

QUEERING THE AFTERMATH:  
RETHINKING THE QUEER IN POSTCOLONIAL  
AND THE (POST)COLONIAL IN QUEER

by

Robert LaRue

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
The University of Texas at Arlington  
May, 2016

Arlington, Texas

Supervising Committee:

Penelope Ingram, Supervising Professor  
Stacy Alaimo  
Cedrick May

## ABSTRACT

Queering the Aftermath:  
Rethinking the Queer in Postcolonial  
and the (Post)Colonial in Queer

Robert LaRue, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2016

Supervising Professor: Penelope Ingram

“Queering the Aftermath: Rethinking the Queer in Postcolonial and the (Post)colonial in Queer,” argues the necessity for a sustained dialogue between the fields of postcolonial studies and queer studies. The paucity of analysis of queerness within postcolonial discourse, along with dearth of analysis of systems of colonialism which undergird much of queer studies impedes both discourses’ aims for challenging the systems of normativity upon which Western hegemony is built. With a focus on sub-Saharan African queer narratives, this work finds that, contrary to common perception, queerness in Africa operates in a myriad of forms that are unrecognized in U.S. notions of queerness. On the one hand, failure to recognize the presence of these forms of contributes to representations of African nations as being among “the most homophobic” nations in the world. On the other hand, failure to recognize the presence of these forms serve to displace systems of oppression. Alongside novels, such as Wole Soyinka’s *The Interpreters* and K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*, this text examines short fiction published by queer African individuals, while emphasizing how these texts reflect and respond to discourses that produce legislation such

as the recent Ugandan anti-homosexuality bill. “Queering the Aftermath” explore how queer postcolonial Africans challenge both the discourse of postcolonialism, which more often than not fails to address the ways in which queer sexualities intersect with issues of gender, race, and globalization, as well as the assumption that all expressions of queerness stem from, and therefore look like Western expressions of queerness.

Copyright by  
Robert LaRue  
2016

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my Supervising Committee, especially Dr. Penelope Ingram, for their dedication to this work and its success.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
Introduction:.....	1
The Battle over Material(ity): The Postcolonial Text.....	2
Queer, Here.....	3
Achebe’s <i>Thing Fall Apart</i> and the Dangers of “Outing” a Postcolonial Text.....	11
Chapter by Chapter.....	18
CHAPTER ONE: A MOMENT OF SILENCE: QUEER(NESS) IN POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES AND QUEER THEORY.....	23
Postcolonial Queer Identity: Negotiating between private desires and national consciousness.....	37
In Context: Ugandan Queer Identities.....	47
Conclusions.....	59
CHAPTER TWO: A RACE FOR HOME: QUEER HISTORIES IN PRE- AND POSTCOLONIAL SPACES.....	61
Studies in Search of “Traditional” Homosexuality.....	64
Queering the “Traditional”.....	72
CHAPTER THREE: QUEST(IONS) OF THE EROTIC CHILD: FINDING PLEASURE, AND REDEFINING THE TROPE OF THE CHILD IN K. SELLO DUIKER’S <i>THIRTEEN CENTS</i> .....	80
Establishing the Trope of the Child.....	92
Attempting to Save “the Children”.....	104
CHAPTER FOUR: QUEER OBJECT(ION)S IN THE POSTCOLONY: LETTING OBJECTS SPEAK IN SILENT PLACES.....	125
Object Accomplices.....	129
Things to Distract.....	136
Things to Dis-member.....	140
Things to Deny.....	144
Things to Re-member.....	148
Conclusion.....	152
CONCLUSIONS.....	153
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	160

### Introduction:

Literature offers one of the most important ways in which these new perceptions [shaped by the experience of colonialism] are expressed and it is in their writing, and through other arts such as painting, sculpture, music, and dance that the day-to-day realities experienced by colonized peoples have been most powerfully encoded and so profoundly influential.

Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths,

*The Empire Writes Back*

There is a tendency to read the Nation rather restrictively; either, as the ideological apparatus of state power, somewhat redefined by a hasty, functionalist reading of Foucault or Bakhtin; or, in a more utopian inversion, as the incipient or emergent expression of the “national-popular” sentiment preserved in a radical memory.

Homi Bhabha, “Introduction” to *Nation and Narration*

This is a project aimed at emphasizing the fact that postcolonial queer lives matter. I make this statement with full knowledge that it constitutes an act of signifyin(g), thus performing an ironic return, of sorts. After all, is Gates’ famous treatise, *The Signifying Monkey*, not, at its core, an attempt to de-queer black literary and linguistic traditions, an attempt to set straight, so to speak, the rhetorical and literary qualities that often made black “speech” so strange? In positing a project aimed at establishing that “postcolonial queer lives matter,” I am obviously echoing the proclamation of the Black Lives Matter movement. This is no simple reverberation. Nor is it an

attempt to dilute the impact of claiming a space for black American lives in a culture that so desperately works to position those very lives as aberrant. My claiming that “postcolonial queer lives matter” is an attempt to hold to the very core of this project.

When I first began this project, I had grand ideas of both the scope of and the approach to the questions and materials I would take on. I envisioned this work being not only textual but (new) material as well. I soon found myself, however, constrained by the prescriptions of the field. Expectations of a “literary” emphasis slowly eroded my plans to address not only literary representations but also (new) material effects and affects. As I watched each chapter sacrifice “real” postcolonial bodies for textual ones, I became more and more conflicted. I never intended a purely “literary” study. But where is the line between the discursive and the (new) material, especially where the postcolony is concerned?

### **The Battle over Material(ity): The Postcolonial Text**

Literature’s role in both the expression *and* construction of material reality is undeniable. Yes, with its concerns, tricks, and applications of language, literature most immediately rests in the realm of the discursive. But these discursive texts are often used to shape everyday behaviors, as people “wad[e] through popular journalism, medical textbooks, epidemiological data, biochemistry handbooks, or other scientific studies” (Alamo 97). These texts and the everyday “specialists” they help to produce function not in the disciplined spaces theorized by Foucault (i.e. psychiatric hospitals, prisons, schools, etc.), but in the common spaces such as the home, the grocery store, and the car. The text, then, allows us to take hold of material bodies in ways social and everyday ethics prohibit so that we can more closely register the ways in which, to paraphrase, Penelope Ingram, those bodies signify. For, what more effective way to explore how “Being is



revealed in and through an ethical relation with a wholly different Other” (Ingram xi) than through textual analysis. The mediation performed by the text allows for a more ethical examination of such relationships because “it is,” at least in part, “through the act of reading that we experience the possibility of ‘authentic Being ethically’” in less invasive and colonizing ways (xiii).

The need for less invasive and colonizing approaches is crucial when dealing with postcolonial spaces, peoples, and histories. In this way, the postcolonial text offers one of the most ethical opportunities for examining Otherness and difference. Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths famously define postcolonial literature as literatures which have “emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tensions with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (2). While the degree to which we can effectively define as postcolonial those voices intent on “writing back” against European and U.S. powers might prove questionable, it is important to emphasize that the postcolonial is a space marred by unethical invasions. I do not want to perpetuate such. Such a realization has helped assuage the tensions produced by my ultimately textual and discursive project. Discourse is never simply discourse; it is that which invests the material world with *our* meaning, making it comprehensible to us.

### **Queer, Here**

Throughout this project I employ the term “queer” rather liberally. Often times I employ it as a way of pointing out the strange and abnormal qualities of a thing, regardless of sexual desire. Other times I intend it to point specifically to same-sex sexual desires. Each time I employ the term, however, I do so hoping to charge my discussions with the resulting friction from the slippage between the multiple meanings and applications of the term. But what does “queer” mean in a

“traditional” queer studies, or queer theory sense? The term “queer” is not easily pinned down. Most commonly, queer has been used as a way to connote a discussion of homosexuality. For instance, when Michael Warner uses the term in his 1993 collection, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, it is used not only to signal “the new wave of lesbian and gay studies” (x)—though he does note that this new wave “has not just replaced older modes of lesbian and gay identity; it has come to exist alongside those older modes, opening up new possibilities and problems” (xxviii). But, unlike those “older” modes, it also to designate a radically political, and politicized, body that “do[es] a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer” (xiii). Queer for Warner, in other words, is a decidedly, and already, political designation that one assumes and attempts to wield so as to highlight and challenge “the wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance, [which function] as the site of violence” against gays and lesbians (xxvi). The political nature of his usage of queer is further emphasized by his parenthetical concession that “alternatively *many people* invest the better parts of their lives to avoid” the political self-understanding that being queer requires (xiii).

Warner’s conceptualization of queer works from an either/or positioning: you are either with us politically, or you are against us (or one of the problems). This form of logic fails to recognize that in many postcolonial communities, being actively political, in and of itself, comes with risks against one’s life. To be politically active against forms of homophobia only amplify those threats. Therefore, it is my contention that mandates for the term queer to possess some sort of overt political action are harmful and shortsighted. Those queers who do not come out politically may be more helpful in changing those sites of normalization critiqued by Warner and other more politically astute queer theorists precisely because they work beneath the veil of society. In other words, in existing, living queerly within mandates or normalization may be equally as, if not more,

effective than overt political identities because it is in those moments that what is normal becomes seen as flexible. Those actions don't necessitate a break, but rather imply a fluidity.

If Warner sees queer as a sort of umbrella term for a politically-motivated, and politically-energized gay and lesbian peoples, Annamarie Jagose, discussed in her 1997 book, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, approaches the term with a little more trepidation. According to Jagose, “[queer] does not have any fixed value”; in fact, “[s]implistic attempts to evaluate this new terminology and conceptual framework ignore the fact that, since the late nineteenth century, knowledge of homosexuality has always been structured by strenuously contested categories” (5-6). Likewise, six years later, Nikki Sullivan arrives at a similar point, noting, in *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, because queer has often been taken to mean anything from non-standard heterosexual sex practices to an umbrella term for gay and lesbian identities to a total rejection of presumed assimilationist gay and lesbian identities, at its base, queer “seems to indicate...that the question of what, or who, is queer is as contentious as the definitions of lesbianism” and other such terms (49). As can be seen by the titles, Jagose's and Sullivan's works are designed less as polemics on queer theory and more as guidebooks on its emergence and theoretical tenets. Still, Sullivan takes her discussion a step further, suggesting that “one way of avoiding the problems associated with the notion of queer as an identity—albeit a non-essential, provisional, and fragmented one—is, as Janet Jakobsen suggests, to ‘complete the Foucauldian move from human being to human doing’...to think of queer as a verb (a set of actions, rather than as a noun (an identity, or even a nameable positionality formed in and through the practice of particular actions)” (Sullivan 50).

However, the queer in queer theory has often remained racially unmarked. Michael Hames-García, in his essay, “Queer Theory Revisited,” criticizes queer theory's tendency to marginalize queer voices of color, establishing white (queer) theory at the center and marginalizing queers of

color. Part of this project involves creating “false chronologies” (28) in which the genealogy of queer theory moves along the line of white theorist and theoretical ideas without recognition of the already present theories on sexuality by writers of color. As Hames-García argues, throughout the history of thinking on race and sexuality, queers of color “have been there all along” (28). “Queer theory and lesbian and gay studies,” he continues, “have never adequately addressed the fact that they are founded on the erasure of a substantial body of critical literature by people of color at the same time that these bodies of work are *included* in queer genealogies for strategic purposes” (28, emphasis in original). Acknowledging the moments in which race has been addressed in queer theory, Hames-García argues that “when queer theorists have included considerations of race it has frequently been through gestures of marginalization, paternalism, or tokenism” (43). To counter this, he suggests following the likes of Roderick Ferguson and María Lugones in understanding that “complex, subtle, and expansive theories of queer sexuality and even liberation need not originate from within the terms of queer theory” (43). Instead, the theorization of women of color feminisms and anti-colonial theorists offer earlier and more nuanced articulations of class-conscious, racialized sexualities.

For instance, in his argument, Hames-García points out the paradox in Eve Sedgwick’s preference for an “analytical separation of sexuality from gender and from race” (Hames-García 22-23) while simultaneously choosing to “privilege especially male homosexuality, making her project gender-specific while simultaneously claiming to investigate sexuality without viewing it in relation to gender” (23). In large, like many of her contemporaries—and many of her intellectual progeny—she does succeed in creating a “separation of sexuality from gender and race. In her seminal book, *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick “proposes that many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured—indeed,

fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century” (1). For this reason, Sedgwick continues:

an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition...[and] the appropriate place for that critical analysis to begin is from the relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory.” (1)

If Sedgwick’s work displays a decidedly masculinist (if not male-specific) bent, Judith Butler’s work helps to re-position gender in the queer debate. In theorizing gender as performative, Butler’s work, in both *Gender Troubles* and *Bodies that Matter*, helps to show that “the institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and [that] this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire” (*Gender Troubles* 30). Ultimately, Butler shows that “gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but rather, as copy is to copy. The parodic repetition of ‘the original’...reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original” (41, original emphases). But, as she warns

[her] project does not propose to lay out within traditional philosophical terms an *ontology* of gender whereby the meaning of being a woman or man is elucidated within the terms of phenomenology. The presumption here is that “being” of gender is *an effect*, an object of a genealogical investigation that maps out the political parameters of its construction in the mode of ontology. To claim that gender is constructed is not to assert its illusoriness or artificiality, where those terms are understood to reside within a binary that counterposes the “real” and the “authentic”

as oppositional. As a genealogy of gender ontology, this inquiry seeks to understand the discursive production of the plausibility of that binary relation and to suggest that certain cultural configurations of gender take the place of “the real” and consolidate and augment their hegemony through that felicitous self-naturalization. (43, original emphases)

Though Butler, here, foregrounds gender, it is clear that sexuality is equally as constructed. And while the major push of *Gender Troubles* is discursive, in *Bodies that Matter*, she argues that it is necessary to pay attention to the actual matter(s) that make up the female body because in doing so, one finds the possibility to break free from the social (mis)conceptions of the feminine. While she recognizes feminists’ concerns that “to problematize the matter of bodies may entail an initial loss of epistemological certainty,” she is also quick to assert that “a loss of certainty is not the same as political nihilism” (*Bodies that Matter* 30). In order, she contends,

for discourse to materialize a set of *effects*, “discourse” itself must be understood as complex and convergent chains in which “effects” are vectors of power. In this sense, what is constituted in discourse is not fixed in or by discourse, but becomes the condition and occasion for a further action...The power of discourse to materialize its effects is thus consonant with the power of discourse to circumscribe the domain of intelligibility. Hence, the reading of “performativity” as willful and arbitrary choice misses the point that the historicity of discourse and, in particular, the historicity of norms (the “chains” of iteration invoked and dissimulated in the imperative utterance) constitute the power of discourse to enact what it names. To think of “sex” as an imperative in this way means that a subject is addressed and produced by such a norm, and that this norm—and the regulatory power of which

it is a token—materializes bodies as an effect of that injunction. And yet this “materialization,” while far from artificial, is not fully stable. (187)

For Butler, then, performativity and discourse are material in that it is only through discourse that they become intelligible, that they become meaningful. Still, discourse cannot be understood as having a one-to-one correlation with its materialized “effect”; instead, discourse must remain, as Bhabha notes of the “stereotype,” “something that must be anxiously repeated” (95). For gender, that means that to “be” a wo/man is to be called to perform as a wo/man; and likewise for sexuality, to “be” hetero/homosexual is to be called to perform as a hetero/homosexual. But as she warns before, this performative condition is neither a voluntary engagement between two parties (in other words, it is not as simple as choosing, or changing what one wears), nor is it a call to the original or “authentic” (there are only copies from which other copies are made).

Yet, as Hames-García suggests, “Butler enlists antiracist critiques *to fortify* her anti-identitarian position, *making them external rather than internal* to” her theory (25, emphases added). As she herself states, texts such as *Paris Is Burning* have “been interesting to read less for the ways in which [they] deploy[] denaturalizing strategies to reidealize whiteness and heterosexual gender norms than for the less stabilizing rearticulations of kinship [they] occasion” (*Bodies that Matter* 240). “Rearticulations of kinship,” or models of family, are more interesting to observe than “denaturalizing *strategies*” for performing whiteness and gender norms. This, at the end of a book invested in exposing the constructedness of norms, seems a curious admission. It might be easy to argue out of this had she not also suggested, in her interrogation of Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, that in the character Clare, “it appears that the uncertain border between black and white is precisely what [is] eroticize[d]” (173), and that “this is like the colonized subject who must resemble the colonizer to a certain degree, but who is prohibited from resembling the

colonizer too well” (275, fn 5). The curious use of metaphoric language, on the one hand, could be read as attempting to avoid suggesting that all (non-dominant) experiences are the same. On the other hand, when taken in conjunction with the statement on *Paris Is Burning*, it seems that Butler has, inadvertently continued performing a similar work of producing an “unsymbolizable” Other against which her larger theory can be materialized. In other words, race seems to be suggested and examined not as a factor that changes the terms of performativity and materializations, but as a group-specific concern that must be navigated under certain circumstances. Or to reformulate this yet again, in Butler’s works, race is not, as Morrison would argue, that which is “on demand and display” for creating American thinking (*Playing in the Dark* 39); rather, it is something that exists in a separate(d) sphere and only presents itself when one is “able to read a marked body in relation to unmarked bodies. Granted Butler acknowledges that Clare’s husband, Bellew, “cannot be white without blacks and without the constant disavowal of his relation to them” (171) and that Bellew “requires the association and its disavowal for an erotic satisfaction that is indistinguishable from his desire to display his own racial purity” (172). In stating this, she follows Fanon in his statement that “as long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others,” or to experience his Self as black (*Black Skin* 109). However, what is not acknowledged are the ways this formulation suggests a dependency on presence. It is only at the moment material bodies are made present that race becomes a factor. This fails to explore the ways in which racial discourses have already altered the language used to make these moments of disavowal possible.

In light of this rather complicated lineage, I employ the term queer in this project as a way of not only speaking of a certain type of sexuality, but also of reconnecting queer to certain processes of racial assemblage. I am less interested in producing a universal portrait of the queer



family. Rather, because, as with all textual studies, this study offers instantiations of queer expression, I aim for “theoretical photobombs,” in which such queer portraits are intentionally disrupted in process rather than, simply, retrospectively.

### **Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and the Dangers of “Outing” a Postcolonial Text**

Because the postcolonial text is deeply concerned with the politics of re-presentation, attempts to read queerness *into* a text—that is, attempt to liberate a queerness that has hitherto remained submerged beneath an otherwise heterosexual narrative—present particular challenges. On the one hand, given the protean nature of the term “queer” itself, attempts to read queerness into a postcolonial text risks establishing queerness as an inherent quality of postcolonialism itself, leaving unaddressed the Western (i.e. European and U.S.) foundations of the term itself. In order to demonstrate the dangers of reading queerness into a postcolonial text, I first offer a queer reading of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, via the character Nwoye. I will then problematize this reading, articulating the ways in which it destabilizes the work of the novel as a postcolonial text.

Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* has long been recognized as a novel that not only depicts the ways in which colonialism “destroyed the integrated precolonial societies and caused alienation and anguish in the colonial subject” but also “shows that despite colonialism’s perniciousness, the African societies contributed to their own disintegration, especially in the way they treated the marginalized sectors of the society” (Mwangi 32). It is for this reason that I emphasize Nwoye’s queerness over Okonkwo’s queer potentials. On the one hand, Okonkwo, that staunch representative for Igbo tradition, dies in the end, leaving Nwoye not only as the heir of tomorrow’s Nigeria, but also as a more appropriate representative of a postcolonial queerness, than does his tradition-bound and defending father. On the other hand, Nwoye represents one of those

“marginalized sectors of the society” against which tradition-driven citizens turn: those men who fail to reach the community’s expectations of manliness, or what we might now term “masculinity.” To this end, and for the purpose of my argument on the dangers of “outing” postcolonial texts, I would like, like Gaurav Desai, to suggest that “the most interesting and dramatic moments” in Achebe’s novel “pertain not to the heterosexual desires of the characters but rather to their anxieties about their own homosocial relationships” (Desai 149).<sup>1</sup>

Following Eve Sedgwick’s reading of *Billy Bud*, in which she declares, “there is a *homosexual* in this text—a homosexual person, presented as different in his essential nature from the normal men around him” (Sedgwick 92, original emphasis), I read the character Nwoye as a *homosexual* character in *Things Fall Apart*.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere does Nwoye’s queerness manifest itself more explicitly than in his (perceived) inability to embrace the “manliness” his father so desperately desires of him (Achebe 52). One particularly potent example of such a failing becomes visible in his turn to Christianity. Though “he did not understand” its logic, Nwoye was particularly attracted to the “poetry of the new religion” and its “hymn[s] about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear” that “seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul—the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed” (147). Christianity, then, becomes seductive because it, unlike his father and his father’s masculinity, offers a chance to process and embrace the pain he carries with him, rather than calling him to act

---

<sup>1</sup> Because my main argument is that a danger lies in such readings, I do not aim for a comprehensive reading of the novel’s or a character’s queerness, but rather a sketch of such.

<sup>2</sup> Since the novel invests its narrative energies in tracing the effects of a tradition of male duty and obligation, an alternative queer reading of this text might be to follow Sedgwick’s further suggestion that “every impulse of every person in this book that could at all be called desire could be called homosexual desire, being directed by men exclusively toward men” (92, original emphases). Every desire Okonkwo has, from his desire to acquire titles to his desire to raise “manly” sons, is shaped and effected by his desire to be seen as a capable (read desirable) man in his community. However, while perhaps interesting, my ultimate goal is to address the dangers of queering otherwise hetero-identified novels and characters. I have, therefore, limited my queer reading to focus on Nwoye’s queer potential.

physically while ignoring his feelings—as his father does.<sup>3</sup> Okonkwo, presented throughout the novel as the voice of tradition, declares the Christians as “a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens,” and Nwoye as “degenerate and effeminate” (Achebe 153). However, while a perfunctory reading of the cause for Okonkwo’s declaration of Nwoye as “degenerate and effeminate” seems dependent upon the boy’s new desire “to abandon the god’s of one’s father and go about . . . praying to the white man’s god” (153), such a reading elides Okonkwo’s constant critique of his son as effeminate.

Ironically, the one period of time in which Okonkwo’s fears of his son’s masculinity are mitigated is also the very period that weighs so heavily on Nwoye’s soul, and that gestures towards Nwoye’s queer desire: the time Nwoye shared with Ikemefuna, Okonkwo’s adopted (prize) son. During the three years Ikemefuna spent in Okonkwo’s house, he and Nwoye became “so deeply attached to each other” that he was able to “have kindled a new fire in the younger boy [Nwoye]” (34, 52). However, Nwoye’s development seems less a matter of permanent personal change, and more a factor of his relationship with Ikemefuna and his understanding of his father’s desires. As if to emphasize the queerness of his character, the reader is informed that

Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell, and which she no doubt still told to her younger children—stories of the tortoise and his wily ways, and of the bird *eneke-nti-oba* who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by the cat. (53, original emphasis)

Moreover, because of his relationship with Ikemefuna, Nwoye

---

<sup>3</sup> Plagued with doubt and regret after killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo realizes that “all he required was something to occupy his mind. If he had killed Ikemefuna during the busy planting season or harvesting [his regret] would not have been so bad; his mind would have been centered on his work” because he “was not a man of thought but of action” (69).

now knew that [the stories that his mother used to tell] were for foolish women and children, and he knew that his father wanted him to be a man. And so he feigned that he no longer cared for women's stories. And when he did this he saw that his father was pleased, and no longer rebuked him or beat him. (54)

Rather than ushering Nwoye across the threshold of an African manhood, reassuring the reader that there is no longer a need to worry about his manliness, the novel problematizes his development, positioning it as an instance of performance. Though he performed, if not temporarily, the masculinity his father so desperately demanded of him, and that his affinity for Ikemefuna inspired in him, Nwoye secretly retains his desire for a less masculine life. As if he can sense the frailty of Nwoye's transformation, Okonkwo worked to reinforce Ikemefuna's influence and Nwoye's development by "encourage[ing] the boys to sit with him in his *obi*" while "he told them stories of the land—masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" (53, original emphasis). In his efforts, Okonkwo might be understood as attempting to abate what Sedgwick terms as "male homosexual panic" (Sedgwick 185). As Sedgwick suggests, "because the paths of male entitlement . . . required certain intense male bonds that were not readily distinguishable from the most reprobate bonds, an endemic and ineradicable state of what I am calling male homosexual panic became the normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement" (185). And that Okonkwo's masculinity serves as the narrative fuel of the novel, it becomes all the more justifiable to view his anxiety of Nwoye's development as a form of male homosexual panic.

It may seem that this reading of Nwoye's queerness has hitherto rested on the presence of a single binary: masculinity/femininity. However, I would like to suggest an alternative point of reference. It is not upon a system built on the masculinity/femininity binary that Okonkwo's anxiety rests; rather, it is upon a binary system of masculinity and *effeminacy*. As José Esteban

Muñoz asserts, “the social construct of masculinity is experienced by far too many men as a regime of power that labors to invalidate, exclude, and extinguish faggotry, effeminacy, and queerly coated butchness” (*Disidentifications* 58). Interestingly, Muñoz’s articulation of masculinity circulates, much like Sedgwick’s notion of the “male homosexual panic,” around a male-male relationship, working to reposition “queerly coated” masculinities, not femininity itself, as the real threats to masculinity. The novel seems to support this reinscription in that, as it depicts the effects of colonization on a “traditional” Igbo society, it is upon the relationships between men that it relies. Women—even those women who might make better men, such as Okonkwo’s daughter, Ezinma—are, largely, pushed to the margins, occupying the spaces beyond the novel’s concern. Moreover, Okonkwo defines his masculinity in terms of how others see him. Not only does he hold that “to show any affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength” (Achebe 28), his consent to killing Ikemefuna arises from his fear of “being thought weak” (61). Because he operates in a realm of “queerly coated masculinity,” as he is unable to detach from his emotions<sup>4</sup> and can only feign to enjoy the things manly men are supposed to enjoy naturally, Nwoye can be seen as a queer character—if not superficially.

The only thing missing is a sign of Nwoye’s queer desire. This desire can be gleaned, however, once we return to the relationship between Nwoye and Ikemefuna. Once again, as an adult, Nwoye is haunted by the question of Ikemefuna’s death. I would suggest that this question is not one asking why Ikemefuna died, but one asking why he, Nwoye, survived. During their time together, Nwoye’s affection for Ikemefuna grew so strong that “as soon as his father walked in, that night, Nwoye knew that Ikemefuna had been killed, and something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow. He did not cry. He just hung limp” (61).

---

<sup>4</sup> When Nwoye hears that Ikemefuna is to be sent back to his home village, he “burst into tears, whereupon his father beat him heavily” (Achebe 57).

Because I am less interested in queering Achebe's novel, I will now turn to the problems incurred when one seeks to dis-cover queerness in a "non-queer" postcolonial text. I very well admit, a certain benefit and thrill definitely presents itself when one endeavors to trace the covertly queer threads holding together an important work. Doing such not only reinforces the argument that "everything is, or can be queer," but also serves to establish queer representatives in locations where an absence had otherwise been assumed. Representative figures with whom one can identify are indeed useful in curbing feelings of alienation and isolation. However, in the context of postcolonial texts, which circulate around the very force of both a society's politics and culture, such interpretive practices risks destabilizing the very texts and people they seek to liberate. A postcolonial text is not just another text; it is a text written with the very purpose of writing against colonial oppressions and histories. And often, postcolonial texts are read not only for their literary but as representative of an entire culture or people. Miss Havisham might come to represent a Victorian woman's experience of domestic life, but Okonkwo comes to represent and be interpreted as *the* Nigerian experience. Where Miss Havisham finds company with other Victorian heroines (Emma and Elizabeth Bennet to name a few) in order to flesh out a reader's understanding of Victorian societies, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* often serves as the only image figuring a reader's understanding of Nigerian society.

In saying that postcolonial texts are texts "written with the very purpose of writing against colonial oppressions and histories," I am not simply suggesting that postcolonial texts are "unidirectional" or "primarily an art of *ressentiment*, reactively directing grudges and hostility at Europe as the cause of all African frustrations" (Mwangi 2, original emphasis). Instead, when I speak of oppressions, I mean both the oppressions conducted by European powers as well as those oppressions postcolonial peoples have applied to and within their own nations and societies. Such

an understanding of the intropsectivity of the postcolonial text is crucial for understanding part of the power of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. If the text can be read as a critique of the effects of colonialism on Nigerian society, it should also, and perhaps more importantly, be read as a critique of the oppressions Nigerians, and notions of tradition, institute upon themselves. More than the effects of colonialism, per se, readers are granted an intimate tale of the effects cultural pressures have on the very people who labor to uphold them. Okonkwo's death, then is not simply a death brought about by the effects of colonialism, it is a death brought about by the pressures of traditional Igbo society, amplified by the increasing (post)colonial contact. In other words, it is very possible to rethink Achebe's text along the lines of Evan Mwangi's claim that the mode of resistance performed by mid-1980s African novels may more effectively be described as their "disregard or demotion of the West as the categorical and ineluctable point of reference in the representation and self-fashioning of the Global South" (1). To paraphrase black queer critic, Joseph Beam's description of the beauty of Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, often, what is taken to be the most glorious thing about Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is the absence of white people (Beam 185).

Because the text attempts self-reflexivity, and because it does so via the transition into colonialism, applying a queer reading to the text becomes problematic. Where, in the West, attempts to queer a culture seek to disrupt the systems of hegemony and heteronormativity resting at the very core of the society, in the (pre-colonial) Africa of the novel, where Western notions of heteronormativity, masculinity, and power lack the same foundation, attempts to uncover a queer text fail to attend to the ways in which such interpretations become "a product not of authorial agency but rather of the critic's interpretive limitations" (Desai 141). Reading Bessie Head's *Maru* as a novel "pertain[ing] not to the heterosexual desires of the characters but rather to their anxieties

about their own homosocial relationships,” Desai notes that, although pre-colonial African sexualities may not have needed to be labeled as “homosexual” or “homoerotic,” “as Michel Foucault suggests of the European context, the emergence of a discourse around such activities also led to a regulation of these activities, and this meant that any such precolonial continuums of male or female desires would, in colonial and postcolonial times, have to be radically disrupted” (149). However, Desai’s formulation fails to recognize its tendency to collapse pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial societies into a single readable text. If *Maru* is a text that “marks the moment of the ambivalent triumph of heteronormativity” (Desai 149), what are we to make of the locating of such a point in the postcolonial text? If Nwoye’s relationship with Ikemefuna is read as a queer relationship—as presented by a text attempting to write itself back to a time before the colonizer—what are we to make of the fact that no one expresses anxiety over the intimacy shared by the two boys? Does this not risk positing the entire culture as queer? But such an assumption misses the normalcy and celebration of both the boys’ shared intimacy and the fact that such intimacy was praised for how it reinforced cultural notions of manhood. In other words, to assert an inherently queer culture here risks undermining the type of masculinity fueling Okonkwo’s descent. That is, if we take Achebe’s novel as a postcolonial novel interested in “re-visiting history,” would a reading invested in queering the text, a reading in which history is pigeon-holed to modern notions of queerness, not disallow for the inclusion of those histories in which heterogeneous understandings of intimacy and bonds exist?

### **Chapter by Chapter**

Admittedly, I have omitted numerous instances and expressions of queerness. But a compendium was never my intention. In fact, it is my belief, and the underlying argument of this



work, that calling for every instance or expression to be made visible helps the ever-restructuring system of heteronormativity more than it does those queers who seek, simply, to live fulfilled lives. Therefore, this project attempts to produce something of a (w)hole from fragments. Chapter one analyzes and critiques the hitherto separate discourses of postcolonial and queer studies. To this end, I argue for an understanding of postcolonial queer identities as hybrid identities, paying special attention to the consequences of failing to recognize these identities as such. Reading the discourse surrounding Uganda's anti-gay bill, this chapter explores how a hetero-normativized postcolonial discourse marks queer-identified postcolonials as outside the postcolony. Because a continued (re)presentation of postcolonial subjects as heterosexual simply displaces systems of oppression onto other bodies rather than dissolving those systems, I suggest that attending to the propagation of a heteronormativized discourse offers a more complete analysis of postcolonial experiences. Furthermore, I challenge assumptions that a single mode of political resistance exists for postcolonial queers. Ultimately, I argue that recognizing postcolonial queer sexual identities as hybrid engenders not only a re-orientation away from the defensive moves of recovery, denial and mobilization, but also a re-evaluation of the very foundations of (post-) colonial discourse themselves.

Following this argument, chapter two problematizes contemporary attempts to (re)discover "traditional" queer sexualities in postcolonial states through an examination and critique of anthropological studies on "indigenous" African queer sexualities. At its core, this chapter argues against searching for "traditional" notions of indigenous queerness. I first outline several important anthropological and historical works—by scholars such as Kurt Falk, Marc Epprecht, and Neville Hoad—that have attempted to "uncover" queer indigenous Homosexualities, and then I work to problematize their findings by highlighting the queer moments within the studies themselves.

Ultimately, I argue that a return is not possible and is, in fact, always troubled by contemporary desires.

Shifting from the theoretically-, anthropologically-, and historically-centered discussions of the first two chapters, chapters three and four offer text-based examples of several expressions of postcolonial queerness. Chapter three demonstrates how an appropriation of the colonial trope of the child may serve as a form of postcolonial queer resistance. Rather than resisting or uncritically capitulating to the current discourse on African progress, I argue that by actively embracing the trope of the child, postcolonial individuals might discover new paths of progress independent of a solely Western-defined modernity. Foundationally, I suggest that by embracing, and then wielding, the trope of the child, opportunities to “write back” against present (post-/neo-)colonial violences arise. Moreover, I suggest the erotic power of the child as an important quality for such writing back. Reading as an example, South African author, K. Sello Duiker’s novel, *Thirteen Cents*, I explore the emergent possibilities offered by a reclamation of the erotic powers within the trope of the child. I posit that Azure, the novel’s protagonist, gains access to his erotic potential as he pushes beyond the social and psychological limits imposed by his childly figure, refusing static interpretations, and insisting on finding new, and more fulfilling paths. Ultimately, I find in Azure a challenge to the parent/child power dynamic that undergirds much of (post-/neo-)colonialism.

