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Becoming Queer, Being African:

Re-thinking an African Queer Epistemological Framework

Eddie Ombagi

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

January, 2019

Epilogue

In 2013, Lasse Lau organized a Queer Geography workshop in Beirut. The edited collection *Queer Geographies* came out of this meeting. In his essay, *A Hands Routine*, Omar Mismar (2013, 26) maps the holding and unholding of hands of two gay lovers, while in the car roaming the streets of Beirut.

'He is driving and I am sitting next to him, sometimes I reach to his side and put my hand in his, other times he reaches to my side and puts his hand in mine. We roam, we talk, and we look. Holding hands becomes a risk, a secret act, fun for being dangerous. We hold and unhold, depending on where we are, who is next to us, and what is next to us. The holding is interrupted: by a traffic light, a higher adjacent car, a rose seller, a beggar, a delivery boy, a passer-by, a heated conversation, a jealous gaze...

As a translucent gay space, the car is vulnerable and exposed. The city and its people become a threat. 'Revolt' does happen every once in a while by keeping the hold even when everything around us (and everything we learned and internalized) tells us not to. We could say it is a form of resisting. We contribute to the interruption of our hand holding as much as everybody out there does. The cause for unholding might be internal: a conversation, a dispute, a sweaty hand... The routine is by no means consistent. It depends on our mood and how alert we are to the outside even when encountering the same threats. It seems that we are threatened by everything and nothing simultaneously.'

This telling of the holding/ unholding of hands is so thorough in showing the complexities of occupying, inhabiting and claiming spaces. In this dissertation, I am here deliberate in my use of this form in my writing.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work and it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Eddie Ombagi,
January 2019,
Johannesburg.

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge that parts of Chapter Four in this thesis have appeared as an article titled 'Nairobi is a Shot of Whisky: Queer Ob(Scenes) in the City' in the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* and parts of Chapter One and Five will appear in the 2019 issue of *Social Dynamics* journal.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my readers, Prof. Helen Strauss, Prof. Hugo Canham and Dr. Henriette Gunkel for their keen eye, meticulous thoughts and critical insights in this thesis. Asante sana!

Dedication

To the young, curious and foolish

For whom no topic is taboo.

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Abstract

This project was initiated by the need to read queer lives and subjectivities in Kenya in the face of the hostile and violent homophobic religious and nationalistic rhetoric. In this project, I argue that Kenya has become a site of and frame for the contradictions of queer liveability on one hand and queer fungibility on the other. What I mean is despite virulent attacks by the political and religious section of the country against queer sexual expressions, intimacies and visibility, there exists a productive queer existence that is predicated on both embodied lived experiences and spatial subjectivity.

In this project, I investigate the selected spaces – both geographical and literary - in ways that enable its users to perform this visibility and allow for the myriad possibilities that exist within this contradiction. I speculate on how the users imagine themselves within these spaces and the kinds of significations and meanings that accrue to the users subjectivities. I further contend that the structure of these spaces allows for queer, queering and queered flows that makes it possible for queer users to subvert them in ways that enables them to read, locate and recognize queer subjectivities.

My critique is about how we understand queer subjectivities, lives and bodies outside of the common narratives of decadence, violence and its theorization as a western import. I wonder what sorts of positionalities and intensities accrue when Nairobi queer bodies inhabit spaces as they variously transition. Here, I aim to show that reading and contextualizing these connected and disconnected liminal spaces, reveals a deeper understanding of how queer individuals restructure the spaces that they occupy in order to account for, and narrativise their lives in light of the socio-political conditions in Kenya.

My reading draws on insights on 'becoming' to insist that to adequately and forcefully locate queer bodies, expressions, desires and spaces within popular imaginaries and cultures, a theoretical spectrum that calls attention to the incoherence and unintelligibility of sexualities in nuanced complexities around community and/or the social fabric as well as lived experiences, spatial subjectivities, and embodied existences is necessary.

Chapter One

1.0 …in the beginning: An introduction.

'Two Kenyan men wed in London,' read the headline of the October 17, 2009 *Saturday Nation*[1] article. The first paragraph read:

> Two Kenyan men on Saturday became the *first gay couple* to wed in London. Charles Ngengi, 40 and his *bride,* Daniel Chege Gichia, 39, became civil partners under the controversial Civil Partnership Act which came into effect in the UK in 2005 allowing couples of the same sex to have legal recognition of the relationship (emphasis mine).

The emphasized words, 'first gay couple' and 'bride' simultaneously summon different archives that are necessary. The assumption that the two are the first Kenyan gay couple is both true and false. False in the sense that there have been recorded evidence of same-sex unions in Kenya before 2009. True because such unions were not, and are not, recognized as legal, therefore, are not categorized as a marriage per se in the sense of the legal framework. Secondly, the fact that the wedding happens miles away in the UK but is summoned within the imaginary of the Kenyan space signifies a heteronormative assumption of the nation such that 'bride,' the second emphasized word, becomes important to invoke. Daniel Chege Gichia is referred to as a bride of Charles Ngengi in order to invoke the homophobic quality of the heteronormative nation. True to form, this strategy worked because most commentators reacted with disgust to this news story to the extent of harming[2] the parents and relatives of the two men who, it might be argued, had nothing to do with the wedding:

> *The family of Daniel Chege — whose gay marriage to Charles Ngengi last weekend in London set off a storm of controversy across Kenya — is facing a backlash from homophobic neighbours.*

[1] Njenga, Gitau & Weru, Gakiha, Two Kenyan men wed in London, *The Saturday Nation*, October 17, 2009. Accessed June 11, 2017 at: http://www.nation.co.ke/news/1056-673614-jkpmrsz/index.html

[2] Karanja, Muchiri, A family scarred by homophobia*, The Daily Nation*, October 22, 2009. Accessed June 11, 2017 at: http://www.nation.co.ke/news/1056-675940-jko6pjz/index.html

> *The harassment has taken a toll on Chege's family in Gathiru village, Murang'a, said Ms Mary Muthoni, a neighbour. 'This thing has really affected the old parents. The mother no longer wants visitors in her homestead, and the old man is no longer the same,' said Ms Muthoni, 50. Mr Gichia Gikonyo, Chege's father, has all but lost his ability to speak ever since the pictures from the union emerged Sunday, she said. And Wamaitha Gichia, Chege's mother, has developed a fear for strangers and no longer welcomes them to the family home, Ms Muthoni said.*

While this case might have been the first-ever reported case of two Kenyan men legally wedding, albeit in a different jurisdiction, it was by no means the last. In 2015, Ben Gitau, a PhD student in Michigan in the United States, married[3] his mathematics professor after the Supreme Court of the United States allowed same-sex unions[4]. What is important about these two events is the common thread that ties them together: that both weddings occurred within the gambit of the diaspora. It is easy, and indeed a shorthand, to casually explain this phenomenon as a result of the criminalization of same-sex expressions in Kenya, but a denser approach would be to carefully interrogate the location, and indeed, the potential of 'away' in relation to 'home' as spaces that make visible and possible certain subjectivities which are always tied back, in discourse, commentary or thought, to the home. What I mean is whatever happens 'away' from 'home' always relates to the 'home' in the way that 'away' facilitates or makes possible such happenings within spatial subjectivities.

This home/away approach, if taken seriously, might also crystallize the case of Edwin, a pastor in Kenya who wed his partner Isaiah in February of 2015[5] in what has been described in the media as 'the first Kenyan gay couple public wedding.' The wedding took place in the Eastern parts of Kenya. Edwin, it is reported, was a pastor who worked in Tanzania, a neighboring country.

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[3] Muriithi, Ben, Kenyan marries another man in USA*, The Daily Nation*, May 23, 2016. Accessed June 11, 2017 at: http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Kenyan-marries-another-man-in-USA/1056-3214636-7i0swg/index.html

[4] Liptak, Adam, Supreme Court Makes Same-Sex Marriage a Right Nationwide*, The New York Times*, June 26, 2015. Accessed June 13, 2017 at: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/27/us/supreme-court-same-sex-marriage.html?mcubz=1

[5] Salandra, Adam, Pastor and boyfriend first in Kenya to marry, now have to flee*, NewNowNext.com*, August 12, 2015. Accessed at: http://www.newnownext.com/pastor-and-boyfriend-first-in-kenya-to-marry-now-have-to-flee/08/2015/

After the wedding, which was 'blessed' by a religious leader, it was reported that the two fled the country for fear of their lives. Two things stand out in this episode: one is that Edwin is a religious leader, a pastor of the Lutheran Church, and the other is that he was working in Tanzania, essentially abroad. The invocation of space becomes an important tool to plug the same-sex discourse within the imaginary of the Kenyan nation. This is juxtaposed against his religious duty, which, the narrative perpetuated states is at odds with same-sex discourse, a framework that sits uncomfortably with itself is built.

These three episodes highlighted above are necessary for this investigation in order to make visible and evident the nature and manner of same-sex relations located in Kenya because of the various discourses, comments and discussions that are not only embedded within it but are continuously evoked. For instance, speaking at a church service on the 5th of July 2015 in Kenya, Deputy President William Ruto declared that there is no room for gays in the country, adding that homosexual relations are unnatural and un-African. This followed the United States Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex unions and the impending visit of the US president Barack Obama to Kenya[6]. The Deputy President is not alone. He is one of the many Kenyan political leaders who have condemned same-sex sexual expressions. The President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, has on several occasions termed the ongoing same-sex debate 'a non-issue' and not 'of interest' to the development of the country. In April 2018 while on a visit to London, the president was interviewed by CNN's Christiane Amanpour and when asked about same-sex unions in Kenya, he said they are 'of no importance.'[7] While this kind of attitude is not new, (in fact, evidence of the

[6] BBC, US Supreme Court rules gay marriage is legal nationwide, *BBC News*, June 27, 2015, accessed October 1, 2017 at: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33290341

[7] Amanpour, Christiane, President: Gay rights 'of no importance' in Kenya*, CNN*, April 20, 2018. Accessed April 20, 2018 at: https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2018/04/20/kenya-uhuru-kenyatta-gay-rights-intv-amanpour-intl.cnn/video/playlists/amanpour/

same is rife in the whole African continent), what is interesting about Kenya, is the contradictory nature of such pronouncements and discourses.

Same-sex desiring individuals in Kenya are always in conversation with multiple discourses namely, sexuality, desire, nationhood, fantasy, language, aspirations and cultural codes. These various discourses are accumulated in ways that highlight different articulations manifested in same-sex individuals. As a result of the interplay of these various artefacts that ultimately rub against the nationalistic discourse, the contradiction about same-sex sexuality becomes starkly evident. In order to usefully tease out these contradictions and map out a same-sex terrain in Kenya, an understanding of Kenya's lived realities that cohere around these specific discourses needs to be undertaken using an enabling framework. This framework should relate to how these various discourses are produced, circulated and understood. In addition, it should include an analysis of how they relate to spatial subjectivities on space and place in Kenya, the multiple lived experiences of Kenyans, and their embodied existences.

1.1 (First); Mapping the Kenyan Terrain

Kenya has become visible as a site of and frame for the contradictions of queer liveability on the one hand and queer visibility on the other. While the legal framework denies queer existence, there exist dynamic lived experiences that betray the notion of contradiction that is upheld by both the political and religious logic in the country. This thesis picks at this contradiction and wonders why Kenya – and more specifically Nairobi - enables its users, the queer[8] individuals, to animate and reanimate the space in ways that not only allow this ambivalence but also question it. There must be something to be said about how space is structured in ways that allow queer, queering and queered flows by its queer users. Also, perhaps we can think of how queer individuals

[8] I use the term queer interchangeably with same-sex intimacies. While I am aware of the existing debates and contestations that accompany the usage of these terms, I intentionally use both terms in order to make my arguments about the incomprehensibility and complexities of same-sex sexual expressions. However, in the next section of this introduction, I have exhaustively engaged with current queer discourses.

in occupying these spaces invert or subvert the spaces in ways that make it possible to read, locate and recognize queer subjectivities and allow a reading of queer contradiction.

In this regard, this thesis primarily interrogates how same-sex lives, both in city spaces and literary geographies attach meanings and significances to their subjectivities through their individual and collective lived experiences and embodied existences and how these contribute to how we conceptualize same-sex sexualities in Kenya. This allows for the examination of how these various meanings attributed to same-sex subjectivities problematize the current contradicting understanding and reception of same-sex intimacies in Kenya. This is important for it demands a call for attention to the need for same-sex articulation that is sensitive to both lived experiences and spatial subjectivities.

In order to understand space and subjectivity it is necessary that a conversation between texts and geographies is introduced. This allows for one to read Nairobi as a queer discursive space and concern ourselves with how queer bodies within this space negotiate meanings *vis a vis* the competing discourses attached to these spaces. Nairobi is understood as an anxious site of queer expression and alternative sexual intimacies which allows queer bodies to redefine themselves. Due to this anxiousness, such re-definitions problematize the various current understandings and received notions of queer expression and behaviour in Kenya. In addition, I consider argue in the various chapters to follow how the reconfigurations of meanings attached to queer subjectivities through lived experience and embodied existence redefine the conception of city space. In this pursuit, interviews and participant observation have been identified as methods that provide opportunities for the analysis of performance, rituals, expressions and the articulations of the self. Additionally, archival materials that take the form of colonial records; prison memoirs and literatures; health records; newspaper articles; blogs; and other online materials are used to enhance the data from the interviews and observations. While these moments of articulation could be transient and shifting even momentarily, they are intended to be read in relation to the city as an

object as well as to other narrative forms that make up the city. I contend that all of these forms have been part of the articulation of and the project of making queer Kenya visible.

In addition to city spaces, I interrogate two short story anthologies: *Queer Africa 1: New and Collected Fiction* as well as its sequel *Queer Africa 2: New Stories*. The short stories have had an impressive impact on the continent and my interest is in how queer subjectivities within texts lend credence to actual lived experiences of queer individuals in the city. Short stories offer spaces to investigate notions of self-expression and self-representation. I am interested in how queer characters negotiate the literary spaces created in the texts in ways that problematize the existing corpus of queer scholarship with the understanding that the literary texts themselves and the spaces, characters, and places they cohere are never distant from the 'real' world. In so doing, I reinforce how the genre of the short story challenges the phenomenological epistemologies of the queer bodies in the Nairobi city space as well as the city space itself.

In addition to the short stories, I analyze *Stories of Our Lives, a 'boocumentary*[9] on queer individuals in Kenya to investigate the positionality of personal subjectivities within larger discourses of queer expressions and comprehension. This genre, partly relying on the 'truth-telling' notion of a memoir, is important because it emphasizes personal experiences of what meanings are attached to same-sex desired (or desiring) bodies and spaces and how such experiences can be used for political mobilization. The boocumentary is a space in which lived experiences of the individual, their stories and narratives are mapped and articulated and I consider how these mappings and experiences enable a novel conceptualization of what it means to be queer in Kenya.

In the case of Kenya, and Nairobi specifically, I argue for a conceptual framework that designates and articulates same-sex sexual expressions within a phenomenological analysis of lived

[9] Boocumentary is a term I have coined from book and documentary to describe the Stories of Our Lives project. The collection of narratives and stories from same-sex desiring Kenyans was turned into an award winning documentary. Later, because of this success, the NEST collective decided to have the narratives and stories made into a book of the same name. While I am not reading the film, I use it as a prop to read the book which followed it.

realities, embodied existence and subjectivities of space. This is in line with what Rosi Braidotti calls the need for the 'renewed conceptual creativity and for informed cartographies of the present.'[10] What this means is that there must be an infusion of local nuances that are cognisant of the multiple and multifarious forms of sexualities in the continent. Also, this framework must be noticeably different from the current queer discourse by stretching the understanding of queer scholarship. A model that theorises queer bodies within a spectrum that calls attention to incoherence and unintelligibility of sexuality in nuanced complexities around community and/or the social fabric as well as lived experiences, spatial subjectivities and embodied existences is necessary.

As I argue later in chapter three, Kenya does indeed have impressive same-sex movements despite the limitations of the law. Starting from 2007 when a number of LGBTI groups merged to form the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK)[11] to the current statistic where there are over 20 LGBTI movements although most of them are in urban centres, particularly Nairobi. GALCK, the most recognizable movement, is fully operational with an office as well as a fully employed staff operating from Nairobi.[12] On the website, they describe themselves as a 'the national SOGIE umbrella body, representing LGBQ voices across Kenya.' SOGIE, an acronym, means Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression. Although most of these movements are located in the city, they have outreach networks in other parts of the country and specifically the rural areas. These factors, on one hand, and the legal/political conditions, on the other, are what fuels the kinds of contradictions that I highlight in the analysis.

Three different but interrelated nodes of analysis are central and form the frame of reference for the rest of this thesis. These nodes of analysis are sexuality, space, and the everyday.

[10] Braidotti, Rosi. 2002. *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. Cambridge: Polity Press. p.11.
[11] Karugu, Nguru. and Mbaru, Monica. 2012. *Lived Realities, Imagined Futures: Baseline Study on LGBTI Organizing in Kenya*. Nairobi: UHAI EASHRI.
[12] For more information see the website: https://www.galck.org/

As intimated above, this thesis reads and locates same-sex sexuality within a conceptual frame of Nairobi, but is not limited to it. It canvasses other conceptual tools that make it possible to coherently and perhaps exhaustively argue for the contradiction that is at the heart of its queer politics. In locating queer sexuality in Nairobi, I capture specific sites of play, pleasure and performance within the city and the ways in which the users animate and reanimate these spaces. I call such sites textual installations, and they include a nightclub, a tavern and an internet café – whose use has been inverted. In addition, I read an ethnographic account of same-sex identifying individuals within Nairobi and how such narrativized framework lends credence to the space that is Nairobi.

1.2 (Second); Queer Sexuality

South Africa remains the only country in Africa to have legalised same-sex intimacies and unions.[13] While other countries have also legalised, or decriminalized same-sex sexualities some continue to prohibit and criminalize them.[14] Therefore, while some countries like Mozambique have decriminalised same-sex activity, such legal provisions do not necessarily accord all queer people the same access, rights or freedoms.[15] In essence then, while it is not criminal to be same-

[13] I mean the first country to accord full rights and recognitions to same-sex desiring individuals which includes marriage, equal employment, and adoption, among other rights.

[14] A reading of sexuality laws across Africa gives an interesting picture about the state of same-sex intimacies. For example there are countries that have legalized and/or decriminalized same-sex intimacies but do not accord the individuals the rights and freedoms that must accompany legalisation. These countries include Sao Tome and Principe, Mozambique, Lesotho and the Seychelles. On the other hand, there are countries that have never enacted laws and regulations against same-sex unions and intimacies that means that it is not a criminal offence but still discriminate against same-sex individuals. These countries include Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Djibouti, and Madagascar. There are, then, these countries that make it illegal for same-sex individuals and have imposed varying sentences for what they call offenders. These countries include Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, South Sudan, Tunisia, Angola, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Somalia, Liberia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Comoros, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Malawi, Cameroon, Chad, Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In these countries if one is arrested and charged, one can be imprisoned from up to a maximum of two years in countries like Algeria to ten years imprisonment in South Sudan. In the Sudan, however, one gets a death penalty while in the Gambia it is life imprisonment. It is important to note that while these sentences are punitive and discriminatory and further marginalise same-sex desiring individuals, there have been robust expressions of same-sex intimacies across the continent. There are same-sex communities, organizations, movements and support systems that thrive in these countries. In 2016, Uganda held its first pride march and in 2018 Swaziland organized the first ever pride march.

[15] BBC, Mozambique decriminalises gay and lesbian relationships*, BBC News*, July 1, 2015, accessed June 30, 2018 at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33342963

sex desiring, it is not legal either. This partly explains reports of sexual violence against same-sex desiring individuals that continue to be on the rise. For instance, South Africa, the poster child for queer freedom in the continent, despite an extensive Constitution that legalizes same-sex unions and accords them rights and privileges like other citizens, queer individuals are continually brutalized, harassed and even murdered. In Uganda, the famous 'Kill the Gays Bill' sponsored by David Bahati, a member of parliament, has seen more individuals suspected of being same-sex desiring chased out of their homes, some seeking asylum in Kenya as well as in European countries.[16] In Nigeria, the Bill that drew inspiration from Uganda, and which the former president, Goodluck Jonathan, assented to, saw many queer Nigerians dehumanized.[17]

These various discourses that contest the presence of same-sex sexual expressions are premised on particular sets of understanding of what is sexuality and what meanings are attached to it especially in relation to the nationalist project.[18] As a result, behaviours that fall outside these understandings are questioned, policed, condemned, otherised[19] and labeled as imports from the decadent West.[20]

For this thesis, it is useful to start by considering the invention of gender and how it merges with sexuality. In other words, the sex/gender binary has to be complicated in order to better articulate sexuality and more specifically same-sex sexuality. In *The Invention of Women: Making an*

[16] Guardian Africa Network, *Gay Ugandans face new threat from anti-homosexuality law, Guardian*, January 6, 2015, accessed July 2, 2018 at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/06/-sp-gay-ugandans-face-new-threat-from-anti-homosexuality-law

[17] Harmon, Shannon, *"Nigeria's anti-homosexuality laws block access to care,"* SciDevNet, January 24, 2017, accessed February 4, 2018 at: https://www.scidev.net/global/human-rights/news/nigeria-s-anti-homosexuality-laws-block-access-to-care.html

[18] Jjuuko, Adrian. 2013. *"The incremental approach: Uganda's struggle for the decriminalization of homosexuality."* In C, Lennox and M, Waites (eds), *Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Commonwealth: Struggles for Decriminalization and Change* (381-408). London: University of London.; Nyanzi, Stella and Karamagi, Andrew. 2015. *"The socio-political dynamics of the anti-homosexuality legislation in Uganda." Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity*. 29(1): 24-38.; Anum, Eric. 2014. "The Body Matters: Rights and Rites of African Sexualities and the Body in the context of 1Cor.6." *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)* 1(8): 92-100.

[19] Spargo, Tamsin. 2000. *Foucault and Queer Theory*. New York: Totem Books.

[20] Zabus, Chantal. 2009. Out in Africa: Queer Desire in some Anthropological and Literary Texts. *Comparative Critical Studies* 6(2): 252-270.

African Sense of Western Gender Discourses[21], Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmi argues that categories of gender originally from a different context are not always appropriate to make claims on sexual difference in Africa. Gender, she argues, is produced along other frameworks that include sexuality, race, class and sometimes ethnicity. This can be termed as troubling gender beyond the assumed naturalness of the binary of male/female and man/woman. Further, in order to understand the complexities of sexuality, we need to consider how subjectivity can be made up through gender discourse and the multiplicitous forms in ways we perform gender and sexuality. Therefore, for instance, the collapse of practice and identity is a product of a particular set of representational politics that does not result in the erotics of same-sex sexuality but rather the character or symbol of the individual. This understanding of gender and sexuality marks the precise juncture where other forms of sexual knowledges become useful tools to understand sexuality and same-sex sexuality in particular.

It is true that same-sex sexualities have been understood within the framework of queer studies popularized in the early 1990s within the American academy. Influenced by scholars like Laurent Berlant, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, David Halperin, José Esteban Muñoz, Diana Fuss and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick among others. While the contribution of these scholars are not in any way seamlessly coherent, I proceed from the basic assumptions of their various queer approaches that reject the supposed stable categories and fixedness of identities, by arguing that sexuality is unstable, fluid and fragmentary.

Notably, queer as a term is problematic to define and that any description of identity is only in relation to a particular context and as such, the term should be understood in the precise context of its use. Queer can be associated with non-monogamy[22], same-sex sexual practices and

[21] For more see Oyěwùmí, Oyèrónkẹ́. 1997. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, also see Nzegwu, Nkiru. 2006. *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture.* Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press and Bakare-Yusuf. 2003. Beyond Determinism: The Phenomenology of African Female Existence. *Feminist Africa* 2

[22] Warner, Michael. 1999. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. New York: Free Press.

expressions[23], crooked subjectivity[24] and asexuality.[25] The point is that queer implies a range of sexual possibilities that are important to understand, contextualise and even imagine how queer bodies articulate themselves generally and particularly in Kenya. In this study, queer could refer to the identities such as gay, lesbian or bisexual. It also includes people whom a particular community considers their sexuality to be transgressive. Additionally, it can, by way of practice, involve those who think that their sexuality and gender should not be read or understood as parallel.[26] As a reaction against the totalizing construction of categories of normative and deviant sexual behaviour, queer discourse looks at, and critiques, anything that falls into normative categories, in particular, sexual and identity categories. Queer Studies grew out of Gay and Lesbian Studies and concerned itself with questions about gender, sexuality and desire that stretched previous discussions that were more certain in their grounding within the realm of identity politics.[27] As an ongoing field of inquiry, Queer Studies was built on deconstruction's insights into human sexuality as a 'fluid, fragmented, dynamic collectivity of possible selves'[28] and celebrated uniqueness and novelty of differences. It rejected any perspective that approached the construction of identity from a universal and totalizing perspective.

While there are multiple queer theorizations, its unifying strand is its allegiance to the antinormative structure. 'Queer inquiry', Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth Wilson argue, 'lies in its capacity to undermine norms, challenge normativity, and interrupt the processes of normalization.'[29] These antinormative politics have been phenomenal towards highlighting

[23] Butler, Judith. .1991. Imitation and Gender Insubordination. In Diana, Fuss (ed), *Inside/Out: Lesbian and Gay Theories*. New York: Routledge.
[24] Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
[25] Sewell, John. 2014. Becoming Rather Than Being: Queer's Double Edged Sword Discourse as Deconstructive Practice. *Journal of Communication* Inquiry 38(4): 291- 307.
[26] Jagose, Annamarie.1996. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
[27] Halperin, David. 1995. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Seidman, Steven. 1995. Deconstructing queer theory or the under theorization of the social and the ethical. In Nicholson and Seidman (eds), *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics* (116-141). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[28] Tyson, Lois. 2006. *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide*. New York: Routledge. Pg.352.
[29] Wiegman, Robyn. & Wilson, Elizabeth. 2015. Introduction: Antinormativity's Queer Conventions. *differences* 26(1): 1-25.

alternative sexualities, however in imagining a positive transformative politics of queer analysis, the refusal of the norm should be viewed relationally rather than oppositionally. As Wiegman and Wilson intuitively ask, what would happen if we challenge the centrality of antinormativity in queer studies? More specifically, 'what objects of study, analytic perspectives, and understanding of politics might emerge if we suspend antinormativity's axiomatic centrality?'[30] Moreover, if we do so, what direction, if any, will queer theorization, application and politics take in a context like Kenya, – where multiple sexualities collide, state sanctions on non-normative sexuality are rife and nationalist discourse against queer bodies and spaces are evident.

As Teresa de Lauretis wrote in 1991, she hoped queer theory would 'recast or reinvent the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual.'[31] The promise of queer theory, therefore, was to recognize the differences inherent in sexuality without necessarily being in opposition to the dominant or the norm. These differences, whether class, race, ethnicity, geography or culture are important to contextualise the several forms of sexualities. While queer theory was a critique of the dominant position in relation to sexuality, it was by no means an explicit opposition to the normative.[32] What de Lauretis argued for in 1991, and what Annemarie Jagose proposes, is that queer should not be 'easily captured by the antagonistic and unidirectional energy of antinormativity' while at the same time recognizing the multiple contestations of the term queer and its suffix 'theory.'[33]

Sexuality is dictated by social and historical codes; and laws and sanctions that relate to particular contexts and forms of meaning. Therefore, the kinds of discourses that these contexts and meanings evoke circulate in moments that are not only multiple but markedly divergent. In addition, these moments that happen in particular contexts shape what language we use and the

[30] Ibid.

[31] de Lauretis, Teresa. 1991. Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities. An Introduction. *differences* 3 (2). p.10.

[32] Jagose, Annemarie. 2015. The Trouble with Antinormativity. *differences* 26(1): 26-47.

[33] Ibid.

ways people narrativize their lives. Some of these sexual terminologies include bodily impulse; forms of fantasy and desire; narrative constructs that relate to love, romance; and different forms of social codes. Therefore, terminologies being cultural artefacts are tied to particular ways of understanding and of being that are specific to a particular cultural milieu.

Therefore, to consider same-sexual expressions within the Kenyan context, perhaps we need to reconsider the foundational stance of queer theory. Wiegman and Wilson ponder on what queer studies would be if its anchor to antinormativity was questioned. They rightly argue that 'nearly every queer theoretical itinerary of analysis that now matters is informed by the prevailing supposition that a critique of normativity marks the spot where queer and theory meet'[34]. What this supposition offers is quite productive to understand the place of queer bodies, spaces, studies, politics, and practices now and in the future especially in Africa and in Kenya specifically.

What we know is that norms refer to the supposed standard of measurement especially as it relates to behaviour. As a result, matters of gender and sexuality become understood through a vocabulary of 'normative' discourses to imply 'normal,' 'desirable,' 'natural,' and 'traditional.' Discourses generate meaning and mobilize an infrastructure from which a subject is created through a set structure of knowledge. It is through these vocabularies that different-sex sexual expressions or heterosexuality was understood, hence 'heteronormativity'. Debates that sought to problematize these productions of norms that were taken for granted and thus supposedly 'compulsory' emerged[35]. Therefore, within queer sexuality studies, emerged a concern with behaviours, performances, and expressions that seemed at odds or deviant from the normative. These expressions were referred to as 'non-normative,' to suggest that not only are there

[34] Wiegman and Wilson. 2015: p.1.
[35] See Rich, Adrienne. 1980. Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5 (4): 631–660.

'normative' expressions, but that those expressions assumed to be 'normative' could and were being challenged.

Scholarship on sexualities in Africa forcefully addresses the presence of a range of same-sex sexual practices on the continent.[36] The contributions made by these writers refute the assumptions that same-sex desires and identities are simply a product of the colonial encounter. The value of these contributions has been the contestations - various and numerous - of the claim of a heterosexual Africa. These contributions have seen the destabilization of the narrative of authentic African values as a basis for the rejection of non-normative sexual expressions on the continent.

