of the fact of his other relationships, but also because it seems to become apparent to her that a heterosexual liaison might come at the expense of her masculinity. The story thus hints at a complex entanglement of gender and sexuality, that does not necessarily conform to standard formulations, but is nonetheless shaped by the heteronormative society in which it exists.

Maart's depiction of Gairo's response to her experience of rape is intimately tied up with gender performance. While it is not made explicit within the story that this rape was 'corrective' or 'curative', it is quite plausible to read it as such. As Gqola explains, "'curative'/'corrective' rape is about 'punishing' women who lie within the sexual eligibility window for heterosexual male consumption, but they 'dare' not to be available" (Rape 9). Halberstam notes that female masculinity does not necessarily denote queer sexuality, but it is very often assumed that there is a

direct correlation and, "when and where female masculinity conjoins with possibly queer identities, it is far less likely to meet with approval" (Female Masculinity 28). Indeed, it compounds the likelihood of rape and other punitive measures being enacted.

Gqola defines rape as "an extreme act of aggression and power, always gendered and enacted against the feminine" (*Rape* 21). She goes on to explain that the "feminine may not always be embodied in a woman's body; it may be enacted against a child of any gender, a man who is considered inappropriately masculine and any gender non-conforming people" (21). Rape acts as a means of 'feminization', where the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' are coded as 'strong' and 'weak' respectively. Gqola observes that "[f]or vulnerable people who were not women, reporting rape also meant dealing with the kind of incomprehension and humiliation that comes with masculinist culture, such as the questioning of a man's own masculinity in not being able to defend himself against another man's violation" (14). For Gairo, the fact that she has been raped seems to have fractured her masculinity in the eyes of the community. The white policeman, Van der Merwe, tells her mother, after the rape: "I always thought you had two daughters and two sons, Mrs Ebrahim. I see that I was wrong" (Maart, *Rosa's District Six* 125). His initial reading of Gairo as masculine seems to be proven false to him because she is raped. Thus, rape might be read as a performative act, particularly with regards to how it functions in "Ai, Gadija". It manufactures gender through repetition – across generations of the same family in this case.

When a doctor asks her about what happened and offers her counselling, she brings out her most masculine performance, "ensuring that the masculinity in her step prevented nurses and doctors, those who might venture interaction upon recognizing her, from further engaging her" (142). Her reaction to this probing is the same as that which she "had learned to adopt among men who wished to feminize her" (141) – a sort of exaggerated performance of masculinity that acts as a means of defence. Gairo's performance can thus be read as a means of reasserting her gender in the face of a system that uses sexual violence to reproduce gender norms. In this moment, her gender performance functions in the way E. Patrick Johnson, in his attempt to draw out a more concrete politics of resistance from Butler's notion of performativity, outlines. Her enactment is

> not only a performance or construction of identity for or toward an 'out there' or even merely an attachment or 'taking up' of a predetermined discursively contingent identity. It is also a performance of self for the self in a moment of self-reflexivity that has the potential to transform one's view of self in relation to the world. People have a need to exercise control over the production of their images so that they feel empowered. For the disenfranchised, the recognition, construction, and maintenance of self-image and cultural identity function to sustain, even when social systems and codes fail to do so. (137-138)

Gairo employs gender performance as a means of reconstructing her self-image and her image in the eyes of the community. While Gairo's refusal to report the rape or accept counselling might be

read as unhealthy, it is also the way in which she negotiates her own sense of self and reasserts her cultural identity within District Six. This can be linked to Butler's formulation of performativity as a theory of agency, which is nonetheless constrained. Gairo's gender performance, like Matthew's, is contingently accepted within District Six, but is still constrained by violent enactments of heteronormativity, patriarchy and misogyny. Maart depicts characters who use strategic gender performance in order to navigate this community, constantly making decisions that attempt to balance their need for control over their self-image with a sense of cultural belonging.

By portraying a broad range of queer characters, Maart challenges any monolithic idea of what it means to be queer. She shows how queer people are not uniformly oppressed by exploring the intersections between sexuality, gender and race and the myriad, complex ways these intersections affect the position of characters within the District Six community. This includes the types of precarity they are subject to as well as the kinds of agency they can wield. Maart queers the official history of District Six, insisting on it as not only the subject of forced removals, but also as the site of multiple (queer) hi*stories* and *her*stories. We might apply Butler's theory of performativity to the literary conversation Maart has with the history of District Six. Through her fictional utterances she reproduces the historical narrative of District Six, along with particular formulations of gender, sexuality and race. This opens up the possibility of remaking this history, and the realities it produces, 'along new lines'. Or, at least, for imagining how this might be done in the 'new' South African nation.

2.4 A Queer Reading of *The One That Got Away*

Wicomb's *The One That Got Away* is concerned with issues of South African history as well as gender, sexuality and family. However, unlike the "Suit" stories and *Rosa's District Six*, it does not directly depict queer desire, relationships or characters. The most overt 'queer' representation appears in "Disgrace", when one of the focalizing characters reads another female character's feelings for a close female friend as romantic. This moment opens up the possibility of a queer reading of the short story cycle as a whole. *The One That Got Away* does present a sustained and complex critique of heteronormativity – such as the deconstruction of the stultifying marriage of Jeff'n'Marie in "Neighbours" – alongside portrayals of homosocial living arrangements and close female relationships – such as that between Dot and Julie in "Friends and Goffels". To unpack each of the potentially queer moments in *The One That Got Away* is beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, I first examine "Disgrace" before turning my attention to "Mrs Pringle's Bed". I hope to show that this story can be read productively through a queer lens due to its narrative of

a woman's passive revolt against a patriarchal, racist, heteronormative domesticity (which reflects the patriarchal, racist and heteronormative history of South Africa) and her institution of a woman-centric alternative. In this queer reading I draw from work by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Boehmer and Halberstam.

The One that Got Away (2008) is Wicomb's second short story cycle after *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987). Although the stories do not share a single geographical setting, as in *Rosa's District Six*, all are set in either Glasgow or Cape Town. The stories and these two settings are linked by recurring characters and the relationships between them. Technically, as Marais argues, it is the first eight stories of *The One That Got Away* that are linked, while the "last four stories in the collection are appended somewhat arbitrarily at the end" (257). While these last four stories share thematic and stylistic elements, they are not linked to the rest of the stories by shared characters. Like Marais, then, I take the first eight stories as a short story cycle. Along with a focus on maid/madam relationships, "Disgrace" and "Mrs Pringle's Bed" are linked by the historical Thomas Pringle. Each explores a different side of this figure and thus, read together, they reveal how history functions differently depending on the perspective from which it is engaged.

In "Disgrace", Fiona, a Scotswoman visiting South Africa, discovers that Thomas Pringle was a Scottish poet who came to South Africa in the 1800s and who, in Fiona's eyes, seems to have "found rather than lost his way in the colony" (31). In "Mrs Pringle's Bed", the eponymous Mrs Pringle is married to Robert Pringle, "a coloured descendant of the original settler family" – the Pringles (Marais 252). Thus, both stories engage with the colonial and literary history that Thomas Pringle embodies, but each reflects a different way of reading this complex historical figure. As Marais notes, there is a "bifurcation […] evident in responses to Thomas Pringle", as he might be read as either "a Scotsman at heart or the first truly South African English poet"; a champion of those oppressed in South Africa, or an imperialist (304-305). Fiona sees in Thomas Pringle a validation of her own relationship with South Africa, as "the man who founded the spirit of freedom in the colony" (Wicomb, *The One That Got Away* 32). For Mrs Pringle, though, marrying into the Pringle family is symbolic of her choice of "a prominent 'white' settler genealogy" (Marais 260) and signals her investment in the value assigned to whiteness under the apartheid dispensation. Thus, for Mrs Pringle, the history of Thomas Pringle is not something to be reclaimed, but rejected.

As *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, a collection of essays edited by Sedgwick, shows, a text does not have to overtly depict queer sexuality to be read as queer. In her introductory essay, Sedgwick notes that in this volume "what seems least settled is any predetermined idea about what makes the queerness of a queer reading" (2). While these readings might "begin from

or move towards sites of same-sex, interpersonal eroticism" this is "not necessarily so" (2). What is offered here is a flexible mode of reading that draws on the expansive potential of queer to shift rigid understandings beyond those of sexuality. Queer, in this mode, becomes a manner of reading the world in general. My reading takes as its starting point the representation of potential 'same-sex, interpersonal eroticism', before expanding its scope. I identify the potential for queer desire in "Disgrace" because this is already done by a character within the story and my focus is not on how queer sexuality might be encoded in the text but on how it might be read. My reading of "Mrs Pringle's Bed" is not concerned with queer sexuality in any direct way at all, but rather with the queering of a heteronormative way of life. Thus, the kind of queer reading I perform diverges from Boehmer's reading of African women's fiction where she asks "whether a queer sexuality may be covertly encoded in these writers' texts in the form of special friendships and special expressions of friendship between women" (175). Nevertheless, Boehmer's queer reading of Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning* and Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions* does inform my own mode of queer reading in various ways.

2.4.1 Queer (Mis)reading in "Disgrace"

"Disgrace" depicts a kind of queer reading, as Grace reads the close friendship between her employer (Shirley), for whom she works as a maid, and the visiting Scottish woman, Fiona McAllister, as the site of queer desire – although she does not use this terminology. [25] She believes that Shirley is in love with Fiona. The story is alternatively focalized through Grace and Fiona's perspectives, juxtaposing two distinctly different 'readings' of the world. Shirley's focalizing perspective is notably absent from the narrative, so her character is always mediated through the readings of the other characters. The main drive of the plot is Grace's resentment of Fiona, of which Fiona is unaware, leading her into 'disgrace' when she steals a silk scarf from the Scotswoman. Shirley and Fiona are old school friends who "lost touch in the eighties when Fiona would not have considered visiting South Africa with its evil regime" (Wicomb, *The One That Got Away* 28), but, since the first democratic elections in 1994, have rekindled their friendship. The story thus foregrounds how personal and political histories are intertwined. Fiona's motivations for visiting South Africa are varied. Apart from seeing Shirley, her motives include her discontent with the "monocultural West End" (30) and a desire to see a man she had romantic feelings for as a student, Grant Fotheringay.

[25] The title of this short story is likely a deliberate allusion to J.M. Coetzee's novel, *Disgrace*. Both the story and the novel share themes of disgrace, miscommunication and the difficulties of understanding an 'other'. Both also contain a white lesbian character who is only ever focalized through another character's perspective. Consequently, Wicomb's "Disgrace" might be read in conversation with Coetzee's novel.

While Fiona's reunion with Grant is disappointing, and her reunion with Shirley much more satisfying, there are no textual clues that suggest Fiona has romantic feelings for Shirley. As focalized through Grace's perspective, it seems that Shirley might indeed feel something more for Fiona. On Fiona's first trip to South Africa, when she leaves for Scotland without returning to Cape Town to say goodbye to Shirley, Shirley will "not be consoled" by Fiona's promise to visit again the next year (32). "How is one to bear it, she dolefully asked Grace, when you finally find a soulmate, and then next thing – she threw up her hands in despair – she's gone?" (32). When the time comes for Fiona to leave Cape Town after her second visit, Grace observes that "Miss Haskins is behaving like a teenager, mooning about with moist eyes" (33). These descriptions all suggest that Shirley has a particularly strong emotional attachment to Fiona and the language – 'soulmate', 'mooning about' – in which these feelings are couched, strongly implies that attachment might have a romantic element.

Grace's interpretation of Shirley's behaviour is not the kind of queer reading that a critic like Boehmer might perform. Rather, it is marked by conflicting discourses that emerge from the context in which Grace has grown up – apartheid South Africa – and the context in which she now lives – post-apartheid South Africa:

> Nobody knows Miss Haskins better than Grace does, and she can see that this overseas person has brought big trouble, 'cause if ever she'd seen anyone in love then it's now her missus. In this new South Africa people get up to all kinds of things, even the coloured girls in the township are at it, falling in love with other girls, and although Grace knows it to be disgusting she can't help feeling that she'd rather Tracy-Anne's dagga-roker were replaced by a girl. She wonders if the woman knows the trouble she is causing, what with her puff-puff kissing and leading innocent people down the garden path. (33)

This reading begins with an assertion of authority on the subject – that no one knows Shirley better than she does – but this authority is undermined both by the context of the broader story, in which Grace misinterprets Fiona's intentions, and the clear difficulty Grace has in coherently 'translating' her understanding of Shirley's feelings in this passage. The sudden shift between 'falling in love' and the harsh qualifier "disgusting" (33) emphasises the fractures in Grace's understanding of same-sex sexuality. The fact that Grace seems to see female same-sex sexuality as a kind of product of the 'new' South Africa emphasizes how a new discourse and new era in history might shape how sexuality is understood. For Grace, this seems to entail the awareness that queer sexuality is a possibility, and a grappling with how to understand it. Her tentative acceptance of the idea is troubled by the homophobic discourse (likely inculcated in her by apartheid-era and conservative Christian conceptualisations of sexuality) in which she is steeped, which leads her to insist, as though defending herself, that she knows same-sex sexuality to be 'disgusting'. Despite this, she does not condemn Shirley for her feelings, rather seeing them as 'trouble' and laying the blame on

Fiona. Further complicating her reading is her distaste for her daughter's husband, which means that she sees the allure of a queer alternative.

Grace's 'queer' reading highlights the manner in which the new national dispensation and its new discourses open up the possibilities for alternative conceptualisations of sexuality. However, it also refuses the clean break often posited by the 'post' in post-apartheid. The history of apartheid homophobic discourse still informs Grace's reading. Embedded in this moment, then, is a formulation of the precarious and contradictory place of queer sexuality in the 'new' nation, as well as a reminder of the histories, both personal and political, that inform any kind of reading. The story as a whole highlights the limitations of individual perspectives through its juxtaposition of Grace and Fiona's conflicting focalizing perspectives and the foregrounding "the themes of inter-cultural communication and miscommunication – of translation, mistranslation and untranslatability" (Marais 256) through the relationship between the two of them. Marais argues that these themes

> are related to hermeneutic processes in general: to interpretation and misinterpretation, and to readings, *misreadings* and *rereadings* – of people, social contexts, and cultural texts. Frequently in the stories conflicting or diametrically opposed interpretations are presented which, since they cannot be conclusively resolved one way or the other, produce exegetical uncertainty. (256; my emphasis)

Thus, unlike, for example, Boehmer's reading of *Nervous Conditions* and *Butterfly Burning*, a queer reading of *The One That Got Away* must take into account the text's self-reflexive emphasis on the very process of reading. In "Disgrace", a queer reading of Shirley's feelings for Fiona by the reader is pre-empted by Grace's reading of it as such, which then asks the reader to consider not only the possibility of this kind of reading, but how such a reading might be shaped by the reader's perspective. It asks the reader not only to look at the potential of queer reading, but its process, and its limitations.

2.4.2 Freedom from History in "Mrs Pringle's Bed"

"Mrs Pringle's Bed" is also about the potential offered by the emergence of the 'new' South Africa. The story begins on "the 14th of May, 1990, when Mrs Pringle takes to her bed" (Wicomb, *The One That Got Away* 53) and ends two or three years later when Mrs Pringle finally gets up again. Therefore, the story is set in the years between the unbanning of the ANC in 1990 and South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 – often described as the 'transition period' in South Africa's history. The story is alternatively focalized through her perspective and that of her maid, Annie. While Mrs Pringle's choice to climb into the bed in her daughter's old room estranges her from her family – her husband and her daughter, Daisy, along with Daisy's husband and new-born baby – it

creates a more convivial relationship between her and Annie. When Annie is beaten by her husband and has to move away, Mrs Pringle insists that Annie move in to Mr Pringle's study. Mr Pringle is enraged and storms out, at which point Mrs Pringle finally gets out of bed and the story ends as she dresses and listens to Annie running her a bath.

Mrs Pringle's decision to retire to bed seems to be spurred by "her inarticulate desire to embrace alternative ways of being in the transitional period of the early nineties in South Africa" (Marais 261). This desire might be read as queer, following Boehmer's argument that queerness "can find expression as a questing and/or questioning that takes its medium as restless and (till now) nameless bodily desire" (175). Mrs Pringle's awareness that things have changed, and that she needs to change with the times, is signalled by her regret at having chosen to marry into the supposed respectability of the Pringle family. By taking to bed, Mrs Pringle slowly undoes her marriage into the Pringle family. This action can thus be seen as a kind of revision of her personal history, in which she rejects aspiration towards whiteness. Mrs Pringle's transition thus reflects the broader transition of the nationalist discourse of South Africa from one marked by racial division and inequality, to the non-racial ideals of the Rainbow Nation.

"Mrs Pringle's Bed" might be read as national allegory, although not in the sense that its characters become mere symbols of the nation. Rather, it might be read as allegorical in the feminist sense that Andrade proposes:

> These fictions require that we perceive the simultaneous production of both literal and allegorical meaning: the family does not disappear so that the glory or pathos of nation might be revealed. Instead, family retains its literalness, its banality, as well as its real material and social significance, thereby troubling the tendency of the national allegory to soar into the realm of the transcendent. The allegory produced under these circumstances is characterized by a quality of productive interchange between the figural and the literal. (38-39)

Moreover, through her unconventional actions, Mrs Pringle can also be seen to attempt to free herself from the strictures of patriarchal heteronormativity. Marais sees her as achieving this successfully. Having "set up an alternative domestic arrangement with Annie – one more convivial and to their mutual satisfaction – Mrs Pringle escapes both the oppressive yoke of heteronormative domesticity and of a supposedly superior lineage" (253). In this way, Wicomb can be seen to tie the transitions, for which Mrs Pringle's story might be read as as an allegory for, to shifts in gendered and racial relations.

In order to unpack how Mrs Pringle goes about this, and to consider how this process might be read as queer, Halberstam's discussion of queer time and space is useful. *In a Queer Time and Place,* Halberstam moves away from the tendency to tie queerness to "an essential definition of homosexual embodiment" (6) and considers instead, following Foucault, that it is in its 'way of

life' that queerness truly challenges heteronormativity. "Queer uses of time and space develop," Halberstam argues, "at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (1). In the South African context, these institutions are part and parcel of the broader racialized system. No longer wanting to reproduce the attitudes of the apartheid past, Mrs Pringle ultimately dissolves her marriage. In her rejection of her Pringle inheritance, obtained through heterosexual marriage, Mrs Pringle rejects what Halberstam, speaking of the notion of queer time in a different context, calls the "time of inheritance" (5). This kind of time can be defined as "an overview of generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next" (5). Halberstam also notes that the time of inheritance "connects the family to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of both familial and national stability" (5). This mode of heteronormative time links Mrs Pringle to the colonial and apartheid past, with which she no longer wishes to be associated. The period of transition she finds herself in offers a kind of rupture in this type of time, as, in moving towards a 'new' democratic South Africa, the link between past, present and future needs to be re-imagined. For Mrs Pringle, this involves a queer engagement with both time and space.

The main effect of Mrs Pringle taking to bed is a reordering of the household. Considering the deeply political nature of domestic space in terms of what Halberstam calls "the gendered logic of the public/private binary" (*In a Queer Time* 8) – in which men are associated with the public space and important political issues, while women are relegated to the private, domestic space and their issues dismissed as negligible – this effect is very significant. Wicomb's novel, *David's Story*, addresses the issue of women and domesticity in relation to nation-building through the characters of female uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) members.[26] The militant contribution of these women is erased as apartheid comes to an end, "as the return to the normalcy of peace issues the demand on women warriors to retreat into the private sphere, to become again, as it were, 'women'" (Samuelson, "The Disfigured Body" 840). Mrs Pringle is no MK woman warrior; she has not been involved in the struggle or taken the opportunities to escape from the domestic sphere that Samuelson argues are offered by conflict situations. Instead, Mrs Pringle, upon encountering the emerging freedoms of the transition period, subverts the patriarchal order of the household in subtle rather than militant ways. By refusing to get out of bed she lets go of the tight control she has up until that day exerted over the household. Instead of focusing on the role of domestic caretaker, she takes up reading the newspaper. Although she remains within the private sphere of her room physically, she begins to engage with the public sphere – with South African politics and world events – through reading.

[26] uMkhonto weSizwe, commonly called MK, was the armed branch of the ANC.

Mrs Pringle also enacts a queering of reproductive time, as the bed she chooses as her refuge used to belong to her daughter. Her daughter has left home, married and is going to have a baby – following the trajectory of reproductive time. In contrast, Mrs Pringle, refuses to take up the traditional role of grandmother – she gives up knitting clothes for the coming grandchild – and instead enacts a symbolic queer refusal of reproductive, linear time by taking to her daughter's bed. Symbolically, she moves backwards rather than forward through time and gender roles as is expected. Writing about South African women's autobiographies, Lewis notes the importance of "the mother icon in much nationalist myth-making" and how the "the passive mother figure, denied any verbal or executive substance, is valued purely in her symbolic role as reproducer or protector" ("Gender Myths" 39). This is also pertinent to Wicomb's fictional portrayal of Mrs Pringle. By taking to bed, Mrs Pringle refuses to remain this mother figure. Instead, she becomes passive in another way, needing to be looked after rather than looking after and, in her daughter's bed, defying any reduction to the symbolic role of mother as 'reproducer or protector'. She rejects female domesticity, by neglecting her duty to run the house and, by no longer sharing a bed with her husband, she also avoids the sexual component of her 'wifely duties'.

Like Mrs Pringle, Mr Pringle also seems to have changed with the times. In fact, this change is likely one of the catalysts for Mrs Pringle's neglect of her domestic duties. Mr Pringle has started to spend a lot more time at work and, eventually, even takes week-long holidays by himself. The implication seems to be that he is having an affair. This change in Mr Pringle is marked by his change in clothing preferences. He rejects the white shirts he always used to wear and starts wearing coloured ones (Wicomb, *The One That Got Away* 52). Apart from signalling a renewed interest in his appearance, the rejection of white shirts in favour of coloured ones might be read to signal a rejection of whiteness and a concomitant celebration of coloured identity and acceptance of rainbow nation multiracialism.

However, this symbol of change is put on and, as is revealed near the end of the story, remains only at the level of appearance. When his place in the household is threatened by Annie, the maid, he reverts to racist, misogynistic attitudes: "[W]ho the fuck does Annie think she is, moving into his room? She should get her fat Hotnot arse back to Bonteheuwel; does she think he wants to live like Hotnos with all types in his house?" (Wicomb, *The One That Got Away* 63).[27] Because he comes from settler stock, Mr Pringle sees himself as higher up on the social hierarchy in terms of racial status, even though he is coloured, like Annie. The internalization of white supremacy that Mrs Pringle is trying to escape – arguably symbolized by her stripping off her

[27] Hotnot, or Hottentot, is what the colonizers called the indigenous Khoisan people who were thought of as less than human, or "as beasts" (Gordon-Chipembre 57). This word soon gained a "derisive secondary meaning" (Jeffreys 163) and was used as a derogatory word for black people in the Cape.

rather conservative clothes – is thus revealed to still be deeply ingrained in Mr Pringle. These traces are not only racist, but misogynist. This is most clearly apparent in the way Mr Pringle not only uses the derogatory term 'Hotnot', but also references Annie's so-called 'steatopygia' – her 'fat arse' – recalling the way in which Khoisan women were used to construct black female sexuality in dehumanizing ways.

There is another potential implication to Mr Pringle's new fondness for coloured shirts. As Munro points out, the

> question of gay rights was an element in many narratives in the 'transitional' public culture from which [the new South African] constitution was forged and with which it engaged, and thus played an integral yet often overlooked role in producing the new imaginary of the 'rainbow nation' – a phrase that encodes the intersection of multiracialism and gay rights. (*South Africa and the Dream* vii)

In light of the link between multiracialism and gay rights, Mr Pringle's coloured shirts might be read as implying that Mr Pringle has embraced a queer sexuality. There are other moments that could support such a reading. For example, Dorothy Driver suggests that that there "may well be a serious undertone to Mr Pringle's repudiation of the conventions of a stereotypical South African masculinity, but Wicomb's playful portrayal of his girlish wave and his propensity for lilac shirts keeps her tone light" (147). However, even if we assume that these moments imply that Mr Pringle's late nights at the office are a cover for an affair with another man, this does not make this character queer in the broader sense because his actions do not challenge the heteronormative way of life.

While Mr Pringle might be read as gay, his actions might also easily be read within a typical heteronormative script. As Cousin Trudie points out, "everyone [knows] that men over fifty [go] after floozies" (Wicomb, *The One That Got Away* 55). He carries on an affair without consideration of his wife's feelings and, even if outside of the domestic space he might be involved in a queer sexual relationship, he seems content for the structure of the household to remain the same. In fact, he is deeply unsettled by his wife's attempt to reorganize it. He also does not challenge the time of inheritance, as is seen by his uninterrupted inheritance of racist and misogynist attitudes. He also continues to put stock in reproductive time, assuming that his wife will 'get better' as soon as their daughter's baby is born (59). By never explicitly stating the cause of the changes in Mr Pringle, Wicomb "sidesteps reductive political allegorizing" (Driver 147) by creating an ambiguous space around his possibly queer identity. If we read Mr Pringle as gay, then it asks us to question the ways in which "[g]ay identity was cast, in at least some quarters, as an exemplary form that freedom might take" (Munro, *South Africa and the Dream* vii). In other words, it reveals the ways in which a gay, coloured man might still be complicit in perpetuating racist, patriarchal and

heteronormative oppression. Whether Mr Pringle is homosexual or heterosexual, his apparent association with the freedoms of the 'new' South Africa is only linked to his own freedom to do as he pleases, and ultimately does not translate into real change in terms of social relations or prejudices.

In contrast, then, to the surface-level nature of the change in Mr Pringle, is the change in Mrs Pringle and how her taking to bed changes the relationship between her and Annie. In her queer reading of Vera and Dangarembga, Boehmer defines queer writing not in relation to "character representation as such, or to context or theme, but to a particular searching and interrogative *approach* to relations between women, and to women's sexual identity" (175; emphasis in original). In the case of "Mrs Pringle's Bed", this approach is directed towards the maid/madam relationship. The renegotiation of this relationship is marked by an increased intimacy and dependence between the two women. They share "delicious naps" (Wicomb, *The One That Got Away* 59), have tea together, and Mrs Pringle teaches Annie how to knit. Mrs Pringle's daughter, concerned about her mother and the new shape of the household, tries to tell Mrs Pringle that Annie is taking advantage of her, but Mrs Pringle will "hear nothing of Annie on whom she has come to rely" (59). When Annie is going to have to leave for Namaqualand because of her abusive husband, Mrs Pringle is hurt that Annie has not spoken to her about it, stopping her daughter midstream in a tirade about not knowing where her father is on holiday. Mrs Pringle is, by this point, unfazed by Mr Pringle's whereabouts – her primary concern is for Annie. Indeed, her solution is to have Annie move into Mr Pringle's study, which ultimately leads to him leaving the house.

Mrs Pringle's actions reflect Penelope Engelbrecht's definition of a lesbian as "a woman who primarily invests in a relationship or bonds with (an)other woman in any or several way(s)" (qtd. in J. Murray, "Daring" 54). I do not wish to assert that Mrs Pringle is a lesbian, as there is no indication that she and Annie have a sexual relationship. What I do want to suggest is that the relationship between Mrs Pringle and Annie might be read as falling along what Rich calls the lesbian continuum. This term encompasses "a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of women-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" ("Compulsory Heterosexuality" 135). Therefore, the story can be read as depicting a queer shift, as Mrs Pringle's primary emotional investment shifts from her husband and child to being directed towards another woman who is not her blood kin.

This is not to say that Mrs Pringle completely frees herself from history. Despite the fact that installing Annie in the house might be a queering of the space and the relationship, Mrs

Pringle's dependence on Annie is not without precedence within apartheid South Africa. Judith Lütge Coullie notes that, despite the "utter separateness" of maid and madam in South Africa, "it was common for women to experience long-term mutual dependencies. The black maid was (and still is) an indispensable […] feature of the white woman's life. And the white employer's goodwill was often all that stood between the black domestic worker and destitution" (2). Although both women in "Mrs Pringle's Bed" are coloured, the dynamic between them still reflects what Coullie describes. Zanele Muholi also observes the paradoxical nature of the maid/madam relationship, finding it curious that "two women could share parts of their personal lives and struggles despite the years of apartheid that kept one woman in the perpetual role of servant and the other in the life-long role of madam" ("I Have Truly Lost" 20). In this relationship, gender might be seen to serve as the grounds for solidarity, even as race (and its entanglement with class) means that the power dynamics between the two women will always be unequal. In other words, the intersection of race, class and gender can be seen to shape the maid/madam relationship.

This kind of paradox is apparent in "Mrs Pringle's Bed". Even as the relationship between Annie and Mrs Pringle changes and grows in intimacy and dependence and, in some ways, challenges racialized hierarchies and patriarchal dominance, it is still marked by a problematic history. Mrs Pringle still retains much of the power in the relationship, as is revealed in the way she orchestrates Annie's move into the study. She instructs Annie that she will be moving in, without asking her opinion, to which Annie mutely acquiesces, expecting she will "get used to the idea" (Wicomb, *The One That Got Away* 63). The power dynamic between maid and madam might be altered, but has not been completely revised. Whether the relationship will continue to change after Mrs Pringle gets out of bed in the final lines of the story, is a question that remains unresolved, leaving the reader to consider the difficulties of productively reshaping relationships that have been so deeply shaped by an oppressive past, and, thus, on a broader scale, the difficulties of truly remaking a nation. The story thus resonates with some of the overtly queer fiction emerging out of the 'new' South Africa that Tim Trengove Jones discusses, observing that no "viable conception of alternative sexuality is possible in a society not fundamentally reconstructed" (127). Thus, the shape of the nation informs the shape of personal relationships and the degree to which they can break from the restrictions of the past.

Read through a queer lens, "Disgrace" and "Mrs Pringle's Bed" reveal a complex engagement with the ways in which relationships (friendships, family relationships, maid/madam relationships and so on) are (re)interpreted, both by those within them and those observing. Although Wicomb does not overtly depict queer desire, she can be seen to grapple with its possibility and how it might be imagined in the 'new' South Africa. Furthermore, *The One That*

Got Away can be read as queer in its critique of heteronormativity and the way in which its characters, particularly as seen in "Mrs Pringle's Bed", challenge conventional conceptions of time and space. This section has attempted to show how a queer reading might be applied to "Disgrace" and "Mrs Pringle's Bed", and thus to suggest that there might be productive possibilities in a queer reading of *The One That Got Away* as a whole. Wicomb's queer conversation with history ultimately rests on how she considers the traces of apartheid history that remain in supposedly post-apartheid South Africa and how her characters, in various ways, grapple with this history and how to live and read within the changing landscape of the 'new' South African nation.

2.5 Conclusion

The stories I have examined in this chapter reveal a preoccupation with the past; with what has come before both in terms of history and literature. This preoccupation is not only with how traces of the apartheid past remain in post-apartheid South Africa, but also with the places, stories and communities that were erased under the apartheid regime. Xaba imagines queer lives in 1950s Sophiatown by reimagining a story from the South African black literary canon and Maart writes a rich, queer culture into the hi*story* of District Six. Wicomb's stories reveal how the past shapes the present, and how the present changes our interpretation of the past. As her stories illustrate, 'queering' the 'new' nation is still a work in process, requiring creative ways of both writing and reading the past and present. Xaba's and Maart's stories are notable examples of this kind of creative work. Through their engagement with different historical intertexts and use of the short story cycle, Xaba, Maart and Wicomb set up complex conversations between various narratives. These conversations take place between official and unoffical narratives of 'nation' and history, stories by different writers and stories within single-author collections. Read together, these stories can be seen to undermine any grand narrative about what it means to be queer in South Africa and to open up multiple possibilities for the negotiation of the queer self within the 'new' South African nation.

Chapter 3: Family Fractures – Queer/Family Relationships in Various Contexts

3.1 Introduction

My focus in the previous chapter was history and nation, but family is also a significant aspect of the stories discussed. In these stories, the family is bound up with patriarchal and heteronormative discourses and functions both as a site for maintaining normativity and as a space that can harbour queer histories and queer people. Xaba's stories even posit potential queer family alternatives, while demonstrating the pressures that work to fracture these possibilities. In this chapter, I concentrate on depictions of the family and unpack how, similarly to nation, family ideologies and institutions often function to create belonging through the exclusion of queer sexualities and nonconforming genders. I consider how the selected authors deal with the fraught intersection between 'queer' and 'family' in stories from Zimbabwe, Botswana, Uganda and Kenya. Although these stories are set against various national backdrops where homosexuality is legislated against, they focus on the personal experiences of queer individuals. They explore the tensions that emerge between the longing for familial belonging (and, through the family institution, belonging to the community, to society and to the nation) and the desire to express queer genders and sexualities. I examine the painful ways in which gender and sexual nonconformity can threaten an individual's sense of belonging and the ways in which sympathetic portrayals of nonconformity can reveal the 'fractures' in restrictive family norms. The notion of 'fractures' helps me to explore the contradictions, tensions and complexities represented in the relationships between queer individuals and families.

I begin the chapter by focusing on stories that deal explicitly with the pain of such 'fractures' and the contradictory ways in which queer women attempt to negotiate them. In the first section, I analyse "Leaving Civvy Street", published in *Queer Africa*, by Zimbabwean author Annie Holmes. Holmes's short fiction has been published in a number of anthologies, and one, "Can You Hear Me Now?", was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2007. She also works as an editor and filmmaker. I explore how her representation of a white, middle-class household during the 1970s Rhodesian civil war reveals fractures along sexual lines in the construction of familial belonging. As I argue, this can be read in relation to national belonging, as family might be read metaphorically as "the nation writ small" (Andrade 21).

In the second section, I examine two stories by Motswana author Wame Molefhe. Apart from *Go Tell the Sun*, Molefhe has published a collection of short stories for children called *Just Once* (2009). She has also written for TV and radio and magazines. She occasionally publishes non-fiction stories about life in Botswana in *The Mail and Guardian*. The stories I analyse are

"Sethunya Likes Girls Better" and "Botswana Rain", found in *Go Tell the Sun*. I consider the 'cracks' that Molefhe reveals in heteronormative family life. Specifically, I focus on the protagonist's outward deference to "regimes of femininity" (Gqola, "Introduction" 5) and her suppressed sexual desire for another woman.

In the third section, I move on to "Chief of the Home", published in *Queer Africa*, by Ugandan author Beatrice Lamwaka. Beatrice Lamwaka has had short stories published in a number of anthologies and literary journals. At the time of the publication of *Queer Africa*, she was working on her first novel and a collection of short stories. Her short story, "Butterfly Dreams", was shortlisted for the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2011. She is also the general secretary of the Ugandan Women's Writers Association (FEMRITE). In this story, the gender nonconforming protagonist offers alternatives to repressive family gender roles and violent masculinities. As I will argue, "Chief of the Home" ultimately functions as a recuperative narrative, which, like its queer main character, works towards healing various social fractures, which manifest most painfully within the family.

Finally, I turn to Kenyan author Nancy Lindah Ilamwenya's story, "Chebor's Light", published in *Queer Africa 2*. Nancy Lindah Ilamwenya writes short stories and poetry. She is also a teacher. Her short story, "Of Nice and Mean", was mentioned as the best African submission to the Umoja Writing Competition. This story is the most optimistic about the positive potential of the family. It tells the story of a woman, ostracized for not being able to fall pregnant, eventually finding a sense of belonging through the custom of woman-woman marriage. The main 'fracture' that I explore here lies in the story's inclusion in a 'queer' anthology, despite its depiction of a customary marriage practice that is represented as having nothing to do with female same-sex sexuality. In examining this selection of stories, I aim to explore family as both a site of pressure and potential for 'queerness' and queer individuals in a manner that unsettles assumptions about notions of 'family', 'queer' and the relationship between them.

3.1.1 'Families' and 'Fractures': Defining Terms

The 'family' is often considered to be the basic unit of society. Significantly for my discussion here, the patriarchal family structure is the basis upon which broader patriarchal discourse is founded, while the heteronormative, reproductive function of the family is used to legitimise the marginalization or repression of queer sexualities. Within this basic construction, the patriarchal, heterosexual family is 'normal', while deviations from the ideal are framed as perverse threats to society. A patriarchal family might be understood as one with a hierarchical power structure in which the man, who is also husband and father, has the authority, while the woman, who is also

wife and mother, is subordinate to him. This is reflected in distinct gender roles. The exact formation of these gender roles depends upon societal context, but generally in patriarchal societies women's roles are underappreciated, and are often limited to the domestic sphere. Patriarchal families are also generally heteronormative, meaning that they are built around the sexual partnership of a man and a woman, with the expectation that this will result in procreation and the extension of the family unit through the extension of the bloodline.

Very few families function precisely in the manner of the patriarchal, heteronormative family defined above. Nevertheless, this description outlines deeply entrenched, normative notions of family or family ideals that are challenged by queer genders and sexualities. Perhaps paradoxically, despite the family taking on many forms across time and space, fractures in its current formation are often assumed to be catastrophic, igniting conservative panic. Susan Andrade's discussion of family provides an explanation for this:

> As the primary institution by which domestic collectivity is organized and represented, the family is often understood to be naturally given, biologically determined, and eternal in its duration. As an idealized institution imbued with unique social and moral force, its symbolic power exceeds its historical boundaries – that is, family is felt on the part of its members to have always existed in the way they know and feel it. The fact that family formations have changed dramatically from century to century and look very different from culture to culture appears to have little bearing on the fact that family is experienced by its members as natural, timeless, and universal. (33)

Due to its 'social and moral force' and its 'symbolic power', the family generally underpins broader social discourses, providing them with legitimation. Most notably for my discussion here, these include discourses regarding sexuality and gender. Furthermore, the family as a social site can also function to enforce normative discourses by playing "the role of confidential regulator" (Mtenje 239) in order to restrict non-normative behaviours, especially those related to sexuality or gender. This kind of regulation reflects the drive within normative family ideology towards what Andrade terms the 'universal', but which might also be described as the ideal. The universal or the ideal is threatened by specificities and thus there is no space within normative conceptualisations of the family for the complexities of lived experience. Paradoxically, the normative drive to conceal the fractures in the ideal family only succeed in producing more fractures. The policing or rejection of 'deviations' from the norm does not serve to eliminate them. Rather, it produce fissures in familial belonging. In turn, these fractures reveal "the performative nature of kinship" as "actively created rather than existing automatically in reality" (Xhonneux, "Queer Kin" 20).

In this section, I use the term 'fracture' to suggest the sense of force required to challenge the power of an entrenched norm, and the sense that the object being 'fractured' does not completely disintegrate but is also no longer (or never was) whole or unquestionably coherent.

Furthermore, ‘fractures’ can describe the painful breaks that occur in the sense of familial belonging when patriarchal, heteronormative notions of sexuality and gender embedded in the normative family clash with queer experiences. In the stories I discuss, these are not clean breaks, as the relationships between the queer characters and their families are not completely severed, but rather fissure at points of tension that emerge from split desires, such as the conflicting desires for familial belonging and queer sexual expression. I draw on different types of fractures to describe different kinds of family/queer relationships in the different sections. In the first section, ‘splinter’ suggests multiple breaks, while in the second I use ‘cracks’ to describe almost invisible fissures. In the third section, I apply the notions of fragmentation and suturing to explore the narrative’s reparative impetus. Finally, I turn to the notion of disjuncture to examine the fractures that might be found at the intersection of ‘queer’, ‘Africa’ and ‘family’.

3.1.2 Family Complexities in African Contexts

A web of theoretical complications exists at the nexus of ‘queer’, ‘Africa’ and ‘family’. To write of the ‘patriarchal, heteronormative family’ might be useful for considering gender and sexual norms, but it also erases other family forms. Even defining family in this way for the purpose of critiquing it runs the risk of assuming a “natural, timeless, and universal” (Andrade 33) family. Queer challenges to family and kinship often assume the existence of a patriarchal, heteronormative nuclear family structure, even though family and kinship in the African context often takes other forms. For example, Brian Siegel observes that in the United States the family is conceived of as “conjugal, or nuclear, […] composed of a married couple and their children”, while in Africa the term is generally used “to denote the extended family, several generations of relatives living at home and away” (2). At the ‘queer’/‘Africa’/‘family’ intersection there are questions of colonial legacies, as well as African traditions and cultures that complicate queer considerations of the family.