More attuned to the material world and circumstances of the queer postcolonial, chapter four traces several connections between postcolonial queerness, objects, and the ordinary or the everyday. More specifically, I am interested in exploring how everyday postcolonial queer enactments gesture towards forms of queer identity that are not necessarily founded on largescale group identities (e.g. “gay”; “lesbian”; “butch”; etc.) and how these identities resist the demands

for politicizing themselves typically placed on marginalized identities. Through a reading of stories by Rahiem Whisgary, Monica Arac de Nyeko, Barbara Adair, and T.O. Molefe, I contend that, in an effort manage daily legal, social, cultural, and economic (to name a few) oppressions within their nations, postcolonial queers engage in practices of “making do,” “introduce[ing] *artistic* tricks and competitions of *accomplices* into a system that reproduces and partitions” images of a healthy national identity (Certau 29, original emphases), and that in making do, these queer enactments often require the participation of not only human accomplices (i.e. friends, family, etc.), but also non-human accomplices as well. Where the presence of human accomplices is often recognized as a possibility—such as in the anti-gay bills proposed in Nigeria and Uganda, which both propose penalties for (assumedly heterosexual) individuals who *secretly* “harbor” knowledge of *active* homosexuals—the presence of non-human accomplices often goes unremarked upon, but often serves as a vital means of expressing or withholding queer desire.

Finally, in the conclusion, I offer a reading of Adaora Nwandu’s 2006 film, *Rag Tag*, as a means of examining the effects of postcolonial queerness. As a British/Nigerian film about two life-long friends who grow to recognize their mutual love for one another, I engage Nwandu’s diasporic African storyline as a way of illustrating not only the hybridity I have argued for throughout this project but also the effects a re-evaluation of queerness within the post-colony has on diasporic notions of masculinity. Change, I demonstrate, does not come because of the efforts of overtly political action. It comes because of the everydayness of the queerness that is experienced and discovered. Ultimately, I conclude that the importance of recognizing postcolonial queerness comes not from a need to prove a universal human experience, but from a need to recognize that human experiences occur along multiple paths. Recognizing such multiplicity more ethically moves us towards a destabilization of the norms that so often serve to

oppress all members of society. I, in other words, end by re-emphasizing the need to shift our focus from liberation to “letting be.”

## CHAPTER ONE

## A MOMENT OF SILENCE:

## QUEER(NESS) IN POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES AND QUEER THEORY

It must be noted that this application is not about homosexuality per se. it [sic] is about fundamental rights and freedoms. However, court not agrees [sic] that section 145, of the Penal Code Act renders every person who is gay a criminal under that section of the Penal Code Act. The scope of section 145 is narrower than gayism generally. One has to commit an act prohibited under section 145 in order to be regarded a criminal.

Hon. Mr. Justice V.F. Musoke-Kibuuka, ruling on the case

*Kasha Jacqueline et al vs. Rolling Stone Ltd. and Giles Muhame*

“They really don’t know that we have to battle to stand and be who we are.”

Stosh Mugisha

Valerie Mason-John begins her contribution to *Queer African Reader* with the assertion that “[u]sing Western labels to identify a queer sensibility is problematic when we try to place the same labels onto the continent of Africa” (309). “You cannot,” she continues, “look through a Eurocentric lens at Africa and begin comparing” (309). However, while she begins her argument with this statement for the need to attend to the nuances and specificities of African sexualities *on* the African continent, the main force of her polemic is directed towards explaining the her own

complicated relations with terms like “queer,” “lesbian,” and “zami” as a “second generation African born in England” (310).<sup>5</sup> In ways, Mason-John’s essay serves as an example of the growing field of queer diaspora studies. Like Mason-John, studies such as Gayatri Gopinath’s *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler’s *Queer Diasporas*, and Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú’s *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* approach postcolonial queers either in diaspora or in the process of migration. Each of these studies seek, in their own way, to “establish queer migration as central in the making of migrant, racial, ethnic, and sexual communities, politics, cultural work, and struggles for social justice” to the formation and maintenance of the West (Patton and Sánchez-Eppler, “Introduction” xxxv).

While these studies are very important, they interrogate queer migration as it moves *from* the native land *to* the US and Europe. Once again, this is important and exciting work. However, it is important to understand how queers in their native lands negotiate the demands of their sexual and “national” lives. This can only be done by investigating the ways in which queer sexualities are navigated at home or with concerns of home. While I find concerns of queer diaspora important because they, as Gopinath states, “mobilize[] questions of the past, memory, and nostalgia for radically different purposes...remember[ing] through queer diasporic desire and the queer diasporic body...a past time and place riven with contradictions and the violence of multiple uprooting, displacements, and exiles” (4), I also find that these concerns risk furthering the assumption that “the grass is greener on the other side”—with that “other side” being outside of

---

<sup>5</sup> “Zami,” popularized by Audre Lorde’s mythobiography, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, signifies a specifically Afro-Caribbean female-female sexual identity. Mason-John notes that, as an *African* lesbian, the word never quite captures her cultural and sexual experiences in the way it does for Afro-Caribbean lesbians.

one's "backward" home country, or more precisely, in a First World environment, and a further overreliance on Western conceptualizations of queerness.

How we discuss queer postcolonial concerns matter. They can neither be subsumed under postcolonial discussions of class, race, or gender; nor taken as reiterations of Western queerness. Rather, I argue, postcolonial queer sexualities must be recognized as hybrid sexualities. While visibility is an important component of Western queer rhetorics and movements towards acceptance, this might not be the desired goal or method for all postcolonial queers. It should not, therefore, be taken as a sign of "backwardness" or as a "lack of progress" when visibility, as it appears in Western queer movements, is not, well, visible. Recognizing postcolonial queerness as irrevocably hybrid not only reorients discussions of hybridity in postcolonial discourse, but also underscores the fact that Western expressions of queerness are not the only expressions possible. When we fail to attend to the intersections of queer and postcolonial studies, that is, fail to recognize that these are not mutually exclusive or antagonistic fields of inquiry, we remain complicit in the displacement of systems of oppression rather than fulfill the promises of destabilization sought by each field.

Against my assertion of the hybridity of postcolonial queer identities, Edouard Glissant's concept of "creolization" might seem more advantageous. As Glissant explains, "creolization" suggests an *active* "deconstruct[ion] of [the oppressing language] to make it serve [the colonized]" (Glissant 162). Although, in the context of a globalized queer community, it is productive to address the ways in which native cultures take portions of imported queer culture and creolize them, altering it to fit their own uses, what I find the notion of hybridity more productive because it positions itself as not only a melding of psychic and material alterations but as an act of re-reading (into) behaviors. Hybridity, thus, offers a more indeterminate discussion of colonial

interactions and exchanges. As it suggests a present state, and a possession of more power than may actually be present, creolization is more likely to initiate a point-based investigation, at best. At worst, it risks perpetuating conceptualizations of postcolonial queers as “lazy peoples” who “can’t get their acts together,” when their expressions of queerness don’t overtly resemble Western models of queerness. Such thinking contributes to accusations of postcolonial spaces being hyper-homophobic (against the West’s seemingly more “tolerant” homophobia). In other words, such formulations present the very real danger of painting postcolonials as still primitive, while absolving the West, and Western queer studies of its role in “silencing” postcolonial acts of speaking.

Recently, scholars have begun addressing queerness in postcolonial studies. Works like Peter Drucker’s *Different Rainbows* (2000), John Hawley’s important collection, *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections* (2001), and William J. Spurlin’s exceptional, *Imperialism within the Margins: Queer Representation and the Politics of Culture in South Africa* (2006), have, in various ways, attempted to assert that “[t]he Third World, the part of the world that shares a colonial past and an economically dependent present, has been part of the global lesbian/gay community for a long time” (Drucker 9). Yet, this scholarship largely either “reads” queerness into, or out of, texts, or only those queer lives that overtly present themselves as or in visible forms of resistance to colonial power. For instance, Gaurav Desai, in his essay “Out in Africa,” finds Frantz Fanon’s implicit heteronormativity as proof that “it was not *homosexuality* that was inherited from the West but rather a more regulatory *homophobia*” (148, original emphases). Desai thus seeks to relieve scholars of both their oversensitivity to and guardedness from “native” cultures by suggesting that walking such a line leaves us unable to answer important question because we are afraid to ask them. Queer postcolonial lives that exist in the shadows of the more



overtly politically active remain invisible—or, at the very least, are approached ambivalently. Readings such as the one in which the “Third World” is defined as “the part of the world that shares a colonial past” suggest that colonialism is something “the othered” postcolonial has to deal with, and risks absolving Western queers of the legacies of colonialism and imperial domination.

While Drucker’s *Different Rainbows* productively works to create space for postcolonial, or to use his terminology, “Third World,” queers, its assumption of a globalized gay/lesbian community belies its foundational assumption that the West, and more specifically America, stands as the epicenter of this community. This is to say, when Drucker insists that “[t]he Third World, the part of the world that shares a colonial past and an economically dependent present, has been part of the global lesbian/gay community for a long time” (Drucker 9), he fails to recognize that this supposed connection has, more often than not, been at the expense of those Third World queers. Rather, by establishing sexuality as the dominant unifying theme, Drucker and the essays in his collection establish a queer sexuality that is universal and transnational in nature, against any recognition of national nuances. By asserting “Third World” queer sexuality as transnational and universal, Drucker’s collection fuels African contestations of queerness. Uprooting postcolonial queer sexualities from the histories and cultures of their respective nations feeds into the idea that such sexualities are imports and, therefore, foreign. In contrast to Drucker’s celebration of an “already-there” presence of “Third World” queers, Hawley’s collection directs a more critical gaze at what it means to be postcolonial, queer(ly). In light of a continually globalized world, *Postcolonial, Queer* “suggest[s] the complex manifestations of postcolonial problems in local discussions of emergent sexualities” (Hawley 13). More specifically, the collection and its essays seeks to begin addressing the ways in which (neo)colonization impacts sexualities “both of those designated elsewhere as subalterns, and of those whose position as

members of the ruling class persisted or persists regardless of their own possibly ‘deviant’ status within their own cultures. Strangely, though, tension remains between the fields of postcolonial studies and queer studies, as exemplified by the comma in Hawley’s title (*Postcolonial, Queer*).

For all their benefits, studies such as Hawley’s and Drucker’s positing of Western queer theories and values as points of departure strips postcolonial queers of their agency. In other words, these studies often retain a commitment to a transnational queer body that takes both the 1969 US Stonewall riot and the AIDS crisis that arose in the 1980s as its points of origin, without making space for the queers of color who also contributed to these defining events.<sup>6</sup> For much of queer theory, volume one of Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, stands as a landmark publication, creating space to re-imagine the place of the queer in modern Western thought. By arguing that modern homosexuality is a period specific product of shifting discourses on desire, queer theorists found in Foucault’s theorizations the space for resisting the constraining identity categories of the gay and lesbian movements. In other words, in positioning Foucault as an originary point, queer theory, and the queer, has been assumed to be a Western movement that suddenly sprang forth. It should come as little surprise, then, that in their uncritical reliance on queer theory, works like Hawley’s and Drucker’s take for granted the primacy of the West in their conceptualizations of queerness, and continue to read sexuality an trait that remains consistent throughout time, nations, and cultures.

Recognizing that ‘it has become fashionable to point to the emergence of the ‘global gay,’ the apparent internationalization of a certain form of social and cultural identity based upon

---

<sup>6</sup> As discourse over Roland Emmerich’s recent film, *Stonewall* (2015) makes clear, despite their contributions in the events of the Stonewall riots of 1969, the riot that is largely taken as *the* originary moment of the modern gay and lesbian movement (in America), queers of color have been marginalized, leaving the movement to be represented as white, male, and (largely) middle-class. Michael Hames-García also critiques queer theory’s tendency to “discover” the works of queer people of color only after non-minority scholars make similar claims (“Revisiting Queer Theory”).

homosexuality” (Altman 20), Dennis Altman implores scholars to keep in mind that sexuality always intersects in various and complex ways with social, economic, political, and cultural structures. Furthermore, Altman cautions, we must recognize that these structures are, because of globalization, influenced by the West *and* by other, and often more proximate/regional nations as well. (Homo)sexual identities come in various forms, and attached to various needs and experiences; therefore, we should avoid placing the sexual experiences of others within a Western (or American) framework and recognized the ways in which different places contextualize both (homo)sexual identities and (homo)sexual behaviors. As Altman states, ‘gay identities may emerge in different ways and without the overtly political rhetoric of the West’ (35).

I certainly agree with Altman: not only does postcolonial queerness emerge differently from its Western counterparts but postcolonial queers might not desire a Western political framework. However, I take issue with one major point in Altman’s rationale. Rather than reading postcolonial queer identities as hybrid, Altman suggests the presence of multiple—and often seemingly contradictory—identities which individuals shift between. As he puts it, “[m]ost people negotiate numerous models of identity in everyday life, and what might seem paradoxical or contradictory to the observer is no more than evidence of the human ability to constantly reshape him- or herself” (36). What I find problematic is not the suggestion of a multitude of queer identities, but the suggestion of an identity hinged on a form of “code-switching.” Postcolonial queer identities are not turned on and off based on social setting, but are constant processes of compression and expansion that come in direct response to forms of postcolonial power. Like Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry, postcolonial queer identities come through as hybrid in that they function as “a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry” 122). If it seems to

those of us who exist on the outside that these identities shift, perhaps this is because we are ill-prepared to read them accurately.

William Spurlin's *Imperialism within the Margins*, most intricately takes up the call for more nuanced investigations of localized expressions of queerness, offering a refreshing departure from this tendency to universalize queer sexual experiences. Rather than taking Western queer theory as his point of departure, Spurlin analyzes the national politics of South Africa, paying attention to the ways in which the transition from an apartheid state to a post-apartheid state creates nationally specific forms of queerness. Furthermore, Spurlin contends that "the cultural production of queerness in southern Africa is neither reducible to, nor to be subsumed under, western queer identity politics and cultural representations, but may very well resist them" (Spurlin 6). Attempting to "broaden postcolonial studies, [while] decolonizing queer studies," as the title of his second chapter suggests, Spurlin also refuses to take for granted queer studies' orientation towards the West. With an eye to queer studies' Western orientation, Spurlin "acknowledge[es] that queer inquiry needs more comparative, historical, rhetorical, and contextualized understandings of 'queer,'" and must "engag[e] localized questions of experience, identity, and history in order to better understand specific processes of imperial domination, subordination, and resistance, so much at the heart of postcolonial inquiry" (5). By arguing that contemporary South African queer identity is the product of both the pressures brought about by, and freedoms found in the transition from apartheid, Spurlin reorients discussions of postcolonial queer identity so that those identities can no longer be read as either "pure" or "imported." I find hope in Spurlin's gesture towards a hybridized postcolonial queer identity. And, while I find his references to an "indigenous" sexuality (Spurlin 18) unsettling and a bit problematic, given their risks of suggesting an "authentic" sexuality, I agree that the social and political context in which contemporary

postcolonial queer identities are formed “are critical . . . to understanding queer politics and identities in South Africa as a hybrid space” (Spurlin 109). Understanding postcolonial queer sexual identities as hybrid allows for a way out of those debates that posit queerness in the postcolony as either transhistorically present or an import of imperialism. Yet, I hold that we should caution against subsuming sexual desire into political engagement, reducing desire to a product of politics.

Yet, as Gayatri Spivak warns, caution must be made when addressing the lived experiences of non-Western peoples. In contrast to Frantz Fanon’s attempt to locate an ontology for the colonized, and Homi Bhabha’s reading of a subversive power pulled from within the system of colonial discourse itself, Spivak asserts that “a nostalgia for lost origins can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism” (*Critique* 291). According to Spivak:

[The Western] S/subject, curiously sewn together into a transparency by denegations, belongs to the exploiters’ side of the international division of labor. It is impossible for contemporary [Western] intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of [the West]. It is not only that everything they read, critical or uncritical, is caught within the debate of the production of that Other, supporting or critiquing the constitution of the Subject as [West]. It is also that, in the constitution of that other of [the West], great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary— not only by ideological and scientific production, but also by the institution of the law. However reductionistic an economic analysis might seem, the [Western] intellectuals forget at their peril that this entire overdetermined enterprise was in the interest of a

dynamic economic situation requiring that interests, motives (desires), and power (of knowledge) be ruthlessly dislocated. (280)

Accordingly, Spivak finds that the subaltern cannot speak, that the subaltern's voice remains untranslatable so long as the Western "S/subject" remains foundational for interpretation (280). Sharing Benita Parry's Marxist orientation, yet differing in her commitment to textual "close readings," Spivak remains skeptical of Western intellectuals's "masquerading as the absent norepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves" (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 292). Unfortunately, while such skepticism fuels Spivak's argument that the non-Western subject has been written out of history and that there is no way of recovering this, it fails to inspire her to question the heteronormativity which grounds notions of the Western subject. In fact, Spivak herself perpetuates this heteronormative grounding of the Subject as she sets childbearing and soul making as the two registers which ground her construction of human beings ("Three Women's Texts" 244).

Nonetheless, much value remains in Spivak's intervention. It draws attention to the ways in which one's theoretical positioning risks stifling the very voices one claims to find. Yet such a recognition "need not signify paralysis" (Spurlin 29). With this in mind, I work to extend Spivak's argument, applying it to queer sexuality. On the one hand, I argue that queer postcolonials have been silenced by both postcolonial and queer narratives, as each takes Western subjects as their ideal subjects—be those subjects hetero- or homosexual. However, on the other hand, rather than attempting to recover a queer postcolonial voice, I want to extend the question of whether or not postcolonial queers "can speak" so that we ask, do postcolonial queers, in fact, *want* to speak—at least in a politically collective manner?

The assertion that queerness necessitates a form of political action is equally as troubling as approaching both queerness and postcoloniality with an “inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the ‘third world’ in the context of a world system dominated by the West” (Mohanty 174). Though directing her argument towards colonialism’s intersections with “class, race, and national boundaries” (173), paying no attention to how queer sexualities impact these intersecting lines (outside, of course, those of the queerness of “Third World” women in relation to “Western” women), her point remains poignant when directed towards postcolonial queer identities. Western-centered analyses can be seen in the arguments of Michel Foucault, Eve Sedgwick, Annamarie Jagose, and Leo Bersani, each of whom create the theoretical groundwork for queer studies and its ideas. Representing various points in the progress of queer liberation, each of their arguments suggests that the “gay and lesbian subject was white” (Jagose 62), rarely critically interrogating race, let alone issues of (post)colonialism, as constitutive of their Western queer subjects. And when queerness is discussed in relation to its intersections with race, it is almost exclusively from Western positions. Not to diminish the important work done by scholars such as Dwight McBride, Cathy Cohen, Sharon P. Holland, E. Patrick Johnson, Mae G. Henderson, Michael Hames-García, Audre Lorde, David Eng, Judith Butler, and Alan Sinfield, though these scholars all work discussions of race into their conversations on queerness, they all leave the Western subject “as the norm or referent” (Mohanty 176)—even if they all do so from different relationships to that referent.

As Michael Warner asserts, those who assume a queer identity come to know that their identity intersects with other social institutions (Warner xiii). I, and I’m sure most how have feared losing family and/or friends due to one’s sexual identity, definitely agree with Warner’s

intersectional understanding of queerness. I, however, take issue with Warner's elaboration of who is queer:

[e]very person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatization is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. *Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time*, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences. ("Introduction" xiii, my emphasis)

As I stated, I agree with Warner's assertion that those who identify as queer understand their identity to be entangled with a myriad of other systems. However, I find problematic Warner's insistence that "[b]eing queer means fighting about these [intersectional] issues all the time, locally and piecemeal" (xiii). In fact, even Warner recognizes the limits of such a mandate, parenthetically admitting that, "[a]lternatively many people invest the better parts of their lives to avoid such a self-understanding and the social reflection it would imply" (xiii). Yet, instead of making space for non-politically active expressions of queerness, such a statement establishes a line between what is and what is not "queer." There, apparently, are the "true" queers, who take up the dirty work of challenging state institutions, and then those other people, who "invest" their energies trying to keep their hands clean. Therefore, according to Warner, to be queer is not only to be politically active and visible, but also to be a member of one or the other "pure" camps. No room is left for those whose political commitments exist in a state of flux, or for those who are, at times, forced to be political in spite of their own wishes. Not all visibility comes in the form of a pride



parade. To call for an always and already political queerness assumes that all politics look the same, and ignores the ways in which such a view have also shaped colonial and imperial missions. Moreover, to call for an always and already political queerness underestimates the queering potential of hybridity. Precisely because it takes, remakes, and then re-presents mixed elements, often doing so in extremely subtle ways, hybridity offers a possibility for affecting queer change beyond the picket-line politics expected by Western thinking. Furthermore, to call for an always and already political queerness assumes that all politics look alike, and ignores the ways in which such a view have also shaped colonial and imperial missions.

Lest I be dismissed as anti-political, I would like to make clear that, in rejecting the notion that queerness as an already and always political identity, I do not intend to diminish or ignore the important work done by those postcolonial queers who do actively and visibly struggle to challenge and change the cultural environments of their nations. Many brave queers—such as David Kato (Uganda), FannyAnn Eddy (Sierra Leone), Sylvia Tamale (Uganda), Ashok Row Kavi (India), and Abdellah Taïa (Morocco), to name but a few—have dedicated their lives to, and at times sacrificed their lives for the cause of creating social spaces in which queer postcolonials can live openly. Because of the visibility and intentionally political manner in which they have lived their lives, they have been able to bring attention to the presence of queerness within national borders that often resist such presences. And this is very important work. However, as I will argue throughout this chapter, this is neither the only manner in which queerness is lived, nor the only effective way to challenge social norms, and suggesting such creates fractures within an already burdened community. Furthermore, such an expectation fails to recognize its dependency upon Western models of queerness, thus failing to recognize that postcolonial queer identities are formed through a processing of local *and* global stimuli.

As Warren's parenthetical rather reluctantly recognizes, political visibility and struggle are not the lived experience of *all* queers—in or out of postcolonial nations. In fact, one official, who runs an LGBT program in Kenya, refuses to have both his and his organization's name made public “for fear of endangering [the organization's assisted] refugees” (“Persecuted at Home”). Two Ugandan refugees being assisted by the organization, and who wished not to have their real names made public, noted that prior to the introduction of Uganda's anti-homosexuality bill, a certain level of freedom and comfort was permitted them as they walked Kampala's streets as a couple. Once the bill brought public condemnation of homosexuality, however, they lost both that freedom and comfort (“Persecuted at Home”). If queerness within Western nations is not always lived as continuously and actively political, to expect queerness within nations caught between a desire to adhere to Western-imported national models and a recognition that those models “have come from an alien culture” (Chatterjee 2) seems irresponsible, at best. Such an expectation promotes the assumption that all queerness stems from and follows Western queer experiences, and fails to recognize that queerness in non-Western, and postcolonial, nations is shaped by its own cultural experiences. Additionally, the requirement for a constantly politicized queer identity re-institutes a new margin as it misses the important gestures less visible queers make as they move beyond the scope visibility.

In the pages that follow, I endeavor to expand the discourse on postcolonial queer identity by articulating such identities as neither simply foreign imports, nor authentically traditional, but as specifically hybrid. Because hybridity remains an important point of discussion in our globalized, and globalizing world, I begin with a discussion of hybridity's place in postcolonial discourse. As I do so, I work to problematize its relationship with notions of queerness. I use hybridity's double role as a marker of difference *and* as an identification in order to build an

argument for understanding postcolonial queer identities as hybrid. Finally, in order to evidence my claim, I (re)visit the discourse surrounding Uganda's recent Anti-Homosexuality Bill. The discourse surrounding the bill, I suggest, demonstrates not only the consequences of leaving postcolonial queers exterior to discourses on postcoloiality, but also the dangers of expecting postcolonial queerness to resemble Western queerness. Attending to the propagation of a heteronormativized postcolonial discourse, as well as a neo-imperialist queer discourse, I suggest, offers a more complete analysis of postcolonial experiences.

### **Postcolonial Queer Identity: Negotiating between private desires and national consciousness**

While John Hutnyk contends that “hybridity is by now such a contested word that its referent has dissolved into mush” and “does not matter in a context where exclusion from resources and opportunities is much more than an absent-minded and myopic blindness of the dominant culture” (39), the concept remains a crucial component of postcolonial discourses. Bhabha famously defines hybridity as

the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the ‘pure’ and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the

discriminated back upon the eye of power . . . making [power's] objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory—or . . . a negative transparency. (*Location* 159-60)

Although critiqued for “returning us to his abhorrence of political concepts of conflict and his undertheorized notions of an ubiquitous middle ground and coalition” (Parry 73), and for “confining the destabilization of the metropole to the changes in the ethnic composition of the population” (Spivak, *Critique*, 360-61), Bhabha’s notion of hybridity remains influential and productive. Hybridity, Bhabha explains, manifests the excesses created by colonial authority’s establishment of systems of differentiation, all the while pointing to the anxieties grounding such differentiations by turning “the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification—a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority” (*Location* 162). Hybridity is an observation of that which colonial power seeks to disavow: that difference as a site of resistance is never *outside of*, but is *in between* (156, my emphases). The most powerful aspects of Bhabhian hybridity its relocation of socially marginal beings from outside of systems of power (as voiceless) to “in-between” the very structures supporting that power (as beings with certain investments *and* agencies in that power). Since Bhabha’s intervention, hybridity has been read as a form of resistance in that it “reverses the *formal* process of disavowal so that the violent dislocation of the act of colonization becomes the conditionality of colonial discourse” (163, original emphasis). Bhabhian hybridity challenges assumptions of a single-sided process, uncovering the mark of the uncertainty resting between and the frailty of colonial authority and that authority’s need for repetition. In other words, Bhabhian hybridity assumes the agency articulated in Glissant’s creolization, while pointing out the instabilities within the very system of power that calls for assimilation.

While Parry and others critique Bhabha's discursive "gestures" (Parry 71) as little more than an "affiliation with a critical practice which undertakes to reveal how the uncertainties of textual meaning are produced/undermined as permutations on a chain of signification" (56), I resist the claim that he is unconcerned with the economic and political environment of colonization (71). I find value in Bhabha's "gestures," if gestures are understood as interpretational and resistant to fixed meaning (Muñoz 65). Gestures, in fact, would seem most appropriate for a scholar writing within the diaspora. What I find most alarming is the ways in which Bhabha, not to mention Parry herself, fails to grapple with queer presences—more specifically, queer sexualities—within (post)colonial discourses.

Moreover, I propose an understanding of postcolonial queer identities as hybrid over a reading of them as forms of mimicry for two very important reasons: First, and most obviously, presenting such identities as forms of mimicry only perpetuates the notion that they are mirror images of Western queernesses. Bhabha positions mimicry as a process in which "the observer becomes the observed and 'partial' representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence" (*Location* 127, original emphasis). In Bhabha's reformulation of Fanon's logic of identification, "what emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a *writing*, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable" (125, original emphasis). Or put more simply, "mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*" (125, original emphasis), imbuing repetition with a menacing effect as it makes visible that which sought to remain undisclosed. While it might be useful to assert that via a process of mimicry, postcolonial queers offer a chance to queer Western notions of queerness, such a logic also threatens to remove from postcolonial queers their own histories of queerness.

Second, mimicry allows Bhabha to perfect Fanon's desire to establish a heteronormative framework for the colonized. Like Fanon, Bhabha remains silent on the ways queer sexualities create different positionings. In fact, on this point, Bhabha goes beyond Fanon: where Fanon at least recognizes sexuality's role in the economy of colonialism, Bhabha makes no mention whatsoever of how sex factors into identities within the system of colonial power. For instance, Fanon's interjects a discussion of the black man's (heterosexual) virility into his discussion of how hybridity affects the colonized's goals, recounting that:

We know historically that the Negro guilty of lying with a white woman is castrated . . . [Nonetheless, t]alking recently with several Antilleans, I found that the dominant concern among those arriving in France was to go to bed with a white woman. As soon as their ships docked in Le Havre, they were off to the houses. *Once this ritual of initiation into "authentic" manhood had been fulfilled, they took the train for Paris.* (*Black Skin* 72, my emphasis)

Here, it becomes clear that desire, as articulated here, is predicated upon a male/female dynamic similar to the one Michael Warner critiques in his introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet*: It testifies to the depth of the culture's assurance (read: insistence) that humanity and heterosexuality are synonymous (xxiii). While Warner's example is of an image plastered to a rocket that is "speed[ing] to the ends of the universe, announcing to passing stars that earth is not, regardless of what anyone says, a queer planet" (xxiii), Fanon's Martinicans are speeding to the heart of the empire because they have internalized the colonial narrative that white (skin, language, sex, etc.) leads to wholeness. The hybridity becomes visible when we realize that, after their sex with white females, they then set off to Paris, where they will find comfort with others like themselves. The black colonized mimics the preference for the European language and culture (as seen in the

journey to Paris), for the European sex-object (the white woman), and for the European claim to an “‘authentic’ manhood”—a manhood, as I note above, which would have been established in a black man/black woman context prior to colonization. But like the image on the rocket, the Martinican’s, along with Fanon, seem bent on reassuring us that the colonized are not from a queer world.

The anxiety that Fanon might have had about homosexuality has been assuaged by his heir. Via the act of mimicry, Bhabha reads “skin/race” as the grounds for “fantasy in the exercise of colonial power” (*Location* 113), repositioning desire, which is coupled with colonized sexuality in Fanon, as a site of tension. Bhabha cautions that “what [he has] called mimicry is not the familiar exercise of *dependent* colonial relations through narcissistic identification so that, as Fanon has observed, the black man stops being an actional person” (126, original emphasis). Rather, he stresses mimicry as “the fetishiz[ation of] colonial culture” (129). This reading relies on Freud’s conceptualization of the fetish as “run[n]g parallel with the disavowal and acknowledgement of castration” (qtd in Bhabha, *Location* 112), and allows Bhabha to subsume material bodies in trans-material culture. Such a move carries with it the assumption that the difference which grounds the fetish is one based on a male/female binary. In other words, the sexual tension wrapped up in the fetish is one with heterosexual origins, and Bhabha leaves such an economy unchallenged. The anxiety that Fanon might have had about homosexuality has been assuaged by his heir.

Though it would seem that an observation of hybridity is an observation of queerness, such implications have received scant attention. In fact, as queer as Bhabha’s formulation is, absent are discussions of (same-sex) sex and (homo)sexuality. Rather than observing hybrid bodies, and the sex that produces them, Bhabha reads as the exemplary sign of hybridity’s work the mis-recognition of the English book (*Location* 146). Extending Bhabha’s culturalist reading of

hybridity, and working against his seeming resistance to the biological underpinnings of the term hybridity itself, Robert J. C. Young not only urges for an understanding of hybridity's biological roots and how such roots have informed colonial desire, but sets sex as an important indicator of colonial hybridity. In place of texts and psychology Young emphasizes bodies, desire, and (the threat of mixed) reproduction. "If," Young explains, "language preserves one major product of [colonial] contact, a second, less usual model . . . is equally literal and more physical: sex," with both "produc[ing] what were regarded as 'hybrid' forms (creole, pidgin and miscegenated children), where were seen to embody threatening forms of perversion and degeneration" (Young 5). Young probes the queerness of the term, exploring its relationship with colonial anxieties over racial difference and power. Yet, he abruptly moves to establish hybridity as necessarily, and always, heterosexual. "Hybridity as a cultural description," Young asserts, "will always carry with it an implicit politics of heterosexuality" because "anxiety about hybridity reflected the desire to keep races separate, which meant that attention was immediately focused on the mixed race offspring that resulted from inter-racial sexual intercourse, the proliferating, embodied, living legacies that abrupt, casual, often coerced, unions had left behind" (25). Because homosexual sex "produced no children," because it was able to "remain silent, covert and unmarked," it "posed no threat" (26). Robert Aldrich, however, argues that, during colonialism, homosexuality was far from an inert set of covert practices. Instead, Aldrich finds homosexual "desires melded into public actions and political beliefs," as well as in the art and writing produced by colonialists (Aldrich 9). But, while Aldrich, admirably, makes no move to "see into the 'native' mind" (8), his emphasis on colonial Europeans' homosexual desire pushes "native" desire and "melding" outside of the economy of colonial authority. In other words, Aldrich, for all the benefits of his work, fails to



engage questions of how hybridity served not only to reconstruct colonialist identities but also “native” identities as well.

Frantz Fanon, too, endeavored to uncover the effects of colonization on the identities of colonized individuals. It is within Fanon’s work that I locate elements of a nascent hybrid queer identity. As Bhabha reminds us, Fanon represents a pivotal point in colonial and postcolonial discourses because he turns “the European existentialist and psychoanalytic traditions to face the history of the Negro which they had never contemplated” (“Remembering Fanon” 122). Additionally, Stuart Hall positions Fanon as offering “those who take these questions [questions of colonization’s effects on colonized individuals] . . . as *constitutive* of the politics of decolonization . . . [an] enormous, unpredicted, and unpredictable influence” (Hall 19, original emphasis). Moreover, Fanon’s argument that colonization produces “a slow composition of [one’s] *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world” (*Black Skin* 111, original emphasis) opens the door for theorizing the hybrid nature of colonial—and subsequently post-colonial—identities. Not only do Fanon’s discussions of the colonized’s relation to the colonizer’s language point to this fact, it is exemplified when he claims that because the colonized Negro builds his identity from the same collective unconscious as the colonizer, it should come as no surprise when he expresses the same desires as the white colonizer (*Black Skin* 191).<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, Fanon demonstrates the effects of colonization as neither *just* physical, nor *just* mental: colonization becomes an identity, and mode of living. And this identity is never all colonized or all colonizer, but is antagonistically hybrid.

---

<sup>7</sup> Given Fanon’s views on black female desire—when, in fact, he does claim a knowledge of them—it seems unlikely that he would be willing to justify her desires as a product of a “collective unconsciousness.” Thus my usage of the masculine pronoun, “he.”

Resisting the homosocial and homoerotic gestures made by his formulation of the black man's relation to the white man, Fanon diligently works to construct heterosexuality as the norm. In the two chapters he devotes specifically to sexuality ("The Man of Color and the White Woman" and "The Woman of Color and the White Man") Fanon asserts that, at its core, normal (read "healthy") colonial relationships can only be formed within the context of a normalized heterosexual framework. Fanon continues heteronormativizing colonized black identities, years later, when he discusses how the fight for liberation inspires a deeper commitment to traditional notions of the heterosexual family unit as a way to ensure the victory of the struggle for liberation (*A Dying Colonialism*).