Scholars have called for the understanding and conceptualization of sexuality to be articulated with careful attention to the specific contexts and locations from which they emerge.[37] In line with this wish, African scholars of sexuality have attempted to challenge understandings of sexuality and the meanings we attach to it. For example, Sylvia Tamale observes that most researchers still consider sexuality and African sexuality, in particular, to be about the act rather than the environments within the geographical space that 'shape [our] multifarious sexualities.'[38] Tamale further adds that sexuality is multidimensional to include 'sexual knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours.'[39] I am proceeding from this premise with the assertion that the conceptualization of sexuality must always be cognizant of local nuances and multiple

[36] See Tucker, Andrew. 2009. *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*. Chichetser, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. Kendall, Kathryn. 1999. Women in Lesotho and the (Western) Construction of Homophobia. In Blackwood, E and Wieringa, S (eds), *Female Desires: Same-Sex Relations and Transgender Practices Across Cultures* (157-181). New York: Columbia University Press; Hoad, Neville. 2007. *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality and Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. ; Gay, Judith. 1999. Mummies and Babies and Friends and Lovers in Lesotho. *Journal of Homosexuality* 11 (4): 97-116.; Epprecht, Marc. 2004.*Hungochani : the history of a dissident sexuality in southern Africa.* Montréal : McGill-Queen's University Press. ; Epprecht, Marc. 2008.*Heterosexual Africa? The history of an idea from the age of exploration to the age of AIDS*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

[37] Obono, Oka. (ed). 2010. *A Tapestry of Human Sexuality in Africa*. Auckland Park, SA: Fanele Press.; Arnfred, Signe. (ed). 2004. *Re-thinking sexualities in Africa.* Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute.

[38] Tamale, Sylvia. 2011. Researching and Theorizing Sexualities in Africa. In S. Tamale (ed), *African Sexualities: A Reader*. Cape Town: Pambazuka Press. p.11

[39] Ibid.

complexities. Given the multiple complexities and contextual understanding of sexuality, there cannot be a monolithic or singular definition, framing, and understanding of African sexuality.

In the *Queer African Reader*[40], Sokari Ekine writes that same-sex sexual expressions in the African continent are caught up within two interrelated discourses. One that claims that queer expressions are 'un-African' and the other reads Africa as intrinsically homophobic. The former discourse is rooted within a combination of nationalist rhetoric and religious fundamentalism that demands for a pure heterosexual Africa. The oft-heard argument that non-heteronormative modes of sexual expression are alien to African values, traditions and structure rely wholly on the assumption, erroneous as it may be that those non-heteronormative bodies are a residual project of the colonial experience in the continent. Stella Nyanzi[41] argues against this line of thinking, noting how it legitimizes the colonial/Western reification of Africa as a monolithic entity and builds, in the process, a binary structure of opposition. To imply that before the continent's contact with the temporalities of coloniality, non-heteronormative modes of sexual expression were non-existent is not only ironic but misleading in the face of overwhelming evidence that suggests otherwise. The latter discourse traces its origins from racist ideologies by colonialists and advanced by nationalists who argue for a distinct African sexuality. This moral and cultural narrative poses a serious threat to queer expressions and requires a persistent need for an engagement with current sexuality scholarships. This engagement should aspire to 'an African queer anti-colonialist politics'[42] that stretches the limits, conceptualization, and application of sexuality.

Further, and convincingly, Tamale argues that the African people are a diverse conglomerate of bodies that differ based on different categories for example race, class or gender. This diversity must include and also extend to sexuality and its varied manifestations. It is therefore

[40] Ekine, Sokari. 2013. Contesting narratives of Queer Africa. In S, Ekine and H, Abbas (ed), *Queer African Reader* (273-289). Dakar: Fahamu Press.
[41] Nyanzi, Stella. 2014.Queering Queer Africa. In Z, Matebeni. (curator), *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer perspectives on sexual and gender identities* (65-68). Cape Town: Modjadji Books.
[42] Ekine, 2013. p.78.

necessary to deconstruct the nationalist rhetoric resident in the continent as the monolithic assumption of an African sexuality, reified in the Euro-American academy is problematic if not downright misleading.

The insistence of a heterosexual Africa is part of the 'heterosexualisation project of nation building'[43] that ignores the multiplicity of sexual expressions and insists on heteronormativity as the only way to access citizenship rights. From a political standpoint, the discourses that term same-sex sexual expressions as Western import stems from an 'exclusionary heterosexual citizenship'[44] which denies access to non-conforming citizens to state, power, community, and resources. This denial strips African queers of their humanness, therefore, excluding them in 'national and international political and economic realities'[45] with the assumptions that they are not affected by such realities. This is mostly done through legal and institutional policies.

The majority of African countries have laws that criminalize same-sex sexual expressions. These laws date back to the colonial era and continue to still be reinforced to date with significant, and often times deadly, modifications in countries like Uganda and Nigeria. The criminalization of such expressions and the recurrent anti-homosexuality debates in Africa – Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Malawi – rest on the ideology of Africanness and what constitutes the ontological status of what it means to be an African. On the one hand, the subtle implication is that there is a particular cultural politics that is 'supposed' to be authentically African. However, the implication goes further and continues to pose serious challenges and sometimes dangerous consequences. Criminalisation alludes to notions of citizenship rights and about which bodies have access to particular rights, and therefore access to citizenship. Therefore, queer bodies get excluded as citizens resulting in their vulnerability to violence, abuse, and discrimination.

[43] Ekine, p.81.
[44] Ossome, Lyn. 2013. Postcolonial discourses of queer activism and class in Africa. In S, Ekine and H, Abbas (ed), *Queer African Reader* (273-289). Dakar: Fahamu Press.
[45] Ibid, p.83.

At the same time, Lyn Ossome, continues to emphasise the need for an empirical structure to understanding the political question of the existence of same-sex sexual expressions. She constructs this argument around materiality and accessibility arguing that this is important given the tendency of exclusion and denial of citizenship rights to same-sex desiring individuals. For example, Ossome explicitly states that people with low economic capital are vulnerable and are likely to have less access to any rights. Therefore we need to not assume that all queer Africans experience this same concern. Also, that for people for whom visibility is the primary politics, she instead says someone who is worried about survival in terms of access to basic needs like food or shelter might care a little less about visibility.

This demand for inclusion by same-sex desiring individuals and the acknowledgment of the presence of same-sex sexual expressions in the continent does not imply that an African ethos did not, or does not, in any way exist. This clamor, following the constructionist discourses of sexuality, affirms the anti-essentialist discourse of Africa's and in this thesis Kenya's queer historicity as dynamic.

In addition, the need for a nuanced empirical approach is informed by the fact that queers in Kenya are not just queer individuals but first and foremost they are human beings. In addition, they are Africans with a long history of colonialism. Some are also women faced with gender inequalities; others are disabled facing discrimination while some are poor with economic exclusion. These differences, occasioned through lived experiences and embodied existences, should intersect with the fight for inclusion and visibility. Ignoring these differences becomes counterproductive for it essentializes queer struggles to the heteronormative, homophobic narratives and presents queer individuals as being only sexual and sexually deviant. As Gathoni Blessol reminds us, 'the queer struggle is also situated in the socio-economic and cultural reality of

everyday lives'[46] therefore making the demand for recognition of queer individuals as social, political and cultural. This context offers a richer understanding of how politics and scholarship intersect in so far as they create an empirical structure that makes queer struggles visible.

In theorizing same-sex intimacies and activities, some scholars have called for a prominence on pleasure and desire rather than discourses on identity and politics of recognition.[47] Zethu Matebeni and Thabo Msibi, contend that in the context of the African continent where same-sex sexual expressions are fraught with punishment and shame, a re-thinking of how we understand sexuality, pleasure and desire is extremely vital. To do so, Nyanzi[48] urges that we conceptualize and theorize same-sex bodies in Africa beyond the current frame and conceptualization to involve knowledges of local realities and how such local knowledges condition and direct bodies within spaces.

At the same time, Vasu Reddy[49] convinces us that we need to extend our understanding of sexuality in the continent from negative affects such as pain, suffering, and mourning to liberatory practices of desire, pleasure and sensuality. These liberatory affects must be noted are concretely anchored and entwined within spatial embodiments. To productively read and articulate the various queer subjectivities, the understanding of spatial logic is paramount. What is of note, and perhaps crucial is this intersection between space and sexuality. A lot of scholars have written a lot on this confluence, and while I am not interested in rehashing these claims, I touch on the major debates. I am particularly interested with the concrete confluence of these two discourses: space and sexuality.

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[46] Blessol, Gathoni. 2013. LGBTI-Queer struggles like other struggles in Africa. In S, Ekine and H, Abbas (ed), *Queer African Reader* (273-289). Dakar: Fahamu Press.
[47] Gunkel, Henriette. 2010. *The cultural politics of female sexuality in South Africa*. New York: Routledge; Matebeni, Zethu & Msibi, Thabo. 2015.Vocabularies of the non-normative. *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity*. 29 (1): 3-9.
[48] Nyanzi, 2014.
[49] Reddy, Vasu. 2004. African feminisms, Sexuality in Africa: some trends, transgressions and tirades. *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity*. 62: 3-11.

1.3 (Third); Space: Spatialized Sexuality

The reading of queer sexuality through space is important because it not only defines (or re-defines) queer sexuality but through proximity enables the transformation of spaces. This is because the introduction of everyday embodied subjectivities of queer individuals in spaces helps to crystallize and make more apparent this play of ambivalent performance. It also enables the potential and promise not only for a radical rethinking of spatialized sexual freedom through, for example movement from one space to another, but also for the understanding of a better, more sensitive way of articulating queer sexuality in Kenya.

I argue that the three nodes of analysis best exemplify queer Kenya with its various and multiple contradictions. When queer individuals inhabit, move through, move in, occupy or transit through spaces in their daily habits, practices, rituals, and performances this intersection between space and sexuality translates as *consumption.*[50]

I situate my analysis in the following chapters at this point of intersection between the nodes of analysis, and in their multiple variations. For example, how queer individuals in Nairobi engage and grapple with their own subjectivities at exactly the points that deny such subjectivities. Here, I mean spaces within the city that demand a refusal of queer knowledge. Such transit and ephemeral spaces where queer individuals then have to engage with different kinds and forms of resistance, adaptation, difference, and accommodation in the everyday habitual negotiations of life.

In the selected anthologies and the 'narrative boocumentary' *Stories of Our Lives* discussed in this thesis, examples of this consumption are made evident. I mean that when queer individuals are forced to contend with and sometimes compelled to actively inhabit liminal spaces not only for habitus in relation to power, precisely so that they can better articulate and even engage with their own subjectivity. Such negation –if we can call it that – becomes an important resource at

[50] I emphasize consumption because I highlight later on how the interstices of space and sexuality can be understood as consumption.

not only imagining a self outside of the oppressive forces that deny queer sexuality, but becomes a site and canvas to imagine a different Kenyan queer framework.

Now, for queer discourse, the invocation of consumption can sometimes summon archives related to race, gender, class, and privilege, which have been a subject of many debates; however in this thesis, I am relying on Danai Mupotsa's articulation of consumption. She writes:

> For those who read consumption as a mode of entering sites of prior exclusion, consumption might indeed hold the possibilities for new articulations of the self and hence the possibilities of *transgression* and even *freedom* (emphasis mine).[51]

I am intrigued by her use of 'transgression' and 'freedom' and the possibilities of the two terms to be used interchangeably, especially in marginal discourses such as queer studies. Can we imagine queer transgression as queer freedom or queer freedom as queer transgression? In a spatial urban context like Nairobi, what does this imagination mean practically to the queer users of such spaces? Moreover, if we extend this imagination to the literary spaces outside of Nairobi and to the other spaces that are depicted in the anthology of short stories analyzed in one of the chapters? Moreover, also, what does this imagination mean or what can it do to imagine more proactively as well as radically a futurity that carves a queer world that is more liveable for queer lives?

The real possibilities of these two terms are amplified by Macharia in his blog. In it, he writes:

> We must insist on our capacity to imagine and pursue freedom. To do so means questioning the political morality that valorizes suffering, to refuse the 'we' constituted as those who 'just survive' or 'endure.' To imagine and pursue freedom means insisting on populating our lifeworlds with the word freedom, to act toward freedom, to enable each other as free. And to think, continuously, of what it means to be 'we,' to be free together. For freedom dreams, as histories of liberation

[51] Mupotsa, Danai. 2014. *White Weddings*. PhD. p.11

> struggles teach us, are dreams about who we shall be together, about how we can imagine being together as those who are free.[52]

The 'we' here is not just queer people, but a collective imagination that demands a radical way of thought and action that, as he says, can 'imagine and pursue freedom.' How then do we transcend 'suffering' and exclusion and imagine a 'we' that is constitutive of and constituted by discourses of not only freedom but freedom together? In other words, and in a country like Kenya, how do we imagine queer liveability at the intersection of the above said ambivalence? How do queer individuals in this spatial location, construct their subjectivity at the consumptive junction of space, sexuality and the everyday life? How do they enhance their performance rituals in these spaces in ways that ensure their liveability at the exact locations of the unliveable and the fungible?

For example, in the *Stories of Our Lives* book, this expression of queer within Nairobi resonates not only with its varied interpretations but is contextually located and is worth retelling:

> I am gay, a homosexual; queer. I'm liking the word queer a lot these days. I never used to like it, but I like it now. You can't be shaped right. You can't fit in. You refuse to follow the program, and you can't understand why. Now I realize that all the books I used to read when I was a kid with eccentric professor characters who lived alone; queer. People who make new things; queer. James Baldwin; queer.[53]

Such an extensive inscription of the queer term and especially within Nairobi not only reflects its immense potential to collect a 'we' that Macharia alluded to earlier but also demands a critical engagement with the Mupotsa's notions of 'transgression' and 'freedom' that are constituted in the consumptive potential of queer subjectivities. To be clear, queer discourse does not produce a geo-spatial boundary within the continent, and neither does it occupy spaces, claimed or unclaimed. In its varied forms, it limits the contextual and multiple understanding of same-sex sexual expressions and same-sex desiring bodies in Africa. Within the continent, and in particular either in Nairobi or

[52] Macharia, Keguro, *imagine freedom*, December 1, 2014, accessed July 12, 2017 at: https://gukira.wordpress.com/2014/12/01/imagine-freedom/
[53] SOOL, p.200-1.

in the other various conceptual nodes, queerness strives to defamiliarize bodies, disrupt spaces and geographies of sexuality and deconstruct notions of desire, conceptions of desire and discourses of 'dis(identification).'[54]

Again, to emphasize, the interest of this thesis is space and sexuality. More precisely about queer sexuality in Nairobi as depicted ethnographically, as narrativized in popular media and in its depiction in literary spatial locales as shown in the anthology of short stories. Therefore, space cannot be extricated from the engagement with the everyday. The question then becomes, how do queer performances look like in everyday spaces? What intensities do they accumulate to the queer self? What do they disperse away from the self? What kinds of energies and affects do they hold and unhold? And what do all these mean to the quest of and for freedom as transgression and, conversely, transgression as freedom? Indeed, it is true that arguing for a framework to locate and articulate queer bodies and spaces in the every day requires a way of seeing. It also requires a way of not seeing.

Since the last quarter of the 20th century, space as a site of inclusion and exclusion has become crucial when conceptualizing gendered, sexed, sexualized and sexuated bodies. As Sara Ahmed[55] writes, bodies get 'directed' or 'orientated' towards particular bodies within particular spatial locations. Some scholars have ably argued about the relationship between spatial locations and sexuality and how space becomes sexuated when populated by sexualized.[56] For my part, I agree that queer bodies in spaces naturally form bands of sociability and transient networks that in turn impact on the spatial structure of the everyday.

I want to capture the imagination of space, especially city spaces appropriating Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's inscription of the 'tubular.' This means that the city should not be

[54] Muñoz, José. 1999. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
[55] Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
[56] Lewin, Ellen and Leap, William. (eds). 2009. *Out in Public: Reinventing Lesbian/Gay Anthropology in a Globalizing World*. Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell.

read as unified whole. Instead it is made up of slippages, and leakages that mutually constitute subjectivity. These leakages become sites for bodies to negotiate and situate themselves.

For Ranka Primorac, cities engage in a 'complex shifting and traveling of meanings'[57] as a result of the constant interactions between its inhabitants and itself. For example, during my ethnographic sojourn in Nairobi, and also readings the selected texts for this thesis; this impression of spaces as constituting different meanings is quite apparent. While this specificity might not be different from, say Johannesburg or London, it reflects a kind of ritualistic metonymy and personification that best exemplifies queer Kenya. This routinized performance depending on say, for example, sartorial choice and 'feeling,' is emblematic of the kinds of social bands and networks that queer individuals build in Nairobi.

For example, in my 2016 field notes, one of my respondents and I had this conversation which is worth repeating here:

> *We decided to meet over drinks at one of the entertainment spots outside town and to watch the F1 Grand Prix whose current leg was in Britain. I arrived 15 minutes after 4 pm and I found him seated at the bar with a bottle of Kenya's favourite beer Tusker.*
>
> *He is a professional, a lawyer working with a law company in the Nairobi CBD. Since it was a Saturday, he was dressed in a jeans trouser; a 'I Love Nairobi' t-shirt and open shoes.*
>
> *After I ordered a drink, I asked why he chose this particular spot, and he immediately replied it was his 'local' because it was closer to home and that could explain his choice of dress.*
>
> *When I asked about the kinds of entertainment joints that he likes to frequent, he explained it depended on what day of the week and what he was looking for while in those establishments.*
>
> *'If I am straight from the office, that means I have a suit, I can go to the west of Nairobi,' he says, 'more classy and I can meet professionals.' 'If it is a Wednesday or Friday,' he continued, 'town works fine. Easy to get laid.'*

[57] Primorac, Ranka. (ed). 2013. *African City Textualities*. New York: Routledge.

'What about here?' I asked, referring to the club we were.

'Never,' he quickly replied, 'this is home.'

(Fieldwork notes) Nairobi: 16th July, 2016

What however complicates this ritual is how to account for this seemingly organized and repetitive routine, yet fully aware of the complicated layered meanings inherent in spaces and the apparent dynamic and random nature that the every day unfolds in.

The city is also a space where several archives originating elsewhere can be summoned by the users to give meaning and signification thus recreating a constructed and, perhaps re-constructed, perception of self. This description foregrounds the repertoire and potential of subjective entities inherent in bodies to configure and reconfigure spaces they inhabit. The city is not simply the physical concrete and steel, but includes the 'artistic and aesthetic'. The above vignette by one of my respondent renders my point valid. The maneuver in the city and deft manner in choice of space is artistic. In the second and third chapters, I further elaborate on this with a sharp clearer focus on how the city of Nairobi is structured to enable its queer users to configure it in order to account for the myriad of ways that the city of Nairobi grapples with sexuality. Additionally, using this configuration, the users are able to negotiate and reconcile with this make-up at the interstices that comprise their selfhood and subjectivity.

Gülsüm Baydar[58] opines that spaces should not be understood as neutral entities. She argues that spaces are constructed as a result of an active dynamic 'production process which involves actors and material components'[59]. For her, space is always a site of endless reconstructions in relation to sexualized bodies. The dynamism offered by the cityscapes, especially Johannesburg, and for my case, Nairobi, are ideal to articulate bodies of desire. Indeed,

[58] Baydar, Gülsüm. 2012. Sexualised Productions of Space. *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography.* 19(6): 699–706.
[59] Ibid, 699.

Johannesburg and Nairobi are multicultural, multiracial and both offer a diverse nature of bodies that intersect in unimaginable and novel ways. Indeed, the majority of queer social movements, activism and negotiations happen in city spaces more so than in other spaces. As Lawrence Knopp[60] asserts, the architecture of the city, both as physical and relational, implies that much more sexual diversity is resident within it than in other spaces. Space, in this case, and how it is negotiated is important for how queer bodies situate and resituate themselves.

Without a doubt, queer individuals have an attachment to spaces that offer a form of connection. These spaces (for examples bars, clubs, and taverns) become re-signified once domiciled by them. I manage to read these spaces physically and socially in ways that queer bodies inhabit and negotiate them and in the process re-negotiating and re-configuring meaning and attachments ascribed to such spaces. Spaces within cities almost always enmesh sex and sexuality tensions in one way or another. This implies that bodies that inhabit such spaces negotiate them in performative and productive ways. For queer bodies, spaces become vital in this performance because of the historical and normative culture of excluding certain bodies in certain sites (see for example Knopp, 2007).[61]

On her part, Elizabeth Grosz, writing in *Sexuality & Space*[62] argues that within the city space, bodies get turned 'inside out and outside in.' This implies the way bodies ascribe meanings to spaces as they negotiate them and how in turn spaces articulate and rearticulate the bodies within and through the locational frame. She further argues that there is a 'constitutive and mutually defining relation between bodies and cities.' For her, spaces are responsible for the production of the sexualized and sexuated body and the coupling of the bodies in time. On the other hand, bodies make up spaces through their interaction, negotiations, locations, and articulations. The city

[60] Knopp, Lawrence. 1995. Sexuality and Urban Space: A framework for analysis. In D. Bell and G.Valentine. (eds), *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexuality* (149-161). New York and London: Routledge.
[61] Knopp, Lawrence. 2007. On the Relationship between Queer and Feminist Geographies. *Professional Geographer.* 59(1): 47–55.
[62] Grosz, Elizabeth. 1992. Bodies-Cities. *I*n Colomina, B, ed, *Sexuality and Space* (241-253). New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

is a site 'where the body is representationally re-explored, transformed, contested, re-inscribed' (249) and at the same time, the queer body transforms the city space 'extending the limits of the city' (249). As Meg Samuelson[63] writes, the city is a textual space which bodies write themselves into and through.

The position of desire and pleasure is quite instrumental in articulating the kind of African queer discourses I am arguing for, and which I hope, could challenge some current queer understandings. For example, the place of desire, love, and emotion in queer bodies and its relationship to queer spaces. The way bodies are directed to other bodies almost always has an influence on the spaces they inhabit. At the same time, the queer spaces they inhabit have a co-relational effects on our bodies thereby creating new meanings and significances as productive sites of desire. For example in *Stories of Our Lives*, this co-influence of space is evident in this excerpt:

> Once I was caught in an incident in [REDACTED]. The people from the community and religious leaders made a plan to get rid of gay people. They knew where we lived and what clubs we frequented. Unluckily, I was caught. I was beaten so badly. They stole my phone and identity card. It had all been planned but the police came to save us. I then moved to Nairobi for three months to stay away from the attacks. I am strong now, unlike the first time.[64]

Bodies position themselves to 'affect and be affected' by spaces in ways that situate and resituate their materiality. The redacted space above is a place that could not be named while Nairobi has been named reflects first, the ambivalence that is queer Kenya but also, more importantly, reflects how space infuses its 'affects' on an individual's materiality. The fact that the police, an arm of government, came to save him also reflects a kind of complicity that I exhaustively discuss in the following chapter.

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[63] Samuelson, Mel. 2008. The urban palimpsest: Re-presenting Sophiatown. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. 44(1): 63-75.
[64] SOOL, p.248.

Spaces show scopes of heterogeneity and queer bodies become sites for multiplicitous contestations. For example, in the anthology of short stories we encounter several characters who not only problematize what it means to be queer in Africa or being African and queer but also provide a grammar for us to engage with these two frames: *queer* and *Africa*. The corporeality of the spaces and locations offered in these short stories are directly imagined in relation to the bodies that variously traverse them. Echoing Loren Kruger[65] when she opines that the urban is a site for the 'excavation and reanimation of space at the present moment,' these various characters model and remodel their disparate settings to animate a present queer moment that is not understood as a rigid, immobile state but a constantly flexible and mobile creature. In the nearby Democratic Republic of Congo, Thomas Hendriks[66] shows how this versatility and capacity to problematize notions of queer and sexuality is a tool used to inhabit the spaces that are replete with violence.

Perhaps the most important intervention in African urban spatial politics is AbdouMaliq Simone's essay, 'People as Infrastructure'[67] which envisions bodies in the city as constituting the makeup of the city-space. His vision entails re-appropriating the understanding of infrastructure as physical to include bodies as collaborating for productions and negotiations. People as Infrastructure demand the bodies to remake the spaces in ways that will be profitable or productive to them. Doing so implies that urban spaces are not simply physical, immobile and rigid assemblages of structures and buildings; but a diverse conglomerate of living, breathing organisms that intertwine and intersect.

This overall principle, of people within urban spaces collaborating with themselves and with the spaces they inhabit in order to create productive potentials, is evident in his other work:

[65] Kruger, Loren. 2013. *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing, and Building*. Johannesburg. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.201.
[66] Hendriks, Thomas. 2016. SIM cards of desire: Sexual versatility and the male homoerotic economy in urban Congo. *American Ethnologist*, 43 (2):230–242.; Hendriks, Thomas. 2017. Queer(ing) popular culture: homo-erotic provocations from Kinshasa. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*: 1-17.
[67] Simone, Abdoumaliq in Nuttall and Mbembe, 2008.

For the City Yet to Come[68]. He is right to observe that the city is a site of 'endless possibilities'[69] of becomings. Yet, he fails to fully articulate his dense theorizations to specifities in urban settings that sometimes make the city exist anxiously with its inhabitants. For example, I write on the specific historical context of Nairobi that straddles across issues of race, gender, class and colonial memory. So, while Simone is right about the complex and multi-layered nature of urban Africa, this lack of contextual insight is what I tease out, unpack and attempt to reconcile in queer Kenya. Within Kenya, a lot of literature has been produced that tries to put into perspective the city of Nairobi. For example, Shadi Rahbaran and Manuel Herz[70] show how movements within and outside of the city of Nairobi, in the course of the everyday shape one's being. On the other hand, Stephen Mills and Bhavna Mills[71] argue that not only does the city change through migration, but the effects and consequences of time change one's perception of the city spaces. They argue that as one sees the city change, their understanding of the city and what it means to inhabit places that are no longer available alters one's conception of the self. Joyce Nyairo[72], takes a cultural perspective in reading the city through symbols, artefacts, slogans and popular discourses and shows us how the city functions in different registers and tones.

This thesis shows how queer bodies that inhabit queer Kenyan spaces, particularly Nairobi city spaces, exploit a number of ways of using and reusing the spatial temporalities available to them. These may be hard to pinpoint, and therefore unable to police and as a result create new meanings for their subjectivities. The spatial logic is foregrounded as a space of ethnographic, visual and textual analysis on how queer bodies negotiate and renegotiate their lived experiences and embodied existence.

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[68] Simone, AbdouMaliq. 2004. *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
[69] Ibid, 9.
[70] Rahbaran, Shadi and Herz, Manuel. 2013. *Nairobi: Migration Shaping the City*. Zurich: Lars Mueller.
[71] Mills, Stephen and Mills, Bhavna. 2013. *Nairobi: Then and Now. Nairobi*: Mills Publishing.
[72] Nyairo, Joyce. 2015. *Kenya @50*: T*rends, Identities and the Politics of Belonging*. Nairobi: Contact Zones. See also Nyairo, Joyce & Ogude, James. 2003. Popular music and the negotiation of contemporary Kenyan identity: The example of Nairobi City Ensemble. *Social Identities* 9(3): 383-400.

Since sexuality is a socio-cultural production, it means that sexuality is almost always given meaning by the socio-cultural production of knowledge. Therefore particular local everyday contexts and nuances are important in understanding and theorizing about queer sexuality[73]. The point being, the sorts of everyday practices, routinized interventions and ordinary performances that manage, organize and link space and queer sexuality.

1.4 (Fourth); The Every day: Embodied Existence

The importance of negotiating and inhabiting the everyday for lives as precarious, liminal and excluded as queer, needs closer scrutiny. What is so crucial about aspects of the every day is its singular focus in highlighting notions of the mundane, the ordinary, and the quotidian. As Sarah Neal and Karim Murji affirm:

> In doing so, they not only give importance to the ordinary, and take the ordinary seriously as a category of analysis, but they also evidence how everyday life social relations, experiences and practices are always more than simply or straightforwardly mundane, ordinary and routine. Rather, everyday life is dynamic, surprising and even enchanting, characterized by ambivalence, perils, puzzles, contradictions, accommodations and transformative possibilities.[74]

In simple terms, focusing on the every day means concerning ourselves with what falsely appears unimportant, insignificant, unremarkable and most of all unobservable not only in our lives, but in others as well as the interactions with other people and things.

For decades, the study of the everyday has been a concern for a lot of scholars. From Michel de Certeau[75]; Henri Lefebvre[76]; Kanishka Goonewardena, et al.[77]; Michael Sheringham[78];

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[73] Tamale, Sylvia. 2014. Exploring the contours of African sexualities: religion, law and power. *African Human Rights Law Journal* 14: 150-177.
[74] Neal, Sarah and Murji, Karim. 2015. *Introduction to Sociologies of Everyday Life*. Sociology, 48(5): 811-819.
[75] de Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. California: University of California Press.
[76] Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
[77] Kanishka Goonewardena, et al. 2008. *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefevbre*. New York: Routledge
[78] Sheringham, Michael. 2006. *Everyday Life Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ben Highmore.[79] Within the African continent, scholars such as Stephanie Newell and Okome Onookome[80]; Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall[81]; Zethu Matebeni[82] have argued extensively about spaces as being co-constitutive of the everyday and in turn on our own subjectivities. While all these scholarly contributions are diverse, spanning different eras, epochs and geographies, their mutual connections are the direct emphasis of a shared and mutually constitutive spatial frame of analysis. Space, as they variously agree, is the bane of everyday politics.

As Neal and Murji insist, 'micro social life – the banal and the familiar – are co-constitutive of the wider complexities, structures and processes of historical and contemporary social worlds.'[83] It is in the every day that the building blocks of the social are laid, or un-laid. Where the social gets translated and where fissures and frictions structure our subjectivities.

What I mean is that the allure of the everyday, at least in this thesis, is its propensity to be overlooked, partly because of the sameness of life and the repetitive routines. This has the risk of 'ignoring' the patterns, impressions, imprints, and practices of the every day which if not overlooked become instructive to understand embodied subjectivity. For example, the respondent, the routines of going to his local bar on Saturday, to an upmarket establishment during the week and perhaps a more hip spot on Friday, can easily be ignored as 'normal' and 'every day.' But, and this is the argument, it is in the every day that 'real' life happens. For queer individuals, possession of the skills and tools to negotiate friends, relatives, work colleagues in the mundane events of the day are what constitutes and structures subjectivity and how queer selfhood is articulated.