Alexandra Schultheis argues that the “paternal family forms the basis for the Western subject’s experience of the world and the identifications that make the subject socially recognizable” (17). This Western notion of the paternal family has great ideological weight in the African context due to its role in the imperial project. As McClintock argues, “the cult of domesticity was a crucial, if concealed […] element of […] the imperial enterprise” (*Imperial Leather* 5). The ‘family’ could be leveraged as a means of legitimising the “murderously violent change” of imperialist expansion “as the progressive unfolding of natural decree” (45). Measured against the ideal of the paternal, nuclear family of the West, alternative configurations of family in Africa could be taken as a sign of ‘barbarity’ and used to justify colonial intervention. In addition,

Wairimū Ngarūiya Njambi and William E. O'Brien observe that a "historical fixation on western nuclear families as a universal ideal" made it very difficult for "particular non-western family forms […] to be evaluated as anything but bizarre novelties" (4). This colonial idealization of one form of the family and its denigration of others makes the family a contentious site, just like homosexuality. To read queer possibilities into the traditional family formations of African cultures might offer subversive potential for Western scholars, but might also be a misreading of family structures considered perfectly 'normal' within their societal context. I address this issue in the final section of this chapter when I discuss the depiction of woman-woman marriage in "Chebor's Light".

It is also worth noting that, generally speaking, family maintains a far more practical importance in many African cultures than it does in the West.[28] While family might still hold a great amount of ideological power in the West, the increasingly individualistic ethos of Western societies means that sexuality is often conceptualised outside of its relational aspects to family. Moore points out that analysis "has been unintentionally divorcing sexuality from patterns of kinship, social status, and the public achievement of masculinity and femininity, motherhood and fatherhood" (15). The stories discussed in this chapter clearly reflect that "whatever forms sexual identities take, they are clearly built at the intersection of many competing life projects and forms of subjectification" and are thus not "best comprehended through a dominant narrative of the growing individualisation of socio-sexual life choices" (15). These stories highlight, across a range of circumstances, the importance of the construct of familial belonging in shaping gender and sexual expression, not just because of its policing function, but also because of its deep importance in the lives of individuals.

In terms of African literature, the representation of the family is complicated by issues of colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism in distinctly gendered ways. Andrade argues that there is a difference in how men and women portray the family in the African literary canon. She argues that, historically, men have tended to idealise the family, while "women are far more likely to have depicted the institution as both a product and an instrument of power" (33-34). Men are more likely to use the family "as an organic mode by which the social hierarchy of national politics is sanctioned" (34) than women, who have been restricted to domestic spaces and excluded from the national narrative, as I discuss in the previous chapter. While family is often used symbolically in fiction by men, in women's writing it often "becomes the primary site of social engagement" (34). This is apparent in all of the stories discussed in this chapter. The site of the family – the private,

[28] See Epprecht's discussion of this in the Zimbabwean context in "The 'Unsaying' of Indigenous Homosexualities in Zimbabwe: Mapping a Blindspot in an African Masculinity."

domestic space – is where the events of the stories play out and, by revealing the intimate and contradictory dynamics of various imagined families, the stories problematise any idealised notion of family. The public sphere of government legislation remains outside the sphere of the stories and, although war is a significant part of "Leaving Civvy Street" and "Chief of the Home", it is represented only through its impact on the intimate social spaces of the characters. The public conflicts that play out in the theatre of war are only alluded to. These stories thus invert the traditional valuation of the public over the private, the national over the domestic.

Although the political contexts of the countries in which the stories are set remain in the background, it is still useful to briefly outline these contexts as they inform the political work that the stories engage in. Published in 2013, but set in the 1970s, "Leaving Civvy Street" can be read in relation to the contexts of both Zimbabwe and Rhodesia. Starting in 1995, Mugabe and his supporters began to frame homosexuality as "a threat to an idealised patriarchal culture and national values" (Epprecht, "The Unsaying" 644). This exclusionary nationalism was linked to calls to return to "'traditional' family values" (632). In 2006, section 73 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act became effective, which criminalised same-sex acts between men (IAGCI 11). Despite the break between the Rhodesian nation and the 'new' Zimbabwean nation, their attitudes towards homosexuality are remarkably similar, as are their anti-homosexuality laws, which do not acknowledge the existence of female same-sex sexuality. Epprecht suggests that the "more generalised culture of intolerance against homosexuality [of the missionaries] may also have intensified over time with the rise of Rhodesian nationalism and its need to project an untarnished image of settler manliness" ("The Unsaying" 645). In both cases, homophobic sentiments centre around a need to bolster a masculinist national and traditional identity, which rest on conceptualisations of the male role of authority in the family. In this case, ironically, both colonial and anti-colonial nationalism in this case draw on similar logics about gender and sexuality.

In Botswana, colonial-era laws remain that criminalize 'unnatural acts' with a sentence of up to seven years (Selemogwe and White 406-407). These are currently being challenged in court and no one has been prosecuted since 1995 (McAllister 92). In contrast to Zimbabwean, Ugandan and Kenyan political figures, former Botswana president Festus Mogae claims to have instructed police not to arrest homosexuals during his presidency (92). In 2011 he called for the decriminalization of homosexuality in order to help fight the spread of HIV/AIDS, although in somewhat heterosexist terms (Ghosh). Ian Khama, who was president at the time of the publication of Molefhe's stories, has made statements of a similarly tolerant nature regarding homosexuality. He has noted that only certain acts are criminalized and not 'gayness' itself, as well as asserting that gay people are citizens (McAllister 92). In 2016, he even went so far as to deport an anti-gay

American pastor, stating: “We don’t want hate speech in this country. Let him do it in his own country” (Bearak, “Botswana”). At the same time, neither president made any move to reverse the anti-homosexuality laws, Mogae noting that this decision was because he feared he would lose the elections if he did so (Masokola). While these politicians have not employed homophobic rhetoric in the same way as political leaders in the other countries discussed here, they have suggested that, whatever their own feelings, the country at large would not accept the legalisation of homosexuality. According to James Denbow, the patrilineal family “is the basic building block of Tswana society” and “[m]arriage and children are two of the most central events affecting an individual’s status and rights within the community” (88). The importance of the family institution and children could explain why Botswanan society remains averse to accepting homosexuality.

In Uganda, the ‘enemies of the family’ rhetoric is explicitly linked to anti-homosexuality legislation. Uganda became a focal point of the discussions surrounding homosexuality in Africa when its Anti-Homosexuality Bill was signed into law in 2014, only to later be ruled unconstitutional and struck down (Bompani and Valois 53). The bill would have amended Uganda’s colonial-era laws that make homosexual acts punishable with up to fourteen years in prison, to punishment with a life sentence – a reprieve from the initially-proposed death sentence (53). The supposed aim of the bill was to strengthen “the nation’s capacity to deal with emerging internal and external threats to the traditional heterosexual family” (qtd. in Zabus 151). In response, Mtenje argues that in “an expedient and a provocative tactic, ‘the family’ – a site freighted in normative culture with the responsibility of reproducing the supposedly essential common good of heterosexuality – was invoked in the authoritative discourses of legality and parliamentary justice as vulnerable to homosexual threat” (232). Mtenje’s description of this tactic thus resonates with the type of rhetoric espoused in Zimbabwe and Kenya, even if it is not so explicitly stated in the legislation of these countries.

The Kenyan Penal Code still includes colonial-era laws criminalizing “carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature”, suggesting a continuity between colonial-era homophobia and that espoused by politicians in contemporary Kenya. The archaic phrasing of the law reflects the kind of naturalising discourse that is often used to entrench the heterosexual family as the norm. The rhetoric employed by anti-gay politicians in Kenya frequently invokes the emotive power of the family in stirring up homophobic sentiment. Mufideh Mohammed, for example, at a political rally called for “our women to protect our kids, especially boys” (Robinson). This statement frames homosexuality as a threat to the heart of the reproductive family – the child – and the focus on boys suggests a particular concern with masculinity, similar to that in Rhodesian and Zimbabwean nationalism. Charles Kanjama, a Kenyan lawyer, has called homosexuality

'cultural imperialism' and described homosexual people as "enemies of the natural family" (Bearak, "Gay Kenyans"). This statement draws not only on the power of the 'natural family' rhetoric, but also a rejection of Western imposition.

3.2 Splintered Spaces: Family and Nation in "Leaving Civvy Street"

Holmes's "Leaving Civvy Street", set during the last years of the white Rhodesian nation, depicts a complex relationship between queer sexuality, familial belonging and nation. I explore how Holmes, like her protagonist, negotiates the tensions of this relationship through the spatial dynamics of the family home. Holmes's use of the domestic space draws on the dichotomy of private/public space that often sets up the home as private and the nation as public. As I will discuss, this representation of family within the domestic space can be read metaphorically as a reflection of the political state of the Rhodesian nation. Moreover, Holmes complicates the private/public dichotomy and the possibilities of a metaphorical reading of the family as nation by focusing on the intimate loyalties that inform the construction of family and its role in shaping acceptable sexualities.

"Leaving Civvy Street" is set during the Rhodesian War in the 1970s.[29] It sets up tension between family and same-sex desire, as the narrator, Beverley Richards, negotiates her loyalties to her family and to Elise van der Linde, her secret girlfriend. Beverley negotiates these loyalties by moving between different spaces – her room, the passage, the braai area and the bar – in the Richards's household. The action plays out on her brother, Don's, last night on 'civvy street' before joining the war effort. At the beginning of the evening, although Beverley wants to join Don and their family and friends by the bar, she ends up in her room with Elise, having sex, while her parents shout exhortations through the closed door for them to join the group. Later, when they do join the family at the braai area, they sit together on the diving board, away from the others. However, Beverley, due to her desire for familial belonging, leaves Elise on the diving board and goes to the bar where she plays along with the flirtations of Mark, a friend of her brother's. This betrayal of her loyalty to Elise leaves her feeling ashamed and she follows the hurt Elise out of the public family area towards her room. The passage, a liminal space between the public, heterosexual, family space and the queer enclave of Beverley's room, is marked by the threat of being 'outed', when one of Don's drunk friends, Stu, comes upon Beverley apologising and gets

[29] "A Boy is a Boy is a…" by Barbara Adair and "Mirage of War" by S van Rooyen share with "Leaving Civvy Street" a critical appraisal of the wars waged during attempts by white nations to maintain their power. Set during the state of emergency – what Adair calls a 'civil war'- in South Africa and the so-called 'Border War' respectively, these stories explore violence and masculinity from the perspective of queer young white men. I have not included them here because they would require a complex discussion of war, violence and masculinity which are beyond the scope of this study and would detract from its woman-centric approach.

suspicious. Beverley is going "to lock Stu out and Elise in" (Holmes 120), but before she can do so she is once again torn by family loyalty as Don, who is drunk, comes down the passage. The story ends with Beverly on the threshold of her room, torn between her loyalties to her family and to Elise – the tension unresolved – illustrating the difficulty of choosing between queer sexual love and familial belonging.

The story plays with private/public spatial dichotomies to explore negotiations of different types of belonging. The image of the closet appears in the flashback where Beverly recounts how she and Elise became lovers. They first touch when they are given a study space, which Beverley describes as "a stock room, a closet really" (113). The invocation of the spatial metaphor of the closet is a powerful way, as Michael P. Brown observes, to "describe the denial, concealment, erasure, or ignorance of lesbians and gay men" (1). Holmes expands on this metaphorical potential by moving beyond the space of the 'closet' to that of the domestic household. Here, she crafts various spatial relationships that illuminate the "absence" and "ironic presence" of queer sexuality "in a society that, in countless interlocking ways, subtly and blatantly dictates that heterosexuality is the only way to be" (1). The girls' liaisons continue to happen shut away from society, of which the family acts as a microcosm.

The implication is that Beverley can only belong to the family if she hides her sexuality. In fact, to solidify family belonging is to enact heterosexuality, as is evident in Beverley's flirtation with Mark. This interaction is shown to have little to do with sexual desire and more to do with reinforcing social bonds, which are tied to familial identity. According to Beverley: "[Mark] holding me […] was tribal, his friend-of-the-family duty" (Holmes 119). While Beverley's queer sexual desire for Elise must be shut away from family and society – the implication being that it would threaten social cohesion – heteronormative displays of sexuality serve to reinforce a sense of familial and, by extension, social belonging. Beverley's mother watches Mark's flirtation with Beverley and smiles to herself, as though indicating her approval of this heterosexual performance (119). This suggests subtle ways in which the family serves as gatekeepers of sexuality. Even if they are not explicit in their expectations, these expectations are clearly apparent to Beverley, who seems to know what type of sexuality she needs to perform in order to belong. To return to Brown's observations regarding the closet, it seems that Beverley "cannot be in the world unless [she] is something [she is] not" (1). In the case of the story, the most immediate potential consequence of 'coming out' of the 'closet' is the loss of familial belonging.

The story also touches on the gendered dichotomy of private/public space, where private, domestic space is considered the realm of women and public, political space the realm of men. Holmes draws on and queers a tradition of African women writers who employ domestic space as

a means to explore the ways in which the personal is political. The story depicts a difference in the positionality of female and male queer sexuality similar to the difference that emerges in the stories of Maart. Like in Maart's stories, queer men can openly move within public spaces to some degree, while queer women cannot. While in Maart's stories this is because of a lack of recognition of the possibility of queer female sexuality, in "Leaving Civvy Street" this is because there is an intense anxiety surrounding queer female sexuality. In Beverley's school, any girl who touches another girl or breaks from the norm in even the slightest way, such as wearing a single earring, is labelled a 'lesbo' (Holmes 110). In contrast to this anxious policing of female sexuality, within broader civil society there is a general acceptance of gay men. For example, Beverley and Elise's classmate, Chris, is openly gay and yet "weirdly, even the other boys didn't seem to give him gyp about it" (110). This tentative acceptance is not apparent when it comes to the military. As Beverley notes: "Soldiers would beat a guy up for having hair slightly longer than military style" (110). Within the military, the same over-bearing anxiety that is apparent regarding female sexuality is brought to bear on male bodies, where even the slightest deviation from military style (read: masculinity) is punishable by violence.

Epprecht explains:

> The militarisation of white society in the late 1960s only made Rhodesian culture less able than ever to accommodate alternative masculinities such as openly gay men. Indeed, while the police, doctors and judges evinced sometimes strikingly liberal attitudes toward 'the problem', popular culture seemed to be narrowing the parameters of acceptable levels of intimacy between males. The ultimate expression of this occurred in 1972 when two white men hunted out and beat to death an alleged homosexual (also white) for no other reason than his apparent queerness. ("The Unsaying" 646)

Thus, although it plays out differently for men and women, the movement of queer individuals within space in the Rhodesian nation is depicted as never completely comfortable. The contingency of the open expression of queerness depending on the gendered logic brought to bear on space is reflected in the fact that even divides between public and private space are tenuous. The 'private' space of the home, for example, reflects broader private/public dichotomies as family space functions as 'public' even within the 'private' domain of the household. Private spaces can also be constructed within public spaces, such as Beverley and Elise's use of the diving board as a sanctuary, but are distinctly precarious. These include unwanted interruptions, such as when Stu, another of Don's friends, attempts to flirt with Beverley, or the lure of family belonging that draws Beverley to the bar. Even Beverley's room is not a completely private space, as her parents are constantly shouting through the door for them to join the family space – reflecting Beverley's ever-present desire for familial belonging. The story thus draws attention to the ways in which both

space and belonging are relationally constructed by the people who inhabit these spaces, and how these affect the forms that expressions of romantic affection can take. These differences are apparent in the way heterosexual affection can be publicly displayed within common areas of the Richards's household, while Beverley and Elise can only display their affection behind closed doors.

The way in which Beverley closes the door between her family and her relationship with Elise reflects a split in her loyalties. While this break is not complete, it is a painful disjuncture that she is continually negotiating. 'Fracture' is not the most apt way to describe the fraught relationship between queer sexual desire and family loyalty in this narrative. Early in the story, Beverley claims that Elise "unspun [her] loyalties" (107), as she seduces Beverley in her bedroom. Spinning provides a sensual metaphor that suggests a relatively gentle deconstruction of familial and heteronormative loyalties, as a piece of yarn might be 'unspun' into its constitutive fibres. However, by the end of the story, the focus is not on the erotic pleasures of finding private spaces for being together, but on the pain of split loyalties. I would suggest that 'splintering' becomes more apt for describing Beverley's experience here. Rather than a dichotomous split, splintering suggests multiple divisions.

The space of the house can also be read as splintered as it becomes divided up into various private and public spaces indicative of different loyalties. The closing of doors becomes a means to splinter off spaces, reflecting the painful ways in which Beverley has to close herself off from various forms of belonging, at least temporarily, and possibly more permanently in the future. Holmes goes beyond the image of the closed door as the characters negotiate other spatial formations, such as the passage, the bar area and the diving board. This 'splintering' complicates the simplistic private/public or 'inside'/'outside' binary inherent in the closet image. Thus, Holmes's story explores the intersection of spatial dynamics and queer sexualities, to borrow Brown's words from his discussion of the closet, "in ways more multiple and complex than the closing of a closet door implies" (3).

The suggestion of a more permanent split is raised by Elise when she proposes that she and Beverley "go and live in Denmark when [they] finish school" because there is "no war there" and they "could get married" (Holmes 118). Here, the issue of nation, which haunts the story in the form of the war, emerges in relation to queer sexuality. Elise identifies that living in an open and socially sanctioned lesbian relationship is only possible outside of the Rhodesian nation. She thus exposes the import of the intersection of nation and sexuality, where national laws about and, conceptions of, sexuality shape queer lives. In Rhodesia, homosexuality was "illegal – and, officially, did not occur" (Godwin and Hancock 40), while Denmark, in contrast, is depicted as

legally legitimating queer relationships. This legitimation through marriage implies that there is less tension between family and queer sexuality in Denmark, as the law allows for the formation of same-sex families. This is something unimaginable in the Rhodesia of the story where the family is entangled with performances of heterosexuality. The tie between family and nation is also apparent in the break with family that Elise imagines alongside a break from the nation: "We wouldn't tell [my mother]. We wouldn't tell anyone" (Holmes 118). Beverley cannot countenance the "Danish loneliness" (118) she imagines in advance. For Beverley, loyalty to nation is predicated on loyalty to family. She does not want to imagine leaving Rhodesia because it would also mean losing her familial connections. Here, the desire for familial belonging creates a kind of loyalty to the nation state, even as Beverley appears to be critical of nationalist Rhodesian propaganda, such as "Rhodesians never die" (115). She can only countenance leaving Rhodesia when it serves her desire for continued family belonging, such as when she thinks that Don should leave the country so that she does not have to risk losing him in the war.

What "Leaving Civvy Street" illustrates is, to use Andrade's words, "the interconnected nature – indeed, the interpenetration – of the private and public spheres of life (in this case, the domestic and national spheres)" (1). Within African fiction, this interconnectedness is often illustrated through metaphor. For example, the portrayal of the family by some African women writers might be read, Andrade argues, as "the nation writ small" (21). This is an inversion of the tendency of male writers to privilege the nation within such metaphorical relationships as 'the family writ large'. Holmes's story seems to lend itself to such a metaphorical reading, since it privileges the domestic space, the family and interpersonal relationships. It does not deny the significance of broader national issues, but focuses on the intimate effects of national concerns (in this case the war) on the family. Considering Mkwesha's assertion that in "the Zimbabwean literary tradition, the house is read as a metaphor for the nation" (39), it is possible to read the Richards's household as representing "a larger social, political and economic drama, enacted in the nation" and functioning as "an education institution where hegemonic ideas about gender" and, I would add, sexuality, "are taught, tested, accepted, challenged and rejected" (39). This kind of 'education' about acceptable sexuality is apparent in the subtle approval given to heterosexual performances and the way in which Beverley uses the domestic space as a testing ground for private challenges to the norm and public experimentation with accepting it.

I would like to read the splintered space of the family home as a metaphor for a splintered white Rhodesian nation, which can exist only by shutting away certain realities (most notably the existence of racial inequality and queer citizens) in a willed attempt to construct a coherent collective identity. My focus here is on the issue of sexuality, but in this case sexuality and race

have a somewhat analogous relationship, although distinct material differences. The issue of race is raised in the story through the character of Cornelius, the elderly black servant who, like Beverley, has a troubled relationship with the domestic space and belonging. While he can move through the household as though he belongs there, he is also distinctly excluded from the familial belonging extended to Don's white friends. His presence reveals the spectre of race that haunts the white Rhodesian nation. While Cornelius is part of the household, he is also a black man and thus the enemy whom Don is going to fight. When it comes to Cornelius, the family's personal loyalties clash with national loyalties that demand racial allegiances. It is hinted that Cornelius might also experience split loyalties between the Richards's family and his own people in his apparent concern for a drunk Don in the conversation between them that concludes the narrative. However, when Don insists that he is "fine", Cornelius says "Okay, Boss", highlighting the power differential between them, and shuts the kitchen door (Holmes 121). Similarly to Beverley, Cornelius negotiates the tensions of split loyalties through movement in space, but there are also distinct differences. Although Beverley's sexuality fractures her loyalties to her family and the nation, her race and class still bind those loyalties tightly enough that she cannot 'close the door' on them completely. Cornelius shutting the door in contrast to Beverley's hesitation in the passage suggests that he has an entire set of loyalties hidden from the view of the Richards family. These split loyalties at the heart of the Richards's household can be read to reflect a white nationalism attempting coherence, but splintered in actuality.

This splintering is apparent in Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock's account of Rhodesia during the armed struggle of the 70s. The country was literally divided into "designated operational areas" (6) and, despite "the deliberate cultivation of a patriotic sentiment […] the unity of White Rhodesia in the latter part of the 1970s was more apparent than real" (7). The nation was being splintered by the war and by the differences within the white population. These 'splinterings' were not acknowledged, but rather wilfully denied. Godwin and Hancock argue that "perhaps [white Rhodesians'] worst collective fault was an almost infinite capacity for self-deception" (11). Alexandra Schultheis observes that this kind of delusion is necessary for the creation of a nation: "For allegiance to become national unity […] depends upon constituents, in Ernst Renan's apt phrase, 'being obliged to have forgotten the fractures of their communal history'" (12). This plays out within the domestic space in "Leaving Civvy Street". Unable to unify Cornelius's presence in the family home with the race-based war Don is going to fight or their family values with the brutality of the war (such as when Beverley's mother tells one of Don's friends to stop telling war stories), they employ a kind of forgetting. Forging national unity in this manner also includes the

'forgetting' of sexual 'others' who threaten coherent narratives of nation built on notions of the 'wholesome family'.

The fracture between rhetoric and reality is apparent in the Rhodesian nation's stance on homosexuality. Although its existence was officially denied, "activity in the closet was not thereby inhibited" (Godwin and Hancock 40). The construction of the nation thus included a denial of queer sexuality, even though it was undeniably part of it, similarly to the way in which Beverley and Elise's relationship is a denied part of the domestic space. Beverley also practices a willed self-delusion in an attempt to solidify her familial belonging at the moment where her brother's departure and Elise's suggestion that they move to Denmark threatens its loss. As she plays in to Mark's flirtation, Beverley makes herself "forget about Elise on the diving board" because she "couldn't work out how to keep her in [her] mind at the same time as [she] felt Mark's tongue on [her] fist" (Holmes 119). There is a disjuncture here that reflects the kind of double consciousness displayed by the other members of her family. Fractured loyalties in the story, as they play out in the domestic space, can thus be seen to reflect the splintered loyalties between individual desires and national belonging.

Seen in this light, "Leaving Civvy Street" arguably employs a domestic narrative as a means of challenging the supposed coherence of hegemonic narratives about nation, family and sexuality. Holmes's method of doing so troubles a simple metaphorical reading. It is by focusing on specificities and material realities that Holmes reveals the fractures in supposedly coherent metanarratives. This is apparent in Holmes's treatment of space. While the household space can be read as a metaphor of the nation state, it also has material implications. Brown's approach to the closet as a spatial metaphor provides a way into this idea. He suggests that space "does not just represent power; it materialises it" (3). This is apparent in Holmes's complex depiction of the domestic space. This space does not only reflect certain heteronormative (and racialised) power dynamics, it is also the means through which they play out. It is within and through space that these power dynamics are negotiated. Closing doors, within the narrative, is not only a metaphor for the concealment of queer sexualities, but also a material means of concealing them, in this case from the sight of those who would likely repudiate them.

Thus, while reading the domestic space in "Leaving Civvy Street" as metaphorical opens up certain analytical possibilities, to read the relationship between domestic space, family and nation as only metaphorical is to obscure the material relationships between them that Holmes illuminates. As apparent earlier in my discussion of Beverley and Elise's Denmark conversation, the relationship between family and nation is not only metaphorical. In a distinctly feminist move, Holmes draws on the notion of the personal as political, without subsuming the personal under the

political. McClintock writes about how the "family as a *metaphor* offered a single genesis narrative for national history while, at the same time, the family as an *institution* became void of history and excluded from national power" (*Imperial Leather* 357; emphasis in original). McClintock's observation here points to how metaphor, while creating meaning, can also obscure it. Holmes's narrative does not simply employ family as a metaphor for nation, it illustrates the ways in which family is implicated in nation simply by its physical situation within national borders. In "Leaving Civvy Street", the heteronormative family is not just a metaphor leveraged by the nation state to maintain heterosexist norms. Rather, it is a site of power in and of itself, which shapes sexuality through modes of heterosexual allegiance.

3.3 Revealing the Cracks in Family Norms in "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" and "Botswana Rain"

Molefhe's two linked short stories – "Sethunya Likes Girls Better"[30] and "Botswana Rain", which appear in her 2011 collection, *Go Tell the Sun* – elucidate Sethunya's inner turmoil as a woman who loves and sexually desires another woman, Kgomotso. Due to family and societal pressures, she has married a kind and loving man, Thato, but remains internally conflicted. Each story is structured similarly, with Sethunya's internal response to an incident in the present framing a series of flashbacks that reflect her struggles to reconcile her queer desires with traditional notions of womanhood and the social security that marriage offers. In "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" it is Sethunya's response to a newspaper article about an escaped ape named Johnnie that frames the flashbacks. Most notably, these reveal her childhood love for Kgomotso and the advice she was given about how to be a good wife by her in-laws. It becomes clear that Sethunya empathises with Johnny because she feels trapped in her marriage, and yet is terrified of what might happen to her if she tries to break the bonds of societal proscriptions of womanhood, embodied in the oft-repeated phrase: "a good Motswana woman" (Molefhe). The story ends with her going about her daily routine, haunted by the refrain of the title 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better'. In "Botswana Rain", some time has clearly passed, as Sethunya now has an infant son. The story begins with Sethunya's mother phoning to tell her that Kgomotso has committed suicide. The present-day ramifications of this news frame numerous flashbacks, some of which expand on her childhood love for Kgomotso and her later marriage to Thato. In the present, Sethunya attends Kgomotso's funeral, and the story ends with her at home the morning after the funeral, lying in her marital bed with her husband and her son.

[30] "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" is also included in *Queer Africa.*

Go Tell the Sun, in which "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" and "Botswana Rain" appear, uses the short story format to address a series of social issues, especially those affecting women. The first six of these stories, as many of the collection's reviewers have noted,[31] are connected by their protagonist, Sethunya, who is represented differently in various stories. "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" and "Botswana Rain" are the only stories in which Sethunya has queer desires. By positioning a queer version of Sethunya alongside portrayals of her as heterosexual, Molefhe situates female same-sex sexuality on a spectrum of issues pertinent to women in Botswana. The use of the character of Sethunya to link the first six stories also speaks to Molefhe's literary sensibility and her desire to write stories that are in some way representative. She used the "character called Sethunya to represent any Motswana woman" (Van Eeden), which explains why, in the different stories, Sethunya lives different lives, loves different people, has different children and different concerns. In the stories other than "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" and "Botswana Rain", she is unequivocally heterosexual – sometimes loving her husband, Ntsimane, and sometimes her lover, Botshelo. This means that Sethunya's same-sex desires are framed as a commonplace occurrence. If Sethunya is 'any Motswana woman', then it is implied that any Motswana woman might love another woman. Same-sex desire thus becomes firmly embedded in the country and the culture, rather than being depicted as something 'exceptional'.

In each of the 'Sethunya' stories, the family is the site of the exploration of the subjects Molefhe is concerned with.[32] In an interview with Janet van Eeden, Molefhe explains: "I wanted to create settings that a person who is not familiar with Botswana can see: woman, husband, child, home, happiness. Then I created little cracks". Molefhe positions family, home and happiness as a universal triumvirate that allows any reader to relate to the stories. The 'cracks' Molefhe describes are arguably the difficulties (the 'aberrations' from the norm) that the characters experience – those things that break apart the easy equation of family life with happiness. In other words, Molefhe is aware of transcultural 'norms' about the family. She sets them up in her stories, only to unsettle them by revealing the 'cracks' in these taken-for-granted notions and by drawing on the specificities of life in Botswana.

The 'cracks' in the 'woman, husband, child, home, happiness' setting in "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" and "Botswana Rain" appear as a result of the societal proscription against female same-sex sexual desire. Sethunya's desire to be a "good Motswana woman" (Molefhe) and secure

[31] See reviews by Lauri Kubuitsile, Eva Hunter and Katharine Quince (which includes a diagram showing the character links across the stories).

[32] These are the social issues that the Sethunya stories deal with: "Who Do You Tell" deals with infidelity in marriage; "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" and "Botswana Rain" deal with female same-sex love; "The Vigil" deals with HIV/AIDS; "Coloured Locks" deals with the loss of Setswana tradition over a generation; and "Blood of Mine" explores infertility.

happiness through family belonging clashes with her love and sexual passion for Kgomotso. The family-happiness equation fails, in Sethunya's case, because it is not inclusive of sexual desires outside of the heteronormative framework. Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed observes that Sethunya embodies "deference to society (through her heterosexual marriage)" but that there is also a complexity to the character. John Marnell claims that the "complexity and emotional roundedness of Molefhe's protagonist is, considering the context in which the story was written, nothing short of radical". I think that this is a bit of a stretch, playing into a tendency to claim radicalness as a source value for a literary text, especially those about queer subjects or other marginalised subjects. However, I do agree that Sethunya displays "hidden resistance […] through her hidden desires" (qtd. in PH), even though it never manifests in active resistance. The narrative focuses on these hidden desires as 'cracks' in the outer façade of the deference that Sethunya uses to avoid ostracization. These fractures can be suitably described as 'cracks' because they break apart the façade, but are only visible on close inspection. Thato often senses that something is amiss, but Sethunya is constantly covering up the fissures by outwardly denying their existence. Sethunya never leaves her husband or rejects her society's norms about what constitutes acceptable womanhood. Indeed, by the end of "Botswana Rain", it seems as though she has lost, along with Kgomotso, any chance of breaking free from the marriage, and the societal norms, by which she feels trapped.

In "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" and "Botswana Rain", cracks emerge along the fault-lines of intersecting and sometimes contradictory oppositions. The central opposition is that of family and female same-sex love and desire and these are linked to oppositional constructions of ostracization and belonging, deference and resistance, society and the individual, entrapment and freedom, and even life and death. What emerges at the intersections of these binary oppositions is a society that offers a very narrow set of choices for queer women. The story seems to suggest that to choose family and social belonging is to end up trapped; while to choose desire, individuality and freedom is to be subject to ostracization. On the surface, "Botswana Rain" also seems to frame the family/queer desire choice as one between life and death, as Sethunya's infant son figures in opposition to Kgomotso's suicide. Yet, as I will discuss, in the end the story complicates this life/death binary in potentially productive ways.

Before discussing this aspect of the stories, I need to outline more generally how the double bind at the intersection of the oppositions above is illustrated through Sethunya and Kgomotso and the different choices they make. Sethunya chooses to conform to societal expectations of womanhood by eschewing gender nonconforming behaviour and choosing to marry Thato rather than attempting to be with Kgomotso. It is arguably the fear of ostracization that drives her. Even

when she is young, as she explains in "Botswana Rain", she pretends to care about boys because she "did not want to be the odd one out" (Molefhe). The title "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" is the taunt she was bullied with as a child, and it haunts her throughout the narrative. Her marriage to Thato is framed as an attempt to prove that this taunt is not true.[33] Marriage, and the social esteem it brings, becomes a means of shielding her from the judgements passed on those who, like Kgomotso, refuse to conform. What drives Sethunya's choices is the assumption that, to draw from Mtenje's discussion of the short story "Jambula Tree", "when male and female abide by the established social rules […] of acceptable heteronormativity, the family benefits, and a woman enjoys the security of a caring, sustaining, conventional marriage" (239). What Sethunya's narrative demonstrates is that although this security protects her from the threat of societal ostracization, it also locks her away from the fulfilment of her individual desires.

This is particularly well illustrated in the dream Sethunya has in "Sethunya Likes Girls Better". In this dream, Sethunya's unconscious mind brings Kgomotso 'to life', even though Sethunya has been trying to repress thoughts of her. Sethunya cannot 'kill' Kgomotso. Even when she dies in "Botswana Rain", Kgomotso still holds a significant place in Sethunya's mind. This suggests the power of desire. The dream also reveals the power of social forces that work to control sexual desire by punishing any 'aberrant' expressions of it. As soon as Kgomotso 'comes alive' in Sethunya's dream, Sethunya is chased by those who want to "grab her and tie her down" (Molefhe). This is a clear reference to the way she feels trapped by societal expectations, as well as to her fear that her desire for Kgomotso will lead to an aggressive response. Those doing the chasing are "her mother, Father Simon" and "sad-eyed women wearing *doeks*" (emphasis in original). These figures represent the institutions of family, the church and tradition, all of which reinforce patriarchal, heteronormative notions of womanhood, which I will discuss in more detail later. For now, it is worth noting that the women who are complicit in enforcing these norms are also negatively affected by them, as implied by Sethunya's description of them as 'sad-eyed' in her dream. Sethunya flees from these representatives of societal control towards a door. Once through it, she looks "back to find Kgomotso, but as she [stands] waiting, the door [clangs] shut" and is locked by Father Simon, who throws away the key. In the dream, even when Sethunya flees societal expectations, she finds herself trapped by them. Notably, her dream implies that she is afraid both of being 'tied down' by societal expectations and of recriminations – such as literally being

[33] This is illustrated, for example, by this moment in "Sethunya Likes Girls Better": "'You're my daughter now and my heart overflows with love for you,' she [Sethunya's mother-in-law] said. As Sethunya stood up, she felt tears sting her eyes. She wiped them away as she stood up to hug her new mother. Yes, this was how things were meant to be. No one could then say she loved girls better" (Molefhe).

imprisoned due to anti-homosexuality legislation – for breaking them. This reinforces the double-bind in which Sethunya finds herself.

The power that societal expectations hold over Sethunya arguably stems from her upbringing. Her mother's acceptance of her is contingent upon her performing socially and culturally endorsed "regimes of femininity" (Gqola, "Introduction" 5). This model of womanhood is bound up with the heterosexual family structure, as the role of a 'good woman' is also that of daughter, wife and mother. Family belonging thus functions as a means of reproducing gender and sexual norms through the promise of acceptance and the threat of rejection. As Mtenje explains in another context:

> The normative social script for women is powerful and pervasive, a gendered cultural imaginary which naturalises a range of symbols and relationships – mothers and daughters, woman and child, the comfort of family, tradition and futurity – which dangle the promise of belonging and fulfillment to persuade those designated 'other' to forgo their difference and return to the fold. (251)

However, this promise of belonging is always contingent. Sethunya cannot fully experience belonging to family and society. Her queer desires fracture the sense of belonging she has attempted to manufacture through her marriage to Thato. This reveals the constructed and contingent nature of belonging more generally. Belonging begins to feel like entrapment, and yet the lure of belonging keeps Sethunya from attempting to break free.

Unlike Sethunya, Kgomotso is unwilling to conform to society's expectations of a 'good Motswana woman'. This individualism seems to stem from her family upbringing. In "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" it is revealed that Kgomotso's mother, in contrast to Sethunya's mother, "said girls could be anything they wanted to be – just like boys" (Molefhe). This reinforces Molefhe's depiction of the family as an important site for shaping gender and sexual norms. It also suggests that the dichotomy between family belonging and queer sexuality might be reimagined although, ultimately in Molefhe's narratives, societal norms sever these possibilities. This stands in contrast to stories like "Jambula Tree" by Monica Arac de Nyeko and "America" by Chinelo Okparanta, where the possibilities of families providing acceptance for queer female sexualities are more hopeful. Unlike Sethunya's 'tomboyism', which ends when her mother begins to discipline her for not behaving like a 'good girl', Kgomotso maintains her gender nonconformity into adulthood. This leads, as one scene in "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" shows, to her being perceived as a woman who pretends to be a man and thus as a woman who needs to be taught how to be a woman by "a real man" (Molefhe). By choosing to live openly, Kgomotso exposes the cracks in normative notions of gender and, concomitantly, sexuality. Claiming the freedom to express her individuality,

however, fractures her social belonging. In turn, this leads to precarity, such as the threat of sexual violence.

Ultimately, the impossibility of the choices available to the two women rest on the dichotomy of life and death that shapes the family/queer sexuality dichotomy. The clearest example of how this opposition functions is in "Botswana Rain", where the two developments in Sethunya's life since "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" are the birth of her son and Kgomotso's suicide. The choice of family and social belonging thus seems to result in new life, while the choice of sexual and gender nonconformity leads to death. Kgomotso's suicide could be read as reflecting the impossibility of the choices available to queer women trying to navigate a repressive society. In this regard, it is useful to consider her suicide in relation to Sethunya's reading of the story of Johnnie in "Sethunya Likes Girls Better". Sethunya empathises with Johnnie's attempt to attain freedom and is saddened by the inevitability of the violence that puts an end to his escape. Her awareness of the terrible consequences of moving beyond the strictures of her society is one potential reason that the story ends with Sethunya allowing herself to be enfolded by the "familiar sounds of her marriage" and going about the rituals of family life at the end of "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" (Molefhe). While the story frames heterosexist society rather than queerness itself as the cause of Kgomotso's suicide, the apparent absence of life-preserving choices for an openly queer woman might be seen to play into "the normative signifying system which so persistently marks queer identity as abnormal, death-driven, and worthless" (S. Murray 6). However, a closer examination of Molefhe's stories reveals a more subversive treatment of suicide and reproduction.

In Molefhe's story, Sethunya's child functions as the next step in Sethunya's assimilation into societal and cultural norms after her marriage to Thato. However, the futuristic implications of this 'next step' are negated by the similarity of "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" and "Botswana Rain". Despite the changes that occur in "Botswana Rain" – the existence of the child and Kgomotso's suicide – Sethunya herself is in a very similar place at the end of the second story as she is in the first. Her grief inspires no change. She seems trapped by her attempts to conform to societal norms, unable to break free from the repetitive patterns of longing and acquiescence that have come to shape her life. Having a child serves as a re-production of familial and societal norms that are antithetical to queer desire. The fact that the child is a boy could also signify the reproduction of patriarchal norms, especially since male children tend to be highly valued in patrilineal societies such as Botswana. The ending of the story, where Sethunya, Thato and the child lie together on the bed, is a moment of stasis that potentially reflects Sethunya's future – a holding pattern of contained rupture that leads to nothing new.

The simple opposition between life and death is complicated in "Botswana Rain". Despite the seeming opposition between them, "messages of birth and death" are conveyed at the same "ungodly hour of the night" (Molefhe). Just as Sethunya's child does not necessarily signify hope, Kgomotso's suicide is marked ambivalently through a sustained reference to the idea that, as she states in her suicide note, she is "going to a better place". This image of the afterlife as a 'better place' appears throughout the story and serves to close the socially enforced gap between queer sexuality and family belonging. As a child, Sethunya wishes to "be God's child and […] go to heaven where everyone was family and everyone was happy". Here, heaven signifies a familial belonging that is all-inclusive. Indeed, heavenly imagery is directly associated with queer sexual desire through Sethunya and Kgomotso's lovemaking, where Sethunya describes the experience as "soaring to the lands [she] had only dreamed of". Finally, once Kgomotso has died, the only thing that consoles Sethunya is that she has "gone to that faraway land that I dreamed of". Ironically, it is through death that the idyllic world Sethunya dreams of might be reached.