While Kobena Mercer, perhaps rightfully, suggests that "homosexuality is a powerful source of anxiety within Fanon's theorizing" (125), Fanon's most explicit reference to homosexuality comes by way of a footnote in his chapter, "The Negro and Psychopathology." As Fanon states:

Let me observe at once that I had no opportunity to establish the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique. This must be viewed as the result of the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles. The schema of homosexuality is well enough known. We should not overlook, however, the existence of what are called there "men dressed like women" or "godmothers." Generally they wear shirts and skirts. But I am convinced that they lead normal sex lives. They can take a punch like any "he-man" and they are not impervious to the allures of women—fish and vegetable merchants. In Europe, on the other hand, I have known several Martinicans who became homosexuals, always passive. But this was by no means a neurotic

homosexuality: For them it was a means to a livelihood, as pimping is for others.  
*(Black Skin 180n44)*

I quote this footnote at length not only because it is the only sustained discussion of homosexuality in Fanon's work, and because, as Mercer argues, it offers an important example of how postcolonial theory has contributed to the violence against queer lives, but because it motions towards the very hybridization of sexual identity that Fanon otherwise works so hard to deny. This hybridity comes as Fanon suggests a difference between that "neurotic" homosexuality, of the Europeans, and the "God-mothers," whose ordinary presence seems queerly natural. Although he suggests that sexual identity remains unaffected by colonization—working from the myth that the colonized black man always has been, and always will be not *homosexual*—a queer tension lurks beneath the surface. Fanon wagers his elision of black homosexuality on the currency of a single term: homosexual. Grounding his argument on the difference of the term, Fanon positions black Martinicans as walking the fine line between what he sees as a European sexual identity and an uncommented upon "native" sexuality.<sup>8</sup> If he has had no chance of observing homosexual Martinicans, he at least seems quite familiar with the "men [who] dressed like women" and the "god-mothers." Nonetheless, he works with an ironic degree of fervor to disentangle these native transgressors from "homosexual" (black) men. "God-mothers" and "men dressed like women" remain men—able to sleep with women (or who are at least "not impervious to the allures of women"; whatever that might mean).

Scholars, such as Thabo Msibi, Marc Epprecht, and Neville Hoad, have demonstrated "how several circuits of discourses, values, desires, and commodities were set in motion in order to account for an unevenly imagined and lived object—lesbian and gay human rights—in and of

---

<sup>8</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the etymology of the term, homosexual, see Annamarie Jagose's *Queer Theory: An Introduction*.

Southern Africa” (Hoad 69). Though they recognize “African societies have never historically had a ‘gay’ identity or a pathologized ‘homosexual’ category” (Msibi 55), they adamantly argue precolonial sexualities as “both more diverse than has hitherto been recognized and in a state of flux” (*Hugochani* 49), meaning that “Africans have always seen sexuality in highly complex ways, which cannot readily be translated into the predominant Western sexual categories” (Msibi 65). To a certain extent, Fanon supports the argument that “native” sexualities were diverse; yet, he still attempts to cleave a black sexual identity away from white sexual identities. However, more than inoculating the colonized culture against Western homosexuality, Fanon inadvertently gestures towards a newly hybridized post-colonial queer identity, ironically making clear that queer identity categories are, in fact, not new or foreign imports to the (post)colonial society.<sup>9</sup> Postcolonial queers who have come to identify as queer do so via a merging of “traditional” queer categories (e.g. “men who dressed like women”), categories which, according to Fanon’s observation, are not tied to daily survival, with newly acquired needs for surviving the contact zone.

In the final sentence of his footnote, Fanon, rather reluctantly, recognizes that he some Martinicans have in fact appropriated a homosexual identity as a way of maneuvering their new post-colonial environment. Although Fanon attempts to present such behavior as a simple act of mimicry, Bhabha point out that mimicry is anything but passive. As Bhabha argues, “mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*,” imbuing repetition with a menacing effect as it makes visible that which sought to remain undisclosed (Location 125, original emphasis). As William S. Wilkerson asserts, sexual identity is an identity which “stabilizes as individuals interpret their desires through

---

<sup>9</sup> Though he contests a certain type of queerness—a contestation built on genre, if you will—he does, with relative ease, make space for other genres of queerness, even if these other genres are posited as remarkably, purely “native.”

contact with others and their own culturally specific norms” (Wilkerson 4). Therefore, suggesting a continuity between pre- and post-colonial Martinican societies no longer becomes possible. Contrary to the trajectory Fanon intends, these Martinicans who have “bec[o]me homosexual” cannot be seen as points of departure. Instead, they must be understood as hybrid constructions built through attempts to navigate a new, hybridized society.

Recognizing the hybridization of queer *identities* allows us to move beyond the “universal”/“imported” binary marring much of the discourse on postcolonial queer identities, and find that the two are not mutually exclusive of one another (one can simultaneously postcolonial and queer). Moreover, unlike Chong Kee Tan, who suggests non-Western queer *cultures* as “a creative renegotiation of local cultural norms” and Western cultural examples (Tan 124), an emphasis on identities avoids the need to understand postcolonial queer identities as having simple (and often Western) origins or of being subsumed in discussions of culture. In what follows, I turn to the contemporary discourse on homosexuality in Uganda. In doing so, I hope to make concrete, so to speak, my argument for hybridity, as well as my argument for why we should be weary of positing an always, and already political postcolonial queer identity.

### **In Context: Ugandan Queer Identities**

By now, it is generally understood that Uganda’s anti-homosexuality bill—introduced by Member of Parliament (MP) David Bahati—was drafted with the intentions of penalizing homosexual acts “within” Uganda. (Not only does the bill seek the power to regulate and penalize homosexual acts within its borders, it also seeks the power to regulate and penalize homosexual acts performed by Ugandan citizens residing in other nations as well, thus extending and drawing

into question the limits, shape, and form of the state itself.) As stated in (Ugandan) Bills Supplement No. 13:

The object of this Bill is to establish a comprehensive consolidated legislation to protect the traditional family by prohibiting (i) any form of sexual relations between persons of the same sex; and (ii) the promotion or recognition of such sexual relations in public institutions and other places through or with the support of any Government entity in Uganda or any non governmental [sic] organization inside or outside the country. (1.1)

Additionally, the bill seeks to buttress the nation's ability to handle "emerging internal and external threats to the traditional heterosexual family," while serving as a legal (and thus official?) acknowledgement that "same sex [sic] attraction is not an innate and immutable characteristic" (1.1).<sup>10</sup> Amid rising international pressure to reject the proposed bill, the Ugandan government initially only offered its tacit support, arguing limited power based to curb the bill due to its respect for the nation's political process. According to the government, although "the anti-homosexuality Bill [sic] was introduced by a private member . . . and not the Government," "[i]t is inconsistent to promote gay rights and at the same time demand that the right of a Member of Parliament to legislate be interfered with" (qtd. in Candia).<sup>11</sup> Or, as Ugandan Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga has reiterated, the government "cannot deny [members of parliament] the right to move Private Members Bills" ("Speaker Clarifies"). In other words, it is beyond the powers of the

---

<sup>10</sup> The danger in dealing with live subject matter is that things are constantly changing. Despite the bill having been overturned by Uganda's Supreme Court, I continue to speak of it in the present tense for one main reason: politicians have warned that they will reintroduce the bill in a future session the national assembly.

<sup>11</sup> It should not be assumed that the entire nation rejects homosexuality as immoral or non-Ugandan. While officials like Bahati have certainly gained new political power because of their arguments against homosexuality, there are, as the bill suggests, those within the nation who are sympathetic to queers. The bill not only seeks to punish those who engage in homosexuality; it also seeks the power to punish those who fail to disclose knowledge of anyone who engaging in it.

government to infringe on the legal rights of individuals members of the state to both use and influence the national body.

On one level, the government's justification remains consistent with the nation's Constitutional identity, which declares that "[t]he State shall be based on democratic principles which empower and encourage the active participation of all citizens at all levels in their own governance" and that "all authority in the State emanates from the people of Uganda; and the people shall be governed through their will and consent" (Ugandan Const. obj. II, sec. i; art. 1, sec. 2). By allowing private members like Bahati to introduce legislation, the state can be seen as responsibly honoring its commitment to its citizens. In many ways, the Ugandan government can be seen as following its pre-marriage-equality mentor, the United States, in allowing "the people" to decide on laws that continually restrict who can be classified as citizens under the nation's law. Much like the U.S. Supreme Court's foundational logic in the 2003 case, *Lawrence and Garner vs. Texas*, the Ugandan government's tacit support of the actions of those who introduced anti-homosexuality legislation circulates around an odd notion of privacy. As Jasbir Puar notes of the *Lawrence-Garner* case, "the relegation to privacy as a kind of confinement that is nevertheless a privileged void from state intervention (the fantasy that the *Lawrence-Garner* ruling fosters) illuminates the taken-for-granted access to privacy and raises many questions about the unacknowledged forms of privilege necessary to indulge such a reading" (124). The private, Puar continues, is a "nationalized construct, insofar as it is granted not only to heterosexuals but to certain citizens and withheld from many others and from noncitizens" (124-25). While in the U.S., (some) queers have increasingly been able to openly gain access to the national body, in Uganda, such opportunities do not exist. The Anti-Homosexuality Bill actively seeks to exclude queer bodies, all the while calling them to identify as part of the state. It calls upon all its citizens to

recognize their commitment to the state as superseding their own desires. Such a call forces queers to negotiate their national identity with their sexual identities, often leading to queer identities that merge the state's desires with their own. As Mason-John notes, in African nations, “[i]t is common for women or men to stay in a heterosexual unit while in a same-sex relationship, not because they necessarily want to, but because if they were to set up home with their lover, they could be attacked, at worst killed, or lose all financial subsistence” (309).

On another level, however, it becomes evident that the struggle with colonial power has not been won in the act of decolonization but has been reconfigured as a battle over identity, as expressed through sexuality, and displaced in the discourse around, and material acts of queer Ugandan bodies. While government officials such as Bahati and Museveni have found new political power as they argue the threat of homosexuality to social and cultural institutions (F. Mugerwa), and church leaders have been able to effect an increase in congregational attendance as they preach against the “moral degradation” of homosexuality (Kazungu), and journals and other media sources have found new relevancy as they turn homosexuality into an ongoing spectacle (Mwikya 143), few seem to recognize how such open discussion of sex and sexuality points to hybridized identities. The discourse on both homosexuality and the bill itself posit homosexuality as something that is not traditionally Ugandan while simultaneously attempting to maintain queers as Ugandan citizens bound by a Ugandan national identity. Working with the Fanonian logic of the “god mothers,” the bill and its discourse recognizes the existence of queer Ugandans while denying their presence. That is to say, as the bill tries to displace queer Ugandans from its national body, it can only do so by first recognizing them as Ugandan, then quickly expelling them as not-Ugandan—though not necessarily foreign.<sup>12</sup> In this way, each moment of

---

<sup>12</sup> I make the distinction between “not-citizen” and “foreigner” in an attempt to demarcate the line upon which the bill walks. In order to maintain any legal force, the bill requires for punishment those bodies that fall under its



desire forces queer Ugandans to respond as not-citizen citizens. As Fanon, Epprecht, and Msibi, demonstrate, queer identities have always been present in some form. Therefore, what really seems to be at stake in the bill's rhetoric is a resistance to the recognition that like the nation's national identity, those sexual identities are now just as much a part of modern-day, postcolonial Uganda as is its contemporary political structure. This fact is made all the clearer when Museveni asserts that "[i]n our society, there were a few homosexuals," but that "[t]here was no persecution, no killings and no marginalization of these people," even though they were not the majority (qtd. in Njoroge). More than offering an explanation of the effects of U.S. or European intervention, as might be suggested, in arguing that prior to colonization, the "few homosexuals" that existed were neither persecuted, nor murdered, nor marginalized, Museveni offers an important glimpse into the cultural shifts demanded of national identity. As he argues, in traditional Ugandan society, "sex among Africans including heterosexuals is confidential," and that if he were "to kiss [his] wife in public, [he] would lose an election in Uganda" (qtd. in Njoroge). Against these comments, the anti-gay bill, then, becomes a clear indication that not only is it now appropriate to discuss (homo)sexuality in the streets, but that it is of national importance to do so. Even if the bill seeks to couch the discussion of (homo)sexuality in prohibitions, the new call to make public what was once expected to remain private indicates a need for constructing a new hybrid identity.

Since its initial attempt to pass its anti-gay law, Uganda has taken center stage as an example not only of "backward" national policies on gay rights, but also yet another example of the barbarity of the "African continent." Most news articles discussing gay rights in Africa are quick to mention that "homosexuality is a taboo in almost all Africa [sic] countries and illegal in 37 [of the continent's 54 countries]" ("John Kerry"); some are even a bit more specific stating that

---

jurisdiction—citizens. Foreigners, by necessity of national and international law and relations are constantly pulled between the law of their current country and the law of their home country.

it is “Sub-Saharan Africa [that] has [had] an infamously poor reputation for LGBT rights” (Fisher); with only a few, if not reminding readers that “most” of those laws “were introduced during colonialism” (Karimi and Thompson), reminding them that “the story of how and why things got so bad is complicated and disputed, not least because it would be impossible to generalize across dozens of countries, a much wider array of cultures and a physical area three times the size of Europe” (Fisher). Often, media outlets in, and scholars from the West have contended that the bill’s staccato progress is due to the “uproar” and “pressures” from the international body. Three important problems exist with such contentions: first, in claiming the presence of an international body that is in opposition to Uganda’s anti-homosexuality stance, such contentions imply that Uganda, and those who share its stance (i.e. Nigeria, Iran, India, etc.), remains outside of that body. Second, such contentions assume the absence of internal forces strong enough to affect change in the nation’s social and political processes. Third, more often than not, the situation in Uganda, as well as other non-Western nations, is presented as exceptional, with few cross-cultural connections ever drawn. For instance, when Issa Sky, writing for the social activist site, *Force Change*, explains that surveys have shown “that the majority of Ugandans think homosexuality is morally wrong,” causing “[h]omosexuals in Uganda [to] live in constant fear of persecution and violence,” asserting that “insistence from major international businesses, such as Citibank and Barclays, both of which are important players in Uganda’s economy and job market” may be enough to “persuade the Ugandan Parliament to expunge this piece of violence-promoting legislation” (Sky), she not only works within the logic that reads Uganda, and the other “African countries” in which homosexuality is criminalized, as outside of progress and modernity, and fails to recognize that the is bill moving through a democratic body, in a sovereign democratic nation, just as bills move in the United States, but she also magnifies the power and importance of international pressure at

the expense of local voices and capabilities.<sup>13</sup> Oddly, in recognizing that certain international bodies, such as Citibank and Barclays, refuse to take definitive stances against Uganda's bill, Western voices like Sky's never seem to investigate the motivations for such reticence. While it is definitely not out of the question that such reticence stems, at least in part, from a fear of declining profits, could it also be due, in part, to their recognition that such bills, as well as the environments in which they are drafted and debated, are more complex than Sky and others often suggest. In other words, could Citibank's and Barclays' hesitancy be an indication that there's more to the story than most Western media outlets indicate? Moreover, is it possible to read the silences of such Western corporations as an ironic statement on the importance of a separation of business and politics?

On the one hand, the attention received by Uganda is well warranted, given the persistence of the Uganda's officials to pass such a law amidst the recent influx of gay rights "victories" elsewhere (Brazil, Spain, France, and most recently the U.S.). On the other hand, the attention fails to recognize the political intentions of the nation's leaders, as well as the (in)actions of those living in the nation who identify as queer but who aren't made visible by the media coverage. In other words, none of these narratives move to recognize the hybrid nature of queerness in the postcolony. This is to say, they overlook the ways in which the concerns of queer sexualities intersect with concerns of the post-colonial (and postcolonial) nation and national identity. More specifically, they overlook the fact that postcolonial queer identities have had to negotiate the transition from localized community identities, in which discretion and "unsaying" stood as the norm, to a new,

---

<sup>13</sup> I would like to make clear that I am not claiming that Western individuals should "mind their own business." It is important for peoples around the globe to empathize with, and display a concern for other peoples. In fact, it is my belief that the world could use more empathy. Rather, my aim is to call into question the tendency to condemn without taking into account the larger picture, so to speak. I seek to stress the need for not simplifying complex situations; and the importance of relocalizing outrage, moving it from one's own locale to the locale of those for whom the outrage seeks to help.

highly (Epprecht, “The ‘Unsayings’”), and necessarily visible national identity, in which performance and declarations stand as the norm. Moreover, these narratives assume queerness to be already and always political in nature. Such an assumption, combined with the lack of critical attention to the ways in which queer sexualities and postcolonial discourses, laws, and materialities intersect, results in the insistence that postcolonial and queer discourses are, and remain, two separate sets of concerns, thus contributing to an environment in which homophobic rhetoric and laws can flourish.

One very poignant example of the dangers of mandating an always and already political queer identity can most clearly be seen in the discourse surrounding the tragic murder of Ugandan queer individual and activist David Kato. In January of 2011, Kato, considered by many to be the father of the Ugandan gay rights movement, was murdered in his rural home on the outskirts of Kampala, the nation’s capital. Kato’s death came less than two years after Ugandan legislators proposed the initial draft of the nation’s anti-gay bill, and months after the Ugandan newspaper, *Rolling Stone*, printed an article outing “known” homosexuals along with the curiously placed subheading: “Hang Them; They Are After Our Kids!!!!” To be fair, despite stories recounting how after the publication of these identities, neighbors have gathered outside the houses of reported homosexuals, “throwing stones through the gate[s] . . . shouting ‘Homosexual! Homosexual!’” (“Ugandan Tabloid”), I am not suggesting a one-to-one relationship between the articles and Kato’s murder. Rather, I seek to illustrate the complicated and intertwining environments in which sexuality, politics, and cultural discourses operate in a nation changed by the experiences of colonization. I also want to highlight the limits of a mandate for an already and always political queer identity by attending to the environment in which Kato’s (visible) queerness circulated. Where queer visibility is presented as inspiring legislation, and expanded rights and social

acceptance in Western nations, in postcolonial contexts it often leads to “investigat[ion],” “prosecut[ion],” and “hang[ing].”

In the Ugandan context, queer hybridity arises from a need to negotiate individual desires and identities with and against larger national desires and identities. A Fanon learned, “instead of being the most tangible, immediate product of popular mobilization, national consciousness is nothing but a crude, empty, fragile shell” (*Wretched* 97). Through this national consciousness, the state “imposes itself in a spectacular manner, flaunts its authority, harasses, making it clear to its citizens that they are in constant danger” (111). While on the one hand, *Rolling Stone*’s editor, Giles Muhame, contends that his paper was simply “quoting” the rhetoric of other civil leaders and that his paper’s article cannot be linked to Kato’s murder, he, on the other hand, states that “we thought, by publishing that story, the police would investigate [the homosexuals], prosecute them, and hang them” (“Ugandan Tabloid”). Interestingly, Muhame’s defense highlights a tension between a culture of knowing and a culture of recognition, thus indicating precisely what I set as at least one of the points of hybridity in this postcolonial context. In arguing that he hoped his articles would inspire the police—those charged with (en)forcing the law—to investigate homosexuals, he suggests a desire to shift from a previously unspoken knowledge of a homosexual presence to an indelibly visible, and therefore manageable, homosexual presence. In other words, Muhame’s justification points to the need for queer Ugandans to maneuver in a space in which “private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy” (*Location* 19). In fact, Kato was already “known” to be actively involved in advocating queer rights—evidenced by his involvement in the organization, Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG),

and his involvement with other queer individuals such as Stosh Mugisha.<sup>14</sup> Muhame, however, aspired to institute a shift in visibility. Not only did the article implore the denouncing of “known” homosexuals, it also served to (re)present homosexual identities as a struggle between individual desire and the crisis of national identity, and it made police of everyday citizens.

In many societies around the world, sexuality—both homosexual *and* heterosexual—remains extremely regulated, and although “same-sex desire continues to be closeted and silenced” many postcolonial nations (Msibi 57). However, as Epprecht point out, in his essay, “The ‘Unsayings’ of Indigenous Homosexualities in Zimbabwe: Mapping a Blindspot in an African Masculinity,” “the appearance of conformity to a fecund heterosexual norm has historically been protected by a deeply embedded culture of discretion—don’t ask, don’t tell. In particular the dominant African cultures in Zimbabwe placed a strong taboo upon the open discussion of sexual matters (‘open’ meaning other than ribald humor, ritual performance or confined to same-sex or same-age discussion groups)” (“The ‘Unsayings’” 635-36). Msibi furthers this point as he contends that “[i]ssues of same-sex desire in Africa are therefore complex and have not historically been ‘personified’ in the way they have in the West. The vitriolic responses that we now witness from African leaders have to do largely with the ‘personification’ of the ‘gay’ identity” (69). In other words, for both Epprecht and Msibi, it is not the presence of same-sex desires that inspires leaders to craft homophobic laws, but the embodiment of, and identification with these desires. Or, to put this in other terms, it is contemporary queers’ visibility which goes against historical (read “traditional”?) mandates for discretion that inspires leaders to propose anti-gay bills. More than the veiled attempts to reclaim a history of African queer sexuality, what is important to note, here,

---

<sup>14</sup> Kato served as one of the first board members of the Ugandan LGBT group, Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMU), which was founded in 2004—six years prior to the publication of the *Rolling Stone*’s article and five years prior to the introduction of the first anti-homosexuality bill.

is the emphasis on discretion. Kato's own move to have a court intervene to halt the publishing of the *Rolling Stone's* article gestures towards Uganda's hybrid queer state. What Muhame, Bahati and Museveni fail to recognize is that, like the Christian religion upon which they often base their rejection of queer sexualities, objects are not carried in their entirety from one culture to another.

Such rhetoric runs the risk of assuming, as Wole Soyinka suggests, that "Africans, being Africans and victims—among other Nature [sic] disasters—of mass leucotomy from some forgotten age—are not even permitted to reflect their immediate environment unless that environment happens to be 2,000 B.C. Africa" (Soyinka 48). In other words, as Soyinka argues, environments change, and attempting to forget the ways in which "African" cultures have "hybridized" imported Western discourses, tools, and practices fails to recognize that today's "African world is a little more intricate" than the African world of 2,000 B.C.—or even fifty years ago (38). Today's (post-colonial) Africa "embraces precision machinery, oil rigs, hydro-electricity, [the] typewriter, railway trains (not iron snakes!), machine guns, bronze sculpture, etc., plus an ontological relationship with the universe including the...pumpkins and iron bells" of a culture past (38). As Bhabha stresses, in colonial environments, an object "acquires its meaning *after* the traumatic scenario of colonial difference, cultural or racial, returns the eye of power to some prior, archaic image or identity," rendering that object neither 'original'—by virtue of the act of repetition that constructs it—nor 'identical'—by virtue of the difference that defines it" (*Location* 153). If this is true for objects, and, as Wilkerson notes, identities are constructed from how we relate to the objects of our environments, it then becomes logical to suggest a hybridization of postcolonial queer identities. While I am not intending to claim identities as objects, I am claiming that identities undergo similar transitions. They are no more stable than is how we use or relate to objects. It could be argued that Christianity is as native to "Uganda" as it is to America,

but such an argument misses, as Soyinka notes, the fluidity inherent in cultures. If the nation of “Uganda” began as product of colonial organization, much like America began as the product of Protestant migration to the “New World,” then one might argue that there could be no modern-day Uganda (or India, or Nigeria, or Mexico) without Christian faith. But, of course, such arguments are much too simplistic.

While Muhame’s article points to the ways in which queer identity merges with crises of national identity within Uganda’s borders, international responses to Kato’s murder accomplished similar results. Following Kato’s death, President Obama released a statement of condolence, ensuring that “[the United States] recommit ourselves to David’s work” (qtd in Malcolm). However, Obama continues by noting that

[i]n the weeks preceding David Kato’s murder in Uganda, five members of the LGBT community in Honduras were also murdered. *It is essential that the Governments of Uganda and Honduras investigate these killings and hold the perpetrators accountable.*

LGBT rights are not special rights; they are human rights. *My Administration will continue to strongly support human rights and assistance work on behalf of LGBT persons abroad. We do this because we recognize the threat faced by leaders like David Kato, and we share their commitment to advancing freedom, fairness and equality for all.* (qtd in Malcolm, my emphasis)

In linking Kato’s murder to the murders in Honduras, Obama shows that homophobia is not just an African problem. However, not only does Obama rather problematically assert that his administration will continue Kato’s work, in the quick leap from Uganda to Honduras (conveniently avoiding the U.S.’s complicated relationships with queers), he relies on notions of



a transnational queerness (i.e. queerness that happens everywhere: “LGBT rights are not special rights; they are human rights”) that take the national citizen as its ideal(ized) subject and identity.<sup>15</sup> What is evidenced in both Muhame’s article and justification, and Obama’s response is that queer Ugandan’s are compelled to repeat the “discriminatory identity” (*Location* 159) of national consciousness even as they identify in ways contrary to state prescriptions. In other words, while queer Ugandans “may be instantly recognized” as Ugandan citizens, in identifying in ways prohibited by the state, they “force a re-cognition of the immediacy and articulacy of authority” itself (160).

## Conclusions

Without a doubt, Kato’s murder and the discourse surrounding it are important. Not only do they point to the dangers of quickly ascribing a Western-based, transnational queerness, they also remind us of the dangers of decontextualized discourses. Kato’s murder is inseparable from Uganda’s ongoing struggle with the presence of homosexuality. As Kenne Mwikya emphasizes, both the allegations made by tabloids such as *Rolling Stone*, and the subsequent murder of Kato occurred within “a ready population, which had been inundated with anti-LGBTI rhetoric from politicians and religious leaders that blamed LGBTI people for the country’s social problems” (142). However, it is also important to recognize that both the bill and publications like the *Rolling Stone*’s outing have allowed for “some ‘headway’ [to be] made in trying to spark discourse on sexual and gender variance” (Mwikya 143). If, as Epprecht and others have shown, “traditional” African custom has emphasized discretion, the assumed inherent Africanness, and the supposed

---

<sup>15</sup> For a more complete study on how queerness is conscripted into the formation and perpetuation of national identity, see Jasbir K. Puar’s important work, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*.

necessity of this new visible discourse—African leaders’ willingness to tackle the issue itself as a matter of African culture—must be seen as an effect of hybridized cultural and sexual identities.

Throughout this essay, in addition to having ventured to explicate the often underdeveloped connection between postcolonial studies and queer studies, I have urged for the recognition of postcolonial queer identities as hybrid identities. As many individuals who have “come out of the closet” attest, one of the most difficult things about being in the closet is feeling divided. Borrowing from such a feeling, I have sought to broaden how postcolonials are imagined so that “deviations” might be viewed as less threatening to the whole. Queerness is a crucial component of the postcolonial experience. This fact needs to be recognized, not eschewed. The more one resists this notion, the further one moves from the postcolonial mission of liberation. However, in broadening how postcolonials are imagined, I caution against speaking for these individuals. Speaking for, or on behalf of, or so as to recover the voices of the oppressed is no more productive than is ignoring the oppression itself. A recognition of postcolonial queer identity as hybrid might serve to mitigate the tensions between the past and the present, and offer a way for queerness in all its forms to be embraced. An embrace of postcolonial queer identity as hybrid, then, is an embrace of the future, not a battle with the past.

CHAPTER TWO  
A RACE FOR HOME:  
QUEER HISTORIES IN PRE- AND POSTCOLONIAL SPACES

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"

For a chapter concerned with narratives of pre-colonial queerness, the selected epigraph, perhaps, seems strange—and for a number of (good) reasons. Most notably, it was first published

in 1921, well after the start of European colonial expeditions; and was written by an American Negro writer of the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>16</sup> Yet this poem fits perfectly with the direction of this chapter in that it mirrors contemporary attempts to re-call a past experience in order to drum up strength and support for one's contemporary situation. And in this vein, it is the queerness trapped within this poem that interests me at this point. Within the poem, tension can be read between Hughes' own much contested queerness, on the one hand; and the way his notion of strength, which he attempts to summon by "looking back" to a point of origin that is separated from his position within the African diaspora, effectively suppresses those notions of queerness, on the other. It is not lands that Hughes remembers; it is rivers. In other words, Hughes has positioned his body, positioned his Self, with the more fluid, more malleable, more effecting waters of the land. He doesn't speak of seas, or even lakes; he, once again, speaks of rivers—bodies of water that cut between lands, that simultaneously unite and divide lands, calling life to meet in the flows. This is a powerful and important act of speaking by an individual historically and culturally located "between lands." Noticeably, the poem suppresses any notions of queerness, presenting, instead, a narrative of lineage and genealogy. After all, the narrator has "known rivers...older than the flow of human blood in human veins."

Recently, the field of "queer diaspora" studies has made much ground in attending to the ways in which queer individuals challenge the largely heterosexist assumptions of nationalism and globalization. In her own intervention in this growing field, Gayatri Gopinath, in her book, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, has recently argued that

---

16 Such a retroactive titling of this Negro arts movement begs many questions. Besides forcing the question of from what death the American Negro being reborn (the death of a history? The death of a lineage?), the label brings to mind the European period also known as the "Renaissance." The Negro, then, seems forever bound to European history, even as she attempts to birth her own. A point which some Negro writers, such as Ralph Ellison, seem keen to point out.

“if conventional diasporic discourse is marked by this backward glance, this ‘overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins, for “times past,” a queer diaspora mobilizes questions of the past, memory, and nostalgia for radically different purposes” (4). Attending to a “queer diaspora” not only forces us to account for the “submerged histories of racist and colonialist violence that continue to resonate in the present and that make themselves felt through bodily desire,” but also to “bring into the present those pasts that are deliberately forgotten within conventional nationalist or diasporic scripts” (4). In short, Gopinath suggests that “queer diasporic cultural forms work against the violent effacements that produce the fictions of purity that lie at the heart of dominant nationalist and diasporic ideologies” (4), ultimately contending that “[w]hen queer subjects register their refusal to abide by the demands placed on bodies to conform to sexual (as well as gendered and racial) norms, they contest the logic and dominance of these regimes [of colonialism, nationalism, and racial and religious absolutism]” (28).

I find much value in Gopinath’s contentions. Like Gopinath, my project is interested in challenging nationalist notions that the nation is, and must be, heterosexual—or heteronormative—by, first, exploring the suppressed queernesses held within national boundaries, and, second, explicating certain powers of queer bodies to “contest the logic and dominance of” suppressive regimes. However, unlike Gopinath, my aim is not to attend to queerness in diaspora. I am specifically interested in queerness in the home nations. This chapter directs its attention to postcolonial queernesses specifically within the boundaries of post-colonial nations. Although I look backwards, I do not want to suggest that there is a possibility for return. There is no going back. My investigation of queerness seeks first to uncover the ways in which colonialism forces native practices to queer themselves, and then to respond to those queernesses. Extending my argument from the previous chapter, I look backwards not as a way to return to the “pure,” but as

a way to better understand the path towards contemporary postcolonial queer sexualities' hybridities.

I recognize that it is tempting to try and find the homosexual before colonialism. In fact, as Bill Stanford Pincheon admits, people reeling from the consequences of having their histories interrupted by colonial aggressions “have a great deal invested in the affirmative acts both of reclaiming and of making history” (Pincheon 40). But there is a danger in this. There is no going back. What are at stake in uncovering pre-colonial queer practices are the opportunities such knowledge create for understanding the changes in perception and practices of queerness that colonialism, and decolonization, brought about. Foucault is important not only because of his discussion of sexuality itself, but because of his notion that discourse is a mechanism of power, and—or perhaps but—power itself is not inherently malevolent. Therefore, in this chapter, I will first lay out several important works that seek to discover the presence of indigenous same-sex persons. Then, I will work to problematize these investigations and what they uncover. Finally, and because these works specifically address same-sex behavior, I will work to bring to light the queer energies that rest just below the surface of the discussion.

### **Studies in Search of “Traditional” Homosexuality**

Historical studies of “traditional” homosexualities are not exactly new. Within the past forty or so years, a growing body of anthropological and historical work has been produced to prove that instances of same-sex relationships have occurred throughout history. For instance, K.J. Dover’s highly influential *Greek Homosexuality*, first published in 1978, sought to outline the presence of and views on homosexuality in ancient Greece. The majority of this research, though, has focused on non-African cultures. In his 2005 study, *Decolonizing the Sodomite: Queer Tropes*

of *Sexuality in Colonial Andean Culture*, Michael J. Horswell argues that within the “tropes of sexuality” used by “the chroniclers, missionaries, civil servants, and historians” who scribed the colonial conquest of the Americas are “traces of pre-Columbian cultural values and subjectivities that can be recovered through careful readings and reconstructions from th[os]e fragments of colonial discourse” (3). Among the objectives of his study is the attempt to “recover the subaltern knowledge of the colonized third-gender subjects misrepresented by the rhetorical figures [of colonial discourse]” (3). For postcolonial scholars such as Bhabha or Spivak, such a claim seems problematic at best, and neocolonial at worst.<sup>17</sup> In anticipation of this, Horswell notes that “to reconstruct the nearly shattered subjectivity of third gender in the colonial discourse of the Andes is to elicit a reflection of the subject based on the distorted image of the abject Other both in and of that discourse” (5). He further asks, “how do we make the image whole when the language that reflects its fragments is the very same that broke the illusion of wholeness in the first place?” (5). In answer to this question, he proposes that “to comprehend the representations of colonized subjectivities marked by processes of marginalization in hegemonic discourses requires an inquiry into the gender and sexual culture of both the invader and the invaded,” therefore he “begin[s] by relocating third-gender subjectivities from the margins of colonial scholarship to the center” (5). Furthermore, he proposes that

From this new vantage point, all readers, regardless of their subject positions, might hear a questioning of the gender and sexual binaries that have historically marginalized what

---

<sup>17</sup> As I discuss in the previous chapter, Bhabha and Spivak, while coming from different directions in respect to attention to both gender and relations to power, share the belief that recovering colonial voices is impossible. Colonial discourse not only mutes the voices of the colonized but also produces hybridized subjects, as Bhabha argues (and as Horswell himself ironically acknowledges [8]); or, to appropriate, as Spivak might, the famous phrase of Audre Lorde, because “the master’s tools can never be used to tear down his house”—that is to say, Western rhetoric is designed to cover that which the scholar is attempting to recover. Either way, there is no “recovering” what once was, as theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thinong’o, and others might desire.

might be understood as a “queer” identity. This is not to situate this project only or even primarily in the recent academic trend of queer studies, but it is to bring aspects of queer theory to colonial Andean studies in order to enact a claim to space in the historical and theoretical record. (5)

While I agree with Horswell in arguing that marginalized sexualities must be rethought, I am troubled by his attempt to recover the lost, or overwritten subjectivities, but, as Pincheon, once again, makes clear, such moves have their benefits. However, research into “traditional” or indigenous African homosexualities has been sporadic, at best. Thabo Msibi contends that silences on African homosexualities dominated because of the “rise in conservative sentiments seeking to legitimize patriarchy” (71). Accordingly, “if homosexuality is discredited, then heterosexuality—and thus patriarchy—remains intact” (71). While Msibi is specifically addressing contemporary African homophobias, his logic also offers an explanation on why matters of same-sex desire and relationships fail to be noted in colonial writings on Africa. In addition to this growing need to protect heterosexuality, many contemporary scholars have noted that most colonial travelers took Africa to be free of “such perversity”—or outside of what Richard Francis Burton terms the “sotadic zone.” According to Burton, “the negro [sic] race is mostly untainted by sodomy and triba[d]ism” (qtd. in Murray and Roscoe xii). However, not all who wrote on Africa during the colonial period subscribed to such views of African sexual “purity.” Among the earliest examples of investigations into the presence of homosexuality in indigenous African communities, Italian priest, Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi’s 1687 writing, “Ganga-Ya-Chibanda,” points out the perversity in the cross-dressing practices of the “witch doctor,” Ganga-Ya-Chibanda. Much of Cavazzi’s disgust with Ya-Chibanda stems less from his selling of divinities, and more from his tendency to



“ordinarily [dress] as a woman and make[] an honor of being called the Grandmother,” despite the fact that he might sleep with the wives and concubines of other men (163).