[79] Highmore, Ben. 2011. *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday*. New York: Routledge.
[80] Newell, Stephanie, and Okome Onookome. 2014. *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday*. New York: Routledge.
[81] Mbembe, Achille. & Nuttall, Sarah. 2004. Writing the World from an African Metropolis. *Public Culture* 16:3. p. 364.
[82] Matebeni, Zethu. 2011.TRACKS: researching sexualities walking abOUT the city of Johannesburg. In S. Tamale (ed), *African Sexualities: A Reader*. Cape Town: Pambazuka Press.
[83] Neal, and Murji. p.812.

For example, in the *Stories of Our Lives*, when one of the respondents was questioned about his views in a chapter titled 'Love, Sex and Everything In Between', this is what he said, which I think is instructive to articulate what the every day does to structure selfhood:

> I feel like most gay people are kind of stumbling, because there are jabs from this side, jabs from that side, and people are refusing you, your family is refusing you, and Christians are refusing you, and you're just there, and you're lonely….[84]

This kind of liminal, precarious and violent existence is a narrative we have heard several times that happens almost daily without it raising an eyebrow except to the victims. Therefore, negotiating these events becomes an arduous task of amassing the necessary tools to defend the self. For example, avoiding friends and family or abandoning church altogether.

What is also instructive is that this quotidian and the ordinary need not be the pleasant, the playful and the cheerful; sometimes, for queer people, it is the frightening, the sad and possibly horrifying. In reading these emotions, we should not fall back on the mistake of pathologizing such negative affects outside of what it does to the body in space – that of constructing and re-constructing the self through spatial experiences collected in the everyday.

The everyday is an invitation at translation; at adaptation; at resistance; at difference and also a petition for and of entanglement. It is an opportunity for unmasking what appears masked; what seems normalized. It is marking the seemingly unremarkable. The everyday acts as enablers, connecting borders, obscuring boundaries and acting as corridors between the self and spaces one inhabits, passes through, connects in and out and navigate.

As Simone;[85] and Newell and Onookome[86] have shown, it is true that that urban spaces, whether geographical or in literary texts, are indeed characterized by dynamism, improvisation,

[84] SOOL, p.293.
[85] Simone, 2004.
[86] Newell and Onookomee, 2004.

and accommodations. If we take this claim seriously, then what would happen if we imagine a fusion of this urban dynamism within the everyday? Asked differently, what forms of being and becoming can be exhibited productively when the 'unremarkable' every day is coded within the queer urban? Also, what can be decoded, uncoded, or just coded when we excavate the every day in the literary queer cartography?

To address these provocations, it is important to engage more critically with Newell and Onookome's seminal text, *Popular Culture in Africa*. They poignantly ask: 'what constitutes the 'streets' of Africa…and how do we write about the 'every day' without losing the cultural specificity and jeopardizing historicity?' This question is extremely relevant in not only understanding the every day within urban palimpsest but also in understanding how the triad I formulated earlier translates to consumption through queer ambivalence. When Newell and Onookome insist on creating a framework of the urban that is sensitive to both specific cultural codes and soundtracks and also aware of certain historical contexts, they are basically arguing for careful attention to local specificities and nuanced complexities around community and/or the social fabric as well as lived experiences and embodied existence.

Just like Newell and Onookome, Ben Highmore[87] insists that 'the every day may be vague, but it is not abstract.' However, abstraction 'might allow some purchase on the amorphousness of what tends to pass, and what tends to get passed off in ordinary life.' The every day is a project of intimacy. So, when describing the every day, I am really invested in describing the dense intimate moments in spaces of leisure, play, and pleasure. In signaling the every day, I am pulling at those intimate sections of our lives into the spaces that we occupy. In effect, the performance of our sexual lives, queer sexuality precisely, in the spaces that we inhabit or move through. Secondly, and related to the above, when we talk about the every day as an affective project, implicated in this claim are all the sensory elements of touch, taste, sight, smell along with the variegated sensations

[87] Highmore, 2011.p.2.

of sensuality and sensibility. Touch, taste, sight and smell are quite crucial in the consumptive scheme of Kenya's queer ambivalence for it consolidates all the affects and intensities of being, becoming and performing queer in everyday spaces. Especially in the second and third chapters, I discuss in detail what these sensory elements do when queer bodies inhabit the spaces of Nairobi.

Therefore, how then do we account for these everyday spaces that are liveable and unliveable; political in terms of resistance and apolitical in terms of pleasure (if we can assume pleasure to be non-political); and more importantly, concrete but also highly precarious spaces? While Newell and Onookomee are right that these sites are where 'social exchanges are transformed at very short notice into cultural forms'[88], how do we concretize this understanding at the interstice of queer ambivalence?

What is instructive then is the urgent need to critically merge the need for 'cultural specificity' without 'jeopardizing historicity.' Grace Musila in Newell and Onookome dubs this framework as 'archives of the present,'[89] slightly echoing Loren Kruger's excavation of the present moment. Musila's preoccupation with this term reveals the ephemeral foundation of 'archives' that constitute the everyday. While reading Parselelo Kantai's 'historical' writing in Kenya, she notes that archives of the present are crucial in testifying for narratives that are deemed too ordinary to warrant 'official archiving.' For example, she insists that the archive of the present is a:

> …site for the validation and recording of fragments of social histories, experiences, and spaces that often remain off the pages of 'official' archives because they are either too inconvenient or too 'every day' to warrant recording.[90]

Therefore, the consumptive potential implicated in the confluence of the triad should 'validate' as well as 'record' these 'inconveniences.' The queer ambivalence that translates as consumption is exactly what these 'archives of the present' reveal. However, while Musila assumes that these

[88] Newell and Onookome, p.14.
[89] Ibid, p.247.
[90] Ibid.

archives are not recorded, my contention is that they have all been 'recorded' albeit in unusual archives.

Here is my point. To describe the every day as ordinary, banal or quotidian requires an active engagement of the senses; listening, observing, participating, sometimes intruding or hijacking. So, in effect, to describe the every day is to describe the self. The reason being the every day is always imprinted on the self; in our bodies; in our routines, practices, performances, and rituals. Everything is recorded in us.

We are the everyday.

The every day is us.

1.5 Methodology

> The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.[91]

Act One:

Title: "In Time and Place 1 & 2."

Time: Sometimes in June, 2013

Place: Outside the Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, Kenya.

Neo Musangi[92] is doing a public performance piece just outside the Kenya National Archives to a group of onlookers and passers-by. In an elaborate gesture of gender-bending, gender non-conforming or non-gender binary, Neo changes clothes in full view of the on-lookers revealing a

[91] Halberstam, Judith. 2011. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press.
[92] Neo is a gender non-conforming feminist academic and activist who lives in Nairobi.

multiplicity of gender. As the show progresses, the on-lookers get shocked at Neo's transformation from looking like a male to looking like a female or neither as a result of the change of clothes and make-up application. These various transformations prompt curious comments from the audience, some wondering if Neo is male or female, while some claiming none of the above.

At the end of the two-part show available on YouTube[93], Neo packs the costumes and walks away leaving the onlookers more confused and surprised. Aptly titled, In *Time and Place*, I pick on this vignette to describe the essence of theory-making, world-making and more importantly, the tools that one can use for this endeavor.

Coming from a literary background, where we primarily read and analyze literary texts of any form, getting immersed into fieldwork was daunting. The task became even more complicated because, on top of ethnographic work, this thesis combined literary texts and a book project borne out of the in-depth ethnographic enterprise. To put together a research design that seamlessly fits all the conceptual pieces of analysis and form a coherent thesis is impossible. Therefore, this project invites us to imagine this impossibility as part and parcel of creating new worlds and inventing new imaginations. As Halberstam reminds us above, this is a queer art of failure.

What Musangi demonstrates is exactly the tools I use to demonstrate how space, sexuality and the everyday mesh up together to imagine, frame, fantasize and invent new forms of not only being queer in Africa but also African and queer, albeit in a messy way. Musangi invites us to think of new ways to imagine the world. Using pieces of clothing, that might, in the every day, be deemed as innocent and without agency; Musangi shows how clothes and fashion are implicated in how we understand gender and sexuality.

Kidnapping a seemingly public space, just in front of a statue of Tom Mboya, a freedom struggle stalwart in Kenya, Neo further invites us to not only question the 'public-private' binary

[93] Musangi, Neo, In Time and Place 1 & 2, accessed January 3, 2018 at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScVcSgEPV6U

of spaces, but also how we ascribe meanings and attach our own materialities to these spaces, in effect how do we perform spaces. Finally, flirting across gender and sexuality during the performance, Musangi shows how the everyday ordinary practices of putting on clothes for example can problematize our own understanding of not only sexuality, but how we navigate through and inhabit sexual (or asexual) spaces. Danai Mupotsa, in her reading of this same scene, puts in context my methodology:

> Against a white concrete wall, a projector reflects images of Neo playing. An act of public space claiming, mischief and sheer brilliance, he draws a large crowd of strangers, bystanders towards her, and then him and then her. These are rather ordinary movements. She only has few objects at his disposal – a Masai blanket, some beaded jewellery, a pair of pants, a t-shirt, a sweater – her own body and this small space in a town square. As she dresses and undresses, the movements of her body change only slightly and yet it is clear to the crowd that face him that something rather troubling is at hand. Through change in dress and posture the space changes, the time changes. It was not simply just that sometimes it is masculinity and her body simply and cleanly says "I am a boy," at other times "I am a man" – it was that sometimes he is a nice rural girl, then a city girl, then a grown woman. And she really has very few objects at her disposal. Through dress and posture, Neo drags us through sex, gender, body, sexualities, pleasure, pain, ambiguity, fixity, process, becomings. We witness a rehearsal of time and space: "traditional," "the modern," the "rural," "the urban."[94]

But this desire at being against disciplinary confines becomes quite central when one grapples, as I have, with a desire of the process of knowledge production that sometimes takes a particular form, against a strong need to 'tell the stories' that this project is invested in. Constantly,

[94] Mupotsa, Danai. 2013. Review of *Queer African Reader*. Edited by Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas. Dakar, Nairobi & Oxford: Pambazuka Press.

I have had to grapple with the tools and grammars deployed for this enterprise of knowledge production.

I have been privileged with the writings of Macharia who urges us to imagine new ways of inventing tools of knowledge production. Provocatively speaking, he insists:

> We must continue asking what material is now being assembled as an archive, what material already exists in our collective (and contested) archives, and what questions our present demands that we ask of the archive.[95]

Presently, I am invested at how these disparate and contested archives speak to each other or past each other and what kinds of articulations, fissures, silences, and productions occur. This project has been interested in the kind of queer stories and narratives that the various archives speak of and what that means when they are laid, or unlaid side by side. Additionally, what kinds of outcomes do they present and how that would fit in articulating a queer Kenyan framework.

Nyanzi[96] further helps supports my claim by insisting that it is not useful to rely on the African queer archive predating colonialism to disabuse the notion of a heterosexual Africa. While these accounts have indeed helped in problematizing the nationalist rhetoric, she rightly argues this line of thinking does not help in imagining the new ways and methods of being and becoming African queers or queer Africans. This approach is useful in this investigation for it allows for the creation of an archive from different forms and materials to assemble a picture of queerness that celebrates diversity and rarely insists on a monolithic understanding of African sexuality.

Claire Colebrook[97] invites me as well to think about why it is important to not only challenge the dominant frames that define us, but also question why we need to challenge those

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[95] Macharia, Keguro. 2015. Archive and method in Queer African Studies" *Agenda,* 29(1): 140-146)

[96] Nyanzi, Stella. 2015. Knowledge is Requisite Power: Making a Case for Queer African Scholarship. In Sandfort, T et al (eds), *Boldly Queer: African Perspectives on Same-Sex Sexuality and Gender Diversity*, (125-135). The Hague: Hivos.

[97] Colebrook, Claire. 2008. How Queer Can You Go? Theory, Normality and Normativity. In N. Giffney and M. Hird (eds), *Queering the Non/Human.* Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

dominant frames in the first place. Doing so, I believe is important for two reasons. First, it enables me to understand that the dominant frames, originally in a different space and time do not adequately locate and position – and even explain- particular experiences. Secondly, it enables me to avoid the danger of creating another dominant frame that functions as a binary opposition to the existing dominant frame. I was careful in the framing of queer positionality hence my over-reliance on a wide range of archives from which allows one to draw from multiple and different subjectivities of queer existence in Kenya.

Starting from Michel Foucault and Judith Butler's arguments that sexuality is socially constructed, to Diana Fuss's articulations of identity as difference, I argue that such positions locate bodies at once in and out of the normative heterosexual prism. Despite queer theory's/theories insistence on collapsing sexual categories, it still exists along a binary ontological position. This means that a reference between the binaries would imply that one cannot exist without the other. Such a politics is unsustainable in arguing for a different matrix. I also note that queer theory's/theories ontological debate as questioning and subsequently dismantling the binary categories. Also not locating the situated existence and embodied lived experiences of queer bodies is not only problematic but dubitable in articulating queer expressions in spaces like Kenya.

Offered, therefore, is a framework that exits from both the sexual difference discourse and the constructionist model of gendered and sexed identities. Through this exercise, I affirm the capacity, ability, and potential of the queer body to hold and cede as well as configure and reconfigure different spaces in ways that generate new forms of seeing and experiences. What is offered is the understanding of queer expressions as contextual and nuanced. An understanding that does not simply create new communities antithetical to old communities of being, but communities of queer bodies capable of multi-layered meanings and significances.

This framework locates more appropriately queer desiring bodies and spaces in Kenya, and by extension Africa, through offering new insights in relation to the specific nuances and contexts.

Using the tools advanced by Deleuze and Guattari[98], I appropriated the discourse of becoming that involves the individuation of the self as an entity or organism that is always in constant motion, always in change; never static or fixed; but ever flexible.

This argument enables me to mark the different bodies that perform, disperform or unperform queer expressions to be, first and foremost, uniquely singular. This is to mean that the sense of selfhoods is never cast in collectives; in fact, Deleuze thought identity as imaginary. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, these bodies are always in constant motion; morphing up with each other in a non- linear fashion in new selfhoods while never remaining in them. The bodies are ever in flight from one expression to another in creative and indeed 'queered' ways.

The idea, therefore, is to recast the lens and frame from 'being' to that of 'becoming'; a paradigm that shifts the discourse from the historicist archival method of 'we-have-always-been-here' to the discourse of continuous construction and deconstruction. In the words of Mupotsa, becoming queer is a reading of sexuated bodies, chiasmic masks and a process of writing in minor literature.[99]

The practice of becoming queer is always that of the minority; the oppressed; the other. Becoming queer then is a framework that creatively imagines new communities, alliances, and affiliations. It is the meshing of non-normative bodies with normative bodies; disidentifying with identity politics and taking moments of motions in ways no one can imagine possible. Becoming queer in Africa is the evolution of sexuality to accommodate lines and flights of being resident in the multiplicitous forms of sexuality. It is the meshing of queer bodies and spaces. It is the queering of queer theory.

[98] Deleuze, Gilles., & Guattari, Felix. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum.
[99] Mupotsa 2014, p.51.

As Braidotti[100] contends, the body should be read as not either biological or social, but rather as a non-linear entity. Becoming situates the body thus; as fragmentary, fluid, multiple and rhizomatic. The desire is simply to offer productive ways of imagining- de/re-imagining – and of reading the collection of queer bodies and spaces in Kenya.

The framework I build is a framework that is sensitive to both place and context, and stayed faithful to its objectives and ambitions. A multi-method approach was assembled that brought together my own desire for an ethnographic model that acknowledged the field to be multiple in character, various in sites of discourse and plural in bodies. My desire, therefore, was to combine these seemingly chaotic forces to form a coherent body where meaning is conceptualised as always contextual. I positioned myself within the field in a manner that did not erase existing realities or refuted lived experiences but allowed for a diverse stories and contested narratives to emerge. For example, through participant observations of queer sexual bodies in the selected experiential spaces, some chapters show how spaces being textual entities are meaningfully productive and capable of offering new ways of conceptualizing queer sexual expressions. Sometimes, I used open-ended and semi-structured interviews to show how these spaces have an impact on both themselves and the spaces they inhabit.

The archival systems in Nairobi enabled me to show how contacts between spaces and users problematized and also celebrated new modes of representation. This was particularly useful to analyze and offer evidence of how certain norms are produced, constituted, resisted and informed. These insights, located in the following chapter, offered the foundation from which the other chapters were formulated. Given the technological advancements currently being enjoyed in Nairobi, I used social media and short message services (SMS) to document and analyze my interlocutions with my respondents.

[100] Braidotti, Rosi. 2003. Becoming Woman: or Sexual Difference Revisited. *Theory, Culture &Society* 20(3): 43-64.

I recognize that positionality is crucial because it compels me to acknowledge my own subjectivity, bias, and power position. My location within the study is extremely crucial. I approached the field both as home and away. I come from Kenya and therefore consider Nairobi as home. Yet, given my research study, I also considered myself an outsider and therefore the field was something I was entering into. For example, the question of access was quite delicate for me because I was unhindered throughout my research process but could not claim insider knowledge. Nairobi, for the most part, remained a purely ideological and geopolitical textual construction to imagine the corporeality of itself in relation to bodies and how body and space co-create new potentials and meanings. The question of access was crucial and the queer ambivalence I spoke about came in handy because I did not have to claim any insider status. I was allowed in at all places. I also understood that reflexivity is an important tool in building my own rubric and understanding as regards the field. I acknowledged, and still do, that I cannot fully speak on behalf of the researched. What I have done is to articulate the lived experiences of people that already live, and always will, such experiences.

I must admit that this work remains largely based on queer men as opposed to queer women or those who are gender non-conforming such as Neo. This was not by design but a result of my experience while in the field where my access and proximity was geared towards queer men. This can also be seen to a large extent in the literary analysis of the short stories anthology. This is by no means to mean that queer women are unavailable. However, while I address, mostly, queer men as they navigate the city and the moments of clarity or messiness, I am aware of scholarship that address the different relationship women have to the city. For example coming out of colonial law, women's visibility in public spaces was almost always criminalized and in terms of public order were accused of being prostitutes.[101] At the same time, there is literature (see for example Zethu

[101] White, Luise. 1990. *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

Matebeni on Walking) that addresses how queer women take up city spaces despite concerns on gendered imbalances that are always about experience, value, access and power.

This project builds specific narratives of queer sexual subjectivities using a carefully chosen small number of respondents and coupled with a dense archive drawn from a wide range of materials. While I recognize the impossibility of remaining an objective, impartial and neutral researcher, I entered the field as a collaborator with the researched in the production of knowledge. This means I acknowledged the crucial role of the researched and my potential of being influenced by them. For example, during the course of my research I developed deep friendship with most of my respondents which continues to shape my worldview as well as theirs.

1.6 Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter serves as an introductory frame for this dissertation because it situates it within the popular queer discourses – past and present - within Kenya generally, but specifically Nairobi. It excavates these queer anxieties using a range of multiple archival materials that include newspaper articles, literary novels, popular media and rumour networks, and public utterances by political and religious leaders. Using these systems, I show how these various queer anxieties and discourses are assembled together into the queer ambivalence matrix that reflects the consumptive potential of queer Nairobi.

In the second chapter, I introduce Nairobi as an empirical site from which to read and locate queer expressions, figurations, and iterations. Using the selected spaces of a tavern, night club, and a cyber café, I show how these everyday spaces allow and/or disallow particular queer expressions through the myriad ways of entanglement and adaptation. I describe the multiple forms of play and pleasure embedded in these spaces and how they create radical forms of queer subjectivity especially because of the contradictions that Nairobi as a site, and Kenya as a whole, presents between queer fungibility and queer tolerance.

Following on this chapter, the third chapter reads the users of these spaces in the different ways they map the everyday. I show how in the ways that they occupy, subvert, control and manipulate these spaces; new practices of queer selves emerge. Offered as textual installations, I describe how the users narrativize their queer selves while new patterns of queer embodiment emerge as a result of the entanglement between the self and the spaces. This is crucial because it reveals the many ways and the different configurations that queer individuals in Kenya emerge to grapple with the ambivalences resident within.

Using the ethnographic lens of the previous two chapters, I read *Stories of Our Lives*, a boocumentary project that captures the authentic and real-life experiences of queer individuals and how they navigate the subjectivities of being queer within the Kenyan imaginary. I examine the power of personal narratives and storytelling to capture the imagination of queer freedom and imagine the various ways queer messiness, anxieties, and ambivalences can result in radical forms of queer world-making in Kenya.

Departing from the Kenyan publics, but enmeshed within the African publics, in this last chapter I read *Queer Africa 1: New and Collected Fiction* and its sequel, *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* as literary artefacts to map the cartography of queer lives/expressions/subjections which are made visible/enacted/performed within the everyday. I rely on the notion of traversal through spaces as a tool through which queer individuals make sense of the multiple forms of subjugation and subordination and redistribute their sensibilities. In part, I superimpose these anthologies with the Kenyan public and insist that the various embodied existences of queer individuals are ways of grappling with and making sense of the consumptive potential of queer ambivalence.

Chapter Two

2.0 Nairobi is a shot of whisky [102]

Picture yourself in a busy street of a busy city. Assume you are enjoying the happenings around you; the choking traffic; the malfunctioning traffic lights; the many potholes in the streets; and the unassuming pedestrians that go about their business. You are heading east, then glance to your right, then you see a group of twenty young men and women, some seated, some standing, around a statue of a famous freedom hero who was assassinated. Think of Tom Mboya. At first, you think nothing of them. Perhaps they are unemployed, you think. How would it feel to sit with them, you wonder? What stories do they have to tell? What can the space of the statue tell you about the city? What about the presence of these people under this statue? A few metres ahead, you encounter a closed door right in the heart of another busy street. Why is it closed, you wonder? Yet you hear sounds, music sounds and bubbly chatter coming from behind the closed door. Would you feel like going inside? It is strange, you think, but walk on nonetheless. At the end of the street, you see a nightclub with a strange name. The name strikes you immediately. What does the name mean, you ask yourself? You mind your own business and walk on ahead. It is just a typical day in a busy street in a busy city.

Picture yourself in the city of Nairobi.

Tony Mochama perhaps offers a more nuanced rendition of Nairobi city. In the book *Nairobi: A Night Guide*[103], he traces the city's historic landmark buildings and the fairly known architectural edifices that coalesce with its inhabitants and have for years told the Nairobi story. What is distinct about Mochama's account in *Nairobi: A Night Guide*, and perhaps why I am invested in his narrative, is two-fold. First, Mochama has for a long time been a narrator of

[102]Wainaina, Binyavanga. 2003. *Discovering Home*. p.10

[103] Mochama, Tony. 2013. *Nairobi A Night Guide Through The City-In-The-Sun*. Nairobi. Native Intelligence.

Nairobi's urban life in the most uncanny fashion. As a famous weekly columnist in a widely read medium of a national and the oldest newspaper in Kenya, *The Standard*, he employs a mix of English and Swahili and the famous urban lingo, *Sheng* to read the contemporary Nairobi urban life that unsurprisingly resonates with the eclectic cultural mix that is Nairobi. As several scholars have noted, Sheng originated as a result of the social conditions prevalent in Nairobi. As a 'street' language, it has competing and sometimes contradicting theories about its origin. For example, Kembo Sure[104] argues that Sheng arose among teenagers in the Eastlands area of Nairobi who shared housing with their parents and therefore needed a language that would guarantee privacy when communicating to each other. While Osinde[105] generally agrees with Kembo Sure, he asserts that Sheng arose among the youth in the same socio-economic order. Ali Mazrui[106] on the other hand suggests that Sheng existed long before the eighties and was prevalent among the criminals and pickpockets in Nairobi as a way of coded communication. Despite all these narratives of Sheng's origin, the common strand that unifies them together is the agreement that it is a Nairobi urban language and it is mostly used to codify and narrate and the city. Secondly, and more crucial for this study, is that Mochama's *Nairobi: A Night Guide* tells the story of the 'city in the sun after the sun has gone down.' To make my point clear, I quote extensively one of the passages in the book:

> *As the sun sets on Nairobi, it is easy to see why they used to call it the 'City in the Sun.' the sun scintillates off Lillian Towers, making the building sparkle like bubbles in a champagne glass. Off-right is Ufundi Co-operative Building. The architects must have had mad dreams of Istanbul and swimming pools when they built it, for it looks like an empty swimming pool that was somehow inverted then erected against the sky. And what's with the Moorish awnings that adorn its top?*
>
> *Beyond it, the city seems awash with trees so that pink buildings in Parklands, like Stima Plaza, seem to peer like a child's eyes between fingers out at the city. Red-bricked Norfolk Apartments*

[104] Sure, E Kembo Sure. 1992. The Coming of Sheng. *English Today* 26–28.
[105] Osinde, K. 1986. *Sheng; an Investigation into the Social and Structural Aspects of an Evolving Language.* Unpublished B.A. dissertation. Nairobi: University of Nairobi.
[106] Mazrui, Ali. 1995. Slang and Code-switching: The Case of Sheng in Kenya. *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapier* 42: 168–179.

too, is swathed in trees, at least from this eagle-eyes' point of perspective. The spire of St. Paul's, also tree cloaked, looks like the proverbial red needle in the haystack.

The glassy cluster of city buildings: View Park towers, Anniversary, Posta Sacco, in the area nicknamed Goldenberg Corner, may be rumored to be unsafe in case of earthquakes but they do add to the grandeur of the city of Nairobi.

While the Nation Twin Towers, in their stark black-and-white, have an industrial stolidity about them, Lonrho House, with its thin antenna top seems to be 'giving the finger' to the buildings around it. I&M stands out in its sheer, elegant and exuberant beauty.

…

Looking thirteen floors to ground level, the Night Runner cannot help contemplating on the night club Florida 1000's strange shape. It does look like a space-ship, doesn't it?

And why does it sit atop a petrol station? Could be that, some dark night the entire enterprise shall blast off into outer space, taking bouncers, dee-jays, prostitutes and disco-revellers back to Pluto where we shall be studied as the 'Earthling Night Runners of the Early 21st Century' by green folk in shimmering, silvery space-suits.

That is the bird's eye view of the city-the illusion put on post-cards and tourist brochures. This is the reality about every city…the view is always shot from the top[107].

This chapter deals with the everyday practices of queer individuals in specific city spaces of Nairobi. I wonder how these city spaces in Nairobi - the nightclub, the tavern, and the cruising spot – manifest in ways that make it possible for the mobility of queer individuals. What Mochama offers above is an invitation for me to imagine what constitutes city spaces and what meanings are attached to it. More specifically, and in direct focus to this thesis, is what constitutes queer spaces especially within the Nairobi imaginary. Many scholars have contributed to the massive scholarship on space and sexuality and especially on the production and reproduction of African city spaces.[108] Also, a whole lot more has been written on space and sexuality in urban spaces.[109] It is not my intention to rehash these claims; rather I situate this chapter within a set of arguments on the

[107] Mochama, 2013, p.18-19

[108]Kruger, Loren. 2013. *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing, and Building*. Johannesburg. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Nuttall, Sarah and Mbembe, Achille. (eds). 2000. *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis. Durham and London*: Duke University Press; Primorac, Ranka. (ed). 2013. *African City Textualities*. New York: Routledge.

[109]Colomina, Beatriz. (ed). *Sexuality and Space*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press; Altman, Denis. 2001. *Global Sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Spronk, Rachael. 2012. *Ambiguous Pleasures: Sexuality and Middle Class Self-Perceptions in Nairobi*. New York: Berghan.

production and circulation of the Nairobi space, its everydayness and the discourses that invade the visibility and invisibility of spaces.

Henri Lefebvre[110], Michel de Certeau[111], and Michel Foucault[112] form the basic foundations of my arguments about the production and circulation of spaces. Through the aforementioned scholars, Nairobi city spaces are understood both queered and queering. Here, I mean that both the spaces and the queer individuals inhabiting them are both co-constitutive in the mutual material production of the various affects, intensities, metaphors, artefacts and energies that circulate between space and user. In addition, I introduce a concept I came to know while on a conference in Mexico with my doctoral supervisor in 2016 that I strongly believe best exemplifies my postulation on space. This concept of *ma*[113] has its origin in Japanese culture.

I have to admit that I am instinctively, and perhaps intentionally, biased in my reading of these scholars. I read these scholars in a non-linear and non-traditional manner. I am not looking for answers- or confirmations- for the arguments that I am making in these scholars. Rather, through these scholars, I follow on Mupotsa's interventions to think about 'space … and personhood' and how they all 'unsettle'[114] and demand an impulse towards instability and fluidity.

In several months between 2016 and 2017, I was in the city of Nairobi to interrogate how these particular spaces in the city in its varied forms and structures, impact on the subjectivity of queer individuals. More specifically, I was interested in what these spaces, as made and remade; defined and redefined; through the co-constitutive potential of 'space' and 'personhood' (to borrow from Mupotsa) mean in relation to the lived realities of the queer individuals. What was also of interest was despite the fact that same-sex sexual expressions and practices are outlawed[115],

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[110] Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
[111] de Certeau, Michael. 1984. *The Practice of Eceryday Life. California*: University of California Press.
[112]Dehaene, M and De Cauter, L. 2008. *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*. New York: Routledge.
[113] I deal with this interesting concept later in this chapter. I introduce it here in order to draw a contrast and point to a disciplinary refusal that has been my pre-occupation for a while.
[114]Mupotsa, Danai. 2014. *White Weddings*. PhD. p.29
[115] The Penal Code. Cap 63. Laws of Kenya.

and despite vitriolic and homophobic statements by political and religious leaders, there seemed to be a vibrant 'queer culture' that circulates within the city of Nairobi. I was interested; therefore, in how the various selected spaces are gestured as queer discursive spaces and how queer bodies within it negotiate meanings attached to them or create new meanings that solidify their subjectivity but also challenge the existing meanings of these spaces. As sites of queer expressions and alternative sexual intimacies, it is interesting the ways in which these spaces animate themselves and allow queer bodies to play and replay themselves within and through it.