The depiction of suicide in Molefhe's story might be productively read through Sisonke Msimang's assertion that "survival requires an imperative to move or die" and that the "compulsion to die" is about "the choice to cross into the realm of death rather than live through disrespect and derision and denial" ("Crossings" x). Kgomotso's suicide note in "Botswana Rain" – "Just couldn't take it. I'm going to a better place" (Molefhe) – reflects a similar refusal to live in this space of disrespect and derision, just as she refuses to live in denial as Sethunya does. Read through this lens, Sethunya's refusal to 'move' signals a kind of metaphorical death. The dynamics of her story reflect the 'formula' that Nick Hadikwa Mwaluko outlines for queer people in Africa, which moves from "more safe, less alive" through to "more approved of, more accepted" to "more connected; more alienated" and ends with "too dead, too safe" (146-147). In a contradictory way, obsessively securing safety leads, metaphorically, to the outcome that the individual was attempting to avoid. The final image of "Botswana Rain" – "We lay together in silence, my husband, my son and me" (Molefhe) – signals belonging through the possessive pronoun 'my', with 'silence' signalling the price she has to pay for such comfort: she cannot verbalise her desires or her grief and challenge the heteronormative construction of family as mother, father and son.

The re-production of norms through the reproductive ideology of family is apparent in the scene in "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" where Sethunya is delivered to her in-laws after her wedding. When Sethunya arrives at her in-laws, the women all remind her of her mother: "the same age, the same wraparound *mateisi*, and plaited hair hidden under *doeks*, the same conviction that marriage was a good woman's trophy" (Molefhe; emphasis in original). These norms cannot be questioned, as their authority and 'rightness' is assumed by the phrase "This is how things are

done". Talking about this phrase in her interview with Van Eeden, Molefhe says: "I think these things we call taboos serve to throttle us, especially when they are proclaimed in uncomfortable-to-challenge words such as *culture* and *tradition*, and my favourite: 'This is how things are done'" (emphasis in original). The word 'throttle' here links to the death-drive that Molefhe seems to place at the heart, not of queerness, but of a society that refuses to change. 'This is how things are done', a phrase repeated throughout "Sethunya Likes Girls Better", functions as a means to shut down possibilities, alongside rigid notions of 'culture' and 'tradition'. Molefhe's two stories focus very clearly on the negation of possibilities by the intersection of a series of socially constructed binary oppositions. While the story does imagine alternatives, these exist beyond the everyday realm of life. Thus, Molefhe's work presents a rather bleak image of queer possibilities in Botswana. In the next two sections, I examine stories that provide more recuperative representations of relationships between individuals and family/community/society, despite repressive laws and heteronormative cultural traditions.

3.4 Suturing Family Fragments in "Chief of the Home"

Lamwaka's account of a gender nonconforming man in "Chief of the Home" challenges normative domestic gender roles, particularly violent patriarchal masculinity. In my reading, I suggest that, although the narrative is concerned with various (violent) fractures, it shares a restorative sensibility with its gender nonconforming character. "Chief of the Home" is the story of Lugul, a gender nonconforming man, retrospectively told by the nameless narrator who considered herself his friend. When she was young, the narrator and Lugul lived in Alokolum village – a traditional, close-knit community – in a time when "all Acholi were family" (Lamwaka, "Chief of the Home" 159). Lugul is from another village and does not have a home of his own, but he is largely accepted by the community. The men are discomforted by Lugul's preference for women's labour and company, but the women appreciate his help and welcome him into their homes for meals. He even becomes a "peace builder" (161) in the village by intervening when men beat their wives. When the war breaks out, Lugul leaves Alokolum and is shot by soldiers who suspect him of being a spy. The other significant characters in the stories are the narrator's mother, who is very fond of Lugul, and the narrator's father, who is antagonistic towards him. After Lugul's death, the narrator's father experiences a change of heart and allows Lugul's body to be buried on his land. While he is a violent patriarch during the time of peace, when war breaks out the narrator's father treats the sick and injured, for which he is shot and killed by soldiers.

Lugul eludes classification, both in his community and in terms of Western identifications. Mtenje discusses how Lugul is described by Lamwaka as a 'transgender man', although as a male

who performs a feminine gender role this is not the 'correct' identification. Mtenje suggests that it "is not that the author is merely refusing inherited categories, but that these are themselves not yet popularly understood, or even agreed upon within various communities" (269). In my analysis, I refer to Lugul as a gender nonconforming man and use 'he/his' pronouns. My use of pronouns is similar to Mtenje's. She notes that some "transgender people prefer to use the gender neutral possessive pronoun 'their' to refer to their non-binary gender identities" (270). She uses 'their' once in order to note this possibility, "but (self)consciously revert[s] to the more normative 'his' in [her] analysis, for the sake of referential clarity" (270). The narrator avoids gendered pronouns – Lugul is only ever 'you' – but other characters clearly read him as a man.

Mtenje argues that it is not clear whether the narrator is a boy or a girl, but it seems to me pretty unequivocal that the narrator is a girl in the following section of the story: "I always admired how easily you cut wood, but the other girls said, 'He is a man so he has a lot of energy to use.' I wished that the men in Alokolum would cut the wood and that we would carry it, something that men shunned because they had been taught that cutting and carrying firewood is a woman's work. My mother never asked Okello, my elder brother, to fetch water. It was also a woman's job so I never expected that of him" (Lamwaka, "Chief of the Home" 160). The narrator's use of the phrase 'other girls', the use of 'we' when talking about carrying the wood and the distinction made between the narrator and the older brother all suggest that the narrator is a girl and that this influences her perspective on Lugul in a positive way.

Mtenje thoroughly analyses "Chief of the Home" in her doctoral dissertation, focusing on how Lugul's gender nonconformity disrupts the gendered norms of the Alokolum community. The community is patriarchal, with a clear gendered division of labour, where the hardest work seems to fall to the women. The gendered power dynamic is embodied in the title 'rwot gang' or 'chief of the home', which automatically bestows authority on men. By performing women's work, Lugul eludes categorisation and Mtenje shows how Lamwaka "uses Lugul's unsettled and unsettling identity […] to critique the deficiencies of the term 'chief of the home' and the supposedly proper masculinity the term describes" (276). Despite Lugul's 'troubling' presence, he is not rejected outright by the community. The story is, as Mtenje notes "very equivocal in the representation of the relationship between Lugul and the community" (273). This "un/easy familiarity" between the community and Lugul is ruptured by the war, which "mobilises men into exaggeratedly aggressive expressions of maleness" (277). Just as Lugul unsettles the traditional gender norms of the community of Alokolum, he also offers an alternative to the "hyper-masculinity which the state requires, and by which it is secured" (276). Mtenje argues that his gender nonconformity is seen

as a threat to the power of the state, which rests on violent, patriarchal regimes of power, and that this leads to his extremely violent death.

Dakoda Smith locates the community's failure to completely accept Lugul within the way he troubles their coherent view of the world and traces their various attempts to explain him such as calling him "a mad man" or claiming he was "possessed by *cen*, spirits" (Lamwaka, "Chief of the Home" 160; emphasis in original). Smith argues that "the locals' inability to fully accept Lugul" is because, "before they can establish a relationship with [him], they need to know and understand [his] body—to obtain the experience of reward that would be finally knowing this information" (98). The anxiety of the community is arguably mitigated by the coherence offered by the certainties of a traditional way of living and the fact that while Lugul is not fully comprehensible to them, he is still known to them.

At the heart of Mtenje's analysis, and the story itself, are various fractures. These include the productive disruptions of gender norms that Lugul offers in breaking from traditional masculinity, and the destructive disruptions to traditional community ways of life exacted by the war. What I want to add to the discussion is an exploration of how the story the narrator tells functions as a reparative response to these various fractures. In particular, I focus on the way in which the narrator incorporates the story of her father into the narrative about Lugul, even though she insists: "This story is not about my father. It is your story" (Lamwaka, "Chief of the Home" 163). In doing so, I fill a lacuna in Mtenje's analysis, which focuses largely on Lugul's gender nonconformity and his relationship to the community and does not really examine the role the family plays. This discussion will expand on Mtenje's offhand observation that the narrator's father allowing Lugul's body to be buried on his land "is a decision oddly unmotivated in the plot" and merely reflects Lamwaka's wish "to push the story towards an ameliorative resolution, in which change of heart is possible, even in the typical patriarch" (277). I want to suggest that this 'ameliorative' drive is fundamental to the narrative and that, read through this lens, the father's 'change of heart' contributes rather than detracts from the narrator's tribute to Lugul.

Gqola describes "Chief of the Home" as "a loving tribute" that "stages the *reclamation* of a loved one rejected for being himself"; that insists on "*recovering* the most frightening and rejected part of the self"; that returns "to love, as a radical *revision* of the world" ("Introduction" 7; emphasis added). The narrative is not only the narrator's tribute to Lugul, but Lamwaka's tribute to a "transgender man", named Martin, who she watched growing up ("Queer Stories"). Embedded in Gqola's description and Lamwaka's motivation is a drive to tell the story of the past in order to recover it for the present and to ameliorate the material losses of the past. This sensibility resonates with Maart's District Six narratives. While Lamwaka does not position "Chief of the Home" as a

therapeutic practice for herself the way Maart does for *Rosa's District Six*, there is a sense that this is true for the story's narrator. As she explains: "I come to the graves of the people I love, and my tears won't stop flowing because I remember their stories and I may never tell their stories because of the pain it will bring me" (160). Although the story is explicitly about Lugul, her storytelling also becomes a means of keeping the memory of the community and her family alive. This recuperative intertwining is restorative in and of itself, as it documents the fractures in the relationships between Lugul, the community and her father while narratively weaving them together. By telling these stories through Lugul's story, the narrator decentres dominant narrative modes and readings of gender so as to present a narrative that is inherently queer.

The queer mode of the narrator's storytelling invokes and disrupts the (heterosexual) reproductive logics of community and family. Telling stories around the fire is described as a community activity in the village of Alokolum, where stories are passed on "from generation to generation" (159). Communal storytelling is thus situated within the heterosexual reproductive logic of family. Lugul's story is not this "kind of story" (159) and so the narrator tells Lugul's story in a different manner – in an intimate form that directly addresses Lugul himself. This form is relational, like the communal tradition of storytelling, but allows for a focus on individual choice rather than group norms. This narrative form also queers the linear logic of heteronormativity by addressing Lugul's story back to him instead of on to the next generation. This intimate mode is also necessary due to the rupture in the community, which disrupts the storytelling tradition and the clear generational line. The structure of the narrative itself is also non-linear, often juxtaposing past and present. Even when it returns to the past, the narrative does not follow a strictly chronological order as it jumps between the narrator's various observations and anecdotes. This structure arguably reflects a suturing together of narrative fragments, created by the loss of communal continuity, in a recuperative attempt at storytelling. It also reflects the narrator's attempt to stitch together a narrative around other painful memories.

It is arguably this narrative structure that makes the narrator's father's choice to bury Lugul seem 'oddly unmotivated by the plot', but it is possible to read a potential motivation into this gap if we consider the father's narrative closely. The narrator reveals the gendered distinction in the Alokolum community's response to Lugul through the different responses of her parents, with the family functioning as a microcosm of the community. The narrator's mother embodies the acceptance the women show Lugul, while her father represents the men's antagonism towards him. He frequently makes comments that denigrate Lugul, reinforce traditional gender norms and show him to be deeply invested in maintaining a dominant form of masculinity. This suggests that family norms shape the gender norms of the community and that community gender norms shape the

family. This is most apparent in the title of 'chief of the home', which positions the man as undisputed head of the household. By challenging these traditional community gender norms, Lugul challenges normative understandings of the family and thus patriarchal power. Yet, he also serves as a recuperative force for family unity in the village by protecting women from their abusive husbands, such as the narrator's father. This productive rather than destructive mode is embodied in the narrator's description of him as a "*latek*, a peace builder" (160; emphasis in original). Lugul's peaceable, restorative, 'feminine' way of being stands in distinct contrast to a violent normative masculinity.

The war reveals the destructive nature of this normative masculinity. I want to suggest that the narrator's father's change of heart about Lugul stems from what the war exposes: that violent masculinity is antithetical rather than fundamental to the traditional way of life in which, judging by his insistence on staying in Alokolum during the war, the narrator's father is deeply invested. It is in the second last paragraph of the story that the narrator recounts this aspect of her father's life, ending with the assertion: "He died helping people" (163), which suggests an attempt by the narrator to reclaim the figure of her father from his violent past. The final paragraph begins: "But this is not about my father. It is your [Lugul's] story" (163). There is a strange disjuncture here, suggesting an inept storyteller who has wandered off from the main thrust of her narrative and needs to get back to the point. It also speaks to a discomfort on the part of the narrator in telling the story of her father, who represents the contradictions at the heart of the community that she has lost. There is arguably an attempt here to suture together a clear image of her father. Ultimately, she cannot comfortably reconcile the violent patriarch with the man of healing, but Lugul's story offers a chance for healing in relation to her father. Therefore, the story is both a tribute to Lugul and a legacy of his role as a peace builder. The narrator even imagines his legacy in her father's turn to healing, suggesting that he might have been inspired by Lugul.

Through her storytelling, the narrator thus creates a (re)generational space, that revives, in the imagination, the potentialities of the Alokolum village community for the inclusion of difference and the restorative legacy of Lugul's life. One of these possibilities is a more expansive imagination of family. Just as Mtenje argues that the narrator offers a more generous conceptualisation of the title 'chief of the home' by bestowing it on Lugul, so her narrative intertwining of self, 'other', community and family suggests a continuity between them. This possibility of a more expansive notion of family is embedded in the past where "all Acholi were family" (159). Here, the metaphor of family is framed in a positive light, in a manner that is expansive rather than exclusionary, and speaks to a time when close community ties bound the people together. As an outsider without a home of his own in the village, Lugul has no family ties

and yet he becomes "part of everyone's home" (160), thus modelling a more expansive mode of belonging. Lugul's story, in the narrator's hands, thus becomes a way of imagining queer ways of suturing together a society fractured by various forms of gendered violence.

3.5 'Queering Queer Africa' in "Chebor's Light"

Ilamwenya's "Chebor's Light" is something of an anomaly in the *Queer Africa 2* collection in that it takes the African tradition of woman-woman marriage as its subject without queering it as a space of possibility for female-female sexual intimacy. The only other short story I have come across that deals with woman-woman marriage is "Two Weddings for Amoit" by Dilman Dila. This story is speculative fiction set in a post-apocalyptic East Africa, where a fundamentalist Christian Council rules. In the story, woman-woman marriage is allowed as a means to deal with the infertility problem besetting the population, but homosexuality is illegal and discovery means death by firing squad. Amoit, who is in love with another woman, marries a man so that she can exploit the possibility of woman-woman marriage for being close to her beloved. In contrast to "Chebor's Light", this narrative does imagine the possibilities of woman-woman marriage for harbouring female same-sex love and desire.

In other words, "Chebor's Light" seems to be a relatively 'straight' interpretation of a custom that bolsters the importance of family and reproduction. Its placement within the frame of 'queer Africa' thus raises a productive disjuncture which, as I will discuss, might be used as a starting point for 'queering queer Africa'. Set in Kenya, "Chebor's Light" is the story of the eponymous character whose place in Kalenjin society – solidified by a good marriage – is slowly eroded due to her infertility. In a desperate attempt to conceive a child, she has sex with men other than her husband, but to no avail. This narrative of Chebor's social descent is told in a flashback. In the present, she lives with her father – it is unclear what has happened to her husband – whose disappointment with her is palpable. She is surprised when the village elders arrive, announcing that they have a solution to her problem. What they propose is a woman-woman marriage to Chebet, an eighteen-year-old widow who has children and wealth, but needs help to deal with both due to her youth and her mental instability after her husband's death. Despite Chebor's initial shock at the idea, she and Chebet are married in a traditional ceremony, leading to contentious discussions between older and younger generations about the 'rightness' of such a custom. Chebor, now gifted with a companion and children, is unconcerned by the disapproval of the town. For her, "now, everything is possible" (Ilamwenya 20).

Woman-woman marriage, as Regina Smith Oboler observes, is "widespread in African patrilineal societies, although the way it functions varies from society to society" (69). Even though

woman-woman marriage was relatively common, and is still practiced today despite pressures from Christian authorities, it has received very little scholarly attention (Njambi and O'Brien 1). Writing in 1980 about woman-woman marriage amongst the Nandi, a sub-group of the Kalenjin people to whom Chebor belongs, Oboler describes woman-woman marriage as when one woman, whom she terms a 'female husband',[34]

> pays bridewealth for, and thus marries (but does not have sexual intercourse with) another woman. By so doing, she becomes the social and legal father of her wife's children. […]. In Nandi, a female husband should always be a woman of advanced age who has failed to bear a son. The purpose of the union is to provide a male heir. (69)

Defined within these parameters, woman-woman marriage has a normative reproductive function because it exists to deal with issues arising from a male-centric notion of lineage and inheritance. Furthermore, woman-woman marriage, unlike Western conceptualisations of same-sex marriage, is asserted to be sexless. Oboler's article focuses on how the 'female husband' is culturally conceptualised as a man and must behave like a man in relation to her wife and children: "Female husbands believe that they can be harmed by pollution connected with the wife's children and treat them with the same cool aloofness displayed by male fathers" (79). Therefore, while the notion of the 'female husband' might initially seem queer, its role, as Oboler argues, is to maintain normative ideas about gender roles

There are clear disjunctures between the woman-woman marriage that Oboler describes and the woman-woman marriage in "Chebor's Light". Chebor, for example, is not of advanced age. Nor does she take on a distinctly male role or remain aloof from the children. Instead, Chebor is feeding one of the children in the final scene of the story. She also treats Chebet as a friend, as is indicated by their mutual gossiping. There are contestations about these aspects of woman-woman marriage in the literature, notably in Njambi and O'Brien's article on the Gīkūyū of Kenya. They challenge the reduction of woman-woman marriages to pure functionality by highlighting other reasons for this kind of marriage, including emotional support. For Chebor marriage offers the care and belonging of a family not only for herself, but for her father, while for Chebet it offers emotional and child-rearing support. Njambi and O'Brien assert, following Donna Haraway, that woman-woman marriage "can be compelling to feminists who are constantly searching for unique practices of feminism that resemble, but are not engineered by, western feminism" (19). "Chebor's Light" offers such a feminism, as woman-woman marriage offers mutual female support and a place of refuge from patriarchal expectations of women, although it does not challenge the broader patriarchal values of the society as a whole. The story's narrative does not set about to free Chebor

[34] Njambi and O'Brien critique this term in their paper on woman-woman marriage among the Gīkūyū of Kenya.

from traditional society's expectations for women or from the necessity of family. Rather, her difficulties are addressed by the village elders through the "esteemed traditions" of the Kalenjin people (Ilamwenya 18).

Considering that "Chebor's Light" is fiction, I do not think it is productive to further pursue the disjunctures in the various accounts of how woman-woman marriages function. Doing so would prove a difficult, if not impossible task, considering the ways in which temporal, spatial and cultural contexts might influence how woman-woman marriages are enacted and to what purposes they are put. I am more interested in considering the relationship that exists between the concept of woman-woman marriage and lesbian/queer politics. This is brought to the foreground by the position of "Chebor's Light" within *Queer Africa 2*. Including the story in the collection suggests that woman-woman marriage is queer, even as Ilamwenya's characters assert, as Ifi Amadiume does, that it has nothing to do with same-sex sexuality. Thus, the story exposes certain theoretical fractures, particularly at the intersection of 'queer' and 'Africa'.

In her ground-breaking work, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, first published in 1987, Amadiume criticizes the ways in which woman-woman marriages and other close female relationships in the African context have been used as a means to bolster lesbian identities in the West. She explains that "[t]here are already some indications that Black lesbians are using […] prejudiced interpretations of African situations to justify their choices of sexual alternatives which have roots and meaning in the West" (7). Amadiume contests the interpretation of these African relationships as lesbian due to the fact that these interpretations would be "shocking and offensive" to the women in these relationships, and cautions: "In our search for power, or more positive role models and images of powerful women, there is a limit to how far facts can be bent to our own wishes and fantasies imposed" (7). These comments led Kathryn Kendall to accuse Amadiume of "virulent homophobia" insisting that to deny the possibility of the erotic between female 'husbands' and their wives is "insulting and essentializing in the extreme" (238-239 qtd. in K. Kaoma 70).

Although I agree with Kendall's assertion that to deny any possibility of erotic intimacy between women in woman-woman marriages is essentializing, I think she misreads Amadiume here. Amadiume seems less concerned with erasing erotic possibilities than she is with contesting the erasure of the specificity of this particular social practice into a broad, Western lesbian politics. At the (dis)juncture between these theorisations emerges the tension between 'queer' and 'Africa', where each might threaten the other's erasure. Nyanzi asserts that to "queer 'Queer Africa' one must simultaneously reclaim Africa in its bold diversities *and* reinsert queerness" ("Queering Queer Africa" 65; my emphasis). Drawing on the way in which queer is used to unsettle all kinds

of essentialised binaries including, as Nyanzi reminds us, the homosexual/heterosexual binary, I ask how Ilamwenya's decision not to include any sexual component in the relationship between Chebor and Chebet might function in a queer manner. I consider how the story signifies in relation to its position in *Queer Africa 2*, where the other stories it exists alongside are more easily recognised as 'queer'.

I would argue that Ilamwenya's representation of a woman-woman marriage without a sexual component might be seen to 'queer' the queer stories around it by providing an alternative configuration of a woman-woman relationship. It expands ideas about what same-sex marriage might look like beyond Western configurations of marriage that centre around romantic love and sexual desire. The story also serves to celebrate a traditional aspect of African culture that has been eroded by Western intervention; subverting the tendency to frame the West as progressive in matters of the family and same-sex marriage, and Africa as 'backwards'. Amadiume, in her 2014 preface to *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, discredits Kendall's accusation of 'virulent homophobia' by briefly discussing the issue of same-sex marriage in the West. Here, she credits the indigenous African tradition of woman-woman marriage as having "sowed the idea" although "not the sexual practice as such" for same-sex marriage, as it was becoming accepted in the West, and observes the irony of "Euro-America […] reaping this victory; while patriarchal aspects of the contemporary, Euro-inherited modern African states are regressively punitive against gay rights" (xv). Within Amadiume's formulation here, the West's 'progress' has been pre-empted by African society and Africa's 'backwardness' is a result of Western influence.

"Chebor's Light" illustrates a similar notion in its portrayal of the various reactions of Chebor's community to the idea of woman-woman marriage. Woman-woman marriage is proposed by the elders and is firmly situated in a traditional African past. The last orkoik in Elburgon, Mzee Kimtai, notes that their "ancestors made provision for women who were consigned to [the] ill fate" of infertility (Ilamwenya 18). At the marriage ceremony, the elders are the ones who are excited about the marriage and spend a lot of time explaining to the horrified youth about "a compassionate society where individual flaws and limitations were borne by everyone" and where woman-woman marriage was common, because they "could not condemn anyone for something they could not change" (20). In the eyes of the elders, woman-woman marriage is not queer because it fits within the norms of their society. In this way, tradition is shown as full of alternative means of inclusion for those who find themselves unable to live up to the norms of the society.

In the story, it is the youth, who have lost touch with their traditions, who are opposed to the marriage. When Chebor she first hears of the idea, she is horrified: "How can you deem it fit

for a woman in the twenty-first century to marry another woman?" (18). She thus situates her objections to the marriage not within tradition, but within modernity. She sees social progress and woman-woman marriage as incompatible. The younger generation's assertions that woman-woman marriage is 'un-African' and forbidden by the Bible implies that their understanding of what is 'African' comes from outside of their own culture (20). The mention of the Bible alludes to Africa's history of colonisation and the ways in which Christian understandings of marriage, gender and sexual morality have been overlaid onto pre-colonial cultures. It is also the youth who want to know about the sexual aspect of the marriage: "And sex? What about that?" (20). In this moment, reading the possibility of sex between the women is not a queer strategy, but rather a normative one that seeks to repudiate this alternative social arrangement. This arguably speaks back to Amadiume's caution about interrogative (mis)reading of African woman-woman relationships. While woman-woman marriage might not be queer in relation to the traditions of the community, it is queer to the contemporary norms of the society, which are shown to have been heavily influenced by various Western discourses. This foreground the ways in which queer is always contextual; always in relation to the 'norm', which is itself constantly shifting. To quote Sally Ann Murray from another context, the story highlights "the forms of relation that always exist between 'queerness' and 'normativity', no matter how much we may have been schooled to deny such reciprocity" (12).

Similarly to "Chief of the Home", which Mtenje sees as a potential response to Nyanzi's call to 'queer Queer Africa', "Chebor's Light" critiques restrictive family and social norms, but positions the traditions of the past as holding possibilities for other ways of being. As the final line of the story asserts: "For Chebor, now, everything is possible" (Ilamwenya 20). These possibilities are posited within the realm of the reproductive family, even as the family takes on an alternative form. In this way, we can see the assertion that Ilamwenya "uses her work to teach the intricacies of Africa: the immense wealth of wisdom, practices and possibilities in this well endowed continent" (Xaba and Martin 307). Including "Chebor's Light" in *Queer Africa 2* is arguably a queer move on the part of the editors, opening up a productive disjuncture that allows us to ask, as Nyanzi does: "if queer is allowed to be queer, why are boundaries of inclusion and exclusion forcibly drawn?" ("Queering Queer Africa" 66). This is not to say that "Chebor's Light" can comfortably be read as queer. Rather, it is its uncertain relation to 'queerness' and the way that it reveals the contingent nature of both 'queer' and the 'norm' that makes it a productive contribution to 'Queer Africa'.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the depiction of a variety of family forms. Specifically, I have explored the fractured and contradictory relationships that emerge between these modes of belonging and individuals who queer gender and sexual expectations. The 'family' itself is shown to be multiple in its manifestations, ranging from the 'traditional' two-parent household in Molefhe, Lamwaka and Holmes's stories, to the household headed by co-wives in Ilamwenya's narrative. Contradictions abound in these stories, from the father figure who is both violent and nurturing in "Chief of the Home", to the woman-woman marriage that is both traditional and queer in "Chebor's Light". These complexities are all reflected in the often paradoxical relationships that the queer characters have with family and, concomitantly, with broader social structures such as community and nation. Even when these relationships are shown to be oppressive or restrictive, they are still portrayed as integral to the lives of the characters. Family can offer refuge even as it curtails freedom; community can be both accepting and suspicious of gender nonconformity; and nation can privilege one aspect of identity even as it erases another.

Taken together, these stories trouble simplistic notions of individual autonomy, particularly when it comes to gender and sexuality. These stories do not necessarily illustrate quite what Butler means in *Undoing Gender* when she talks about "the constitutive sociality of the self" and the ways in which human beings are "undone by each other" (19). Nevertheless, these authors' explorations of the excruciating tensions in relationships between families, communities and queer individuals certainly speak to the fact that "when we speak about *my* sexuality or *my* gender" as Butler insists "we do (and we must), we mean something complicated by it" (19; emphasis in original). In the stories, the genders and sexualities of the queer characters are often in opposition to the expectations of the family and the community, and yet the difficulties they experience in breaking away from those expectations and norms embodied in those intimate relationships highlights how impossible a clean break is. In Butler's words, these tensions display "the way in which we are in the thrall of our relations with others that we cannot always recount or explain" (19). These stories focus on the ways in which relationships are integral to making life liveable for human beings, and how family relationships are often particularly significant in this regard. Ultimately, these stories point to the necessity of exposing the fractures in the supposed coherence of patriarchal, heterosexist norms, and remaking family, community and nation in ways that imagine new kinds of belonging for queer individuals.

Chapter 4: Reconceptualising Queer Sexualities in Relation to Religion

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have explored how family might affect the lives of queer individuals and the expression of their sexuality, as well as how 'queerness' might challenge patriarchal, heteronormative family structures. In this chapter, I focus on religion. Religion, similarly to family, has a significant amount of ideological power in shaping how sexualities are conceptualised and experienced. I examine a selection of short stories from Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa that explicate the tension between queer sexuality and religion; in this case Christianity and Islam. This tension emerges in multiple ways, as characters grapple with reconciling their beliefs with their queer desires or find themselves ostracized by communities that use religion to justify their homophobia. Nonetheless, as with my analysis in the previous chapter, I trace a productive response to these tensions through the stories as they work to reconceptualise queer sexualities, sometimes within and sometimes outside of religious terms. In doing so, they also offer a potential reconceptualisation of religion in their pragmatic, flexible and sometimes sacrilegious approach.

Apart from the stories I discuss here, there are many other short stories, both discussed elsewhere in this thesis and not covered. They are not included here because they either do not represent a particular conflict or tension between relious belief and queer sexuality, or else do not offer a reconceptualization. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Jumping Monkey Hill", Chinelo Okparanta's "America" and Monica Arac de Nyeko's "Jambula Tree" all include moments that point to the conflict between Christianity and queer sexuality. Wame Molefhe's "Sethunya Likes Girls Better" and "Botswana Rain" deal with this issue more extensively, but at no point offer an alternative conceptualisation. In contrast to these stories, Adichie's "The Shivering" portrays a gay character who is also a devout Pentecostal Christian from Nigeria. While he cannot live openly in his home country, he is represented as having no difficulty reconciling his faith with his sexuality. Similarly, in Maart's "Ai, Gadija", Gairo is accepted into her Muslim family without any concerns and, in Suzy Bell's "Mrs Habib's Hypothalamus", the main character lives comfortably in the Muslim area of the Bo-Kaap, despite sexually desiring other women and not being a practising Muslim.

The first section of this chapter deals with two stories that engage directly with Christian conceptualisations of queer sexuality – "Grace" by Nigerian author Chinelo Okparanta, published in her short story collection, *Happiness, Like Water,* and "Telling Stories" by Kenyan author Happy Mwende Kinyili, published in the *Queer African Reader* (2013). Okparanta has an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her short story, "America", was shortlisted for the 2013 Caine Prize for

African Writing. She has also published a collection of short stories, *Happiness, Like Water*, and a novel, *Under the Udala Trees.* Kinyili is the Director of Programmes at Mama Cash, a fund for feminist activism. I read these stories as didactic narratives that challenge homophobic readings of the Bible by reconceptualising queer sexuality through the frame of divine love. I consider the techniques each story uses to put this message across and how effective they are.

The second section examines two short stories that depict the sexual awakening of young Muslim women and how religious discourses are invoked to police their sexual desires. These stories, "Nine Pieces of Desire" and "Is It Love That Has You?" by Kenyan writers Idza L and Bishara Mohamed, both published in *Queer Africa 2*, reconceptualise queer sexuality outside of the framework of religious discourse. L "is interested in writing stories about women and the lives they live" (Xaba and Martin 307). Apart from *Queer Africa 2*, she has also written for Jalada Africa, Short Story Day Africa and Writivism. Mohamed is an interdisciplinary artist who uses visual media, film, performance, public speaking and writing in her work.

The final section considers how South African author Lindiwe Nkutha adopts a sacrilegious approach to religion in "Confessions of Karelina", published in *Open,* and "The Glass Pecker", published in *180º*. Nkutha is a multimedia storyteller. Apart from the three queer short stories examined in this thesis, Nkutha has also published poetry, made two films – *Muted Screams* and *Jo'burg Rising* – self-published a novella and showcased photographic work. "The Glass Pecker" was published in 2005 in *180º: New Fiction by South African Women Writers* and "Confessions of Karelina" was published in 2008 in *Open: An Erotic Anthology by South African Women Writers.* I examine how Nkutha subverts various aspects of the Catholic faith, including the sacrament of confession and the figure of the Virgin Mary, and appropriates other religious traditions in reconceptualising female same-sex sexuality as sacred. Thus, each section examines different religious concepts and explores the methods that the authors employ in the process of reconceptualisation.

4.1.1 Conceptualising 'Reconceptualising' and 'Religion': Defining Terms

Religion offers compelling resources for conceptualising the world and its social and moral dimensions. The forms of understanding it creates also shape behaviour, such as when same-sex sex is conceptualised as deviant within religious discourse it can be used to justify the persecution of those who practice it. By 'religion', I am referring to more than just the belief in, and worship of, a higher power. I use religion to mean a system of faith.[35] Although the terms 'religion' and

[35] The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines 'religion' as "the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power" and "a particular system of faith and worship".

'spirituality' are linked, it is this systematic element of religion that is absent from spirituality. (The spiritual has to do with belief in the spirit or soul.)[36] This system of faith includes sets of beliefs, practices, religious texts, holy figures or icons, figures of authority and a variety of related discourses espoused by the communities that practice religion.

By reconceptualisation I mean the process of forming an understanding of something in response to a previously existing conceptualisation. I think of reconceptualisation as a process that is part of the constant contestation of meaning that occurs within texts of all kinds, rather than as a finite act. In this case, I use reconceptualisation in a reparative sense to refer to the development of alternatives to dominant religious discourses about queer sexualities. Reconceptualisation is thus similar to the concept of revisioning, which is the subject of chapter two, but has more to do with engaging with concepts than reimagining histories. I argue that the stories selected for this chapter engage in reconceptualisations of queer sexualities through questioning, interrogating, challenging, reinterpreting and subverting religious discourses. Some of these stories provide clear reconceptualisations, while others are more open-ended, but all offer alternative ways of thinking about and imagining queer sex and sexuality in contrast to some of the negative conceptualisations propagated through religious discourse. While I focus on stories that deal with damaging religious discourses about queer sexualities, it is worth noting that not all religious discourses on the subject are negative. I discuss some of the positive aspects in the next sub-section.

4.1.2 The Abrahamic Religions in Africa

Religion has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on the way in which queer sexualities are conceptualised. Halberstam goes so far as to claim that, "when it comes to gender norms and sexual mores, religion really is the root of all evil, and that cuts across all religions" (*Gaga Feminism* 28). While religion has certainly shaped restrictive norms and been used to justify violence against those who do not conform, there are also multiple religions, practised in a variety of ways. To frame this complex set of discourses and practises simply as 'the root of all evil' is not very illuminating.[37] Even more problematically, this dismissal ignores the agency of queer people and how they grapple with religious discourses. These engagements include the (re)interpretation

[36] The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines 'spiritual' as "relating to or affecting the human spirit or soul".

[37] Halberstam's call for a purely secular examination of gender and sexuality can also be problematized in relation to David Carr's observation about the importance of rereading the Bible in relation to sexuality: "The more I have become clear about the way the Bible has been used to repress sexuality, the more I have moved toward a rereading of the Bible as a whole. I do this out of a conviction that real change requires an engagement with the cultural resources we already have. Only thus can our solutions connect with where we are and take us forward. To be sure, there are some who would prefer simply to disregard the Bible, but it is too deeply embedded in many of us and in our culture. We ignore it at our peril. Just when we think we are free of it, old interpretations of the Bible come back and misguide us again" (11-12).

of holy texts and laws, the practice of religious rituals, the challenging of religious institutions and the appropriation of religious symbols, figures and discourse in ways that would be considered sacrilegious by orthodox practitioners of the faith.[38] These kinds of meaning-making are apparent in the stories selected for this chapter. Literature offers an important platform for the imaginative exploration of the agency of the individual,[39] which is often lost in broader debates about religious ideology.[40] Although my analysis focuses on literary depictions of religious issues, it is necessary for me to briefly outline the stances the religions under discussion take on queer sexuality. Since this is not an exhaustive study on this subject, this introduction cannot cover all the tensions and contradictions of this subject, but does attempt to point towards some of these complexities.

Tamale observes that eighty-six per cent of the African population subscribe to the Abrahamic religions (Christianity and Islam) ("Exploring the Contours" 152). These are the religions dealt with in the stories discussed in this chapter. She notes, however, that African Traditional Religions (ATRs) still have a considerable influence and are often practised alongside Christianity and Islam (152). I discuss ATRs briefly in the next section and outline how they have played a distinctly different role in conceptualising queer sexualities than the Abrahamic Religions. The influence of Islam in Africa began in the middle of the seventh century when Arabic forces gained control of the North African coast (Levtzion and Pouwels, "Patterns of Islamization" 2). The spread of Islam was very much influenced by geography. It moved from the North to West Africa through the Sahara Desert and reached East Africa across the Indian Ocean (1). It "reached South Africa with free and slave migration from Malaya and the islands of the Indian Ocean" (8). Islam remained the dominant Abrahamic religion in Africa from the twelfth until about the eighteenth century (1) and still plays a significant role in many African societies. Christianity has an even longer history in Africa than Islam. According to tradition, St Mark introduced Christianity to Egypt as early as the 1st century and leaders in the North African Churches "provided the foundations of Christian theology" (Parratt 1). This Christianity was lost as Islam became more dominant, only surviving as a minority faith in Egypt and in "highly distinctive form" as the

[38] In the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 'orthodox' is defined as "following or conforming to the traditional or generally accepted rules or beliefs of a religion, philosophy, or practice". It can also mean "of the ordinary or usual type; normal". Therefore, 'queer', meaning 'non-normative', stands in contrast to orthodoxy.

[39] In his work, Scott Kugle emphasises the agency of LGBTQIQ Muslims. He notes that the experiences of LGBTQIQ activists "showcase a sustained struggle to reconcile religious belonging with alienation because of sexual orientation and gender identity" (Kugle, *Living Out Islam* 6). I would argue that this reflects a process of constant reconceptualisation, in which these Muslim people rethink religious discourse surrounding sexualities and genders.

[40] Life writing plays a similar role to literature in that it foregrounds individual experience. An important example in relation to queer sexuality and religion in Africa is *Hijab: Unveiling Queer Muslim Lives* (2009), edited by Pepe Henricks. Although religion is not their main subject, *Proudly Malawian: Life Stories from Lesbian and Gender-nonconforming Individuals* (2016), edited by Xaba and Crystal Biruk, and *Trans: Transgender Life Stories from South Africa* (2011), edited by Ruth Morgan et al, all contain multiple stories that discuss the contributors' experiences with religion.

national religion of Ethiopia (Isichei 2). Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Christianity was reintroduced to some African societies, but renewed interest in missionary work only came in the late eighteenth century "as a result of the Evangelical revival" (2), particularly among the Protestants. Despite its slow and sporadic start, the "expansion of Christianity in twentieth-century Africa has been so dramatic that it has been called 'the fourth great age of Christian expansion'" (1). Today, Christianity plays an integral role in the lives of millions of African people.

It is generally understood that "Islamic law categorically forbids homosexuality" (Zollner 193), while Christianity conceptualises homosexual acts as inherently sinful. Both share the view that procreation is the purpose of sex.[41] According to Nicole Kligerman, in Islam, "homosexuality is seen as an aberration of Allah's will which threatens Muslims with extinction" (54). For Christians, "the only real sex between persons is penile-vaginal intercourse" and thus "same-sex relations are necessarily 'less than the norm' and to be opposed" (Gorrell 23). Nevertheless, there are some distinct differences between Islam and Christianity in their approach to sexuality. Firstly, Muslim understandings of sexuality influence the penalties for sexual transgressions under shari'a (Islamic law), while Christianity (at least theoretically) offers punishment only in the afterlife. Secondly, Islam is not fundamentally erotophobic, as sexual pleasure is valorised, while, as Paul Gorrell argues, Christianity is generally erotophobic.[42] This means that it fears "sexual desire" and "erotic pleasure" and thus "endorses the control and abdication of the wonder of sexual feelings, of the pleasure of erotic experiences, and of the beauty of sexual differences" (21). This difference is apparent in the two religions' treatment of female sexuality:

> In Christian philosophy sex is associated with sin and women are therefore discouraged from being sexual. Unlike Christianity, Islam does not deny women's sexuality but instead portrays it as more powerful and dangerous than men's. For this reason it has to be controlled. (Pereira and Ibrahim 922)

In the stories discussed in this chapter, the religious conceptualisation of same-sex sexuality is often intertwined with that of female sexuality.

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[41] In the Christian tradition, Thomas Aquinas, writing in the 1200s, explicated a number of types of 'unnatural vice', including male-male sex, the "the common denominator of which is their hindering of procreation" (Efron 70). Aquinas has had a profound influence on Christian conceptualisations of sin and sexuality.