Still, with the nineteenth-century’s shift towards discussions of (homo- and hetero)sexuality came more interest in positioning Africa, like Greece and Rome, as an additional site for illustrating the “naturalness” of homosexuality. Of these reports, interestingly enough, German sexologist Kurt Falk has asserted, in his 1923 essay, “Same-Sex Life among a Few Negro Tribes of Angola,” that “it is quite clear that same-sex love and intercourse are an integral component of the sex life” of southern African tribal life (“Same-Sex Life” 169). Pulling from knowledge acquired through years of traveling throughout southern Africa, Falk outlines a homosexual presence in the face of those, like Richard Burton, who suggest that the African continent is free of “perversity”—a term that invested with as much legal condemnation as it was moral condemnation. According to Falk, “hand digitation, that is, mutual masturbation, is widely practiced by heterosexuals as well as by homosexuals,” with one word, “okulikoweka,” designating both male same-sex *and* female same-sex intercourse (167). Yet, he notes, “the most frequent same-sex technique,” for both men and women, “is that of *coitus inter femora* [intracural intercourse]” (167). Much of Falk’s work in this essay aims to highlight the presence of those whom others were eager to ignore. Despite the fact that this essay is short and lacks much of the rigor one would expect of an “ethnological” endeavor, it serves to shed light on the complex structure of African sexualities.

In a later essay, published in 1926, Falk further elaborates on his earlier findings, accounting for his previous shortcomings by not only diversifying the objects of his study (he is no longer looking at a single area or two tribes within the same space), but also by becoming a bit more critical of the terms he engages. To begin, he clarifies that, “for a better understanding of”

his work, he “would like to note that [he] include[s] under ‘homosexuality’ same-sex life... the same-sex activity of bisexuals, and pseudo-homosexuals, but under ‘homoerotic’ [he] include[s] same-sex life with respect to the same-sex activity of *genuine, born* homosexuals” (“Homosexuality among the Natives” 187). What is interesting about this attempt at clarification is that, in ways, it picks up on the sense of confusion his earlier works allow. For instance, in “Same-Sex Life among a Few Negro Tribes in Angola,” the line between what was homosexual and what was, dare I suggest, a “practical” sexual behavior is blurred. Fleetinglly, at the beginning of the essay, he notes that “homosexuals...who actively or passively practice podicatio [anal intercourse] are sneered at and punished,” causing them to “hide themselves” (“Same-Sex Life” 167). It is not, however, until his final two paragraphs, after recounting the story of the Nginé soldier whose defense against his being punished was that “there are men who from youth on desire women, and others, who are attracted only to men...God created him like this—that he can only love men!” (170), that Falk questions the lines that divide same-sex sexual behaviors. Falk closes “Same-Sex Life” with the following realization that “therein may lie the problem’s solution: When same-sex intercourse is customary among a tribe, or generally permissible, then that tribe is viewed by others as especially tinted with homosexuality, even though among those tribes that would condemn homosexual acts they are secretly practiced to exactly the same extent” (170).<sup>18</sup> Falk’s instantiations of African sexualities illustrate both the social and political motivation for European homosexuals (or homosexual sympathizers) to explore homosexual practices in other

---

<sup>18</sup> I would like to point out that I am aware of the contradictions within this discussion. On the one hand, Falk suggests that homosexuals are shunned and are forced into hiding; but on the other hand, he posits a distinction between homosexuals (those who engage in same-sex behavior because of its practical “applications” or ‘lessons,’ but seemingly prefer “normal” sexual arrangements) and homoerotics (presumably those who actually desire and/or prefer same-sex relations), suggesting that homosexuals are more common in society, while homoerotics are encountered less often. Later in this essay I intend to assess this contradiction in greater depth.

non-European contexts, as well as the fact such exploration was less about creating space for indigenous homosexuals and more about buttressing or validating European homosexuals. In other words, even in these early investigations on African homosexualities, there was little concern for Africans and their homosexualities.

Yet still, within the past fifteen years, research into African homosexualities has increased exponentially. The important 1998 volume, *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies in African Homosexualities*, edited by Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe marks a critical shift towards attending to African homosexualities in a more substantial way. The book's many essays, "offers multiple Africas and diverse patterns of same-sex sexuality" ("Preface" xviii), while recognizing the "unevenness of the research to date" ("Preface" xx). More recently, discussing the possibilities of indigenous same-sex relationships and opinions about such relationships in southern Africa, Marc Epprecht's 2004, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa*, "seeks to queer (to query, to problematize, to destabilize) homophobic and heterosexist as well as just plain sexist and racist discourses around identity and politics in southern Africa" by "clarify[ing] the record about historical and actually existing homosexualities" (23).

In his research, Epprecht notes that in many "traditional" southern African communities, "same-sex sexual infractions traditionally had several possible causes and consequently were regarded with ambivalence" (*Hugochani* 35). He continues,

what we would now term homosexual orientation or transgender identity was not necessarily an offence at all but a respected attribute if caused by certain types of spirit possession and manifested in certain ways. This would have included rare cases of physiological hermaphroditism as well as possession by benign spirits of the opposite sex. Such explanations of cause removed blame from an individual, and same-sex couples so

possessed could live together as husband and wife without attracting opprobrium. A male who took the role of wife, doing all the public duties and chores that a female wife would do, was known as *murumekadzi* (literally, “man-woman”). A woman who took the role of a man in an analogous relationship with another woman was *mukadzirume* (“woman-man”). In both cases what happened between the couple inside their hut was not the subject of close investigation. (35)

In a single move, Epprecht asserts that not only the presences of same-sex relationships but also that there are words within the language to account for such relationships. This latter move rebuts those, such as Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe who claim homosexuality to be a “Western import” and that—or because—there are no native words for such behaviors. And not to be accused of “fixing” or “locking” the native into pre-modern traditions, Epprecht recognizes, and rightly so, that “it would be mistaken, of course, to assume an unchanging Bushman culture stretching back thousands of years” (26). Still, the aim of his work is to “clarify the record about historical and actually existing homosexualities” in southern African communities (23). Similarly, Nkunzi Nkabinde and Ruth Morgan have recently offered “challenges [to] the idea that same-sexuality is unAfrican [sic]” by turning to the southern African tradition of “sangomas,” which are traditional healers (10). By observing the practices of contemporary female sangomas, Nkabinde, herself a sangoma, who also self-identifies as a lesbian, asserts that “women sangomas have always used ancestral wives as a way to have secret same-sex relationships” (19).

Yet *Hugochani* can be seen, in many ways, as the continuation of Epprecht’s work, which places as its central aim an attempt to contest the notions that black Africans have no homosexuality, and that anthropologists and research into such matters arrived at these conclusions by way of objective and empirical data. In each of his other texts, Epprecht has attempted to “draw

attention to just one more of the striking testimonies to the diversity of relationships and identities that formerly were subsumed within old silences and categories” (“Bisexuality and the Politics of Normal” 196). He has even, and significantly, attempted to question the accuracy of labeling African anti-homosexual rhetoric as “homophobic” by illuminating the history within African communities of “unsaying” issues of sex and sexuality. As he contends in his 1998 essay, “The ‘Unsaying’ of Indigenous Homosexualities in Zimbabwe: Mapping a Blindspot in an African Masculinity,” “the appearance of conformity to a fecund heterosexual norm has historically been protected by a deeply embedded culture of discretion—don’t ask, don’t tell. In particular the dominant African cultures in Zimbabwe placed a strong taboo upon the open discussion of sexual matters (‘open’ meaning other than ribald humor, ritual performance or confined to same-sex or same-age discussion groups)” (“The ‘Unsaying’” 635-36). It is against this historical mandate for discretion that he, as well as Msibi, attempts to reread contemporary accusations of Africa as a deeply homophobic space.

Neville Hoad’s 2007 study, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization*, “seeks both to develop an archive for the investigation of ‘homosexuality’s’ place in contemporary Africa and to interrogate the meaningfulness of the terms *sexuality* and *homosexuality* as they appear in diverse contexts, genres, and publics” (xi). In developing this archive, Hoad argues for a reconfiguring of how we relate to the narratives of not only Africa, but also of race and sexuality. The practice of writing and rewriting, of narrating and narration is the foundation upon which Hoad’s argument is built and serves to underscore his archival investigation. To illustrate his argument, Hoad rereads specific instances—such as the attempt to demonize the Gandan king Mwanga’s “corporeal intimacies with his pages” (Hoad 6). Ultimately, Hoad’s argument works from the stance that “[i]n the moment of writing, the emergence of an international public sphere

dedicated to finding and making ‘homosexuals’ in parts of the world that have not seen public articulations of such persons may further allow ‘homosexuality’ to be seen as an ongoing imperial project” (xiii) and “investigates the place of an entity that comes to be called ‘homosexuality’ in the production (discursive, material, imaginary) of a place called ‘Africa’” (xvi).

### **Queering the “Traditional”**

Without a doubt, works like Horswell’s, Hoad’s, and Epprecht’s are important steps towards opening dialogue on matters of sexuality in postcolonial nations. Each in their own way illustrates the historicity of conceptualizations of sexuality, and each emphasizes some of the problems that come with ignoring or failing to recognize that sexuality has not always been as fixed as it is often taken to be today. Nonetheless, works such as these come with their own sets of problems as well. As much as they seek to create space for expanded conceptualizations of indigenous sexualities, offering “queer” readings of indigenous sexuality from a historical perspective, they continue to posit, as Malawian feminist Jessie Kabwila, heterosexuality “as the norm, [with] anything outside it portrayed as an anomaly” (“Seeing Beyond” 379). Or to state this in another way, in spite of their attempts to queer historical social relations by showing that sexuality has not always been as rigid as it is now taken to be, these studies never seem to see that queerness as an integral part of society. Instead, they take it as common knowledge that whatever queerness existed happened behind the normal heterosexuality—or structures of heteronormativity. Therefore, it is to some of these problems that I now turn. My intention in doing so is two-fold: first, while I do not want to discard, en masse, the efforts of these works, I do want to illustrate the problems that exist in attempting to recover something from the past—especially a past invested in forgetting. Following Gayatri Spivak, I want to highlight the necessary failures

that haunt attempts to look back and find, or dis-cover hidden moments. Second, I seek to bring the queer forward, so to speak, thus extending the efforts attempted by these works. By looking at the tensions that exist in the need to look back, I hope to demonstrate that, any queerness we see, or don't see—or need to see—arises from an already queered postcolonial present. In this way, I seek to further my argument that postcolonial queerness is more a part of contemporary times than its opponents—and perhaps many of its supporters—might assume. Rereading previous scholarship on the state and presence of postcolonial queerness, I extend my previous argument that postcolonial queerness is a hybrid construction, and as such can neither be reduced to a “pure” past, nor lamented as an un-African “import.”

Michel Foucault's influential *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, has been credited with establishing the constructionist approach to sexuality, by arguing “that homosexuality is necessarily a modern formation because, while there were previously same-sex acts, there was no corresponding category of identification” (Jagose 10).<sup>19</sup> Foucault's purpose, in volume 1 was to highlight how “the central issue” in a study on sexuality

is not to determine whether one says yes or no to sex, whether one formulates prohibitions or permissions, whether one asserts its importance or denies its effects, or whether one refines the words one uses to designate it; but to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the

---

<sup>19</sup> Such an argument has, in turn, inspired scholars such as David M. Halperin, in his 1990 work, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love*, to contend that “instead of attempting to trace the history of ‘homosexuality,’ as if it were a *thing*, we might more profitably analyze how the significance of same-sex sexual contacts has been variously constructed over time by members of human living groups” (29). Furthermore, Halperin continues, any history that fails to attend to the constructedness of such histories “will be history written from the perspective of contemporary gay interests—just as feminist history is not, properly speaking, the history of women but history that reflects the concerns of contemporary feminism” (29).

things that are said. What is at issue, briefly, is the over-all “discursive fact,” the way in which sex is “put into discourse.” (11)

Furthermore, Foucault reminds us, “sex is the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations, and pleasures” (155); therefore, “we must not refer a history of sexuality to the agency of sex; but rather show how ‘sex’ is historically subordinate to sexuality” (157). It is here within this insistence to understand sex as a faculty subsumed under the category sexuality that I find fault with works such as Hoad’s and Epprecht’s. In their discussions of African sexualities, the line between sex and sexuality seems to blur, leaving one with the sense that they are the same thing—or at least, unproblematically interchangeable. For instance, while Epprecht recognizes that a ‘functionalist’ approach to sex [has been and] is still reflected today in a profound inability among many Zimbabweans to conceive the point of homosex” (“The ‘Unsayings’ 634), this does not prevent him from illustrating his deconstruction of the myth of an inherently and traditionally heterosexual pre-colonial Africa with discussions of specific sex acts alone. In other words, the bulk of the force behind Epprecht’s work comes from his ability to highlight specific behaviors as if they contained within them particular identifications. In large, Epprecht’s attempt to uncover a tradition of native homosexuality finds itself drawing an image of the native as superstitious, ritual practices, and forms of initiation practices (where youth learn, or practice, sex acts before they are able to enter into adulthood—by way of marriage.). If the only time same-sex relationships were not rejected or attacked was when they were assumed to be the work of some otherworld spirit, what does this say about not only the agency of the individuals, but about the state of the native culture?



Recently, Siobhan B. Somerville has argued that “to disrupt naturalized constructions of racial difference involves simultaneously unsettling one’s relationship to normative constructions of gender and sexuality as well” (137). And while her study takes late nineteenth century America, with its developing concepts of race, gender, and sexuality, as its point of interest, her insistence on understanding an intertwined relationship between the three is instructive here. In discussing the scientific discourse surrounding sex and sexuality in the nineteenth century, Somerville notes the ways in which African bodies, and female African bodies in particular, were used to establish the boundaries of what was to be considered normal sexuality. As she explains, “sexologists writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries inherited [comparative anatomist] tendenc[ies] to racialize perceived sexual ambiguity,” then while “[p]roducing ‘data’ about their newly created object of study, the invert, they also routinely included physical examinations in their accounts” (27). Despite each study preferring a different anatomical part (hymen, clitoris, labia, vagina, etc.), Somerville notes that “the underlying theory remained constant: women’s genitalia and reproductive anatomy held a valuable and presumably visual key to ranking bodies according to norms of sexuality” (27). Moreover, “they placed their study in a line of inquiry concerning the African woman’s body that had begun at least a half century earlier with French naturalist Georges Cuvier’s description of the woman popularly known as the ‘Hottentot Venus,’ or Saartjie Baartman,<sup>20</sup> who was displayed to European audiences fascinated by her ‘steatopygia’ (protruding buttocks)” (26).

Given its focus on American racism and sexual practices, Somerville’s argument may seem incongruous with a discussion on postcolonial sexualities. However, apart from illustrating that

---

<sup>20</sup> Other common spellings of Baartman’s name are: Sarah Baartman (Saartjie is the Dutch diminutive of the name Somerville uses), Sarah Bartmann (which is what Hoard uses). Henceforth, I will follow Somerville’s spelling of her last name, and refer to her as either Sarah Baartman, or simply Baartman.

research into sexuality often pulled from colonial expeditions, much in the way that Mary Louise Pratt shows us that scientific cataloguing and European travel writings contribute to the Othering of non-Western peoples, Somerville's argument helps illuminate how social, political, and cultural desires or needs help to construct certain readings of "distant" texts.<sup>21</sup> It also helps illustrate how race seeps into a reading, or rereading of a text, coloring what one sees and, or, does not see. Perhaps because of her focus on America, Somerville never fully engages the colonial implications of this connection. Following Hoad's discussion of Baartman, however, it becomes possible to see the ways that not only race and gender come to bear on one another, but also how structures of, and struggles with colonial power come to bear on race and gender to produce contemporary boundaries of sexuality.

If for Somerville, Baartman came to help shore up notions of proper heterosexuality, Hoad shows us that in a postcolonial South Africa, Baartman also "exemplifies how sexual denigration may be necessary for imperial forms of sovereignty" (Hoad 96). In fact, Hoad's main purpose for employing Baartman in his discussion is first to critique South African President Thabo Mbeki's critique of the European imperialism that first "stole" Baartman from her South African homeland, turning her into a European spectacle, and then to critique Mbeki's failure to respond to South Africa's growing HIV/AIDS crisis. In other words, Baartman, is a way of opening up a critique on the president's domestic policy. Or, to state this coming from the opposite direction: Hoad uses the marriage of the "abducted," yet "returned," black woman and the indignant black man as a way to engage a discussion of a national problem: HIV/AIDS. As he reads Mbeki's flight to anti-

---

<sup>21</sup> I mean "distant" not only in a physical or geographical sense, but also in a temporal and cultural sense as well. In terms of Sarah Baartman, for many of the comparative sex researchers, her body was not only physically distant, as they were only able to gain proximity to it through texts that traveled from Europe, but it was also culturally distant in that they saw Baartman's body as from another world all together—hence her ability to stand as the idealized Other woman.

whiteness (112), Hoad leaves unaddressed the ways in which queerness circulates in and around Baartman both in Mbeki's and his own narratives. For Mbeki, Baartman's abduction to, and appropriation in Europe never fails to emphasize the ways the black woman's sexuality was constantly on display for voyeuristic European eyes. However, not even Hoad stops to consider Baartman as a whole, and socially contextualized, being. For instance, it is never mentioned how normal Baartman's proportions were in relation to other Khoi women—let alone men. It would seem that, as with Falk and earlier studies of African homosexualities, Hoad's use of Baartman is less about Baartman—or blackness—and more about the larger (and “white”-inclusive) issue of HIV and AIDS.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, it is never mentioned how the spectacle of Baartman's return “home” offers its own—and now (postcolonial) African—voyeuristic pleasures, and/or horrors. In other words, as Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer question, in speaking about Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of nude black men, what do such spectacles “say to our wants and desires?” (Julien and Mercer 170). Furthermore, they note that “colonial fantasy can sometimes be reappropriated by black viewers and reconstructed to serve purposes of identity” (170). In the case of Baartman, we see not only her body having undergone such a reappropriation, but also the very idea of her body has helped construct a national identity that circulates in a heterosexual economy. (Woman taken from a man who is now forced to eulogize her as she is returned to him.) But while Hoad ultimately reads the Gandan Mwanga as “heroic, as someone who fucked (with the full bizarre semantic range of that verb) both Christianity and imperialism”—though he “ultimately lost”—because he used homosexuality as a way to reject colonial intervention into his kingdom, Hoad's use of Baartman

---

<sup>22</sup> See the discussion on Kurt Falk's use of African homosexuality in the above section, “Studies in Search of ‘Traditional’ Homosexuality.”

as a way to reproduce a discussion on an epidemic never affords her the same possibilities of resistance.

In locating Mwangi's "homosexuality" as an attempt to "harness his corporeal pleasures for political ends...against the forces of colonial exploitation" (19), *African Intimacies*—and the book's first chapter, "African Sodomy in the Missionary Position: Corporeal Intimacies and Signifying Regimes," in particular—forces us to question what exactly we mean when we speak of a "pre-colonial" past. Hoad attempts to "unsettle polemics on both sides of the currently raging debate about the status of male homosexuality in African cultures" by "suggest[ing] how one may read sexual subtexts in narrations of national, religious, and racial authenticity at the cusp of formal European colonization" (1-2).<sup>23</sup>

I have taken what might seem a rather extended detour in order to illustrate that the road from former notions of sexuality to contemporary notions has been an arduous and winding one. And while it might be tempting to begin the long walk home, any attempt to recover any lost sexuality (whether that sexuality be homosexuality or heterosexuality) will more than likely only serve to re-cover what one wishes to find. Both contemporary lamentations of a Western "imported" homosexualities and contemporary excavations for a historical indigenous homosexual presence seem to be in a race for one thing: a true historical narrative of indigenous life. (And I mean life in the singular.) However, each rushes to "find home" without recognizing the vehicle

---

<sup>23</sup> The current terms of the debate surrounding not only African, but other once colonized nations, can be generalized as follows: On the one side, anti-colonial, anti-Western nationalists argue that homosexuality is a product and "import" of the West—it is a "white man's problem or concern"; on the other side, pro-queer proponents argue that homosexuality is in fact indigenous to all lands, especially to their homelands. In one sense, at least, these debates rely on a, more often than not, version of Eve Sedgwick's notions of "minoritizing" and "universalizing" discourses of homosexuality, with the anti-colonialist polemics in the position of "minoritizing" homosexuality so as to locate it outside of the nation, and proponents of an indigenous queerness as "universalizing" homosexuality so as to create a sort of "transnational" vision of homosexuality (homosexuality is "natural" across the globe).

they share to get there. As Hoad has shown in regards to Mwanga, recoding behaviors is a dangerous business with a cost often too high for either party to pay.

## CHAPTER THREE

## QUEST(IONS) OF THE EROTIC CHILD:

## FINDING PLEASURE, AND REDEFINING THE TROPE OF THE CHILD IN K. SELLO

DUIKER'S *THIRTEEN CENTS*

When Ella heard 124 was occupied by something-or-other beating up on Sethe, it infuriated her and gave her another opportunity to measure what could very well be the devil himself against “the lowest yet.” There was also something very personal in her fury. Whatever Sethe had done, *Ella didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present*. Sethe's crime was staggering and her pride outstripped even that; but she could not countenance the possibility of sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy...nobody needed a grown-up evil sitting at the table with a grudge. As long as *the ghost* showed out from *its* ghostly place—shaking stuff, crying, smashing and such—Ella respected *it*. But if it took flesh and came in her world, well, the shoe was on the other foot. She didn't mind a little communication between the two worlds, but *this was an invasion*.

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

We have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge...The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having

experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves.

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"

Decades after formal decolonization, the trope of the child continues to plague relationships between many postcolonial societies and the Western world. Much energy is still expended contending with, what Joseph A. Massad describes as, "Western social Darwinists, who include modernization and development theorists and their kindred spirits (UN agencies, human rights organizations and activists, NGOs, IMF, the World Bank, the U.S. State Department, etc.)," bent on projecting postcolonial progress "toward a Western-defined and sponsored modernity as part of a historical teleology wherein non-Europeans who are still at the stage of *European childhood* will eventually replicate European 'progress' toward modern forms of organization, sociality, economics, politics, and sexual desires" (49, my emphasis). These relationships put postcolonial politicians and organizations in the position of either capitulating or, insisting, as anti-colonialists such as Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe, that postcolonial nations are no longer the children of "imperialist and colonialist" (qtd. in Jones). This chapter argues for new ways of responding to this dynamic. Rather than resisting or uncritically capitulating, I argue that by actively embracing the trope of the child, postcolonial individuals might discover new paths of progress independent of a solely Western-defined modernity.

Given this contentious relationship with the trope of the child, suggesting that the postcolonial might be served well by embracing it is risky, to say the least. Yet I intend precisely this. Foundationally, I suggest that by embracing, and then wielding, the trope of the child,

opportunities for “writing back” against present (post-/neo-)colonial violences arise.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, I suggest attending to the erotic powers of the child as an important quality for such writing back. Reading as an example, South African author, K. Sello Duiker’s novel, *Thirteen Cents*, I explore the emergent possibilities offered by a reclamation of the erotic powers within the trope of the child. I posit that Azure, the novel’s protagonist, gains access to his erotic potential as he pushes beyond the social and psychological limits imposed by his childly figure, refusing static interpretations, and insisting on finding new, and more fulfilling paths. Ultimately, I find in Azure a challenge to the parent/child power dynamic that undergirds much of (post-/neo)colonialism.<sup>25</sup>

In and of itself, the argument I propose is not terribly queer. After all, child figures litter Western literature. From Dickens’s Tiny Tim and Oliver Twist to Twain’s Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, from Salinger’s Hold Caulfield to Knowles’s Gene Forrester and Phineas child figures have served to agitate social consciousness. And these figures have often been deployed as a way of writing a national identity. Yet such figures, while important, were deployed as mirrors against which their societies are reflected. Tiny Tim and Oliver Twist reflect the hypocrisies and horrors of social customs (or the loss thereof), while Gene and Phineas reflect the anxieties war bring to matured/-ing and civilized lives. In other words, these child figures have often been employed not as a way of writing out of social oppression, but as a way of displaying fractures within an otherwise whole society. But then there are those children like Morrison’s Beloved whose sole purpose is to question the very structures of society.

---

<sup>24</sup> Referencing Bill Ashcroft et al.’s notion of “writing back,” I aim to suggest a play of power and an attempt to redress how one becomes represented by such power.

<sup>25</sup> Throughout, I am less interested in cataloging Azure’s individual pleasures than I am in exploring how the discovery of pleasure support, sustain, and guide his journey.



In many ways, Morrison has perfected the craft of (re)producing<sup>26</sup> some potentially queer children.<sup>27</sup> Beloved, perhaps, being her most haunting child figure to date. The absence-presence of Beloved, the maybe-ghostly reincarnation of Sethe's slain infant, haunts not only the halls, walls, and rooms (not to mention people, objects, and animals) of 124, turning everything—lives and objects—upside down; but also the fabric of the community in which she leaves Sethe and the rest of her kin. But her haunting cannot be easily reduced to good or bad. Just as her absence-presence sucks the life—and love—out of an entire community, it also serves as the catalyst for the reparation of a hole in a community and in the lives of community members.<sup>28</sup> While the news and spectacle surrounding her murdered body knocks the air out of the community, the news and spectacle of her return propels even the most unforgiving of hearts to Sethe's aide.

In order to position Beloved as such a haunting child, Morrison draws attention to the tensions between desire and expectation as they relate to the child. Sethe's desire for her child is strong; however, equally as strong is her inability to relinquish her expectations for that child. Sethe's fixation on her stolen milk suggests more than a simple justification for her actions. It highlights the queerness of her expectations for her child. As her daughter, Sethe expects Beloved not only to value the stolen milk, but *to be able to value* that milk. More than anything, Sethe's expectations for her child seem to betray the slippery slope spanning the gap between the child and the adult, suggesting that the expectations Sethe has for Beloved's concern with the stolen

---

<sup>26</sup> I suggest this as an act of reproduction, given Morrison's contention that her writing process is a matter of letting characters, who co-exist with her, speak through her. See, for instance, her conversation with Dan White.

<sup>27</sup> In fact, Morrison has a knack for crafting children who trouble our notions of the child, with some of the most beautiful and haunting prose (Pecola, Claudia, etc.). Her children agitate. They disturb. They do all this as they suffer...or cause others to suffer. It is such troubling—not just troubled—child figures that I seek to latch on to.

<sup>28</sup> I frame Beloved's place in the novel as an "absence-presence" precisely because she is always simultaneously there, yet not there. Her ghostly incarnations always brought with them the absence of her physical presence; yet, her physical reincarnation always carries with it traces of her death, traces of her absence. In other words, Beloved, as with Morrison's notion of rememory, is a collapsing of events, histories, and bodies. Her collapsing of moments queers her equally as much as her seemingly sexually-tinged desire for Sethe.

milk are really projections of Sethe's own desires and values. In other words, the child is not child; it is me-as-child. Sethe, in this moment, highlights the child's status as a "potential-me," as a "delayed-me." Beloved's return, then, can be read as a rememory of her mother's life, not of her own childhood. Morrison suggests that childhood vanishes at the point of expectation. There is no hope of growing, here. At best one can hope for a return.

But the threat of a return turns out to be equally as problematic, as the epigraph illustrates. The return always threatens to collapse into rememory. How do we get from return to rememory? As Sethe explains, rememory is a bringing of the past and present together at once. As she puts it, "If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world... The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be here for you, waiting for you" (Morrison 36). In other words, rememory is the "still-thereness" of places and events, of people and lives, of time. While, on one the one hand, I agree with Caroline Rody when she argues, in her article "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: History, 'Rememory,' and a 'Clamor for a Kiss,'" that "'Rememory' thus functions in Morrison's 'history' as a trope for the problem of reimagining one's heritage" (Rody 101-102), I find rememory to be more than a psychological reimagining.<sup>29</sup> Rememory re-submerges the present into the past so that both are indistinguishable from one another, *all while* pushing them both to the point they becoming tangible. This is what Ella rejects. It is one thing, she says, to float behind the present,

---

<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, while Rody's project concerns itself with mending the gap between "ideological reading[s] of historical fiction" and "the inscribed psychological project of reimagining an inherited past" (Rody 95), she picks up on the queer relationship between the adult and the child. As she suggests, "setting a metaphorical struggle between mother and ghostly daughter at the center of an epic reimagining of an entire ancestry, Morrison's history centrally dramatizes the problem of imagining, writing, and publishing—'witnessing'—a story about her own daughterly heritage" (98-99). Moreover, she suggests, "the ghost Beloved, who gives body and face to that which is in excess of African-American history—the absences at that history's core—also functions, in a dramatic reversal, as a marvelous figure for the struggle of daughterly historiographic desire itself" (99). It seems the adult and the child are never too far away from one another—especially when the project of self-, or group, discovery is at hand.

but when the past attempted to take “possession of the present,” things have gone too far (Morrison 256). Therefore, *Beloved*, representing the child, highlights the impossibility of our expectations for the child. It is never about the child. It is about our own (in)abilities to return.

When queried on her choice to withhold condemnation from Sethe, Morrison explains that, “I realized there was only one person who was in the position to make that judgment, and that was the dead child” (White). To suggest that only a (dead) child can judge the actions of her mother is an extremely queer move. Judgement, we are often led to believe, lies in the hands of those mature enough to effectively weigh behaviors. Yet, more queer than suggesting that it is the child’s place to judge the parent, Morrison also suggests that the actions of the living are at the mercy of the dead. So, by suggesting that only the dead child could judge the actions of the living parent, Morrison inserts agency and consciousness into the child that is so often denied, all while freezing the child in its childhood. What would it mean to grant the child—the comingling of our sexual, emotional, and physical labors—the power to determine the values of those labors, of our choices, of our actions? Yet this is precisely the backbone of *Beloved*. *Beloved* is an earnest attempt to play with the responsibilities and powers of the child figure in an attempt to heal wounds.<sup>30</sup>

Addressing the oppressions of women, Audre Lorde points to the erotic as a path (back) towards a full life, which male oppressions deny. As one of many types of power, “the erotic,” Lorde contends, lies within each of us and is “firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (53). Lorde expends considerable energy distinguishing the erotic from “the plasticized sensation” often labeled “the pornographic” (54). Unlike pornography, which “emphasizes sensation without feeling” (54), the erotic looks to those feelings which point to one’s personal limits—personal truths. “This,” Lorde declares, “is one reason why the erotic is so

---

<sup>30</sup> This is a particularly visible point when one reads, as scholars such as Rody do, the novel as a black artists attempt to grapple with the legacy of slavery.

feared...once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of” (57). But, once again, Lorde’s articulation of the erotic is directed towards *women*. Little direct attention is paid to the child’s erotic power. Still, her extension of the erotic beyond sex and sexuality, beyond sensation, remains instructive for both understandings of postcolonial societies which posit (hyper)sexuality as a defining trait, and queer theories that position the child as an obstacle to fulfillments of pleasure. Extended in such a way, the erotic becomes not only a site of pleasure and fulfillment but also as a queer site of hope and of futurity.

Still, less than twenty years after the publication of Morrison’s *Beloved*, Lee Edelman, in his highly influential text, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, suggests the rejection of the child as a symbol of hope and the future. Offering a critique of queer theory’s turn towards, what, in a different context, Jasbir Puar terms, “homonationalism,” Edelman contends that queer theory should resist “the conservatism of the ego [that] compels the subject, whether liberal or conservative politically, to endorse as the meaning of politics itself the reproductive futurism that perpetuates as reality a fantasy frame intended to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child” (Edelman 14).<sup>31</sup> For Edelman, reproductive futurism ensures the survival of the very system that places the queer as abject and deviant, constantly forestalling “the constant threat of apocalypse now—or later” (18). The Child, “shimmer[ing] with the iridescent promise of Noah’s rainbow” (18), then, comes to embody that forestalled end to world—as we know it. Ultimately, Edelman’s project attempts to liberate queers from a system in which they are always,

---

<sup>31</sup> I would like to point out that, while they share some overlap, Puar’s conceptualization of homonationalism, differs from Edelman’s in a number of important ways. First, and most notably, Puar aims to expose and undermine the race politics that help white(ned) Americans work their way into the nation’s social, political, and economic fabric. For Puar, the ascension of gays and lesbians to the status of full-fledged citizens (at whatever speed) comes at the price of racialized others. (More specific to her argument, Puar avers that the acquisition of gay and lesbian rights is directly tied to the production of a terrorist body—an othered body that threatens the national body.) Second, unlike Edelman, sexual practices are not the foundation of her understanding of queer.

and necessarily placed on the outside. Or, as José Esteban Muñoz explains, “Edelman recommends that queers give up hope and embrace a certain negation endemic to our abjection within the symbolic,” since “political hope fails queers because, like signification, it was not originally made for us” (Muñoz 91).