In the book, *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues that space is always a result of social relations and activities. He further argues that the relationship between social space and social relations and activities are linked together, as he says, *'(social) space is a (social) product'*[116](emphasis in original).' Lefebvre's theorization of space expands our understanding of how spatial phenomena interact and negotiate with each other. His major focus is on social space, and he suggests that we think of space, not as a rigid, inflexible and neutral but a cyclical and dynamic production of spatial relations. Space, for him, is always a product of social interactions. Perhaps, Lefebvre's most lasting and enduring epistemological contribution in the book is his conceptualization of what he termed as the spatial triad. In this triad, which he posits uses three conceptions of space, Lefebvre argues, has the ability to make visible everyday life; spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces.

Spatial practice, Lefebvre writes, 'embraces production and reproduction and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristics of each social formation.'[117] He referred to this as the 'perceived' space, in terms of its practicality. What Lefebvre means here is that the spatial practice or perceived space is a result of how one uses or utilizes the space available; and the manner of conditioning and negotiating that result from the use of a space. As he writes, 'the spatial practice

[116] Lefebvre, 1991, p.26.
[117] Ibid, p. 33.

of a society secretes that society's space.'[118] Representations of space, for Lefebvre, are 'tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge.'[119] He terms this the 'conceived' space and refers to the realm of the scientists as urban planners and geographers. What he alludes to here is the space that has been designed and conceived by the relevant authorities to serve a particular purpose. This, he writes, 'is the dominant space in society.'[120] Interestingly, within the Nairobi space, this dominant space has been inverted in myriad and dynamic ways. Finally, representational spaces reflect, 'complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life.'[121] What Lefebvre means in this third conception is 'space [is] directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users.'[122]

This *perceived-conceived-lived* triad is what, in Lefebvre's postulations, forms the basis of the social space as seen, felt, experienced by its users. I superimpose Lefebvre's thinking and postulate how the city of Nairobi's select spaces and its active and daily users interlink together to create social space. For example, in terms of spatial practice, how do queer bodies use the space of Nairobi in ways that enable their agency or subjectivity? Secondly, how do these queer spaces in the city of Nairobi, if at all, encourage or discourage certain sexual subjectivities resident in it? How does the city live and 'breathe' through its inhabitants? Put another way, how does the Nairobi space, as conceived officially through urban planners and geographers enable or disable sexual diversities? It is here that we perceive the inversion of official conceived spaces in Nairobi in the narration of Mochama above. Aside from the questions of the city enabling queer subjectivity, I also grapple with whether in its various forms; it enables certain forms of experimental sexuality that might be deemed queer at only the moments that they happen. For

[118] Ibid, p. 38.
[119] Ibid, p. 33.
[120] Ibid, p. 39.
[121] Ibid, p. 33.
[122] Ibid, p. 39.

example, in the *Stories of Our Lives* boocumentary, an excerpt that best illustrates this possibility is useful to retell:

> *I met him at some party in [REDACTED]. We were tipsy, and he was leaning in, and I was thinking, 'What the hell is happening?' I did not stop him; he just went in. It was very different. These tiny hairs of mine stood up, that feeling you cannot explain. It is kinda sweet but different. I slapped him afterward. I was confused, a thousand things running through my mind like, 'what the hell am I doing?' Oh my God*
>
> *A lot of things.*
>
> *He looked at me and stormed off, and I thought to myself, 'Fuck what have I done?'*[123]

To contextualize the above narration, perhaps Homi Bhabha's iteration in his book *The Location of Culture*[124] is apt. For Bhabha, these expressions can be seen as a way of articulation, and a means of explaining spaces that imagine new possibilities. These spaces have no 'primordial unity or fixity' and therefore the ambivalence that generate becomes a way of locating the various discourses. As the above narration shows, and Bhabha belabours this point, these spaces refuse all attempts at categorizations and actively eschews the dualistic categories that have always been attached to these spaces. While this extrapolation might seem contradictory, it is productive because it ensures inclusivity rather than exclusion and 'initiates new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation.'[125]

2.1 (One); City Voyeurs

While Lefevbre's triad forms the basis from which the social space of Nairobi city space is felt, experienced and inhabited, de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* explores how people navigate the city through sensorial affects. He examines how the often-assumed passive activity of walking, for example, appropriates the city through the confluence of the street walker and the city space. For de Certeau, the act of walking, and thereby knowing the city is a mechanism of

[123] SOOL, p.23.
[124] Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
[125] Ibid, p.1.

production which must not be thought of as passive but rather as an active and powerful skill much like reading, or storytelling. 'The act of walking,' he says, 'is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered.'[126] Borrowing on the speech act theory, de Certeau powerfully claims that walking is the 'speech-acting' of the spaces on which the walking takes place. In other words, walking can be described as the space of enunciation. What this means is that the act of walking in the city is an active process that constantly produces and reproduces power and knowledge over and about the city space.

Nairobi city as a space is flexible and dynamic made so by its users and can be re-inscribed in several of ways. At the same time, walking is both a 'here' and a 'there' to indicate its flexible and dynamic nature as well as its powerful potential to inscribe new meanings to the city. 'Walking,' he writes, 'which alternatively follows a path and has followers, creates a mobile organic city in the environment, a sequence of phatic topoi.'[127] The topos, in this case the city space, can be molded in accordance with the operation and production of the user. The user stylizes the city space and molds it to his own specification.

While I agree with de Certeau's arguments of space as dynamic and amenable to influence by its users, I focus on one of his analogies to better explain my interest in production of queer spaces and spatialized productions in Nairobi. De Certeau writes that walking in the city is an art in production much like *narration* and r*eading*. Of reading he writes:

> The activity of reading has, on the contrary, all the characteristics of a silent production: the drift across the page, the metamorphosis of the text effected by the wandering eyes of the reader, the improvisation and expectations of meanings inferred from a few words, leaps over written spaces in ephemeral dance. But since he is incapable of stockpiling (unless he writes or records), the reader cannot protect himself against the erosion of time (while reading, he forgets, and he forgets

[126] de Certeau, 1984, p. 99.
[127] Ibid.

> what he has read) unless he buys the object (book, image) which is no more than a substitute (the spoor or promise) of moments 'lost' in reading'.[128]

If, as de Certeau says, walking is much like reading, then what meanings are accumulated when a queer sex worker walks in a city street and towards the tavern in the city center? Alternatively, what nuances are unpacked when one walks towards and around the cruising spot at dusk? Alternatively, what can be read when a flirtatious dance is performed vigorously on the floor of a queer nightclub? What 'drifts' occur, what 'metamorphosis' take place and what 'improvisations' are legible on the part of the actors? 'A space,' de Certeau avers, 'exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables.'[129] This is what he means: queer spaces result in the everyday lived experiences and embodied realities of queer individuals.

Suppose I am having a beer at my local bar while following the Formula One race. The discernible activity that can be read is that I am drinking beer and watching the race on television. When de Certeau writes about 'ways of operating', it is a question of production: what do I do in the process of drinking beer and watching television? Surely, it cannot be that those two activities are the only legible – or illegible- activities that I am involved in. In other words, while occupying spaces, what modes of behaviours, attitudes, mannerisms, and codes are accumulated in and through the discursive production and reproductions of spaces? What everyday practices accrue while I sit in the bar drinking beer and watching Formula One?

Indeed, there are stories, spatial stories, which occur and are narrated within the every day in the city of Nairobi. 'Stories could also take this noble name: every day,' de Certeau emphatically writes, 'they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories.'[130]

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[128] Ibid, preface, xxi.
[129] Ibid, p. 117.
[130] Ibid, p. 115.

Zethu Matebeni[131] shows us how walking/being in the city of Johannesburg defines or re-defines the conception of being queer. Writing about queer women who constantly have to navigate the city, she proves that walking or moving 'abOUT' in search of safer or friendlier spaces, is an integral part of queer subjectivity. These movements, she argues, always results in two scenarios: the change of the individual walking and/or the transformation of the space. While the city of Johannesburg is markedly different from other cities in Africa like Nairobi because of its long history with queer activism, Matebeni's arguments about the potential of walking in the city impacting on queer subjectivity remains valid. Just as de Certeau averred before, Matebeni suggests that walking in the city is two-pronged: it enables the walker to look into the city-spaces and also inversely this experience enables the city user to negotiate own subjectivity. Experiencing queer sexuality through walking, Matebeni suggests, is productive because it aligns the user with the spaces as a result of the visibility it affords the user but also the proximity to it.

2.2 (Two); Of Heterotopia

Michel Foucault's insistence of the feeling of the city through walking as a form of storytelling and narrativization of the city is quite powerful especially so when we perceive these spaces in Nairobi as subversive and dissident spaces. In essence, thinking of these spaces as *heterotopic*. Coined by Foucault in his famous lecture in 1967, heterotopia literally means other places. As opposed to utopia, which for Foucault is not real spaces for they present society as that which it is not, heterotopia, on the other hand, are real spaces, or two spaces at once, even mixed spaces which act as counter sites and where the real spaces are 'represented, contested and inverted.'[132] Foucault means that heterotopias are realized utopias; they exist in the every day but are structured in ways that offer resistance and contestations. They are spaces that can be located

[131] Matebeni, 2011.
[132] Dehaene and De Cauter, 2008, p. 17.

and pointed at but in them, because of the multiple contestations, are ascribed several meanings, significances, and knowledges of thought.

Foucault, in his explanation of heterotopia, develops a six-point principle to describe the concept. All communities, Foucault starts, in the world have heterotopias though in disparate and various ways. Secondly, heterotopias have the uncanny ability to function and operate differently from the function it was accorded. In this principle, Foucault gives the example of the cemetery. Thirdly, heterotopias have the ability to bring different spaces that are not compatible together in one space. Here, Foucault gives an example of the theatre where different spaces – the home, school, church, - are brought together onto one stage. Foucault argues that the fourth principle relates to time and how heterotopias have the ability to 'trap' time. Foucault gives a distinction between those heterotopias that 'accumulate' time in space for example libraries and museums that encompass years and years of time accumulation and are therefore more permanent. On the other hand, Foucault continues, are those heterotopias that are momentary and do not seek to trap time in space for a longer period and are therefore temporary for example festivals and fairs that occur say once or twice a year. The fifth principle concerns itself with its accessibility or lack of. Heterotopias are both accessible and at the same time inaccessible. In other words, it is not freely within reach of the populace. Foucault gives the example of the prisons where one has to be forced into it rather than through free will. Elsewhere, there are those heterotopias that one freely submits to, for example, the monastery. Either way, Foucault argues, they are not freely accessible to the public. The last principle is the spaces that are created in relation to or as opposed to other available spaces. Here are those spaces that are designed 'perfectly' in order to lay bare the imperfection of the other spaces. For example, the colonies created by the Western world in Africa and the Caribbean were to perfect spaces outside of the available spaces.

Foucault appears ambitious in his six-point explanation of heterotopias. Indeed, some scholars have argued that in its current form, Foucault's explanation of heterotopias is too broad

to run the risk of lacking in meaning.[133] While I am sympathetic to this view, I hold that its basic assumption is still valid: heterotopias, as understood as spaces that disrupt the continuities and ordinariness of everyday life, make sense.

For my case, I rely on the second and third principle to highlight the varied and multiple spaces in the city of Nairobi and how, in my opinion, they are heterotopic and therefore challenge and problematize the assumptions of everyday life and living in Nairobi. The second principle avers that heterotopic spaces in any existing society function differently from its initial function. Other times, the different functions could be multiple. The fifth principle argues that heterotopic spaces can be both accessible and inaccessible at the same time. It is also true, that some of these spaces can appear accessible, but the appearance of accessibility is a façade in the sense that it does not. With these two principles, I am concerned in the ways in which queer users have subverted and contested the spaces in Nairobi. Tied to this, is the concern with the very principle of access. Here I mean, a la de Certeau, can these subverted spaces be narrated within the play of performance of accessibility and inaccessibility?

2.3 (Three); The Presence of Absence[134]

Nairobi is the capital and largest city in Kenya and the fourth largest in Africa. It traces its origin and development to the British colonial incursion in 1875. Nairobi was not a city then, and it was not going to be for another 25 years. It became a city in 1900 under colonial rule, and in that year, Nairobi made history as the first colonial capital in the British Commonwealth.

[133] See for example Johnson, Peter. 2006. Unravelling Foucault's 'different spaces'. *History of the Human Sciences,* 19(4): 75-90.; also Knight, Kelvin. 2017. Placeless places: resolving the paradox of Foucault's heterotopia. *Textual Practice*, 31(1): 141-158.

[134] I borrowed this title from Keiko Oyamatu's report written in 2013. I have also relied on his arguments to make a case for the concept of *ma*, which will be a recurrent think all through this thesis.

As James Smart wrote in 1950, 'the plain on which Nairobi now stands was part of the 'no-man's-land to high adventure; the unconsidered wilderness that stood between the Queen's peace and Uganda, the country to which they carried the Flag and the Faith.' Nairobi, then, offered temporary respite as the colonial juggernaut marched on towards the hinterland from the coast of Mombasa. With its undulating hills, green swamps and fresh water known as the Nairobi river, it provided a stopover, 'a civilized comfort after weeks on safari.' Then, as it is now, Nairobi, despite the changes to the city, still provides respite, comfort, and safety to the millions of its inhabitants.

The motif of Nairobi 'temporariness' and 'in-betweenness' is a discourse I enjoin with the concept of *Ma* I mentioned earlier in this chapter. *Ma* has its roots in the ancient Japanese culture and traverses all aspects of the Japanese way of life. While a number of scholars have written on it[135], I focus on a few contributions that best demonstrate my own engagements with its basic principles. The word *Ma* writes Richard Pilgrim means an 'interval between two (or more) spatial or temporal things and events.' It carries, Pilgrim explains, intense significance to denote among other things a 'gap, opening, space between, time between, and so forth.'[136] While it was originally conceived within architectural and solid spatial terms, *Ma* is not only 'something within objective descriptive reality,' Richard Pilgrim writes, but it also 'signifies particular modes of experience' [137]and has been widely applied in music, drama, dance, and poetry.

I rely on Pilgrim's arguments on the experiential aspect of this concept, and I show this concept of *Ma* transcends the physical realm and enters into the realm of being in Nairobi and becoming the city. Pilgrim writes:

> Ma is made up of two elements; the enclosing radical meaning gate or door (mon) and the inner character meaning moon (tsuki). The visual image or character, therefore, suggests a light shining through a gate or door. If we were to take the

[135]Nitschke Günter. 1993.Ma – Place, Space, Void, In *From Shinto to Ando*, pp. 48-61, London: Academy Editions and Ernst &Sohn. See also Sen Shoyitsu, A Usefully Useless thing and Ando Tadao, *Thinking MA, Opening MA.*
[136] Pilgrim, R. 1986. Intervals ("ma") in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Paradigm in Japan. *History of Religions*, 25 (3), p. 255.
[137] Ibid, p. 256.

> gate itself as representing the things or phenomena and events of the world, the opening in the gate becomes *ma* or interval between the things.[138]

This 'interval between things' becomes a space of radical potential, as an affirmation of a productive force. These in-between spaces become spaces where real and authentic meanings are produced, circulated and consumed. *Ma* is a concern with human experience and how at that particular moment one views the world. It is an opening and emptying of oneself into the immediacy of the ever-changing moment beyond the distinctions and into the in-between of the 'this and that' world. '*Ma* is a particular mode of experience or sensitivity,' writes Richard Pilgrim, 'one that is highly attuned to the immediacy of sensual experience.'[139] What Pilgrim insists on is that *Ma* privileges on the potential of the immediate experience. To say it otherwise, it is what happens to you when you are dancing in the club, and a fellow reveler gently caresses your back? Or as you are seated sipping your drink, someone, across the table from you winks at you and smiles? It is these immediate and instant actions and reactions that form not only the everyday reality but are the focus of lived experiences. I personally experienced a *Ma* moment one night while on fieldwork in the nightclub. While seated with my friends, we ordered for a round of Tequila shots. After drinking that first round, a second one arrived at our table, and since we had not ordered, we inquired as to the source. The waitress pointed to the bar counter to a group of three men possibly in their thirties who had a shot of Tequila each raised at us. Instinctively, we raised the just arrived Tequila shots towards them, and for a split second, the gaze was on each other: my friends and I towards them and them towards us. The mode of experience and sensitivity palpable in that moment of raised glasses is twofold. First, direct and total attention was invested in the gaze if only momentary. And secondly, the intention of, and for mutual desire had been

[138] Ibid, p. 258.
[139] Ibid, p. 267.

established and acknowledged. This desire was only ephemeral because after drinking the shots we went back to our conversations, at least for the time being.

Alongside Pilgrim, Keiko Oyamatsu avers that the concept of *Ma* is a 'negative space' or 'space in-between.' For him, it refers, to the unseen, which 'has a much bigger psyche than things which are seen.'[140] Quoting Thomas McEvilley, Oyamatsu writes, '[it is] the realm of freedom and creativity, a space where sensibility is evoked and endlessly recognized, a zone of nothingness and everything, where there are no names, rules, boundaries or definitions.'[141] In Nairobi, I invoke *Ma* in spaces where nothing is assumed to be happening. Spaces where ruptures and tensions are possible while assuming a demeanor that evokes a narrative of non-disruption of the system.

Oyamatsu, in his thesis, *The Presence of Absence*, insists that *Ma* is a space of endless possibilities. 'Ma does not confide to the limits of dualism,' Oyamatsu writes, 'It is an 'in-between' space where a paradox can exist.' 'It is always changing, undefinable and uncontrollable;' he continues, 'a field where 'things' are being born and disappearing. It does not belong to anything but is inseparable from everything.'[142] In the city of Nairobi, I wonder how the 'unseen,' for example, our gaze in the nightclub, coalesce to encourage queer subjectivities. And, what do those 'unseen things' enable?

During the colonial period, Nairobi being the center of the administrative, industrial and commercial interests was 'spatially demarcated by racial profiles of its inhabitants.'[143] As Tom Odhiambo describes it, 'racial differences produced social class differences.'[144] As a result, Europeans benefitted from higher income margins followed by the Asians and lastly Africans. These disparities resulted in the social stratification and gentrification where Europeans occupied the most prestigious and fertile areas of Nairobi while Asians and Blacks occupied the middle and

[140]Oyamatsu, Keiko. 2013. The Presence of Absence. p.3.
[141] Ibid, p.4.
[142] Ibid, p.40.
[143]Odhiambo, Tom. 2010. Ways of Being and Not Being in Nairobi, In *Learning from Nairobi Mobility*, p.54
[144] Ibid. p.54

low prestigious estates respectively. While colonial rule ended more than 50 years ago, Nairobi is still socio economically separated along the lines drawn by the Europeans. Depending on your income ability and social status, one automatically qualifies to circulate, be it in private or in public, in particular spaces. Nairobi city then could be said to be born out of or within the fringes of extremities that ensures mobility between the two; an in-between of sorts. It consists of upper-end residential areas communing with open sewer slums. Tall skyscrapers compete with tin-roofed mud houses. Nairobi is a haven of contradictions, an anachronistic milieu and to echo Binyavanga Wainaina's metaphor of Nairobi as a 'shot of whisky,' this city is bittersweet.

Within the city of Nairobi then, naming where one's place of stay is, automatically gestures towards a grammar of social and economic capital. Lavington, Karen, and Muthaiga, being residential areas populated by politicians and expats usually signal strong economic and social mobility while Dandora, Kibera, and Mathare gesticulates towards the opposite, as they are low income residential areas commonly known as slums. Residential areas like South B, South C and Buruburu denotes a middle-class social capital. However, and this is an important point, 'these categories are often false,' writes Tom Odhiambo, 'hiding immense disparities in income, wealth and welfare of the occupants of these places.'[145]

I exploit this concept of inclusion and exclusion as relates to spatial subjectivity within Nairobi and especially towards its various relations to queer existence. Careful attention is paid to how particular spaces can both include and exclude and what parameters of existence permeate these dialectic politics which as Odhiambo notes is often false. And in this twin and simultaneous play of exclusion and inclusion, how does that imply or mean on the subjectivity of the queer self and body.

[145] Ibid. p.55.

Aware of the many debates about the 'homosexual,' I am guided principally by Neville Hoad's provocation in his seminal text; *African Intimacies.*[146] I engage with his arguments about the 'the place of an entity that comes to be called 'homosexuality' in the production (discursive, material, imaginary) of a place called 'Africa',[147] but within Nairobi. While Hoad, to some degree of success, locates the Foucauldian 'homosexual' in a place/space called Africa, I take a contrarian view by inverting his thesis within the city spaces of Nairobi. I examine the position of Nairobi spaces as a 'discursive, material [and] imaginary' space in which queer subjectivities emerge, circulate and travel within and through it. And in this mobility, the interest then shifts to how the space transgresses its boundaries to allow the figure of the queer subject to emerge and re-emerge. To rephrase it, how is the queer subject recuperated in these many travels and mobilities within the city of Nairobi. Macharia puts it in better form than I could: 'how bodies gain and lose meaning over time, how sex and sexuality become attached to bodies as they move through space.'[148]

2.4 Installation I: The Club.

On a warm Saturday evening, a little past 6.00 pm. I receive a call. It was Juma, one of my respondents, and he was calling to inquire about my whereabouts. We had planned on visiting one of the most popular queer hangouts in the city. Juma had insisted that I had to visit the club and see for myself. I tell him I am in the house. '*Cole atakuja*,' he said and hung up. Cole is coming. Cole is his friend and my respondent as well. I was excited, and the night promised to be exciting.

The *Club* is a spot located along one of the mainstream and busiest streets in the Central Business District (CBD) of Nairobi. This street is always choked with traffic – vehicles, and humans. I meet up with Juma next to Hilton hotel, at the intersection of Kenyatta Avenue and

[146] Hoad, Neville. 2007. *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.

[147]Ibid,. p.xvi.
[148]Macharia, Keguro. 2015. Archive and Method in Queer African Studies. *Agenda.* p.144.

City Hall way. We walk to the club a few meters towards a popular hotel. We arrive at the club at around 9.00 pm. to find it practically empty. We choose a spot on the balcony overlooking the busy street, and since it was still early, residents of Nairobi were busy beating the rush to go home. The balcony is half full, and Juma tells me that by 11 pm, the club would be 'alive.' At around 10.30pm, Cole, Juma's friend, joins us and by then the club was impressively full. Popular hits, from Pitbull's latest single featuring Enrique Iglesias *Messin' Around*[149] to Tanzanian AY's featuring Diamond Platnumz *Nakula kwa Macho*[150] were being belted from the DJ's booth, and revelers had started dancing the night away. The choice of music I noted immediately was striking. For example, Pitbull's *Messin' Around* is a provocatively raunchy and explicit music video that not only excites but as Cole said gets one in the 'mood.' While there was no dance floor, people stood up and danced next to their seats. Mostly young people, between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five were in the club. However, the majority of them were much younger, in their early to late 20s - perhaps young professionals and students in the city's colleges and universities. This club, I observed, attracted a much larger and wider clientele that those in the more upmarket locations. Its location in the CBD implied that access was not restrictive like the upmarket clubs. As most did not own private means of transport, partying in the CBD meant an assurance to get public transport home. In fact, there was public transport bus terminus right opposite the club, and it operated all night. Secondly, meals and drinks are relatively cheaper, and therefore students and young professionals can comfortably afford.

Unlike the inside of the club, the balcony was occupied by a much younger crowd in their late twenties. These are the cool ones I thought; they drank *Heineken* and *Tusker Lite* beer and

[149] The lyrics of this music video are quite apt to set a backdrop to the entire scene. The chorus is quite striking and goes like this: I heard it from a friend who heard it from a friend who/Heard it from another you been messin' around/ I'm hoping that your friend, too, told you about me, too/ 'Cause I'mma tell you straight up, I been messin' around. Specific archives of sex, infidelity, fun-time and the use of rumours are assembled in order to create a scene that indeed set the mood in the nightclub.

[150] This song's Swahili title translates to English as 'I am eating with my eyes' to mobilize archives of desire and lust within the nightclub.

smoked *Embassy* and *Dunhill* cigarettes. A few would smoke marijuana, despite its criminalization in Kenya. It was also instructive that I felt more comfortable and very relaxed in the balcony as opposed to the inside of the club, partly because of codified symbols of the balcony that I explain in detail later. Inside the club, however, was a much more varied crowd but mostly patrons in their thirties or perhaps older. On this Saturday night, and many other Saturday nights that I visited, there was a game of football, the English Premier League (EPL), and most were engrossed in watching it. However, I noticed, that there was a constant flow of human traffic in and out of the balcony from the inside of the club. Men and women would walk past the tables at the balcony and casts glances at and sometimes chat with those present and move along. It was like a synchronized 'speed dating' performance. As an 'outsider', I thought this was normal casual encounter and was impressed that everyone seemed to know everyone. My naiveté was crushed when one reveller, in his late twenties, walked past our table and cast a glance at Cole. It was only then that I realized that it was a seduction ritual. 'When one casts *the glance* at you,' Cole explained to me, 'he is interested in you. You size him or her up and if you are interested you pick up from there.' It was a fast move, lasting no more than five seconds. This seduction ritual I noticed was mostly restricted to queer men. While this performance, one can argue, is not any different from other cities generally, for Nairobi, it is distinct mainly because of the place and location of the queer clubs at the centre of not only the heteronormative nation-state but also the infrastructure of the club itself. The queer women, I observed, appeared to be in a close-knit intimate community with each other. They seemed to know each other more closely because whenever one walked into the club they all seemed excited and would hug and kiss and invite her to the circle. While there wasn't any noticeable seduction ritual among them, it does not mean it was non-existent. In fact Matebeni has argued about the dialectics of in/out with reference to lesbian spaces and how they do not function on hypervisibility but intimacy and sometimes silences. In the next chapter, this will be addressed as a reference point to the glaring absence of queer women in this project.

This went on, as I noticed, in different tables on the balcony. However, the inside of the club was much timider and laid back. Most drank the popular brands of beer, *Tusker* Lager or *Guinness* stout and did not seem to engage in this seduction ritual. Some, however, would come to the balcony to participate in the ritual.

The performance at the balcony of the *Club* was markedly different from the club inside. There was a much freer movement at the balcony. They would seductively and raunchily dance with each other, gyrating and grinding on each other in a move that I noticed was a *performance for the other*. The seductive dances are meant for the potential mates that kept moving up and down the balcony. Once someone dances, a potential mate would come over and request for a dance, which would be happily provided, and then they will talk as they dance. A few couples made out right in front of their friends and the whole balcony erupted in applause, an indication that such performative rituals have an audience outside of the self.

The *performance for the other*, an other that is potentially unknown and also unknowable[151] is in the Lefebvrean analysis, a spatialized practice. In Lefebvre's spatial triad, spatial practice refers to how users utilize the space. In this case, how queer individuals in the *Club* produce and consume the space. More importantly, however, is how the structure of the *Club* allows itself to be produced and consumed through social relations. To analyze how it gives itself to this production and therefore its consumption, I build a framework that links Lefebvre, de Certeau and Foucault. Writing in the *Everyday Life*[152], Michael Sheringham intervenes that it is impossible to read Lefebvre, de Certeau and Foucault in isolation. Sheringham remains incredibly resolute with the main arguments of the authors on the practices of the every day and how they are produced and reproduced. However, it is curious to note that he fails to acknowledge the important role that space plays in the production, circulation, and consumption of the everyday. He is right that the

[151] Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge.
[152]Sheringham, Michael. 2006. *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

every day produces spaces, but he does not acknowledge the reverse. I build on Sheringham's reading oversight of these authors to show how the *Club* is a site to produce, a means to circulate and a scene to consume queer desires. While these authors concern themselves with the notions and ideas of the every day and they recognize how space is integral to the production of the everyday, their ideas are not in any way similar. Lefebvre saw social practices as spatial practices; de Certeau maintained the every day as experiential through spaces while Foucault insisted on the value of power through subversion of spaces. However, it is important to note that while they come from different intellectual traditions, their contribution to the production of space feeds into each other.

Given the judicial-political climate in Kenya,[153] the blatant, unabashed and intentional existence of the *Club* right in the middle of one of the busiest streets in Nairobi is interesting if not curious. This not only undermines the legal and political narrative in the country, but it echoes Foucault's heterotopic postulation. In his second principle, Foucault argues that heterotopic spaces function differently from their intended or assumed function: 'a society can make a heterotopia that exists, and has not ceased to exist, function in a very different way.'[154] The *Club* functions in this same way. While I agree with Foucault's argument of a subversion of space mediated by society, I argue that the space itself allows for its subversion. For example, the *Club's* balcony's complicity for its re-appropriation can be deduced in how it grants access to registers of queer desires. The balcony overlooks the busy street, which has an active *matatu* terminus right across. Invariably, therefore, at every point in time (day or night), there is a high number of passers-by crossing the street, residents of the city who are boarding the *matatus*[155] home. In effect users of the balcony can view the street and its events. Conversely, the various users of the street can view

[153] See Macharia, Keguro. 2013. Queer Kenya in Law and Policy. In S, Ekine and H, Abbas (ed), *Queer African Reader* (273-289). Dakar: Fahamu Press; and Mwangi, Evan. 2014. Queer Agency in Kenya's Digital Media. *African Studies Review*. 52(2): 93-113.
[154]Dehane and De Cauter, 2008, p. 18.
[155] These are Public Passenger Vehicles (PSV) that act as taxis but are privately owned.

the balcony and its events. The balcony becomes both accessible and inaccessible. Accessible because from the outside, one can practice voyeurism and at the same time invisible because it is in a space that has some restrictions (for example no admission for the underage). Foucault reminds us that heterotopic spaces function as spaces of and for resistance, contestation, and subversion. The balcony, and by extension the club, by its very existence in Nairobi amid multiple narratives against the possibility of queer desires is an act of resistance and contestation. Secondly, the obvious and visible motions of intentional seductions, explicit dances and rampant make-out sessions in a space openly visible to the 'public' are acts of subversion.