[42] According to Gayle Rubin: "Western cultures generally consider sex to be a dangerous, destructive, negative force. Most Christian tradition, following Paul, holds that sex is inherently sinful. It may be redeemed if performed within marriage for procreative purposes and if the pleasurable aspects are not enjoyed too much" (148). Carr argues that early Christianity was influenced by the antisexual elements of certain Greek traditions, as well as the belief that the world was soon to end and so sex and family was a distraction (5). He claims that although "there are certainly exceptions to this antisexual attitude, most of Christianity has been more hostile toward sex than is almost any other world religion" (6), and although this attitude has changed somewhat in recent times, the legacy of a history of hostility towards sex within Christianity remains. Those attempting to "rethink Christian theology in an eros-affirming way" are often "women, gay and lesbian people, and others whose sexuality is most judged by traditional Christianity" (9)

The general pathologisation of homosexuality apparent in the brief theoretical discussion above plays out in attitudes towards same-sex sexuality in the various contexts under discussion in this chapter. In Nigeria, which has about equal numbers of Christian and Muslim adherents (Pereira and Ibrahim 923), the anti-homosexuality bill that was passed in 2014, (which punishes same-sex acts with up to fourteen years in prison) was welcomed by both Christian and Muslim leaders (Nzwili). Similarly, in Kenya, which is a majority Christian country with approximately 30 percent of the country subscribing to Islam (Menkhaus 109), the anti-gay message finds resonance amongst both Christians and Muslims (Robinson). Somalia, a majority-Muslim country, has anti-homosexuality laws carrying a punishment of incarceration for up to three years (Stewart). There are reports that the death penalty has been meted out in those areas of Somalia where strict shari'a law is enforced by the terrorist group Al-Shabaab (Stewart). Homosexuality is also punishable by death in the northern states of Nigeria where shari'a is in effect (Okparanta, *Under the Udala Trees*). In South Africa, although same-sex sexuality is protected by law, there are plenty of examples of religious organizations promulgating homophobic rhetoric. A good example is the African Christian Democratic Party "which has vehemently opposed gay rights since its founding in 1993 and the decriminalization of homosexuality in South Africa" (Engela). These various examples reveal ways in which religion's conceptualisations of queer sexualities can have real effects on the treatment of queer people, either by bolstering secular legislation, enacting its own punishments based on religious law, or even in contesting legislation that protects gay rights.

Although Islamic and Christian texts and discourses are often invoked to support homophobic legislation and attitudes, this does not necessarily mean that practicing these religions has to be antithetical to queer acceptance. Certainly, there are many queer Muslims and Christians who have reconciled their faith and their sexuality.[43] There are also religious scholars, authorities and denominations who support rather than condemn queer people. For example, Zollner points out that the view that homosexuality transgresses shari'a is largely put forward by neo-orthodox scholars and is not held by all Islamic legal scholars (193). While the Catholic Church and others remain staunch in their condemnation of homosexuality as sin, the Anglican Church is known to be far more liberal, instating its first openly gay bishop in 2004 (Grossman). There are also examples from the African continent. Rev Rowland Jide Macaulay founded Nigeria's first gay church, House of Rainbow, although it is run from London (Machunga). South Africa is home to Africa's first gay-friendly mosque, founded by Imam Muhsin Hendricks (Bruce-Lockhart), and Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu has been vocal in his defence of gay rights. Tutu has been

[43] Examples of this can be found in some of the life-writing in *Trans, Hijab* and the interviews in Kugle's *Living Out Islam.*

most publicly and harshly criticized for these views by controversial US pastor, Steven Anderson (Mortlock). This is somewhat ironic in light of the narrative of a homophobic Africa and a progressive West.

The discussion of the intersection between religion and queer sexualities on the African continent is complicated by colonial histories, including contemporary neo-colonial interventions by right-wing US Christian groups. Van Zyl sums up the issue succinctly:

> Many post-colonial rulers today who decry homosexuality as unAfrican were educated in these religious traditions [Islam and Christianity], bringing colonial erasures into imagined present-day African identities. Currently new waves of imperialist Christianity and Islam aligned with post-colonial heteropatriarchies are (re)fuelling misogyny and the hatred of homosexuals throughout Africa. Essentialised post-colonial African identities informed by nationalist 'struggle' masculinities advance 'cultural' arguments against gender equality and homosexuality. Simultaneously contemporary African sexual subjectivities are still being wrought through northern discursive regimes of globalised identities, and queers seek legitimacy for their identities through universalising human rights discourses […]. ("Taming Monsters" 151)

In other words, discrimination against 'homosexuals' in Africa today is informed by the legacy of colonial religious discourses and by neo-imperialist religious movements. Epprecht observes, for example, that "the most vocal defenders of 'African traditions' in the 1990s have tended to be Christian, university-educated, often professionals, and often with years of living in the West under their belts" ("The Unsaying"). Kapya John Kaoma argues, rather polemically, that the "true instigators" of homophobic legislation in countries like Uganda are "U.S. Christian Right figures" (vi). In this case, homophobia might be regarded as a Western import rather than homosexuality. While this is an oversimplification, it does point to the inherent fallacy of both the 'homosexuality is un-African' and 'African homophobia' stereotypes.

At the same time, dominant liberatory discourses surrounding sexualities are also situated in the West. These discourses run the risk of reinforcing colonial stereotypes of African 'barbarity' in contrast to an 'enlightened' West, specifically through the stereotype of 'homophobic Africa'. Islam in general is more complicated to discuss in relation to sexuality than Christianity, even when it is not situated on the African continent, due to the contentious relationship between Islamic countries and the West. For example, Joseph Massad notes that the "new Islamist discourse" sets up a binary logic of "Western licentiousness versus adherence to 'true' Islam" (193). An inverted, Islamophobic version of this binary also exists in Western discourse that pits "sexual 'rights" against "repression and religious barbarism" (193). Habib makes a similar point. Massad critiques this reductionist binary logic on both fronts and points out the irony of the "fact that much of Islamist discourse on sex and sexuality is an emulation of Western Christian fundamentalisms" (194). To borrow from Samar Habib, queer people in Africa "do not uniformly live a life of

oppression" as there are "plenty of dynamic inconsistencies" in their societies (xxviii). The stories analysed in this chapter explore some of these 'dynamic inconsistencies' and complexities, thus providing a complex literary intervention into reductionist discourses about religion, queer sexuality and the African continent.

4.1.3 The Queer Possibilities of African Traditional Religions

Before delving into the main body of this chapter, where I examine stories that depict tensions between religion and queer sexualities, I want to briefly discuss the function that African Traditional Religions have played in contemporary reconceptualisations of African 'queerness' in scholarly and fictional works. 'ATRs' is an umbrella term for a myriad of spiritual traditions that originated on the African continent and share a number of features, such as ancestor-worship. It is a porous term and can be seen to include the Abrahamic religions, since, John Mbiti argues, both "are 'traditional' and 'African' in a historical sense, and he sees it as a pity that they tend to be regarded as 'foreign', 'European' and 'Arab'" (xii). Certainly, both Islam and Christianity have influenced older traditional practises and, conversely, these practises have 'Africanized' the Abrahamic religions (Levtzion and Pouwels, "Preface" ix; Van der Merwe). Nevertheless, 'African Traditional Religions' are often considered to refer to a group of traditional religious practices that are distinct from the Abrahamic religions, despite the cross-pollination between them. Furthermore, they have been mobilised in opposition to the Abrahamic religions for queer purposes.

One of the ironies of supporting the claim that homosexuality is 'un-African' by drawing on the Abrahamic religions is that traditional African religions, according to feminist and anti-homophobic scholars, seem to have been far more open to what are today considered queer forms of sexuality. Tamale notes that the process of conversion to the Abrahamic religions "subverted, overthrew and demonised African traditional religions, which formed an integral part of African sexual culture" ("Exploring the Contours" 152). Tamale, Van Zyl and Kaoma describe this sexual culture as being more accepting of a variety of sexual practices than the Abrahamic religions. For example, Tamale describes ATRs as generally tolerant of "practices such as masturbation, fornication, infidelity, adultery, non-penetrative sex, prostitution and homoerotics" (161), which were only "encoded with the distinctive tags of 'deviant', 'illegitimate' and 'criminal' through the process of proselytisation and acculturation" ("Exploring the Contours" 154). Although Van Zyl cautions against generalising about the African continent, she does note that

> the weight of evidence shows that in contrast to the almost pathological attitudes of European colonisers towards sexuality, and their obsessive disciplining of sexualities, in precolonial sub-Saharan Africa sexualities were accepted as a natural and normal part of

> human existence — subject to norms, but accepting of its diverse expression. ("Taming Monsters" 149)

For these scholars, then, the Abrahamic religions have played (and continue to play) a role in shaping proscriptive and homophobic understandings of sexuality, in contrast to more open conceptualisations of queer sexualities and genders in traditional African religions.[44]

One of the practices within ATRs that is most often used to reconceptualise queer sexualities and genders is ancestor-worship. Kaoma notes that belief in the ancestors has created spaces for the inclusion of gender nonconformity and same-sex sexuality because African cultural tradition is "open to viewing same-sex orientation as a sign of a respected ancestral spirit rather than a demon possession" (vii). Kaoma gives an example of a woman whose family attempted to exorcize her demons until her grandmother claimed that she was possessed by a male ancestor, which lead to her being "valued and encouraged to date women" (5). In the Ugandan context, Nyanzi talks of research participants who "claimed continuities of indigenous performances of homosexuality in contemporary society" claiming that "they were possessed by the spirits of ancestors who demanded same-sex relationships" ("Dismantling Reified African Culture" 961).

In South Africa, research about 'lesbian sangomas' has been one avenue through which scholars have explored the 'queer' potential of ATRs. Ruth Morgan outlines how some female traditional healers have been able to "use the ancestors (the site of indigenous power) to create a space for expressing their sexuality through gender inversion" (79). She finds that "women who are possessed by male ancestors explain their same-sex desires and practices in terms of their need to become social males and have relationships with other women in order to satisfy their ancestors" (79). This is also explored in Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's autobiography, *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma*. In these examples, ATR offers an alternative view of gender nonconformity and thus provides women who sexually desire women a socially acceptable way of justifying their desires.

Xaba's short stories "Behind *The Suit*" and "*The Suit* Continued: The Other Side" reflect this general assertion that ATRs offer possibilities rather than repression as ancestor-worship is aligned with acceptance, and even empowerment, of queer persons. In "Behind *The Suit*", this is evident in the figure of Hloniphekile, Mondli's mother, a traditional healer who is skilled in communicating with the ancestors.[45] She is supportive of Mondli and Philemon's relationship,

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[44] This is not to say that ATRs should be romanticised as completely progressive. Charmaine Pereira and Jibrin Ibrahim, for example, note that "[a]ccording to traditional African religions, women are believed to possess sexual powers that can overcome men and enslave women" (922). This notion of uncontrollable female sexuality is similar to that found in Islam.

[45] Zabus explains that by "virtue of their residence in the nether world (usually the earth), these spirits [ancestors] are in unhindered touch with the essence of things. Specialized avenues of consultation (mainly through rites such as sacrifice or libation-pouring) have to be devised in order to reach them. They thrive on being satiated and can be

because she feels that the ancestors are content with Mondli and Philemon being lovers (Xaba, *Running* 6). In the story, the authority of the ancestors provides a means of legitimating queer relationships. In "*The Suit* Continued: The Other Side", Xaba depicts Matilda as an ancestor in order to allow her to tell her story after death. Xaba taps into ATR as a resource for feminist and queer revisionism, employing traditional belief in the ancestors in order to refute Matilda's tragic ending in Themba and Mahala's stories. While her life might still end, her continued existence as an ancestor provides her with the chance to (re)write her narrative. The fact that she, a queer woman, is figured as an ancestor, refutes the notion that same-sex sexuality is a Western import, showing it to be embedded in the South African past.[46]

4.2 Divine Love and Didactic Queer, Christian Narratives

In this section, I examine two short stories concerned with the tensions at the intersection of Christian discourse and queer sexuality and/or gender nonconformity and how they draw on the Christian conceptualisation of divine love in an attempt to resolve them. The first is "Grace" by Okparanta. The second is "Telling Stories" by Kinyili. Both stories have notable didactic elements, as they outline Christian arguments about queer sexuality. While these stories are critical of interpretations of the Bible that frame same-sex sexuality as a sin, they do not discard Christian theology. Rather, they attempt to reconcile their queer character's faith with their queer desires by foregrounding one of the central tenets of Christian teaching: love. In both stories, divine love offers the characters an alternative lens through which to reconceptualise both their same-sex attractions and their faith. I examine the different ways these stories perform this reconceptualisation and the different didactic strategies they employ in order to attempt to convey this lesson about queer sexuality to the reader.

Love is perhaps the most important concept of the New Testament of the Bible. When Jesus, in whom it is necessary to believe in order to be considered a Christian, is asked which commandment is most important, he asserts: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your strength and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbour as yourself" (*The Holy Bible* Luke 10:27). 'Love' might also be seen to animate the various works of Jesus on earth, as he offers compassion to all, especially those who are ostracized by society. Divine love, associated with a perfect God, rather than a flawed humanity, is a perfect love. Hypothetically, it

displeased if lacking in offerings or other forms of appeasement. In the case of *sangomas*, ancestral spirits designate the chosen ones, who are visited by visions, dizziness, severe headaches, or otherworldly phenomena. The emphasis is on the absence of choice or volition in the *sangoma*, who is thus 'called' by her wilful ancestor" (emphasis in original).

[46] A similar project exists in Robert Colman's 1998 play *After Nines!* in which a black teenage lesbian living in South Africa, who has been rejected by her family, meets three gay ancestors who tell her about their lives in the 1950s (Munro, *South Africa and the Dream* 135).

is extended to all of humanity. This rather radical notion tends to be watered down by caveats, most notably regarding belief.

Writing about the growing body of work on queer sexualities in Africa, John Hawley observes that "much of the writing has a didactic tone" (121). Didactic literature can be defined as "instructive; designed to impart information, advice, or some doctrine of morality or philosophy", although its boundaries are open to debate (Baldick 66). Works that have a clear moral, political or philosophical view can be considered didactic. The stories in this thesis can be read as having didactic elements, as they share a political and moral rejection of homophobia and sexism. By representing queer characters sympathetically and showing the damage inflicted upon them by homophobia and sexism, these stories arguably perform a didactic function. They potentially 'instruct' the reader that homophobia is morally reprehensible and teach empathy for queer individuals. A stricter definition of didactic literature, according to Chris Baldick, "would confine the term to those works that explicitly tell readers what they should do" (66). I would suggest that didactic literature is identified as such when its 'lesson' is baldly stated, rather than subtly suggested. Both "Grace" and "Telling Stories" might be defined as didactic literature under this definition, although only "Telling Stories" could be said to tell its readers what to do. These stories explicitly engage with Christian doctrine and the arguments that emerge from conflicting understandings of what this doctrine has to say about the morality of queer sexuality.

Literature identified as explicitly didactic has often been dismissed in the contemporary literary landscape. A good example of the contestations surrounding the place of didacticism in queer African literature is apparent in Ken Junior Lipenga's discussion of two Caine Prize-nominated queer short stories: Monica Arac de Nyeko's "Jambula Tree" and Stanley Kenani's "Love on Trial". Despite both containing sympathetic portrayals of queer characters and offering a critique of homophobic societies, "Jambula Tree" was generally accepted as "admirable writing" (Lipenga 44), while "Love on Trial" was labelled 'agenda writing' for being too 'preachy' (Ikheloa) and described as being more of a 'morality fable' than a short story (Partington). Both Lipenga and Mtenje have since offered more nuanced readings of "Love on Trial". Rather than dismissing the story, they examine its productive potential and what its narrative failures suggest about the difficulties of writing queer African fiction. Rather than dismissing "Grace" and "Telling Stories" due to their didactic tone, I unpack the different strategies employed by the stories and how effective they are in the project of reconceptualising queer sexualities in Christian terms. In doing so, I consider the potential role of literature in challenging dominant religious lessons drawn from one of the most influential pieces of didactic literature ever produced – the Bible.

4.2.1 Suggestive Didacticism and Biblical Readings in "Grace"

Okparanta's "Grace" explores the tension between Christian faith and female same-sex sexuality through the narrator, an American literature professor teaching a course on the Old Testament, and Grace, a Nigerian-American university student attending the course. The two form a bond when Grace comes to discuss her concerns with the Bible's stance on female same-sex sexuality. She reveals that she desires women, but that her family expects her to go through with an arranged marriage with a man from Nigeria. Over the course of their next few brief meetings, the narrator – who was previously married to a man she only loved platonically – finds herself developing feelings for Grace, which she struggles with. She sees these feelings as "inappropriate desires" (Okparanta, *Happiness*) for numerous reasons: she is far older than Grace, Grace is a student and the Bible seems to condemn these kinds of desires. Meanwhile, Grace agrees to the arranged marriage after being beaten by her mother and brother. However, before she returns to Nigeria to get married, she meets the narrator at a park by the river and announces that she is in love with her and they kiss. The story ends with the two together beside the river, caught in a precarious moment of happiness. It is unclear whether Grace will get married or choose to be with the narrator, just as it is uncertain whether the narrator will willingly risk her career and her relationship with her children in order to be with Grace.

Munro focuses on "Grace" in relation to the theme of interracial and cross-cultural female same-sex sexuality that first emerges in African literature in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*. Munro argues that Okparanta revises the script that Aidoo established "by writing in the narrative voice of an aging White North American woman, a professor who falls in love with a Nigerian student, Grace, and by making their attraction reciprocal" ("States of Emergence" 193). According to Munro the

> narrator's melancholy appreciation of the 'verge of joy' is hard to shoehorn into a political statement about the unequal power relations between the United States and Nigeria, or between Black and White women. The story and its intertextuality evoke imperial histories, but suggest that the people inhabiting these positions—the 'American lesbian'—are merely human. (193-194)

The story thus provides a complex and subtle take on the intersection of race and queer sexuality. It's exploration of religion and queer sexuality, however, is more overt, but has not yet been examined in-depth.

The narrative of "Grace" is, as Hawley notes of Okparanta's novel, *Under the Udala Trees* (2015), to some degree a "didactic rehearsal" of the arguments about whether the Bible condemns same-sex sexuality (123). *Under the Udala Trees* is Okparanta's most sustained examination to date of the intersection between Christianity and female same-sex sexuality. This intersection is

manifested in *Under the Udala Trees* in the character of Ijeoma's mother who, upon discovering Ijeoma's love affair with another girl, uses the Bible as a source for the justification of her disapproval and a means to 'cure' Ijeoma. Ijeoma's coming-of-age story is not only about living through the horrors of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War or exploring her sexuality, but also about grappling with the Bible (the story is laced with Biblical quotes) and Christian doctrine in order to reconcile it to her own experiences. Eventually, Ijeoma manages to do this to some extent and find some peace, and her mother finally stops trying to force her to fit into the heterosexual mould. She does this in religious terms, stating: "God, who created you, must have known what He did. Enough is enough" (Okparanta, Under the Udala Trees). The way in which Christianity is used to perpetuate homophobia and oppression is critiqued but, ultimately, Christian faith is not discarded, but re-interpreted. The novel, then, resonates with Adichie's treatment of Christianity in *Purple Hibiscus* (Mabura; Wallace) and "The Shivering" – it is both a critique and an embrace – although less subtle in its execution.[47]

In "Grace", Okparanta makes this kind of "feminist 'agenda writing' unexpected" (Munro, "States of Emergence" 196). Important to my discussion is the fact that the narrative foregrounds the didactic nature of the story through the narrator's profession. This provides a plausible reason for the Biblical discussions that take place and allows for an exploration of what it means to teach. The discussion Grace and the narrator have about the Bible positions Grace as the student with questions, and the narrator as the teacher who potentially has the answers. Yet, the narrator's responses are not classically didactic. Rather than speaking as the authority on the subject, she notes the difficulties that surround interpreting the Bible. 'Teaching', here, is modelled not as dictatorial, but rather as a means to open up new spaces for others to explore ideas beyond the limits of what they have already been offered. Beyond this first discussion, the narrator in fact goes on to grapple with the issues raised as she finds herself with a personal stake in them due to her developing feelings for Grace. The teacher/student binary that often accompanies didactic practices is further unsettled when it is Grace who offers the narrator a potential reconceptualisation of same-sex sexuality within religious terms.

The story itself has a suggestive rather than instructive didactic mode. By undermining the didactic authority of its characters, the story also unsettles its own authority to some extent. While it raises questions and potential answers, it does not insist that any are necessarily correct. The 'unfinished' quality that is more easily achieved in the short story form rather than the novel might explain why "Grace" is less overtly didactic than *Under the Udala Trees.* Without the space to tie

[47] For a more extensive analysis of Under the Udala Trees see Osinubi's article "The Promise of Lesbians in African Literary History".

up each narrative thread and potential outcome, "Grace" leaves more space for reader engagement and thus arguably encourages active reconceptualisations of the issues at hand by the reader. Somewhat paradoxically, this actually supports the story's clear intention to challenge interpretations of the Bible that justify homophobia and the repression of women. By undermining didactic authority, the story also works to undermine the authority of literal readings of the Bible. As the narrator suggests to Grace: "Try not to take it all so literally. There are things in the Bible that should not be taken literally" (Okparanta, *Happiness*). The turn to the possibilities of interpretation is one generally made by scholars and theologians invested in challenging erotophobic interpretations of the Bible. David Carr, for example, points out that using the Bible to "interpret the world and navigate […] through it" has always "required selectivity in the choice of Biblical viewpoints and creativity in combining them" (13). This sensibility opens up space for the reconsideration and potential reconceptualisation of verses in the Bible that appear to condemn same-sex sexuality.

The questioning attitude of the story is initially embodied in Grace, whose questions emerge from the clash between her personal experience, the Biblical text, and an implied community that employs the Bible to justify heterosexist norms. Grace sees a certain amount of authority in the Bible, as she notes that it "has caused quite a bit of destruction in the world" (Okparanta, *Happiness*). She thus ascribes agency to the Bible by ignoring the fact that it is people who have caused the destruction she refers to, using the Bible as a means of justification. This Biblical authority exists, in Grace's mind, because it is God's word. "[I]s the bible okay with that?" Grace asks, and then: "Is God okay with that?", thus conflating the two. It is the narrator who notes that the Bible "is inspired by God in many ways, but […] was still written by humans, with human biases, all based on the existing cultural norms of the time". This opens up the potential for less literal readings of the Bible for Grace.

The story rehearses some of the possibilities for alternative readings of some of the verses that are generally referred to by conservative Christians in order to justify the argument that homosexuality is a sin. Most notably, for my discussion here, Grace brings up Leviticus 20:13, which states: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is an abomination". This is the most direct proscription of same-sex sexuality in the Bible and is often cited alongside verses

in Genesis,[48] Romans[49] and Corinthians.[50] The notes on these verses in the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* provide a clear example of literal readings of such verses. The comment on 1 Corinthians 6:9 asserts that the "Bible specifically calls homosexual behaviour sin" (1603).[51] Plenty of philosophers and theologians have, in recent times, critiqued this interpretation by reading the Bible in a more holistic way and with greater focus on the cultural context in which the verses were written.[52] The narrator makes one such argument, by pointing to the difficulties of interpretation that occur along the lines of time and space. She notes that, for example, it is "hard to even know what [the word 'abomination'] meant back then" (Okparanta, *Happiness*). This is a move away from the universal and towards the specific. The story itself functions similarly, by asking the reader to consider the questions of religion and queer sexuality not within the realm of broad abstractions, but within the individual lives of two women.

The resolution, such as it is, of the tensions between Christianity and queer desire comes through the invocation of love, and its ties to the divine. This is foreshadowed by the narrator's observation, in her and Grace's discussion, that the "greatest commandments, according to Jesus, are, first, love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. And second, love your neighbour as yourself'". Steve de Gruchy and Paul Germond argue that, through the commandment to 'love your neighbour as yourself', "Jesus makes a radical difference not just to the relationship between 'us' and 'them', but to the very categorization itself" (2). They argue that at the centre of Christian teachings is a deep questioning of the binary categorizations that inform the creation of the 'other'. Because of this, they assert that the use of the Bible as a means of justifying prejudice against homosexual people is profoundly problematic in Biblical terms.

This provides a useful lens through which to read the Bible holistically, potentially pointing to moments where a literal approach leads to interpretations that conflict with this basic Christian tenet. This Biblical valorisation of love also offers a means for validating queer relationships.

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[48] In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah some men come to Lot's house and insist he bring out the strangers who are staying with him so that they "can have sex with them" (Genesis 19:5).

[49] Romans 1:26-27: "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion."

[50] 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral no idolators nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

[51] These notes do point out that "Christians must be careful to condemn only the practice, not the people" and that the "church should be a haven of forgiveness and healing for repentant homosexuals without compromising its stance against homosexual behavior" (1603), so at least they do not condone the demonization of those with same-sex sexual desires.

[52] For example, "Sexual Diversity and Divine Creation: A Tightrope Walk Between Christianity and Science" by Yiftach Fehige, *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality and the Bible* by Carr, "The Making of Male Same-Sex in The Graeco-Roman World and its Implications for the Interpretation of Biblical Discourses" by Johannes Vorster and "The Bible in the Gay-Debate in South Africa: Towards an Ethics of Interpretation" by Jeremy Punt.

Mtenje, writing about Okparanta's "America", discusses how the general category of 'love' is used to make "'sexuality' […] a little more discreet, or palatable, by being understood as romantic attachment" (250). The power of such a rhetorical manoeuvre is multiplied when attached to divine authority. Grace validates what she feels for the professor by formulating it, first, as love and then by conceptualising love as "seeing someone the way God would see that person" (Okparanta, *Happiness*). In other words, "[s]eeing in that person something pure and divinely beautiful, seeing in that person the true image of God". Love is thus formulated as something that recognises the divine in another; associating both the lover and the beloved with the divine. This conceptualisation draws on the authority of the divine. This authority initially led Grace to worry about her desires, but here it becomes a means to reconceptualise queer sexuality in an affirming manner.

4.2.2 Rhetorical Techniques and Narrative Failures in "Telling Stories"

Kinyili's "Telling Stories" begins with the unnamed narrator observing the self-loathing of a man he calls Shining Ebony. Next, he describes a woman who attempts to tell the world "a different story" (165) and is rejected. Finally, he describes a church service full of devout believers. When the sermon starts, some congregants feel condemned. Each description of rejection, which is vague on the cause, is punctuated by the narrator's empathy in action: "I cry" (165). The issue at hand is only revealed when the narrator meets with Shining Ebony, who tells the narrator 'his story' about his desire for other men and his prayerful struggle to overcome it. The narrator responds with his own story, revealing that he is Jesus. In what is pretty much a summarised account of the Gospels, this fictionalised Jesus attempts to convince Shining Ebony that divine love is also offered to him. The story ends without revealing whether Shining Ebony finally accepts what the narrator is offering him.

Through Jesus's narrative, "Telling Stories" rehearses many of the same arguments that "Grace" does, although in a more overtly didactic manner. The narrator foregrounds the importance of the aforementioned commandment about love. He points to the fact that the Bible is a collection of stories told by people throughout history in an attempt to make sense of their world, and highlights the difficulty in applying them to contemporary situations. He also foregrounds the ways in which Jesus chose to surround himself with those who were outcast from society. Shining Ebony proves to be difficult to convince, insisting that the narrator's focus on divine love ignores the other aspects of the Bible that condemn homosexuality. The narrator's response to this is to condemn the use of the Bible "to deny others the experience of divine love" and his message to Shining Ebony is that of "divine love", which he came to share with all humanity (168). The narrator's

message to Shining Ebony is also clearly the message to the reader, whatever their sexual orientation.

Despite its title, "Telling Stories" can only be loosely defined as a short story. After the opening descriptions of Shining Ebony, the nameless female character and the church, the narrative basically becomes a sermon on divine love, taking the Gospel narrative as its source text. The message of the story, which is a moral one, is explicitly stated rather than embedded in a complex narrative. The story is thus straightforwardly didactic and unapologetically political. Speaking of herself, Kinyili notes that her "struggle is to identify, name, and confront the oppressions that permeate our lived realities" ("Coming Home"). While the focus of the narrative is to counter homophobic Christian rhetoric, the narrator also extends his critique to the use of the Bible to oppress "women, black people, economically oppressed people" (Kinyili, "Telling Stories" 168). Therefore, the story's politics seem to be intersectional. Kinyili certainly achieves her didactic aims in this fictionalized rhetoric, although she does not succeed in creating a compelling narrative, intriguing characters or stylistic innovation. Thus, Kinyili does not exploit the potential for complexity offered by the short story form, which "Grace" does a far better job of harnessing in order to convey a similar idea.

Unlike "Grace", which unsettles its own didactic authority, "Telling Stories" works to shore up this authority through a variety of rhetorical devices. Baldick describes "the rhetorical dimension of a literary work" being "those aspects of the work that persuade or otherwise guide the responses of readers" (217). The most significant rhetorical choice Kinyili makes is her use of the character of Jesus as narrator. Not only is Jesus the central teacher of the Christian faith, he also speaks with divine authority, being, according to Christian theology, literally God made man. He is also the embodiment of divine love – "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (*The Holy Bible* John 3:16) – making him a powerful interlocutor for Kinyili's message. Kinyili buttresses the authority of the Jesus figure by drawing on the Bible, which also, as I discuss in relation to "Grace", is seen as having divine authority. Kinyili provides footnotes containing the Biblical verses which correspond with the narrator's story. This is a distinctly rhetorical rather than narrative move. Referring to Biblical verses is a staple method of claiming didactic authority within Christian circles. The story clearly works within a Christian paradigm in tackling homophobia as it draws on Jesus's narrative, and his didactic authority, as a means of championing queer acceptance.

Kinyili's use of Jesus as narrator aligns with Kittridge Cherry's reminder that Jesus "represent[s] all people, including the outcast and the sexually marginalized". Although Kinyili does not present an image of 'gay Jesus' that Cherry suggests is so necessary in the face of the use

of Christian rhetoric to justify discrimination against LGBT people, she does present a Jesus who foregrounds his teaching of "radical love" and challenges the way "his image is being twisted to promote hate". By presenting her reconceptualisation of queer persons as worthy of divine love through the voice of Jesus, Kinyili's story can be seen to contribute, as Cherry argues for "Queer Christian art", to enlarging "the way people see God and [making] it easier to recognize the image of God in oneself and in others, particularly LGBT people". Kinyili's attempt has some limitations in this regard, most notably in its representation of queer characters.

The characters of Shining Ebony and the briefly mentioned nameless woman – whose exclusion is likely to do with her sexual orientation, but might also be due to her gender – also serve rhetorical purposes in the story. They work to provide an illustration of the experience of ostracization due to sexual 'deviance'. The narrator's empathetic reaction to their plight mirrors Jesus's response to the outcast in the Gospels, which the author foregrounds by having Jesus refer to his compassionate response to the woman who washes his feet with her hair. Through the narrator's responses to these characters, Kinyili models what the extension of divine love might look like, in contrast to those Christian teachers who "declare that it is because of this very love that they shun you and declare you a sinner" ("Telling Stories" 167). Nevertheless, Shining Ebony serves as little more than a rhetorical device in the story. He serves as a general representative for gay African men. Only the bare bones of his own story are provided – that he loves men, is ashamed and prays to desire women – and even the name that the narrator gives him refers to his stock appearance. Thus, the ability of Shining Ebony to humanise the gay, Christian, African man is limited. The narrator's attempt to humanise Shining Ebony by showing him love, and Kinyili's attempt to humanise him through the message of divine love for all of humanity, is thus ironically undercut by the underdrawn nature of his character.

Both "Grace" and "Telling Stories" challenge the use of the Bible and Christian rhetoric as a means to condemn queer sexuality and ostracize queer individuals, while maintaining a distinctly Christian worldview. Neither reaches a conclusion about whether queer sexual practices should be understood as sins, focusing instead on love as a means to reconceptualise individual understandings of queer sexuality and as a lens through which to (re)read the Bible. Where the two stories diverge is in their form. While both might be read as didactic narratives or 'agenda-writing', "Grace" is far subtler than "Telling Stories". Although it does rehearse various Christian arguments about queer sexuality, it frames them within a love story between characters who are carefully situated and who grapple with the issues at hand from their individual positions. "Grace" formally reflects the kind of contextualised interpretation of the Bible its characters suggest, where personal experience becomes an important lens through which to consider issues of sexuality and faith.

"Telling Stories", despite providing a more convincing argument due to its assertion rather than disruption of didactic authority, is far less successful in exploiting the potential of fictional narrative to explore contentious ideas in nuanced and specific ways.

4.3 Haram or Halaal? Proscription and Pathologisation in Queer Muslim Lives

In this section, I examine Mohamed's "Is It Love That Has You?" and L's "Nine Pieces of Desire", which reconceptualise female same-sex sexuality of Muslim women in the face of proscriptive and pathologizing discourses. Both stories depict young Muslim schoolgirls who discover their sexual desires for other women in contexts where they have very little agency to pursue them. Fatima Mernissi argues that the "entire Muslim social structure can be seen as an attack on, and a defence against, the disruptive power of female sexuality" (45). Although this is a broad generalization, societal control, as exerted through religious and familial authority, is shown to be extremely powerful in both Mohamed and L's stories. Despite the fact that the girls and young women in the stories have little agency to actively challenge this control and the conceptualisations of female same-sex sexuality that justify it, the stories still work to challenge the proscriptions and pathologisations at work in the narratives.

Implicitly and explicitly, these two stories raise the question of whether same-sex sexuality is haram or halaal – in other words, whether or not it is proscribed or prescribed within Islam. As Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi explains, haram means "forbidden, prohibited" (82) in the strongest terms. It "is necessary to abstain from the acts which are haram" and if "someone performs a haram act, he will be punished either by the Islamic court or in the Islamic court or in the hereafter or both" (82). These stories deal with this proscriptive aspect of Islam, although not in relation to the Islamic courts. Rather, the space of contention is the family, as a micro-expression of broader society. In "Nine Pieces of Desire", the figures of authority are the mother and grandmother, and it is they who shape the protagonist, Mariam's, understanding of Islam. Mariam's grandmother, Bibi, describes Allah as swiftly and mercilessly punitive, while Mariam's mother, wracked with grief over the loss of her other daughters, interprets everything pleasurable as haram: "Sleeping is haram. Laughing loudly is haram. Eating is also haram" (L 265). In "Is It Love That Has You?", it is the protagonist's mother who instigates the violent exorcism meant to control her daughter's sexual desires. In these stories, to use Kugle's description from another context, "religious authority […] is also parental authority" (*Living Out Islam* 61). L and Mohamed's narratives thus illustrates how the institution of family produces and draws on religious discourse in order to legitimate the restriction of queer female sexualities.

The conceptualisation of queer sexuality as pathological is another way in which the families in these stories justify the control of queer female sexualities. Pathologisation of queer sexualities is widely apparent across religions – see the current view of 'intrinsic disorder' held by the Roman Catholic Church (Fehige 43) – and even beyond.[53] For example, early scientific discourse about sex in the West, particularly in "medical and psychiatric literatures", was responsible for promulgating and formalizing "assumptions of disease and dysfunction" regarding any sexuality that was not procreative (Rubin 311). Amongst Muslims, such pathologisation often takes the form of the "pernicious stereotype of a morally fraught, lascivious homosexual who brings and spreads disease and who contravenes upon the laws of nature" (Habib lviii). In his interview with Kugle, Mushin, one of the founders of the Al-Fitra Foundation in South Africa, which is a support group for LGBT Muslims, highlights the prevalence of the pathologisation and outlines the group's strategic response: "The message then was to let people know that [homosexuality] is not a pathology, […] it is part of your fitra—your nature" (*Living Out Islam* 30). L and Mohamed's stories provide other examples of pathologizing discourses and means of challenging them. Whether it is drawn from scientific discourse or religious doctrine, pathologisation implies that it is impossible for same-sex sexuality to be in any way innate, 'natural', moral or good. Situating it outside any person's 'nature' serves to justify treating people with same-sex desires in inhumane ways in order to 'cure' or 'exorcise' supposedly 'unnatural' sexual desires. Here, compassion and empathy for the desiring person do not have to be considered, because the 'evil' is not considered part of them.

4.3.1 Language and Love in "Is It Love That Has You?"

"Is It Love That Has You?", set in Somalia, is the love story of two teenagers, Sabrin and Ubax. Focalized throughout from Sabrin's perspective, and switching from the third to the first person halfway through, the narrative begins when she first meets Ubax, who dresses like a boy. Her attraction is immediate, although it takes her a while to understand what her physical reaction means. She becomes friends with Ubax, they often hold hands when walking home together and, when Sabrin invites Ubax over to her house, they kiss for the first time. This is a revelation for Sabrin, who understands that her initial physical reaction was desire. Their intimate moments in Sabrin's room are threatened by the presence of Sabrin's mother, who eventually discovers them kissing. She is horrified. She sends Ubax away and violently assaults her daughter. Sabrin never sees Ubax again. She later discovers that Ubax has been sent away to Saudi Arabia, seemingly

[53] Rubin lists numerous negative metaphors that have traditionally been used to frame same-sex sexuality, including "sin, disease, neurosis, pathology, decadence, pollution, or the decline and the fall of empires" (147).

because of what happened between them. Sabrin also has to endure a violent exorcism by the imam in an attempt to rid her of her queer desires. The story ends with Sabrin recounting that she went on to get married and have children, but still thinks about Ubax constantly. Her feelings for Ubax are still so strong she has not even had a relationship with another woman. The story ends on this despair-filled note as Sabrin states: "This might just be the exile that I die in" (Mohamed 98).

At first, Sabrin lacks a conscious understanding of her own sexuality. At the beginning of the story, she mistakes her attraction to Ubax as a sickness, only realising at the moment of their first kiss that this 'sickness' is actually her "own longing and desire" (92). Sabrin thus rejects her initial pathologisation of her desires. At the moment of this realisation, the story changes from third person narration to first person narration. This switch reflects Sabrin's new level of self-awareness, as well as implying a fuller embodiment of the self. Despite this revelation, after the first time she and Ubax have sex, Sabrin once again grapples with the implications of their relationship, this time in Islamic terms. She is concerned that what they have done might be haram.[54] Ubax, the only person she can ask about this, states that she cannot tell her "what's haram or halaal" (95). She does not draw on moral or religious authority in order to defend their relationship. Instead, she draws on personal knowledge about her own feelings: she knows she likes Sabrin, likes being with her and feels like she has known her forever (95). This is a personal, intimate narrative in contrast to the grand narrative of religion. This is similar to "Grace", in which personal experience of desire leads the characters to question certain Christian narratives about queer sexuality and to reconceptualise their understanding of love. In both these narratives, the personal is depicted as an important resource for women in challenging the dominant discourses that work to control their sexualities.

By the end of the story, it is clear that Sabrin has reconceptualised her sexual desire for Ubax. She asserts that the exorcism fails because she "wasn't possessed by anything, but a love for Ubax" (98). The 'haram or halaal' framework is elided in favour of a narrative about feeling; a feeling recognisable as love. This use of 'possessed' subverts the pathology narrative that underlies the violent exorcism, where the imam attempts to call forth the jinn believed to be causing Sabrin's desires (98).[55] It does so by drawing on the cliché of being 'possessed by love', which, despite the

[54] This reflects Kugle's observation about the transgender, lesbian and gay Muslims he interviewed; that they "experience conflict over whether their sexual orientation and gender identity are against their religion", question whether certain behaviours are immoral and "do not need family members or religious leaders to engage in debate, for this debate is already heated within their individual conscience" (*Living Out Islam* 12).