Nonetheless, while he agrees with Edelman’s rejection of reproductive futurism, Muñoz, writing in the tradition of Ernst Bloch, criticizes both Edelman’s rejection of hope and the ways in which his polemic evacuates racial, economic, and cultural difference in the name of a privileged child image. According to Muñoz, “although Edelman does indicate that the future of the child as futurity is different from the future of actual children, his framing nonetheless accepts and reproduces this monolithic figure of the child that is indeed always already white...all but ignor[ing] the point that other modes of particularity within the social are constitutive of subjecthood beyond the kind of jouissance that refuses both narratological meaning and what he understands as the fantasy of futurity” (95). For Muñoz, hope is a crucial component of queerness precisely because, as Muñoz avers, “queerness is not yet here” (1). Muñoz defines queerness as

a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing. Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. Both the ornamental and the quotidian can contain a map of the utopia that is queerness. Turning to the aesthetic in the case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations. Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for

and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world. (1)

In addition to sharing a predilection for aesthetic glimpses of queerness, Muñoz and Edelman share an understanding that queerness is and should reach beyond normative social systems. Yet, Muñoz deemphasizes the psychoanalytic underpinnings of queerness on which Edelman relies, emphasizing, instead, queerness's performative aspects. In other words, where Edelman looks at the motivations for queer acts in the present, Muñoz looks at how the performances of, or gestures towards queerness point towards a future yet to come. Muñoz differentiates gestures from acts, by suggesting gestures as being less concerned with end-points. In contrast to acts, which "have more to do with the moving body's flow," he reads gestures as "signal[ing] a refusal of a certain kind of finitude" (65). Ultimately, gestures require establishing a language grounded in the ambulatory body. Queerness, for Muñoz, is a constant striving towards a more perfect moment. So, despite the fact that Muñoz might agree with Edelman's argument that " queerness names the side of 'not fighting for the children,' the side of outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the value of reproductive futurism" (Edelman 20), at those moments when he is forced to "negotiate the ever-increasing sidewalk obstacles produced by oversized baby strollers on parade in the city in which [he] lives" (91-92), he refuses to give up a hope for a future, not-yet-here, which Edelman says the child embodies. Thus, following his reticence for positing a childly future, the iterations of futurity presented by Muñoz are embodied by child *and* adult figures.

Where the entirety of Edelman's project works to resist orientations towards the figure of the child, Muñoz finds queer potential in such figures and he employs child figures alongside adult figures—though he implicitly privileges the adult. For instance, after reading the queer gestures in Samuel R. Delany's memoir, *The Motion of Light in Water*, Muñoz reads the gestures of high

school characters in LeRoi Jones's play, *The Toilet*. However, Muñoz always only reads these queerings in the same terms as he does those of adult figures. Rather than explicating how child and adult figures gesture towards a diversified queer future, Muñoz flattens the experiences of the child with the experiences of the adult. Nowhere in his readings of Delany and the teens from Jones's play does he examine how age and the expectations attached to representations of certain ages leads towards different ideas of the future. Instead, his readings of both seem to suggest a single—adult—queer future. Here, I attempt to attend to some of these nuances.

In many ways, I, like Muñoz, agree with Edelman's insistence on a queerness that embraces its place as outside of the dominant order of things. But I also share Muñoz's refusal to abandon hope and an orientation towards the future. I believe that both by embracing one's queer difference *and* gesturing towards a better tomorrow—towards utopia—queers can begin doing the work expected of them: dismantling systems of norms. But must notions of queerness give up the child in order for them to enact their full queer potential? Moreover, under what circumstances *can* one—queer or otherwise—reject the child? At its base, this chapter argues that disavowals of the child betray a Western, anglocentric positioning as they fail to recognize that, in some settings, a flight to the child might actually be beneficial. Here, then, Morrison's *Beloved* is instructive in two important ways: first, as Rody also asserts, its use of the child figure of Beloved can be seen as “the child or descendent mourn[ing] the mother or ancestor” with Beloved functioning “to figure both the lost past and the mourning author—the ‘daughter’ of this lost ancestry, desiring the face of the mother from whom time has separated her” (Rody 104-105). Second, the complex comingling of race and child figures is inseparable from the narrative itself. Beloved is queer

*because* she is a black child, deeply-loved and protected in a system that places no emotional value on black children; and she is queer *as* a black child because of that same love and protection.<sup>32</sup>

In this chapter, I examine South African author, K. Sello Duiker's novel, *Thirteen Cents*, in order to explore how the use of the child figure might function as an act of "writing back" against the lingering specters of colonialism, and into a future of healing.<sup>33</sup> *Thirteen Cents* follows the narrative of Azure, a black South African boy of twelve, as he struggles to survive on the streets of Cape Town. At its core, the novel can be read as a journey towards (self-)healing. With its mixture of realism and the fantastic, it questions the state of post-apartheid South Africa through the voice of those nations so often contend they seek to protect: the children—or, here, a single child. Realistic images of homelessness and the everyday lives of "street children" are interconnected with dreams of lizard-men and dead ancestral figures, all the while maintaining its commitment to exploring the day-to-day struggles of a boy trying to find security in an insecure world. Walking the city, Azure narrates his experiences with other "street boys"—specifically, nine-year-old Bafana, and Vincent, who is slightly older than Azure himself—as well as the various adult figures he encounters. There is Joyce, the matronly Afrikaner who leaves him food in exchange for the ability to "hold" the money he earns; Allen, the colored pimp who controls the flow of contraband items (shoes, shirts, etc.) Azure purchases, and who displays no shame in publicly assaulting the women working for him; Gerald, the colored leader of a gang of colored and black thugs, and the man who most frequently causes Azure physical harm; and Sealy,

---

<sup>32</sup> Scholars, such as Robert Staples, in his article "To Be Young, Black and Oppressed," have noted that "for black youth there was historically no such stage as adolescence, where one could be carefree until taking on the responsibilities of adulthood" (2), thus suggesting the black *child* as a queer phenomenon.

<sup>33</sup> While I will return to this notion of "writing back," below, I will comment here that I am in fact referencing Bill Ashcroft et al.'s phrasing. I do so in hopes of suggesting a recognition of power and an attempt to redress some of the conditions of one's position to such power.



Gerald's lead black factotum. Intermittently, he finds himself engaging with and fleeing from these adult figures as his narrative progresses.<sup>34</sup>

If, as Rody suggests, *Beloved* (both the character and the novel itself) can be seen as Morrison's grappling with her heritage, Duiker's child protagonist, Azure, I argue, should be seen as Duiker's attempt to offer post-apartheid South Africa a future that can depart from its violent history. In the place of the child figure meant to "embod[y] the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good" (Edelman 11), Duiker inserts an orphaned and rejected boy, and then works to allow that child to find his own erotic pleasures and connection in life. I argue that Azure's most instructive queering comes through what I will call his "boyancy," from his refusal to surrender to the expectations and limits others place on his age, as he marches towards a future where he might be able to "walk the streets the way [he] like[s]" (167).<sup>35</sup> In his "boyancy,"<sup>36</sup> bobbing between the signifiers "child" and "adult," he constantly displays that in the midst of his need to continue to grow, he is growing towards more than is expected from or can be anticipate of him. From such a state, he forces us to recognize not only the trap of the trope of the child but the trap of the concept of the child itself. Through Azure's eyes we see that we have never been grown-up, and, moreover, we never will grow up unless we learn to see our past, present *and* future with different eyes.

---

<sup>34</sup> Throughout the essay, I will discuss these relationships in greater detail.

<sup>35</sup> I employ the term "boyancy" as an intentional play on words. In this play, I seek to condense the gap between the adult and the child, while emphasizing the agency of the child. As a term, I struggled with whether or not to maintain the "u" in the term buoyancy. After all, the "u" is more symbolic than a simple letter. In an argument that deals not only with the effects of colonialism but also with a post-apartheid society, the letter's homophonous resonance with its more accusatory utterance, "you," cannot be ignored. Isn't the "writing back" that has come to be known as post-colonial literature "constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices" that desire to "interrogate European discourse and discursive strategies from its position within and between two worlds" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 221)? Why, after all, would "(yo)u" not be a crucial, if not integral part of the theoretical "buoyancy" that is argued for the postcolonial figure of Azure? Or to put this another way, why not let the "u" haunt the reader by using "b(u)oyancy" as the spelling (for surely this is a textual haunting, as verbal pronouncement would silence both the presence and absence of the letters, leaving the hearer to construct for themselves what they are used to, what they want to hear)?

<sup>36</sup> I will sometimes employ the adjective "boyant" with similar intentions.

In the pages that follow, I will first begin by laying out the discourse on the colonial trope of the child. I begin here in an attempt to contextualize the trope as well as to begin gesturing towards the trope's potential as a form of resistance. I will then move to an extended discussion of Duiker's novel. In this discussion, I aim to tease out the relationship between Azure's "boyancy" and his erotic pleasures.

### **Establishing the Trope of the Child**

Studies of the colonial trope of the child have attempted to expand contemporary understandings of how the child figure has been applied to colonized individuals—ultimately, in an effort to infantilize a people. In his 2001 text, *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture*, Bill Ashcroft offers an analysis of how and why the trope grew in tandem with colonialism. Rather than absolving the political, cultural, and educational institutions of Western society, Ashcroft implicates them all, pointing out how they intertwine with and come to bear on individuals outside of the home country. Ashcroft takes investigations like Sommerville's, which observe "that abstraction, 'childhood,' which is made up of the expectations, hopes, and fears societies have expressed with regard to their youngest members" (Sommerville 7), a step further by pointing out that, if we are to take seriously "the ways children have been important to adults throughout history and the reasons for the changes in their status" (7), we cannot do so without recognizing that the child has developed alongside, and, in part, because of, systems of colonization and understandings of those who were colonized. Revisiting the notion of the child in the context of colonialism, Ashcroft asserts that, among the most useful tools for managing colonial discourses, politics, and behaviors, no other trope functioned with as much efficacy as did the trope of the child. The trope of the child made it easy to carry out colonial maneuvers without

too much disrupting the consciousness of the populace at home. Reworking Hannah Arendt's concept of "inner contradiction," which took at its object European totalitarianism, Gyan Prakash, in his 1996 essay, "Who's Afraid of Postcoloniality?," asserts that "the concepts of displacement, doubling, and ambivalence" embedded within Arendt's "inner contradictions" "show that colonial power and subjects were constituted and contested in the space of insurmountable contradictions and conflicts produced by colonization" (187-88). The trope of the child, Ashcroft argues, functioned as a way to "absorb[] and suppress[] the contradictions of imperial discourse itself" (Ashcroft 36).<sup>37</sup> Understood at home as a figure that needs protection, while still offering the potential to be "guided" towards the "right" path, the figure of the child justifies means of colonial control and domination because all actions can be said to be carried out *with the future of the child in mind*—even when that "child" is a grown woman or man, or when the actual children in a colonial state are denied the same rights, the same protections afforded to certain children back home.<sup>38</sup>

As Hugh Cunningham notes, although there is "a problem for the historian of childhood and children in that it is easier to write with some confidence about childhood than about children" (3), "ideas about childhood in the past exist in plentitude" (2). And for many reasons, it is certainly "easier to write a history of childhood than of children" (2) because children have very rarely been able to speak. Paraphrasing historian David Rothman, Cunningham asserts that, if, as Rothman

---

<sup>37</sup> In directing attention towards the trope of the child, Ashcroft and others imitate a sort of Foucauldian shift away from "children as human beings and [towards] childhood as a shifting set of ideas" (Cunningham 1). I will return to the distinction between beings and ideas below.

<sup>38</sup> I suppose I may run the risk of belaboring the point of (post)colonial individuals being infantilized. After all, Franz Fanon, in both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*—not to mention in *A Dying Colonialism* and *Towards an African Revolution*—makes note of the infantilizing practices of colonials (see his chapter on language in *Black Skin*, or his chapter "On Violence" in *Wretched*). Similarly, Edward W. Said makes note of the infantilization of Arabs in his master work, *Orientalism*. More recently, Achille Mbembe has noted the current state of such infantilizing practices when he argues, in his 2001 work, *On the Postcolony*, that even today, there is no chance of speaking Africa because Africa has never been given a voice.

argues, “many historians have experienced that middle-of-the-night panic when contemplating how thin a line sometimes separates their work from fiction” (quoted. in Cunningham 186), “the study of childhood seems especially nerve-racking, threatening to turn us all into novelists” (Cunningham 186). After all, because there exists a dearth of first-hand examples of thinking by children, hypotheses of their experiences are the best that can be offered. Compounding the problem, when concerns of the child have been taken up, they, most often, it has been in the context of larger bodies (the family unit; the state; the school; the media; the medical complex; etc.). The child as an individual, however, remains dangerous, and terrifying territory. Much of this terror seems to come from the connection of concepts of the child to concepts of nation and progress. As Cunningham suggests, it has “been common to imagine the history of humankind as equivalent to the life cycle of a human being; some societies have seen this in an ascent from savagery/childhood to civilization/adulthood, others as a descent from primeval innocence/childhood to corruption/adulthood” (2). If we dig deeper into the child’s history, what will we find about our own present?

In fact, roots of the child as a trope can be seen as early as Mesopotamian civilizations. In his book, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*, C. John Sommerville quotes “the lament of a scribe” where he protests against the decline of civilization: “Our earth is degenerate in these latter days. Bribery and corruption are common. *Children no longer obey their parents...The end of the world is evidently approaching*” (quoted in Sommerville 21, my emphasis). Even at its start civilization was declining, and all because those with whom the hope of the future was invested never fulfilled their potential—dare we say, never grew up? The scribe’s lament not only tethers the actions of children to the ultimate degeneracy of civilization (they no longer obey), it also suggests an abstraction of the concept of the child, through the generalizing and universalizing “they,” from

the lived experiences of actual children. The scribe no longer seems concerned with what children are actually doing; rather, s/he relies on the assumption of a hierarchical gap between the adult, as the parent who should be obeyed, and the child, as the one who should be obeying. A historian himself, Sommerville recognizes in historians an aptitude for “noticing something just as it is about to disappear from their world and then seeking to preserve it in our memory” (Sommerville 7), yet as Cunningham argues, attempt at preservation must broaden its connections: “We need to embed [the history of children] in wider economic, social and political developments” (4).

Grounding his notion of the child in the discourse of the Enlightenment, by way of Locke and Rousseau, Ashcroft uncovers a child that is both desired because of its potential to be filled—because of its promise for correction—and despised because it draws attention to the porousness of the wall between the self and the Other—because of how it disallows a clean distinction between identities. Education became the means by which both to fulfill the child’s potential and to curtail its threat. As Ashcroft notes, “[l]iteracy and education reinforce the existence of the very gap they are designed to close, the gap between colonizer and colonized, civilized and primitive; in short, the gap between adult and child” (39). They are capable of performing such tasks “because education is always on the terms of an adult consciousness to which the colonial subject can never aspire” (39).<sup>39</sup> As Locke’s “tabula rasa” suggests, the child is a colonized subject. It is to be filled not by its own thoughts, but by the lessons of those adults who have come before. Projecting onto the colonial space and subject, this child—simultaneously presented as a “tabula rasa” (Locke) and as a “wild plant” (Rousseau)—allows for the creation of a gap between the adult and the child—between the self and the other. In such a gap can be displaced the “possibility of an adulthood”; however, this possibility is always one that “will never come in any form other than

---

<sup>39</sup> I recognize the interchange that has occurred between “child” and “colonized.” I do not think this too illogical, though.

an [as] an image of the West” (Ashcroft 42). By re-presenting the colonized, and their spaces, as children, the colonizer is able to position them as both inherently “evil,” and as having potential that requires salvation. However, this child, “as an image of the West,” always risks returning the West back to itself. Aimé Césaire is correct when he formulates colonization as equivalent to “thingification” (Césaire 42). Moreover, when he argues that between the colonizer and the colonized there exists “no human contact,” only “relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production” (42), drawing on “the old refrain: ‘The-Negroes-are-big-children’” (60), he makes visible, once again, that “image of the West” that had been transported to new lands.

To a certain extent, Michel Foucault picks up on the discursive qualities of the trope of the child in his work. Two instances within his body of work are of interest here: the first being his discussion of the carceral system; the second being his discussion of the modern homosexual. In *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault ends his study on the exercise of power and discourse by turning to the opening of the juvenile detention colony, Mettray—what he suggests as “the completion of the carceral system” (*Discipline* 293).<sup>40</sup> Beyond its example of how power came “to produce bodies that were both docile and capable” (294), in the discussion of Mettray, I am particularly interested in how it works to queer the concept of the child. Recognizing the apparent arbitrariness of his selection, Foucault explains that he hones in on Mettray, “[p]recisely because this choice is somewhat ‘unjust’...Because Mettray was a prison, but not

---

<sup>40</sup> In typical Foucauldian fashion, Foucault, feeling somewhat expected to pinpoint a specific moment in time, rather mockingly suggests 22 January 1840 as this start. Of course, the irony of such a suggestion is that it anticipates the resistance to the work in which the text has been engaged. In fact, the work of the text has been an attempt to reach beyond a date, suggesting that our “modern” system is an accumulation of systems that have existed since the rise of society itself.

entirely a prison in that it contained *young delinquents condemned by the courts*” (296, emphasis added). “And yet something else, too,” he continues, “*because it also contained minors who had been charged, but acquitted under article 66 of the code,*<sup>41</sup> and boarders held...*as an alternative to paternal correction*” (296, emphasis added). Though Foucault’s direct interest is not in uncovering the queerness of children, he cannot help doing so. In attempting to explicate the diversification of power and discipline, Foucault makes clear the inherent system of education upon which power relies. In other words, in emphasizing that no longer was the “right of parents to lock up their children” (297) held within the house, the system of Mettray demonstrates the porosity of the line between the child and the adult because both become subject to the parental figure of disciplining institutions. In the new system, there are no real children, as children become invested with certain “adult” qualities—namely the possession of responsibility for one’s actions; likewise, there are no real adults, as adults become children in the eyes of the law—under the disciplining hand of power. Not only is the assumed innocence of the child now parallel to his or her potential culpability, but the expectation for growth collapses so that the child is simultaneously growing and grown. And beyond the legal code, the early modern period’s “plethora of advice books t[elling] adults how to behave,” so as to rear good citizens, also serves to “mark[] off the distance between adult and child” (Cunningham 5), though marking that distance as closer, rather than farther. The queered child, the child as delinquent, disrupts more than the written law; it disrupts the founding ideology of civilization itself. Mettray made explicit the inconsistencies within conceptualizations of the child by codifying, and then concretizing those inconsistencies. The child, just like the adult, could no longer be said to exist outside of social valuations of good and evil—of right and wrong; and the adult could no longer be comfortably positioned apart from the child.

---

<sup>41</sup> Article 66 of the French Constitution states that “no person shall be arbitrarily detained” (France, my translation).

However, Foucault offers a more explicit queering of the child. While his discussion of Mettray queers the child by emphasizing that his or her innocence is not absolute, such a queering never engages the child's relationship to sexuality. The child remains a desexualized body—discursively, at least.<sup>42</sup> But Foucault returns to further queer the child, this time attending to issues of sexuality—though still discursively. As Foucault rather (in)famously argues, in addition to “complet[ing] the carceral system” (*Discipline* 293), the nineteenth century is when the “homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood.” (*History of Sexuality* 43, my emphasis). I would like to quote, at length, this troubling passage for reasons I hope to make clear afterwards. In volume one of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault asserts that

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became *a personage*, a past, a case history, and *a childhood*, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into that total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized—Westphal's famous article of 1870 on “contrary sexual sensations” can stand as its date of birth—less by a type of sexual

---

<sup>42</sup>I will return to this distinction between the discursive child and the living child in more detail below.



relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto the kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (43)

On the one hand, Foucault's formulation of the "origins" of the modern homosexual, as a product of a certain episteme, has contributed to a (social) constructionist logic that understands modern categorizations to be culturally specific constructions. By rejecting a certain transhistoricim of the homosexual—and not necessarily homosexuality—Foucault allows for a critical examination of power serves to (re)produce not only homosexuality but a discourse of sexuality. Or, as David Halperin notes, Foucault's project "is routinely taken to authorize the doctrine that before the nineteenth century the categories or classifications typically employed by European cultures to articulate sexual difference did not distinguish among different kinds of sexual actors but only among different kinds of sex acts" (*How to Do the History of Homosexuality* 28). However, Halperin is keen to point out that "such a misreading of Foucault can be constructed only by setting aside, and then forgetting, the decisive qualifying phrase with which his infamous pronouncement opens: *"As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes"* (29, emphasis in original). Against such misreading, Halperin emphasizes that Foucault's pronouncement "is making a carefully limited point about the differing styles of disqualification applied to male love by pre-modern legal definitions of sodomy and by nineteenth-century psychiatric conceptualizations of homosexuality, respectively" (29). In other words, Halperin points out that Foucault is not specifically interested in addressing "popular attitudes or private emotions," or even how people of the time actually thought during and about sexual acts (29). His interest lies in making clear the "new and

distinctive” “discursive and institutional practices that produced the *category* of ‘the homosexual’” as we know him (29).<sup>43</sup> And it is under the auspices of this re-reading of Foucault that Halperin is able “encourage us to inquire into the construction of sexual identities before the emergence of sexual orientations and to do this *without* recurring necessarily to modern notions of ‘sexuality’ or sexual orientation...to supplement our notion of sexual identity with a more refined concept of, say, partial identity, emergent identity, transient identity, semi-identity, incomplete identity, proto-identity, or subidentity” (43, emphasis in original).

But even Halperin is critical of how Foucault “narrowly frames his comparison between sodomy and homosexuality” (32). As Halperin protests, “[t]he point-by-point contrast—between legal discourse (*codes* and *droits*) and psychiatric discourse, between juridical subjects and sexual subjects, between psychiatric discourse, between acts contrary to nature and embodied subjects or species of individuals—is ruthlessly schematic” (32, emphasis in original). “That schematic reduction,” as Halperin calls it, both contributes to the power of Foucault’s work and limits it by causing it to overlook conceptualizations that fall outside, or in-between the poles of his research.<sup>44</sup> Like Halperin, I agree that it is important to recognize that Foucault’s theoretical force lies in his ability help us see not only the power of discourses in shaping institutions and the practices within those institutions, but also the temporal and cultural specificity of those discourses—in other words in his ability to help us see that it is not that the notion of (homo)sexuality started with us, but that *our* conceptualizations of sexuality are markedly different from those other, and earlier notions.

---

<sup>43</sup> My choice of the masculine pronoun here is intentional. Between the focus of sexologists and the burgeoning homophile movement, much of the discussion of same-sex love or behavior focused on males and the impending criminalization of male same-sex behavior.

<sup>44</sup> In order to make this point, Halperin examines the classical concept of the *kinaidos* to demonstrate that “the ancients were quite capable of conceptualizing the figure of the *kinaidos*, when they so desired, not only in anxiously universalizing terms but also in comfortably minoritizing ones” (34, emphasis in original). The “conception of a *kinaidos* was of a man socially deviant in his entire being, principally observable in behavior that flagrantly violated or contravened the dominant social definition of masculinity” (33) because he allowed, and desired, “other men to use [him] as objects of sexual degradation” (33).

However, I also agree with Halperin that perhaps we need to rethink sexual identity, looking not only to those formed identities, but also to those “proto-identities” that have presented themselves. And Foucault’s formulation of the homosexual as a childhood allows for such “proto-identities”—though he never quite moves there.

Entering into the space opened by Foucault, Kathryn Bond Stockton, in her recent study, *The Queer Child: Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, asserts that, most often, “the question of the child makes us climb inside a cloud—‘a shadowy spot on a field of light’—leading us, in moments, to cloudiness and ghostliness surrounding children as figures in time” (2); therefore, the notion of “a gay child illuminates the darkness of the child” (3). In light of this, she then calls us to ask, “what might the notion of a gay child do to conceptions of the child? What might this ghost have to say about its peers?” (3). Stockton’s work seeks to explore “the conceptual force of ghostly gayness in the figure of the child—this child’s subliminal, cresting appearances only *as* fiction (as something many do not believe in)” (4). In fact, it is in the “far more liquid and labile” gayness of the child that she finds “the new *queer*—a term that touts its problems and shares them with anyone” (4). For her, part of the inherent queerness of the child becomes visible within the expectations of growth, and the delays that accompany that growth. The movement of growth, and the delay that comes with it is not only vertical (as expressed in the phrase, “growing up”), but is also, and more powerfully, horizontal, or, as she states, “sideways” (6). Viewing the growth of children as a “sideways” movement is possible “in part because they cannot, according to our concepts, advance to adulthood until we say it’s time” (6). In ways, Stockton’s conceptualizations of the child pull from Foucault’s connection of the child(hood) to homosexuality. The queer child, she argues is never far from the adult, queer or otherwise. The threat of what the child might become, the need to protect and save the child from failing to meet expectations, serves to

discipline children *and* parents. Furthermore, Stockton serves to enter those proto-identities often ignored by Foucault by querying the feared, or rejected, desires of children. As Stockton states, “one notes how closely the protogay child is made, by the strictures of public discourse, to trace the path of the ghost in the nursery—though in this case, and this point is crucial, the ghostly gay child *may* be fully conscious of its deferred birth” (14-15, emphasis in original). At the point before they are assumed to possess an identity, Stockton suggests a possible cognitive recognition.

Yet still, much of the studies of the child have ignored intertwinedness of the notion of the child to race and colonialism.<sup>45</sup> This is why Ashcroft’s assertion is so powerful: it reconnects the child to its siblings, colonialism and race. In her article, “Death and Rebirth of a Movement: Queering Critical Ethnic Studies,” Cathy Cohen urges for the expansion of how we conceptualize the queer. And interestingly enough, she presents her argument through a reflection of the murder of a “queer” black boy, Derrion Albert. Albert, a black sixteen year-old student in Chicago, Illinois, was brutally attacked as he walked to his house from school. In constructing her argument, Cohen forces the disciplining body, the child delinquent, and the queer (child) to converge on the violently assaulted, technologically recorded, and socially distributed body of the black teen. As Cohen notes, though “[w]e know the specifics of Derrion’s brutal murder because it was captured on a cell phone video seen around the world” (126), many “who espouse queer political commitments push back against the inclusion of Derrion Albert in the queer diaspora. Insistently, they ask: Was he queer?” (127). Through Derrion, Cohen resists the suggestions that she is “stretching the

---

<sup>45</sup> While Foucault can very clearly be said to be lacking a discussion of the linkages between his studies, colonial practices, race, Stockton does address issues of race. Devoting one of her chapters to “the child queered by innocence or queered by color,” she explores the construction of a privileged (and white) conceptualization of the child that comes about in contrast to the raced child who lacks (the privileged child’s) innocence. And, elsewhere, Stockton argues that texts are “fraught [with] the place where race and queerness cross—between groups of people, inside specific groups or in individuals—and [they] cross, moreover, at odd, oblique angles” (“The Queerness of Race and Same-Sex Desire” 116). Unfortunately, these two discussions most often run parallel, rather than intersecting.

concept of queer too far or using it incorrectly” (127) by arguing that accusations of “stretching the concept of queer too far” only arise when race enters into the discussion, or when non-heteronormative rights-based agendas are left behind. Finding the current conceptualization of the term too constricting, she works to push for a more intersectional approach that takes the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality as important points of oppression. While she deemphasizes Albert’s sexual desires—either as queer or as a child—she does so precisely because her point is that sexuality must not be the only factor in queering an individual. Cohen insists that “the “normalizing project of queer theory must undress the contradictory relationship of marginalized folks, often communities of color, toward normalization” (131). Rather than simply continue “the liberal, rights-based agenda that dominated [American and transnational] LGBTQ politics today,” we must also reorient ourselves towards an understanding of queer that includes all those individuals who stand as “the targets of racial normalizing projects intent on pathologizing across the dimensions of race, class, gender, and sexuality” (128).

Though Cohen looks beyond the possibilities of Albert as a child with (sexual) desires, refusing to allow his sexual desires to position him internally or externally to queer, what I appreciate, and seek to extend in Cohen’s argument is how she, like Roderick Ferguson, Michael Hames-García, Robert Reidd-Pharr, and Sharron P. Holland, to name but a few, wedges open the door of traditional queer theory, making inescapable the fact that “sexuality and desire cannot be adequately understood apart from ‘race, colonialism, and political economy’” (“What’s After Queer Theory?” 389). And while Ashcroft’s intervention into the trope of the child is important, its lack of attention to the sexuality and sexual desires circulating within that trope leaves much more work to be done. As Cohen contends of Albert’s murder, I suggest that Duiker’s protagonist, Azure, forces us to rethink not only what falls under the auspice of “queer,” but also what

constitutes a child. If, as Stockton and Sommerville purport, a child is “a body said to need protections more than freedoms” (Stockton 16), or one who is “economically dependent [on parents?]” (Sommerville 9), Azure’s status as a homeless orphan, who sleeps with men for money calls in to question both the notion of a child (what becomes of a child when it has neither parents nor a stable home?), and the notion of queerness (what are we to make of a twelve-year-old boy who chooses to sleep with men, yet does not identify with them?). It is in Azure that we can observe both Stockton’s insistence on the importance of observing the queerness of children, and Cohen’s re-conceptualization of queer as necessarily including those “marginalized folks” (131) who are “targets of racial normalizing projects intent on pathologizing across the dimensions of race, class, gender, and sexuality” (Cohen 128)—of course not forgetting, as Hames-García’s insists, that these projects always include “race, colonialism, and political economy” (“What’s After Queer Theory?” 389).

### **Attempting to Save “the Children”**

I would now like to turn to Duiker’s text. And to reiterate, part of my argument is that, by appropriating and queering the figure of the child, Duiker invests in the child figure—a figure so often used to characterize (adult) colonized peoples—a hope for a future different from the present, but not bound by the past. It is fitting that Duiker’s debut novel, *Thirteen Cents*, centers on the story of a queer child. *Thirteen Cents* follows the narrative of Azure, a young black South African boy as he struggles to survive on the streets of Cape Town. An orphan from the impoverished, informal settlement of Mshenguville, just outside of Soweto, Azure walks readers through the underbelly of life in Cape Town.<sup>46</sup> Through Azure’s eyes, we are given an intimate viewing of the

---

<sup>46</sup> Since 2009, Mshenguville has been reappropriated as an eco park and its former residents have relocated to a housing project in Johannesburg. However, its history seems pointedly relevant in this project of locating Azure.

city that can only be seen through the eyes of a foreigner. Azure narrates his maneuverings through a contraband society and his interactions with the “crime lords” who desperately cling to their power, all the while commenting on his distance from the world—and bodies—that shape the city and its political landscape.<sup>47</sup> Through his eyes, we are forced to rethink the avenues available in postcolonial societies.

To be sure, Azure is no simple character. Commenting on the power of his character and its impact on the formation of a new postapartheid South African identity, Shaun Viljoen notes that “Azure’s position as a twelve-year-old who turns thirteen in the novel situates him on the threshold of the world of adults and subjects him to the rites of passage that induct him into particular forms of adulthood—in this case a particularly exploitive, destructive social order” (ix). Towards a different end, arguing him as exemplary of the postapartheid increase in street children, Mamadou Ngom argues that “he is portrayed as a gritty survivalist...going all out to walk a tightrope between pandering to the demands of hard-nosed gangsters and indulging the lustful whims of philandering white folks who use him for oral and anal sex in return for money” (Ngom 45). In most cases, Azure’s queer potential is either reduced to discussions of identity or evacuated all together as he is reinscribed as “just another lost child.” However, I suggest that, more than standing at the “threshold of the world of adults” (Viljoen ix), and more than “fall[ing] prey to sexual exploitation and abuse of any ilk, wanton violence, or breach of trust” (Ngom 45), Azure

---

Mshenguville began as a temporary settlement in 1985 after the then Soweto mayor, Ephraim Tshabalala, began permitting blacks to build temporary shacks on what had until then been a golf course. Like Azure, the settlement remained, despite the lack of basic provisions afforded a normal settlement (i.e. plumbing, running water, electricity).

<sup>47</sup> In employing the phrase “contraband society” I hope to bring to mind the system of contraband goods in which traditional channels of commerce (i.e. department stores or other small business retailers) are circumvented and goods are purchased and distributed from houses and backrooms. I intend this precisely because, on the one hand, all goods and services, the majority of the transactions, are carried out in the backrooms—or, more accurate to the story, under bridges. On the other hand, however, the phrase “contraband society” suggests the tensions that exist between approved and unapproved circuits of exchange, between the lawful and the unlawful. In short, the phrase, I feel, draws attention to the fact that the lines between the margins and the center are portable and porous.

queers not only the threshold, but also what exists on either side of it as he asserts his own pressures on them. In part, he accomplishes such a queering by deconstructing the expectations of the child, allowing for the expression of a queerness that comes not from the child's potential for, and expectation of growth, but in how his childish gaze constantly outpaces the growth of its environment.<sup>48</sup> In other words, Azure queers as he forces us to dissociate notions of grownness from the bodies to which we so often attribute them. In his observations, we are called to rethink what it means to be grown(-up) and what it means to grow. Azure enacts such queering not simply *because* he is a child, but because he is a child who refuses to be limited by a status.

Jean Comaroff suggests that, in post-Apartheid South Africa, the recent privatizations of history have resulted in “[a]n infinite regress of assertive voices [which] threatens to postpone, indefinitely, the process of shared *recollection*, the subsuming of difference into an overarching totality—even if only as a field of dispute—against which claims can be relativized and difference measured” (142). In her formulation, Comaroff presents History as something towards which we turn from the present through a process of detaching our individual experiences. Such a presentation of History suggests an evacuation of those moments of pleasure found not only in individual experiences of the present but also in the telling of one's story.

Annie Gagiano argues Duiker's writing as creating “strange new stories” that are “strange because the pasts called to mind are the kind formerly obscured by the grand chessboard narratives of apartheid *and* because the present or the future envisaged...illustrates what Mia Couto, in a memorable phrase, has called the ‘deep complex meshing of cultures’” (Gagiano 815).<sup>49</sup> While I

---

<sup>48</sup> Here, by calling his gaze “childish,” I do not suggest the immaturity or inexperience often associated with the term. Instead, I merely suggest, for lack of a more accurate word, that his gaze comes from his position as “not adult.”