Agreeing with Foucault, Michiel Dehaene and Lieven de Cauter write that heterotopic spaces allow for the dispossessed and the oppressed to 'defy regulating mechanisms of the established order.'[156] The *Club* allows for the unhinged and cyclical production, circulation and consumption of queer desires and behaviours that fall outside of the imagination of Nairobi as heteronormative. The space makes possible the journeying of intense desires of romance, love and sex within its users in ways that other 'public' spaces could not and perhaps cannot.

When Foucault defines heterotopia as other places, he imagined such spaces as contesting and subverting the real spaces that are modelled against. The *Club,* therefore*,* occupies this position. 'We call it *Kanisa*' Cole told me on another night. *Kanisa,* a Swahili word means church. So in the imaginary of the space, it mirrors the church as people go to 'worship' at the altar of queer desires and behaviours. The intrinsic quality of the name should not go unnoticed. A church, by its very nature, is a welcoming space. 'Everyone' – all shades, colors, taste, preferences- are welcomed in the church. Churches do not 'discriminate.' They attract everyone. The *Club* works in the same principle. Essentially it is a 'public' space. It is not an exclusive 'queer' space. At other times, my respondents told me, the space is converted to a more 'straight' space. 'Especially during the week,' Cole told me, 'it is a *kawaida* [normal] bar. And it is very boring.' What that means is

[156] Dehane and De Cauter, p. 192.

that the space mutates and transforms into a more heteronormative setup. However, this does not mean that it becomes exclusionary to queer desires. Also, during the times that the space is queered, heteronormative presence is also felt. 'Curious people' Kamau another respondent told me one other night months later, 'come here and try whatever. Almost half of the people in this bar are straight.' When I asked what that meant for him, he shrugged his shoulders, 'it is what you want to see.' I understood that to mean that it does not have to mean anything in the broader spectrum of identity markers. From my observation of the space and the conversations with my respondents, I gathered that this space allows for a particular brand of queer sexual voyages and cruises back and forth. This is a way of thinking about spaces as people occupy them in ways that goes beyond the narrow functional spectrum.

Sheringham, for example, does an incredible analysis of de Certeau's main ideas about the every day and how it shapes spaces. 'Participation in daily acts,' Sheringham insists, 'places us in a sphere of anonymity, a fluid, undramatic present.'[157] Sheringham reminds us that the everyday practices are systemic. He means acts 'display heterogeneous multiplicity and metaphorical interchangeability.'[158] Conversely analyzed therefore, the *Club* as a canvas allows for 'participation' by its users. On the one hand, it 'anonymizes' its users by providing a space to act out queer desires – a kind of a safe space. On the other hand, it performs and mutates in very 'heterogeneous' and 'multiple' ways that makes its users visible and invisible in different publics while aware of the precarious position that they occupy and therefore guarantee their liveability. It is this intrinsic potential of the *Club* that makes it not only unique as a territory of queer desire but also as a site of and for radical re-imagination of queer liveability.

[157]Sheringham, 2006, p. 16.
[158] Ibid, p. 222.

2.5 Installation II: The Spot.

Off the busy Accra Road in downtown Nairobi, stands a forlorn lane that connects the busy Accra Road with Luthuli Avenue. Accra Road is home to the Embassava Matatu Services, a public transport company that plies the ever-busy Nairobi CBD and Embakasi route. It is therefore easy to miss the events that occur almost daily along that forlorn lane as it is overshadowed by the hustle and bustle of Accra Road. Over several months of 2016 and early 2017, I frequented the *Spot*, a small, rundown tavern that has been in existence since the colonial era with some of my respondents. Ken, my respondent, told me about the joint when I first met him at the *Club*. 'It is an old 'chilled' spot, not laid back but rustic,' he said. 'Mostly patronized by older men with old money,' he said, 'and younger men and women in need of money.' Ryan, Ken's friend accompanied us the first two times. As you step in, plastic chairs are loosely scattered all over the hall with few tables that are covered with *Tusker* tablecloths. The lime green wall painting is chipping away revealing a yellowish undercoat (However when I visited the same space towards the end of 2017, there was a fresh coat of paint). The pungent stench from the urinals hits your nostrils and is a bit nauseating. At the door, young women are positioned, standing or seated, keenly checking over any visitor. Meeting your eye, one of them winks at you; this is a sexual invitation. I was advised that we sit at the back close to the urinals because that's where the action usually is. Hawkers of all kinds - selling ready-made samosas and kebabs, screw drivers, shoes, handkerchiefs, socks and even airtime – jostle for space with the waiters, some of whom are drunk. This eclectic mix was quite fascinating for me. On a simplistic level, it could be argued that the various capital registers present in the space might signal a neoliberal demand for economic progression. However, I think this setup goes deeper. It is a mechanism, a way to defuse the anxiety that is obviously wrought by the performance in this space, which I explain below.

The mostly middle aged population of the bar is glued to the one television set that is airing some popular local programme and it got me thinking how this device as a consumptive product

ensures the coherence of this group. We take our seats and one of the waiters staggers over and takes our orders. At the right hand side, under several umbrella canopies is a group of twenty-five young men in their early twenties to late thirties all seated as if in a conference presentation style, sipping their beers and chewing on khat, a popular sedative drug commonly known as *miraa*. I can tell they are checking us over with the familiar knowledge of those who can tell strangers from the usual patrons.

Our order comes, and we settle into the back of the hall facing the door. Shortly, an older man walks in, marches through the middle of the hall and heads straight to the bathroom behind us. He is wearing a dark blue suit and carrying a large leather briefcase. The conference on our right is immediately scuttled as the entire focus now shifts to the visitor as he walks to the bathroom. Immediately, three men stand up and follow him to the bathroom and after a few minutes, two of them return and take their seats. The suited man emerges out of the bathroom and walks out and the third man follows him out of the bathroom, heads to where he is seated, grabs his luggage, a large suitcase and a hoodie jumper, exchanges knowing glances- large smiles and hi-fives to his friends- and hurriedly leaves the bar to follow the man who was no doubt waiting for him outside. As he leaves, I overhear one of his friends chuckle, '*huyu amebahatika leo*', he is lucky tonight.

What I had witnessed was a sexual transaction that took place in under five minutes in this space. My presence in a space patronized by a population that the nationalist discourse has us believe that they are naturally inclined against same sex desire was instructive. The older men and women seated drinking beer and watching the television even barely noticed the suited man and his young lover and the mating ritual. Or, if they did, it did not warrant their attention - or they did not care. This ritual happened every time I was at *The Spot* and sometimes as many as six over the course of four hours.

What was even more instructive was the cohabitation between the male and female sex workers. As you walk into the bar, the demarcation between the two demographics is discernible. The women sex workers sit next to the door while the men sit at the very end next to the bathrooms. I come to understand that if a potential client walks straight to the bathroom or to the back of the bar, then he is interested in the male sex workers. This performance that occurs daily is particularly interesting for it speaks about the structure and organization of *the Spot* not as a safe space for sexualized individuals or individualized sexualities, but as an anxious and vulnerable site where all possible kinds of sexual desires are produced, circulated and consumed.

On another night, I enter this space just when the prime time news comes on air at 9pm and the space is pin drop silent. After the usual political news, a documentary news story is aired. The setting is recognizable and the individuals being interviewed are also recognized. It is at the same space that we all are. The excitement is palpable and everyone rushes near the TV set to hear every word. One of the people being interviewed in the recorded documentary is also present in the bar although he remains seated uninterested, clutching to his beer. I rush to the television set to hear every word and the man is complaining about police harassment at night and sometimes during the day but says if one pays a little fee they are left unbothered. At the end of the documentary, the journalist argues that despite the fact that homosexuality is criminalized in Kenya and political leaders continue to deny its existence, apparently it goes on even under the watchful radar of the security personnel. That news item gets the whole bar talking including the female sex workers. While some complained that the story would make the police invade the establishment, some look really excited shouting that it's about time. One of them, clearly inebriated said, '*nisawa, wajue tuko*', its fine, they should know we are here.

I offer an analysis of the space at *the Spot* using a two-pronged paradigm that I had earlier assembled. Firstly, using the Japanese concept of *Ma,* I designate this space as an 'in-between' space. And because of this in-betweenness, I signal the space, as conceived by both de Certeau

and Foucault, as both accessible and inaccessible to its various users. When José Esteban Muñoz says that 'queerness is also a performance because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future,[159] he means that queerness is essentially a Deleuzean *becoming*[160]– a processual definitions and redefinitions of the self which is never productive. Essentially, it's a never ending aspiration, a desire for the 'never-here', 'there or then' or even more bleakly 'never-never'. In the Japanese concept, it's a 'here' and 'there'.

There is therefore some difficulty in denoting particular spaces as 'concrete' queer spaces. More so in the Kenyan context, it would be limiting if not downright misleading. Speaking with each other, I find Foucault's conceptualization of heterotopia and the distinction that Muñoz makes about utopia quite recuperative. While Foucault insists on heterotopia as real spaces that subvert and contest, Muñoz prefers to speak of utopia as either 'abstract' or 'concrete'. Muñoz insists on 'abstract utopias' over 'concrete utopias' because they imagine a radical potential. Abstract utopias, writes Muñoz, 'pose a critique function that fuels a critical and potentially transformative political imagination.'[161] Read together, Foucault and Muñoz seem to be talking about the same thing: the real possibility of radical transformation realized through spaces.

The Spot occupies this space because it resists a categorization and cartography of the present. It is both here and not here at the same time. It is an in-between. By its very existence, it is both an affirmation of queer selves and a negation at the same time. *The Spot* is both a queer space and at the same time it is not. It is a queer space because queer sexualities are produced and circulate, and it is not because the Kenyan nation-state body politic does not recognize queer sexualities. With this in mind then, how does this space, sustain and circulate queer sexualities in ways that its inhabitants embody and therefore play out the performance. Ashley Currier and

[159] Muñoz, José. 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press, p.1.
[160]Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum.
[161] Muñoz, 2009, p. 3.

Thérèse Migraine-George wonder on the 'location of queer African subjects who live and strategize in liminal spaces at the moving junction of visibility and invisibility'.[162]

What they mean to ask is what plays, performances and interactions accrue at the intersections of spaces that are not here nor there; liminal spaces so to speak. What is gained *or* lost, or what is lost *and* gained at the contours of the shifting and somewhat transient nexus of visibility and invisibility? How does the suited man negotiate his visibility and invisibility as a queer subject when inside *The Spot?* At the same time, how do the young men seated at the corner of this space mediate their own subjectivities? Or to ask the same question in reverse, how complicit is *The Spot* in making the suited man and the young men both visible and at the same time invisible?

If we are referencing the space, then outside it, the suited man is not visible as a queer subject. As he steps into the bar, he is immediately designated as a sexual subject by his very presence in the space. However, he occupies a space that recognizes or designates him as both a queer and a non-queer subject. The performance and ritual within this space, no doubt enabled, sustained and enhanced by the space itself will determine his subjectivity. At the door, as the female sex workers size him up and wink at him, he is designated a non-queer label. Three things are important to note here: first, is the invitation by the sex workers, secondly is his refusal of the invitation and lastly the enabling environment of the space. His refusal of the invitation on its own cannot mark him as a queer subject. He could have stepped into the bar to have a cold beer on his way home. Even a more plausible explanation could be he is a visitor to the city, and he is looking for accommodation. However, the space becomes complicit in marking him as a queer subject. For starters, the presence of other queer subjects in the space introduces the possibility of a queer encounter. Secondly, the rehashed performance by the suited man becomes instantly legible; it is

[162] Currier, Ashley and Migraine-George, Thérèse. 2016. Queer Studies African Studies: An (Im)possible Transaction. *GLQ*, 22 (2): 281–305.

received, coded and replayed back. The man walks in, struts across the hall, and heads straight to the bathroom. It is a code that is instantly recognized and performatively read out. Even on the other end of the spectrum, the three young men who follow the suited man to the bathroom also perform out, enhanced by the space itself. We should note that such a performance is not simple or trivial. It requires close attention to detail, and quick agility. It is overt but also covert; invisible and also invisible.

I contend that the queer subjects at *The Spot* occupy this precarious location at the interstices of overt and covert, visible and invisible, seen and unseen possibilities and moments. This space that queer subjects occupy is a 'never-never', because it is not here but it is at the same time because of the spatial infrastructure of *The Spot.*

2.6 Installation III: The Depot.

In a rundown multi storied building, three blocks away from The *Club*, exists an Internet café in the first floor. 'Meet me here,' Luke one of my other respondents told me, 'you will understand why we call it the *Fap Depot*.' I first visited the establishment in late July of 2016 and subsequently for the next seven months with Luke, Ken and sometimes Cole. The *Depot* is a sizable room creatively divided horizontally into two by metal sheets creating an illusion of two floors. On the 'first floor', activities associated with a cyber café happen as usual – browsing the Internet, sending emails, printing, and photocopying. However, up the metal staircase to the 'second' floor, a different performance is at play.

Old computers were stationed in small cubicles facing each other and numbered numerically. 'When you climb up the stairs,' Mike another respondent had told me on the phone earlier, 'take the cubicle directly facing the stairs.' Luckily it was unoccupied. 'It is a vantage point,' he said, 'you will observe everyone coming in and out.' Also, I could see the activities in the other cubicles. In the many hours I sat, I occupied the position of a voyeur: people would walk up the

stairs, and then briefly but deftly scan the entire room. Instinctively, those seated and busy on their computers would look up. I looked up too. The new arrivals would select a cubicle and sit down. 'When they sit down' I was told, 'most often than not they open a pornographic site.' Then, still seated, they will throw glances at the occupants in the next cubicle. Some would start a conversation or banter. Some, I observed, exchanged contacts perhaps to meet up later. In several occasions, some left together minutes after their entrance.

'The owner downstairs knows what is happening up here,' several of my respondents told me, 'but they let us.' 'So it's like a cruising spot?' I asked wanting to know the appeal of this evidently open visible but also invisible space. 'Yeah, you could say that,' some replied, 'but not really like the New York or Amsterdam ones. It is our own – a *fap depot*!'

My interest in the *The Depot* is precisely because of this appropriation: The ingenious partition of the room, the leeway afforded to the participants upstairs and the intentional compliance by the participants downstairs (including the proprietor). Particularly, I am interested in the metal staircase as a figure of this appropriation. When I walked into the cyber café and stepped on the metal staircase on my way up, then I entered a different realm. Immediately, I ceased being a client interested in the rigors of an Internet shop. Immediately my feet touch the staircase, I automatically signal my disinterest in photocopying or sending emails. I am immediately registered by the participants in this space as a sexual being. Every participant upstairs becomes a sexual being, in effect a queer body! The metal staircase, therefore, facilitates this legibility and comprehension. The metal staircase elides any doubt or question on the place and location of myself and the participants upstairs.

The metal staircase, in and of itself, has no intrinsic place of its own, but it relates, significantly to the other spaces that it connects to. The staircase, recalling the Japanese concept of *Ma,* Foucaldian heterotopia and Lefebvre's analysis of social practice, is an in-between space. 'The in-between is a strange place,' writes Grosz, '[it] lacks a fundamental identity, lacks a form, a

givenness, a nature.' However, its potential and power to communicate its positive transformative quality is evident. 'Yet,' continues Grosz, 'it is which facilitates, allows into being, all identities, all matter, all substance.'[163] Grosz's articulations recall Deleuze's postulation of identity as rhizomatic, as a becoming. The staircase facilitates identities and notions while being invisible to the underlying structure of meaning making. It is my contention that this invisibility is what makes it powerful in its transformative quality. To a casual look, the going up and down the stairs may mean nothing. For them, a staircase is simply a way, a link that connects the 'here' and 'there'. This assumption is wrong. [164]

The staircase is the site where transformation occurs. It is a marker of subversion; a sign of transgression, and a site of and for deviance. It is where possible futures can be imagined and reimagined. It is not a bridge from the 'here' and 'there' understood spatially. Neither, is it a point amidst the 'then' and 'now' conceived temporally. Rather, the in-between is a solid space, an actual reality of the everyday that points to a politics of change, of radical optimism. The in-between, Grosz asserts, 'disrupt the operations of the identities that constitute it,'[165] and it is this disruptive radical quality that marks it as an important space. The metal staircase is a space of subversion, of disruption where sexualities deemed non-existent can be made visible, where desires thought aberrant can flourish. The metal staircase, in its invisibility, in its mundaneness, its ordinariness, and its everydayness makes queer desires, bodies and activities visible. It signals a possibility, a future for the other. It's a promise of other worlds (upstairs for starters) and alternatives. Foucault's assertions of power, and how power functions, whether overtly or covertly, can be appropriated to the metal staircase. Its power is resident in its ability to make visible the other, and

[163] Grosz, Elizabeth. 2001. *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Spaces*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, p. 90.
[164] See for example Roland Barthes, 2002 and George Perec, 1997 on their ideas of how invisible spaces are really visible.
[165] Grosz, 2001, p. 92.

in so doing a framework of meaning making and making of meaning is created through the interaction of the space and the bodies that occupy it.

This staircase is a metaphor to the in-between spaces that re-direct and re-position queer lives in the city of Nairobi. For example, the *Club,* sitting in the first floor, has a staircase that opens up from the busy street. It is the only establishment in the first floor and therefore the staircase can also be marked as a metaphor of transgression and subversion, since while on it, you can only be headed into the club. *The Spot* has a long dimly lit passageway that opens up into the street. As you walk along the passageway, at the end of it you immediately get into the establishment. Just like the other two spaces, the passageway only leads to it.

This chapter was invested in how Nairobi city spaces particularly the tavern, the night club and the internet cafe, as made and re-made, make it possible for queer individuals to negotiate the city spaces in ways that enable their sexual subjectivities. I have argued that the space of the in-between in these sites then enables the oppressed other to emerge, a coming of age of sorts. Read alongside Lefebvre's examination of ritualized spatial practices, de Certeau's everyday imprints of walking in the city and Foucault's subversive spaces, the metal staircase at the *Depot*, the concrete staircase leading to the *Club*, and the dark passageway into *The Spot* are signalled as signposts in which queer liveability and possibility can be legible and articulated. At these interstices, queer subjectivities as emergent in daily-lived realities are realized. These spaces become agents of and for the realization of queer desires, expressions and bodies. As these spaces have shown, there is an intrinsic quality in them, a quality inherent in them that make possible subversive transgressions of the self and body. These arenas of transgressions, sites of subversions therefore make visible queer liveability in the city spaces of Nairobi.

In order to fully contextualise these spaces especially when inhabited and occupied by queer individuals, it is necessary to map out the queer cartography in Kenya. In the next chapter, I situate the Nairobi space as well as its queer occupants along a queer imaginary continuum in

order to adequately locate the tensions, fissures, frictions, ambivalences and complicities within the various publics that ultimately make it possible to subvert the space to own advantage.

Chapter Three

3.0 A Fluid Disposition[166]: On Kenyan Queer Imaginaries.

> Nairobi is fascinating. It is vibrant, eccentric and extreme city made up of different and contradictory worlds. Nairobi is also an elusive city; difficult to comprehend and fully penetrate
>
> Tony Mochama[167]

In the previous chapter, I concluded on a spatial analysis of selected city spaces in Nairobi in ways that they enable queer subjectivities not only to emerge but to sit side by side with competing and conflicting queer discourses in Kenya. I argued that in order to fully contextualise the structure, manner and framework of these spaces, Nairobi must be understood in relation to the various and opposing debates on queer lives and expressions.

In this chapter, I approach this mapping of a queer imaginary from a *provocative* sense. In the Oxford English Dictionary *provocative* evokes notions akin to 'aggravate', 'challenge', 'disturb', 'stimulate', 'incite', 'influence', or 'goad'. These terms, in all their various and multiple contexts, do not sufficiently arouse my desire with the labour of provoking. Even then, my own understanding of provocative fails me. Provoke here implies to make the various ideas that I outline sit uncomfortably with each other and rub against each other. Provoke sits beside queer imaginary as a tool to map out various queer artefacts, technologies, soundtracks, materials, archives, knowledges and connections in Kenya. It is also a mental mind-shift: a different way of finding alternatives.

Provoke in this chapter is a line[168], or lines – straight, curved, warped, tangled, untangled – that link or unlink several nodes of popular queer expressions in Kenya that constitute a queer

[166] Borrowed from the second chapter of Binyavanga Wainaina's *Discovering Home* (2003). The intended meaning of this term reflects the contradictions, ambivalences and complicities that Kenya has on queer liveability and expressions.
[167] Mochama, Tony. 2013. *Nairobi A Night Guide Through the City-In-The Sun.*
[168] Ingold, Tim. 2007. *Lines: A Brief History*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

imaginary. If my contribution in this chapter seems contradictory, if they seem to un-hold each other or seem to be in opposition to each other, I hope they reflect my very contention about the uneasiness (and sometimes impossibility) of mapping a queer imaginary in Kenya. Print media reports, Kenyan literary novels and memoirs, legal documents, and following on Musila[169], popular rumours and speculations are placed side by side without an attempt to flatten out the uncomfortable creases that result. This I do, in order to contextualize the conceptual site of the Nairobi urban.

Musila offers a convincing argument on the nexus between an individual and the narrative process and how that mediates the understanding of the self. Narrative, in all its forms, she argues, 'offers a critique of rationality, the unity of the subject and its related logocentrism as key tenets of colonial modernity that continues to mediate metropolitan readings of postcolonial Africa.'[170] She acknowledges the power of narratives to render most bare 'truths' in ways that enable – and sometimes disable – the emergence of a self, and in this case, the queer self. Towards the mapping the Kenyan queer imaginary through narrative and the narrative process, Mary Louise Pratt's[171] concept of the 'contact zones' constantly comes to mind.

This mapping is centrally anchored on space and spatial formations and how such installations manufacture, both ontologically and conceptually, possibilities and impossibilities of queer desires and expressions in Kenya. While this project is not an excavation of instances of queer desires in the mould of 'salvage anthropology', it is however a more discursive and logocentric project. For example, borrowing from Pratts' contact zones these are sites or 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly

[169] Grace Musila. 2015. *A Death Retold.*
[170] Musila, p.4
[171] Pratt, Mary. 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge

asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination'[172]. This is the conceptual frame from which I approach the mapping of the queer imaginary in Kenya.

'In Kenya,' Musila adds, 'popular wisdom on morality is distilled from a range of institutions including religious doctrine and an array of customary practices, all of which are firmly conservative regarding sexuality in general, and female sexuality in particular.'[173] While she was alluding to the highly publicised murder of the Briton Julie Ward and two other women and the subsequent accusations of the deceased as women with loose morals, her arguments remains true against queer sexuality, and I argue, even more so, especially in Kenya.

3.1 (A); Grammar of the Kenyan State and Public

I started the previous chapter with a newspaper headline about a wedding[174] that took place in the United Kingdom between two men of Kenyan origin. In my analysis, I invoked the trope of home and away and the ways in which events that happen outside of the home are usually summoned to the homeland in order to make claims about the home. In that article, Charles Ngengi and Daniel Chege Gichia's wedding was termed as the first ever in Kenya and it attracted a lot of attention.[175]

In analysing the Charles and Daniel's UK wedding, Evan Mwangi[176] notes that it was 'treated as both a spectacle and a national shame.' It was deliberately sensationalized to create as much buzz as possible in order to invoke nationalistic metaphors of degraded and decrepit Western influence. This appeal to nationalism, through such affects of shame and disgust, Mwangi

[172] Ibid, p.4
[173] Musila, p.85.
[174] Njenga, Gitau & Weru, Gakiha, Two Kenyan men wed in London, *The Satuday Nation*, October 17, 2009. Accessed June 11, 2017 at: http://www.nation.co.ke/news/1056-673614-jkpmrsz/index.html
[175] Karanja, Muchiri, A family scarred by homophobia, *The Daily Nation*, October 22, 2009. Accessed June 11, 2017 at: http://www.nation.co.ke/news/1056-675940-jko6pjz/index.html
[176] Mwangi, Evan. 2014. Queer Agency in Kenya's Digital Media. *African Studies Review*, 57: 93-113.

notes, was achieved through among other strategies, the writers of the article. While stories from the diaspora are usually filed by foreign correspondents, this particular wedding was covered by a Kenyan, Gitau wa Njenga, who lived in the UK and, Gakiha Weru, a Kenyan journalist based in Nairobi. As a result, the hype and its attendant violence that the news generated were precisely as a result of the mobilization of the said affects.

It must be noted that in terms of organizational capacity, Kenya does indeed have an impressive Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) movement. Starting from 2007, when a number of LGBTI groups merged to form the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK)[177] the collective organizational initiative gathered momentum to the current statistic where there are over 20 LGBTI movements although most of them are in urban centres, particularly Nairobi. GALCK, the most recognizable movement, is fully operational with an office as well as a fully employed staff operating from Nairobi[178]. In the website, they describe themselves as a 'the national SOGIE umbrella body, representing LGBQ voices across Kenya.' SOGIE, an acronym, means Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression. Although most of these movements are located in the city, they have outreach networks in other parts of the country and specifically the rural areas.

I note that that the 7th edition of the World Social Forum (WSF) that was held in Nairobi in 2007 was the major turning point in LGBTI organizing and mobilizing in Kenya because it provided global visibility to GALCK. During the event, GALCK was afforded the opportunity to canvass and network with other LGBTI movements across the world despite the legal framework in the country disavowing queer existence. I highlight this in order to introduce another provocation that sits uncomfortably with the national rhetoric in Kenya. It should be noted that all these organizations are registered by relevant government agencies that include the Non-

[177] Karugu, Nguru. and Mbaru, Monica. 2012. *Lived Realities, Imagined Futures: Baseline Study on LGBTI Organizing in Kenya.* Nairobi: UHAI EASHRI.
[178] For more information see the website: https://www.galck.org/

Governmental Organizations (NGO) Co-ordination board. This is an arm of the same government that under the penal code[179] criminalizes and brutalizes same sex sexual expressions as illegal. Two things have to be noted here: first, is the irony of a government that enhances the visibility of minority groups and its institutionalization through registration while at the same time insisting on their illegitimacy because of the law. Secondly, and I think more important, the fact that the same government, appears to be complicit, by design I should add, in this façade.

Admittedly, while most of these organizations do not explicitly indicate that they are LGBTI organizations while seeking formal registrations, for they insist on the organizations being youth-based, or community based, other organizations like the GALCK and David Gitari's National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission[180] (NGLHRC) are formally registered as LGBTI organizations. While the fact that the registration process allows for such a manoeuvre is an important point to note. The use of such a tactic in order to get registered is not only a strategy by the LGBTI organizations to 'survive' but also a complicit gesture by the government agencies which lays the contradictions and ambivalences that undergird queer liveability in Kenya. The fact that the organizations operate and institute programs that touch on LGBTI lives directly and in full view of the public and the state, for example the annual Gay and Lesbian awards that began in 2012 are a testament to this complicity. These awards held at City Hall in Nairobi, formerly the Mayor's offices but currently the Governor's office, further entrench this complicity. This complicity is not entirely tied to formal legal obligations and requirements but is also evident in

[179] Kenyan Penal Code (2009), Cap. 162. This particular penal code ironically has its roots from the 'sodomy offense' in the British law which criminalized 'carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature.' Nearly all the countries in the world that criminalize queer expressions have inherited their laws from the British Empire. The irony then is the contradiction within the Kenyan legal structure on one hand that relied on colonial rules to criminalize queer expressions while on the other hand insist on sexual sovereignty.

[180] In their website, the NGLHRC is an independent human rights institution working for legal and policy reforms towards equality and full inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in Kenya. They even held their inaugural Gay and Lesbian Awards in December 2012 that affirmed the *Kenyanness* of the LGBTIQ community while demanding for their inclusion in public and social organizing spaces. Since then, NGLHRC has been encouraging diversity and agitating for public dialogue on sex, sexuality, gender and non-conformity. For more information, visit: https://www.nglhrc.com/

daily-lived realities and experiences. For example, in a *Daily Nation* article on Friday, 12th February 2010, titled 'Gay wedding here? No way, vow preachers', this supposed collusion is alluded to:

> *Sheikh Hussein and Bishop Chai called on the government to intervene and urged the provincial administration to take their calls seriously. They also demanded that a government institution in the town be investigated, for allegedly providing medical services to homosexuals.*
>
> *'How can a State institution be involved in providing counselling services to these criminals. We ask the government to shut it down with immediate effect or we shall descend on its officials,' warned Sheikh Hussein.*
>
> *They claimed that the clinic was being used as a recruitment centre where members gather every Sunday for treatment.*[181]

In this instance, religious leaders convened a day long 'hunt' for suspected homosexuals in the coastal town of Mombasa, alleging a planned 'gay wedding' in the area. According to a report done by UHAI-EASHRI[182], 'an unsuspecting employee of a government research facility was set upon, doused in petrol and almost set alight before the police intervened'[183]. For the religious leaders, they claimed to be 'saving' the town from Sodom and Gomorrah, a reference to the Biblical town that was allegedly known for hedonism and debauchery. For these religious leaders, and their adherents, it never occurred to them that their attempt at 'saving' almost led to loss of lives. The government facility alluded to was Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI), which provided medical intervention to homosexuals. Again, in this instance, the complicity that the government binds itself to is evident. Thus when the religious leaders demanded that the facility be shut down, it was an acknowledgement of this complicity and ambivalence.

This complicity is an invitation. An invitation to grapple with, and indeed encounter the various contradictions and fissures that underlie the queer imaginary in Kenya. It is also an invitation to understand the rough textures with which queer discourse in Kenya is implicated in.

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[181] Bocha, Galgalo, Gay wedding here? Now way, vow preachers, *The Daily Nation*, February 11, 2010, accessed July 20, 2017 at http://www.nation.co.ke/news/1056-860254-ii8v7fz/index.html
[182] UHAI-EASHRI. 2010. *A People Condemned.*
[183] Ibdi, p.19.

finally, it is an invitation to imagine newer forms of queer sociability and interactions within the Nairobi/Kenyan landscape read as sites of leisure and pleasure.