[55]Another possession narrative within the context of Islam is that of Nargis, as explicated in *Living Out Islam*: "Although she herself turned to a secular-trained professional who was a Muslim woman to guide her through mental and emotional health issues, her family turned to other authorities. They were close to many *mawlanas*, male Muslim religious authorities who combine scholarly knowledge with "spiritual medicine," often to counter "black magic." Her family was convinced that Nargis was not in her right mind, and blamed her lesbian partner for placing a spell upon her. […] *Mawlanas* or religious experts were treating her for sorcery or spirit possession with "cures" that bordered

fact that 'possessed' tends to have negative connotations, is frequently idealized. This conceptualisation is borne out by the fact that "Is It Love That Has You?" can be read as a tragic love story, in which two young lovers are torn apart by the ignorance of their community. The intertextual reference to Faarax M.J. Cawl's tragic love story, *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love* – the first novel written in the Somali language (The Woyingi Blogger) – draws attention to the fact that "Is It Love That Has You?" should be read within a broader canon of love stories, as well as Somali literature in general. Thus, the story claims a place for same-sex love stories within the Somali literary landscape, reconceptualising same-sex desires and intimacy as that which is immortalized in literature – love. This reflects the ways in which "Grace" and "Telling Stories" deploy 'love' as a means of reconceptualising same-sex sexuality. The difference is that Okparanta and Kinyili's stories draw from a conceptualisation of divine love, while Mohamed's story draws on ideas about romantic love.

This strategy for conceptualising same-sex desire and intimacy outside the proscriptive framework of haram and halaal found in their community speaks to the broader issue of the language used to describe sex and same-sex sexuality. Sabrin's various difficulties in conceptualising her own sexuality indicate a lack of language regarding same-sex sexual desires. She never refers to the sexual encounter between her and Ubax as 'sex', only as "what we did", and part of her concern about their actions stems from the fact that "there isn't even a word in [their] language for what [they] are" (Mohamed 95). Sabrin's initial concern with sexual practice – whether it is prohibited or permissible – here slips into concern about identity. In contrast to the possession narrative of same-sex sexuality, Sabrin seems to consider sexual practice to be linked to something innate about herself. The lack of a word to describe this seems to her an indication that there is something aberrant about same-sex sexual behaviour and thus about herself. The lack of a language to name and conceptualise her desires and practices creates difficulties for Sabrin in her process of self-conceptualisation. Nevertheless, it is only when the secrecy of her and Ubax's relationship is shattered and Sabrin's mother provides a name for 'what they are' that their relationship is torn apart and they are subject to violence.

Research on sexualities in Africa has frequently dealt with the issue of language with regards to the naming of same-sex relationships. Serena Owusua Dankwa notes that a "'culture of silence' […] is said to mark sexual matters, and same-sex practices in particular, throughout the African continent" (193). Nevertheless, as both she and Epprecht observe, a lack of explicit terminology does not necessarily mean that these sexualities were historically absent, repressed or

on magic. But this treatment did not work, and only served to intensify Nargis's frustration with her family" (Kugle 66; emphasis in original).

discriminated against. In her article, Dankwa usefully summarises Signe Arnfred's argument in "'African Sexuality'/Sexuality in Africa: Tales and Silences" that "as opposed to an oppressive silence, […] discretion prevents discursive rather than sexual acts" (193). In other words, a lack of language for, or discussion of, same-sex sexuality does not prevent same-sex sexual acts or relationships, as is apparent in the case of Sabrin and Ubax. "Is It Love That Has You?" does not depict a vibrant same-sex community in which discretion forms an essential part of sexual culture like the one Dankwa observes amongst Ghanaian working women. Nevertheless, Dankwa's analysis points to the ambiguities inherent in the naming of same-sex sexualities apparent in Mohamed's story. On the one hand, Sabrin desires a name for her sexuality in order to feel reassured that there is nothing wrong with her. On the other hand, when a name is provided for it, it is used to denigrate her and Ubax. (Interestingly enough, Ubax's female masculinity is recognisable to Sabrin. She uses the term 'wiilo' to describe Ubax, which is a Somali word that describes a 'girl who dresses like a boy' (Owunna). In Sabrin's usage, it seems to have no negative connotations. Ubax's gender performance does not seem to be considered indicative of an unacceptable sexuality, as it would be in Western society.)

The ways in which language can be used as a tool for denigration is apparent when Sabrin's mother discovers Sabrin and Ubax's relationship. Sabrin's mother describes Sabrin as a 'khanis', a Somali term for gay people. It is clearly used in a derogatory manner, and comes with an outburst of vitriol, which includes pathologizing language – in which she calls Ubax "sick and filthy" (Mohamed 96) – and sexual shaming – in which she calls Sabrin a "sharmuuto" (97), which means 'whore'. Thus, the language of identification in this context does not enable acceptance or empowerment. Rather, it reflects "how language is often instrumentalised as a tool for ridiculing and denigrating queer subjectivities" in order to produce an "objectified 'other'; an 'other' who is targeted in a heteronormative project of defacing." (Matebeni and Msibi 6). In Mohamed's story, this 'defacing' is a brutal beating that Sabrin's mother doles out, followed by an exorcism – a literal attempt to rip something out of her – and finally forced capitulation to a heteronormative life of marriage and children.

Within the story, the available language for female same-sex sexuality is inadequate and only serves to justify homophobic violence. It does not capture the love and sexual desire that exists between the two young women, but rather traps them in a discourse that dehumanizes them in various ways and thus justifies the violence enacted against them. Here, rather than legitimising sexual acts, language serves to curtail them. Natasha Distiller, writing from a South African context, argues that the depiction of lesbian desires and subjectivities is fraught, due to the fact that the "vocabulary to represent lesbian desires and the pleasures of their fulfilment is produced by a

linguistic and representational system which has no space to engage with the notion of the lesbian except in relation to its own normative hetero/sexuality" (45). Just because a vocabulary for those who experience female same-sex desires exists does not mean it is necessarily conducive to portraying them in ways that make their lives more liveable. In some ways, "Is It Love That Has You?" remains trapped within this representational system, as it turns to the valorised concept of love in order to reconceptualise female same-sex desire. While 'love' has generally been framed in recent Western history in relatively heteronormative and otherwise exclusive terms, it provides Sabrin with a means of expressing her feelings for Ubax, without having to capitulate to the pathologizing narrative inherent in the language her mother employs. At the end of the story, Sabrin's regret is that she never told Ubax how much she loved her and still loves her (Mohamed 98). In this moment, that act of speaking takes on the potential for a powerful insistence on the reality of her own experience, one that was curtailed by the repressive society she grew up in.

4.3.2 Awakening Desire and Subconscious Critique in "Nine Pieces of Desire"

"Nine Pieces of Desire" is set in Kenya and narrated by Mariam, a ten-year-old girl living in a house dominated by women and marked by loss. One of Mariam's sisters died young and the other was sent away. Mariam's mother deals with her grief by eschewing the pleasures of life and devoting her life to Islam. Since her mother largely ignores her, Mariam is raised by her grandmother, Bibi. The tenants who live at the back of the house are Christian, which irritates Bibi. They have a daughter called Grace, who is about Mariam's age. The story centres on the two girls going out to play. They end up at Mariam's madrassa classroom, where Grace climbs on top of Mariam in a sexually suggestive manner. Mariam is confused by her own arousal and the encounter is disrupted by the laughter of two boys who tell the imam what they have seen. The imam, in turn, tells Bibi, who calmly forbids Mariam from ever seeing Grace again. She justifies this by referencing an Islamic religious text and asserting a pathologizing narrative about female sexuality. The story ends with the suggestion that Mariam may be on the verge of questioning her grandmother's proscriptions, even if only within her own mind.

Mariam's experience of Islam is marked by proscription, reinforced with the threat of punishment. For example, Bibi tells her that if she does "something very wrong, Allah will not hesitate to strike [her] dead" (L 263). The list of 'wrong' things, according to Mariam's mother, is long: "Sleeping is haram. Laughing loudly is haram. Eating is also haram" (265). Although her mother's interpretation is clearly extreme, Islam is associated with proscription outside of the household as well. When Mariam and Grace go to the madrassa classroom one of the boys outside is shouting "'Haram! Haram!' incessantly as if he were rehearsing a chant" (298). This boy's chant

of ‘Forbidden! Forbidden!’ reflects the unquestioned proscriptions that shape Mariam’s life. It is through the character of Grace that these proscriptions come to be challenged. As a Christian girl, Grace signifies a defiance of the Muslim proscriptions of Mariam’s household in multiple ways. This is not to say that it is suggested that Christianity is more liberal and less proscriptive than Islam. Rather, the religious difference between the two girls is another way in which their relationship crosses boundaries. At the same time, the fact that Grace’s family lives in a section of Mariam’s house presents a milieu in which such boundaries are already porous, and their maintenance an illusion.

In response to the emergence of Mariam’s sexuality, Bibi draws on a pathologizing conceptualisation of female sexuality. She begins by referring to a hadith attributed to Ali ibn Abu Taleh, cousin and son-in-law to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Romanska 214). This hadith states that “when Allah created humans, he had ten pieces of desire in His Hand. He gave nine pieces to women and only one piece to men” (L 271). Mernissi argues that this hadith has contributed to the Muslim notion that women are more sexually active than men and thus need to be more strictly controlled – in Bibi’s words, watched “very, very closely” (L 270). Rizvi refutes this interpretation of the hadith, pointing to its second part and arguing that Allah “has given the women greater part of sexual desire but He has also neutralized it by giving equal parts of shyness to them” (19). This highlights the issue of interpretation, just as the story does. Bibi’s interpretation of this hadith is shaped by her own experience with raising daughters and by what she has been told by other women. It is her mother’s sister who told her about the madness in girls’ blood. Just as Mariam’s understanding of Islam is shaped by her mother and grandmother, so Bibi’s understanding of how to interpret Islamic teaching is shaped by the women in her life.

Bibi extends this idea of active female sexuality into the realm of pathology by drawing from the advice of her mother’s sister, who once told her that “there is a certain age in a girl’s life when she has to be protected from other girls” because there is “a type of madness that moves around in their bodies like blood”, which is contractible “like a disease” (271). Same-sex sexual desire among girls is framed as mental and physical pathology. Due to the dangerous and highly infectious nature of this ‘disease’, the increased policing of women, and particularly girls on the verge of adolescence, becomes justifiable. Mariam’s already restrictive environment shrinks further as Bibi forbids her to talk to Grace again and prohibits her from having other female friendships until she “starts to notice boys” (271). Heteronormativity is thus protected through the isolation of women from each other.

In contrast to the pathologizing narrative about the sexuality of girls, the encounter between Mariam and Grace is portrayed as a sexual exploration that is both thrilling and mundane:

> [Grace] then stretches her legs in front of her before crossing them at her sides as if to put them away. Then, watching me, she brings her bent knee slowly, slowly as far as it can go between my legs. Her gaze holds me captive so that I am both here and not here and I am afraid of moving even the slightest inch. My stillness registers as assent to her because she is now moving her knee further in with the urgency of someone who really needs to pee. I find myself opening my legs further apart, keenly aware of a thrill that is building up in my middle part. I surprise myself by sighing when Grace's knee goes just short of grazing my panty. I move my body slightly nearer her and push my legs further apart. Grace gets up, scans the room quickly, and gets on top of me. (269)

Grace's approach here is exploratory, but deliberate. She seems to be more sexually aware than Mariam, who is surprised at her own reactions and her own arousal. This description can be contrasted with the description of Sabrin and Ubax's first kiss, which is framed in romantic terms, indicated by phrases like "charged energy" and the use of words such as "lingering" (Mohamed 91, 92). In the above passage the focus is on physical reactions, rather than romantic feelings. This is apparent, for example, in the description of Grace moving "with the urgency of someone who really needs to pee" (L 269). Unlike "Is It Love That Has You?", "Nine Pieces of Desire" is not a love story, and the encounter between the two girls is not romanticized. Nevertheless, both narratives have a normalizing function. "Is It Love That Has You?" describes queer female sexuality with the familiar, clichéd language of the love story, while "Nine Pieces of Desire" shows it to be an ordinary part of growing up.

"Nine Pieces of Desire" also suggests that starting to question familial and religious authority is part of growing up. In the story, this counter-consciousness emerges without clear intent or understanding at first. Signs of the development of a more critical consciousness on Mariam's part emerge right at the end of the story, after Bibi forbids her from ever seeing Grace. Firstly, Mariam breaks "out into loud sobs", thus failing to abide by her mother's restrictions – her mother prefers her "sorrow dry" (L 271). This pre-linguistic expression that breaks the household proscriptions hints at the potential for more sophisticated articulations of dissent beyond the end of the story. That this challenge might include a critique of Bibi's pathologizing narrative about female sexuality is intimated in the story of Baba's dog, which had to be killed because it had rabies and had bitten someone. This story rises into Mariam's mind as she listens to Bibi pathologizing female sexuality and she finds herself recalling that the man who was bitten by the dog did not actually die and how it "seemed that the dog had never had rabies in the first place" (271). Although Mariam does not overtly make the link between the dubiousness of the dog's diagnosis and her own supposed disease, this moment suggests that she is subconsciously questioning the validity of Bibi's claims about her sexuality. By ending on this moment, the story intimates that this subconscious questioning might develop, as she grows up, into a conscious critique. Significantly, the potential for this critique is situated within her own mundane memory,

suggesting the power of personal experience and knowledge as a basis from which to critique and potentially reconceptualise transgressive sexual desire.

Both "Nine Pieces of Desire" and "Is It Love That Has You?" portray the proscription and pathologisation of female same-sex sexuality within a Muslim context. Concerned with the initial discovery of same-sex desire, the stories depict characters who have to come to terms with their sexualities without a positive conceptual framework within which to understand them. Although the question of whether same-sex female desire and sexual practices are haram or halaal is raised – explicitly in "Is It Love That Has You?" and implicitly in "Nine Pieces of Desire" – the stories do not answer this question. Rather, they represent the personal experiences of their protagonists as a framework for questioning dominant discourse about female sexuality. "Nine Pieces of Desire" frames sexual exploration between girls as an integral and ordinary part of growing up. It also ends with the cessation of Mariam's unquestioning acceptance of her grandmother's and mother's proscriptions. "Is It Love That Has You?" ends with Sabrin married to a man, unable to have an affair with another woman because she still has feelings for her first love, Ubax. Despite the tragic sense of closure here, both Sabrin and the story itself firmly reject the pathologizing narrative and reconceptualise same-sex female desire and intimacy as love.

4.4 Playing with the Sacred and the Profane: Sacrilegious Subversions of Catholicism

Nkutha's short stories, "Confessions of Karelina" and "The Glass Pecker", play with the notions of the sacred and the profane, blurring the line between them and even inverting them in their reconceptualisation of female same-sex sex. Stobie identifies "The Glass Pecker" as one of the few narratives that "examine queer from a black woman's perspective" ("Postcolonial Pomosexuality" 348). Stobie provides little more than a plot summary, however, and does not examine the story's treatment of religion. Nkutha's work has been neglected in critical analysis on the South African queer short story, despite its early arrival on the scene and its appearance in *Queer Africa*. While the stories discussed so far in this chapter are not afraid to challenge dominant interpretations of religious discourse in relation to sexuality, they still treat religion with some degree of respect. Nkutha, in contrast, has a profane, sacrilegious sensibility.[56] In "Confessions of Karelina" she

[56] This is also apparent in her short story, "Rock", although religion is not as central to the narrative as the stories I discuss here. Nkutha's narrator notes: "I had come to believe that this Gold person was either hard of hearing or just did not care. Hard of hearing, because everyone I had heard speak to him found it necessary to do so at the top of their voice. My mother, too, on the occasions when she spoke to him, did not care because he never responded to any of the requests either my mother or the mantis had placed before him. I personally thought it would make much more sense if Goldie relocated from that place on the other side of the sky to some place more pragmatic like, say, the Carlton Centre. Although we would still have to pay to speak to him, as we do in church, at least this time he would be much closer to us and thus better able to hear. And perhaps those who spoke to would give up the need to shout when they addressed themselves to him" (192-193).

profanes the sacrament of confession, while in "The Glass Pecker" she subverts sacred Catholic iconography. Both stories are marked by playful mockery and irreverent humour.

The sacred is defined in opposition to the profane. It is something that is connected to God and, due to its relationship to the divine, is so valuable that it should not be interfered with.[57] Daniel Maguire, for example, describes the sacred as "the superlative of precious", the place where "valuation dips into mystery" (26). The profane, apart from being the opposite of the sacred, can also refer to the secular, or to someone who is irreverent or not sufficiently respectful of religious practice.[58] The sacred/profane binary thus falls under the broader opposition between divine and human (secular). Nkutha challenges this binary by incongruously juxtaposing the sacred and the profane. These 'incongruities' might be "understood as deliberate disruptions that derive from placing seemingly contrary words or images in relation to one another," serving to "jar the audience" and potentially producing "alternative perspectives for one or both elements of the juxtaposition" (Morrissey 291). For Nkutha, these 'incongruities' serve to question what deserves the respect and veneration of the 'sacred'.

Although recent Catholic doctrine has emphasised that 'homosexual persons' should not be discriminated against, it still conceptualises same-same sexuality as intrinsically disordered and same-sex sex acts as sins. Church writings on the subject do not tend to distinguish between male and female same-sex sexuality, with the term 'homosexuality' used to refer to both. The current pope, Pope Francis, has noted: "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge him?" (Lucie-Smith). The 1986 "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" makes a similar point, stating that it is "deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). However, it also observes that "[a]lthough the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder". Fehige calls this the "View of Intrinsic Disorder", and notes that in this view, "homosexual acts are morally wrong whatever the intentions of the agents or the consequences of these acts are" (43; emphasis in original).

This view seems to emerge because homosexual acts are formulated as being in direct opposition to the 'sacred' nature of procreative, heterosexual sex within the confines of the

[57] The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines the 'sacred' as that which is "connected with God or a god or dedicated to a religious purpose and so deserving of veneration" and is consequently "too valuable to be interfered with; sacrosanct". 'Sacrilege' can be defined as the "violation or misuse of what is regarded as sacred".

[58] According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English* the 'profane' can be defined as "not relating to that which is sacred or religious", in other words "secular". It also refers to a person or a behaviour that is "not respectful of religious practice", in other words: "irreverent".

sacrament of marriage. As explained in a 1986 Letter to the Bishops, since God "fashions mankind, male and female, in his own image and likeness" they "are called to reflect the inner unity of the Creator […] in their cooperation with him in the transmission of life by a mutual donation of the self to the other" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). Here, the concept of humankind being made in the image of the divine is employed to reinforce heteronormativity. Heterosexual sex is figured as sacred because it reflects the life-giving nature of the divine. In contrast, same-sex sex is framed as inherently sinful because it cannot be reproductive nor sanctified through marriage. It is this narrow conceptualisation of heterosex as sacred that Nkutha challenges in "Confessions of Karelina". Furthermore, despite the supposed sacred nature of procreative heterosexual sex within marriage, it is celibacy and virginity that are most venerated within the Catholic faith.[59] This is evident in its celibate religious orders and, most notably, in the figure of Mary, the Virgin Mother of Christ.[60] Bibi Bakare-Yusuf suggests that in "order to continue to sustain the myth of reproduction without erotic desire or encounter, it is necessary to build a case for Mary's miraculous conception, free of coitus" (34-35). This relates back to the erotophobia Gorrell observes in Christianity and has gendered implications. The "erasure of Eve" in favour of the Virgin Mary, according to Bakare-Yusuf, "amounts to only one thing: the elimination of an originary female desire in favour of patriarchy" (35). Nkutha subversively invokes the figure of Mary in the "Glass Pecker" and, in both stories, (re)asserts the potency of female sexual desire.

4.4.1 Subverting the Sacrament in "Confessions of Karelina"

In "Confessions of Karelina", Nkutha examines the notion that sex between women is sin, as her eponymous protagonist grapples with "Catholic guilt" (138) after her first sexual encounter with Dana, another woman. The story begins with Karelina, after her first night with Dana, agonising over whether she has committed a sin; her attempts at confession through prayer interrupted by lascivious thoughts about her sexual experience. Having asked various people in her life for their opinion, she eventually seeks a 'fifth opinion' from a priest in the confessional. When the priest's answers about "what constitutes a sin" (143) fail to enlighten her, Karelina tells him about how she met Dana at the work cafeteria and how, some weeks later, Dana showed up at her door. She then recounts the sexual encounter that follows, which she describes as being like having "touched God" (146). At the end of her story, the priest gives her a lacklustre absolution. Having heard Karelina's story, he is now not sure whether her sexual experience can be categorised as a sin. Karelina leaves

[59] The same logic has led the Catholic Church to denounce contraception, pre-marital sex and masturbation.
[60] Of Christianity more broadly, Vesna Malesevic argues that "the 'patristic doctrine of marriage', 'penitentials', the idealisation of celibacy and virginity, and the 'moral manuals' deepened a Manichaean dualism of Spirit versus Flesh and of Man versus Woman" (109)

the confessional as confused as she entered it, but with a great deal of excitement for Dana's next visit.

Central to the story, then, is the concept of 'sin' and the story serves to directly question the equation of same-sex sex with sin through Dana's own questioning. Since 'sin' transgresses divine law, it stands in opposition to the sacred.[61] Confession is one of the catholic sacraments, a term which indicates its sacred significance. The confession ritual entails the penitent divulging what they believe to be their sins to a priest and confessing their remorse. The priest is then able to absolve them of their sins. The story profanes this sacrament the moment it depicts what occurs within the confessional box, as it breaks the seal of the confessional that is supposed to ensure the confidentiality of all acts of confession. The reader, by participating in the crossing of a sacred boundary, is thus implicated in the story's sacrilegious play with the boundaries between the sacred and the profane.

As Jennifer Cooke notes, drawing from Foucault, "the confessional mode […] is governed by morality seeking to reward and (re)establish normative behaviour" (4). The process of detailing one's sins and repenting of them functions to reinforce their conceptualisation as sin and thus to enforce a moral code, in this case relating to sexual acts. While Karelina comes to the priest with the intention of gaining clarity about how her encounter fits into the Catholic framework of sin and sacred, she only succeeds in undermining the authority of the priest and the confession ritual's moralizing, normative function. The normal process of the confession ritual is disrupted not only because Karelina cannot find it in herself to be truly repentant, but because the priest liberally edits the confession ritual, skipping "the performance of the act of penance" and 'absolving' Karelina of sins he finds he is not sure are really sins (Nkutha, "Confessions" 147). If this performance of repentance and absolution is what gives this ritual its power, then this disruption has profound consequences for maintaining the conceptualisation of same-sex sex as sinful. Moreover, the equivocation on the part of the priest subverts the authoritative force of Catholic doctrine and its modes of enforcement.

The story also serves to undermine the patriarchal authority of the Catholic Church through its mocking, but sympathetic, portrayal of the priest to whom Karelina confesses. Nkutha undermines priestly authority early on, when the omniscient narrator describes priests as Fathers "with a capital F, of the Catholic persuasion; the sort who wear white collars around their necks and walk around in dresses on Sundays" (141). The patriarchal authority of this father-figure is undermined by the humorous reference to a Catholic priest's vestments, which points out the

[61]The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines 'sin' as "an immoral act considered to be a transgression against divine law".

ironically queer nature of a priestly performance mandated by a homophobic religious tradition. Karelina's 'confession' is subversive in part because it undermines the authority of the priest. The fact that the priest is the fifth person she asks for advice about Dana, potentially indicates a lack of respect for his authority, although it could also suggest a reluctance on Karelina's part because he represents the authority of the church. Initially, the priest's response to Karelina's questions about how to know what constitutes a sin is curt and prescriptive, as he cites "one's conscience" and "precepts clearly stated in the scriptures and in the catechism" (143). The priest's certainty is unsettled when Karelina goes on to describe her sexual encounter with Dana in detail. The priest listens with rapt attention and it is implied that his own sexual desires might be aroused by the description. Instead of being able to maintain a moral distance, the priest becomes complicit in Karelina's experience of same-sex sexual desire and pleasure. The specificity of Karelina's descriptions of her sexual encounter also challenges the broad rubrics that the priest offers as a means to evaluate the 'sinfulness' of her actions.

While the characters remain ambivalent about whether female-female sex is sinful, the story itself dismisses the conceptualisation of this kind of sex as sin from the beginning. The third person narrator is unequivocal about the fact that "honestly, really, truly honestly, what [Karelina] had done was not sinful – she'd simply 'fallen in love' – although, in her case, 'lust' would be more appropriate" (138). The narrative thus refuses to contemplate that Karelina's quandary might be a moral issue, instead critiquing what it describes as Catholic "indoctrination" and the way in which it promotes a guilt complex in its practitioners (138). In opposition to the conceptualisation of female-female sex as sin, the story offers a reconceptualisation of it as sacred. In multiple (sacrilegious) ways, Karelina associates her sexual encounter with the sacred. For example, she calls Dana the "Mother Teresa of the Sheets" (146), sexualising the philanthropic figure who was declared a saint in 2016 (Perry et al) and perhaps suggesting that giving sexual pleasure is a holy act. She also asks the priest: "How can this be a sin, Father, when after years of trying to touch God, I finally managed to do just that in the arms of Dana?" (147). Here, Karelina associates queer sex with the divine, a lascivious version of Grace's invocation of queer love in terms of divine love.

Despite the fact that priests are supposed to have a close relationship to God, Karelina later wonders if the priest "had himself ever touched God" (Nkutha, "Confessions" 146). The sadness "rising from him" (146) in response to her story suggests that either he has never encountered such pleasure or that he did once but is no longer able to due to his vows of celibacy. Rather than celebrating celibacy as sacred, it is formulated as a potential loss, and perhaps even a detriment to one's ability to experience the divine.

Although appearing in opposition to the Catholicism embodied by the priest, the idea of sexual pleasure as divine is not alien to the Catholic traditions. In female mystical literature of the later Middle ages, for example, "the female body and female longing in all its facets appear to be the central objects" (Kügeler-Race 39). In these works, the "discourse of the body and the carnal is inscribed with spiritual meaning with the effect that sexual desires and sexual pleasures are 'sanctified' in order to express the inexpressible experience of being unified with God" (51). This is not to say that actual sexual encounters (and certainly not encounters between women) were celebrated as sacred, just that sacred experiences were often depicted in erotic terms, which stands in contrast to "a present-day uneasiness with equating the urges of the flesh as a sign of divine inspiration" (43). We might read the story, then, not as pure opposition to Catholicism, but rather to a certain discourse that potentially has its roots in the historical shift to priestly celibacy.

While suggesting it, the story does not end with a reification of the idea of same-sex sex as sacred. The priest has no answer to Dana's question about whether it is possible that she experienced the divine through her sexual encounter with Dana, except to edit the prayer of absolution to reflect his newfound uncertainties. On the level of discourse, then, the story ends with ambivalence. Despite Karelina's lack of theological clarity by the end of the story, the befuddlement on her face is belied by her body, on which "a different message could be read – the word 'anticipation' was written all over her" (147). Ultimately, then, the story foregrounds bodily experience over religious rhetoric, and offers the possibility of reconceptualising this as sacred rather than profane. In doing so, it destabilises the binaries that separate "sexuality and spirituality, mind and body" that Carr notes have been so pervasive in Western Christian culture (5). The only certainty Karelina experiences in the story is grounded in the pleasures and anticipations of the flesh. Thus, the normative valuations of the spirituality/sexuality and mind/body binaries are subverted. The idealization of the abstractions of spirituality and mind are challenged by their failure to account for bodily experience. These incongruities trouble the traditional understandings of sacred and profane – the spiritual generally being associated with the sacred, and the bodily with the profane.

4.4.2 Queer Iconography in "The Glass Pecker"

"The Glass Pecker" has a similar sensibility to "Confessions of Karelina", although its critique of Catholic doctrine is less direct. Unlike in "Confessions of Karelina", the tension between Catholic ideology and same-sex love and lust is not outlined overtly. Rather, it is implied by the invocation of Catholic iconography. It is through Nkutha's use of an alternative iconography that "The Glass Pecker" offers a reconceptualisation of the same-sex relationship between Nonceba and the glass

pecker, as well as a complex negotiation of the associations of the sacred and the profane. In my analysis, I use the term 'iconography' in both its religious and secular senses, as Nkutha herself juxtaposes allusions to both the sacred and the profane. In the strictest Catholic or Orthodox sense of the word, an icon is a painted image of a religious figure that is considered to be "a sacramental presence, a place where the divine may actually be encountered, not merely in the imagination but in reality" (Clark 1). Due to this, to "play with icons can be seen as profaning the sacred: challenging doctrine and tradition" or "can be taken as an affirmation that icons, doctrine and tradition are susceptible to questioning and reinterpretation" (1). This is pertinent to my discussion of Nkutha's use of the religious icon of the Virgin Mary, whose iconic status Nkutha subverts. Nkutha also alludes to various historical and mythical figures in "The Glass Pecker". They are 'icons' in the sense that they are persons regarded as worthy of veneration. I examine Nkutha's invocation of a number of iconic figures from African history and myth in a sacrilegious but recuperative effort to reconceptualise same-sex desire and love-making. Finally, I consider Nkutha's own iconic construction of the image of the glass pecker, one whose profane connotations are subverted in a reclamation of the sacred aspects of queer sex.

"The Glass Pecker" centres on a transcontinental relationship between Nonceba, a behaviourally bisexual Xhosa woman living in Johannesburg, and her female Egyptian lover, nicknamed 'the glass pecker'. The story is narrated by the glass pecker from the afterlife, as she has committed suicide. In ghostly form, the glass pecker observes Nonceba as she smokes her last cinnamon cigarette with her friends at the bar *The Devil's Bottom*. Here, she often picks up men who describe themselves as being "in-between marriages" (Nkutha, "The Glass Pecker" 192). This tendency has earned her the nickname *Our Lady of Mercy Who Shed Her Clothes Because She Felt Pity*. Nonceba fails to find solace or advice from her friends to help her deal with the glass pecker's suicide. As she walks home, the glass pecker speaks of their time together in Egypt. The story ends with Nonceba committing suicide as well, even though the glass pecker tries to convince her otherwise. In the final lines of the story, Nonceba joins the glass-pecker in the afterlife – sitting right next to her "on Neferetiti's tomb" (198).[62]

The story sets up a contrast between unsatisfying heterosexual promiscuity and an intimate, loving and mutually pleasurable relationship between two women. Neither are acceptable within a Catholic conceptualisation of sexuality, and yet the story's depiction of Nonceba's relationships with men arguably functions as a critique of those conceptualisations of sex. This work is performed through Nonceba's nickname, *Our Lady of Mercy Who Shed Her Clothes Because She Felt Pity*, which incongruously juxtaposes the sacred and the profane. Our Lady of Mercy is one

[62] According to my research, this name is normally spelt Nefertiti. I follow Nkutha's spelling in my analysis.

of the many titles of the Virgin Mary, a central and sacred figure in the Catholic tradition.[63] The humour of the nickname lies in the apparent contradiction between this sacred figure's virginity and Nonceba's promiscuity. This profane subversion of the image of the Virgin functions as a critique of Catholic notions of female sexuality. This tongue-in-cheek send-up of religious iconography is also apparent in the name of the bar Nonceba frequents, *The Devil's Bottom.* Here, the seriousness of the figure of Satan is subverted by reference to his bottom, undercutting his supernatural power by referencing perhaps the least serious part of the human anatomy. This technique serves to set up the Christian idea of evil, only to taint it with all-too-human realities.

From a feminist perspective, Elas Maeckelberghe explains, Mary is "an ambiguous religious symbol" (3). While, "womanhood was elevated in Mary" (3), she also embodies "the impossible ideal of sexual purity, maternity and selfless devotion" (Taylor 39). Although Mary is a female icon worthy of veneration, it is only because she embodies a sexuality deemed ideal within a heteronormative, patriarchal discourse. Julia Kristeva makes the same observation, noting that Mary is the "ideal that no individual woman could possibly embody"; the eternal virgin, desired and yet always inaccessible ("Stabat Mater" 141). Paul VI does note that the "picture of the Blessed Virgin presented in a certain type of devotional literature cannot easily be reconciled with today's life-style, especially the way women live today". He sees this issue as stemming out of the socio-cultural conditions under which Mary lived, in which she was largely restricted to the home – conditions very different from the conditions of many modern women in Western society. While noting these difficulties, he ultimately reasserts that Mary transcends these cultural limitations, as "different generations of Christians, looking on her as the New Woman and perfect Christian, found in her as a virgin, wife and mother the outstanding type of womanhood and the preeminent exemplar of life lived in accordance with the Gospels and summing up the most characteristic situations in the life of a woman". Although Mary might have lived under very different circumstances from many women today, and women are not expected to remain housebound, she remains the ideal.

With her many "predilections" (Nkutha, "The Glass Pecker" 190), rather than virtues, Nonceba initially seems to be completely different from the Virgin but, on closer inspection, her promiscuous (hetero)sexuality is a profane mirror-image of Mary's sexual 'purity'. Writing about the similarities between the conceptualisations of the Virgin Mary and Marilyn Monroe, Ruth Adams notes that, "[w]hether chaste or 'loose' they are both portrayed as passive vessels of an active male sexuality" (93). The difference is that the active male sexuality for which Mary is a

[63] The Virgin Mary is less central in other denominations. Elas Maeckelberghe explains that "Catholic reformation […] used Mary as its hallmark. Mary became associated with anti-Protestantism, or seen from the opposite perspective, Mary became typically Roman Catholic" (12).

vessel is framed as divine (93). Nonceba is also a passive recipient of male sexuality, having sex with men who are described as predatory[64] simply because she feels pity for them. The reference to Our Lady of Mercy also supports my argument here. Our Lady of Mercy is an iconic image of "a tall figure of the Virgin standing and holding her great mantle with outstretched arms so it covers small figures of the faithful flanking her on either side" (Solway 359). Although this image portrays Mary as powerfully protective, it is also an image which evokes one of the virtues most often associated with her: pity (367). This comes from the Latin root, *Pietas*, which is the "virtue which caused the Virgin's compassion for mankind and motivated her intercession on its behalf" (367; emphasis in original). We can see this reflected in Nonceba's 'pity' for the men at the bar she frequents, although instead of opening her mantle to shelter them, she sheds her clothes to service their sexual desires. Through juxtaposing the Virgin Mary and Nonceba, Nkutha, to use Rosemary's Clark's phrase from her discussion of Juan Marsé's subversive take on Catholic iconography, "sexualis[es] the sacred" (194). In Nkutha's case, this strategy allows her to critique the Catholic conceptualisation of a passive female sexuality as ideal, by associating it with exploitative and unfulfilling sexual encounters.

Not only does Nkutha sexualise the figure of the Virgin Mary, she also taps this icon's queer potential. Although the Virgin Mary has been used to enshrine an idealized version of passive female sexuality at the centre of a patriarchal, heteronormative family, the actual narrative of the virgin birth upsets, rather than reinforces, these norms. As Cherry points out, Christian iconography tends to remain "surprisingly safe and static" considering "the shocking point of the Christmas myth: God became human, and in a most disreputable context – born in poverty to an unwed teenage mother". Mary breaks the sexual norms of her own society, something which tends to be ignored in conservative readings of the gospels. There is also something decidedly queer about having a child without sex; a 2000-year-old precedent for the technology that allows gay and lesbian couples to have children today.

Read in this (queer) manner, Nonceba's own 'disreputable' circumstances and violation of sexual norms is only a subversion of the sanitized icon of the Virgin Mary, rather than a challenge to the Biblical narrative. The deprivation of Nonceba's childhood is conveyed by the description that she had "practically given birth to herself in the streets of Johannesburg" (Nkutha, "The Glass Pecker" 191). This description, which echoes the impossibility of a virgin birth, frames Nonceba's very existence as miraculous. In the same vein, to survive without proper parental support,

[64] For example: "There was a rattish smile plastered on the face of one of the scavenging cat [*sic*] who always hovered about, sniffing-sniffing at *The Devil's Bottom*. A night like this was jackpot time for him. He didn't even have to exert himself; his prey practically landed itself, garnish and all, in his claws. He wasn't choosy either; he polished off whatever circumstances provided" (Nkutha, "The Glass Pecker" 190).

Nonceba "had to learn how to be mother, father, aunt, sister and cousin to herself all at once" (191). This mirrors the way in which Mary, as French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva argues, has been conceptualised as not only "her son's *mother* and his *daughter*, […but] also his *wife*" ("Stabat Mater" 139; emphasis in original). Nonceba enacts a queer version of Mary's passing through "all three women's stages in the most restricted of all possible kinship systems" (139). She has to learn to take on a wide variety of extended family roles, which are excluded from the idealised nuclear family of Holy Family tableau, but are a fundamental aspect of family life in many African cultures. Furthermore, she also has to take on the role of 'father' – always clearly demarcated from the feminine in Christian doctrine and the placeholder for the divine. This gender-bending performance not only further unsettles the idealized iconic image of the Virgin Mary, but also emphasises the material realities of Nonceba's life and the queer modes of kinship that are essential to her survival.

While Nkutha might queer Nonceba's association with the figure of the Virgin Mary, when it comes to reconceptualising the same-sex relationship between her and the glass pecker, she draws on icons from African history and myth. Exploitative and unsatisfying heterosexual sex is associated with a repressive Catholic discourse on sexuality, while emotionally and physically fulfilling sex between women is couched in African terms. The use of African myths as a means of reconceptualising same-sex desires is not unprecedented. Zabus describes how many "male African writers deem that their 'homosexuality' […] needs to be buttressed by African myths". To Zabus, this "annexation of myths reveals a certain level of insecurity in dealing with male and female same-sex desire, as if these writers wished to demonstrate that their culture is ancestrally hospitable to gender variance". Nkutha's work does not reflect this kind of insecurity. She draws on iconic figures from history and myth as an imaginative means of celebrating female same-sex sexuality, and does so in a playful and sacrilegious manner that undermines any temptation to reify culture. For example, the glass pecker imagines that she and Nonceba were "Neferetiti and Nzinga making love across time lines" (Nkutha, "The Glass Pecker" 195), Neferetiti being one of the famous queens of Egypt in the 14th century BCE (Tyldesley) and Nzinga a queen in 16th and 17th century Angola (Mingren). Nonceba herself calls this "a bad comparison and downright sacrilegious" (195). However, for the glass pecker, historical accuracy or 'orthodoxy' are not important in this moment. She is trying to evoke a feeling, one which imaginatively celebrates, rather than authenticates, the relationship between the two women. By drawing on iconic women from African history, she creates a framework for female sexuality alternative to that embodied by the Virgin Mary. These are women who ruled over men in their time, gaining recognition and veneration for themselves rather than merely as intercessors for a higher male power.

In “Confessions of Karelina”, Nkutha also draws on alternative traditions to celebrate queer sexuality as sacred. Karelina references “that Sufi poet” (138) and his claim that lovemaking is akin to touching God. This use of the mystic branch of Islam is done rather blasphemously and without a deep or sustained engagement with this religious tradition. William Stoddart critiques the appropriation of the spiritual aspect of Sufism without attendance to its orthodox aspect. He explains that Sufism is “the mysticism of Islam” and cannot be understood as separate from the religion itself (3). Mysticism is the “inward dimension of formal religion” (3) and, although it might lead to “total freedom in respect of outward forms” (24), the doorway to this freedom is in fact the “‘dogmas’ of a religion” (15). From the perspective of Stoddart, then, Karelina’s appropriation of the words of a Sufi poet would be problematic, as it ignores the fact that Islamic dogma is essential to Sufi mysticism. Indeed, the fact that Karelina does not seem to know the name of the Sufi poet whose words she appropriates – he is referred to only as “that Sufi poet” (Nkutha, “Confessions of Karelina” 138) – suggests that she is drawing less from the Sufi mystic tradition and more from the popular discourse around Sufi mysticism from the West. This appropriation is problematic considering the way in which Sufi mysticism has been appropriated in the West, while at the same time this blasphemous use of religion signals a postmodernist challenge to religious orthodoxy that historically and currently condemns same-sex sex acts.

Despite the fact that the icons the glass pecker invokes had power on earth rather than in heaven, it is only in the afterlife that she and Nonceba find a way to be together. In fact, the reference to two queens making love across timelines suggests the impossibility of their love as it highlights the distance that separates them. Nevertheless, the tragedy of their separation and their “dual suicide” is subverted, Stobie argues, “by concluding with a romantic fantasy of transcultural and transcontinental union” (“Postcolonial Pomosexuality” 348). The narrative draws on Egyptian mythology to enable this ‘fantasy’, as the two lovers are reunited by Neferetiti’s tomb. In her suicide note, the glass pecker references Osiris, “primarily a god of the dead” (Hamlyn 134), and Isis, his sister-wife (Hart 101). She does so in a sacrilegious manner that blurs the roles of the god and goddess, thus subverting masculine authority and queering gendered roles. It is thus within the realm of a queered African mythology that possibilities for transcontinental love between women emerge.