<sup>49</sup> Gagiano focuses her argument on Duiker's second novel, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*. This novel takes as its main character the college student Tshepo, who is not only suffers from psychic instability, but who is also questioning his sexuality, questions which only intensify as he begins working in a male brothel. My choice of Azure and *Thirteen Cents* as my objects of study rests in the differences between what we expect from each



completely agree that Duiker creates strange new stories, I argue that *Thirteen Cents* is less interested in invoking a “History” and stories of the past. Instead, it heavily invests itself in the forward-facing narrative of a single character—it is about progress, not a return. Azure neither is, nor does he present himself as, a figural child produced by a “backward birth”—a past child narrated by his/her present adult self (Stockton 6). Thus, he, in his present-tense narrative, queers his postcolonial context by demonstrating the possibility of an existence not encumbered by History. This narrative is personal, displaying little interest in either “postponing” or “undermining the status of history” itself, while rendering notions of a distant history impossible by queerly turning history into just what it is: a narrative of temporal gestural experiences. Most importantly, Azure finds a strange pleasure in telling—and being able to tell—his story. With each moment of his present-tense narrative he begins to discover pleasures, and begins to accept no less than that which brings him joy. For instance, when he encounters a guard who seeks to intimidate him with his leashed dog, Azure takes pleasure in knowing that the futility of the guard’s actions. “I have a secret,” he confides, “I have a way with dogs. Ever since I was bitten by a dog when I was seven, dogs have never bothered me again” (Duiker 22). And sure enough, as he passes the dog doesn’t even register his presence, leaving him free to “just walk away” pleased (22). Rather than become baggage, time and experience become companions for Azure as he learns his own way forward.

I would like to make clear that, as I move to locate Azure between the figures of the child and the adult, I do not intend to suggest him as innocent. After all, neither Lorde, nor Edelman, nor Muñoz posit innocence as a condition for resisting (hetero-)normativized oppressions. As

---

character. As a college student, our expectations of Tshupo, and thus his queering potentials, are different given his age and level of education. Such a position is more often analyzed—and critiqued. Moreover, such a position is irrevocably tied to questions of race, nation, and identity in ways that the childly character, Azure is not. Azure offers an analysis that often goes uncommented upon precisely because we often refuse to make explicit the queer potentials of the child, of children. Furthermore, because the lines between the child and the nation, and the child and identity are tenuously drawn, at best, Azure possesses important potentials for reworking postcolonial positionalities.

Robert Reid-Pharr, speaking of the sexually underwritten state of American race relations, makes clear, “we are not, it seems, ever quite saintly enough” (144), thus a flight to innocence offers no relief from our own relationships with the oppressions of life. “We must,” Reid-Pharr continues, “give up on the idea that there can be either innocent communities or innocent leaders” and “insist upon a new level of maturity in our production of” our lives (145). Likewise, speaking of the push for normalization within the gay and lesbian movement, Michael Warner suggests that a fully matured society can be raised only by embracing the non-innocent expressions of life and autonomy. According to Warner, those on the outside are “always tempted to believe that the way to overcome stigma [is] to win acceptance by the dominant culture, rather than to change the self-understanding of that culture” (51), and that the only path to winning that acceptance is through denouncing “as relativist, self-indulgent, or merely libertine” those elements the dominant culture might find perverse (35).<sup>50</sup> So, the last thing I seek to find in Azure is innocence. Innocence is also the last thing he seeks for himself. While he refuses harder drugs like sniffing glue and taking acid because they do “terrible things to your body” (Duiker 3), he openly confesses to liking to “smoking ganja [marijuana], quite a lot actually” (2).

In addition, Azure often seeks older men who will pay him for sex. In his twelve years he has learned exactly what it takes to please men sexually. “I know,” he insists, “how to please a man. I’ve done this a thousand times” (Duiker 98). Interestingly enough, though, his sexual encounters with men, and the money he gains from it, are not simply about gaining the means for survival. In fact, within the first few pages of the novel when he alerts readers to the person he is, and how he goes about surviving the streets, he makes no mention of prostitution. As he describes,

---

<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, both Reid-Pharr’s and Warner’s discussions of innocence seem to rely on the adult/child dynamic which underlines so much of postcolonial discourse. Where Reid-Pharr uses “communities” and “leaders,” Warner discusses “dominant” and “outside” cultures. Such logic only serves to emphasize the importance of the trope of the child.

“I sleep in Sea Point near the swimming pool because it’s the safest place to be at night. In town there are too many pimps and gangsters. I don’t want to make my money like them” (3). Like his body, he is obsessed with his means of survival being clean. He states that he makes his money, more respectfully by “help[ing] park cars in Cape Town” (3). “I work,” he notes, “near a takeaway shop called Subway” (4). With this money he buys “half a loaf of white bread with chips and Coke,” along with his marijuana (4). He meets men on the beach (8), while leaving the flats of recent tricks (11), and at the park (32), but, notably, he never he speaks of his moments with men as work.

On a certain level, these sexual exchanges enact Edelman’s contention that true queerness rejects notions of reproductive futurism—that is, they reject the notion that sex should be aimed towards producing more than acts and sensual pleasures. The question remains of what Azure seeks in these sexual encounters. It can be said that he is neither seeking a father figure (he only spends enough time with the men to “get the job done”), nor money for survival (at most, he uses his money to buy ice cream and a jacket). Not only is the notion of the child ejected from these sexual encounters, the encounters themselves are not predicated upon (re)producing a means for survival—at most, he buys additional shirts and some shoes with these earnings. On another level, these sexual exchanges function as a source of discovery for his own erotic pleasures. If, as Lorde contends, we find our erotic pleasures at the limits of what we are willing to accept, Azure’s sexual experiences prove instructive. It is through these encounters that he learns about adults in an intimate way. He then takes this knowledge and uses it as the foundation for what he will no longer settle for. In short, Azure’s sexual encounters demonstrate his erotic power is not solely defined by or through sex and sexuality. Sex and sexuality, instead, become parts of a larger, more encompassing erotic power.

While Evan Maina Mwangi contends that “the sexual abuse of [Azure] at the hands of sodomites . . . indicates subtly that the victim might have to eventually accept homosexuality as his sexual orientation” (219), I argue that Azure refuses such a simplistic formulation. Much like Fanon’s footnote, in which he refuses to give the black queer over to the “neurotic homosexuality” of the white European (Black Skin 180, fn 44), Azure refuses to equate his behaviors with that of the “moffies”<sup>51</sup> with whom he sleeps. Azure never describes his own sexual pleasures. And while this is a queer absence given the frankness of his discussions of sex, it also, as Lorde asserts, helps to open space for a reading of erotic pleasure as more than just physical pleasure. Without a doubt, the fact that he is still a child and yet so brazenly catalogs his sexual excursions is a significant queering of the notion of the child. As Lee Edelman and Kathryn Bond Stockton, among countless others, assert, children are afforded no sexuality. At most they are considered beings “who ‘will be’ straight.”<sup>52</sup> Desire is a concept not typically associated with the child itself, but with who—or what—the child “will be” at some foreseeable (ironically, read desirable) point in the future. This potential for becoming straight, Stockton argues, is always “approaching while crucially delaying (in [their] own asynchronous fix) the official destination of straight sexuality, and therefore showing [themselves] as estranged from what [they] would approach” (Stockton 7). However, Azure, through both his narration of his sexual exploit(ation)s and through his refusal to claim a sexual identity, forces us to reconnect the two concepts in rather complicated—if not

---

<sup>51</sup> William Spurlin has noted that, much like “queer” and “gay” in the West, the term “moffie” has been “reclaimed as a term of empowerment” by (mostly white) queer South African queers (20). Therefore, in this sense, rather than simply reading Azure’s declaration that he is “not a moffie” (Duiker 171) might be read as a rejection of a specific identity—an identity that comes with certain privileges and exploitive behaviors with which he feels no connection.

<sup>52</sup> While queer theorists have recently begun exploring the overtly queer structure of the child (both as a concept, and as individually and socially lived lives), Western organizations such as the conservative Family First Foundation, or the Westboro Baptist Church more covertly imply a lack of child sexuality. Operating under the argument that discussions of homosexuality have no place in educational or public settings (where public is expanded to include the media), these organizations rally against any visible queerness. Likewise, in nations such as Nigeria, Uganda, Iran, etc., similar arguments have been used to justify the rejection of gay rights. For more of a discussion of this, see my chapter two, which deals with homosexuality and tradition.

uncomfortable—ways. Even if Azure were to claim a hetero-sexuality, there is no “going back,” so to speak, to an untainted, pure heterosexual identity. Nonetheless, he never expresses any remorse for this loss, even if he never expresses a desire to find a queer sexual identity. In this way, to an extent, Azure’s sexuality is freed from the mandate to be defined as he narrates through, not back to, his own desires. In other words, against the typical retrospective adult narrator who tells us about his or her childhood from their now more fully understood queer identity, Azure’s queerness shows us that he is not queer because *he* sees himself as such but, rather, because *we* see him.<sup>53</sup> He does not label himself a homosexual—that moniker is given to the adults against which he exists. He is, in other words, a child playing around—innuendos intended.

Xavier Livermon, in the vein of Michael Warner and others, argues, in “Queer(y)ing Freedom: Black Queer Visibilities in Postapartheid South Africa,” that queerness can only effectively challenge heteronormativity if queers and queerness engage in the “cultural labor” of making explicit nonheteronormative behaviors (Livermon 300). In arguing that the freedoms queers seek can only be found once they make themselves both politically *and* socially visible, Livermon carries the torch of a queer theory that finds queer that which is “able, more or less articulately, to challenge the common understanding of what gender difference means, or what the state is for, or what ‘health’ entails, or what would define fairness, or what a good relation to the planet’s environment would be” (Warner xiii).<sup>54</sup> However, freedom, or change, is not only won

---

<sup>53</sup> I will return to this point, below. However, at this point, I will say that it seems an important function of Azure’s story rests in its unfolding, rather than refolding. If it is important for us to know, at the start of the novel, that Azure has different, or queer, eyes (blue eyes in his dark black body), we must ask why. One answer to this, as I am attempting to articulate in this chapter, is because his perspective, in all of its already queer properties, forces us as readers to queer our own seeings, our own approaches to what we are being led to see: a child queering the world in which he lives.

<sup>54</sup> To be fair, Livermon’s argument separates itself from arguments such as Warner’s by emphasizing a localized visibility over a more national one. Speaking about black gay South African communities, he argues that *beyond* pushing for the state to recognize the presence of black queers, black queers should be working to make their own communities recognize their presences, *and* should work towards changing the general connection of blackness to

when and if queers “bring dissident sexualities and gender nonconformity into the public arena” (Livermon 300) by openly speaking, and/or identifying, and/or voting, and/or displaying, and/or lobbying—or even by working on a more localized scale, making their specific (ethnic, class, etc.) communities aware of their presences. Freedoms can be, and are created in those moments when the unspeakable doesn’t need to be spoken. Or, as Lorde argues, freedom can be understood as beginning from within the individual when s/he embraces and lives for her erotic pleasures. In other words, freedom beginning from one’s intimate desires and pleasures also has the ability to queer the social—and political—as one begins to enact his pleasures, in the gestures one makes towards the fulfillment of her desires. This is the sense of queer “speaking” I suggest of Azure. His aim is not to march in the streets against institutional corruption. It is simply to walk the streets the way he wants to (Duiker 167).

And, lest I be accused of political naïveté, I will make it clear that I am not arguing that “loud” queerings are without their purpose. As I mention in previous chapters, I fully agree that important gains are made by those who actively and visibly fight the good fight against social and political oppressions. However, it seems to me that emphasizing the visible over the more clandestine—or the “loud” over the “soft,” as I will refer to them—queerings seems to diminish the works done beneath the social and political veils, if you will. In seeking to fulfill his own erotic pleasures, Azure performs gestures of “soft” queering, not challenging institutions, but individuals with whom he has intimate (proximate) contact.<sup>55</sup> It seems to me that visibility, as argued by individuals such as Livermon and Warner, amongst others, rests on the notion that someone

---

heteronormativity. Nonetheless, much like Warner’s argument, Livermon’s notion of queerness still seems to take for granted the overt presence and recognition of black queers and their actions.

<sup>55</sup> I prefer the modifiers “loud” and “soft” over “visible” and “invisible” because the latter suggests a sort of non-existence. To say, for instance, that Azure’s queering is “invisible” would risk raising the almost visceral question of “Well, how can you tell it is happening?” “Soft,” on the other hand, conveys a detectable presence.

externally is looking in on the community. As Epprecht makes clear in much of his writing (which I explore in more detail in chapter two)—as do gay writers such as Essex Hemphill and Joseph Beam—there seems to be a distinction between what the community knows and tacitly permits, and what the outside onlooker knows or is permitted to see. With such a recognition, it becomes clear that those “soft” queerings, as I will call them because they refuse the publicity of more explicit queerings, do just as much to queer the lived context and experiences of the community as “loud” queerings do to queer the discursive images of the community. For instance, when Epprecht notes that families looked the other way when a boy, or later a husband who has carried his boyhood relationship into adulthood, engages in sexual relations with a member of the same sex (even when done so out in public), he seems to implicitly suggest a queered notion of not only community but of knowing, of marriage, of sex, of time, and of belonging (of who does and does not belong to such a system of things—to the community itself).<sup>56</sup>

Azure moves beyond simply finding pleasure in the present moment. He projects his pleasure into the future as a way of maintaining equilibrium in a world turned upside down. In this sense, as a postcolonial child figure, Azure serves to sidestep postcolonial attempts to “return” to a past unaffected by the present. History becomes another part of his-story, part of his present *and* his future. Though he reconnects with historical figures, such as Saartjie (Sarah) Baartman, he is unaware of their historical weight. He encounters and engages them in the force of how they present themselves to him in his present moment. This mixing of temporalities allows him to gain a surety of self after so many people have tried—often literally—to kill both his present and future. For instance, after fleeing Gerald, Azure finds himself alone on a mountain. While on the

---

<sup>56</sup> This can also be seen in the novel itself. While characters like Vincent and Gerald all seem to possess intimate knowledge of Azure’s life on the street, no one ever mentions his sexual encounters with other men (either as a way to ridicule or demean him, or as a simple acknowledgement of what he does).

mountain, he not only gains a chance to heal, to “cleanse” himself (Duiker 122), but also a chance to enact his inner joys.

I come out in the sun. I lay my clothes on a rock and go below to get some wood. I feel happy and miss nothing. I don't feel hunger and I don't feel thirst. I just feel myself. I feel strong. I jump from one rock to another like a buck, a small buck. But I am careful. I shake out my ankle and think of Gerald. He thought he was going to destroy me. I'll give him fire. I'll give him destruction. I'll give them all destruction, I say and start gathering wood. I take the dead ones, the ones that look grey and white from too much drying in the sun. They will burn easily, I say, and leave the brown ones. It is hard work carrying them up and down and through the tunnel but I enjoy it. I work silently. For the first time I work like I know what I am doing. I don't think too much. I choose wisely...I pick the ones I like, the ones that look like something. I carry back arms, legs, bodies, birds, elephants, monsters with many arms and legs and other things. I even see one that looks like a head with a long neck. I pile them outside the cave. (125-26)

If Lorde argues erotic power as an “internal sense of satisfaction” which allows us “to demand the most from ourselves,” as offering something to which we can aspire, Azure's gestures evidence the fulfillment of such internalized aspirations. In his gestures, we find Azure taking pleasure in making the present what he wants. We find him demonstrating that in order to make our pleasures manifest, we must destroy those obstacles that block our way. In other words, pleasure and destruction necessitate one another. Moreover, in the hands of a child, this combination becomes all the more potent because it walks the line between play and seriousness, muddling the two, dirtying purity while (at least partially) cleansing corruption. More importantly, Azure finds his



pleasure while in a self-imposed isolation. It is not simply the destruction he relishes; this instance of destruction is so sweet for him because it is all his own. Nothing but his inner voice has told him to carry out these actions. And he arises from this fire ritual a changed individual. After descending the mountain, he finds Sealy who informs him of Gerald's recent death and who beseeches Azure to take Gerald's place. Azure refuses. He wants no part in continuing any legacy—"My mother is dead. My father is dead," he repeats one last time (Duiker 190). In the end, it turns out, all he wants really is the freedom to "walk the streets the way [he] like[s]" (167) as he has recently discovered. In ways, Shaun Viljoen is correct to note that "Azure is remarkably similar to Okri's exceptional spirit child Azaro in *The Famished Road*" and that "the Nigerian's negotiation of realist and surrealist styles clearly inspired the young South African [Duiker]" (xxi). But unlike Ben Okri's Azaro, Azure is no abiku. There is no return to the spirit world for him. Nor is there a desire for "the liberty of limitations," as Azaro wants (Okri 487). Azure survives, and seeks to survive in the land of the living, but not with a desire for limitations. In the end, his mother and father are dead, but he is not. He has arisen from the wreckage having "seen the center of darkness" and having "seen the slave-driver of darkness," who "is a mad bastard" (Duiker 190). But he rises a victor—"I know his secrets. I know what he does when we sleep," he stresses (190)—heading into a future that is his alone. In the end, he chooses to return to the mountain alone, where he has a vision of the remainder of the city being burned by rains of fire.

Dismissing Azure's pleasure and actions as those of a childish boy would miss the power of Azure's character. Azure is a queer child indeed—and his queerness goes beyond simply queering the sexual economies of the child. Within the first few paragraphs of the novel, Azure establishes his own queerness as a child in control of his own story. At the start of the novel, we find out that Azure is a dark skinned boy with blue eyes, who is "nearly thirteen years old," and is

alone on the streets of Sea Point, an affluent suburb of Cape Town. But these elements of his queerness seem to pale, though they do not lose their significance, in comparison to his most queer feature: the acute vision granted by both his blue eyes and dark skin, and his youth and isolation. “My name is Azure. Ah-zoo-ray. That’s how you say it” (1). In relation to this barely thirteen-year-old, the adult reader becomes the students.<sup>57</sup> The first lesson is how to not mispronounce “Azure,” and how to not misrepresent who or what he is. He tells us exactly what we must know about him, exactly in the order we must know it: his name, his important physical qualities, his path. In the procession of these proclamations, all that remains is for us to follow him, and his journey—for us to see behind his experiences. Moreover, the present-tense of the narrative aids in the process of queering into which Azure draws us. Unlike many other postcolonial novels written from the perspective of a child, such as Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* or Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, *Thirteen Cents* draws us forward in time, not backwards. So, rather than attempt a return, in which we would have a grown Azure remembering moments in his youth, we are propelled forward with Azure, entering a future that has not yet happened, that is not yet known. We are not privileged to a distanced retrospection; we are subjected to a life as it unfolds in, and folds time. The distance between the unknown—that which has not yet been revealed—and the unknowable—that which cannot be determined—collapse. In the rubble exists the seeds of new possibilities. If it was argued that *Beloved* queers the notion of return by coming back as a haunting presence who holds the present hostage to the past, Azure furthers this queering by refusing any return, *and* by refusing to settle as either child or adult.

In fact, demonstrating remarkable acuity throughout his narrative. For example, his aforementioned turn to the mountain displays an understanding of his own powers and limitations.

---

<sup>57</sup> Despite the simple diction and syntax, this is not a story written for children—as the frank discussions of sex, drugs, and prostitution demonstrate.

Although destruction is his goal, he decides to enact a symbolic destruction rather than repeat the cycle of physical violence he constantly witnesses. Most importantly, unlike other famous child protagonists (e.g. Salinger's Holden Caulfield; Selvadurai's Amrith; Dangarembga's Tamu; etc.) who share a similar alertness, Azure refuses the boundaries offered to him: both the childish boy figure and the grown-up adult figure. In doing so, rather than simply calling into question single poles, he calls into question an entire social system. Addressing his youthful status, he assures us that he couldn't be further from a boy:

I'm not a boy. I know I'm thirteen but I'm not a boy. On the street boys my age support their families. They give their mothers money so that they can buy drugs and feed them nothing. They break into cars and steal small change from dashboards...They mug old ladies and buy buttons [drugs]. And when they are fucked out of their faces they cry about it till [sic] snot drips like water.

A boy? I'm not a boy. I've seen a woman being raped by policemen at night near the station. I've seen a white man let a boy Bafana's age get into his car. I've seen a couple drive over a street child and they still kept going...A boy? Fuck off. They must leave me alone. I have seen enough rubbish to fill the sea. I have been fucked by enough bastards and they've come on me with enough come to fill the swimming pool in Sea Point...I just want to be left alone. I just want to be able to walk the streets the way I like...I don't want to walk around being frightened all the time. (Duiker 166-67)

Azure is not a boy. Boys do things without purpose, and he possesses too much awareness for such foolishness. Boys, he tells us, are unprepared and unable to handle life's challenges without being overwhelmed. Azure is not a boy. He is "boyant," floating on the horizon between a past that never

was and a future that is always a gesture away. Throughout the novel, one particular child receives Azure's attention, offering an instructive point of contrast: Bafana, the nine-year-old who looks up to Azure as a sort of parental-/brotherly-figure (though Azure openly rejects such a role). Azure is quick to remind himself, "I'm not his father" (7), before he can be accused of being a parental figure—an adult. Still, he refuses to leave the boy completely to his own devices and can't help but let the "laaitie . . . [get] under [his] armpit, under [his] soft spot" (7). Yet, once again, he emphasizes the difference between his position and the position(s) of boys like Bafana as he tells himself he must not get too attached because he's "seen too many kids die and disappear" (7). But a distinction is made to prevent the collapsing of their ages. In contrast to himself, Bafana is

only nine years old and he's on the streets. And he is naughty. He has a home to go back to in Langa but he chooses to roam the streets. He likes sniffing glue and smoking buttons when he has money. I don't like that stuff, it makes my head sore...Now Bafana when he smokes glue and buttons he becomes an animal, really. He starts grunting and doesn't speak much and he messes his pants. So whenever I see him smoking that stuff I beat him. (2)

In addition to the drugs, Bafana also enjoys befriending white kids, who "look rich and bored with their money," seeking "the whole experience unedited" of his and Azure's world (24-25). Neither of these interest Azure. He might be homeless, but he has other plans for his time.<sup>58</sup> More importantly, as expressed above, Azure finds Bafana too young for the complex economies of sex with men. Accordingly, Azure refuses to invest energy or emotional stock in boys like Bafana

---

<sup>58</sup> Although he never specifies any concrete future goals, I do not read this as a failure, or as a lack of "fulfilling his erotic pleasures." I read this as quite the opposite, in fact. Starting from Muñoz's reading of gestures (as being undefined, or not having finite points), I read the openness of Azure's future—a future towards which he move—as an example of Lorde's contention that the erotic pleasure is always a matter of knowing what you want, but of knowing what you don't want. In other words, while we are never given concrete clues of Azure's goals (other than to walk without fear [Duiker 167]), we are constantly shown precisely what he doesn't want. And it is from this knowledge of what he doesn't want that he moves towards his future.

because he has “seen too many kids die and disappear” (7-8). The only glimpses we are given of children in the “traditional,” or “expected” sense of the word—children unencumbered by the burden of survival—occur when Azure reflects on public spaces such as in the streets, where he *observes* them “running down the street playing soccer” (59). Yet even in this (or especially in this, considering he watches them from a rooftop where he is being held hostage by Gerald’s minions), there is a sense of “I am not [like] them” in his tone. Azure only ever observes other children; he never plays with them, or interacts with them for any extended periods of time.

Further standing to emphasize his refusal of the “boy” position, we are given Azure’s “only connection in Cape Town” (113): Vincent, a slightly older homeless youth from Mshenguville and Azure’s closest friend/adviser/confidant. Unlike the voyeuristic white teens who attempt to enlist Azure as a “guide” into the city’s street life so they can “get the whole experience unedited” (25), Azure looks up to Vincent, who “always looks out for [him],” seeing Vincent as his eyes (109).

To quote Azure:

He’s [Vincent is] my connection. The only one I have in Cape Town. Without him I’ll have no one. And everyone has a connection, even if it’s just one person in the whole word [sic]...I think of Vincent as my eyes. He’s older than me. He’s seen more, done more. I don’t think anything scares him any more [sic]. Everything seems to make sense to him. Vincent, he’s grown-up but not like the others. He doesn’t bullshit. He just says it like it is. And sometimes it isn’t pretty. But that doesn’t worry him. He just stays Vincent, Mandla; the guy I grew up with in Mshenguville. He’s all right, Vincent. He always looks out for me. All the things he tells me, they help me. They help me become like him, a man, a grown-up. (109)

Vincent is also the one who advises Azure that he “must try and work around [himself]” (40). Understanding that others covet and are unnerved by his blue eyes, he instructs Azure to “be the blackest person” (40). And when Azure misunderstands, objecting that his dark skin should indicate his blackness, Vincent corrects him: “I mean you have to be more black . . . like more black than all of us” (40, ellipses in original). “That’s why,” he concludes, “people have beat you up all your life. They think you’re not black enough” (40). In other words, in contrast to Azure, Vincent is seen as a destination to which Azure does not see himself having arrived.

But if not a boy, can we safely position him as an adult? Commenting on the power of his character in the formation of a new postapartheid South African identity, Viljoen asserts that “Azure’s position as a twelve-year-old who turns thirteen in the novel situates him on the threshold of the world of adults and subjects him to the rites of passage that induct him into particular forms of adulthood—in this case a particularly exploitive, destructive social order” (ix). However, while I share Viljoen’s assessment of Azure as between worlds, I argue that, rather than gesturing “the rites of passage” which will “induct him into particular forms of adulthood,” Azure rejects what is offered in favor of forging his own world. In addition to rejecting the status of boy, he rejects a “grown-up” status. His experiences with “grown-ups” are exploitive and destructive. Joyce turns cruel and vengeful when he returns asking to withdraw his deposits.

In the adult figures of Allen and Gerald, Azure finds an over emphasis on the value of money and power. After paying for a pair of shoes, and being told to return several days later, Allen swindles Azure, substituting a pair of flip-flops for the sneakers he had already paid for, and threatens Azure when he attempts to protest the deal. Allen, Azure notices, always want to look better than others so that he can emphasize his distinction. As Azure puts it, Allen “always gives me clothes that are just about to fall apart, so that I’m always dependent on him. So that I will

always go back to him for more and spend my money on him” (Duiker 18). But, each time, Azure is aware of what is to come from his exchanges, he continues, “I understand” (18). Gerald, however, presents the greatest example of what Azure does not want (to become). The combination of Gerald’s god-complex, racism, and intense jealousy of Azure’s blue eyes prove a volatile mix, and often lead to Gerald physically attempting to kill Azure (Duiker 20-21; 118-19). Gerald not only has Azure beaten for mistaking him for one of his black subordinates (44-47), he also orders his men to rape and imprison him (Duiker 52-67). Later attributing his actions to instructing Azure how to “understand everything so that [he] could live” (83), he, nonetheless, attempts to kill Azure when he feels Azure to be challenging his power by wearing a color (orange) that Gerald had instructed him was for him alone (118-19). Each of the adult figures Azure encounters seems to take some odd pleasure in the pain and suffering they inflict. This is something that Azure, despite his acuity, never seems to fully understand—or want to understand.

The world of “grown-ups” is not what he longs to enter. Their pleasures are not what he desires. Though he “knows their games” (Duiker 9), he never quite displays a reverence for them. Their methods are cruel and manipulative, their pleasures perverse and painful. He gleans neither moments of fulfillment, nor gestures towards utopias from their actions—only more promises of a continued dystopic state. The most noticeable threshold across which he steps is the line dividing mild annoyance and pure disgust. Early in the novel, he understands grown-ups as liking cleanliness (3), as desiring deference and politeness from (colored) subordinates (3), and as liking children to smile (9). By the end of the novel, he decries grown-ups as evil and exploitive, lamenting that “grown-ups are evil and they use you and they use their children to use you” (167). Rather than as a mark of immaturity, one gets the sense that his employment of the term “grown-up” signals his recognition that these seemingly adult figure are little more than children who have,

literally, only grown upwards.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps these adult figures serve as warnings for those who no longer live with children in mind.

In a strange twist, Vincent (Azure's teenage friend) is the one person Azure calls a "grown-up" without a sense of bitterness in his tone. Unlike the other adult figures, Vincent "always looks out for" Azure (109). Floating in and out of Azure's narrative, Vincent offers Azure the wisdom and advice he has gained from his own life and experiences on the streets, information Azure digests willingly. If, according to Azure, "everyone has a connection, even if it's just one person in the whole world" (109), Vincent is Azure's. Orphaned at the age of nine, by the brutal murder of his parents, and abandoned by relatives who "don't care about [him] anyway" (105), Vincent remains Azure's single friend, his "eyes" (109), his "big brother" (115).<sup>60</sup> Yet, Vincent ultimately leaves Azure, further emphasizing the boy's orphan status, and the need for him to find his own way.

It may appear that, in situating Azure between the child and the adult, I have complicated my argument. That is to say, if, according to his own declarations, he is not a boy, how can the argument that he provides an example of a child's erotic power be maintained? But I hope, throughout, I have made clear that Azure is no simple boy. This is not to say, however, that he does not recognize his lack of access to certain "adult" privileges and systems (hence Joyce's role as his banker). During a dream conversation with the unrecognized Baartman, he is told of her T-Rex husband who is devouring Cape Town's population. Fearing being eaten, Azure inquires,

---

<sup>59</sup> Here, I refer to Stockton's concept of directional growth as she argues for an understanding of queer children's capacity for "sideways" growth (4).

<sup>60</sup> I have avoided reading sexual desire *into* Azure's homosocial bond with Vincent because I fear that such a reading would only result in my making Azure speak what he otherwise refuses. While it is clear that Azure has a great affinity for Vincent, it is not as clear if this affection carries with it traces of sexual desire. Azure makes no comments on Vincent's physicality (other than one queer instance when he reflects on "playing house" with neighboring girls when he and Vincent were younger, and the girls being afraid to "go to bed with Vincent" because his "thing was go big" [Duiker 172]), nor does he express a desire for physical intimacy.



“Does he eat children?” (Duiker 141), demonstrating a general understanding of himself.<sup>61</sup> But, nowhere are we to read “child/ren” as “youthful” not immature or inexperienced. In demonstrating that he is both equipped to handle the traumas of (his) life and mature enough to understand himself as anything but an innocent victim, he becomes precisely what we expect an adult to look like. Yet his childish body keeps him on the outside of such systems. Still, there is no sense of a lost innocence in his tale, nor does he undergo a journey to reclaim (his) innocence. He is content to continue down his own path; his only desire—the pleasure he discovers—rests in being left alone to make his way. This is what I find most instructive for postcolonial societies battling Western infantilizing. The power of the child figure is its potential for and promise of growth. An embrace of both that potential and promise, combined with an endeavoring to find one’s own way, apart from the given models, might offer a productive means of furthering the efforts of decolonization.

So, while on the surface, *Thirteen Cents* tells the story of a twelve-year-old orphaned boy struggling to survive amongst the streets of Cape Town, Azure transcends this simplistic reading. Azure is more than a boy struggling to survive; he is a boy who recognizes his own “boyancy,” if you will, and refuses to surrender. He refuses to be crushed, or rushed in his development. My choice of spelling here is intentional. Azure agitates with his unrelenting gaze which, on the one hand constantly separates himself from the world of “grown-ups” while, on the other hand, constantly functioning with a level of acuteness not expected of a child—especially a twelve-year-old black orphan who never completed school—unless it comes from the voice the child’s “backward birth” (Stockton 6). In his presence, in the present tense of his narrative Azure queers

---

<sup>61</sup> Coincidentally, she responds, “Yes, *he eats everything*” (Duiker 141, my emphasis), once again flattening the relationship between the child and the adult.

us grown-up readers by having us queerly follow a child who queerly experiences his environment. Gazing forward, through the blue eyes of this child, we begin to queer.<sup>62</sup>

To be clear, I have made no moves to privilege the child. Rather, borrowing from Eve Sedgwick, I have aimed to “explore some ways around the topos of depth or hiddenness, typically followed by a drama of exposure, that has been such a staple of critical work of the past” (Sedgwick 8), by moving the child *beside* the adult. Revisiting the figure of the child, I have attempted to tease out its potential for producing a queer figure capable of moving around the binary logic of the adult and child—a dynamic still plaguing much of the postcolonial world. Following Muñoz, I have examined the trope of the child as a way of arriving at a queer moment in which old histories are no longer recycled. Rather than resisting the figure of the child, I have argued that new paths towards postcolonial fulfillment might be best served by embracing, and reworking that figure, by reevaluating the child’s erotic power. In the boy character, Azure, I find a queerness that neither demands recognition, nor attempts to assimilate into non-queer existences, but seeks, instead, fulfillment based on one’s own erotic pleasures. If Stockton looks to the queer child as a way to uncover the limits of the child, and thus adult (3), I have looked to the figure of the queer postcolonial child as a way to dis-cover the limits of colonial “thingification” (Césaire 42). Azure agitates with his unrelenting gaze, which is aimed not at fulfilling historically defined trajectories but at finding and living according to his own pleasures. Ultimately, he teaches us we would be well-served to remember that not only is the future the stuff of kids, but so is the present; and that, it is not so much about our need to grow as it is about how we are growing.

---

<sup>62</sup> Here I mean to suggest, as Janet R. Jakobsen does, that queer should be thought of “not only as a nonessential identity but as a verb,” or “if as an identity at all, then as an identity of doing rather than being” (516). What we queer is still in need of an answer. As is who we are that queer and what types of bodies can queer?

## CHAPTER FOUR

QUEER OBJECT(ION)S IN THE POSTCOLONY:  
 LETTING OBJECTS SPEAK IN SILENT PLACES

Öjĩ luo ünö okwuo ebe osi bia

(When the Kola nut reaches home, it will tell where it came from”)

Igbo proverb

In every headline we are reminded that this is not home for us

Bloc Party, “Where Is Home?”

In 2007, the British indie rock band, Bloc Party, released their sophomore album, *A Weekend in the City*. Unlike their debut album, *Silent Alarm*, which set themes of youthful hope and anxieties to a popish drum and guitar rhythms, *A Weekend in the City* is, as Craig McLean notes, an “unflinchingly honest depiction of a world of drugs, racism, religion, suicide, gay sex, violence, youth in hoodies and white vigilantes. This is London, it says, and this is now.” As Kele Okereke, the band’s lead singer and main lyricist, states, “One of the things I was most disappointed about with *Silent Alarm* was I was hiding behind abstraction” (qtd. in McLean). And from a band fronted by Kele Okereke, a son of Nigerian immigrants, such an “unflinchingly honest depiction” speaks volumes. In order to speak its honesty, Okereke fills it with objects, letting those objects speak what the society and its inhabitants refuse to utter.