I am not suggesting, even remotely, that the government is silent. While there have been public, even robust, proclamations by government leaders against queer expressions in Kenya (see for example the BBC[184] on former President Daniel Moi, Michael Onyiego[185] on former Prime Minister Raila Odinga, Lucy Westcott[186] on President Uhuru Kenyatta and Samuel Karanja[187] on Deputy President William Ruto), I am suggesting that even in their public proclamations, the complicity trope is evident. While political leaders in other countries for example have come out strongly to denounce queer expressions, going to the extent of insults and abuses, Kenyan politicians have not been that bold. For example, while former Zimbabwean president has once called queer individuals 'worse than dogs and pigs', in a recent interview Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta said 'gay rights are of no importance.' While both comments by political leaders have the real potential to inflict physical, psychological and material violence on queer individuals, the complicity within the Kenyan space sometimes masks the threats of this violence. In fact, while President Kenyatta was making these statements, three LGBTI movements had moved to court in Nairobi seeking the court to quash the legal hurdles in the Penal Code that prevent queer individuals from having rights to privacy, equality and dignity. This is by far the first ever legal battle between queer individuals and the Government of Kenya and if they succeed it will be the second country after South Africa.[188]

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[184] BBC World Service, Moi condemns gays, *BBC News*, September 30, 1999, accessed October 1, 2017 at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/461626.stm

[185] Onyiego, Michael, Odinga Remarks Spark Persecution Fears for Kenya's Gay Community, *Voice of Africa*, November 29, 2010, accessed October 1, 2017 at: https://www.voanews.com/a/odinga-remarks-spark-persecution-fears-for-kenyas-gay-community-111057574/156941.htmml

[186] Westcott, Lucy, Kenyan leaders Respond to Obama's Support for LGBT Rights, *Newsweek*, July 27, 2015, accessed October 1, 2017 at: http://www.newsweek.com/kenyan-leaders-respond-obamas-support-lgbt-rights-357563

[187] Karanja, Samuel, William Ruto vows to defend Kenya against homosexuality, *The Daily Nation*, July 5, 2015, accessed October 1, 2017 at: http://www.nation.co.ke/news/politics/William-Ruto-Gay-Rights-Homosexuality/1064-2775872-cpjhn6z/index.html

[188] Bearak, Max and Ombuor, Rael, Gay Kenyans sense they may be on the brink of a historic legal triumph, Washington *Post,* April 3, 2018. Accessed May 8, 2018 at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/gay-

What is also productive in these acts of violence and many others that have been reported not only in Kenya[189], but also elsewhere (see Nyanzi on Uganda; Hendriks on Congo; Mujuzi on Malawi), is the economy within which these public spectacles of violence work on the larger rubric of queer visibility. While such acts of violence could, and sometimes do, cement the oft heard rhetoric of African homophobia, it also most powerfully as well build a shared and common vulnerability schema and therefore 'enables the formation of queer affective communities and counter-publics'[190] that by large ruptures the various publics on queer livabilities as well as build an archive on the Kenyan queer imaginary.

What I am insisting is that what the violent acts that erupt when acts of homosexuality are uncovered and punished do is to enhance queer visibility ironically while it purports to disavow which results in the uncovering of its own complicity and hypocrisy.

At the same time, another uncomfortable provocation within the Kenyan public sits beside the above incident. While religious fundamentalists in Kenya are largely homophobic, there are ruptures within the same religious fabric. There are some religious leaders who champion a more imaginative queer imaginary[191]. For example, in a *Daily Nation* article on 12th May 2010, titled 'Church where Kenya's gay, lesbian Christians worship', Emeka-Mayaka Gekara writes:

> *The Rev Michael Kimindu, an ordained Anglican priest, is not your usual preacher; he says he is on a mission to help Christians 'read the Bible with new eyes'. The priest, who was 'stopped' from the Anglican Church, has been running what he proudly calls a gay church to preach to 'the other sheep.'*

kenyans-sense-they-may-be-on-the-brink-of-a-historic-legal-triumph/2018/04/02/a2a370e4-2965-11e8-a227-fd2b009466bc_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a8aac312068c.

[189] See the Kenya Human Rights Report, 2010.

[190] Hendricks, Thomas. 2017. Queer(ing) popular culture: homo-erotic provocations from Kinshasa. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*: 1-17.

[191] Nzwili, Fredrick, Pastor John Makokha welcomes persecuted LGBT community to his church in Kenya, *The Huffington Post*, April 30, 2014 accessed August 13, 2017 at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/30/john-makokha-lgbt-church-kenya_n_5241105.html

> *The Rev Kimindu is the coordinator of Kenyan branch of the Other Sheep East Africa*[192]*, a worldwide Christian organisation for gays and lesbians. Tucked away in a flat at Nairobi's Tena estate, this is probably the first openly declared gay church in Kenya.*
>
> *The priest, a retired military chaplain, says of his church: 'We include everybody because sexual orientation is not a choice; it is innate and there is nothing one can do about it.'*
>
> *The mainstream church is opposed to gay life saying it is evil but for the Rev Kimindu, gays are the 'other sheep' Jesus was out to rescue in the Gospel of* John Chapter 10;16. 'All *these people were created by God and since He is the Lord of love, who are we to keep His people out of church?'*
>
> *The Rev Kimindu has 22 members. It is a unique fellowship of university students, middle-level professionals working in the city and clergy aged between 23 and 40. This closely knit group attends church at 3pm on Sundays where they discuss living gay but Christian lives.*[193]

What these various ruptures do, apart from obviously raising the visibility of the queer population in Kenya, is puncturing the rhetoric that claims that queerness sits uncomfortably with religion. When the Kenyan public is forced to reconcile the two opposing discourses, the tension that results is important to create a landscape of queer liveability in Kenya. Of course such a tension might never be reconciled, but I argue that the very nature of the opposing discourses, the fissures and cracks; leaks and slippages become crucial in building up an archive of what queers, queerness, being queer and becoming queer can do or what it should look like.

In this regard above, I am not simply excavating opposing discourses within the religious frame that insist on a 'homosexual Kenya,' far from it. By juxtaposing the two incidences that sit beside each other, in opposition and contradiction, newer worlds are imagined. Better worlds are thought possible through this deliberate highlighting of the tensions that inform the queer imaginary in Kenya while cognizant of the pressures and stretches that enable an archive within which we can imagine – or re-imagine – a 'homosexual Kenya' (if ever such a term can exist).

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[192] Other Sheep: Multicultural Ministries with Sexual Minorities. http://www.othersheep.org.
[193] Gekara, Emeka-Mayaka, Church where Kenya's gay, lesbian Christians worship*, The Daily Nation*, May 20, 2010, accessed July 29, 2017 at: http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Church-where-Kenyas-gay-lesbian-Christians-worship/1056-922476-ley2xh/index.html

Juxtaposing these tensions, I am thinking with Mupotsa's[194] claim of *scenes of epistemic mutiny* to map out cartography of radical queer imaginary/imagination. While she addresses the location of the University space in South Africa as sites that could potentially produce affects of freedom through radical thought, her use of 'besides' as point of entry is quite provocative. Summoning Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, she insists 'besides' is principally against duality or oppositionality:

> Beside comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiations, rivalling, leaning, twistiness, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations.[195]

What this line of thinking does for me in the mapping of a queer cartography, is to centrally locate the place of queer affects within the mapping of queer subjectivities, ontologies, praxis, practice and genealogies.

With her, I suggest a way to think through and with the queer archive through negative affects that, in a case of a 'homophobic' Kenya automatically builds a queer trajectory. For example, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*[196], Ahmed reminds us of the kinds of possibilities that negative affects such as pain, hate, fear, disgust and shame bring onto understanding queer lives and queer liveabilities. Additionally still in her book the *Promise of Happiness*[197], she reminds us why the feeling of being unhappy is a force that ruptures the very assumptions that demand of us to be happy. She wonders what unhappiness does in the process of world making. And specifically to queer worlds, what does unhappiness and its attendant metaphors of sadness, anger and shame achieve in this project of queer world making?

To be unhappy, Ahmed insists, is to be undone in the world that demands happiness as proof of citizenship in this world. In the case of queerness then, to be happy is to be not queer, to

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[194] Mupotsa, Danai. 2017. Being/Becoming an Undutiful Daughter: Thinking as a practice of Freedom. In Osman, Ruksana and Hornsby, David. (eds). *Transforming Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
[195] Ibid, p.38.
[196] Ahmed, Sara. 2014. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburg: Edinburg University Press.
[197] Ahmed, Sara. 2010. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke: Duke University Press.

be straight or straight acting.[198] Implicit in this argument is that a queer world, or a possibility of such a world, is almost always an unhappy world. I am not suggesting an unhappy queer world is a world of sadness (as if these are direct opposites), I am offering a proposition that would imagine a queer world that does not assume the negative effects as limiting, narrow or prevent a re-imagination of inhabiting the same world. To be sure, any resultant effects on the part of queers or queerness is in direct and opposite antagonism to the nation. Such that queer sadness or pain or grief is read and interpreted as national or nationalistic celebration and helps the nation to recognize itself in opposition to that which is not: queer. Evan Mwangi agrees that, 'in Kenya, gay happiness, however private, is mourned as a collective national death'[199]. What I am suggesting here is that any form of negative effects, such as the shaming and wounding of the gay couples in the reports above, should be read, and indeed analysed as part of the queer imaginary in Kenya. Any reported cases of violence, homophobic rant, and any discriminative instance and/or case whether in employment or housing must be understood as part of the archive that substantially forms the queer imaginary in Kenya. 'Rather than reading unhappy endings as a sign of the withholding of moral approval for the queer lives,' Ahmed reasons, 'we must consider how unhappiness circulates within and around this archive, and *what it allows us to do*' [emphasis in original][200]. This is what I mean by tensions sitting beside each other but constituting a subjectivity that travels with and through queer bodies.

While this archive, in most instances, is read as forming the evidence of an African homophobia, while at the same time reflecting a deeper anxiety on sexuality as well as contested gender assumptions, it is not my intention to pursue such a trajectory for I believe it is not useful. In this provocation, I track negative affects that 'stick' to queer bodies. Heather Love, for example, offers a starting point that is useful. 'We need a genealogy of queer affect that does not overlook

198 Ibid. p. 96.
199 Mwangi, 2015. p. 101.
200 Ahmed, 2010. p. 89.

the negative, shameful and difficult feelings that have been so central to queer existence in the last century'[201] (cited in Ahmed, 2010). These difficult feelings that have always been theorized as unwanted and needed to be disavowed form part and parcel of a queer subject.

According to the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) report[202], LGBTI persons are often harassed by state officials, who enforce heteronormativity against presumed homosexual expressions, extort for bribes or ask for sexual favours and harass those who do not comply with their demands with trumped up charges. For example, one of the respondents in the report said the following:

> *I was in my house with my partner when persons claiming to be police officers banged my door demanding entry. As I was trying to open they forced themselves in without identifying themselves and proceeded to search the house without a warrant. They claimed they had been tracking my text messages and knew we were about to commit an act of gross indecency (sodomy). They found gay pornographic magazines and also confiscated my laptop claiming to take it for further hard drive searches. They then made us strip naked, beat us up and told us to have sex for them to see what we do. We refused and they beat us up further. They said they would frog march us naked from my fourth floor apartment, call the media and make an arrest of gay people caught in the act I am a respected doctor and live in the staff residence. They said if I paid them 100,000shs they would leave us alone.*[203]

The act of forcing them to strip naked, beating them up and forcing them to have sex in full view is an act of humiliation designed to specifically arouse such affects as shame, pain and grief. What these acts are meant to achieve is to make them recoil back to their selves and view themselves in relation to the world that does not recognize them. The fact that police officers led the raid must be read in relation to the religious leaders who led a similar raid in the previous provocation. Both the police and religious leaders are symbols of the nation who are supposed to preserve law and order: one political/state, the other religious/morality. In fact the threat to 'frog

[201] Love, Heather. 2007. *Feeling Backward: The Politics of Loss in Queer History.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press p. 127.
[202] Kenya Human Rights Commission. 2011. *The Outlawed Amongst Us: A Study of the LGBTI Community's Search For Equality and Non-Discrimination in Kenya.*
[203] Ibid, p.21.

march' them 'naked' in the presence of 'media' is a strategy that the nation employs to confirm the undesirability of queers within its fabric. It is a straightening device[204] that is constructed to make queers unhappy and therefore desire or endeavour to disavow queerness and therefore themselves. This disavowal as a device thus works to caricature the nation in relation to the queers.

Apart from this device, a common thread that runs through the above incident is what I term as *visual spectacle fetish* (both grotesque and desirable – and the desirability is a result of its grotesqueness). This is a demand by the various actors of the nation that suspected homosexuals perform public sex or forced sexual activities in full view of the public; a demand which is designed to shame. Several accounts of harassment by either state officials or even citizens have variations of these acts: either they are forced to have sex or are raped. While these acts can be read as a disciplining mechanism (see for example Pumla Gqola's *Rape: A South African Nightmare*[205]), within the Kenyan queer imaginary it goes deeper to more than an act of punishment. It, I argue, speaks to the double fascination between liveability and fungibility of queer citizens. There is an interesting mix of affects both negative and positive that coalesce within the Kenyan queer sphere that makes it peculiar. Queers are undesirable because they represent a threat to the nation. On the other hand, the nation cannot imagine itself without distinguishing itself from and against the objects that threaten their existence, in this case queer individuals. The two represent that threat, and the police have to employ a mix of both negative and positive affects to achieve this. Therefore, the demand for public sex represents both of these affects. For the above account in the KHRC report, an act of forced public sex represents shame and pain but for the police (and the public), it is a disciplining device as well as a source of pleasure for them. This hate-love fetish (fascination and abhorrence) represent a peculiar project within Kenya that partly explains how homophobia sits together (although uncomfortably) with queerness.

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[204] Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology*. Durham: Duke University Press.
[205] Gqola, Pumla. 2015. *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. Johannesburg: MFB.

This interesting ambivalence can also explain the discourse that followed the news of the divorce[206] of the allegedly first Kenyan couple to wed in London that I introduced earlier. After two years as a married couple, Charles Ngengi and Daniel Chege Gichia divorced. The news of the divorce quite expectedly was announced in several Kenyan media platforms, despite, again, having occurred elsewhere. Not unexpectedly, the various commentaries on the divorce were divided on what the marriage initially implied and what the divorce means. For those who held the view that the marriage signalled a path for recognition of and for same-sex union they were expectedly disappointed. While those who condemned the marriage earlier when it was reported in 2009 felt vindicated at the impossibility of such a union. They argued if such a union could not survive in the UK, how can it survive in Kenya?

The divorce can be conceptualized as a form of gay sadness which then become reverted as nationalistic celebration and/or happiness. But it should be noted that 'celebration' then depends on a narrative that is primarily at odds with it. I mean that to celebrate an event implies to overcome another event that would have achieved a different affect. So nationalistic celebration, in this example, relies solely on queer narratives – even if such narratives have to be summoned from outside Kenya. So while there is opposition in popular discourse and in the tripartite network of *religo-politico and juridico* conversations, these discursive regimes rely on the circulation of queer narratives and expressions to recognise, sustain and reproduce themselves. The narratives then maintain and promote such regimes in an extensive network reminiscent of Musila's rumours and hearsays framework which I will come to later.

Still on this framework, I analyse the incident in which two suspected gay men were arrested by the police in Mombasa, the coastal town of Kenya and subjected to forced 'anal exam', to confirm evidence of homosexual acts and therefore homosexuality. The two moved to court to

[206] Ngugi, Joséph, Kenyan gay couple files for divorce two years after wedding, *The Daily Nation*, October 5, 2011, accessed July 15, 2017 at: http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Kenyan-gay-couple-file-for-divorce-two-years-after-wedding/1056-1248756-mt7b1p/index.html.

challenge this examination as a violation of their rights; however, unsurprisingly, the court found the procedure constitutional.[207] I argue that anal examination proves nothing of substance about evidence of homosexuality and going by the UN Special Rapporteur report on torture, 'the procedure is medically worthless and amounts to torture and ill-treatment.' Basically, the procedure is designed to humiliate its victims. It involves forcibly stripping the victim and physically inserting a lubricated finger into the victim's anus. Not only is this procedure cruel and inhumane, it works much in the same way as forced public sex in the analysis above. It is structured so as to shame the victims. Sally Munt reminds us the power of shame[208] in disciplining her victims. While she admits that there cannot be a 'homosexual subject who is not formed from shame,'[209] and suggests how shame can be used productively as a change agent, I offer a sideways approach in reading this incident. It is hard to imagine how such kinds of torture and the resultant shame, pain and grief might be used productively for transformation. However, if we examine it from the other side of the looking glass, as in the fascination – indeed the demand – by the police officers to insist on such a procedure for salvage anthropology, then the same desire for *public visual spectacle* is starkly evident. In the law's insistence to find evidence of criminality, is a hidden hunger to be implicated in as both witness and victim in queer desire. To not only become a witness to someone's pain but witness their emotions is to be a victim of the pleasure that such pain results in you. What this means is that if you derive your pleasure from gay sadness, then your own happiness (if I am permitted to call it that crudely) exclusively emerges from not only gay sadness but the conditions with which gay sadness is produced and circulated. This symbiotic, even incestuous, relationship in Kenya is what makes the queer archive and genealogy in Kenya interesting.

[207] Bearak, Max, Kenyan court rules anal exams to test sexual orientation are legal, *The Washington Post*, June 16, 2016, accessed August 20, 2017 at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/06/16/kenyan-court-rules-anal-exams-to-test-sexual-orientation-are-legal/?utm_term=.f34685ecd60c
[208] Munt, Sally. 2008. *Queer Attachments, The Cultural Politics of Shame.* Aldershot: Ashgate.
[209] Ibid, p. 95.

In queer reparative and recuperative politics, there is something to be said about narrating good queer stories: happy queer stories for that matter. Of course there is something powerful, even enabling, to tell stories of triumph, of strength and of resilience about queers in the face of discrimination, hate, loss and violence. However, there is also something powerful in stories of failure and unhappiness and sadness. If we start from the Ahmedian presumption that the queer world is an unhappy world, then a demand for happiness is also demand for a non-queer world. So inhabiting unhappiness as a project of queer world making is productive because it imagines other ways of being in the world. As she insists, '[T]o narrate unhappiness can be affirmative; it can gesture toward another world, even if we are given a vision of the world as it might exist after the walls of misery are brought down'[210].

3.2 (B); Hostile Witnesses to Queer Caricature

Apart from the popular discourse and narratives as analysed above, other narratives as seen in Kenyan literary novels and prison memoirs, the image of the homosexual is still seen through the nationalistic lens. Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi, for instance, in Hostile Witnesses and Queer Life in Kenyan Prison Writing,[211] notes at length the grammar used to mobilize and configure the Kenyan queer imaginary at the height of colonial rule or immediately after. While reading J.M Kariuki's *Mau Mau Detainee*[212], Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writers Prison Diary.*[213] and Maina wa Kinyatti's *Kenya: A Prison Notebook*[214], Taiwo shows how within the nationalist imagination of the three writers, same-sex sexual expressions had a long history that attract to itself negative emotions of disgust and shame in relation to the nation.

[210] Ahmed, 2010. p. 107.
[211] Osinubi, Adetunji Taiwo. 2015. Hostile Witnesses and Queer Life in Kenyan Prison Writing. *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*. 1(3/4):152-166.
[212] Kariuki, Josiah Mwangi. 1963. *Mau Mau Detainee*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
[213] wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. 1981. *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. London: Heinemann.
[214] wa Kinyatti, Maina. 1996. *Kenya: A Prison Notebook*. London: Vita Books.

In Kariuki's memoir, Osinubi quotes:

> In the jails [Mau Mau prisoners] had formed a separate group from the *mahurukanga,* who were ordinary criminals, thieves, pickpockets and so on. *Mahuru* is the word for carrion crows and they were given this name because they could steal and quarrel, fight and commit sodomy with each other: they had no discipline and they were like the vultures who have no shame and eat the filth and garbage and the flesh of dead things.[215]

It is interesting that Kariuki distances himself and other struggle prisoners from the rest of the inmates who, in his words, were 'ordinary criminals' who had no 'discipline' and 'shame'. The delineation of struggle prisoners with the others denotes a trajectory towards nationalism that had its roots in the need for sexual discipline: that to fight for one country implied withstanding imprudent sexual urges that were at odds with the family and therefore the nation. Kariuki's implication is consistent with arguments about sex as reproductive and therefore productive to the nation. A second point to note, then, and this is rampant in prison literature is the invocation of 'sodomy' as synonymous with same-sex sexual expressions. The word sodomy, drawing its roots from the colonial imaginary, is a term that criminalizes sexual activity among members of the same-sex, primarily male. Therefore, in inserting this lexicon in his nationalist autobiography, Kariuki signals queer expressions as outside the nation/home that he (and other fellow Mau Mau prisoners) is fighting for. As I have argued before, Kariuki plays on the invisibility matrix of same-sex desiring and practicing individuals. When he invokes that the sodomites in his prison have no 'discipline' and also lack 'shame', is to instantly recognize them and also deny their visibility within his nationalistic lens.

[215] Kariuki, p. 139-140.

Unlike Kariuki's memoir that recorded same-sex intimacies with such contempt, Maina wa Kinyatti's memoir plays on a different scale altogether. Written in a diary form, Kinyatti reorients sexual intimacies in prison through a dialectical prism of desire and as ways in which inmates cope with being incarcerated. The below excerpts will help contextualize my arguments as well as draw a direct connection with Kariuki's memoir.

> *December 1982*
>
> *Thursday 1*: I watched a prison drama this morning. Two men were caught in the toilet having an *affair*. They were paraded in front of us, naked. I felt sad. Both of them looked miserable and defenseless. But I don't understand why the guards are making an issue about it since they encourage *sodomy* in prison (emphasis mine)[216]
>
> *Tuesday 20*: Christmas is a big market day here. It is also used as a *fornication* season by the sodomites.[217]
>
> *Saturday 24*: People are allowed to move from one block to another – to visit their friends and *'lovers.'* (Emphasis mine)[218]
>
> *December 1984*
>
> *Wednesday 26*: The Christmas celebration is in full swing today. Food is plentiful. In B-Bock there is a *sodomite wedding* this afternoon and a reception and a dance after the wedding. This is a great day in prison. (Emphasis mine)[219]

The words 'affair', 'lovers' and 'wedding' that Kinyatti mobilizes in these accounts signal that the same-sex economy that was ongoing in prison was not simply an a act of same-sex sexual activity, but it operated, more ontologically, on exchange of desire. Additionally, the rampant amorous activities during festive seasons become implicated as part of the celebratory potential of; say for example, the Christmas holidays. What Kinyatti does, by these accounts, albeit unintentionally is

[216] Kinyatti, p. 57.
[217] Ibid, p. 59.
[218] Ibid, p.60.
[219] Ibdi, p.103.

to recuperate same-sex intimacy in prison literature from sex as a disciplining mechanism to liberatory potential of pleasure and desire. As Osinubi rightly avers:

> Kinyatti's obsession with carceral libidinal exchanges overwhelm his account so radically that he is incapable of enforcing any normative frame on prison sexuality. In effect, precisely because Kinyatti documents the operationalization of sexual dynamics he is unable to segregate inmate intimacies into proper and improper conduct; sexual activity surfaces as coping mechanisms, re-appropriation and re-direction of the episteme of control and surveillance, or as a result of desire[220]

Juxtaposed with Kariuki's narrative, Kinyatti appears more sensitive and intellectually aware of the dynamics of the same-sex rubric in prison. It must be said that both Kariuki and Kinyatti were in the same prison but at different times. Both were political prisoners and therefore it can be argued their different but related discourses emerged and circulated within the nationalist rhetoric. Finally, both witnessed the same-sex sexual economy in prison. What then, I wonder, motivated Kinyatti to write his account starkly different from Kariuki? In recognizing the same-sex economy in prison and narrating it without the negative effects that litter Kariuki's account, what, if any, did such a framework achieve? Finally, what does these two accounts that sit uncomfortably with each other within the prison economy achieve in understanding the queer rubric in Kenya? When Kinyatti records the same-sex intimacies in prison, he is careful as well not to pass any judgement or to let his own nationalistic inclination cloud his narrative. I follow Osinubi's line of argument:

> Kinyatti never condemns this event. In effect, the recurrent weddings around Christmas, the episodes of consensual sex, and evidence of homosexual pairings suggest an alternative narrative of sexual life, which Kinyatti cannot explain but which surreptitiously creeps into his narrative.[221]

[220] Osinubi, p.9.
[221] Ibid,p. 10.

Both accounts powerfully draw the space of the prison into the broader sexual politics of Kenya. The extension of prison queer narratives into the broader Kenyan imaginary is important for it extends queer discourses in and around geographies that have historically been locked out of queer desire and pleasure. So, even going by the periodized dates that these events took place, and aware of the freedom struggles around these periods, then a clear cartography of a Kenyan queer imaginary begins to take shape.

Secondly, in having both Kariuki and Kinyatti's narratives that seem at face value to be at odds with each other in the ways that they are narrated, confirms my earlier assertion of the disparate, difficult and uneven textures that queer politics in Kenya stand on. Even in prison, where struggle heroes agreed on the place of the nation and family, their understanding of the nature of same-sex intimacies and the form such intimacies take are not only different but discordant with their understanding of the nation.

So while these accounts confirm Macharia's[222] claims that within the nationalist imagination, the figure of the 'male homosexual was understood to be indifferent to freedom struggles and complicit in anti-freedom criminality'[223], their very presence and agency within the very same imagination and dispensation confirms the fissures and failures of the heteronormative project of nationalism. Further, it reveals the contradictions inherent in the understanding of nationalism especially within prison literature. It also reveals the many layers and meanings that accompany, or inherently are subsumed in queer sexuality.

Outside of prison narratives but also within the nationalist imagination, Jomo Kenyatta's contributions in *Facing Mount Kenya*[224], directly inserts himself within the same rhetoric of homosexuality being alien to the nation/family. He claims that among the *Agikuyu* ethnic tribe that

[222] Macharia, Keguro. 2015. Archive and method in Queer African Studies*, Agenda*, 29(1): 140-146.
[223] Ibid, p.143.
[224] Kenyatta, Jomo. 1962. *Facing Mount Kenya*. New York: Random House.

he comes from, homosexuality was unknown and alien. Still referring to the metaphors of undesirability and alien, Kenyatta positions the *Agikuyu* tribe as the site on which his own anxieties about sex, sexuality and gender are played and confirmed. Unsure about his own positionality, and unaware about the contested nature of his own claims, Kenyatta creates in the process a rubric within his own community that at once demands a visibility of homosexuals for their eventual erasure. Unlike the prison narratives that confirmed the presence and agency of the homosexuals just so that a distinction can be made between good citizens and the undesirables, Kenyatta claims to invent a category, pigeonholing a non-existent people in his own admission, in order to confirm his own fears and therefore justify them. While I understand what this does to the queer individuals within Kenyatta's community, my intervention against this claim is clear: such manoeuvres and actions lays bare the hypocrisy and ultimate failure of heterosexist ideology[225] that the myth of family and nation relies on to not only sustain itself but also recognize itself.

These three interventions rely and operate on three different assumptions that are hinged on the nationalist rhetoric that has guided ideas of queer sexualities and intimacies in Kenya. While Kariuki and Kinyatti recognize same-sex intimacy, Kenyatta refuses this recognition from the outset. And while Kariuki is contemptuous of the same-sex intimacies, locating them in decrepit and immoral urges, Kinyatti recuperates the intimacies through the prism of pleasure and desire. Kenyatta on the other hand, refuses either. These three seemingly contradictory accounts seem at odds with each other but emerge from the family/nation framework and theorization. While all the accounts cavort with notions of same-sex intimacies and expressions, their various arguments, I argue, reflect the tensions that build a pastiche, divergent and dissimilar, of queer imaginaries in Kenya. Secondly, their seemingly inconsonant nature, even at the altar of nationalist politics, confirms my arguments about the troublesome queer sexuality fragments in Kenya that sits with and to borrow from Mupotsa, besides, each other.

[225] Hendriks, 2017. p.3

3.3 (C); Queer Diasporic Imaginations

Dan Ojwang',[226] on the other hand, runs a parallel to the above contributions. Using the language of diasporic imagination, he emphasizes the centrality of 'place' and 'location' of queer diasporic individuals within the Kenyan imaginary. While Kariuki, Kinyatti and Kenyatta collectively agree on the nation/family as important tenets in any individual's subjectivity, Ojwang' reminds us on the need to understand the nation/family from a diasporic lens. This way, he argues, the comforts of home are always haunted by the coercive moments of their consolidation outside of the home.

If, we take from the outset, that queer and diaspora are mobile and unstable categories, then how do we reconcile the two at the intersection of our own subjectivities? Queer diaspora as flows of instability brings with itself various sets of discussions that are both about the local as well as the global and the intervening forces that connect the two. Gayatri Gopinath,[227] writing about queer Asian diaspora asks about the question of representation and attention to inequalities as a result of mobility. There is need, especially when imagining the African queer diaspora, to consider the various forms of difference that intersect when imagining queer diaspora. Careful attention needs to be paid to the tensions, frictions, and unease that underpin queer diaspora because, as she argues, questions of identity, sexuality, race, gender and sometimes political ideologies intervene. She insists that 'queer desire reorients the traditionally backward-looking glance of diaspora'[228] because queer diasporic movements intervene to produce new experiences that not only helps us to understand gender and sexuality better but also trouble the current frameworks of modernity. Gopinath invites us to think critically of the dichotomy between queer and diaspora because of the apparent schism between the two. She says:

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[226] Ojwang, Dan. 2013. *Reading Migration and Culture: The World of East African Indian Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
[227] Gopinath, Gayatri. 2003. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press.
[228] Ibid, p.3.