These possibilities stand in contrast to a Catholic tradition which figures not only same-sex sex as sin, but also suicide as a mortal sin and thus a sentence to hell. The condemnation of suicide has lessened over time. Jonathan Dollimore’s discussion of George Minois’s short history of suicide in the Western world provides a brief outline of the changes regarding the conceptualisation of suicide in the Western world. He charts “a gradual if uneven movement from unequivocal

condemnation to greater tolerance" but notes "[t[hroughout, Church and State have condemned it as severely as was possible at the time" (148). In other words, the Catholic Church, as institution, has retained a strict proscription against suicide, even as broader societal condemnation has softened.

Although presenting suicide as a happy ending for a queer couple might be seen as problematic in that it could be read as romanticising the reality of the extremely high suicide rates amongst queer persons, it also subverts a discourse that not only frames the lives of queer people as 'intrinsically disordered', but would then condemn them for choosing death over intolerable living conditions. Nkutha thus imagines an ending for the lovers in which they escape the Catholic logic where "sexuality implies death and vice versa, so that it is impossible to escape the latter without shunning the former" (Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" 137). In fact, they choose death in order to fully embrace their sexuality. This points to the impossibilities that still exist for queer African women, even as the story employs Egyptian mythology as a means of (re)writing an ending for the lovers. This re-imagination of suicide through the fictional realisation of an afterlife resonates with the figuration of Matilda as an ancestor in "*The Suit* Continued: The Other Side" and Sethunya imagining Kgomotso in heaven in "Botswana Rain". This recurring trope is also apparent in the writing of Yvonne Vera, who depicts suicide as a form of agency, as Grace Musila demonstrates, rather than defeat.[65] All these works signal a refusal to acquiesce to a society which confines women and their sexuality and releases them from the insistence that they should acquiesce in order to survive.

Along with subversively playing with the meanings of the icon of the Virgin Mary and 'sacrilegiously' appropriating female icons from African history, the story also sets up an icon of its own in the figure of the glass pecker. She takes on iconic status in Nonceba's imagination, as Nonceba retells the story of the glass pecker introducing her to cinnamon cigarettes "a hundred and two times" (Nkutha, "The Glass Pecker" 189), always ending by describing the glass pecker

[65] Discussing Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*, Musila writes: "Read within conventional understandings of agency, the two women's suicides would appear to signal defeat. This is more so against a backdrop of popular assumptions which view agency through the lens of survival; where continuing to live, and to survive a given set of oppressive circumstances, is taken as the ultimate expression of resistance. To interpret the two women's actions thus, however, is to weigh them down with simplistic, even mundane parameters of agency and resistance. These are, one could argue, the same parameters which work with the various structures of confinement to keep the women's aspirations modest, unambitious, and resigned. I have argued elsewhere that the two suicides mark a shift of frameworks of engagement, which in a sense express a simultaneous disengagement with and capitulation to the constraining forces in their environment, and indeed, an acknowledgement of the body's immutable capacity to trap the spirit in itself […]. However, alternative readings of these suicides are possible. In many ways, the two suicides in the novel articulate a bold defiance of life itself, and the capacity of the constraints of lived experiences to visit pain on the self. By opting for these painful deaths, the two women reappropriate both their bodies and their lives, and in one elegant gesture truly hold their bodies and lives in their hands. […] In the two women's acts of self-destruction is enacted a transcendence of life and death, both of which are contained in their bodies, and at which they fling a refusal to live undignified lives, in perpetual social death" (59).

as "the most extraordinary person [she has] ever met" (190). The ritualistic telling of the story, with the same ending and gesture every time, recalls the rituals of the Catholic faith. Treating the glass pecker, a queer African woman, as "an object of praise" (190) or veneration is a subversive gesture considering the heteropatriarchal, Western legacy of the Catholic Church.

The glass pecker's name comes from the way she "worked like a meticulous glass pecker" to open Nonceba's "heart to let love in" (196). The nickname could be a play on the image of the woodpecker – the bird that tunnels into tree trunks with its beak – with 'glass' being a reference to the fragile state of Nonceba's heart and the care her lover has to take in opening her up to emotional intimacy. In this case, the nickname would speak to the emotional intimacy between the two women and the caring nature of the relationship. Considering the irreverent sensibility of the stories, the fact that 'pecker' is also a colloquial word for a penis means that 'glass pecker' could be a reference to a glass dildo. The image of the dildo challenges Catholic discourses about sexual complementarity and 'natural' sex, by introducing reference to artificial aids for pleasure. Pleasure, often treated with suspicion in Catholic discourse about sex, is celebrated through the image of the artificial phallus which makes a mockery of the Catholic focus on the procreative aspects of sex. Thus named, and with her celebratory attitude towards sex between women, the glass pecker becomes a (profane) icon embodying the joy of queer sex.

In both "Confessions of Karelina" and "The Glass Pecker", sex between women might be described as "*cloital*", a word coined by the glass pecker to describe the "magical act of mutual sexual stimulation between two women, where both women pleasure each other unselfishly until both their bodies and emotions are dancing to the same beat" (Nkutha, "The Glass Pecker" 195; emphasis in original). The most explicit example of this is in "Confessions of Karelina", where Karelina remembers her sexual encounter with Dana in terms of their fingers: fingers moving from "sides of necks" across their bodies until they are "fondling vulvas, […] massaging, caressing each desire-filled nerve" (140). Fingers are figured as erotic in this passage – indeed as the agents of pleasure. They present an alternative erotic topography to that of stereotypical heterosexual pleasure, with its tendency to foreground the penis, and thus the male body, as active, and the female body as passive.[66] Here, both partners are shown to be agentic; the fingers are both "[h]ers and Dana's" (140). This is an egalitarian representation of sex, where both partners are active givers and receivers of pleasure. The image of "The Glass Pecker" offers another subversive take on female-female sex. It separates penetration from the symbolic authority of the 'Phallus' through

[66] Claire O'Callaghan makes a similar argument about Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith*, describing how "Waters points to alternative expressions of the carnality of lesbian desire and highlights the specificities of lesbian sex" from the patriarchal, heteronormative tendency to focus only on penetration (568). For example, the title alludes to the importance of fingers in lesbian sex (569), just as Nkutha does.

implied reference to a dildo. In doing so, it expands the erotic topography of same-sex sex. Both these stories portray female sexuality as active, rather than passive and subordinated to the imperatives of reproduction and male pleasure, as embodied by the Virgin Mary. In the next chapter, I focus specifically on depictions of the erotic, which perform similar work to Nkutha's stories in reimagining female same-sex eroticism.

In her two stories, Nkutha undercuts Catholic conceptualisations of female and same-sex sexuality. She suggests that same-sex sex between women might be reconceptualised as sacred and, in doing so, implies that the binary notion of the sacred and the profane might also require reconceptualisation. The Catholic tendency to posit sexual pleasure as profane and only permissible if it is in service of procreation, is also undermined. Sex between women – figured as 'barren' within the Catholic imaginary – is described as pleasurable, egalitarian and both physically and emotionally fulfilling. Thus, in her play with the sacred and the profane, Nkutha reconceptualises sexual pleasure as positive and female same-sex sex as the closest thing to an experience of the sacred in a world of hard realities.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed a number of stories that grapple with different aspects of religious traditions, from the Christian notion of divine love, to the Islamic understanding of haram, to the split between the sacred and the profane in Catholic discourse. In different ways, the authors critique, challenge, appropriate and reconceptualise both religious discourse and the discourses surrounding queer sexuality. Due to this flexible approach to religion, I argue that these authors share a sensibility that resonates with African Traditional Religions. Mbiti argues that African religious beliefs and practices are not "formulated into a systematic set of dogmas which a person is expected to accept" (3). Rather, "[p]eople simply assimilate whatever religious ideas and practices are held or observed by their families and communities […] and each generation takes them up with modifications suitable to its own historical situation and needs" (3). Belief springs from action and experience, rather than dogma, and must always be useful to the person and their community (4). In the stories discussed in this chapter, dogma is cast aside in favour of a more flexible approach to religion, one that is able to reject the damaging aspects of a religion and assimilate any useful concept, whether it is secular or religious. The idea that religion must always be useful to the person and the community is further reflected in the fact that, in many of the stories examined here, the reconceptualisation of queer sexuality is based upon the personal knowledge, experiences and emotions of the characters.

This more open sensibility is not completely alien to the Abrahamic religions. Kugle notes, for example, that "Muslims have profound resources for dealing theologically and ethically with diversity"; specifically, a "tolerance for diversity of interpretation of sacred texts" (*Homosexuality in Islam*) and "Telling Stories" ably demonstrates that the message of love at the centre of Christian teachings offers a means of challenging interpretations of Christian scripture that are damaging rather than empowering. Other aspects of the stories also reveal similarities between the different religious traditions. Perhaps most notable is the recurring theme of possession as a means to explain queer sexuality or nonconforming gender. While "Is It Love That Has You?" shows the homophobic ways this narrative might be employed, ATRs offer an alternative narrative of possession, one which leads to acceptance and even empowerment. This illustrates, once again, what I argue is at the core of these stories – a sense of the constructed nature of discourse and thus the potential to interrogate and subvert it. Within religious narratives lie the potential for alternative conceptualisations of queer sexuality and gender nonconformity, which the stories examined here grapple with in multiple different ways.

Stories like "Is It Love That Has You?", "The Glass Pecker" and "Confessions of Karelina" all offer celebratory reconceptualisations of female same-sex sexuality in contrast to the conceptualisations of queer sexuality as pathological or sinful. However, as Lies Xhonneux points out, drawing from Mary Bernstein and Renate Reimann, the 'flip side of discrimination' is romanticisation ("Rebecca Brown" 136). To challenge the negative stereotypes of female same-sex sexuality can be to fall into another stereotype – that of the egalitarian lesbian relationship. I want to suggest that there is nothing inherently wrong with romanticising queer sexuality, since heteronormativity has been romanticised far more. It is only a problem if there are no other representations of queer sexuality available. The stories selected for this chapter offer more than just romanticized reconceptualisations. "Nine Pieces of Desire" depicts queer sexuality as mundane rather than romanticised and Xaba's "Suit" stories show the ordinary joys and struggles of queer relationships, including how power dynamics exist within these types of relationships and cause damage to those involved. Read together, these stories offer a complex literary intervention into the debates surrounding queer sexuality and religion. They do not offer a sound theological rebuttal to homophobic interpretations of religious traditions and texts, but rather, through imaginative means, offer an opportunity for readers to exercise their power of empathy in order to reconsider not only how queer lives might be understood, but the role of religion in understanding them.

Chapter 5: Erotic 'Joy Cultures' in Queer Feminist African Erotica

5.1 Introduction

The erotic is a vital aspect of many of the renderings of queer sexuality discussed in this thesis. In some stories, the erotic appears in the form of a subtle erotic charge between characters and in others it can be found in the depiction of the experience of sexual pleasure. In this chapter, I foreground the issue of representing erotic experience between women in Africa by focusing on a selection of short stories that can be identified as erotica. I take as my starting point the radical feminist assertion that erotica offers the potential for imagining "sexuality in nonhierarchical, nonsexist, nonsubordinating ways" (McNair 50). Therefore, I have selected the stories based on their positive, even celebratory, approach to female-female eroticism. While some African erotic short stories, such as those by Davina Owombre and Chantelle Gray van Heerden,[67] provide interesting explorations of uncomfortable power dynamics in female-female sexual encounters, I have chosen to focus on those that are clearly invested in framing these encounters as mutually pleasurable. Xaba, for example, makes these intentions clear in my interview with her. She states: "Erotic representation to me speaks to pleasure, enjoyment, consent and a mutual desire to engage sexually with the other person." (Xaba and Du Preez 138). This allows me to explore different approaches to depicting queer female sexuality as 'nonhierarchical, nonsexist, nonsubordinating' and to unpack the potential and the limitations of this kind of erotica.

The authors of these stories might be seen to be writing erotic 'joy cultures' – a phrase Wanuri Kahiu uses to describe African art that focuses on the light, fun and joyous aspects of the continent. Kahiu sees the creation of 'joy cultures' in African art as important due to the dominant narrative of Africa as a place of violence, suffering and trauma. As I will discuss in more detail later, a similar narrative around sexuality in Africa exists and thus the creation of erotic 'joy cultures' serves an important function. The legacy of colonialism informs the representation of sex and the erotic in Africa through a history of racist discourses. These frame sexuality in Africa as 'other' – "at times exotic, fecund, wild, and above all 'uncivilized'" (Van Zyl, "Shaping Sexualities" 23). This means that the creation of an empowering and nonsubordinating erotica in Africa not only has to take into account how women's sexuality, and sex between women, has been objectified and denigrated, but also how racialised colonial discourse has shaped the portrayal of African sexualities. This complex and fraught history makes the kind of egalitarian erotica I am

[67] Owombre's "After Marilyn" is about a married woman who treats the women she picks up for sex with little respect. Van Heerden's "The Most Tender Place" depicts a sadomasochistic sexual relationship between a woman unhappy in her heterosexual open marriage and a young woman who is likely a sex worker. The problematic power relationship lies not in the sadomasochistic nature of their sexual encounters, but the lack of trust between the two women.

exploring difficult to create without inadvertently (re)presenting problematic power relations. My reading of the erotica in this chapter is, therefore, informed by consideration of the intersection of gender, sexuality and race and its historical context.

Although the stories in this chapter share a feminist sensibility, there are also distinct differences in how they treat the erotic. In the first section, I examine "Inside" by Xaba and "Mrs Habib's Hypothalamus" by Suzy Bell. Bell writes both short stories and poetry. She has a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Cape Town and works as an editor with John Brown Publishing in Cape Town. She has also written for various South African newspapers, as a columnist and arts critic. Xaba's and Bell's stories, I argue, 'rediscover' the erotic as ordinary. Both stories are from *Open: An Erotic Anthology by South African Women Writers* (2008). Neither Xaba's nor Bell's stories contain sex scenes. Instead, they focus on erotic experiences in everyday interactions and conversations. By depicting the erotic as ordinary, these writers avoid and contest the 'spectacularisation' and abjection of the black lesbian body.

In the second section, I examine two short stories, "Coming into Self-Awareness" by Tiffany Kagure Mugo and "Personal Shopper" by Sarah Lotz, that frame the erotic as liberatory. According to her *Adults Only* biography, Mugo is the director of a social media consultancy called Kagure Konceptions, as well as being one of the founders of *HOLAAfrica.* Still at the beginning of her writing career, she spends most of her creative energy blogging, but has also published a paper in *Agenda* about "how sexuality plays out on social media" (Hichens 42). Lotz has a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Cape Town, and has also been a set painter, a sculptor and an illustrator. She is also part of the erotica writing team that publishes under the name Helena S. Paige. "Coming into Self-Awareness" appears in *Adults Only: Stories of Love, Lust, Sex and Sensuality* (2014), while "Personal Shopper" is found in *Open*. These stories focus on queer, female sexual pleasure and have a liberatory trajectory that moves from an alienated or limiting perspective towards a more intimate and positive relationship to place, space and the body.

In the final section, I examine Dolar Vasani's "All Covered Up" – published in *Queer Africa* – whose joyous portrayal of lesbian sex is constructed within the fraught dynamics of the 'exotic erotic'. Vasani was born in Uganda and relocated to England when Idi Amin expelled the Asian Ugandans from the country. She has worked in international development and has lived in various places around the world, including Tanzania, South Africa and the Netherlands. Apart from "All Covered Up", she has published *Not Yet Uhuru: Lesbian Flash Fiction* (2013). I examine how, in "All Covered Up", Vasani employs this construction of the erotic that is bound up in colonialist, orientalist and homophobic discourses in a manner that retains these problematic traces.

Nevertheless, in the end I propose that an alternative kind of reading might reveal the potential for this kind of narrative to unsettle the colonial implications of the 'exotic erotic'.

5.1.1 Erotic/a: Defining Terms

For the purposes of this chapter, I define 'erotic' as a term that refers to more than just the mechanics of a sexual act. I contest John Atkins's statement that "whatever bears a relation to sex, in any form, is erotic in essence" (12), as it ignores the fact that an experience can be sexual without being erotic. As Baldick notes, "it is commonly accepted that eroticism treats sexuality within some fuller human and imaginative context" (199). Following Baldick, I argue that 'erotic' has richer connotations than 'sexual' or 'sex'. The 'erotic' encompasses sexual arousal, desire, pleasure, sensuality and emotion. Any definition of the erotic is necessarily contingent and flexible due to its subjective, personal and relational nature. The stories discussed in this chapter reveal some of the variation in the ways the erotic can be imagined by foregrounding different aspects of the erotic – some highlighting desire and emotion, others sexual pleasure.

The subjective nature of the erotic also makes defining erotica difficult. For the purposes of this chapter I use a feminist definition, drawn from Audre Lorde and Gloria Steinem. Both define erotic/a in opposition to pornography. In her influential essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power", first presented as a speech in 1978, Lorde foregrounds 'true feeling' in her (re)definition of the erotic (54). This is particularly relevant to my discussion of the erotic as ordinary, which I will unpack later. For now, it is worth noting the difference between the pornographic and the erotic that Lorde outlines. For Lorde, "[p]ornography emphasizes sensation without feeling" (54). Steinem defines pornography as depictions of sex that are bound up in voyeuristic process of objectification and are often about "domination and violence against women" (37). Moreover, as Terralee Bensinger notes, one "of the main problems with pornography, historically, has been the way in which the form as well as the content of its visual representations of sexuality are determined by the imperatives of white male heterosexual desire" (76). Thus, erotica can be defined as literature that focuses on erotic experience that foreground mutual pleasure, positive choice, sensuality and equality (Steinem 37) and de-centres 'white male heterosexual desire'. Schimke, in her preface to *Open,* also provides a useful formulation of the distinction between pornography and erotica: "Porn is prurient. It is obscene, lewd, even gross. It is indecent. It exploits. Erotica is voluptuous, amorous, sensual. It arouses subtly, mysteriously" ("Preface" viii). Erotica, in this definition, may or may not include graphic depictions of sex.

Although not important to my discussion, it is worth noting certain approaches have "used the concept of erotica to make aesthetic judgements about the 'artistic' quality of sexual

representations" by positing "pornography as the mass cultural commoditized form of sexual representation" and erotica as "the authentic, uncommodified form of sexual representation: Art with a capital 'A'" (McNair 51). This is somewhat ironic considering the recent commodification of 'erotica' in the form of works like *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Although, from a feminist perspective like Steinem's, it might be argued that *Fifty Shades* is more pornographic than erotic. Erotica "has also been defined as a category of representation which, unlike pornography, accurately or authentically reflects the sexuality of the observer" (McNair 50). Brian McNair expounds on this by using the example of lesbian representation and the differentiation that is frequently made between depictions of lesbian sexuality for the male gaze versus "a (denotatively) similar image produced for lesbians or bisexual women" (50). While this discussion is significant for the issue of writing queer and feminist erotica, I do not engage with this aspect here. I am less concerned with ideas of 'authenticity' than I am with textual representation and its politics and influences.

It is important to note that Steinem's distinction between erotica and pornography, while still useful, emerged out of the feminist 'sex wars' in America, where radical feminists often ended up aligned with moral conservatives on the issue of pornography. Distinctly problematic in Steinem's piece is her dismissal of sadomasochistic sexual practice as abusive. This assumption has been critiqued extensively by the likes of Patrick Califia, Rubin and Anita Phillips in the Western context, and recently by Siphumeze Khundayi and Tiffany Kagure Mugo in the African context. In their recent article and photographic essay, Khundayi and Mugo explore queer African women's relationship to kink and challenge various preconceptions about BDSM including that that there is no "feminism and autonomy" in kink as well as that "[k]ink is privileged sex […] for the middle class/white people" and ("Your Kink is Not My Kink" 137).

Steinem's piece also emerged in response to a literary history where "erotic texts [were] written for male consumption [… and] women's erotic preferences were either marginalized or assumed to coincide with men's" (Patthey-Chavez et al 79). Today, there is an increasing production of erotic texts by women. In fact, pornography is generally associated with filmic depictions of sex, while written representations are mostly produced by women. These are labelled erotica or erotic romances and are "profoundly gendered" (80). Despite these changes, feminist concerns remain about the kinds of scripts about eroticism and sex (and romance) that these texts produce. Thus, Steinem's distinction remains pertinent to the discussion of erotica. There is still a need for feminist erotica, one that increasingly calls for the inclusion of queer women. This kind of erotica includes practices Steinem would see as abusive (such as bondage in "Coming into Self-Awareness") portrayed in a manner that is compatible with notions of mutual pleasure and positive choice.

5.1.2 The Complexities of Writing the Erotic in Africa

The debate surrounding representation of the erotic and sex that informs much of contemporary thinking has largely taken place in the West. Although there are African representations of the erotic, the ideas that influence contemporary literature, such as the stories I discuss in this chapter, are entangled in a history of Western modernity. This is clearly apparent in Schimke's preface to *Open*, where she frames these stories by considering the difference between erotica and pornography. Helena S. Paige, in her foreword to *Adults Only*, a more recent collection of South African erotic short stories, credits *Fifty Shades of Grey* with making "[w]riting and reading about sex […] mainstream" (8). Despite the fact that the authors of the stories in these two anthologies are African, the African context is largely absent from the framing of these stories, except that it makes their existence notable against the assumption of a literary tradition void of erotic representation. However, even here, a history of erotic representation by black women writers is not invoked. *Open*, for example, is "renowned as the first erotic anthology written by women for women (in any language) in South Africa" (Selvick 460). It gains recognition for its existence within a particular context, but this context is not used to frame these anthologies. Xaba's introduction to *Adults Only* does contextualise the stories within South Africa's apartheid era 'immorality' laws, as well as questioning the lack of representation of HIV/AIDS in the stories and the lack of contributions by black women writers ("Let's Talk About Sex"). To trace the history of erotic representation on the African continent is far beyond the scope of this study. Rather, I touch on its existence briefly before attempting to situate the erotic short stories I analyse within the concerns of contemporary African women writers, scholars and activists regarding the erotic and how these align with, but also expand, feminist notions of erotica.

Generally, African literature has been seen as sexless. Ainehi Edoro, writing for her blog, *Brittle Paper,* suggests that two rules govern the inclusion of sex in African novels: Firstly, to "leave it out of the story entirely", or, secondly, to handle it "as cautiously as possible by placing it within a moralizing context" ("How Keen Are African Novelists on Sex?"). There have, of course, been exceptions to these rules. On her blog, Edoro endeavours to bring these to her readers' attention. Examples that she discusses range from the 1950s Onitsha Market chapbooks to Buchi Emecheta's novels, Naiwo Osahon's 1971 pornographic text "Sex is a Nigger" to the contemporary African *Ankara Romance Series* and the online erotica collection from Jalada entitled *Sext Me Stories and Poems*. Edoro's blog provides erotic excerpts from some of these works, as well as original erotic stories by contemporary writers and erotic fan fiction of canonical African literature,

such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.[68] Plenty of the stories I have collected for my own study contain erotic scenes, from the erotic bath scene in Rozena Maart's "No Rosa, No District Six", to the interrupted encounter couched in metaphor between the two girls in Monica Arac de Nyeko's "Jambula Tree", to the pleasure-filled reminiscences in Lindiwe Nkutha's "Confessions of Karelina".

The portrayal of African sexuality and eroticism is "haunted by the passage of the African (female) body through colonial scopic regimes" (Coly 256). While white Western feminists have largely been concerned with patriarchal renderings of female sexuality and, more recently, heterosexist representations, Africa's colonial legacy means that the intersection of race and sexuality cannot be ignored. As Lewis points out, "the topic of represented sexualities [in Africa] is particularly charged" ("Representing African Sexualities" 200) because African people "have been defined in terms of sexual excess, bestiality and bodily deviance" (205). This discourse about African sexuality still exists today, although in different forms, surfacing even in depictions that are "presented as positive and ennobling celebrations of the black body" (201), such as the celebration of black male virility or even the rejection of the existence of sexual 'perversity' in Africa. The intersection of gender and sexuality adds another element to the portrayal of female sexuality in Africa, where African women have been "defined by colonial myths, by fictions about their hypersexuality, their physical degeneracy and their tantalising exoticism" (206).[69] These constructions of African sexuality are both imperialist, but could also be read as pornographic.

This link between imperialism and pornography is apparent in the ways in which, in the late 1800s, "metaphors of imperialism and sexuality were closely interwoven" (Arnfred, "African Sexuality" 63). White female sexuality was also constructed in relation to race and various racial and sexual anxieties of Western society in the late nineteenth century. According to Rebecca Stott, the "dualisms of white/male/civilized and black/female/primitive characteristic of the late nineteenth century run through imperialist discourses of this period" (76). The "land was seen as a female body ('virgin land') and the female body was seen as a continent yet to be explored" (Arnfred, "African Sexuality" 63), and this was racialised when it came to the African landscape. Stott notes the explicit connection between such imperialist discourse and the pornography of the time, noting that the "landscape of potential empire becomes the landscape of pornographic

[68] Edoro has posted excerpts from Osahon's work, Mongo Beti's *Poor Christ of Bomba* and Tayeb Salih's *Seasons of Migration to the North*. Erotic short stories posted on the blog include "Unspeakable Joy" by Djarabi Al-Misaawi and "Lesotho is Like Stepping into a Frosty Fairytale" by M.V. Sematlane. African fan-fiction erotica written for *Brittle Paper* by Kiru Taye includes "My Alien Lover" based on Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon,* "Lunch with Ifemelu" based on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and "Thighs Fell Apart" based on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart.*

[69] Tamale, writing about Uganda, argues that these colonialist constructions of African sexuality were exploited by patriarchs in order to intensify the "repression and surveillance of African women's sexuality" ("Eroticism, Sensuality and 'Women's Secrets'" 266).

fantasies and sexual terrors" (85). Like the pornography of the time – and the pornography that feminists have railed against – imperialist narratives, such as the adventure fiction of Rider Haggard, are also shaped by white, male, heterosexual desire. "The focus is always on the experience of the white male dominator or explorer, not on the experience of the colonized" (85). The metaphorical association between African landscape and female body emerges in three of the stories discussed in this chapter, all in direct relation to sexual desire or the sex act, revealing its continued relevance in the erotic imaginary. As I will discuss, these depictions reframe this metaphor, within the context of erotica rather than pornography, to different effects. What these representations share is a separation of this metaphorical construct from the white male gaze and imperialist anxieties about sexual and cultural otherness.

Since the depiction of female African sexualities is 'particularly charged' due to its discursive history, it is difficult to write African erotica – especially that which contains explicit sex scenes – without considering how it negotiates this colonial legacy and whether it might risk perpetuating the 'othering' to which Lewis refers. To deal with African female sexuality and the body openly is to risk playing into colonial discourses, or at least to be seen to do so. Thus, as Ayo Coly points out, postcolonial narratives, in attempting to counter colonial objectification of black women, have tended "to cover up, de-sexualise and de-corporealise African womanhood" (654). Coly points to the difficulties in trying to break with this kind of representation through the example of Calixthe Beyala, who is frequently accused of "pornographic and colonialist treatment of African women for the benefit of Western readership" (255-256). This criticism is also likely exacerbated by the fact that Beyala includes female same-sex sexuality in her work.

The 'de-sexualisation' of African women in postcolonial narratives is changing. There is an increasing amount of African scholarship and artistic production that foregrounds African female sexuality. This includes scholarly focus on African women's sexual pleasure (an early and notable example being Patricia McFadden's "Sexual Pleasure and Feminist Choice" and Charmaine Pereira's critical response to it) and erotic practices, websites and podcasts that focus on African women's sexual experiences,[70] photographic work by artists such as Zanele Muholi and Angèle Essamba, and an emerging body of African erotica, a small sample of which is discussed here. As scholars such as Lewis, Matebeni and Van Zyl attest, restorative work focused on (re)claiming the erotic for African women is essential because the colonial discourses that

[70] Celebratory spaces for such discussions include the websites *HOLAAfrica* and *Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women*, and the podcasts *The Spread* (produced by someone with the handle Karenkazlucas) and *Black Women Be Like*. *HOLAAfrica* creators Mugo and Khundayi celebrate these resources as places for African women to have honest conversations about sex. Conversations that, they argue in their TEDx Talks, are necessary for women to develop healthier and more pleasurable relationships towards sex. In these spaces, speaking openly about sex is framed as an empowering practice. Also see Munro's "Pleasure in Queer African Studies: Screenshots of the Present".

hypersexualised the African body simultaneously stripped it of its capacity for the erotic. The erotica discussed in this chapter can be seen to perform this restorative function in that it treats African women's sexuality in a sensual way. These stories are thus politically important, even if they vary in success in separating themselves from hegemonic discourses. ("Personal Shopper" differs here because its protagonist is white, which means that her representation is shaped by a different set of discourses than the black women at the centre of the other stories.)

These representations are also important because of a contemporary focus on violence and victimhood when discussing women's sexuality in Africa. Bakare-Yusuf calls for counter-narratives that foreground women's sexual desires, pleasures and autonomy in contrast to this dominant narrative.[71] She explains:

> Telling positive stories about women's sexual lives matters because it helps to restore what previously has been maligned and objectified; they can empower and remind us that women's sexual universe is not simply a litany of errors, negations, fears and terrors. The right to sexual pleasure, curiosity, exploration, joy, intimacy, reciprocity, love and longing are all part of what it means to be a sexual being. Sexual negation as the main sexual narrative of women's experience must be resisted and challenged. We must always present it as a violating anomaly in our lived sexual universe, even if its occurrence has taken on the appearance of normativity. (37)

Erotica can be seen to fulfil this empowering function. Lynda Spencer makes a similar argument for African chick lit: "It is through sexual pleasure, a desire for intimacy, expressions of love and erotic expression that women begin to define themselves in new ways. Like its mainstream counterpart, 'uprising genres' depict female characters as sexually desiring, desirable and erotic beings, in spite of the characters' attempts to conform to conservative forms of femininity" (23-24). Not only can it offer alternatives to the dominant narratives about female sexuality, but the pleasure it provides its readers has the potential to return them "to the erotic embodied agency that is a central part of women's lived experience" (35).[72] I would argue that the kind of erotica discussed in this chapter emerges out of this kind of feminist discourse that frames the erotic as a fundamental and empowering aspect of women's lives.

While telling positive stories about women's sexual lives might create a counter-narrative to hegemonic discourses that normalise violence, this does not mean that such stories cannot also perpetuate other dominant discourses about women's sexuality. Genre erotica from the West, for

[71] Cassava Republic Press, based in Abuja in Nigeria and co-founded by Bakare-Yusuf, is planning on putting together a selection of erotic stories by African women writers in order to "provide examples of the interiority of women's erotic imagination, so that other women can reconnect with their own erotic core and begin to see that violation or danger is not the grammar of women's erotic life" (Bakare-Yusuf 39).

[72] There is some debate about whether mainstream erotica fulfils this function or simply reproduces problematic gender power relations often seen in pornography and romance fiction. See Simon Hardy, Esther Sonnet and the debate surrounding works like *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

example, frequently employs a narrative of feminist sexual empowerment in its advertising and yet still fixes "patriarchal heterosexuality in its demand for a unified female subject", which "admits little differentiation by class, culture, ethnicity, age or physical embodiment and so repeat[s] the dominant western version of a sexually desirable woman" (Sonnet 183). For example, the erotica series *Black Lace* advertises itself as erotica by women and for women. As Hardy notes, the series employs a liberal feminist discourse, which posits its texts as "enabling women to take or reclaim a realm of erotic experience and agency long withheld" and, therefore, "consciously aligns itself with the feminism of taking pleasures rather than the feminism of avoiding or neutralizing dangers" (435-436). While this aligns with Bakare-Yusuf's sentiments, simply focusing on female pleasure does not necessarily mean a break with patriarchal and heterosexist notions of female sexuality, let alone a challenge to dominant discourses constructed along other axes of oppression. Hardy and Sonnet both critically examine the *Black Lace* series and interrogate how much the novels actually deviate from their immediate generic antecedents: pornography and romance novels.This highlights the importance of an intersectional approach when trying to create empowering erotica, as well as the ways in which mass-produced genre erotica is unlikely to challenged deeply entrenched norms.

Stephanie Newell's notion of 'uprising genres' is useful for considering the ways in which the erotica discussed in this chapter might be able to challenge sexual and gender norms. As Newell explains in relation to romance, when a

> dominant genre is put into operation by writers who are situated geographically and economically *outside* the centres of mass-production, then the gender conservatism commonly associated with the genre is detached: when authors who are neither mainstream nor canonical take on the romance, it becomes an 'uprising' form, capable of conveying potentially radical challenges to popular gender ideologies. (144 qtd. in Spencer 7; emphasis in original)

The erotica discussed here, like the chick lit from Africa that Lynda Spencer discusses, "is more political and attempts to disrupt the original" genre "by offering a critique of society" (1). Of course, simply being positioned geographically outside of the West does not necessarily equate to radical literature. In terms of genre erotica, South Africa has authors Helena S. Paige and Jassy Mackenzie. Paige is the pen name for the collaboration of authors Paige Nick, Helen Moffett and Sarah Lotz. They have written three 'choose-your-own-erotic-destiny' novels, combining a chick lit sensibility, explicit sex scenes and a 'choose-your-own-adventure' format. While offering a discourse of feminist empowerment, apparent in their slogan "Your fantasy, Your rules", the novels offer little in the way of subversion. In *A Girl Walks into a Bar* (2014), a sexual encounter with another woman is merely a bit of fun experimentation and, if the reader's desire to experiment

with kink goes too far, they are asked if they are 'out of their mind' and quickly rerouted to a more acceptable narrative. While the reader might bring 'difference' to the female protagonist, on a textual level she remains generic, as does the setting, which includes little South African specificity. Thus, despite their liberal feminist slogan and genre experimentation, these novels remain limited in their engagement with sexual politics.

The stories analysed in this chapter provide better examples of the potential of uprising genres. Most significantly, of course, they foreground lesbian and bisexual experiences rather than using them as an ingredient to 'spice up' a (hetero)sexual narrative. They also provide clearer attempts to expand notions of the erotic and engage with the politics of place, although to varying degrees. The fact that the erotica discussed here is written in the short story form arguably contributes to its political potential. Awadalla and March-Russell describe the short story as occupying an "ambiguous cultural position", at once "a product of mass and minority culture" (4). To write in the short story form is thus potentially to be situated "*outside* the centres of mass-production" (Newell 144 qtd. in Spencer 7; emphasis in original), where there is more space for experimentation. At the same time, the short story still has the capacity to reach large audiences and to be consumed for pleasure rather than intellectual stimulation. Furthermore, as Xaba, in her introduction to *Adults Only*, observes: maybe "the short story genre is indeed appropriate for these brief emotional rides and physical encounters of foreplay, the sexual act and climax" as the "scenes, dialogue and narrative within the confines of a short story seem to facilitate clarity and urgency on matters sexual" ("Let's Talk About Sex" 12). The short story format allows for a condensed narrative that is suited to the intensity of erotic feeling and sexual pleasure.

5.2 Rediscovering the Erotic as Ordinary

In this section, I explore the possibilities of rediscovering the erotic as ordinary as a strategy for writing queer, feminist erotica that successfully negotiates heterosexist, patriarchal, racist and colonial discourses. To do so, I focus on two South African short stories that depict erotic tension between women, but do not contain graphic sex scenes. These are "Inside" by Makhosazana Xaba and "Mrs Habib's Hypothalamus" by Suzy Bell. Both stories emphasize the ordinary place of sexual desire in the lives of women by detailing the interior life of a female character whose everyday life is limned by the erotic. The focus in these stories is not on the sex act, but on the build-up of sexual desire. Furthermore, the erotic is not limited to sexual desire, but runs through other aspects of the characters' lives, including spiritual, intellectual and embodied experiences. It is through these various elements that these two authors imagine the erotic as ordinary.

I use 'ordinary' here not only to refer to the mundane and the everyday, but also in a similar sense to Njabulo Ndebele in "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary". Ndebele famously coined the phrase 'the rediscovery of the ordinary' in the title of his essay critiquing what he saw as the 'spectacular' tendencies of South African protest literature. He defines the 'spectacular' as being focused on exteriority, on people as signs or symbols of inequality and oppression, and calls instead for a rediscovery of the ordinary – a turn towards depth, interiority, reflexivity and a focus on detail. In a 2009 article that explores the continued significance of Ndebele's work on the 'spectacular' and the 'ordinary' in contemporary South Africa, Gqola points out that, unlike in literature under apartheid, "the focus on the common textures of people's lives and interiority is the common ground in post-apartheid literature" (62). Indeed, she argues that the 'ordinary' has not only been 'rediscovered' in this body of literature, but "turned upside down, probed, circle and celebrated in various forms" (62). Despite this shift in the literary sphere, for Gqola, Ndebele's theorising on the 'ordinary' and the 'spectacular' remains pertinent because of the spectacular nature of the violent masculinities that have come to dominate the South African political sphere since the Jacob Zuma rape trial. She thus proposes that these concepts can usefully be applied to contexts and issues beyond protest literature, including the dynamics of gender in contemporary South Africa.

Here I wish to adapt his notions of the 'spectacular' and the 'ordinary' to considering representations of the erotic. The erotic is often portrayed in 'spectacular' ways. The focus tends to be on descriptions of the sex act. These descriptions tend to be clichéd and mainly concerned with the exterior, mechanistic movements of the body. In South Africa, discourse around black lesbian women is also often reduced to the spectacular. As Stephanie Selvick points out, in a country where gender-based violence and 'corrective/curative' rape is so rife, "sensationalist news headlines about violated and traumatized lesbians" (455) can easily become the dominant, spectacular narrative about the lesbian experience. With this 'spectacular' context in mind, to rediscover the erotic as ordinary, particularly for black, lesbian women, could be to focus on the interior lives and desires of the characters and on details that refuse reduction to stereotype (Ndebele 149-150).

To rediscover the erotic as ordinary could also be to expand the scope of the erotic. As the commentary on "Uses of the Erotic" in *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life* notes, in this piece Lorde "blurs the boundaries between the erotic, on the one hand, and political, creative, and everyday activities, on the other" (Lovaas and Jenkins 87). For Lorde, the erotic is defined as more than simply sex or sexual arousal. Rather, it is a holistic and emotional power that has the potential to animate women's everyday lives. Lorde's work on the erotic is frequently drawn upon

in the African context. Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi's use of Lorde to analyse the erotic in Werewere Liking's work provides an apt description of the kind of eroticism pertinent to my analysis:

> The power of the erotic becomes a fusion of a totality of desires, mind, body, creative energies, plenitude; a force that enriches without necessarily impoverishing or depersonalizing. […] This power is not only all-inclusive but challenging as well, since it intervenes in dualistic thinking by questioning the separation of thought and body, mind and knowledge. (101)

Here, the erotic is understood as an integrative force, which contests the ways in which sexist and racist discourses about black women seek to reduce them to their bodies and transform those bodies into sexual objects with no desires of their own.

In Xaba's and Bell's stories, what is specifically contested is what Xhonneux terms "the old myth of lesbianism as unnatural or abject" ("Rebecca Brown" 137) and the "persistent productions of black girls' [and women's] bodies as abject and animalistic" (Ohito and Khoja-Moolji 278). The narrative of the abject is a spectacular one that revolves around the experience of disgust for the bodily. The most influential theoretical formulation of the abject in feminist scholarship was put forward in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* by French theorist Julia Kristeva. She describes the psycho-sexual development of the self as contingent upon the rejection, or abjection, of the maternal body. As Imogen Tyler observes, Kristeva associates the abject with all that is "repulsive and fascinating about bodies and, in particular, those aspects of bodily experience which unsettle singular bodily integrity: death, decay, fluids, orifices, sex, defecation, vomiting, illness, menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth" ("Against Abjection" 80). Tyler goes on to critique certain feminist appropriations of Kristeva's theory of the abject, warning against the perpetuation of the construction of the female body as abject. Instead, she argues that "the deeply engrained psycho-social association between the maternal and the abject is an historical condition and not an unchangeable fact" and that feminism should oppose it (91). Both Xaba and Bell, in their treatment of that which Kristeva would consider abject, can be seen to articulate this kind of opposition.