One song in particular funnels the album’s honesty, frustration, anxieties, and rage through the circulation of objects: “Where Is Home?”<sup>63</sup> Okereke describes the core of the song as being

---

<sup>63</sup> I set this song apart from other songs on the album that deal with “speaking objects” because of its postcolonial specificity. In contrast to “I Still Remember,” which uses objects such as boys’s ties and trousers to say “what [a boy] couldn’t say aloud” (Okereke, qtd in McLean), “SXRT,” which circulates around an anti-depression pill

“about the fostering, by right-wing newspapers, of a fear of ‘The Other’. That is, black youth in hoodies. And how that then means opportunities denied” (McLean). As suggested by the song, it is not the citizens—beyond those abjected few who openly declare their disdain for immigrant bodies—who alert the immigrants and their children of their queerness in the society; rather, it is the headlines. Immigrants find the truth about their place within the stories of “what they d[o] to the black boy[s]” (Bloc Party, *A Weekend in the City*) or the warnings of foreigners “taking our women and taking our jobs” (Bloc Party).

In this chapter, I am interested in tracing connections between postcolonial queernesses, objects, and “the ordinary.”<sup>64</sup> More specifically, I am interested in exploring how everyday postcolonial queer enactments gesture towards forms of queer identity that are not necessarily founded on largescale group or political identities (e.g. “gay”; “lesbian”; “butch”; etc.) and how these identities resist the demands for politicizing themselves typically placed on marginalized identities. It is my contention that, in an effort navigate daily legal, social, cultural, and economic (to name a few) oppressions within their nations, postcolonial queers engage in practices of “making do,” “introduce[ing] *artistic* tricks and competitions of *accomplices* into a system that reproduces and partitions” images of a healthy national identity (Certau 29, original emphases). The queer enactments of “making do” often depend on non-human accomplices just as much as, if not more than, they do human accomplices.<sup>65</sup> Sara Ahmed makes a similar point when she argues that our emotions make accomplices of objects in order to enact their fulfillment. According to

---

(Seroxat), or “7:18,” which finds a metro train speaking for a longing to move in a society that is stuck, “Where Is Home?” refuses to cloak its concerns in a veil of social universality. The song not only localizes the terror and pain experienced by a group of immigrants and their descendants, but also makes explicit the convergence of race and conflicting desires in a poignantly diasporic lament that screams of postcolonial tensions.

<sup>64</sup> Henceforth, I will no longer enclose these terms in quotation marks.

<sup>65</sup> I would like to clarify that, I speak of “postcolonial queers” as a monolithic whole as a way to simplify my discussion. I am in no way suggesting that all postcolonial queers have the same experiences or relationships with objects. I hope to diversify queer experiences through the various short stories I use.

Ahmed, “happiness functions as a promise that directs us toward certain objects, which then circulate as social goods” (Ahmed 29). Where the presence of human accomplices is often recognized as a possibility—such as in the anti-gay bill proposed in Uganda, which proposes penalties for (assumedly heterosexual) individuals who *secretly* “harbor” knowledge of *active* homosexuals—the presence of non-human accomplices often goes unremarked upon. Yet, non-human accomplices often play a large role in creating the very possibilities of such queer enactments.

Taking after Lauren Berlant, Kathleen Stewart “tries to slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate” us (Stewart 4), arguing for an understanding of “the ordinary” as “a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life” (Stewart 1). Within “the ordinary” she finds “ordinary affects,” which

are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences. They’re things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *something*. (1-2, emphasis in original)

“Rooted,” she continues, “not in fixed conditions of possibility but in the actual lines of potential that a *something* coming together calls to mind and sets in motion, they can be seen as both the pressure points of events or banalities suffered and the trajectories that forces might take if they

were to go unchecked” (2, emphasis in original). And, rather than attempting “meanings,” “they pick up density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds” (3). They are

[l]iterally moving things—things that are in motion and that are defined by their capacity to affect and to be affected—they have to be mapped through different, coexisting forms of composition, habituation, and event. They can be “seen,” obtusely, in circuits and failed relays, in jumpy moves and the layered textures of a scene. They surge or become submerged. They point to the jump of something coming together for a minute and to the spreading lines of resonance and connection that become possible and might snap into sense in some sharp or vague way. (4)

Through Stewart’s reading of “ordinary affects,” the ordinary fragments and becomes an impossible (w)hole. In the place of a singular, heterogeneous ordinary, diffuse and shifting ordinaries are brought to the surface. In his text, *A Sense of Things*, Bill Brown similarly observes how objects “surge or become submerged” in their ordinary-ness, especially as they come to relate human identity. Brown’s argument on the role of the object in Mark Twain’s *The Prince and the Pauper*, in particular, highlights the relationship between objects and human identity and the threat of the ordinary as it relates to objects. Focusing on the “coronation crisis,” Brown notes how “the throne hangs on ‘so trivial a thing’” as the lost seal, and that the crisis of this lost object “suggests how arbitrary, how irrational if unconditional, is the differentiation of the doubles, one from another” (Brown 40). If the boys’ (the prince’s and his doppelganger, the pauper’s) bodies can only be distinguished by the metaphysical knowledge of an absent object, the seal, “the ‘trivial thing’ that differentiates the boys . . . might thus be said to materialize the immaterial excess that differentiates a royal body from its brute physicality, the aura that is at once absent yet present: the

royalty, phantasmaically transmitted by blood, that is in fact metaphysical, neither blood nor bone” (40). In other words, it is the object that comes to stabilize the socially recognized—and socially approved—body of the king. But it is in the habituation of the everyday that allows such a stabilization to occur. Without the object to mediate the prince’s genealogy *and* the blanketing of the object’s ordinary presence (the anxiety arises when expectations of the objects presence are no longer met), the prince fails to exist as ruler. As Brown points out, it is not until the presence of the human twin is known that the connection between the prince’s body and the object becomes visible. Knowledge of the twinned body throws the identity of the prince into a confusion that can only be mediated by the prince’s knowledge of an inanimate object—the seal. Still, while both Stewart’s argument on “the ordinary” and on “ordinary affects” offers useful insight to the collectives we take as wholes, and Brown’s argument helps highlight the connection between objects and human identities they both seem to privilege the story of the objects over the objects that help form those stories. In other words, both arguments return us to a place where the discursive reigns supreme.

### **Object Accomplices**

I employ the phrase the ordinary as a way to work against the “big picture” of events most often labeled political (protests, rallies, petitioning, etc.). Drawing from Ben Highmore, I too read the ordinary as “the accumulation of ‘small things’ that constitute a more expansive but hard to register ‘big thing’” (Highmore 1). Things happen every day off the political battlefield that deserve recognition. As I have attempted to argue throughout this work, there are multiple ways to challenge social norms—politicized visibility is just one of those ways. Ben Highmore suggests that “the ordinary demands complexity because, at times, nothing is really in the foreground of

experience” (2). In the ordinary, thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and desires become “con-fused.”<sup>66</sup> Highmore seeks to counter an understanding of human experiences as necessitating clear beginning and end points. For instance, discussing Freud, Highmore notes that “[w]hen Freud claimed that chronic toothache and being in love were mutually incompatible...he was participating in an age-old understanding of human nature where one passion (pain) blocks out another (love)” (2). I, like Highmore, do not see ordinary experiences in such clearly defined terms.

Frantz Fanon offers a more radical example of the power held within this fragmentation of the ordinary. Explicating how French attempts to destabilize Algerian resistance to colonial French rule came, most dramatically, when the French began “concentrate[ing] their efforts on the [Algerian woman’s] wearing of the veil” (*Dying Colonialism* 37), Fanon traces how Algerian practices and culture shifted, ultimately strengthening the resistance by allowing them a certain degree of control over the fragmentation of the ordinary, or everyday. As Fanon notes, “the absence of the veil distorts the Algerian woman’s corporal pattern. She quickly has to invent new dimensions for her body new means of muscular control. She has to create for herself an attitude of unveiled-woman-outside” (59). This call to reinvent her body allows her to “relearn[] her body, re-establish[] it in a totally revolutionary fashion” (59). Unveiled, the Algerian woman becomes able to subvert the everyday experiences of colonial Algerian life by more easily being able to sneak bombs into ordinary places. In her newly unveiled state, the female Algerian no longer draws attention to herself, thus allowing her to become one of many combatant weapons in the fight for liberation.

While, Penelope Ingram has astutely drawn attention to the ways this renegotiation calls into question the limits of representation (“Veiled Resistance”), I would like to point out how such

---

<sup>66</sup> Here, I am drawing on Highmore’s assertion that “con-fusion is the fusing together of disparate material in ways that aren’t reconciled into clear and discrete syntheses” (2).



renegotiation is predicated upon a relationship between the object and the everyday. Not only does Fanon demonstrate how, as Highmore suggests, the ordinary con-fuses senses and thoughts, but he relates how such con-fusion can become militant and dangerous. Still it cannot be ignored that such con-fusion also possesses liberatory qualities. The absences of the veil, the newly (re)discovered female Algerian body, an Algerian culture previously bound to a tradition of veiling, each serve as instances of liberation, even as they serve as instances of con-fusion and danger. None of these moments, however, become possible without drawing upon the relationship between the human and the object-veil.

In one sense, the (re)turn to Fanon might seem a bit strange or even contradictory if I am arguing that postcolonial queers do not always engage in overtly political acts of resistance. After all, Fanon's entire discussion of the veil is, both figuratively and literally, premised upon an exploding of the overt. Yet, it is also about making the covert, or, to use a term from thing and Object Oriented Ontology, the *withdrawn* the nature of postcolonial existence an active part of the ordinary. In these unveiled attacks, not only is the relationship between the human and the object rethought (if the Algerian woman had to relearn her body, she also had to relearn the object of the veil, *and* her relationship with that object), but so too are the relationships between the object and the everyday. However, Fanon's discussion points to the possible benefits of rethinking the relationship between postcolonial discourse and objects.

Even when they are related to liberationist struggles, objects have typically been posited "as passive stuff, as raw, brute, or inert" (Bennett vii), or as "composite things built of something more fundamental" (Harman 172).<sup>67</sup> If Fanon has ventured to read the veil as an object of

---

<sup>67</sup> Of course, in saying this I do not intend to ignore those who seek to invest objects with a certain power to "conjure up" sentiments and memories within us (e.g. a family heirloom, a piece of artwork, an engraved tree, etc.). However, it is often not the objects themselves that we see. Rather it is our past experiences projected onto those objects.

resistance, his reading has rested on the will of those humans who have struggled to remake the object—or lack thereof—work for them. Here, Levi Bryant’s argument for a “flat-ontology” proves instructive. According to Bryant, a flat-ontology holds that: (1.) there is no single entity from which all other entities originate, (2.) there is no such thing as *a* world, (3.) there is no privileged relationship between subjects and objects, and (4.) there is no one object, or objects that hold more value than other objects (Bryant 245-46). While the immediate connection between an object oriented, flat-ontology and a system in which the system’s entire economy is tied to creating “a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (Bhabha 101) might seem a stretch, I argue that the divide is a lot smaller than it might immediately appear.

While postcolonial discourse is interested in the discourse of the colonial situation, this discourse, much like Foucault’s discourses on discipline and sexuality, is a very corporeal discourse. In this discourse, bodies work to establish borders and make one responsible for “[his] body, for [his] race, for [his] ancestors” (Fanon 112) by “overdeterm[ing them] from without” (116). It should be recognized, however, that in order for Bryant’s theory to be effective and not work to further subjugate truly oppressed individuals, people would have to reconfigure the ways that they see not only the world, but their places within the world.

Such a reconfiguration, I argue, is a part of the everyday practices of postcolonial queers. Postcolonial queers queer this relationship with objects. Postcolonial queers queer the ordinary as they expose the agency often denied to objects. Reading Monica Arac de Nyeko’s “Jambula Tree,” To Molefe’s “Lower Main,” Rahiem Whisgary’s “The Filth of Freedom,” and Barbara Adair’s “A Boy is a Boy is a . . .,” I trace the ways in which objects become accomplices in expressing non-visible queer desires. In each of these stories, everyday, non-human objects assist in mediating

unspoken queer desires. As these objects assist in mediating the unspoken—or the unspeakable—they help present subtle shifts in the social economies in which they circulate. While words—those elusive intangible objects—seem the most obvious path for observing postcolonial queer speaking, words often, and for various reasons, fail. More often than not, in postcolonial spaces where certain words (such as “gay,” or “lesbian”) are not completely accurate or unavailable, objects allow for the most accurate forms of speaking.

Up to this point, I have rather obliquely discussed how postcolonial queers and their relationships with objects queer the normal. I will state the core of my argument more plainly: postcolonial queers queer the ordinary as they recognize, embraces, and embody the constant state of withdrawal in which objects exist. In general, queers are often more in tune with the queer nature of ordinary objects. Most queers recognize that objects are imbued with powers that lie outside of normal economies—in other words, queers often respond to objects has having the capacity “to impede or block the will and designs of humans” (Bennett viii). Such a relationship can be seen when queers comment on how a wrist belies a sexual orientation, or how a preferred toy risks betraying their infidelity to prescribed gender norms. Objects are also enlisted in speaking unspoken desire. This, for instance, can be glimpsed when José Muñoz recounts the horror he felt when a boy brought to his attention how he “pulled [his] books too close to [his] chest like a girl” (Muñoz 69). Although Muñoz’s main interest is in describing the gestures his body makes towards specific gendered performances, the relationship between these gestures, his feelings, and his queer being cannot be overlooked. It is the con-fusing of his gender infidelity with his books that together express what he himself had hitherto been unaware of. In other words, queer relationships with objects are often a mixture of anxiety, surrender, and vulnerability. There is often a great comfort taken in objects as they can become the sole bearers of one’s truth. Conversely, there is the threat

of objects wounding one by betraying one's secret. When one is fearful of being exposed, fearful of exposing that which society refuses, objects can join the list of potential betrayers of one's secret.

Much like the voices of minorities within the West, postcolonial voices are often homogenized and positioned as “representatives” of an entire ethnic—which is rendered as national—population. In her 2007 article, “Why Must Authors Be Tied to Their Ethnicity,” Crystal Mahey insists that “understanding literature in terms of a homogenized construct, whether it's ‘African,’ ‘south Asian’ or ‘British diaspora,’ can be limiting—and many differences including race, class, ethnicity, gender and generation in both the writing and the writers will be eclipsed under such umbrellas” (Mahey). However, in agreement with South African author Henrietta Rose-Innes, Mahey concedes, “the need to resign yourself to a label that effaces diversity, if one wants to reach a wide international audience, is a problem for a writers [sic] who want to explore areas not stereotypically understood as ‘African’”(Mahey). Concurring with this sentiment, Monica Arac de Nyeko states, “African literature is not properly in the British mainstream yet. The way it is perceived is very much still in the 1960s. As an African writer, if you are not writing about things like war and famine your authenticity is questioned” (qtd in Mahey). Of relevancy to this particular argument is the expectation of the notion of Africanness to deal with “war and famine” at the sacrifice of more personal concerns.

For postcolonial queers, relationships with objects can serve simultaneously to conceal or displace desire, and to disclose or bring nearer that very desire—by allowing the object to speak what the individual cannot. Relationships with objects become a means by which queer individuals queer their surroundings as these relationships impregnate the expected, or anticipated meanings of the ordinary—of ordinary things—with alternative, or unpredictable meanings and uses, tinging

those objects with seeds of queer desire. For instance, in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, which I discussed at length in my previous chapter, there was a proliferation of objects, all of which offer a chance to rethink the relationship between objects and queer postcolonial figures. Most notably, queer object relations can be glimpsed as Azure reflects on his in-between status:

But I'm not a boy. I know I'm thirteen but I'm not a boy. On the street boys my age support their families. They give their mothers money so that they can buy drugs and feed them nothing. They break into cars and steal small change from dashboards . . . They mug old ladies and buy buttons. And when they are fucked out of their faces they cry about it till [sic] snot drips like water. (167)

While, in my previous discussion of Azure and of this passage, I emphasized his boyancy—his floating between the child and the adult—here I would like to draw attention to how objects help him speak the unspeakable. The difference he notices circulates around how individuals relate to certain everyday—at least in his world—objects. According to Azure, boys are defined by their relation to money and drugs. Boys are made in relation to the objects that they acquire. They are made in their vandalism of cars, and they are separated from him by the “drips” of snot they let flow when they are messed over. Likewise, adults are defined by the objects they use. They use their children, they use women, and they use vehicles to run over the world (168). In other words, the only way for Azure to explain his own relation to that which he is not—a boy or a grown-up—is to allow those objects which circulate in the hands of boys to speak with him.

Similarly, and more specific to this chapter, in the stories upon which this chapter draws its material, queer relationships with objects not only help express queer desire, but also function to challenge systems of normativization. In Whisgary's “The Filth of Freedom,” a spent cigarette butt comes to represent the protagonist James Drummond's hidden queer desires. The cigarette

butt becomes an accomplice in representing not only Drummond's sexual desire for other men, as well as the truth behind the glossy middle-class white suburban South African society in which he lives. In Nyeko's "Jambula Tree," the jambula tree assists both in providing shelter to two girls' forbidden desire for one another, and in providing strength as they weather the fallout of those desires. Adair's "A Boy is a Boy is a..." enlists the aid of a train car to create a space in which desires can be enacted upon, in between states of familiarity and unfamiliarity. Finally, Molefe's "Lower Main" finds the protagonist's relationship with pictures speaking her hidden desires for her best friend. Ultimately, objects, in the spaces of these stories are neither personifications of human behaviors or characteristics, nor are they simple manifestations of something more fundamental. They are understood as having an agency of their own apart from the humans with whom they interact shine light on.

### **Things to Distract**

To Molefe's "Lower Main" narrates a reunion between two black South African lesbians, Dee, the story's narrator, and her friend, Madz. As story unfolds, the circumstances surrounding the end of Madz's recent relationship are disclosed, as well as Dee's unspoken desire for her friend. Set on the patio of a café on Lower Main road in Cape Town, the story continues the work of post-apartheid South African writing, offering an intimate image of black lesbian life within the nation.<sup>68</sup> Within the story, rather than aiding in the articulation of an unspoken desire, objects are enlisted in forestalling the articulation of such desire. Dee understands her feelings for her friend.

---

<sup>68</sup> The story's title is derived from the name of one of the main roads in the Cape Town neighborhood of Observatory. Described as "Cape Town's bohemian suburb," by Cape Town's tourism website, the area mixes both university culture (due to its close proximity to the University of Cape Town) and the arts (with its eclectic mix of music and art venues). Moreover, the area has historically been recognized for its more diverse mix of peoples—even during South African apartheid.

However, she resists following through with those desires, she resists the fulfilment of her desire. Objects become her way of not having to speak.

On one level, within Molefe's "Lower Main," a veiled sense of desire circulates through the channels of verbal disclosure (storytelling). While Dee and Madz convene to discuss the end of Madz's previous relationship with her presumably white ex-girlfriend, no clear articulation of desire comes of the conversation. The picture Madz paints of both her relationship and her breakup are in made in (post)modernist abstract motions. She speaks of the period in which she stopped bathing, losing track of time in the process, without being able to directly articulate the confusion and feelings of filth that arose in her while in her relationship. Paradoxically noting that "the longer [she] didn't shower, the clearer the memory of being clean became" (Molefe 58), Madz subtly reiterates the interracial tensions—both sexual and non-sexual—serving as the backbone for much of Molefe's story. While the story begins with Dee reflecting on her relationship with Madz before Madz "ran off to the southern suburbs" with her ex-girlfriend (Molefe 53), and the physical beauty of her friend, from which Dee must "tear [her] eyes away" (53), the flow of the narrative is constantly interrupted by Dee's observations of a heterosexual, white tourist couple walking up and down Lower Main road.

The interruption of the couple—or, perhaps more accurately put, Dee's deflection of her desires onto the movements of the couple—mirrors the tensions around interracial relationships in contemporary South Africa. Though they are "eclectic" (56) and open-minded—Dee "made a sort of career" out of posing nude for "artist" sketches (54)<sup>69</sup>—both women seem conflicted about their identities within a society that still subtly emphasizes race. This racial tension is present when Dee

---

<sup>69</sup> I enclose artists in quotation marks because, as Dee notes, while she sometimes "got lucky" and "end[ed] up posing for a real artist" (54), most of her work came from posing for "well-to-do, liberal housewives" who were "bored with decoupage and painting fruit" (54). These encounters were often tinged with racist remarks about Dee's shape and weight (bordering the common discourse of Sarah Baartman).

notes that “something seemed to be missing in an aching kind of way” between the “white spaces around the smudged black and white forms” of Madz’s drawings (55); or when she reiterates that she never really “liked” Madz’s ex-girlfriend for Madz, without ever clearly articulating the exact reason for her dislike—just that she never really properly understood Madz (like Dee herself does). Yet, as Pumla Dineo Gqola notes, the story “is about so much more than playing with bodies in an exploration of identity; it is also about what it means to be a subject who is constantly observed, read, consumed and packaged by some other gaze owned by those who have no consideration for your own self-making” (Gqola 5). Dee’s observation and irritation with the white couple forestall the completion of Dee thoughts each time she inches towards fully articulating her desire for her friend. For instance, it is after she is admiring Madz’s beauty that she first notices the couple “gawk[ing] at each person they see” on the street—a street Dee describes as a “kaleidoscope of freakishness” (53). Or when Madz catches Dee staring at her, Dee breaks the building tension by describing to the audience the tourists who are discussing a poster outside a black beauty parlor (56). But the verbal discourse of the story always seems limited and unfulfilling.

Yet, if desires are left unspoken, left un verbalized, it is because Dee exhibits a deeper level of comfort with objects than with these desires—not their queer nation, but with their potential fulfilment. The story ends with the following passage:

“Dee, my friend, this is why I am talking to you,” Madz says. She reaches toward me, clasps her fingers around the back of my neck and pulls me to her. I feel her warm breath first, then her lips, soft against my forehead.

Everything disappears. A warm, wooly silence engulfs me and time seems to pause. Then slowly, it ebbs back. The door chime of the café, a scooter racing by on the street. In the distance, one of the *bergies* [a homeless person who lives in



Cape Town] is awake. He shouts to a woman, ‘Hey madam, sorry pretty lady . . .’  
 The tourist couple have taken a seat at the table next to us. When I notice them,  
 they trade furtive glances. She quickly closes her notebook and slips it into her bag.  
 He puts the lens cap back on his camera and pretends not to have been taking  
 pictures of us. (59-60)

In this scene, not only are the terms of the two women’s relationship laid bare, but Dee’s relationship with objects manifests itself more clearly than anywhere else in the story. Where elsewhere, it might be confused that Dee turns to objects as an attempt to distract her nerves, here objects function to bring to return her to the reality of her life. Rather than focusing on the kiss itself, she describes the objects (fingers, lips, breath) that create the space for it. In fact, if, for a moment she enjoys the intimacy of the kiss itself, that intimacy proves to be too much. It throws her into a “warm, wooly silence.” An immediate reading of Dee’s modification of the type of silence she experiences might suggest a sense of euphoria or peace. However, I suggest a different reading. This silence is not just warm; it is wooly, as well. I suggest this as a queer description of the silence in that wool, while warming, is also itchy and irritating to bare flesh. And I read bare, here, both as naked *and* as vulnerable or exposed. Throughout the story, as I have attempted to make clear, Dee is anything but vulnerable. At each moment of disclosure, she withdraws, she refuses to speak her desires—at least to Madz.<sup>70</sup>

In order to mitigate her irritation, Dee once again begins to register the objects. Even as she describes the silence as “ebb[ing] back,” the immediacy of the following sentence suggest a rather vigorous return. The door chime and the scooter are briskly recognized, thus adding to the suggestion of irritation I propose. Yet, what I find most intriguing here is not the objects

---

<sup>70</sup> Those moments in which we are permitted to glimpse Dee’s desires for Madz come not through her direct speech, but through her internal dialogue.

themselves, but the ways in which her description of each object are tethered to a capacity for seeing. The notebook, in which the female tourist writes her observations, and the camera, with which the male tourist captures pictures of Dee and Madz, both offer opportunities for viewing in extended ways. What they see will last, longer than the pause of the “warm, wooly silence.” More importantly, this seeing captures Dee and Madz at a moment of vulnerability Dee herself refuses to continue. But rather than suggesting these objects as interrupters, I suggest them as accomplices in Dee’s attempt to forestall her own desires. The irritation Dee expresses for these objects, and their holders is the same irritation she feels in the moment of intimacy expressed with Madz. These objects, and the vulnerability they capture, help Dee keep unspoken what she wants.

### **Things to Dis-member**

Where Molefe’s story enlists objects to distract from one’s desires, in Barbara Adair’s “A Boy is a Boy is a...,” objects assist in creation of a space outside of heteronormative South African culture. “A Boy” follows a seventeen year old boy as he boards a train, traveling to Johannesburg, South Africa. Superficially, this is a story about seduction and boundaries—a coming-of-age story, of sorts. It follows the young protagonist as he discovers how to navigate his and other men’s sexual urges. However, at a deeper level, this is a story about a rejection of innocence—a similar rejection of innocence that I read of Duiker’s young protagonist, Azure, in the above chapter.<sup>71</sup> Much of the story is predicated upon the circulation of objects. In fact, in its investigation of (queer) sexual desire, the story troubles the boundaries between the human and the object, turning humans into rather queer sexual(ized) objects among other objects. The protagonist, along with

---

<sup>71</sup> In a later study, I will analyze the parameters of the boyancy, as I earlier termed it. I find it interesting that though they differ in age (Azure is 12/13, while this boy is 17), they both possess a keen awareness of the notions of innocence expected of their bodies—even as they refuse such innocence.

every other character in the story, is never named, only ever to be referred to by the narrator—who alone possesses a strange intimacy with him—as “the boy.” His namelessness is one of many moments of object-ification he encounters within the story.

If Bennett finds her objects as they rest in her gutter (Bennett 4), motion and object-ification go hand and hand in Adair’s story, as it is through this motion that a sense of liberation of the unspoken is gained. It is not until the train begins to move that the boy and the soldiers fully abandon whatever commitments to society they carried aboard with them. Prior to moving, the boy and the soldiers perform a careful tango, pivoting on the presence—or absence—of a book of Rimbaud’s poetry. For the boy, the book offers a moment of posturing, a moment of delay until he can accurately interpret the desires of the soldiers. But it is his desire that causes him to enter the soldiers’ train car. Having previously walked past a car occupied by women who attempted to seduce him, he is caught by the dangerous masculinity of the soldiers’ cabin, a cabin in which he “can smell stale sweat and rancid butter; the smell of filth, of life, of heavenly husbands” (Adair 151). Upon entering the cabin occupied by the soldiers, “the boy feels saturated with impudence and entitlement, tragic in a sensuous way,” yet he wonders, “how should I act? . . . How does one perform in a setting like this? What kind of variety show do they want?” (151). It is at this moment of uncertainty that he removes the “flat, black book with a torn cover, stained,” from his bag (151). The book sets in motion the interaction between him and the soldiers, as they inquire what he is reading. However, they, unlike him, are unable to interpret the words on the page, presumably because they are in French, though the narrator never quite clarifies the cause of confusion. Instead of reading the book, or perhaps because they are unable to do so, the soldiers begin to *read* the boy himself. Turning from the book, one soldier questions “if this young fuck is a queer, a pansy,” as

“only a fucking queer reads fucking creep words like this”—words that “look like poems” (152). It is at this point that the train itself begins to move.

What I am attempting to draw out here is the boy’s reliance on an object in order to make his and the soldiers’ desires known. Here, objects are not distractions, as they are in Molefe’s “Lower Main,” nor are they shields behind which one can deflect unwanted desires, as I will suggest below of Whisgary’s “The Filth of Freedom.” Rather, they become assistants in materializing an unspeakable desire. As the book of Rimbaud’s poetry helps shift the boy into an object of observation, bringing to the surface his queerness in the hyper-masculine car, traveling through a war-torn nation, it allows him to reach that which he was previously uncertain of. Moreover, it is as an object that he becomes able to discern the nuances of those desires. Unable to accurately, or effectively, speak his own desire (a desire which is sexual in its intent), the boy allows himself to be objectified by way of a misreading of the book object. The boy embraces Bennett’s assertion that “human power is itself a kind of thing-power” (Bennett 10). Through this thing-power, he is able to most effectively engage the desire that spurred his very entrance into the train car. After all, the boy’s first impressions of the soldiers is that they are

healthy superior, in service of their country; men who kill just like all people kill; soldiers that pillage, wolves that follow the living, knowing that soon there will be a carcass, raw meat; service-men in sunburnt boots and shoulder ensigns, blue and orange and white, the defense force colors of a nation, a nation of white skins lepers; they ae on a journey to the Holy Land, crusaders. (150)

It is not that the boy feels helpless in their presence, but that he wants to abandon himself—and to them. The motion of the train becomes a crucial part of such a loss. To reiterate, the story takes place on a train traveling to Johannesburg. The transitory state of the train reflects the transitory

state of the boy towards an embrace of thing-power as a means of fulfilling his queer desire. Only after the train begins to move does the desire bottled within the train car begin to manifest in tangible ways. After calling out the boy's queerness, the soldiers begin moving the boy towards their own desires. While sharing their brandy with him, they spill some of the drink on their boots and invite the boy to lick it off, thus beginning a scene of sexual contact. During this contact, the boy becomes the same as the other objects—the metallic guns in the soldiers' possession, the flask full of brandy, the boots—that fill the space. And the boy acquiesces with a pleasure he has hitherto been unable to voice:

It seems a long time before he sits up, coughing, debauchery in his emotions. A burden lifts from him; his innocence is forced apart, his wisdom squandered. I am dying, the boy thinks. So all I can do is call my executioners closer. (154)

As one soldier notes, when questioned about how long it has been since he has slept with a (white) woman, the soldier replies “a cunt is a cunt is a . . .” (154). This phrasing redirects attention to the title of the story (“A boy is a boy is a . . .”), reiterating the object-ification of the boy in relation to the soldiers' desires. Each object within the cabin, hurling between cities, becomes an accomplice in the fulfillment of sexual desires that rest outside of the heteronormative boundaries of the soldiers' daily lives off the train. It is during this sexual contact, in which “[t]here is no sound except the light that hisses” (155), and only the constant motion of objects—the boy, the metallic guns, hands, mouths, boots, genitalia—that the boy “feels his innocence . . . loves his innocence” (156). The exchange leaves the boy (more) complete. As the action concludes:

[t]he boy lies in a pool, a puddle of his own blood and sweat and semen, and laughs. He laughs because he knows something more now; he laughs because he feels something more; he laughs because he feels pain and exaltation. It is the power that

he laughs about, the ecstasy, sublime power; power that he alone has created, bewitching. He laughs and he thinks of his teacher, he would have been proud, proud and happy to know that he survived, enjoyed the pain; as the teacher enjoyed pain, the pain of rejection by a schoolboy, the pain of a boy's touch. The boy laughs at how much of a simulation it all is, his life a remake. And they were good men these soldiers; they did not kill him. (156)

Beyond this, the boy places this day's events along the continuum of his life—this day becomes another object in a string of the ordinary. These actions, in all their violence and pleasure, become a part of his concern for the everyday. He, like the teacher—that symbol of repetition and habit, as he seeks to carry forward canonical knowledge—become points in series. And in contrast to his earlier uncertainty, there is an elation in regards to the actions, and a sense of sadness. Picking up the book of Rimbaud, which set everything in motion, the boy mourns the end of his objectification, thinking, “Who will love me now, who will love me” (156-57). In the end, it is with the assistance of objects that allows at least a moment of (en)joy(ment) and pleasure, where there was otherwise only desire.

### **Things to Deny**

As I mentioned above, in South African author, Rahiem Whisgary's “The Filth of Freedom” the relationship between humans and objects becomes one built on a need for concealment. But this concealment is not one in which objects become subject to human will. Rather, the relationship becomes one in which the power of the object to disclose becomes recognized, forcing the human to renegotiate his own desires.

“The Filth of Freedom” traces the protagonist, James Drummond, and his struggle with his sexual orientation. At eighteen, James struggles with feeling like an outsider in his middle-class white South African family, and much of his struggle is spoken through his relationship with the desires of his parents via the remnants of cigarettes butts, which he leaves scattered outside his bedroom window. In contrast to Thabo, the black seventeen-year-old son of their maid, Margaret, James is “slight in build, tentative and shy,” and “certainly prefers his own company” (80), yet fashions himself as resistant to the social tendency towards “complacen[cy] in the mediocrity of life, of obeying, of achieving to the established benchmarks” (85). The acceptance of Thabo, who has become “the son with whom Mr. Drummond can share his views on the state of South African rugby, the son Mr. Drummond can consult about difficult business decisions” (81), has left James feeling the pressure “of competition, of failing, of falling” out of step with the family and its desires for normalcy (85). In fact, constant emphasis is placed on the divide between James and Thabo:

Thabo, secure in his erudite masculinity, achieving on the sports field as well as academically. Thabo, able, like Mr. and Mrs. Drummond, to wash over the passionate shades of red, purple and black in their lives with a more neutral beige. Thabo, who doesn’t have anything to hide, no secret fantasies. Thabo, who is complacent in the mediocrity of life, of obeying, of achieving to the established benchmarks rather than setting his own. Thabo, who constantly feels the need to be better than James. (85)

Much of the tension between James and Thabo centers on James’ own insecurities with his relationship with his family *and* Thabo’s own recognition that, while he is welcomed, his place within the family is always limited by his being the son of the family’s maid. It is this tension that manifests itself in the exchange upon which the story centers. Upon waking from a dream in which

“beautifully sculpted males . . . secretly tempt[ed] him with the arch of a foot, the subtle flex of a thigh, the slight exposure of a neck” (82), James finds Thabo entering his room, and at his door the discarded cigarette butts he threw out of his window. Already irritable from the dream, which left him “hating mankind, hating himself, [and] feeling dirty—not physically, not even mentally, but dirty on the inside, under his skin” (83), the sight of the cigarette butts which had previously “give[n] James a thrill, a sense of malicious excitement” become points of horror and anxiety as “they come to mean acknowledgement” (81, 83). Sitting in his doorway, presumably at the hands of Thabo, these cigarette butts come to mean the “acknowledgement of his faults, of his disobedience, of his dishonor, not only to himself but to his family, to his parents” (83-84), and he realizes that such a flagrant flaunting of his “sordid habits” would end in “retribution” (84).