> Rather than evoking an imaginary homeland frozen in an idyllic movement outside history, what is remembered through queer diasporic desire and the queer diasporic body is a past time and place riven with *contradictions* and the violence of multiple *uprootings*, *displacements* and *exiles* (emphasis mine).[229]

I choose to highlight the terms 'contradictions,' 'uprootings,' 'displacements,' and 'exiles' because they speak back to Ojwang's iterations of diaspora as being haunted by the coercive moments of the home and are clearly highlighted in the two texts analysed in this section. Ojwang' undertakes a partial reading of Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla's *Ode to Lata* [230]and Shailja Patel's *Migritude*[231], in order to pointedly question the connection between the diaspora in Kenya and the global flows and transnational travels of queer identities and subjectivities. *Ode to Lata*, set in Los Angeles, is a remarkable depiction of the young banker, Ali, originally from the coastal town of Mombasa in Kenya. Once a vibrant professional who spent his days in the office and his nights cruising gay hot spots, but lately these indulgences have failed to bring him satisfaction. Through a mix of self-hate occasioned primarily by his Muslim religious upbringing in Kenya which is at odds with his sexuality and his bothersome mother, Ali reminisces of his childhood days in Kenya and especially his intimate moments with his schoolmate Amin while at the same time actively nurturing an obsessive attraction to Richard, a sly conniving self-professed hustler in the streets of Los Angeles. On the other hand, Patel's *Migritude* is a collection of poetry that refuses neat categorizations. Part biographical, part historical and part reparative, *Migritude* recounts the various violences (colonial, migrancy, diasporic, sexual) that travel transnationally in and out of bodies – including hers. As biographical, some poems recount her own journeys emerging from an Indian family that from the outset assumed her eventual heterosexual wedding a fact testified by her mother accumulating *saris*, the traditional Indian wear, in readiness for her wedding. *Migritude*, then, is an outsider story

[229] Ibid, p.4.
[230] Dhalla, Ghalib Shiraz. 2002. *Ode to Lata*. Los Angeles: Really Great Books.
[231] Patel, Shailja. 2010. *Migritude.* New York: Kaya Press.

both literally and symbolically. It is a story of being an 'other' and 'othered' for your 'otherness' and navigating that 'otherness.'

Both texts, emphasize on the diasporic imagination to imagine the self especially in ways that they constantly 'return' to the 'home' (here understood as Kenya broadly) to account for their own subjectivities. Ali's nostalgia about his childhood lover Amin is in part a strategy to understand his current tribulations for unrequited love from Richard. While Patel's constant reference to her Indian upbringing and culture in Kenya, even as she travels all over the world implicates the 'home' in her own place in the world. Ali and Patel's transgressive ways of life as it relates to sexuality is traced entirely to the home, however not directly. This implication is only referenced as events, implicit and explicit, that actively pursued the erasure of queer sexuality while at the same time being complicit in their visibility.

I am interested in Ojwang's frame of analysis in these two texts to further my argument about the dialectics of queer liveability and fungibility within Kenya. He frames these connections provocatively in ways that structure my own assessment of a queer imaginary in Kenya, complicit in the various transnational debates of diasporic thought. He asks three provocative questions that I deem fit to reiterate: first, 'what happens when the taxonomical imperative in dominant Western logics of sexuality encounters same-sex practices in African and Indian Ocean texts'; secondly, 'what forms of agency, if at all, do they recuperate from incognito and fugitive sex-acts'; finally 'what, according to these texts, are machineries or discursive formations that facilitate queer identities in sites in the Global North and South?'[232] Ojwang's fascination with Indian Ocean literary studies puts him in great company among scholars like Isabel Hofmeyr and Godwin Siundu to name but a few. But his focus on the diasporic imagination implicit in queer identities is quite novel and sets the tone for understanding the very nature of queer energies and subjectivities that

[232] Ojwang, p.123.

travel over time and space. In his analysis of the two texts, he also debunks the myth of queer expressions as being a result of the recalcitrant West because he manages to show how this travel happens in reverse; as in back 'home,' through the nostalgic tools that both Shiraz (Ali) and Patel employ to trace a line, wavy as it is, back to the 'home'.

Both texts are set in Mombasa, the coastal town of Kenya and while there have been several scholarships on queer desire and expressions on the same (see for example Murray and Roscoe[233]), what Ojwang does through his analysis and also explains my own intentions of signalling the same is the way he addresses the litany of questions that frame his interventions. He privileges the question of access and desire in the way that queer desires have been historically produced, circulated and consumed within the Kenyan queer imaginary. For him, the two texts provide a suitable canvas of the 'multifaceted site for queer practice, but [also] raise questions about desirability of naming desire'[234] and the potential of what this does if applied or replicated within the larger imagination of the Kenyan state and its multiple and contested relationship/s with desire, transgressive or otherwise, and how they are recorded, performed as well as recalled in various and different publics.

As my last contribution to map out the Kenyan queer imaginary, I use Musila's[235] concept of rumours, speculations and hearsays to read certain cultural texts that have couched the debates on queer lives in Kenya. In this regard, two texts come to mind:

In 2013, the Ministry of Education in Kenya, through the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) (now the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)), approved[236] the *Whale*

[233] Murray, S and Roscoe, W. 1998. *Boy Wives and Female Husbands: studies in African homosexualities*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
[234] Ojwang, p. 130.
[235] Musila, 2015.
[236] Mwangi, Evan, KIE censors score a first by picking gay author's novel, *The Daily Nation*, January 4, 2013, accessed September 1, 2017 at: http://www.nation.co.ke/news/KIE-censors-score-a-first-by-picking-gay-authors-novel-/1056-1657730-133rgvnz/index.html

Rider[237], a novel by the New Zealander Witi Ihimaera as a set book to be read and examined in secondary schools. Not only was the author openly gay, the novel had several subtexts with homoerotic and subtle homosexual references. Shortly after its approval, the clergy and parents petitioned the government to withdraw the book because, as they argued, 'any literature with any element of gayism or lesbianism should not be allowed in our schools' to the point that the then Minister of Education threatened[238] to ban the book. When KIE (now KICD) defended the move, they were accused of promoting gay culture in an otherwise conservative society and there were calls for the resignation of the directors.

The second text is a newspaper article that through a system of public outing, named suspected top gays and lesbians in Kenya. Titled 'Top gays, lesbians list come out,'[239] (May 11-17 2015) the Citizen Weekly, published a list of prominent men and women in high ranking in Kenya. They included former Chief Justice Willy Mutunga, Prof. Makau Mutua, respected law scholar, as well as writer Binyavanga Wainaina. Reminiscent of the Ugandan tabloid magazine *Rolling Stone* that also 'named and shamed' top 100 gays in Uganda and called for their beheading, this newspaper article fell short of this demand but attracted widespread public discourse. I signal these two texts and place them in conversation in order to show how queer anxieties on one hand generate specific affects that circulate and get consumed through a rumour and speculation system as indexed by Grace Musila.

Musila assembles several conceptual nodes that she expertly ties together in mapping the death of the British wildlife conservationist and photographer Ms. Julie Ward. Variously relying

[237] Ihimaera, Witi. 2008. *The Whale Rider*. Rosedale, N.Z.: Penguin.
[238] Africa Review, Kenyan Minister seeks school book ban over gay link. *Africa Review*, January 5, 2015, accessed September 1, 2017 at: http://www.africareview.com/news/979180-1658284-84w7uhz/index.html#
[239] The Citizen Weekly, Top gays, lesbians list come out, *The Citizen Weekly*, May 11-15, 2015.

on 'parallel publics'[240], 'promise and denial dimension of modernity'[241] and 'African modernity'[242], she insists that rumours and hearsays gain legitimacy because of not only the suspect nature of truth and facts that are replayed by official systems but also by the troubling nature of modernity that privileges science, facts and the law. If we are to take Musila seriously that 'narrative works as a cognitive device which sometimes excavates repressed knowledges in an unexpected enactment of the return of the oppressed'[243], then the rumours and speculation exemplified by the newspaper article then can be assumed as excavating such repressed knowledges. But, it should be pointed out that such knowledges cannot be assumed as representing the truth or the fact for as she insists 'these rumours were also a commentary on the limits of privileging legal truths'.[244]

For the Julie Ward case, Musila insists that 'Kenyan publics…actively sought, created and circulated their own versions of the truth behind the tragedy through the grapevine, some of which made their way into local print media and back'[245]. Superimposing this particular event onto the queer imaginary discourse within the same public, I insist that rumours and hearsay gain legitimacy because of the absence of official systems of control. In effect, rumours and hearsays fill up a vacuum. Therefore rumours gain legitimacy in the Kenyan public as opposed to known facts and truths. For example, the fact that one is suspected of being queer is more appealing in the various publics as opposed to when one actually comes out in public.

When the KICD defended the move of selecting the *Whale Rider* for secondary school education, they were accused of promoting gay culture within the Kenyan education system. Such assertions gain a bigger currency and travel within and through the several publics precisely because

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[240] Cohen, David and Odhiambo, Atieno. 2004. *The Risks of Knowledge: Investigations into the Death of Hon. Minister John Robert Ouko in Kenya, 1990*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
[241] Gikandi Simon. 2002. Reason, Modernity and the African Crisis. In Jan-Georg Deutsch, Peter Probst and Heike Schmidt (eds). *African Modernities: Entangled Meanings in Current Debate*. Portsmouth NH and Oxford: Heinemann and James Currey.
[242] Macamo, Elisio. 2005. Negotiating Modernity: From Colonialism to Globalisation. In Elisio Macamo (ed). *Negotiating Modernity: Africa's Ambivalent Experience*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
[243] Musila, p.4.
[244] Ibid, p.91.
[245] Ibid, p.93.

the networks that privilege truth and facts have failed to mobilize a language that can adequately locate the experience.

At the same time, the rumours and speculations about the top ten gay men in Kenya work in the same principle. For example, the former Chief Justice Dr. Willy Mutunga, who wears a stud and once wrote an opinion piece in the daily nespapers about the need for gay rights, becomes a target precisely because of such metaphors that implicate him within the queer discourse. In particular, Dr. Willy Mutunga's case was not peculiar. In 2011, after the promulgation of the Kenyan Constitution in 2010, while being interviewed for the position of Chief Justice and Deputy Chief Justice respectively, Willy Mutunga and Nancy Barasa were '*forced*' [246] to declare that they were not gay by the interview panel. Again, I am emphasizing the word 'forced', not only because of the absurdity of such proclamation (as if declaring 'I am not gay' means anything at all), but to summon the reason for the need for such proclamation. For Willy Mutunga, he was accused of a number of crimes: first he was allegedly 'tolerable' of gay rights because during the writing of the constitution, he wrote an article in the Newspaper voicing support for gay rights. Secondly, he donned a stud in his left ear, a symbol apparently associated with queerness. Thirdly, he was reported to have been divorced or on the verge of divorce and lastly, his nephew was rumoured to be gay. As ludicrous as these claims sound, the Kenyan public imaginary, represented by the legislators, needed to be 'put at ease' by his 'confirmation' that he is not gay. For Nancy Barasa, the 'charges' were few but equally preposterous. She was divorced and was pursuing a PhD on homosexuality in Kenya. 'The real challenge faced by Mutunga and Barasa, therefore,' wrote Mwangi, 'was their liberal stand on sexual identity issues'[247]. Here their 'accusers' were summoning the archive of the family, a microset of the nation. What was equally interesting in this incident was the public's perception during the live interview process. The public needed to be assuaged

[246] Mutua, Martin, Mutunga: I am not gay*, The Standard*, June 8, 2011, accessed September 1, 2017 at: https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/article/2000036730/mutunga-i-am-not-gay
[247] Mwangi, 2014. p.107.

that they were not homosexuals, or at the very least not tolerant. The need for confirmation by both the lawmakers and the public raises interesting points which calcifies a more nuanced cartography of the queer imaginary. First, what exctly does it mean when individuals are required to avow (and in this case disavow) through *speech* a 'thing', in this case a rumour? And secondly, what sorts of intensities are mobilized when a rumour needs to be confirmed in order to make people at *ease*?

I highlight, again, 'speech' and 'easy' so as to introduce what Willy Mutunga and Nancy Barasa both said as a way of reply. Mutunga said bluntly, 'I am not gay' and Barasa, with a chuckle, said, 'I'm not a lesbian. If I were a lesbian, there are some very good friends of mine in this room (and) I would have dated them'. The replies were sufficient enough and by way of speech, Mutunga and Barasa plugged into the Kenyan queer discourse symbolized by the messy binary of queer liveability and fungibility. The binaries that reduce queer experiences and lives to an act of speech. At the same time, and in the same newspaper article, Maina Kageni, a popular radio presenter with Classic 105 FM's *Maina and King'ang'i Breakfast Show* becomes enjoined in the same queer rumour network because in addition to being single well in his forties, his radio show mostly addresses issues of sexual nature. It is noteworthy to remark that while Wainaina was mentioned in the same article, he did not gain as much media attention precisely because he had already come out openly as gay[248]. In the way the story was packaged, the tabloid intended for the publication to be treated as an expose, a sort of investigative journalism that relies on a clandestine and hidden mechanism of news gathering. Thereby, including Binyavanga Wainaina's name, it ceased or lacked the potency of an investigative piece. In effect it was not a rumour. The supposed truth and facts inherent in his *confession* stamped him as an authority on himself. In his case particularly, the rumour networks failed only because the truth/fact networks were privileged.

[248] Wainaina, Binyavanga, I am a homosexual, mum*, Africa Is A Country*, January 19, 2014, accessed September 1, 2017 at: http://africasacountry.com/2014/01/i-am-a-homosexual-mum/

While Di Fonzo and Bordia[249] argue that rumours arise as a result of lack of information, I argue that in the case with the Kenyan queer imaginary, it is because the information sources do not comprehend or imagine such information. It is not that systems of control muzzle the information; it is that the systems of control lack the grammar and tools to articulate the same. When it is articulated, it is often couched in legal terms: in terms of criminal activities and therefore arrests, prosecution and control. The reason for rumours and hearsays in the Kenyan queer imaginary is precisely because of the lack of tools and grammars to articulate the truths and knowledges as regards to queer sexuality in the official conventional sense but outside of the legal privileges. While other rumours in Kenya relied on the suspicious nature of official versions of truths, queer rumours rely on the absence of any official version and in the presence of such versions, which were legal terms anyway; a need for a social explanation is evident. For Musila 'rumours remain relevant to our purposes not only because of their consistency and recurrence of specific motifs, but also in the way such rumours tease out questions about the epistemological embeddedness of notions of truth and legitimacy of information.'[250]

Even when such rumours are an exaggeration, Musila still avers that they still reflect their 'elasticity as a constantly morphing medium.'[251] For example, when Dr Willy Mutunga and Maina Kageni were accused of being gay because of assumptions on their daily lived realities, this exaggeration reflects how rumours, allegation and speculation work on a system that enables 'local construction of meaning.'[252] In order to *understand* Mutunga and Kageni, and the *contradictions* that they embody in their lived realities, and also aware of the official state's positions as it relates to queer expressions, then room for speculation and rumour is created. I italicize 'understand' and 'contradictions' as they are inherent tropes of the rumour networks.

[249] DiFonzo, Nicholas and Bordia, Prashant. 2007. Rumour, Gossip and Urban Legends. *Diogenes* 54(1): 19-35.
[250] Musila, 2015. p. 99.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid, p.93.

The need to reconcile the various contradictions (of both the Kenyan nation and its citizens) is a way for the Kenyan grapevine to make sense of these conflicting narratives that play out in the same public. Narratives and narrative processes are almost always deeply invested in the unravelling of truth/s. And they are not understood in terms of the fidelity it offers to the process of excavating reality, but rather what knowledges, meanings and intensities permeate or are made visible through such processes. Popular rumours about queer sexuality function to sustain the discourse on same-sex sexual expressions. Such rumours work to rupture into the modernist discourses that demand a binary with tradition. Their very existence and the networks that circulate and sustain it work to validate popular imaginations about queer sexuality in Kenya in complete opposition to its criminalization. The popularity of such rumours and their networks serve to bolster the consumption of the same in Kenyan imaginary. Hence as Musila insists that 'the knowledge production processes that these rumours entailed are of interest as social mechanisms for the interrogation of official modern state institutions and their preferred truths,'[253] what this does is to add onto the queer archives that generate the various queer imaginaries in Kenya.

The three provocations that I have just outlined reflect the myriad ways that one can superimpose the different queer experiences and knowledge onto a conceptual frame like the city spaces of Nairobi. Through popular culture and literary artefacts, it becomes evident the various ways that queer individuals navigate the spaces they inhabit and consequently how these several experiences constitute a queer embodied subjectivity. It reflects a different way of seeing or more precisely a different way of locating the queers. For example writing about Nigerian fiction, Green-Simms, uses the term 'emergent queer' [254] in order to argue that it is hard to periodize events within

[253] Ibid, p.112.
[254] Green-Simms, Lindsey. 2016. The Emergent Queer: Homosexuality and Nigerian Fiction in the 21st Century. *Research in African Literatures* 47(2): 139 -161.

the queer imaginary of a space or place because of the different and organic ways that are made visible to us. She writes:

> The emergent might express new structures of feeling, but it is not necessarily what comes after or next. Rather, the emergent refers to social or cultural forms that exist in relation to the dominant or the hegemonic, forms that are excluded from the dominant and that resist incorporation to it.[255]

While I agree with her that the emergent resists the demand to periodize using a temporal constitution, as evidenced in the textual frames I have analysed above, her insistence on queer narratives that appear 'articulated' sits uncomfortably with me. 'Emergence,' she writes, 'can therefore be seen as process that pushes against modes of domination'. While it is reparative within the Kenyan queer imaginary to have narratives that 'push against modes of domination,' I have resisted the urge, in this chapter, to only privilege these narratives that appear at once recuperative and celebratory. I have insisted that what is important is the discourse and the underlying currents that carry the 'emergent' in the everyday lived experiences of queer individuals in Kenya. In spaces that still criminalize same-sex sexual expressions, lived queer encounters even when not 'fully articulate' become important ruptures that not only push back against the dominant but more crucially build up a repository of a Kenyan queer imaginary.

In the newspaper articles that I have examined above which are not only disparate but contradictory, the complicity of the nation-state in and around queer liveabilities, and the various depictions in queer narratives, a cartography that resists neat categorizations in its multiple inarticulations is evident. Consequently, the negative affects of emotions that bid us to re-imagine ways of becoming queer in the world as well as how such becomings are mobilized and circulated through Musila's framework of rumours and speculations helps us to re-contextualize the emergent queer.

[255] Ibid, p.142.

While there are indeed queer stories that are fully articulated in Kenya, (Wainaina comes to mind for example), a majority are not as fully articulated and these are more appealing in painting multidimensional and polythematic subjectivities. In all these various contexts that allude to queer desires, expressions and acts, a paradigm can be created: that of pleasure/danger and/or promise/denial. What I mean is that a Kenyan queer imaginary is framed along the desire for multiple pleasures which invariably, is a desire for danger. In addition, the question of silence, for example, is subsumed in those inarticulate queer stories. Silence does indeed speak because as I have described in previous chapters, invisibility does not mean absence. It is a tool, a framework, from which other inarticulate narratives can be formulated and circulated in different publics. For example, the apparent lack of queer women stories in this thesis does not in any way imply their absence. The kinds of spaces and publics that this project is hinged on function on a different kind of intimacy as opposed to spaces of queer women. In addition, as Matebeni shows, there are different matrices in the way queer men and women inhabit spaces as well as the language deployed to mark the different registers in those spaces. The modalities of in/out; public/private spaces within queer women circles in Nairobi function on a dynamism that does not privilege hypervisibility.

In the chapter that follows, I paint a vivid picture of disparate and inarticulate queer expressions specifically within the city of Nairobi as they navigate the spaces of habitation. In this chapter therefore, whatever forms of queer pleasures are almost always queer failures because of the precise moments of their inarticulations. So, for example, even in the public spectacle fetish that seeks to discipline queer desires, the failure of this enterprise always reflects this promise. At the same time, the contradictory nature in which queer liveability and queer fungibility sits side by side, often in opposition but mutually dependent on each other shows the unique position that Kenya, and the selected Nairobi sites specifically, occupy in the spectrum of an imaginative queer genealogy.

Chapter Four

4.0 Queer (Ob) Scenes in Nairobi, the City-under-the-Sun.

> *Maybe sometimes*. That was the legend inscribed above the door of a remodelled Peugeot 404 that used to ply the city centre – Kawangware route, via Hurlingham, in 1986. I would stare at it every often on my daily runs across the city. I tried to work whether that legend was grammatically correct. Did it need a comma to separate the two words? I also pondered the numerous ways in which it could be interpreted, never mind its questionable grammar. That legend was a literary delight because there really was nothing fixed about it except the place where it sat – above the door. Its mobility at a cognitive level was replayed as a physical journey as the matatu coursed up valley Road and down Argwings Kodhek Road. That moving legend redefined both the spaces and the ways in which we tell our stories, quite dramatically.[256]

Here we go,
See I'm loving what you do to me so if it's cool (let me know),
We can take it to the VIP because the (party don't stop till three),
Meaning you're in the crib all over me,
C.I.P.T.R.IR.P.P.E.R and we are,
C.A.M.P to the Mulla,
We blow this bazooka.[257]

CAMP Mulla's hit single '*Party Don't Stop*' must always play whichever club I visit and at any point in the night. Everybody raises their hands, glasses held high as they sing along and dance to its bewitching lyrics and highlife beat. The popularity of this song reflects the growing party culture in Nairobi that has for some time now equated a good night life with a young, trendier

[256] This is the opening paragraph of Joyce Nyairo's monumental book *Kenya @50* that I extensively use in this chapter. This paragraph, encapsulates for me, and also sets the tone, the many realities about Kenya in its different variations. For queer individuals therefore, the various ambivalences that necessarily create the Kenyan Queer imaginary is quite crucial for the multiple ways that a Kenyan queer world can be imagined and built.
[257] CAMP Mulla, 'Party Don't Stop', from the album Funky Town, 2010.

music culture that can be said betrays a kind of sophisticated urban lifestyle.[258] Good music and a good night out cannot be separated from each other. As I had mentioned in the previous chapters, Kenya has become visible as a site of and frame for the contradictions of queer liveability on one hand and queer visibility on the other.[259] While the legal framework denies a queer existence, a dynamic lived experience reveals a queer ambivalence at odds with both the political and religious logic in the country.[260] In this chapter, I continue with this trope introduced in the last two chapters and speculate why Kenya – and more specifically Nairobi - enables the users, the queer individuals, to animate and reanimate the spaces in which they occupy in ways that not only allow this ambivalence but also problematize the legal framework. For example, this can be discerned in the ways in which the Nairobi space is structured to allow queer, queering and queered flows by its queer users. Additionally, and tied to the earlier point, queer individuals who occupy this space invert or subvert the spaces in ways that make it possible to read, locate and recognize queer subjectivities and allow a reading of queer ambivalence.

Within the city of Nairobi, Nyairo[261] points to the potentialities of urban culture. In her book *Kenya @50,* Nyairo engages the politics and poetics of culture and identity and argues for the 'expressive capabilities of the everyday lives of citizens' and 'continual processes or performance in the pursuit of belonging'.[262] For her, the Nairobi urban logic is a 'celebration of the urban as a place and as cultural practice'.[263] What she advocates is a framework to think of Nairobi in terms of the kinds of relations and discourses that guide the production and consumption of the various competing narratives about it. Sherif El-Azama, an Egyptian anthropologist contends that these questions can be gleaned through the practice of psychogeography. 'Psychogeography,' he writes,

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258 Spronk, Rachel. 2012. *Ambiguous Pleasures: Sexuality and Middle Class Self-Perceptions in Nairobi*. New York: Berghahn Books.
259 Macharia, Keguro. 2016. On Being Area-Studied: A Litany of Complaint. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 22 (2): 183-190.
260 Musangi, Neo. 2014. *In Time and Space. In* Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Identities, edited by Zethu Matebeni, 53–58. Cape Town: Modjaji Books.
261 Nyairo, Joyce. 2015. *Kenya @50*: T*rends, Identities and the Politics of Belonging*. Nairobi: Contact Zones.
262 Ibid, p.15.
263 Ibid, p.290.

is 'the practice that rediscovers the physical city through the moods and atmospheres that act upon the individual.' What he means is that this practice of feeling the urban form through walking, sitting, queuing and inhabiting built environments in the city spaces enables one to be, practically, alive to the 'metaphors, visual rhymes, coincidences and analogies and changing moods of the street [space].'[264] Additionally, the sensorial sensations of sight, touch, smell and feelings become important to understand navigation of spaces. In the same vein, George Perec in his book *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces,*[265] wonders where the everyday can be located or read amidst our hunger for the spectacular. 'What speaks to us, seemingly,' he writes, 'is always the big event, the untoward, and the extra-ordinary: the front-page splash, the banner headlines. Railway trains only begin to exist when they are derailed, and the more passengers that are killed, the more the trains exist.' He further wonders, 'how should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs everyday: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, and the habitual? This question, of adequately addressing the everyday has been addressed, at least in part by among others Joyce Nyairo.

Nairobi users draw on and refashion the historical antecedents that gather around Nairobi and are mobilized by being in Nairobi. 'Self-identity,' Nyairo continues, 'finds expression in precisely these places…'[266] Elsewhere, while analysing contemporary Kenyan identity, Nyairo and Ogude [267], contend that spaces in which new forms of being and becoming are forged are usually sites 'full of pain and anxiety'.[268] What this means is that such precarious and liminal spaces are usually structured through a grammar of vulnerability and constant production and reproduction of meanings. What then does it mean for queer individuals to inhabit, move through, move in,

[264] In an article that appeared in the e-flux Journal, Sherif el Azma writes in detail on experiential street walking. While el Azma is more interested in the principle of wandering the streets, I am appropriating these arguments in relation to queer spaces in the city. el Azma, Sherif. 2011. *The Psychogeography of Loose Associations*. www.africancitiesreader.org.za. 12th March 2016.
[265] Perec, George. 1997. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, transl. J. Sturrock. London; New York: Penguin Books.
[266] Ibid, p.294.
[267] Nyairo, Joyce & Ogude, James. 2003. Popular music and the negotiation of contemporary Kenyan identity: The example of Nairobi City Ensemble. *Social Identities* 9(3): 383-400.
[268] Ibid, p.388.

move out, connect to, and connect out of city-spaces when such spaces become imaginaries of the city? How does one, as one navigates the Nairobi city-space, negotiate knowledges of queer desire, queer sex, queer erotics and 'queer ambiance'[269] in multiple and different publics that allow (and sometimes disallow) such a manoeuvres? 'Space,' asserts Henri Lefebvre, 'unleashes desire'[270] and this desire is encapsulated more prominently within daily occurrences and the meanings that accrue as a result of such daily occurrences in Nairobi.

Following on Nyairo and Ogude, but extending their views on urban spaces, I use the 'queer urban logic'[271] on the Nairobi city-spaces. I use the term Queer Nairobi to denote spaces within the city that are deemed, within the imaginary of its inhabitants, as friendly and that, despite the prohibitive legal framework, carry within them various forms of ambivalence in relation to queer individuals and the city. While acutely aware of the fraught discourses that accompany the term queer[272], evinced by several scholars such as Macharia[273] and Nyanzi[274], what I seek to do can be termed a *defamiliarization project*: reading the implications of queer spaces in the city of Nairobi to queer lives and livabilities in ways that mainstream discourse and literatures have often tended to ignore. Such spaces, I show, possess certain situational qualities that emerge upon occupation by the queer users.

As I had explained in the previous chapter, this chapter will read in detail and showing specific instances, the conceptual frameworks I selected. While in the previous chapters, *The Club*, *The Depot*, and *The Spot* were analysed as spaces that actively allow for certain sexual subjectivities

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[269] Hendriks, Thomas. 2017. "Queer(ing) popular culture: homo-erotic provocations from Kinshasa." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*: p.1-17.
[270] Lefevbre, 1991, p.97
[271] By queer urban logic, I mean all the artefacts, soundtracks, materials, knowledges, connections, and imaginaries that constitute the structure of a queer or queered city-space.
[272] For the purpose of this article, I rely on the contextualization of the term queer by Ekine and Abass, 2013;Nyanzi, 2014; Macharia, 2015 and Hoad, 2007.
[273] Macharia, Keguro. 2014. *"*Archive and method in Queer African Studies*". Agenda*, 29(1): 140-146.
[274] Nyanzi, Stella. 2013. *"*Dismantling reified African culture through localized homosexualities in Uganda.*" Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 15(8): 952-967.

to emerge and thrive Here, *The Club* (a nightclub), *The Depot* (a cruising café) and *The Spot (*a tavern) are offered as textual installations[275] in the ways in which they are imagined, understood, archived and finally recalled by their users according to the following provocations. First, how do the users of these spaces imagine themselves within and outside these spaces? Secondly, what significations are accrued to the users' subjectivities in relation to, and as a result of, these spaces? And finally, how can they be understood within the larger rubric of queer liveability in Kenya?

4.1 (i); A Guide to Nairobi

Over a period of several months from late 2015 to late 2017, I accompanied my respondents to these spaces to observe, experience and position how the spaces that the disparate queer individuals occupy, especially in moments of pleasure, play, and celebration help to construct selfhoods and subjectivities. I read these sites in the city of Nairobi as spaces that overturn and override existing notions of queer subjectivity and liveability in Kenya, using an intricate performance of visibility/invisibility and private/public tropes.

Aware of official control and regulation that include legal restrictions and state sanction, policing and harassment, I read the ways in which the users of these subverted spaces encounter, challenge and subvert the systems of regulation and control. I think through these spaces using the rubric formulated by Aaron Betsky.[276] In his landmark book, *Queer Spaces: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*, Betsky constructs a tripartite framework of 'closet', 'mirror' and 'orgasm' in which queer individuals simultaneously traverse them. For him, while one recognizes the self in the closet, this recognition at the same time recognizes others and self in the metaphor of a mirror. Upon this recognition of the self and others, this intensity bursts out as orgasmic energy at moments of pleasure and play. In Nairobi, for instance, the queer spaces and the users can be understood using

[275] For safety reasons, and given the sensitive nature of this study in Kenya, names of these spaces have been changed as well as those of my respondents.
[276] Betsky, Aaron. 1997. *Queer Spaces: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*. New York: Willian Morrow & Company.

this framework. Queer individuals collect themselves into and within the self, inside the closet (here understood as spaces) where desire must be acknowledged.