5.2.1 The Erotic as Ordinary in "Inside"

Xaba's "Inside" provides a quintessential example of what I mean by rediscovering the erotic as ordinary. The erotic is an important theme in Xaba's poetry and emerges in multiple ways in the stories of *Running.* Throughout her body of work, ordinary, and sometimes unexpected, moments are often imbued with an erotic charge. Her concern with the erotic and the ordinary is also apparent in her introduction to *Adults Only,* in which she interprets the "banal-sounding titles" of the stories

as a reminder that "sex is ordinary" ("Let's Talk About Sex" 10). Xaba notes that Ndebele's "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary" had an influence on some of the stories in Running. She identifies this influence in the stories "Prayers" and "The Trip": In "Prayers, I wanted the challenge of a teenage narrator's voice. How could a teenager tell a story of national relevance? In "The Trip" I was motivated by the desire to tell an ordinary story set around long distance driving" (Beukes). I would argue that "Inside" and the other stories in the collection show this influence as well, due to their focus on mundane situations, details and character interiority. This reflects both the spirit of Ndebele's call for a rediscovery or the ordinary and his own practice of this in *Fools and Other Stories.*

The idea that the erotic as ordinary is explored in "Inside". The story is about Bhekiwe and her growing acquaintance with, and sexual desire for, a teacher called Zodwa. The narrative begins with Bhekiwe picking out flowers for her first visit to Zodwa's apartment, flashes back to how they first met, and then brings the reader back to the present. Bhekiwe arrives at Zodwa's apartment, where they share breakfast and engage in a conversation. Throughout the story, Bhekiwe's desire for Zodwa builds. As she leaves the apartment and the story ends, "she can feel Zodwa's smiling eyes lingering on her" (Xaba, "Inside" 128). As is apparent from this brief outline, "Inside" is not plot-driven. Rather, the focus is on the mundane happenings of Bhekiwe's life. It is through describing the ordinary details of Bhekiwe and Zodwa's interactions that Xaba develops the sexual tension between them.

Xaba indicates the reasoning behind these narrative choices in an interview, as she states:

> I wanted to explore other and nuanced layers and ways of writing the erotic, within a same-sex couple. A reader once told me of how irritated they were when they first read "Inside" because "nothing happens in this story". It was upon the third rereading that they got it and suddenly, "so much was happening". This feedback affirms my intentions. (Xaba and Du Preez 138)[73]

The reader's account here suggests that Xaba has been successful in exploring 'other' ways of writing the erotic. Her narrative is not immediately legible to the reader, who is perhaps used to 'spectacular' depictions of the erotic that rely on easily understood clichés and explicit sex scenes.

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[73] Xaba makes a similar comment elsewhere*:* "The idea behind *Inside* was to capture the eroticism embedded inside attraction and desire – that often tension-filled, maybe-I-should-run-away-but-I-am-determined-to-be-calm-impersonated feeling, of the pre-dating phase. I needed both characters to be women. When I submitted it for the book that was tagged as 'erotic' I was not sure it would be accepted as it was not so 'full-on'. It was first published in *Open: An Erotic Anthology by South African Women Writers*. As one young friend of mine once told me, 'At first I hated that story because nothing happened, but when I read it again, months later, I could see just how much, in fact, happened'" (Beukes).

The appearance that 'nothing is happening' means that the reader has to learn a new way of reading through continued engagement. By layering the erotic beneath the ordinary, Xaba interrupts an easy reading process that might reinforce narrow understandings of the erotic, especially in relation to female same-sex sexuality. The reader cannot hypersexualise, objectify or 'other' the female erotic experience because it is woven into the familiar. And yet, the story does not de-eroticize female same-sex sexuality, as the erotic is the most essential element of the narrative.

Apart from layering the erotic with the ordinary, Xaba expands the realm of the erotic by intertwining it with the spiritual. This emerges in Bhekiwe's response to the music of Taiwa. During one of their early meetings, Zodwa and Bhekiwe go to one of his performances, and when Bhekiwe visits Zodwa's apartment it is Taiwa that she listens to while waiting for Zodwa to shower. The music takes her back to the night at the jazz club and her erotic memories of Zodwa in that space, but it also takes her further back to "her childhood in Tanzania" (Xaba, "Inside" 122). This experience is sensual: "She feels the humid Tanzanian air embrace her body, caressing her skin then easing into her pores" (123). This is the erotic in the broader sense of which Lorde speaks. Lorde references music in her own discussion of the erotic, noting:

> In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea. (56-57)

Lorde thus uses the bodily experience of listening to music as a metaphor for the experience of opening herself up to erotic experience in all aspects of her life. Xaba uses it in a similar manner, as Taiwa's music leads Bhekiwe to mentally return to various sensual experiences.

In Xaba's story, music also serves as a catalyst for internal exploration, which is framed as an erotic experience. The title of the story, "Inside", refers to a moment when, seeing Bhekiwe listening to Taiwa, Zodwa says: "I'd like to find a place inside you that I'd take somewhere you've never been" (Xaba, "Inside" 123). While this 'inside' might be read as sexually suggestive, it can also be read, according to Selvick, as "a place of emotional and erotic intimacy" (463). What Selvick does not mention is the spiritual implication of 'inside' and of Bhekiwe's newly acquired desire to 'find herself' in response to Taiwa's music and her conversation with Zodwa. The erotic tension between the two women has a spiritual aspect to it in the sense that it ignites a desire for self-discovery. The story ends with Bhekiwe driving off into an "unplanned day", where the only thing she has written in her diary is "Finding oneself" and she can "feel Zodwa's smiling eyes lingering on her" (Xaba, "Inside" 128). The story thus ends with a moment of possibility for the discovery of new aspects of herself as well as possible erotic futures for her and Zodwa. These

potentialities are entangled, presenting the erotic as a fundamental part of the ordinary internal explorations of life.

Linking the erotic to the ordinary and the spiritual potentially runs the risk of disembodying the erotic. However, alongside Taiwa's music, Xaba also includes a range of moments where Zodwa's body is figured erotically. These include various physical features from her dimples (125) to her "tight abdominal muscles, with a soft covering of hair" exposed in her jogging outfit (119). The most explicitly erotic moment occurs in response to talk about menstruation. This moment embodies the erotic without reducing it to the bodily. The subject of menstruation is raised casually in the conversation between Bhekiwe and Zodwa, as Zodwa explains that she needs to shower because her "period is on" (121). Menstruation is framed as a practical, everyday matter. As a subject it is no more shocking or taboo than the subject of Bhekiwe's Masters thesis that they were discussing before. This "talk of menstrual blood awakens [Bhekiwe's] vagina" and she "feels a sudden seeping of juices" (122). This moment thus portrays menstruation – something that has often been situated in the 'spectacular' realm of the abject and the taboo – as both ordinary and erotic.

This moment does a lot of work, as is apparent in Selvick's discussion of blood as an erotic and political metaphor in "Inside". She reads "Inside" alongside a dance performance piece by Mlu Zondi and the photography of Zanele Muholi. In Selvick's analysis, blood allows these artists to explore sexual and gender violence and simultaneously depict the female same-sex eroticism. In other words, Selvick examines how these works avoid the pitfalls of the spectacular in representing queer female sexuality, particularly regarding the violence enacted against such women. She argues that of all of these works, "Inside" "separates desire from violence most emphatically" (447), but also observes that "Xaba still chooses to set her story in the wake of apartheid and its history of trauma" (447). This is apparent in Zodwa's explanation of how her period is linked to her personal history:

> Well, let's see, I started menstruating a day before my fifteenth birthday. I'm thirty-two years old. That's seventeen years; 204 months of bleeding. But then, I missed six months when I was nineteen because of medication I was on. In 1985 I was in prison during the state of emergency, and my period disappeared. Stress, I think, but it was only for three months. I've been regular since. That brings the total down to 195 months. Can you imagine how many litres of blood that is? (Xaba, "Inside" 121)

Selvick reads the lingering trauma of life under apartheid in this narrative, but notes that Zodwa does not dwell on this. The bleeding (or absence of bleeding) that seems to signify trauma is "recuperated and transformed into the catalyst which sexually excites and connects Xaba's female protagonists" (462).

Along with transforming the spectacle of trauma into a site of potential pleasure, Selvick argues that Xaba transforms "the tendency to turn away in disgust from menstrual excrement, and reframe[s] this gesture as that which fuels female-female eroticism" (446). To rephrase this in the terms of my argument, menstruation is not depicted as abject, but rather as ordinary and erotic. In "Inside", menstrual blood is not an abject threat to identity or the symbolic, as Kristeva outlines in *The Powers of Horror*. Rather, menstruation is an integral part of how Zodwa constructs her personal history and her own understanding of herself. Her systematic accounting of her bodily history subtly undermines the notion of a grand (male) narrative of history, which I have discussed in chapter two. It also insists on the place of the female body in South Africa's political history. Here, the overtly political – the spectacular subject of South Africa's official history – is shown to be part of 'ordinary' female history. The female body that has been violated and 'abjected' in order to build the nation state is reclaimed, as it is used to frame the history that has rejected it. What Bhekiwe finds arousing is not just the fact of the female body, but specifically the "*talk* of menstrual blood" (Xaba, "Inside" 122; my emphasis). This is not what Tyler calls Kristeva's "speechless maternal", which "*disavows* the very possibility of vocalising lived accounts of maternity" ("Against Abjection" 87; emphasis in original) or, more broadly, women's lives. Rather, it is a portrayal of women who construct their own understanding of the supposedly 'abject' parts of themselves and whose engagement with the erotic, to use Musila's phrase, intertwines "the corporeal and the discursive" (52). To return to Nfah-Abbenyi, Xaba's treatment of eroticism challenges "the separation of thought and body, mind and knowledge" (101) in a manner that frames the erotic as ordinary.

5.2.2 The Erotic Animation of the Ordinary in "Mrs Habib's Hypothalamus"

Like "Inside", "Mrs Habib's Hypothalamus" does not have a strong plot, focusing instead on the ordinary details of the life of its protagonist. While the details of Bhekiwe's life appear mundane due to their matter-of-fact narration, Mrs Habib's everyday life is depicted as being animated by the erotic. The story is set in the Bo-Kaap, a Muslim area of Cape Town. It follows Mrs Habib – a 55-year-old atheist of Muslim heritage who is haunted by sexual desire in the form of her 'throbbing hypothalamus' – as she goes about her day. The narrative opens with Mrs Habib's morning routine, sketches some of the textures of her life and then, in a flashback, reveals the catalyst for her throbbing hypothalamus: a meeting with Miss Duval, a bookshop assistant, with whom she shared an intense conversation about literature. Like in "Inside", the story ends with only the potential of the consummation of the erotic charge between the characters.

In "Uses of the Erotic", Lorde observes that women have been "taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of [their] lives other than sex" (55) and calls for this lesson to be unlearnt. For Lorde, joy and the erotic are strongly connected, as an "important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of [the] capacity for joy" (56). Writing far more recently than Lorde, and from a different perspective, Staci Newmahr also problematizes the reduction of eroticism to the phenomenon of sexual arousal. She argues for understanding "eroticism as an emotional experience" (211). For Newmahr, eroticism is arousal not only when it manifests in 'genital excitement'. Rather, it "is an arousal in that it marks a phenomenological change, from a relative dormancy to a relative vitality. It awakens, enlivens, and spills from one phenomenological category to another" (211). What differentiates it from other emotional arousals is that it is experienced as pleasurable. This theorisation of eroticism resonates with Lorde's description of the erotic as a deep emotional satisfaction or enlivening force that makes work a pleasure.

Mrs Habib's life appears animated by this kind of eroticism. Each moment of Mrs Habib's everyday routine is imbued with enlivening joy, even those aspects which might be discomforting or depressing to most. She finds delight in her fat and aging body, even though it would be considered abject by societal standards. For example:

> She admired her fulsome nakedness, staring at every inch of herself in her full-length bedroom mirror. There was more than an inch to be explored. 'A moment on the lips, another inch on the hips,' she tittered to herself as she fondly inspected what she did not see as deterioration, but rather a miraculous metamorphosis. She accepted new wrinkles and sags with curious delight and astonishing glee. Mrs Habib was proud of her soft folds of skin. They were such a familiar comfort to her – like her soft cotton pyjamas, which she could never imagine living without. (Bell 22-23)

Mrs Habib's morning routine of caring for her body is not depicted as dull or repetitive. Nor is it marked by the self-doubt that accompanies many narratives where women confront their naked bodies. (A good example is "Personal Shopper" where the female protagonist angsts over her supposed physical imperfections in a changing room mirror until she is seduced by another woman.) Rather, Mrs Habib finds an erotic pleasure in her own naked body, one that is marked by a sense of fondness, familiarity and comfort – suggested by the comparison to her soft cotton pyjamas. The erotic is thus an ordinary, everyday part of Mrs Habib's life, even as it elevates that 'ordinariness', as can be seen in the phrase 'miraculous metamorphosis'.

Furthermore, the notion of 'eroticism as an emotional experience' is conveyed in the story through the image that Bell uses to signal Mrs Habib's erotic desire for Miss Duval –her 'throbbing hypothalamus'. While the word 'throbbing' is commonly used to describe a sexual organ in a state of sexual arousal, in this case it is used to describe part of the brain. The location of erotic desire

in the brain rather than the genitals is a dislocation of clichéd erotic topography. The hypothalamus is located in the brain's limbic system and is involved in sexual functions (Swenson). Metaphorically, this image can be read as emphasising the intellectual aspect of sexual desire and the erotic – which Bell also does in other ways – it is significant that the hypothalamus is located in the emotional rather than the rational part of the brain (Swenson). By drawing on neuroscience, Bell complicates stereotypical conceptualisations of the erotic and unsettles the mind/body dichotomy that informs many understandings of sexuality. In employing the image of the 'throbbing hypothalamus' Bell foregrounds the complex links between 'mind' and 'body', 'intellect' and 'emotion' as part of her expansive imagination of the erotic.

The site of the erotic encounter between Mrs Habib and Miss Duval is the bookshop where Miss Duval works. Thus, the erotic is literally situated within the realm of the intellectual and the literary. The 'flirtation' between the two women takes the form of an intensely intellectual debate about Joseph Conrad's infamous novel, *The Heart of Darkness*, and whether it is a racist text, as Miss Duval insists, or "a masterwork of irony", as Mrs Habib argues (Bell 27). Conrad's representation of Africa is arguably a 'spectacular' one filled, as Miss Duval notes, with "stock metaphors and stock stereotypes", "colonial language", "sexualisation of the landscape" and even "the noble savage" (28). Within the story, this spectacular depiction of Africa is made ordinary as two South African women discuss it over chai tea. The intellectual capacity of 'Africans' absent in works like Conrad's is asserted here in a very ordinary context. Ndebele, in fact, positions the analytical and the philosophical within the realm of the ordinary (152-153). Tying the intellectual to the erotic thus frames it as ordinary, even as Bell's story challenges Ndebele's rather dry idea of the ordinary as "sobering rationality" (152). Linking the erotic to the intellectual does not strip the erotic of its emotional components. Rather, the erotic infuses the intellectual as the passion of the women enlivens the discussion of Conrad.

The colonial trope of the sexualised landscape in Conrad's novel is an example of how the erotic has been 'misnamed and misused' in the repression of African women. The African landscape is compared to the sexualised body of a woman. She is not portrayed as having an inner life, and thus her body can be indiscriminately explored. Similarly, the hypersexualised bodies of African women can be used without consideration of their subjecthood. As I have already mentioned, the sexualisation of the African landscape is arguably pornographic. However, as Miss Duval critiques Conrad's use of this trope, Mrs Habib finds her "mind momentarily wander[ing] to the sexualisation of Miss Duval's own physical landscape" (Bell 28). This kind of sexualisation has already been suggested through Mrs Habib's association of Miss Duval's "smooth, round, brown belly" (27) with the view of Lion's Head mountain.

It is significant that this sexualisation of the landscape does not serve to make Miss Duval appear exotic. Rather, it links her body to an ordinary part of Mrs Habib's daily routine – the view from her window. The same might be said of Mrs Habib looking at "Miss Duval as if she were a delicious pineapple dipped in hot orange masala" (Bell 28). While this might be read as exotic, it might also, in light of Mrs Habib's heritage and her love of food, be read as part of her everyday imaginary. Just because certain metaphors or tropes might signify exotic stereotyping in a colonial context, in another they might be read in a completely different light.

Writing about Yvonne Vera's work, Musila observes that "the body features predominantly as a metaphor in the African canon and criticism" (51). She critiques this tendency because of the way in which this erases the reality of the corporeal body. In her words: "This use of the body-as-metaphor creates a gap between the level of discourse in which the body is a linguistic object on the one hand, and lived experience on the other" (51). What differs in Mrs Habib's use of the metaphorical link between the female body and the landscape is, firstly, that the landscape is being used as metaphor rather than the body and, secondly, that it does not impersonalise women's bodies. Rather, the link Mrs Habib draws between Miss Duval's body and the mountain landscape is a deeply personal one. Mrs Habib earlier likens her own body to the mountain view she sees through her bedroom window. She uses this metaphorical link to affirm "her chosen body shape" (Bell 26). Rather than denying female agency and subjecthood, in this context the land/body metaphor serves to underline women's ownership over their own bodies.

In addition, Bell's story further works to close the gap between metaphor and lived bodily experience by focusing explicitly on the specificities of Mrs Habib's aging body. The metaphorical link between this body and the mountain serves as a celebration of a body likely to be considered abject, but does not romanticize it. Mrs Habib's body marks her as a potentially abject subject in numerous ways. She is old and fat, has hairy legs and a voracious appetite.[74] She is, in other words, the epitome of feminine excess that tends to be abjected.[75] The abject seems to function very similarly to Musila's 'body-as-metaphor', in that it separates the body from the female subject and the specificity of bodily experience. As Tyler explains: "It is when the maternal is no longer recognisable as *a* body and thus as a subject that it/she becomes abject. It is a subject-less maternal that is the sight/site of collective psycho-social disgust" ("Against Abjection" 86). This observation can usefully be extended to the female body in general.

[74] Karín Lesnik-Oberstein suggests that body hair on women is the 'last taboo' in contemporary Western culture.

[75] It is also worth noting that Mrs Habib is a taxidermist and is obsessed with death. This is another abject thing that she revels in rather than being repulsed by. Kristeva describes the corpse as follows: "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (*Powers of Horror* 4).

The story challenges the tendency to represent the female body as abject when it does not fit into the narrow category of 'sexually desirable'. Mrs Habib is very clearly framed as a subject, since the story is focalized through her perspective. It is through this perspective that the reader encounters her body, which she embraces with an erotic affection. Mrs Habib's approach to her own body is a joyful and erotic celebration of the supposed 'abject'. Her love and care for her body is explicitly linked to the erotic. As she rubs her round stomach, she thinks about "the last time she'd enjoyed being naked with someone", a thought which triggers "sensations of erotic bliss" (Bell 26). Her desires are explicitly situated outside of a heteronormative framework, illustrating that female sexual desire is about more than reproductivity: "Mrs Habib knew there was absolutely no chance of pregnancy, but that did not mean she never thought about wild New York-style sex" (26). This characterisation of Mrs Habib is significant because it refuses the stereotype of the desireless, even sexless older woman, trying desperately to cling to her youth through beauty and exercise regimens. Mrs Habib embodies self-acceptance, self-care, and an unabashed celebration of her own erotic capacity.

Furthermore, Mrs Habib's position as a queer, atheist Muslim can also be read in relation to the abject. Tyler uses the concept of abjection to consider "the processes through which minoritized populations are imagined and configured as revolting and become subject to control, stigma and censure" (*Revolting Subjects* 3-4). Both her queer desires and her Muslim heritage could thus figure Mrs Habib as abject. The erasure of these minoritized populations by dominant culture is apparent in Mrs Habib's concerns about the gentrification of the Bo-Kaap. The queer space of the Kitsch & Collectibles shop that Mrs Habib adored – run by "the town's most famous 'metal-*moffie*'" (Bell 24; emphasis in original) and stocking such items as "a dirty blonde wig once owned by Black Marilyn, the 2006 Miss Gay Western Cape" (25) – has already closed down. Mrs Habib fears the development of "icy-cold-chrome studio apartments" inhabited by heterosexual bachelors masturbating over "Minki or Rosie Motene in their golden bikinis" (25). Seen through Mrs Habib's eyes this white heteronormativity appears formulaic and lifeless in contrast to the queer eroticism that enlivens Mrs Habib's world and her relationship with her body. Within this context, Mrs Habib's pleasures in life can be read as a kind of defiance and clearly illustrate one way in which we might consider 'the erotic as power'.

Both "Inside" and "Mrs Habib's Hypothalamus" extend the domain of the erotic beyond sex and sexual arousal into the realm of the ordinary and everyday. This is not to say that they diminish the importance of sex in the lives of the women they depict. In fact, they portray sexual desire as a fundamental part of these women's lives, but the experience of eroticism is not limited to the sexual. In "Inside", it is the mundane details of the interactions between two women that

form the substance of the erotic and the erotic itself emerges as just another moment in ordinary life. Subtly, the power of the erotic as an enlivening force is revealed as it prompts a journey 'inside'. Here, the erotic is ordinary in that it is deeply linked to the characters' inner lives. In "Mrs Habib's Hypothalamus", the eponymous character's everyday life is more overtly marked by the erotic. Eroticism enlivens the potentially 'mundane'. In different ways, then, these stories work to expand the ways we think about the erotic by representing it as embedded in ordinary, everyday life. To quote Schimke, writing about the stories in *Open*: "These stories open a vista on the subtleties of arousal; the frank spectacle of the different forms of sex in women's lives; the presentation of intimacy as both deeply mundane and vividly transformative" ("Preface" ix).

5.3 Sexual Pleasure and the Erotic as Liberatory

Female orgasm serves as the climax of the liberatory narrative trajectories of both Mugo's "Coming into Self-Awareness" and Lotz's "Personal Shopper". Thus, in contrast to the stories discussed in the previous chapter, explicit sex scenes and orgasmic sexual pleasure are foregrounded in Mugo's and Lotz's depictions of the erotic. In this context, I use 'liberatory' to refer to release from behavioural and perceptual limitations informed by patriarchal, heteronormative and (neo)colonial discourses and norms. The liberatory trajectory of the stories moves from patriarchal and heteronormative towards feminist and queer. It is through queer relationships with other women that the protagonists are able to free themselves from various limitations, shift their perspective and grow in self-awareness. The stories link personal liberation with political liberation. "Coming into Self-Awareness" deals with this explicitly by relating the issue of neo-imperialism, in the form of humanitarian aid on the African continent, to the protagonist's journey of sexual discovery. "Personal Shopper" deals with insidious patriarchal oppression within heterosexual marriage. As I will explore, these stories' portrayal of the erotic as liberatory is not always coherent, as they create contradictions and ambiguities that unsettle a simple equation between queer female pleasure and liberation.

In their introduction to *Women, Sexuality and the Political Power of Pleasure*, Susie Jolly, Andrea Cornwall and Kate Hawkins outline why a focus on female sexual pleasure can be empowering or even liberatory:

> Sometimes, this is because the focus on pleasure undoes the effects of inequalities between women and men. Sometimes, the focus on pleasure is empowering for other reasons, for example, by bringing about bodily liberation, shifts in thinking, or building solidarity between women. ("Women, Sexuality" 22)

The two stories discussed in this section illustrate some of these ideas, particularly the empowering function of erotic experience to facilitate a 'shift in thinking', as both protagonists come to a new

perception of their bodies through the experience of sexual pleasure. "Coming into Self-Awareness" focuses on bodily liberation. Its female protagonist is empowered by learning to pleasure herself. In "Personal Shopper", a pleasurable erotic encounter shifts the balance of power between the female protagonist and her chauvinistic husband, thus unsettling the 'inequalities between women and men'.

Jolly et al observe that "an uncritical celebration of pleasure can be just as damaging as a suppression of the possibilities for pleasure" because it can create "new expectations and standards that put pressure on people" ("Women, Sexuality" 7). An 'uncritical' celebration of pleasure' also ignores the fact that, in an increasingly neo-liberal world, both sexual pleasure and erotica are regularly commodified. Especially for the cosmopolitan middle and upper classes, indulgence in sexual pleasure and the consumption of erotica can be embedded in oppressive economic structures. For (queer) women of these classes, erotica might offer personal liberation or empowerment from patriarchal heteronormative restrictions, without challenging broader economic and geographical inequalities. These are important considerations, but beyond the scope of my discussion here, although "Personal Shopper" does touch on the issue of consumer culture.

5.3.1 Sexual Self-Knowledge and Intimate Knowledge of Africa in "Coming into Self-Awareness"

"Coming into Self-Awareness" can be read as part of Mugo's broader project to help 'liberate' queer African women (and African people more generally) from damaging notions about sex. Her non-fictional work deals with queer African women's sexuality and she has a "passion for making sure people [have] the orgasms and conversations that elude them whilst being given [a] comprehensive healthy knowledge of sexuality" (TED). Her website, *HOLAAfrica*, provides a platform for queer African women to share stories about their sexual experiences, and her two TEDx talks filmed in Cape Town with Siphumeze Khundayi are aimed at encouraging African women to develop healthier relationships with sex and sexual pleasure.[76] "Coming into Self-Awareness" functions to elicit sexual arousal in the reader, and potentially pleasure, while also depicting a journey of sexual discovery; an exploration of a variety of sexual pleasures that unsettle puritanical, reproductive and heteronormative notions of sex. The story thus works to liberate its protagonist from limiting understandings of sex. What is interesting about the story is the way in which it navigates the intersection of Africa, modernity and sexuality in its construction of a

[76] The creation of *HOLAAfrica* had a number of intended purposes, including: broadening the narrative about queer women in Africa beyond stories of violence and corrective rape, providing a safe space for these women to tell their stories, and, in doing so, moving away from viewing these women through a Westernized lens (Briley).

liberatory sexual narrative. I examine how Mugo negotiates this intersection in ways that reflect some of the challenges of writing queer African erotica.

"Coming into Self-Awareness" is the story of Khanya, a South African woman who works for an international humanitarian aid agency. At the beginning of the story, she is unsatisfied with her job in the United Kingdom and unsatisfied with her sex life because, despite having athletic sex with an East African man, she never orgasms. She returns home to South Africa in the hopes of carrying out more effective humanitarian work at a grass-roots level. This coincides with the beginning of a sexual relationship with a woman named Vee. Although sex with Vee opens up a whole new vista of sexual experience, Khanya is still unable to orgasm until Vee shows her how to masturbate. Her climax is also the climax of the story, as she literally cums into self-awareness; her new knowledge about her body and sexual pleasure conflated with her epiphany about the importance of African self-knowledge for solving 'African' problems.

'African', here, is used in a manner that essentializes "cultural particularity, hence elevating it to an 'African' universal" (Spronk 5). While Africa is significant to the narrative, it is Africa as discursive construct rather than physical place and cultural specificity that is at issue here. Although most of the story is set in Johannesburg, there is little in the way of descriptive detail to ground the narrative. Thus, while the idea of Africa is important to the narrative, the South African setting is less significant. This might be seen as a failure on Mugo's part to adequately set the scene, but I would suggest that this lack of descriptive detail instead speaks to Khanya's experience as a globally mobile African subject living in a city that reflects "the practice of the global homogenization of urban space in Africa" (11). In this case, the physical details of the urban space are less important than the discursive construction of that place.

This positionality has implications for how sexuality is conceptualised. Writing about the sexuality of young professionals living in Nairobi, Kenya, Rachel Spronk discusses how "questions of identity are brought to the fore […] and consequently questions of sexuality become politicized" (6), not only in relation to gender, but also to cultural identity. She describes the way the young professionals she interviewed struggle to reconcile their ideas of mutual sexual pleasure, which they frame as 'modern', with a repudiation of 'Westernization' and a reification of 'African culture'. Spronk argues that they "cannot escape using the categories 'African' and 'Western', or 'traditional' and 'modern' because they are directly caught up in the current debates which polarize 'Africa' on the one hand against 'Western' and 'modern' on the other" (15). This kind of tension informs Mugo's work. Her attempts to reconcile these generally opposing conceptualisations of sexuality and erotic pleasure are apparent, for example, in how she regularly draws from Nkiru Nzegwu's article entitled "Osunality (Or African Eroticism)" as a means of grounding her calls for

conversation and celebration of sexual pleasure, which might otherwise seem to emerge from a modern, western discourse, within an African history.

Nzegwu argues for the continued presence of an 'African eroticism' that "affirms the normality of sexual pleasure and the erotic" (258) and "the right of women to enjoy sex" (260) in stark contrast to the anti-sex, anti-pleasure discourse that emerged during the Victorian era in the West.[77] Mugo draws on various aspects of Nzegwu's work as a resource for reimagining "what it means to be having good, safe sex and what healthy sexual practices look like" (Mugo, "Osunality"). Drawing on Nzegwu is strategic, as asserting the 'African-ness' of female pleasure counters the "regressive traditionalist cultural argument against sex positivity and sexual empowerment" ("You Sexy African"). One way in which Mugo draws from Nzegwu's work in her depiction of nonsubordinating sexual encounters is through her use of the image of the 'devouring vagina'. Nzegwu identifies this image as significant in what she calls the 'African sexual ontology', arguing that it "assigns agency to the vagina that is absent in Western notions of the erotic and […] assigns a measure of passivity to the penis, which is seen as the organ of dominance in the Western frame" (264). Nzegwu's statement here is not strictly true, as the image of the *vagina dentata* or 'vagina with teeth' is prevalent across cultures, including the West. As Barbara Creed observes, in Western culture it has tended to symbolise male castration anxiety. Nzegwu's take on the image of the 'devouring vagina' offers an assertion of women's sexual agency without invoking castration anxiety. She presents a conceptualisation of both male and female sexuality as agentic, as she explains that "to devour or to eat something is to assert one's power and will over it, yet that act does not deny power to that which is eaten, because what is eaten provides nourishment to the eater" (264).[78]

Mugo invokes the image of the 'devouring vagina', to assert Khanya's power in the relationship between her and her East African lover. Her lover is incredibly physically strong, but, while he is "strong in limb when he entered her she devoured him" (Mugo, "Coming" 30). While

[77] Arnfred, reading a 1989 paper by John Caldwell on African sexual practice through a feminist lens, comes to a similar conclusion about African sexuality, before the intervention of the West: "Read with feminist eyes this is the bottom line of the Caldwell paper: *that women in Africa have greater freedom, autonomy and power than women are accorded in the Christian edition of 'Eurasian' culture,* with female sexuality under male control and female chastity as the emblem of civilization. This in fact is quite an interesting outcome, especially compared with other tales of the deplorable state of patriarchal power and female oppression in Africa" ("African Sexualities" 72; emphasis in original).

[78] Nzegwu's discussion further expands on the power of the vagina: "It is to their credit that African cultures created a positive role for the vagina without castrating male libido. Men still play an important role in sexual matters, but the emphasis is different. The positive conception of the vagina derives from its vital role as a conduit through which all people come, regardless of sex, class and social status. Because of its importance in the continuation of birth and the expansion of families, the vagina becomes the seat of women's power. […] The capacity and functionality of the vagina makes it both a desirable and dreaded organ. Its moist (or dry), warm chamber allures and arouses men and drives them to seek copulation. […] It is feared also, because its concealed inner depths are the receptacle for the origin of life. As owners of this passage, women dictate the terms of entrance. They can make entrance a pleasurable experience through muscular rhythmic contractions or they can frustrate that experience by lack of cooperation" (264).

Khanya enjoys the sexual feats her lover can perform due to his physical strength, she also loves using her 'sexual muscle' to pull him in because it is an act of "pure unadulterated power" (30). What is described here is not a male/female sexual relationship free of power, but one in which the power is distributed between partners and played with for the pleasure of both participants. Thus, this sexual relationship does not conform to "the domination/subjugation complex of patriarchal ideology", which Nzegwu argues emerges from the West, and "infuses current understandings of the erotic and eroticism" (263). Significantly, here, Mugo imagines a mutually pleasurable heterosexual relationship. While the trajectory of the narrative moves from a cross-sex relationship to a same-sex relationship, Mugo does not frame Khanya's sexual relationship with a man as inherently oppressive. While she ends the story in a relationship with another woman, the story is a celebration of bisexuality and a whole range of sexual pleasures.

Mugo's attempt to align an empowered female sexuality with 'African-ness' is also apparent in the way the story intertwines Khanya's personal sexual liberation with African liberation. Near the end of the story, Vee argues that "the African solutions being formulated were built around 'imported ideas'" and that, similarly, Khanya's 'solutions' to her inability to cum also fail because they are 'imported' from her lovers (Mugo, "Coming" 38). At the heart of the metaphor that Vee draws on is an assertion that self-awareness is key to both problems. Implicit in this idea is a rejection of Western frameworks as offering solutions and a critique of neo-colonial modes of intervention. This is most clearly established through Mugo's early invocation of the metaphor of African landscape as sexualised female body. Khanya's problems with the approach of the humanitarian organisation for which she works are made clear when she compares them and the sexual tactics of her East African lover:

> The problem was his approach. His tactics mirrored those of the organisation she worked for. Step one: land in a foreign land. Step two: gain no knowledge of the local context. Step three: throw brute force at the situation. Step four: pat yourself on the back on a job well done whilst the locals look dazed and confused. Repeat as needed. (31)

Here, the link between African land and the female body is invoked to critique the treatment of both. This passage rejects the imposition of 'outside' views of what is needed on both African countries and the individual female body. This moment reflects Moore's observation about the ways in which vectors of oppression are not distinctly different, but rather have "overdetermined similarities" in how they "resonate with and manifest as variants of each other" (11). Here, patriarchy and neo-colonialism are both shown to function along similar lines of logic. The solution the story offers is self-awareness – a shift away from the external to the internal – demonstrated in the final masturbatory sex scene. This kind of awareness is also shown to emerge from an active engagement rather than simply existing in a place. Simply 'having' her body is not enough for

Khanya to know it fully, just as her move back to South Africa is not enough for her to truly know how to begin tackling the humanitarian problems she wants to fix. There is a difference between having a body and being truly embodied; between living in a place and belonging to that place. In Mugo's story, the liberation offered by the West – both sexual and humanitarian – is shown to be disconnected from what is essential in order to achieve it. Mugo's story, focusing on a globally mobile character, figures the liberatory trajectory not as a flight from oppressive circumstances, but as a return home – both to the continent and to the embodied self.

Despite the ways in which Mugo grounds satisfactory female eroticism within a return to 'African-ness', she does not fall into the trap of attempting to claim African 'authenticity'. Her negotiation avoids this kind of essentialism, as is apparent in the criticisms she levels at the traditions outlined in Nzegwu's articles. Although she finds much to draw on in these traditions, Mugo also observes that some are "far less sex positive than one would hope for (with the act of sex again tied back to marriage" and thus "heteronormative and sometimes patriarchal [in] nature" ("Osunality"). She adopts a pragmatic approach which embraces the "progressive potential in a melting and merging of new and traditional ideas" ("Osunality") and thus argues that in "the same breath that one speaks of a vibrator one can speak about the vagina's awesome mystical power in a cultural sense" ("You Sexy African"). This playful juxtaposition of 'modern' and 'traditional' is a productive way of negotiating the tensions between African/traditional and Western/modern, as is apparent in "Coming into Self-Awareness". This is evident in the ways she intertwines generic Western traditions of erotica (explicit sex scenes) and chick lit (the conversations between Khanya and her friends about sex), with African political concerns about humanitarian aid, thus politicizing two genres that are normally seen as distinctly apolitical.

The final aspect I want to consider in analysing Mugo's construction of a sexually empowering, queer and African narrative is her depiction of masturbation. Aligning masturbation with liberatory self-knowledge[79] has its roots in early 1970s America when, in contrast to its former status as abject and pathologized, masturbation was figured as "a virtue: self-pleasuring was the path to self-knowledge" (Laqueur 78).[80] It is important to note that masturbation as a profane act was invented in the West in the early 1700s (13). Therefore, the feminist and gay movements that championed masturbation as liberatory from the 1970s were contesting this understanding of the act. Interesting to note is the way in which the neo-liberal context has affected the role masturbation plays in the construction of the self. Mark Weeks, writing about *American Beauty*, observes that

[79] As Vee tells Khanya: "You cannot keep seeing yourself as a sexual being through someone else's eyes. You have to know yourself before we can give you what you want" (Mugo, "Coming" 38).
[80] Important feminist texts on the subject include Anne Koedt's "Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" (1970), *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1971) by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective and Betty Dodson's *Liberating Masturbation: A Meditation on Self Love* (1974).

after "nearly two decades of neo-liberal ascendency" (54), the "strategic deployment of auto-eroticism may have been intended to liberate the woman from her sexual subjugation in a patriarchal society, but it would also serve her pleasurable redefinition […] as a neo-liberal subject" (56-57). As Weeks explains, "though the very indiscriminateness of capitalism's free-flowing tendencies can serve the liberation of sexualities, the intensified discourse around sex could simultaneously serve as a means of extending capitalist power through bodies into the finest interstices of being" (63). This is a reminder of the fact that sexual pleasure cannot be considered in-and-of itself liberatory, and has complex relationships with broader political and socio-economic dynamics.

It is the profane notion of masturbation that colonialism imported to the African continent, along with other puritanical and sex-negative notions of sex prevalent at the time. Feminist ideas about masturbation and empowerment also have a recent history in Africa,[81] as is apparent in Xaba's response to "Coming into Self-Awareness" in her introduction to *Adults Only*. Xaba recalls her experience working in the women's health field in the nineties in South Africa and the inclusion of discussions about masturbation in the workshops she held.[82] She clearly outlines a feminist perspective on masturbation that is found in Mugo's story:

> The importance of women claiming pleasure from their bodies through sex will forever be crucial in a society where women's bodies are viewed in the conventional child-bearing role, or as objects for sexual gratification for sexist and misogynist men, or in the hyper-sexualised roles seen in commercialised women's-bodies-as-merchandise spaces and the controversial pornography industry. ("Let's Talk About Sex" 11)

Xaba's discussion here frames masturbation as empowering for women. It also foregrounds how this kind of feminist work, no matter its origins, has played an important role in the sexual empowerment of African women.

Mugo's valorisation of masturbation as the climax of sexual liberation reflects a similar sensibility. The final sex scene is devoted to Khanya's exploration of her body and her eventual climax and is given the same erotic charge as any of the other sex scenes. It includes a romantic atmosphere, foreplay, and Khanya's growing desire to know her own body and satisfy herself. The story reverses the patriarchal, heteronormative sexual hierarchy by beginning with sex between a man and a woman, progressing to sex between women and ending with so-called 'solitary sex'. If we follow Betty Dodson's assertion that masturbation is essentially a queer act because "it's a same sex activity no matter what you might be fantasizing about" (157), then the story has a distinctly queer trajectory.

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[81] Also see Macharia's defence of masturbation in his blog post "Masturbation is Great!".
[82] She also gave 'homework' to women who had never masturbated before.

Mugo's portrayal of the erotic as liberatory draws on an eclectic range of ideas about sexuality in its negotiation of the complex discursive contentions around the intersection of queer, Africa, modernity and sex. Her story counters the pathologisation of queer, African and female eroticism differently from Xaba and Bell, as she includes a number of explicit sex scenes. The joyful and mutually pleasurable nature of these scenes are a far cry from pornographic depictions of sex, but at the same time they run the risk of subtly reinforcing patriarchal tropes. The tenuousness of Mugo's disruption of patriarchal norms for representing female sexuality is apparent in her description of Khanya's masturbation. For one thing, Khanya's first masturbatory experience is not really 'solitary sex'. Not only does Vee both instigate and observe this act, triggering her own arousal, but the scene is also staged for the reader. While Mugo's staging of masturbation debunks various myths about female masturbation, its valorised depiction also plays into the myth that "women's masturbation is supposed to be a spectacle" (Weiss). The story challenges this to some degree as the reader experiences Khanya's seduction of herself through her eyes and the focus is clearly on her own desire for herself as she learns the curves of her body and finally brings herself to orgasm. Nevertheless, the way in which the scene is set with candles, the way Khanya caresses her body and tears off her underwear and finally 'explodes', reflect rather than disrupt mainstream ideas about female masturbation as a kind of performance. Suzannah Weiss says of her own masturbation process: "I don't get into sexy poses or make seductive noises. I don't light candles or take baths. In short, I don't go about the process differently from the way anyone else – men included – does". While the story's climactic masturbatory scene celebrates female pleasure, she arguably romanticizes masturbation. Indeed, Vee identifies women's orgasms as "something magical" (41). While this is a powerful tactic to counter the denial of women's pleasure, at the same time this mystification of female sexuality actually plays into patriarchal tropes. This tension highlights the challenges at hand in creating an empowering queer, feminist, African erotica.