While the shift in James’ relationship with the cigarette butts, from a one of excitement to one of anxiety, might be dismissed either as happenstance or as a single-sided event, I suggest it as a site in which the ordinary becomes visibly queered, *and* in which that queering is contingent upon the speaking ability of the object itself—or, as Bennett terms it, the object’s very own “thing-power.” As he enters the room, it is not that Thabo immediately mentions the cigarette butts to James that terrifies him. It is that they are “flagrantly” presenting themselves, and, in so doing, their relationship with James’ disobedience to the system of normalcy in place. In fact, looking behind Thabo’s physical presence in the door, it is the cigarette butts themselves that spark James’ concern. Thabo states that his purpose for entering the room is to inform James that James’ mother would like for James to assist Thabo in cleaning the pool. It is only after recognizing James’ discomfort that Thabo makes the fact that he has placed the butts in James’ doorway known. Upon James’ inquiry as to why he has done this, Thabo responds, “So they don’t think it’s me that smokes” and “because [James] is a faggot (85). With his reasoning, Thabo draws attention to both



his own endangered status within the system of the house (who “they” are is never defined, yet it seems understood that “they” means James’ parents), and his understanding of the signifying power of objects.

Thabo’s understanding of the power of objects differs from James’ own in that Thabo feels himself to be able to control the meaning being signified. He has intentionally brought the butts—the material manifestations of James’ queerness—into view. In his hands, the power of these objects becomes something he can inject into the object, rather than something inherent in the object itself. This ultimately comes to backfire on him when James’ mother walks into the room and James tells her that Thabo placed the cigarette butts in his doorway. Instead of becoming Thabo’s means to victory, James, enlists the cigarette butts as he simply states that Thabo left them at his door. Though he understands the cigarette butts to represent his defiance of the family’s normalcy and expectations, James allows them to speak what they will according to his mother’s ideas. And just as both he expects, and as Thabo had hoped for, Mrs. Drummond comes to her own conclusions based on her own rules and expectations. These conclusions inspire her to confirm Thabo’s anxieties over the fragility of his place in the family, while surprisingly bolstering James’ place within it. At the sight of the cigarette butts, Mrs. Drummond’s true feelings about Thabo surface. Filtered through the cigarette butts, “she sees the boy who overachieved, who became closer to her husband than his own son. She sees through his pure outer casing to his spiteful inside self . . . [Thabo] will only be satisfied once he’s completely pushed James out [of her family]” (87). At this moment she lashes out at him, making it known that she had in fact seen the cigarette butts there earlier but had suspected Thabo’s mother to be the one to have placed them there as a warning for either James or her (87).

Ultimately, the difference between Thabo's use of the cigarette butts and James' enlistment of them is that, in contrast to Thabo's handling of the cigarette butts, James' understanding of them carries with them traces of his relationship with them as a form of deviancy from the family's norms and expectations. As he makes the cigarette butts visible to his mother, James counts on their capacity to withdraw information, on their constant state of concealment, as a way to navigate around the expectations of his mother—and the unexpected resurfacing of the cigarette butts themselves, and Thabo's recognition of James' queerness. It is not that the objects are enlisted to distract, as they are with Molefe's character Dee; but rather that they are allowed to be what they are: simultaneously present and absent. In other words, James enlists the cigarette butts to be whole, understanding that in their entirety they will always open a hole in meaning. And this hole is what allows James to deny his desires without ever drawing attention to them. It is not a denial in the form of rejection. It is a denial in the form of leaving unspoken that which one is not yet ready to speak.

### **Things to Re-member**

Where the earlier discussions have focused on the less overtly positive relationships queers have with objects, the relationship between queers and objects in Ugandan author, Monica Arac de Nyeko's "Jambula Tree" is noticeably more positive one. A story about consequences of the love and affection between two girls, "Jambula Tree" relies on objects, such as the jambula trees beneath which they sit and bond, to re-member a sense of completion from fragmented moments.

In many ways, "Jambula Tree" is reminiscent of Senegalese writer, Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*. As with *So Long*, "Jambula Tree" grounds its story in the relationship between two female characters who share a history of intimacy, and who have been separated by life's circumstances.

This separation, for both stories, results in the epistolary form of the narrative as a means of updating and reminiscing. Like in *So Long*, the author of each epistle risks “shaking...twisting a knife in a wound hardly healed” in her distant friend as she revisits past transgressions and a shared history (Bâ 26). However, these are two markedly different texts, with two markedly different aims. *So Long* is a story of a woman justifying her decision to remain committed to a marriage that had long since positioned her as excess baggage, and the relationship between the narrator and her friend, though intimate, is not sexual. Bâ’s narrator finds her ultimate message to be the assertion of “the inevitable and necessary complementarity of man and woman” (88), which she holds as the key to (national) ills. As Ramatoulaye, the novella’s protagonist, states, “The success of a family is born of a couple’s harmony...The nation is made up of all the families...The success of a nation therefore depends inevitably on the family” (89). Nyeko’s story, in contrast focuses on the love and sexual desire between her two female characters. Anyango writes to her distanced friend because she misses their physical connection just as much as she misses her emotional support. And rather than read the family as an extension of the nation, Nyeko reads the love between two girls as the very thing that will break a community.

At the story’s opening, we find the narrator, Anyango addressing her returning friend, Sanyu, recounting to her what has transpired in their estate since her exile some years ago. As Anyango describes the present state of the estate, she weaves into her narrative memories of her past experiences with Sanyu. As she recounts the happenings of the estate’s women, women she and Sanyu “did not want to become” (Arac de Nyeko 92), Anyango narrates their experiences as a state of conflict, in which the women constantly battle against the objects that risk to betray their truths. Of these women, Anyango notes how

[m]ost of the women don't work. Like Mama Atim they sit and talk, talk, talk and wait for their husbands to bring home a kilo of offal. Those are the kind of women we did not want to become. They bleached their skins with Mekako skin lightening soap till they became tender and pale like a sun-scorched baby. They took over their children's *dool* and *kwepena* catfights till the local councilor had to be called for arbitration. Then they did not talk to each other for a year. Nakawa's women laugh at each other for wearing the cheapest sandals on sale by the hawkers...these women know every love charm by heart and every ju-ju man's shrine because they need them to conjure up their husbands' love and penises from drinkin places with smoking pipes filled with dried hen's throat artery. These women know that an even number is a bad sign as they watch the cowry shells and coffee beans fall onto cowhide when consulting the spirits about their husbands' fidelity. (92)

The story juxtaposes the truth expressed through talking—in the form of gossip—to the truth expressed by things and objects. Talking's truth destroys. Mama Atim talks of the “immorality” (96) of others, veiling the imperfections within her own family (96), and it is because of her telling of her having found Anyango and Sanyu touching one another under the jambula tree in front of her house that the two girls are forced to separate. Talking, or more accurately, not talking, also becomes a means of avoidance. After the relationship Sanyu is sent off, her mother no longer talks to Anyango or her mother so as not to have to acknowledge the history that haunts her via her daughter's absence. In contrast to these women, Sanyu and Anyango, Anyango reminds Sanyu

That's what we fought against when we walked to school each day. Me and you hand in hand, towards school, running away from Nakawa Housing Estates' drifting tide which threatened to engulf us and turn us into noisy, gossiping and frightening

housewives. You said it yourself, we could be anything. Anything coming from your mouth was seasoned and alive. You said it to me, as we sat on a mango tree branch. We are not allowed to climb trees, but we did, and there, inside the green branches, you said—we can be anything. (92)

Although she begins with a recounting of shame, of a loss of innocence, the story ends with Anyango's pride in the jambula tree and all it represents. She recognizes that it is not an object of shame, but of pride and life, telling Sanyu to "rise like the sun and stand tall like the jambula tree" (Nyeko 105). But what I want to suggest here is that Anyango's reliance on objects like the jambula tree become a means for her to re-member not only Sanyu's connection with the estate and Anyango herself, but also a means for Anyango to re-member the social order of the estate itself. The truth of objects, in contrast to the truth in speaking, opens up paths for more intimate knowledge and bonds individuals. Not only do Sanyu and Anyango come to know one another most intimately when they "walk hand in hand," they also learn a new intimacy between themselves when they make contact with each other's breasts and waists "under the jambula tree in front of [Mama Atim's] house" (96).<sup>72</sup> Objects become the supreme form of truth telling because they are not bound by the norms of society or the desire for control sought by so many within society. If the jambula tree represents life, it also represents a constant queering of the ordinary. The tree, resting in front of Mama Atim's house, carries with it its history with Anyango and Sanyu. Each day it serves as a constant reminder of the queer desire it sheltered, and of Anyango's defiance of the social norm. And each day it remains, it stands as the community's tacit acknowledgement of Anyango and Sanyu's desire and love. This recognition is held within

---

<sup>72</sup> The truth brought out by objects does not always result in pleasant or fulfilling discoveries, such as when Mama Atim's "torch shone upon [the two girls]—naked" (93). However, the ability of these truths to be translated either positively or negatively speaks to the "purity" of the object's truth in that it refuses to take sides.

Anyango's call for Sanyu to rise like the tree because she knows that no matter what happens to the tree itself, whether it is left to grow or it is cut down, it will always carry with its part in the two girls' love.

## **Conclusion**

In her timely, and important text *The Erotic Life of Racism*, Sharon P. Holland urges an examination of the intimacy which grounds "quotidian racist practices" (Holland 4). Ultimately, Holland seeks to rearrange "the terrain of critical contact" that occurs along "an ordinary road that we all must travel" (15), stressing that racism is not just spectacular—or a spectacle—event, but is, most often, an occurrence of the everyday. Holland's point resonates with my argument, though I have taken race as one of many daily obstacles that need to be negotiated. Like Holland, I to have sought to discuss the ways in which quotidian experiences stand as the sites of very important, and self-defining interactions. However, here, I have sought to read the ordinary as a site of resistance in which queer postcolonials gain a means for subverting the (hetero)normative demands of their societies. In each of these stories I have attempted to explicate the queer relationships shared by objects and various postcolonial queers. Each, in its own way, demonstrates, as Bryant, Harman, Bennett and others argue, that objects are more than they are typically taken to be. In doing so, each, in its own way, points to the state of withdrawal in which objects exist. More than this, as each story highlights how objects withdraw from the ordinary which takes up much of human life, it also draws attention to the special relationships queer postcolonials share with those objects.

## CONCLUSIONS

What is African writing? Must one be black or brown in order to write it, or may one be any old color? Must the work deal with situations that couldn't come about in quite the same way anywhere else in the world? Or can it deal with matters that preoccupy people everywhere? Must it be written in one of the world languages which came to Africa in colonial times, or must it be written in African languages? . . . From the start, then, modern African literature has been essentially a committed literature. Back men found their voices in the need to protest and demand. African writers have often been and are political leaders and politicians as well.

Nadine Gordimer, "The Interpreters:  
Some Themes and Directions in African Literature"

In response to an inquiry of the role her recent novel, *Under the Udala Trees*, a novel which, among other things, follows the love between two Nigerian girls, plays in the fight for and over Nigerian LGBTQ rights, Chinelo Okparanta states:

The situation in Nigeria is not all that different from many places around the world. After the publication of this book, I've been shocked by a handful of people here in the United States who have come up to me and said things along the lines of, "Well, we've moved on from that. Same-sex marriage is now legal in the United States, so what's the point writing that book?" I look at the people making the statement and I can just smell the privilege wafting out of them like perfume. And, I think to myself: this is the problem with privilege. When we live in our own

privileged little bubble, it is convenient to pretend that all is well with the world, that everyone enjoys the same privileges that we do. We conveniently forget that there are others, sometimes our very own next-door neighbors, who suffer in ways that we do not. I think the novel is a testament to this: a reminder that just because we perceive ourselves free does not mean that everyone is indeed free . . . The novel, then, seeks to open up—make transparent—the lives of these particular members of Nigeria’s LGBTQ community, so that those with a hatred for same-sex love might see just how human same-sex love really is. Nothing to be afraid of. Certainly nothing deserving of punishment. This ability to expose—to make transparent—is the power of literature. (Krull)

I quote Okparanta at length here because I find within her response very important intersections with the project in which I have hitherto engaged. First, not only does Okparanta establish literature as *one* of many tools, not the only tool, in the fight against oppression and ignorance, she also reiterates literature’s capacities for worlding—that is, the material potentials literature possesses. As Okparanta states, the novel is able to open space for understanding, and lead to more ethical relationships. The novel has the power to lay bare the limits of humanity. In this regard, the novel is similar to the scientific and medical writings favored by new materialist thinkers. People are able to take from it and apply it to their own lives, communities, and interactions. Because being human is neither an absolute scientific endeavor nor a purely philosophic one, it is important to recognize the continued need for multiple forms of engagement.

Second, within her response, Okparanta calls to the fore systems, positions, and states of privilege that often blind people—both here, in the global West *and* in places like Nigeria—from recognizing the continued and *continual* need for social change. Suggestions that, because places



like the U.S. have “solved” their problems with queerness, there is no longer a need to circulate, let alone write, works that emphasize the experiences of queer postcolonial individuals belie the expectation for all the world’s peoples to move at the pace as the West. Often times, Westerners—and scholars, critics, politicians, and organizations are not immune to such thinking—fail to recognize the time it took for them to achieve the degrees of progress they currently enjoy. Once a level of progress has been achieved, all other peoples are expected to instantaneously meet that level of growth, never having been afforded the time to develop their own solutions or paths. No clearer example of this exists than the example of Western expectations for Africa and other postcolonial nations to instantaneously move beyond its “barbaric” and “backwards” views of queerness. In addition to overlooking the irony of calling for an end to backwards and barbaric African, Indian, and Middle Eastern treatment of queers in the midst of its own issues with legal prohibitions, hate crimes, and political violence, Western peoples shockingly suffer a form of social amnesia, erasing the fact that it was only in 2015 that the U.S. as a nation “officially” “moved on from” its backwards and barbaric prohibitions on homosexuality.

Third, Okparanta’s emphasis on the humanness and normalcy of same-sex love, a love that is “nothing to be afraid of,” speaks to a complex postcolonial Nigerian relationship with queerness, while subtly suggesting the very everydayness of that queerness much of this project has attempted to make space for. More than a being a project invested in “asserting,” “uncovering,” or “placing” queerness within postcolonial studies and the postcolony itself, this project, if nothing else, has attempted to rethink the limits and forms of both, questioning the guiding principles of each. In opposition to the assumed heterosexual postcolonial subject, I have worked to highlight the queerness that haunts the construction and maintenance of that subject. And in opposition to the queerly unmarked queer subject, I have presented a nationally and ethnically marked queer subject.

Most importantly, however, I have attempted to challenge the expectation of an already and always political queer *and* postcolonial subject.

I appreciate and empathize with the bewilderment Okparanta expresses within her response to why she wrote *Under the Udala Trees*, and much of my current project has been a response to such bewildering sentiments. At its core, this has been a project concerned with the negotiation of difference. While the particular genre of difference I have articulated has been queer difference, I have not done so seeking to invert “the order of things” or to venerate one form of difference over other forms. This is to say, I have neither desired to establish queerness as *the* most important difference in the postcolony, nor to assert an apolitical—that is, non-protest—queerness as the *preferred* or most effective method of asserting difference in the postcolony. Put it simply, I have worked, similarly to Alexander Weheliye, to produce a project “concerned not with inclusion in reigning precincts of the status quo but, in Cedrick Robinson’s apt phrasing, ‘the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggle for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve . . . the collective being, the ontological totality’” (Weheliye 136). Weheliye’s project, though, differs from my own in that it aims to rethink the structures and limits of bare life and biopolitics, re-inserting race back into the unmarked politics of each, while I have set out to re-assert the everyday or ordinary as having a politics and political power of its own.

Throughout my project I have relied on the presence and power of difference—sometimes rather overtly, sometimes subtly—to present three main assertions: first, that postcolonial queer sexual identities must be understood as hybrid; second, that rather than creating new forms of resistance postcolonial queers are often well-served by reimagining and redeploying tools that have often aided in their oppressions; and third, that glimpses of such reimaginings and

redeployments are often found outside the obviously political methods of protesting, lobbying, and organizing.

My emphases on the ordinary—that is to say, the everyday—queerings of postcolonial queers has in no way been a call to reject queer political activism. On the contrary, I find great value in the work of movements like Namibia’s The Rainbow Project (TRP), Zimbabwe’s Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), and Uganda’s Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG). These movements’ involvement in their nations’ political systems have not only contributed to an increased global awareness of the presence of queers outside of the global North (what I have hitherto referred to as the West, following the predilection of most African critics—queer and otherwise) but have also, and perhaps more importantly, forced open discussions of the presence and status of queers within their own national discourses. Rather, what I have been after has been a re-thinking of the limits of the political. In part, my argument follows scholars and activists such as Sylvia Tamale, Lyn Oosome, and Ashley Currier who seek to redress current views of African queer politics. In her 2012 text, *Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa*, Ashley Currier questions the role of visibility in African queer politics. Currier finds that rather than serving as a constant goal, African queer movements employ visibility as one of many *strategies* in their struggle to alter their respective social conditions. As Currier states, “instead of treating visibility only as an attainable goal, accomplishment, or end result, I treat it as a strategy. Regarding visibility as a strategy prevents scholars from seeing it as a flattened attribute in the sense that social movements are either visible or invisible” (Currier7).

As I have examined the differences that exist between Western and postcolonial conceptions of queerness, I have, at each turn, been acutely aware of the Western positioning of this work. This is to say, as a scholar in the West, I have been aware of the perilous—if not

paradoxical—nature of the task I have undertaken. To call for a “recognition” of unseen modes of postcolonial queerness risks a perpetuation of the very violences I would like to mitigate. How do you avoid the violence of making visible that which does not desire visibility? How do you begin recognizing the queer potential in that which has hitherto remained unrecognizable? These are the questions that have simultaneously haunted and propelled this work. As I have demonstrated, such queerings are not necessarily the products of novel tools, but the products of novel ways of approaching and relating to those tools. When Dukier’s young protagonist, Azure, for instance, redeploys the colonial trope of the child that might otherwise enable others to read him as helplessly malleable, he is not necessarily *creating* a new tool so much as he is forcing that tool to signify in novel ways. Or when Anyango and Sanyu, of Monica Arac de Nykeo’s “Jambula Tree,” enlist the jambula tree standing at the center of their estate to help alter the community’s relation to queerness they do so not by creating a new object but by relying on the consistency of the tree itself. In spite of the community’s lack of progress, the tree continues to grow, and with each instance of growth it carries with it the history and future of the two queer girls who dare(d) to desire and to seek one another beneath its branches. Therefore, the main force of this project remains aimed at re-orienting how Western peoples think of and relate to postcolonial peoples. More than searching for ways to liberate postcolonial queers, I have searched for ways to reposition such queers, as they are conceived in Western thought, as in possession of their own liberatory powers *apart from* the West. Put simply, I have argued postcolonial queers as being and have been fighting for their own liberation in their own ways, and that one of the greatest impediments to their struggle has been and continues to be the failure of others (both local and Western individuals and groups) to sufficiently negotiate the difference of postcolonial queer(ing)s.

While this project has focused on queer postcolonial experiences, its lessons have significant implications for those queers with ties (however tenuous) to postcolonial nations but who live in the

diaspora. A reoriented understanding of African queerness, for instance, might lead to a rethinking of the origins of African American homophobia. By rethinking Africa's relationship with queerness, perhaps accusations that Black identity has no room for queerness can be countered in more productive ways.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor, 1994. Print.
- “Ahmadinejad Speaks; Outrage and Controversy Follow.” *CNN*. Cable News Network. 24 Sept. 2007. Web. 20 Aug. 2014.
- Ahmed, Sara. “Happy Objects.” *The Affect Theory Reader*. Eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. Durham: Duke UP, 2000. 29-51. Print.
- Altman, Dennis. “Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities.” *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. 19-41. Print.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. 1992. Print.
- Arac de Nyeko, Monica. “Jambula Tree.” *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction*. Eds. Karen Martin and Makhosazana Xaba. Braamfontein: MaThoko’s Books, 2013. 91-105. Print.
- Ashcroft, Bill. *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture*. London: Continuum, 2001. Print.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Bâ, Mariama. *So Long a Letter*. Trans. Modupé Bodé-Thomas. Johannesburg: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1989. Print.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. Print.
- Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge Classics, 2004. Print.
- --- ---. “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition.” *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New

- York: Columbia UP, 1994. 112-23. Print.
- Biryabarema, Elias. "Uganda Dismisses Obama's Stance on Anti-Gay Law." *The Huffington Post*. The Huffington Post. 19 Feb. 2014. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.
- Bloc Party. *Silent Alarm*. Wichita, 2005. CD.
- --- ---. *A Weekend in the City*. Wichita, 2007. CD.
- Brown, Bill. *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. Print.
- Bryant, Levi R. *The Democracy of Objects*. Open Humanities Press. 2011. PDF.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Troubles: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Cavazzi, Giovanni Antonio. "Ganga-Ya-Chibanda." *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*. Eds. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe. New York: Palgrave, 1998. 163-66. Print.
- Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. Trans. Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000. Print.
- Cohen, Cathy. "Death and Rebirth of a Movement: Queering Critical Ethnic Studies." *Social Justice* 37.4. (2011-2012): 126-32. *Jstor*. Web. 31 Jul. 2014
- Comaroff, Jean. "The End of History, Again?: Pursuing the Past in the Postcolony." *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. Eds. Ania Loomba et al. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. 125-44. Print.
- Cunningham, Hugh. *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*. New York: Longman Publishing, 1995. Print.
- Dean, Tim. "The Erotics of Transgression." *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*. Ed. Hugh Stevens. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. Print.

- Delany, Max and Godfrey Olukya. "David Kato, Uganda Gay Activist Brutally Slain." *The World Post*. The Huffington Post. 27 Jan. 2011. Web. 30 Apr. 2014.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Différance." *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982. 1-27. Print.
- Desai, Gaurav. "Out in Africa." *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*. Ed. John C. Hawley. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. 139-64. Print.
- Dover, K.J. *Greek Homosexuality*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989. Print.
- Drucker, Peter. *Different Rainbows*. Ed. Peter Drucker. London: Millivres, 2000. Print.
- Duiker, K. Sello. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001. Print.
- --- ---. *Thirteen Cents*. Athens: Ohio UP. 2013. Print.
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004. Print.
- Epprecht, Marc. "'Bisexuality' and the Politics of Normal in African Ethnography." *Anthropologica* 48.2 (2006): 187-201. *Jstor*. Web. 7 Feb. 2014.
- --- ---. *Hugochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2006. Print.
- --- ---. "The 'Unsayings' of Indigenous Homosexualities in Zimbabwe: mapping a Blindspot in an African Masculinity." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24.4 Dec. 1998: 631-51. *Jstor*. Web. 26 Jul. 2014.
- Falk, Kurt. "Homosexuality among the Natives of Southwest Africa." *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*. Eds. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe. New York: Palgrave, 1998. 187-96. Print.



- --- ---. "Same-Sex Life among a Few Negro Tribes of Angola." *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*. Eds. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe. New York: Palgrave, 1998. 167-70. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967. Print.
- --- ---. *A Dying Colonialism*. New York: Grove Press, 1965. 35-67. Print.
- --- ---. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press. New York, NY. 1961. Print.
- Farley, Jim. "Uganda in the Hands of an Angry God: Jim Farley Talks with the Director of *God Loves Uganda*." *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 21.4 (2014): 12-16. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 23 Aug. 2015.
- Fisher, Max. "From Colonialism to 'Kill the Gays': The Surprisingly Recent Roots of Homophobia in Africa." *The Washington Post*. The Washington Post. 27 Jun. 2013. Web. 27 Apr. 2014.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. Print.
- --- ---. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990. Print.
- France. Constitution du 4 Octobre 1958. Art. 66. *Legifrance*. 1 Apr. 2014. Web. 27 Jan. 2015.
- Gagiano, Annie. "Adapting the National Imaginary: Shifting Identities in Three Post-1994 South African Novels." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30.4 Dec. 2004: 811-24. *Jstor*. Web. 21 Jan. 2015.
- Gettleman, Jeffrey. "Ugandan Who Spoke Up for Gays Is Beaten to Death." *The New York Times*. The New York Times. 27 Jan. 2011. Web. 26 Apr. 2014.
- Glick, Elisa. *Materializing Queer Desire: Oscar Wilde to Andy Warhol*. Albany: SUNY Press,

2009. Print.

Glissant, Edouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Trans. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999. Print.

Gopinath, Gayatri. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. Print.

Hall, Donald E. *Queer Theories*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003. Print.

Hall, Stuart. "The After-life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why *Black Skin, White Masks*?" *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*. Ed. Alan Read. Seattle: Bay Press, 1996. 12-37. Print.

Halperin, David M. *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. Print.

--- --- ---. *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.

Hames-García, Michael. "Queer Theory Revisited." *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011. 19-45. Print.

--- --- ---. "What's After Queer Theory?: Queer Ethnic and Indigenous Studies." *Feminist Studies* 39.2 (2013): 384-404. *Jstor*. Web. 10 Oct. 2014.

Hawley, John C. "Introduction." *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*. Ed. John C. Hawley. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. 1-18. Print.

Hennessy, Rosemary and Rajeswari Mohan. "The Construction of Woman in Three Popular Texts of Empire: Towards a Critique of Materialist Feminism." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. 462-79. Print.

- Highmore, Ben. *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.
- Hoad, Neville. *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. Print.
- Horswell, Michael J. *Decolonizing the Sodomite: Queer Tropes of Sexuality in Colonial Andean Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. Print.
- Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Vintage Classics, 1990. 4. Print.
- Hutnyk, John. "Hybridity Saves?: Authenticity and/or the Critique of Appropriation." *Amerasia Journal* 25.3 (1999/2000): 39-58. *Jstor*. Web. 22 Aug. 2015.
- Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York UP, 1996. Print.
- Jakobsen, Janet R. "Queer Is? Queer Does?: Normativity and the Problem of Resistance." *GLQ* 4.4 (1998): 511-36. *ProjectMuse*. Web. 8 May 2014.
- "John Kerry Likens Uganda Anti-Gay Law to Anti-Semitism and Apartheid." *The Huffington Post*. The Huffington Post. 26 Feb. 2014. Web. 27 Apr. 2014.
- Jones, Sam. "Robert Mugabe Assumes African Union Helm with Familiar Rallying Cry." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media. 30 Jan. 2015. Web. 27 Jul. 2015.
- Julien, Isaac and Kobena Mercer. "True Confessions: A Discourse on Images of Black Male Sexuality." *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men*. Ed. Essex Hemphill. Boston : Alyson Publications, Inc., 1991. 167-73. Print.
- Kabwila, Jessie. "Seeing Beyond Colonial Binaries: Unpacking Malawi's Homosexuality Discourse." *Queer African Reader*. Eds. Sokari Ekin and Hakima Abbas. Dakar: Pambazuka Press, 2013. 376-92. Print.
- Karimi, Faith and Nick Thompson. "Uganda's President Museveni Signs Controversial Anti-Gay

- Bill into Law.” *CNN*. Cable News Network. 25 Febr. 2014. Web. 27 Apr. 2014.
- Krull, Ryan. “The Rumpus Interview with Chinelo Okparanta.” *The Rumpus*. The Rumpus. 6 Nov. 2015. Web. 31 Jan 2016.
- Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995. Print.
- Livermon, Xavier. “Queer(y)ing Freedom: Black Queer Visibilities in Postapartheid South Africa.” *GLQ* 18.2-3 (2012): 297-323. *ProjectMuse*. Web. 18 Jan. 2015.
- Lorde, Audre. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. New York: Ten Speed Press, 2007. 110-13. Print.
- --- ---. “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. New York: Ten Speed Press, 2007. 53-59. Print.
- Luibhéid, Eithne. “Queer/Migration: An Unruly Body of Scholarship.” *GLQ* 14.2-3 (2008): 169-90. *ProjectMuse*. Web. 13 Nov. 2013. 169-90. Article.
- --- ---. “Introduction.” *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*. Eds. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. Print.
- Macaulay, Thomas Babington. “Minute on Education.” *Sources of Indian Tradition*. Eds William Theodore de Bary et al. New York: Columbia UP. 596-601. Print.
- Mahey, Crystal. “Why Must Authors Be Tied to Their Ethnicity?” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media. 11 Jul. 2007. Web. 8 Feb. 2016.
- Malcolm, Andrew. “Obama Mourns David Kato, Prominent African Gay Rights Advocate Beaten to Death.” *LA Times*. Los Angeles Times. 27 Jan. 2011. Web. 30 Apr. 2014.
- Mason-John, Valerie. “What’s in a Letter?” *Queer African Reader*. Eds. Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas. Dakar: Pambazuka Press, 2013. 309-15. Print.

- Massad, Joseph A. *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007. Print.
- Mercer, Kobena. "Decolonisation and Disappointment: Reading Fanon's Sexual Politics." *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*. Ed. Alan Read. Seattle: Bay Press, 1996. 114-31. Print.
- McBride, Dwight A. *Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality*. New York: New York UP, 2005. Print.
- McLean, Craig. "Twenty-First-Century Boy." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media. 6 Jan. 2007. Web. 21 Mar. 2015.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. 196-220. Print.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Plume, 1987. Print.
- --- ---. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. Print.
- Msibi, Thabo. "The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo)Sexuality in Africa." *Africa Today* 58.1 Sept. 2011: 55-77. Web. 2 Jul. 2014.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York UP, 2009. Print.
- --- ---. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. Print.
- Murray, Stephen O. and Will Roscoe, Eds. *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*. New York: Palgrave, 1998. Print.
- Museveni, Yoweri K. "Anti-Gay Bill: Museveni Responds to Obama." *The Observer*. Observer.

21 Feb. 2014. Web. 30 Apr. 2014.

Mwangi, Evan Maina. *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender, Sexuality*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009. Print.

Ngom, Mamadou Abdou Babou. "Thirteen Cents by K. Sello Duiker: Exposing Street Child Reality in South Africa." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6.9 May 2014: 44-57. *Jstor*. Web. 15 Jan. 2015.

Nkabinde, Nkunzi and Ruth Morgan. "'This Has Happened since Ancient Times...It's Something that You Are Born with': Ancestral Wives among Same-Sex Sangomas in South Africa." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equality* 2 & 3.67 (2006): 9-19. *Jstor*. Web. 26 Jul. 2014.

Obadare, Ebenezer. "Africa's Imaginary Gay Crisis." *New Humanist*. Rationalist Association. 30 Jun. 2011. Web. 22 Nov. 2013.

Okri, Ben. *The Famished Road*. New York: Anchor, 1993. Print.

Owombre, Davina. "Pelican Driver." *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction*. Eds. Karen Martin and Makhosazana Xaba. Braamfontein: MaThoko's Books, 2013. 9-26. Print.

Parry, Benita. *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Pincheon, Bill Stanford. "An Ethnography of Silences: Race, (Homo)Sexualities, and a Discourse of Africa." *African Studies Review* 43.3 Dec. 2000: 39-58. *Jstor*. Web. 26 Jul. 2014.

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Professing in the Contact Zone*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English. 1-18. PDF.

--- --- ---. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1995. Print.

Puar, Jasbir K. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. Print.

- Puwar, Nirmal. *Space Invaders: Race, Gender, and Bodies Out of Place*. Oxford: Berg, 2004. Print.
- “The Queer Child in Contemporary Literature and Culture.” NeMLA. 13 June 2014. Cfp. 4 Dec. 2014.
- Reid-Pharr, Robert. *Once You Go Black: Choice, Desire, and the Black American Intellectual*. New York: New York UP, 2007. Print.
- Rody, Caroline. “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: History, ‘Rememory,’ and a ‘Clamor for a Kiss.’” *American Literary History* 7.1 Spring 1995: 92-119. *Jstor*. Web. 15 Dec. 2013.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. Print.
- --- ---. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. Print.
- Selvadurai, Shyam. *Funny Boy*. San Diego: Harvest Book, 1994. Print.
- Sinfield, Alan. *On Sexuality and Power*. New York: Columbia UP, 2004. Print.
- Somerville, Siobhan B. *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke UP, 2000. Print.
- Sommerville, C. John. *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982. Print.
- Soyinka, Wole. “Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition.” *Transition* 48 (1975): 38-44. *Jstor*. Web. 10 Nov. 2014.
- Spillers, Hortense J. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics* 17.2 Sum. 1987: 64-81. *Jstor*. 5 Jan. 2014.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press,

1988. 271-313. Print.
- Staples, Robert. "To Be Young, Black and Oppressed." *The Black Scholar* 7.4 Dec. 1975: 2-9. *Jstor*. 9 Nov. 2013.
- Stevens, Hugh. "Normalcy and Queerness in Gay Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*. Ed. Hugh Stevens. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. 81-96. Print.
- Stewart, Kathleen. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. Print.
- Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *The Queer Child: Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke UP, 2009. Print.
- --- ---. "The Queerness of Race and Same-Sex Desire." *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*. Ed. Hugh Stevens. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. 116-31. Print.
- Tan, Chong Kee. "Transcending Sexual Nationalism and Colonialism: Cultural Hybridity as Process of Sexual Politics in '90s Taiwan." *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*. Ed. John C. Hawley. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. 123-38. Print.
- "Ugandan Tabloid Publishes New 'Gay List'." *CNN*. Cable News Network. 1 Nov. 2010. Web. 26 April 2014.
- Viljoen, Shaun. "K.Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents: An Introduction*." *Thirteen Cents*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2013. v-xxxiii. Print.
- Viswanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. New York: Columbia UP, 1989. Print.
- Wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Suffolk: James Currey Ltd., 2011. Print.
- Wallace, Maurice O. "On Being Witness: Passion, Pedagogy, and the Legacy of James Baldwin."



- Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. Eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. 276-86. Print.
- Warner, Michael. "Introduction." *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. vii-xxxi. Print.
- --- ---. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000. Print.
- Weheliye, Alexander G. *Habeas Viscus: Racial Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. Print.
- Whisgary, Rahiem. "The Filth of Freedom." *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction*. Eds. Karen Martin and Makhosazana Xaba. Braamfontein: MaThoko's Books, 2013. 79-90. Print.
- White, Dan. "Toni Morrison and Angela Davis on Friendship and Creativity." University of California Santa Cruz Newscenter. Regents of the University of California, 29 Oct. 2014. Web. 24 Jan. 2015.