5.3.2 Queer Spaces and Women's Pleasures in "Personal Shopper"

Like in "Coming into Self-Awareness", the setting of "Personal Shopper" is a 'worlding' African city – Cape Town. The fact that it is set in a shopping centre foregrounds "the practice of the global homogenization of urban space in Africa" (Spronk 11). Shopping centres are recognisable as such across geographic boundaries. However, unlike in the previous story, the idea of 'Africa' is not negotiated. Rather, there is very little in the story that marks its portrayal of the erotic as specific to Africa and African concerns. This is arguably because of the relationship white South Africans have to place and location. The sexuality of white women in South Africa is shaped differently to

that of black women, as it is not bound up with concerns about African 'authenticity' or a legacy of dehumanizing racist images of black sexuality. There is thus a certain apolitical sensibility to "Personal Shopper", even though it engages with a feminist and queer politics. Unlike "Coming into Self-Awareness", which engages with the politics of place, "Personal Shopper" deals with the politics of space through its use of the space of the boutique changing booth within the narrative. I examine how the movement and confinement of the characters within the boutique, and the dynamics between them, are depicted as altering the changing booth from an oppressive space to an erotic and liberating one.

Charlene, the protagonist and narrator of "Personal Shopper", is a married woman trying to find a dress at a boutique for her brother-in-law's wedding. The action of the story takes place within the confines of a changing booth, where Charlene, who is uncomfortable with the contempt of the shop assistant and the sight of her body in the mirror, gets a dress stuck over her head. She is unwilling to ask for help from the shop assistant, who she feels has judged her. Instead, she is assisted by a beautiful blonde British stranger, who removes the dress, finds her another that fits, and then seduces her. All the while, the two women's husbands sit outside the changing booth exchanging chauvinistic comments about women, shopping and sport. They remain oblivious to the erotic scene playing out behind the curtain of the booth. The story ends with the promise of another erotic encounter as Charlene plans to go shopping with 'the blonde' before she returns to the United Kingdom.

The story begins with Charlene confined by the fabric of an expensive dress. This could be symbolic of how she feels trapped by her husband's expectations and, by implication, the patriarchal expectations of broader society. The judgemental nature of the shop assistant, her husband's comments from the other side of the curtain and the three-way mirror highlighting every perceived physical flaw all serve to frame the changing booth as an oppressive space. This is a confluence of patriarchy, classism, and a consumerist society that trades on unrealistic female beauty standards. Canal Walk, a shopping centre in Cape Town, and, more specifically, the boutique changing booth, are sites that magnify these aspects of society. Charlene is not only trapped by these various judgements – some external and some internalized – but by the fact that clothes shopping is framed as something women are expected to enjoy, even though, "for many women, shopping for and trying on clothes may simply serve as a potent reminder that their body is not 'right'" (Tiggemann and Lacy 286). The blonde woman frees Charlene from the confines of the dress and, through her sexual desire for the body Charlene loathes, also offers liberation from body shame. Instead of seeing the flaws that Charlene sees, the blonde woman sees "[g]reat

tits" (Lotz 169). Clothes shopping becomes a site of pleasure for Charlene by the end of the narrative; in this case, sexual pleasure.

In Lotz's story, space, as a site of both oppression and liberation, is figured as relational. Not only does space shape the dynamics of the interactions between people, it is also shaped by the presence of these people and how they act within the space. Eddie Ombagi's article on queer spaces, although they focus on spaces such as clubs in Nairobi in Kenya, is useful in unpacking Lotz's use of space. He asserts that "[s]paces are always in a constant shift of meaning making that largely depends on who is occupying such spaces, what experiences they bring to such spaces and how they enter the spaces" (12-13). In "Personal Shopper", the elitism of the shop assistant, the chauvinistic presence of Charlene's husband and Charlene's own perception of herself and her lack of belonging all contribute to the oppressive nature of the boutique and the changing booth. This is altered by the entrance of the woman who is only ever referred to as 'the blonde'. Initially she exacerbates Charlene's discomfort in the space of the changing room. Her physical presence makes the booth feel smaller and leads Charlene to compare her own body unfavourably to 'the blonde's'.

In contrast, 'the blonde' is perfectly comfortable in the space, describing it as "cosy" rather than confining (Lotz 171). Her comfort with the space of the boutique and the changing booth initially mark her as part of the patriarchal and elitist logics of that space. The image of stylishness and physical perfection which Charlene describes initially leads the reader to assume that 'the blonde' conforms to the various patriarchal, heteronormative standards with which Charlene is so concerned. The very figure of 'the blonde' stands in mainstream discourse as the embodiment of a contemporary, patriarchal ideal of femininity: sexually available, aesthetically pleasing and lacking intelligence. Such a figure is also accorded other negative traits such as shallowness, vanity and competitiveness with other women. The story subverts such stereotypical expectations, as it is the woman who embodies the physical characteristics that are, paradoxically, both idealized and disdained by patriarchal, heteronormative society, who turns out to be the least constricted by the norms of that society. The stereotypical narrative of female competition is queered, as Charlene's comparison between her and the 'blonde's' bodies gives way to mutual bodily pleasure.

I read the changing booth as a 'queer space'. It is a space built for a normative purpose, but is temporarily appropriated for something else. To borrow from Ombagi: "At the very point where the intended use of the spaces collapse, then the queer potential emerges" (12). The normative use of the changing booth is trying on clothing in order to determine whether to purchase it. The privacy the booth provides is intended to preserve modesty in an otherwise public space, thus preserving norms regarding the body. It also has gendered implications, as it conceals the construction of femininity through the selection of clothing, allowing the naturalness of femininity to remain

unquestioned by those outside of this intimate space. The story reveals the constructed nature of this femininity through Charlene's failure to perform the femininity she feels her husband expects from her by getting stuck in the dress. Like the protagonist of Helen Fieldings's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Charlene's "comically flawed performance of femininity bespeaks the performativity of gender" (Hurst 462). The blonde's entrance into the changing booth queers the space as she employs its privacy to seduce Charlene rather than to reinforce constricting 'regimes of femininity'.

Lotz uses the space of the changing room as a means of creating erotic tension. The small space requires physical intimacy, while the activity of trying on clothes involves nudity, both aspects that easily lend themselves to the erotic. As an integral aspect of the shopping experience, the changing booth is also linked discursively to the feminine pleasure that clothes shopping is supposed to provide (Rabbiosi 211). This pleasure becomes eroticized in the story, as 'the blonde' reclaims shopping as a pleasurable female experience in the orgasmic sense. The eroticism of the experience is also heightened by two characteristics of the changing booth. Firstly, the ambivalence of its position in relation to the dichotomy between public and private space and, secondly, the temporary, unstable nature of its appropriation. The changing booth offers privacy within a public space, but is also a public space in and of itself, as the private space it offers is only temporary. The curtain that separates it from the public space of the boutique is easily penetrable. Initially, this 'porous' boundary means that Charlene cannot escape from her husband's expectations as he exhorts her to hurry up. However, it also gives 'the blonde' easy access. As 'the blonde' seduces Charlene, the flimsiness of the curtain and the proximity of her husband shifts from being an invasive intrusion to setting the scene for an eroticism heightened by the possibility of discovery and the blatant nature of the transgression. I am inclined to suggest that one answer to Ombagi's question about what "affective potential is generated when privacy is enacted in public" (8) is eroticism. Ombagi observes that the fact that the realization that queer spaces "are not concrete […] heightens the pleasure, the entertainment, the meshing of bodies, the grinding of bodies, the intimacy of proximity, and the very act of sexual intercourse" (12-13). This observation about heightened pleasure can be applied to Lotz's use of space as a means to heighten the erotic effect of her story. The temporary nature of the sexual encounter between Charlene and 'the blonde', and its erotic effect, can be seen to reflect Xaba's observation about the suitability of the short story format for erotic narratives.

The liberatory trajectory of the story is marked by ambivalence. While the temporary nature of the encounter with 'the blonde' might heighten its eroticism, the story also leaves us with the question of whether Charlene's liberation might be temporary as well. While Ombagi observes that

the ambivalence of queer spaces, and their temporary nature, "become the most powerful claim to subversion" (4), this has a different weight in Kenya, where same-sex sexuality is illegal. In a South African, middle-class, suburban context where same-sex sexuality is protected by law, the liaison between 'the blonde' and Charlene lacks political weight. The story gives no real sense that Charlene is going to leave her male partner, nor is there an indication that 'the blonde' might leave hers, even though there is nothing substantive in their white, middle-class, cosmopolitan lives to prevent a more concrete change. Hidden behind the curtain of the changing booth and heterosexual family lives, the subversiveness of the encounter between 'the blonde' and Charlene is confined to the realm of the individual rather than challenging patriarchal heteronormativity in society more broadly.

"Coming into Self-Awareness" and "Personal Shopper" portray female sexual pleasure as having implications beyond physical sensation. In these stories, it has the potential to alter the relationships that women have with place, space and their own bodies. These stories thus foreground the politics of pleasure. Nevertheless, the correlation of individual erotic liberation and broader social change remains tenuous within these narratives. While Mugo makes a clear link between sexual self-knowledge and African self-knowledge, this is rhetorical rather than illustrated in the story. The link Lotz makes is less explicit and even more ambivalent. The way these stories represent the erotic differs distinctly from the way it is depicted in Xaba and Bell's narratives. Although both frame the erotic as an empowering resource, the erotic in Mugo and Lotz's stories takes on more spectacular dimensions. The notion of the erotic as liberatory frames the erotic as exceptional rather than as part of women's everyday lives. Thus, while the stories provide celebratory takes on women's sexual pleasure experienced with other women, there are limits to the subversiveness of these narratives.

5.4 The Exotic Erotic in "All Covered Up"

Vasani's "All Covered Up", is arguably the least successful at negotiating a history of problematic discourses surrounding queer, female and African sexuality. Gqola describes "All Covered Up" as "a beautiful, sensual narrative that is at the same time incredibly political in what is disrupted, played around with and teased out" ("Introduction" 6). She does not unpack what she means by this 'political' aspect of the story. In this section, I identify the 'political' in the story's employment of the trope of the 'exotic erotic'; this phrase taken from Yakini Kemp's article on the 'exotic erotic' in Audre Lorde's writing. While the story is a joyful and sensual depiction of lesbian sex and eroticism, the 'exotic erotic' has often been used in colonial, patriarchal and heteronormative discourses to frame the African landscape, the black body, the Muslim body and lesbian eroticism

in problematic ways. In this section, I unpack the tension between the celebratory aspect of the story and the problematic connotations of the erotic dynamics on which the story draws. I add to Dakoda Smith and Sally Ann Murray's discussions of this aspect of the story by focusing on Vasani's erotic use of the 'veil'. In doing so, I draw from Meyda Yeğenoğlu's and Fadwa El Guindi's theorisations on the orientalist sexualisation of the hijab. While, like Smith, I examine the problematic aspects of the story's use of the exotic erotic, in the end I contest her pessimistic reading of the story by pointing to some subtle ways in which a careful reading of certain moments of the story offers the potential to 'disrupt' and 'play' with the power relations associated with the exotic erotic, and 'teases out' some potentially subversive erotic paradoxes.

The most influential work on the idea of 'orientalism' is, of course, Edward's Said's. He argues that the "Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1). For Said, to 'know' the 'orient' was to have control over it, and so the 'occident' invested an enormous amount of resources in creating "a system of knowledge about the Orient" (6). This produced not only much scholarship, but also, according to Said, "a great many Victorian pornographic novels" (8). As Kugle notes, Said "has been justifiably critiqued for selectively using Foucault's ideas while constructing an ahistorical binary opposition between Western powers and Eastern peoples" (*Living Out Islam* 5), but his ideas remain pertinent to discussions of the West's contemporary relationship to the East and its construction of Islam. The theorists I draw on here themselves draw from Said.

"All Covered Up" has a formulaic plot. Dr Carmen Fernandez, a middle-aged woman born in Zanzibar but living and working in Switzerland, returns to the country of her birth on a work assignment for the United Nations. Here, she encounters the flirtations of both her boss, Yasmin, and her guide, Fatma. The Zanzibar setting is described in clichéd terms that evoke a sense of the exotic, as tourists contemplate "the mysteries of the ancient spice island" and "swaying coconut trees in a sea of green vegetation, and the red earth, immediately infuse an air of exotic fantasy" (Vasani, "All Covered Up" 67, 68). In this "lush island locale conveniently stripped of history, in the service of the erotic" (S. Murray 9), Carmen immediately finds erotic possibilities in the flirtations of her boss and her guide, Fatma. After building up the sexual tension between Carmen and Fatma, the story climaxes with an explicit sex scene between them in Carmen's hotel room before she leaves for Switzerland. This scene is marked by clichéd language and the invocation of the colonial trope of body as sexual landscape to be explored.

Sally Ann Murray provides a succinct critique of both the potential and the problematics of Vasani's employment of the exotic erotic:

> Vasani's story might be considered a provocative, postcolonial, gender non-conforming narrative that performatively *camps* the tired clichés of hetero romance: hunter/prey, silky cinnamon body, sexy lingerie, breasts like mangoes, and the hyper-ventilated embodiment of hardening arching squealing swelling gushing pulsating. But […] [t]hey do not automatically disrupt normative vapidity by dragging it playfully against the antic raunch of queer desire. Yes, a writer may make this *attempt*, but she or he runs the risk of reprising oppressive hierarchies of power that remain entrenched in the wider structures of social reality, and serve to construct orientalizing margins and marginality in the service of centrist, heteronormative, exoticizing fantasies. (9; emphasis in original)

Dakoda Smith is even more sceptical of the story's potential for subversion, focusing on the way Fatma is objectified in the narrative by what Smith frames as an orientalist curiosity. She argues that "Fatma's own desires are virtually erased by Carmen's unending curiosity" and her body "only served as a tool for Carmen's education on queer Muslims" (108) and the satisfaction of her own desires. In my own analysis, I begin by expanding on what I see as the orientalist tendencies in the story, particularly as they pertain to the eroticization of the 'veil'. Then I consider how a close reading of certain moments in the story offers the potential – even if not fully realised in the text – for subverting the orientalist tropes of 'the veil' and the exotic erotic.

One of the most significant props in the story's employment of the exotic erotic, besides the description of the location, is the 'veil'. The term 'veil' reflects the monolithic Western understanding of veiling as invoking "Islam and synonymous with female weakness and oppression." (El Guindi 10). In fact, in Arabic, 'veil' "has no single Arabic linguistic referent" (El Guindi xi). Instead, there are a plethora of Arabic terms, including hijab, abaya and buibui, which are used in "All Covered Up". El Guindi contests the Western understanding of the veil, showing that "veiling is a rich and nuanced phenomenon, a language that communicates social and cultural messages," and, in Islamic societies, is a "symbol of both identity and resistance" (xii). In Vasani's story, 'the veil' does not signify women's oppression in Zanzibar. The person in charge of the narrator's work in Zanzibar is a woman called Yasmin Ahmed, who is described as having "a powerful aura" and clearly demands the respect and attention of everyone around her (Vasani, "All Covered Up" 69). She also wears a hijab. Fatma, Carmen's guide, is described as confident, competent and spontaneous, while also wearing a hijab and a buibui. Both women flirt with Carmen, Fatma going so far as to seduce her. Therefore, the story challenges contemporary stereotypes about Islam as universally sexually oppressive and Islamic women as necessarily oppressed by the veil.

For Smith, Carmen's descriptions of the clothing and accessories of the various Muslim women that she meets are 'painful' because they express "her overwhelming fascination specifically with the pieces that can be exoticised" (107). Although Smith does not focus on Muslim women's 'veils', the hijab, the buibui and the abaya are all items that can be exoticised, as well as serving

an explicitly erotic function within the narrative. References to these items of clothing appear constantly in the story, often in relation to Carmen's sexual desire. Frequently, this desire is heightened by, to use Smith's word, 'curiosity' about what lies beneath these 'veils'. For example, the contemplation of the 'mystery' of what Yasmin's hair looks like without her hijab is a trigger for Carmen to consider the possibility of a lesbian sexual encounter in Zanzibar. While much conservative thinking about clothing, especially in the West, associates bare skin with sexual attraction and promiscuity, and covered bodies with modesty, El Guindi, writing about the 'veil', challenges this 'common sense' association.

Firstly, she argues that understanding veiling in Islamic tradition as having to do with modesty is a Western conception. She argues that it might be better understood within "a cultural code of sanctity-reserve-respect" rather than the "complex of the seclusion-shame-modesty code" (83). More pertinently to this analysis, she draws on Crawley's proposal that there are "elements of mystery and attraction that […] accompany concealment" (51). For Carmen, the 'mysteries' that lie beneath the 'veils' of the Muslim women are erotic. This is clearly apparent when she and Fatma finally have sex, as, in the process of undressing Fatma she exclaims: "Gosh Fatma, you are mysterious" (Vasani, "All Covered Up'" 76). Carmen's desire to discover these mysteries is clearly part of the sexual desire she feels for Fatma.

Carmen's desire to discover the "uncharted and hidden territory" (76) of Fatma's body clearly evokes colonial tropes of the African continent as sexualised female body. I have already discussed this trope in my analysis of "Mrs Habib's Hypothalamus" where I demonstrated how Bell subverts the metaphorical link between landscape and body by grounding it in the familiar. This is not the case in "All Covered Up", where the exotic connotations of this metaphor are played up rather than undermined. The veil also plays a part in this construction of Fatma's body, as well as the colonial trope of the fanatical exploration of the feminized exotic landscape. Yeğenoğlu discusses the Orientalist view of the veil as erecting "a barrier between the body of the Oriental woman and the Western gaze, the opaque, all-encompassing veil seems to place her body out of the reach of the Western gaze and desire", leading Western desire to subject this enigma "to a relentless investigation" (39). According to Yeğenoğlu, the "veil is one of those tropes through which Western fantasies of penetration into the mysteries of the Orient and access to the interiority of the other are fantasmatically achieved" (39). The fact that Carmen was born in Zanzibar does not ameliorate her tendency to exoticize the Muslim women in the story. This reflects Yeğenoğlu's argument that the category of the Western subject refers "to a position or positioning, to a place, or placing, that is, to a specific inhabiting of place" (3). Carmen, despite the fact of her birth, inhabits Zanzibar as a foreigner.

What offers more obvious potential for the subversion of long-established erotic tropes is the fact that the story's eroticism is lesbian rather than heterosexual. Within the story, the narrator finds Fatma's forwardness "titillating and a shock to [her] system, forcing [her] to challenge all [her] preconceived notions and stereotypes" (Vasani, "All Covered Up" 71). The implication seems to be that the narrator assumed Zanzibari women to be reserved and passive – certainly not active pursuers of sexual encounters with other women. If this is the case then the stereotype through which Carmen initially views Zanzibar is that of heterosexual, homophobic Africa. This idea is reinforced later on when she hears the news about "Uganda's proposed anti-homosexuality bill" (73). Her flirtatious encounters with both Yasmin and Fatma thus challenge this stereotype. At the same time, Carmen's 'discovery' of this land of lesbian erotic fantasy plays into other orientalist tropes, as well as more recent problematic power dynamics at the intersection of 'queer' and 'African'.

El Guindi outlines the way in which the Muslim world, with its institutions of the harem, women's baths and veils, was constructed as a site of lesbian sexuality in the colonial imaginary.[83] The colonial-era lesbian eroticism was, of course, not subversive, but rather, as it often is in "popular representation of woman-to-woman eroticism […] relegated to male-centered sex fantasy" (Kemp 23). While in "All Covered Up", the fantasy is woman-centred, the issue of the power dynamic between the West and Africa makes it problematic. El Guindi critiques the accuracy of claims made about "lesbian relations" and "sexual lewdness" in these spaces (32) as another colonialist misreading of Muslim societies. Generally, the colonial imagination has made a distinction between the Arab world – the site of sexual perversion – and Africa – the site of pure, primitive sexuality. The absurdity of this dichotomy is underscored by the existence of Islamized African societies. This dichotomy also creates difficulties for writers of lesbian erotic fiction in Africa, who must navigate a landscape that is already over-imbued with sexualized discourses, often in paradoxical relation to each another. These difficulties are apparent in "All Covered Up". While the depiction of lesbian eroticism in almost every interaction in the story might challenge the colonial stereotype of heterosexual Africa, it also plays into orientalist conceptualisations of Islamic societies as lascivious.

Reading the story from Carmen's perspective offers little in the way of subversion, but there are some subversive possibilities if Fatma's perspective is considered. From this perspective, Dakoda Smith's assertion that "Fatma's own desires are virtually erased by Carmen's unending curiosity" (108) might be challenged. Certainly, Fatma remains a mystery to the reader, as she does

[83] As El Guindi explains, in relation to "Christian ideals […] the idea that members of the same sex can be socialized to have close, intimate, confiding, and private relations without necessarily sexualizing them is incomprehensible" (32).

to Carmen, but Smith's rather narrow reading serves to reinforce Fatma's erasure. A closer reading of the story allows for consideration of Fatma's agency and the possibility that she subtly challenges her own exoticisation. Firstly, I think it is important to note that Fatma is framed as the pursuer in the relationship between her and Carmen, rather than being passively pursued or explored. This might be read as another way in which Vasani constructs an exotic erotic fantasy for the reader who presumably experiences the narrative from Carmen's point-of-view, but this does not negate the fact that Fatma is portrayed as having explicit sexual desires, which she pursues.

Secondly, Smith's point that "Fatma is never truly able to make herself fully seen in [her and Carmen's] erotic exchange" (108) assumes that she desires visibility. It ignores the possibility that Fatma might be playing with 'veiling' and 'unveiling' for her own erotic purposes, such as the night when she wears a tight-fitting top with short sleeves, but still wears hijab. Fatma might very well be taking pleasure in the erotic power she wields through her manipulation of the 'veil'. There is also potential agency to be gained through concealment and the choice about when and what to reveal. Such resistance is apparent when Carmen asks Fatma about Yasmin and about Abu, the man Fatma left with one night – clearly probing for information about Yasmin's sexual orientation and Fatma's relationship to Abu. Fatma's laughing reply arguably serves as a critique of the ways in which Carmen views Zanzibar and its people: "You ask too many questions and read too much into things" (77). This gentle rebuke critiques the tendency of the Western subject towards 'relentless interrogation' of the supposedly 'exotic' spaces in which every sign might be one of potential lesbian eroticism. Fatma might be seen as resisting Carmen's curiosity and, in this way, asserting the sovereignty of her own subjecthood.

Finally, Fatma subtly displays her own 'exoticisation' of Carmen in a manner that problematizes an assumption of a Western norm and an African/Oriental 'other'. Fatma's observation that Carmen has "the most distinguished way of tying [her] hair" and her question about whether she ever wears it loose (71), for example, might be read as a subtle challenge to the sexualization of the veil. In this moment, Carmen's Western method of tying up her hair is 'made strange'. It might be read as a kind of veiling that is not recognised as such because of its normalization in Western culture. Here, the sexualizing gaze is reversed and the 'normal' Western mode of dress made 'exotic'. The reciprocity of the sexualized gaze is further reinforced by the way Carmen and Fatma are described as starting "another round of mutual exploration" (77) during their sexual encounter. The colonial connotations of exploration are upset here as the hierarchy upon which the colonialist/colonized relation is built is undermined through the invocation of

mutuality. Thus, while Vasani draws from a colonial/Orientalist vocabulary, and cannot be seen to completely escape its limitations, her story does expose some of its paradoxes and inconsistencies.

Many African artists and writers have produced works which grapple with ways of disrupting or subverting the hegemonic gaze. Writing about Muholi's photography, for example, Matebeni writes:

> This controlled gaze works towards dismantling the pornographic and colonialist lens that exploits the (black) female body. Muholi dares her viewers to open themselves to this kind of alternative gaze. Unlike many genres of pornography, which convey desirability and accessibility, this photograph may be desirable, but the pairs' gaze makes it inaccessible. Their bodies cannot be possessed by the viewer. ("Intimacy, Queerness, Race" 407)

In terms of the 'exotic erotic', inacessbility – or at least the gesture towards it – becomes part of the power dynamics of the gaze. It thus has to be negotiated differently. Read carefully, Fatma's reversal of the gaze in certain moments can be seen to unsettle the assumptions about the one-way direction of the gaze, and its implications for desire and accessibility, even as the reader is only provided with Carmen's perspective.

While Vasani sets up Zanzibar as the site of erotic lesbian fantasy, the character of Fatma can be read as subtly turning the gaze of the 'other' back onto the narrator and the voyeuristic reader. I think it is here, rather than in its potential for 'camping' the clichés of the hetero-romance, that the story offers its most subversive potential. My suggestion here is not that the story succeeds as a subversive play with the politics of the exotic erotic, as the critical responses to the piece assert a discomfort with the orientalist overtones from which the story fails to extricate itself. Rather, in attempting a counter-focalizing reading of the story, I want to first highlight the way in which queer modes of reading might offer alternatives to dominant discourses even when the literature itself fails. These failures might then be seen as productive rather than stifling. Of all the stories discussed in this chapter, Vasani's story most clearly demonstrates the challenges that exist for writing a queer, feminist, African erotica. It reveals the ways in which hetero, patriarchal, colonial and orientalist tropes still overdetermine the site of the erotic and thus the challenging representational landscape that authors have to traverse. At the same time, in the possibilities it offers when subjected to an alternative kind of reading, it demonstrates how creative solutions to these challenges exist, as is demonstrated, to varying degrees, in the other erotica analysed here.

5.5 Conclusion

Writing about "Inside", Selvick argues that Xaba participates "in creating a lesbian esthetic which celebrates, rather than pathologizes, female bodies" and, in eroticizing "physical intimacy, rather

than ‘sex acts’ as normatively understood, as central to female-female pleasure [helps] to forge an alternative narrative about black female sexuality and lesbianism” (463). The stories that have been examined in this chapter can be seen as contributing to the new narrative of which Selvick speaks. Each of them allows “readers to see what same-sex sexual expressions can look like outside the framework of rape and patriarchal prohibition” (463). Along with their similarities, these stories provide a range of ideas about what female same-sex sexual expression and experience of the erotic might look like. Xaba’s and Bell’s stories provide an expanded sense of what eroticism might constitute beyond the explicitly sexual. This is not to say that they de-eroticize lesbian sexuality in the African context. Rather, the erotic is portrayed as overflowing the narrow confines of what is normatively understood as sexual into the sensuous pleasures of intellectual, spiritual and embodied experience. While sexual pleasure is central to Mugo and Lotz’s stories, this aspect of the erotic is also shown to be about more than just sex, as it serves as the catalyst for liberation from limiting ways of understanding place, space and the body.

My analysis of “All Covered Up” highlights how even celebratory portrayals of the erotic and female same-sex sexuality are still informed by oppressive discourses, even if in reaction or contestation. The depictions of the erotic discussed in this chapter are haunted by a history of colonial, homophobic, puritanical and patriarchal formulations of the erotic. As Bensinger notes, “there is no Utopian space that falls outside dominant social structures” and thus “all sexual practice falls within the field of hegemonic representations” (83). This does not mean, of course, that these stories do not push at the boundaries of normative representations of sex and the erotic. As Bensinger insists when writing about lesbian pornography, “heterosexual tropes only inform formulations of desire; they cannot determine them” (83). Thus, as is apparent in the stories analysed in this chapter, “negotiation of these channels (no matter how ideologically saturated) is still possible” (83). The difficulties of this kind of negotiation are clearly apparent in “All Covered Up” and include not only the writer, but the reader as well.

It is also important to acknowledge that, although haunted by various hegemonic discourses about sexuality that perpetuate racism, sexism and homophobia, these stories emerge out of a set of feminist, queer and African discourses that promote joyous expressions of the erotic. While these erotic joy cultures are clearly proliferating in the contemporary milieu, they also have historical roots that contemporary scholars are beginning to draw from. A notable example being Nzegwu and her description of osunality, and the ways in which Mugo draws from this in her fictional formulation of the erotic. The stories draw from or share sensibilities with many other feminist sources, from Lorde’s “Uses of the Erotic” to the more contested sites of female erotic empowerment such as mainstream erotic and chick lit. Finally, these stories must be situated within

the broader queer development in African literature. This is a body of fiction which works, as Selvick observes of "Inside", to write queer "into [a] 'positive' futurity" (463). The erotica discussed in this chapter is only a forerunner to what the future of queer African erotic literature might hold.

Chapter 6: Conclusion – A Reparative Political Pragmatism

While it can be argued that all literature is political, writing about queer sexualities and genders in Africa is a particularly politicized act. To do so is to negotiate a complex web of power relations embedded in two linked stereotypes: that homosexuality is 'un-African' and that Africa is homophobic. Both essentialise Africa from different perspectives and are related to Africa's colonial history and its still-contentious relationship with the West. I have argued that the short story, as a genre that lends itself to tackling marginalized subjects, offers writers a way to challenge totalizing metanarratives. At the same time, it seems that these counter-narratives cannot necessarily escape the totalizing grand narratives. One of my initial intentions when embarking on this study was to explore alternative ways of conceptualising sexualities and genders beyond the scope of the Western framework, and yet the stories did not reveal as much as I hoped they would in this regard. It is difficult to tell the extent to which my own positionality has limited the ways of reading open to me, and the extent to which the stories themselves cannot escape the spectre of the West. Even proposing narratives as a counterpoint to Western grand narratives about genders and sexualities tends to lead one to centre the West as the central point of reference, against which all other narratives are written. I hope, in future research, to try and find ways to navigate this more successfully. Exploration of forms and works generally excluded from the canon seem like one productive avenue through which to do this kind of thinking.

That being said, the brevity of the short story means that it tends to be anthologized, and thus positioned alongside other stories. This foregrounds the fact that a short story should be read as one of many possible stories, rather than as the dangerous single story that Adichie cautions against ("The Danger of a Single Story"). The short story can easily be read as a suggestion, a 'what if' – one of many possible imaginings. This is foregrounded in the "Suit" stories discussed in chapter two, where Mahala's, Wanner's and Xaba's stories explore the numerous possibilities that might be imaginatively excavated from a single narrative.

Despite the diversity of the short stories discussed in this thesis, they are united by what I see as a political pragmatism that is both anti-homophobic and feminist. The stories often focus on the overlap between patriarchal and heterosexist conceptualisations of female sexuality. The political pragmatism of the stories' approaches can be seen in the fact that they tend to contain at least one of the following elements: (1) queer character/s who are unequivocally good, (2) a same-sex romantic relationship that is loving and supportive and/or (3) celebratory depictions of same-sex sex or eroticism. These are generally cast against repressive institutions and discourses, usually embodied by heterosexual characters. While the stories do not always set up a simple dichotomy between queer sexualities and genders and heteronormative society at large – indeed, they often

complicate simplistic binaries by foregrounding intersections, especially between gender and sexuality – the general implication is that queer love, desire and sex are 'good' and 'healthy', and, if they were not repressed, could offer liberatory possibilities. In this body of literature, there is a "normalisation of queer" (Stobie, "Postcolonial Pomosexuality" 338) as the stories work to assure readers that queer desires are ordinary – that 'love is just love' – and not disruptive of culture, nation, family and so on, except when these institutions are oppressive.

This is an important strategy for countering dominant pathologizing narratives about queer sexualities and genders and for imagining an inclusive queer Africa. However, it is worth noting that this political pragmatism can limit the literary and imaginative scope of fiction and the extent to which it can challenge its readers. Jonathan Dollimore notes the more troubling aspects of dissident desire, which he argues can compromise "our most cherished ethical beliefs" and unsettle not only "oppressive social life, but also what are widely agreed to be the necessary limits of civilization itself" (xii). Notably, the growing body of queer African short fiction in English contains a strain of more transgressive and troubling representations that are less interested in depathologising queer sexualities or genders than in exploring the disconcerting aspects of sex, sexuality and desire. Considering the political climate in many African countries, these stories are riskier, but offer another step away from essentialising narratives about queer Africa. Further research into the field of queer African short fiction by women might consider the work performed by these kinds of stories. Significant examples of these kinds of narratives include stories by Nigerian author Davina Owombre ("Pelican Driver", "After Marilyn" and "Hush is on the Menu at the River Run Plate"), South African authors Barbara Adair ("A Boy is a Boy is a…" and "Phillip") and Chantelle Gray van Heerden ("The Most Tender Place"), and Zambian author Efemia Chela ("Perigee"). These works contain more 'scandalous' depictions of queer sexualities, similar to what Munro finds in African Francophone literature ("States of Emergence" 189).

Importantly, the political pragmatism of the short stories discussed in this thesis is a productive one, with a distinctly recuperative sensibility. Sally Ann Murray, writing about her queer exploration of South African short fiction, notes:

> [I]f I anticipated examples which illustrate the quotidian precarity of queer life, I was also hoping for stories which boldly re-narrativize abjected desire and ostracized identity, re-casting the more habitual heteronormative figurations which seem to insist on queerness as deviance, deficit, subversion, transgression, trauma, injustice, melancholy, grief, loss, death. (6)

This points to the ways in which the politics engaged in by the authors discussed in this thesis is important, even if it does not encompass the full range of possibilities for a queer African fiction. Macharia observes that "[c]ontemporary writing about queer Africa—by Africans and non-

Africans—traffics in the spectacular" ("Blogging Queer Kenya"). He ties the spectacular to the "Afro-pessimism that directs the 'genre' of Africa, that stamps stories of African despair and deprivation as authentic" and argues that this "also authenticates queer narratives: a genuinely African queer narrative must detail loss, deprivation, homophobia, and exile to a more liberating space in Europe or North America". The stories discussed in this thesis are not free from themes of 'loss, deprivation and homophobia', although the West is not portrayed as a more liberating space. There are also distinct moves towards depictions of ordinary queer lives and towards narratives of joy and pleasure. This is most apparent in the erotica discussed in chapter five. Significantly, even the more pessimistic and spectacular aspects of the stories in this thesis are often resignified. Suicide is arguably the ultimate signifier for 'trauma, injustice, melancholy, grief, loss, death'. Yet, in the stories of Xaba, Molefhe and Nkutha, it both encompasses these aspects of queer experience and is reimagined in ways that offer possibilities for joy, peace, belonging and love. It is notable that in both Xaba's and Nkutha's stories, these possibilities are imagined through a break with the realist mode that Munro attributes to the African short story in English more generally ("States of Emergence" 189). In these stories, the afterlife exists as a real possibility, not just an imaginative one. This kind of anti-realist experimentation is worth exploring in more depth in future research on the subject.

While intersectionality, emerging as it did out of a need to more effectively analyse forms of oppression, might seem to be at odds with the restorative sensibility of the stories examined in this study, its three core tenets of context, relationality and complexity prove to be useful tools in exploring a critical/restorative aesthetic. Intersectionality's focus on complexity serves as a constant reminder that any essentialist depiction or reading of a situation is necessarily reductionist. The intersection of multiple social categories, discourses and power structures that intersectionality prompts us to consider, not only compound oppressions, but also open up spaces for negotiations and mitigations of such oppressions. Furthermore, in reading intersectionality through the lens of fiction, rather than just the other way around, one is reminded that social categories, discourses and power structures, no matter the significance of their effects, also interact with individuals, whose lives are shaped by specific experiences and relationships that escape categorisation. These are the complexities that must necessarily slip through any kind of systematic analysis, but which are the very subject of literature.

The four main chapters of this thesis have explored different areas in which women writers have engaged politically in both a critical and restorative manner. In chapter two, I have examined the political implications of short stories by Xaba, Maart and Wicomb, arguing that these stories engage in queer conversations with history. These narratives can be seen as contributing to the

imagination of a 'new' South African nation, one which reflects the protections for sexual orientation embedded in the constitution. As Munro observes, while "literature doesn't have the direct power of the law or the wide audience of popular culture, novels [and, I would add, short stories] can help make legal recognition into shared structures of feeling about the nation and people's place in it" ("Queer Family Romance" 399). Xaba's, Maart's and Wicomb's stories illustrate this potential, and the importance of history in the construction of national belonging. These writers' engagement with the past has a distinctly recuperative function. Queering history becomes a way to reimagine the present, as is apparent in my queer reading of Wicomb's "Mrs Pringle's Bed", where the eponymous character's renegotiation of her household provides an illuminating exploration into what it might be to make a change.

While specific to the post-apartheid South African context, the stories I have discussed in chapter two resonate with the critical/restorative sensibility of the stories from Zimbabwe, Botswana, Uganda and Kenya examined in the next chapter. In chapter three, I have focused on the representation of tensions within the family in relation to queer sexualities and genders. The selected stories depict the comforts offered by familial belonging, but also expose the painful ways in which this belonging can become exclusionary for queer individuals. While critiquing the ways in which family maintains and enforces sexual and gender norms, these stories also explore the agency of queer individuals as they negotiate these norms. They imagine queer alternatives to heteronormativity, domestic gender roles, and familial belonging that rests on the threat of exclusion. This recuperative drive is most evident in Beatrice Lamwaka's "Chief of the Home", which frames queerness as encompassing the potential for healing, even if this restoration is always contingent, tentative and precarious.

In chapter four, I have discussed how a selection of short stories engage with the intersection of queer sexualities and religion in various contexts. Like family, religion is another institution that has a profound impact on queer lives. I have traced the ways in which these stories challenge religious proscriptions and pathologisations regarding queer sexuality and how they reconceptualise queer sexuality in relation to religion. My argument is that this restorative sensibility can be linked to traditional African religions due to their lack of dogma, and their creativity and flexibility. This approach aligns with the stories' rejection of damaging and repressive aspects of the Abrahamic religions, their reworking of those aspects that contain queer potential, and the appropriation of concepts from other religious and secular traditions that offer nurturing rather than pathologizing conceptualisations of queer sexualities.

In chapter five, I have analysed a selection of queer, feminist, African erotica. The focus of this analysis is the potentially restorative possibilities of erotica in the face of a history of

representations of the erotic and sex that violently objectify queer people, black people and women. I have explored different negotiations of these representational histories, from the depiction of the erotic as ordinary in the stories of Xaba and Bell, to the more spectacular explorations of the erotic as liberatory in stories by Mugo and Lotz, to the unsuccessful (re)negotiation of the exotic erotic in Vasani's "All Covered Up". I have examined both the potential and the limitations of these different restorative strategies, which aim to reclaim the erotic from a history of misuse by straight, white men. The inclusion of explicit scenes containing sexual arousal and sex acts is significant considering Munro's observation that 'actual sex' has often been missing from queer African short stories in English. Sex, here, is not in opposition to a politically pragmatic strategy. This hints at the ways in which discussions of sexuality in Africa (particularly the taboo realms of women's sexuality and queer sexuality) are becoming more mainstream, especially in digital spaces such as *HOLAAfrica*.

Running through the literary formation examined in this thesis, then, is a political pragmatism marked by both a critical agenda and a restorative drive. These stories simultaneously critique homophobia and patriarchy on the African continent, assert a queer African presence, and explore the queer possibilities that can be imagined on the continent in ways that resonate with African cultures, customs and religions. In doing so, these stories refuse the insistence that homosexuality is un-African and reject the stereotype that Africa is essentially homophobic. What emerges from these stories is a sense of a diverse continent, which will no doubt be further fleshed out and complexified as the body of queer African literature grows. The short stories discussed in this thesis represent an exciting development in the depiction of queer genders and sexualities in Africa; one in which women have significant voices. The publication the novel *Under the Udala Trees* (2015) by Chinelo Okparanta, who first explored queer themes in the short story, hints at how the short story can offer a way into the more mainstream literary form of the novel. Similarly, the recent Kenyan film, *Rafiki*, about a sexual relationship between two women, was inspired by Monica Arac de Nyeko's "Jambula Tree". As I finish writing this thesis, then, it seems that canonical fiction on the African continent stands poised for another queer turn, emerging from, and inspired by, the queer short story.

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