Nairobi queer spaces offer a counter narrative to the dominant discourses on queer expressions that usually equate it with sexual immorality, social degeneration and aberration. These spaces recuperate such negative assumptions of queer lives and practices to more positive and affirmative tones of community, friendship and celebrations of love. The spaces can be said to develop out of specific practices. Inherent however, are qualities that allow development of such practices. They offer avenues for deployment of survival tactics because of the precarious nature of such spaces and the feelings and perceptions around non-heteronormative desires. It should be noted that Kenya prohibits same-sex sexual expression and that queer desire is criminalized within the legal, political and also the social realm (see for example Mwangi 2014; Macharia 2013a).[277] This means that queer spaces of leisure and pleasure, like the nightclub, cruising spot and tavern, are imagined, read and decoded as invisible: as being outside the public imaginary. The political and social imaginary does not conceive of their presence let alone their use. Their very presence therefore, its physicality and functionality, implies that they transgress the function they were intended for.

The *Club,* a popular hangout entertainment establishment, sits in the middle of one of the busiest streets in Nairobi while *The Depot,* also in the middle of another busy street, is an Internet cyber café. *The Spot*, on the other hand, prides itself as one of the oldest taverns in the city, having opened its doors during colonial days. Such spaces, before they are allowed to operate, require compliance to various city bylaws and approvals from various offices in Nairobi. The inversion of their intended authorized legal use is a subversive act that highlights the queer ambivalence present

[277] Mwangi, Evan. 2014. Queer Agency in Kenya's Digital Media. *African Studies Review*, 57: 93-113; Macharia, Keguro. 2013a. "Queer Kenya in law and policy." In Sokari, Ekine and Hakima Abbas (ed), *Queer African Reader* (273-289). Dakar: Fahamu Press.

in Nairobi. As mentioned earlier, these spaces are read within the political rubric and the heteronormative social logic as being invisible. Therefore, the users do not necessarily transgress the space because they possess knowledge of encountering and subverting it, but upon occupation, the spaces become heterotopic as explained by Foucault (1986). Here, Foucault means that these spaces exist in the everyday but are structured in ways that offer resistance and contestations. They are spaces that can be located and pointed at but in them, because of the multiple contestations, are ascribed several meanings.

If we are to believe Betsky that 'by its very nature, queer space is something that is not built, only implied, and usually invisible'[278] then, from the outset, these spaces' ambivalences become the most powerful claim to subversion. It is true that queer spaces do not lay claim to materiality and stability, then this ephemeral quality becomes an important rhetorical device through which queer individuals exploit and operate. When these spaces allow for constant redefinitions, reconstructions and rebuilding while at the same time projecting a stable but ironical façade, queer individuals in these very processes build worlds and subjective knowledges. Before I left for Nairobi from Johannesburg, through a mutual friend I was introduced to Aubrey[279] a 24-year-old third year University student at one of the institutions in the city. I informed him of my intentions once I arrived in Nairobi and his response, immediate and positive, was remarkable. '*Wee kam ntakushow mashoga wa Nairobi.*' (You come; I will show you queers of Nairobi). Two things are worthy of note in his reply. First, the term 'mashoga' can mean a close friend or same-sex lover (see for example Amory, 1998)[280], therefore this description by Aubrey plugs into the social erotic economy that circulates within same-sex desire in Kenya. Second, his use of language and the subsequent code switching between English, Swahili and *Sheng*, an urban Kenyan lingo, betrayed

[278] Betsky, 1997, p.18.
[279] All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.
[280] Amory, Deborah. 1998. Mashoga, Mabasha and Magai: 'Homosexuality' on the East African Coast. In Stephen, Murray and Will Roscoe (ed), *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies in African Homosexualities*. New York: St Martin's Press, 67-87.

a cultural literacy that placed Aubrey within the imaginary of an urban spatial logic. The use of Sheng' locates Aubrey within contemporary urban culture and city life and authenticates his queer subjectivity as Kenyan because it ruptures the discourses that claim it as an import of the decadent West. Elsewhere, commenting on queer blogging in Kenya, Macharia[281] asserts rightfully that the use of *Sheng* draws in a Kenyan audience that would ignore or disparage queerness as being 'elite and western.' The use of Sheng, a unique Kenyan urban lingo therefore places Aubrey as both queer and Kenyan.

A few days after I arrived in Nairobi, Aubrey invited me to join him and his friends on a night out at *The Club* in the central business district of Nairobi. When Aubrey picked me up, in the car were his best friend Logan, and two other friends Hillary and Clifford. Logan is 28 and a media executive in one of the advertising agencies in the city. Hillary, a medical doctor and Clifford a postgraduate student were both in their early 30s and living together as a couple. On this chilly Saturday night, we got to the CBD at around 10pm and entered *The Club*. It was packed with no space to manoeuvre. Unlike the last time I had visited the club alone, this time; there were two bars newly renovated and a visible DJ booth just next to the balcony. The packed atmosphere smelled of sweat and sex and everyone was dancing to the blaring music coming from the speakers. Rihanna's[282] hit *Work* came on and Aubrey started dancing in response to the music. The inclusion of international music inserts the Kenyan public, queer or not, into the discourses of globalization and transnational flows. 'Whenever I come here, I am at peace,' Aubrey tells me as he is dancing, 'I meet my friends, I meet my enemies and they see I am living a fabulous life.' On this night, given the eclectic mix of the club, we were speaking in English. 'This place is like a sanctuary,' Hillary says, 'In here, we forget that the world out there is cruel and sad.' Both Aubrey and Hillary view *The Club* as a home of sorts. As I observe the space, Aubrey and Hillary leave to get some drinks; I head to the balcony with Logan and Clifford. Unlike the last time, the wall that separated the

[281] Macharia, Keguro. 2013b. Blogging Queer Kenya. *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, 1(1): 103-21.
[282] International R&B star

balcony from inside the club had been torn down and was now separated only by metal rails. One can easily observe the activities inside the club while at the balcony. From where we find seats, I can easily reach to the DJ and request a song.

Aubrey and Hillary return with the drinks and once settled they start dancing again. As I observe and read the signs, bodies and performances in action, I am also acutely aware of being observed. After a while a tall and dark guy, in his mid-twenties, comes to the DJ and requests a song and then leans on the rails towards us and calls: 'Aubrey.' He and Aubrey are classmates from the University though Aubrey admits that they do not speak much in school. I notice that Aubrey and his friends are very popular in this club. Most people keep on coming and talking to them. Exaggerated hugs and prolonged laughter are part of the ritual. And now as I watch them from my position next to the stranger who called Aubrey's name and has never left, I finally understand why Aubrey called this place 'home' and Hillary insisted it is a 'sanctuary' and why the stranger called Aubrey's name and never left.

For a brief moment, just one night of every week, every Friday, this space at *The Club*, becomes a community of persons. It collects disparate identities collapsing them into an entity of friendship; it houses multiple selves reducing the different selves into a range of possibilities that are as genuine as they are temporary. They all know that the night at some point will wear off. However, for the moment, Aubrey, Hillary, Logan, Clifford and everyone else in *The Club* redirect queer love, longing, and desire into this space and make it visible and real. This they do by the activities and practices as serious as dancing, as mundane as sipping a drink, as passionate as making out and as real as emotionally connecting with strangers. The music blared on, and the bodies on the dance floor gyrated to it, grinding with each other. I am acutely aware of how this space 'loses' the patrons as a result of the safe space that it provides. On my left, is a group of men who, just like me, are on the balcony watching the dance floor. Aubrey leans in to me while still dancing and whispers: *'hawa wasee wanahunt*' (those men are hunting!). The men on my left were in

the club hoping to get partners for sex, perhaps a one-night stand. Aside from the commodification and the desire for sex exchange, which is widespread anyway, the balcony as an exemplar for the queer ambivalence in Nairobi, and a metaphor for this potential exchange is critical. These three men, enjoying a 'bird's eye view' of the dance floor, just as I was, seemed to reinforce de Certeau's concept of the balcony as 'God's eye view': a place of control and power. Because it is primarily a space to view others, it therefore makes the space accessible. For example, McCune[283] justifies the importance of the balcony in queer spaces because it:

> allows the viewer to observe action from afar and potentially locate those whose gestural schemas, and/or sex appeal, are in line with their ideals. Here the traveller in this queer world can be selective about who piques his queer desires. From this spectator's location, the voyeur has control and is almost unavailable for direct physical interaction.[284]

While McCune is right that the voyeur/seer/observer (and in my case researcher) has control over who or what he sees, he is wrong when he writes that this location shields one from physical interaction. What McCune implies is that while I have the power to be voyeuristic or observing, this location reads and presents me as invisible or inaccessible to be observed. Being in the club renders me visible and therefore potentially desired. The balcony is not only a space of power, but, more importantly, that of vulnerability. Standing on the balcony watching the dance floor invites a performance play among those dancing and who might be interested in your attention. For example, Betsky writes:

> Once inside, the queer bar has most of the same ingredients as its straight equivalent, except that they are, once again, exaggerated. Mirrors abound, so that customers can reflect themselves and engage others without direct contact. There is also plenty of 'runway space,' long strips of empty territory, sometimes even raised, where men can display themselves to a line of spectators. The social ritual

[283] McCune, Jeffrey. 2008. 'Out' in the Club: The Down Low, Hip-Hop, and the Architecture of Black Masculinity. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 28(3): 298-314.
[284] Ibid, p.35.

> of display and desire here has a stage set with a forthrightness that often startles the uninitiated.[285]

The Club places importance on 'display' and 'desire.' Queer users at *The Club* emphasized this performance of watching and being aware of being watched and mentioned the emotions that gather around and in the self. This acute awareness is gathered together around vulnerability that is manifested, of course, in the play of desire and in the form of display. Every move, performance and play are choreographed through a carefully selected set of signs and codes that ultimately come down to a need to be desired and a demand to desire. Spectators and voyeurs, like myself, become participants, while active participants like Aubrey and Shawn become part of a spectacle woven together with the fabric of vulnerability.

I returned to the club two weeks later with Aubrey and Shawn, my other respondent. Aubrey, as usual, was on the dance floor getting comfortable with all the attention he was getting. Shawn and I were on the balcony observing the dance floor. Just like the last time I was there, the balcony was full of people dancing. The balcony, just like the dance floor, comes to be viewed through a spectral frame. The dance floor had literally moved to the balcony with the advantage of discreteness. At some point during the night, Shawn tapped my shoulder to draw my attention to the corner of the balcony where two men were seated. One of them was waving at him while curling his fingers, a seductive ritual, he told me: '*huyu msee ananikatia*' (this guy is hitting on me!). Shawn raised the beer bottle he was holding towards his direction and nodded sideways, to mean he was not interested. He did not ignore the man who curled a finger, but he acknowledged and even revelled in the seduction. The man, on the other hand, smiled at him and directed his sexualised gaze elsewhere. Two things are worth noting here: first, Shawn acknowledged the gaze which confirms the assertion of the queer space as primarily a space where desire collides.

[285] Betsky, p.158

Secondly, by playing this choreographed ritual, both Shawn and the man implicate themselves within the economy of queer desire.

Here I mean they possess a shared knowledge that allows them to recognise their mutual legibility for and of each other. This shows that the space that we were occupying made us accessible to queer advances. While it is true that being in the club opens you up to queer advances, I contend that the balcony renders one hyper visible because it sets one apart to be read and located. By one's very location, one becomes a spectator as well as a spectacle. Shawn described himself as 'discreet', meaning he does not make known or visible his sexual desires and inclinations, or does not care to do so. When I pushed him further, he said he was on the 'DL' (Down Low). The term down low refers to men of colour in the Americas who publicly identified as heterosexuals and had sexual relations with members of the opposite sex while secretly having sexual relations with members of their own sex.[286] While the Down Low refers to a secret sexual activity, it also refers to 'where' such activity takes place.[287] The 'where' becomes critical to understanding the Down Low outside its geographical emergence, and in a space like Nairobi, because as Stone confirms, it can both be an act of transgression as well as a critical and interesting heterotopic space. He writes:

> It is honest to say that most black men on the Down Low are not explicitly formulating their activity in terms of critique of dominant discourse. That fact, however, does not matter, for resistance to power does not require explicit formulation.[288]

While aware of the geo-historical flow and travel of the term, I was quite intrigued by Shawn's appropriation of it. It was not only Shawn who told me he is on the down low. Michael, an 18-year-old former high school student, told me the same. Michael and I met at the steps of *The Spot*

[286] Boykin, Keith. 2005. *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies, and Denial in Black America*. New York: Carroll and Graf.
[287] Stone, Brad. 2011. The Down Low and the Sexuality of Race. *Foucault Studies*, 12: 25-60.
[288] Ibid ,p. 49.

as I was climbing the stairs to the Internet café on the higher level. We spoke briefly, and we exchanged contacts and later met for coffee in one of the city's restaurants. He was wary of the environment, always looking over his shoulder as if he would meet someone he knew. '*Niko chini ya maji msee*,' he told me when I asked why he was uneasy. In Swahili, '*chini ya maji*' literally means under water, which in sexual vernacular could mean on the down low. He explained that his parents and siblings did not know about his sexuality and he preferred it that way. But this uncomfortable mien that he exhibited was quickly discarded when we went together to *The Club* later. He was happily dancing and exchanging contacts on the dance floor and seemed generally at ease. When I asked him later on the way out why he felt more comfortable at the club than in the restaurant, his simple reply was: 'it's *The Club* man!'

This vernacular use of the term 'down low' serves two purposes: Firstly, the terms: 'I am discreet', 'on the down low' and its Kenyan variation '*chini ya maji'* echo fluencies of queer sexual vernaculars that flow globally and also locally. These terms are also prevalent in the popular queer social application *Grindr* that Shawn, Michael and Aubrey subscribe to. The terms therefore denote deliberate insertion of their sexual lives within the discourses that historically have located queer subjectivities. Secondly, it raises fundamental questions about what it means to be discreet while at the same time visible in queer spaces.[289] Specifically, what does it mean to be 'out' in spaces that lack the vocabulary for its articulation? Shawn and Michael identified as queer both in and out of the queer spaces where I encountered them. However, they were willing to practice and even to showcase their queerness more in the queer spaces than outside of these queer spaces. As I had mentioned earlier, given the legal and political climate in Kenya that prohibits same sex sexual expressions and also the socio religious atmosphere that discourages and demonizes queer expressions, one would be tempted to attribute such factors to their refusal to 'act' queer out of

[289] Hendriks, Thomas. 2016. SIM cards of desire: Sexual versatility and the male homoerotic economy in urban Congo. *American Ethnologist*, 43 (2):230–242.

these queer spaces. As Shawn told me, '*nje ya club, mimi ni straight acting*' (outside the club, I am straight acting.) While those factors could well be at play as Michael added, 'sitaki parents wajue' (I don't want my parents to know) without elaborating why, I want to suggest that there is more to these performances. Shawn and Michael are not in the closet because they admit they are queer. I believe this performance has to do with the paradox and often misleading dialectic of private and public spaces.

4.2 (ii); Queer Performances and Queer Intimacies

Writing about LGBTIQ film festivals in Denmark, for instance, Elena Stanciu[290] discusses the dialectics of the public and private space within an urban context. Relying on Foucault, Stanciu identifies and explores 'modes of urban existence' that correlate, at least in part, to 'space, alternatives to it, and queer subjectivity'.[291] 'The fine line between public and private,' she says reflects, 'complex dimensions of social life. 'The public-private binary inherited from the early experiences of modernity,' she continues, 'is contained within a larger web of such dichotomies fostered by contemporary urban space, and perpetuated by everyday performances: inside/out, right/wrong, I/other, centre/periphery'.[292] Stanciu builds on Zygmunt Bauman's concept of the urban as 'liquid'[293] and argues that this urban fluidity reflects 'an inherent and contradictory placelessness of urban space, fragmentation, and interdependence of resulting fragments'.[294] What she means is that urban spaces rely on these fragments to construct themselves. Queer fragments, in all their forms, constitute the materialities that build the urban. 'The city,' for Stanciu then, can 'seem a mirage, simultaneity of meanings and realities, which require either acute awareness, of

[290] Stanciu, Elena. 2014. Urban Space and Queer Identities: The LGBTQ Film Festival as Heterotopia. *Analize – Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies,* 3:159-177.
[291] Ibid, p.159.
[292] Ibid, p.160.
[293] Bauman, Zygmunt. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
[294] Ibid.

place or self or a liberating merging with structures and mechanisms'.[295] For this reason therefore, the need to collapse the binary of public and private, in and out, seems more than a question of merger but one of lived and embodied affects as you experience the city. This is the constant quest for excavating and finding meaning within and around the city. 'This struggle for meaning,' avers Stanciu, 'lies underneath a deeper ontological and epistemological sphere, namely the construction of the city through discourse'.[296] There is therefore a need to approach the city, and the spaces inhabited as texts from which discourse and language can help us 'read' the city becomes imperative. What stories accumulate, and what narratives circulate when users immerse themselves in queer spaces? Conversely, what meanings are generated when such stories assemble or disassemble in the queer selves? This reading, in order to make sense and be productive, should by no means, follow any inherent, predictive or linear flow of narrative or narrative process. Since the city by its very nature is disjunctive, disjointed, disorderly and chaotic, nuance must therefore be found in the chaos.

In relation to my respondents, these arguments reveal a deeper and denser structure to account for the various seemingly contradictory performances. For my respondents, it seemed that there was no acute and intentional demarcation of either private or public places. *The Club* or *The Depot* and, as we shall later see, *The Spot* are not private places. Nor are they exclusively queer spaces that bear a distinct queer cultural imaginary or logic, but as I have said before, they are friendly to queer desires and flows. Secondly, they are not exclusively queer intimate spaces. Strangers frequent these spaces. Straight identifying individuals frequent the spaces, men as well as women, and while some might not discern the queer dynamics in these spaces, it only goes to reinforce my earlier argument that these spaces possess an inherent structure that supports queer erotics.

[295] Ibid.
[296] Ibid., p.163.

While the respondents claim the power of queer spaces in making visible or public their queer selves, it must be noted that these queer spaces are by no means public spheres, nor are they intended to be. They are not public squares. They are real spaces which are constitutive of heterotopology. They therefore, as maintained by Stanciu, operate on a public/private dynamism which rejects the binary distinction of the two. 'Privacy,' Stanciu argues, 'explored at a public level, becomes a tool of liberation and manifest subjectivity'.[297] Here the dialectical defence of the public and private sphere is dramatically, if not out rightly, collapsed. For example, *The Club* and *The Depot* are both spaces that actively, if not consciously, collapse the public/private binary. What affective potential is generated when privacy is enacted in public? 'The blurring of the public-private,' Stanciu argues, 'reduces invisibility that crippled sexual and gender minorities in the past'.[298] However, within the Nairobi context, this answer is insufficient. The assumption that the cataclysmic collapse of this binary automatically means a demand for visibility is misleading, if not false. This is because it inadvertently raises another binary problem, that of visibility and/or invisibility, which *The Club* and *The Depot* do not aspire to. Because the public/private binary has been collapsed in these spaces, the framework shifts from the polemics of in (as in inside the space) and out (as in outside the space) to the discourses of meaning and meaning making, narrative and narrative processes and subjectivities through performance and agency through interaction.

I therefore find Aaron Betsky's argument that queer spaces are essentially 'lonely spaces' more helpful in making my argument. The loneliness Betsky writes about is a form of loneliness that is aware of itself in spite of itself. 'This is a loneliness,' he writes, 'that is the natural opposite of the walls of separation, fear and distance that are meant to create community within their confines'.[299] In inhabiting these queer spaces, queer bodies in Nairobi ultimately long for community and friendship and connection – even if only momentary and ephemeral. With the

[297] Ibid, p.173.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Betsky, 1997, p.173

search of and for connection, queerness therefore disrupts the teleological and temporal usage of the spaces in fleeting and temporary ways. Queerness imposes its presence, thereby revealing the fallacy and futility of restriction, confines and boundaries of the city spaces as well as of the dialectics of public/private; in/out; visible/invisible that such spaces usually collect. Hunter and others [300] while writing on Black people's placemaking in Chicago in the USA, show how 'interaction'[301] can be deployed to generate meanings that impact and reflect on spaces. Placemaking, they argue, is where spaces attain meaning through the people who occupy them. In the case of queer individuals, therefore, placemaking in queer clubs reflects being queer, and aware of being queer, and being around other queers and being in tune with the subjectivities, implications and densities that accrue as a result.

Using the concept of 'Urban Commons,' they show how queer identified individuals in the city 'create shared leisure spaces on their own.' 'These spaces,' they continue, are sites to 'share affinities and resources and to sustain and expand networks in an effort to survive in the city'.[302] A slight departure here can be detected and observed with the Nairobi scene. Unlike the Chicago scene, queers in the city of Nairobi did not appear to search for long lasting solid social support networks in these spaces; they nevertheless were in search of safe, comfortable and fun spaces that would allow for occasional flirting, intense sensual energy and sexual release. Elsewhere, Marcus Hunter[303], writing on nightlife, insists that nightclubs are 'spaces [that] help sustain and enhance social capital among groups typically presumed to suffer greater social isolation'.[304] There appears a contradiction in the case of Nairobi. The contradictory performance played out in these spaces encourages the seemingly disparate actions among my respondents. It is in these spaces, various and multiple, that the users engage in acts of celebratory experiences and pleasurable playfulness.

[300] Hunter, Marcus, Mary Patillo and Zandria Robinson. 2016. Black Placemaking: Celebration, Play and Poetry. *Theory, Culture & Society* 33(7-8): 31-56.
[301] Ibid, 32.
[302] Ibid, 36.
[303] Hunter, Marcus. 2010. The nightly round: Space, social capital, and urban black nightlife. *City & Community* 9(2):165-186.
[304] Ibid, p.166.

At the same time, they are aware of the refusal of such spaces for permanence or stability. One sees this, for instance, in Shawn's 'sanctuary' comment and in Michael's multiple behavioural practices in and out of *The Club*.

Writing in his blog[305], Kenyan queer theorist Macharia speaks of his own experience that captures the contradicting play within queer nightclubs. He notes:

> It was not a place to make friends. I brought my friends along with me, and left with them. I did not find community there, not in the sense I had once found community in the church groups I had belonged to, a sense of mutual care and responsibility. Yet, I found refuge and escape. Those hours I spent there dancing made many other hostile hours in other places possible.[306]

What Macharia alludes to could as well relate to most users of the queer spaces in the city of Nairobi. While some of the users indeed find friendship, or even love, the majority are just looking for community, refuge and escape, even momentarily.

The story of K is a case in point. I met K on one chilly Friday night at *The Club* while I was alone. Slender looking, dark and tall, K by his own admission is a 'gym fanatic.' Last born in his family, he lives alone in the city having emigrated from the Western region of Kenya. He moved, in 2013, to attend college and had just graduated and was looking for a job. He was alone when I joined his table and after we got talking I asked him how he came to *The Club*. 'I just found it one Saturday night while I was strolling,' he told me, 'and I have been coming here ever since.' I have met K on several other occasions (and lately we have struck up a good friendship) and most times

[305] In this blog, Keguro Macharia thinks as he writes and what emerges is a dense but easily accessible archive of knowledge making and world building in intellectual discourse. The blog can be found at www.gukira.wordpress.com

[306] This particular quotation appears in a blogpost titled '*refuge*' published on June 13, 2016. Keguro Macharia here, using a play of words and a strong analytical frame, unpacks the contradiction that queer nightclubs accumulate to themselves.

he is alone seated by the balcony. In all those occasions, he does not seem interested in either flirting or dancing. One time I asked him why that was so. '*Hii vibe inanibamba*,' he told me (I like the vibe in the club). It could be the music or the ambience of the club. '*Na si unaeza get hii vibe kwa club zote tao*?' I ask (Can't you get this vibe in any other clubs in town?). He shook his head and while sweeping his hand across the club said, '*Boss cheki hii stuff*' (look at all this). I argue that the register of *The Club* marked as a queer space is what appeals to him. The cultural fluency of the term 'vibe,' I theorise, speaks more broadly to the global consumption of gay culture as being hip and fashionable. For K, *The Club* is a hideaway, a sanctuary but not in the way a church is understood as a sanctuary. In these spaces, nothing gets fixed. When I ask him much later if he has been to *The Depot*, he laughs which to me was an admission. I ask what he thinks about that space, he was quick with an answer: 'I like it here.' For me, his admission to have knowledge of both spaces implicates him within the queer sexual economy and erotic publics of the city but his preference for *The Club* over *The Depot* speaks more to the complicated understanding of visibility and invisibility. This, I understood days later when K sent me a phone message that in part read:

> *Do you remember you asking me why I always go to the club? Coz (sic) it makes me invisible. I prefer it that way* (verbatim).

Aside from the contradictory performance discussed, this phone message raised critical questions that were instructive to understanding how individual users of these shared spaces constructed their understanding of selves while inhabiting spaces. Aubrey and Hillary who described *The Club* as home and as a sanctuary and played to the politics of visibility contrasted sharply with K who drew on invisibility. Three questions arose in my mind while I was trying to understand K's text message: first, what does a quest for invisibility mean for queer liveability? Secondly, what affects, positive or negative, accrue as a result of this invisibility? Finally, what should these affects imply for possible forms of subjectivity in relation to space?

The answers to these questions became clearer to me as I intermeshed the kind of invisibility to which K was referring with a different kind of invisibility at *The Spot* tavern, the third textual installation. For several weekends, I spent time in *The Spot*. Having established contact with one of my respondents, Sly, a male sex worker operating from the tavern, I called him up and set up a meeting. '*wee kuja tu. Sina neno but nikipata biashara nitaenda tu*' he told me (Just come but if I get business (client) I will go). I arrived one Friday at 8pm and was there till 1am. It was impossible, at least in my own estimation, to label the space as queer at all. As a tavern, both male and female sex workers were present. It was easily discernible as an opposite-sex pick up joint, but nothing could point to clearly defined same-sex liaisons. I sat with Sly at one of the tables at the back of the tavern surrounded by other tables occupied by other male sex workers who were chatting and laughing loudly. For my safety, and possibly his too, he had told me to introduce myself as his cousin. Having gained access to this intimate group of about seven men, as a result of my supposed filial attachment to him, I was able to pick up cues of queer expressions. '*umekua wapi kwani?*' (Where have you been?) One asked me, while another asked my 'cousin' '*nimchukue?*' (Can I take him?), which elicited laugher from the others. I argue that the use of the playful flirtatious language is critical because it locates me as a participant in the queer erotics economy that allows me some form of intimacy within this group.

For the duration of my stay, and for a number of following nights, it was clear how this space was instrumental to the male same sex workers. Unlike the female sex workers who had to 'hassle' and 'fight' for clients, this all-male group did not have to do that. I witnessed two 'pick ups' where a potential suitor would walk into the tavern, hesitate a little bit just next to the tables and head straight to the bathroom. A few of the male same sex workers would follow him and 'negotiate' in the bathroom and whoever took his fancy would follow him out and possibly to his home or to a guest house. This was unlike the female sex work where the 'hassle' and 'negotiation' was in full view of everyone in the tavern and even encouraged through the glances, smiles and

nods of the patrons. This 'hassle' and 'negotiation' was almost always exaggerated, in an attempt to mask the male same-sex economy that was circulating in the background. It should be noted, however, that the 'discreet' flirtation by the male same sex workers was not in any way a testimony of the unsuitability of same-sex sexual expressions. On the contrary, it was a tactic employed by both the male-sex workers and their clients, and assisted by their female counterparts, to subvert and reanimate the space that is *The Spot,* to their advantage. It was known how the performative seduction ritual played itself out, and it was understood how the mechanics of acquiring a mate functioned. However, unlike for the female sex workers, it was not required that this performance become visible. This, again, does not mean that the performances were invisible in the sense of outside of the public sphere. It was very much in the public sphere. It played itself in the very eyes of the patrons who were present in the tavern. However, it did not demand the kind of intensities that female sex work generated or pulled towards itself.

When read together, K's demand for invisibility and *The Spot*'s play of invisibility speak more broadly to what I refer to as *reverted visibility*. It is a way of seeing through not seeing. For example, an event becomes spectacular only by its sheer dullness. At *The Club*, K can only be legible when he becomes illegible among other illegible bodies. That is to say, he becomes seen through a process of unseeing himself, occasioned by a space that allows such unseeing. He is visible only because he cavorts with invisibility. At the same time Sly, and by extension all his friends at *The Spot,* can only become visible through an intricate and complicated mix of spectacle and the ordinary. The hypervisible performance of the female sex workers which is, intentionally designed to mask or render invisible the male sex play in the space, serves in reverted visibility, to make manifest the performance of the 'spectacle'. In other words, the hypervisibility of the female sex workers ensured the production and circulation of the male sex performance. I argue that these can only be possible in spaces that build a network that makes such a performance visible. What this achieves, ultimately, is to build up a repository of queer knowledge/s, artefacts and

experiences, archived in queer bodies and realized through and in queer spaces. In these archives are included massive repositories of knowledges, intimate histories, flows of information, politically and socially inflected grammars, traces of control and limitation, and ultimately sites of new productive potentials. In the encounter, therefore, between queer spaces and queer users, an archive emerges and, in this archive, subjectivities of self in space and in time (however temporary, mostly precarious and liminal) are born.

The Spot, especially, bears, in all its forms and structures, this radical potential of the queer space to inflect and affect its users. A run-down building, built during the colonial years, its aging edifice seems like a perfect spot for queer love. Right in the middle of the central business district, although hidden from view, *The Spot* therefore supports notions of queer spaces as emerging at the point where surveillance and control fail. Queer spaces find redemption in places where the city fails to function – where the city literally breaks down, most famously in abandoned buildings, public parks, urinals, taverns as well as bars. At the very point where the intended use of the spaces collapses, then the queer potential emerges. It undermines normal conventional use; obstructs normative surveillance through a vast array of coded networks and covert gestures and revels in its subversion. The nature of these queer spaces in Nairobi is to be discerned through various grammars of communications and expressions that always include non-verbal cues, gesticulations and also physical touch. The gestural impulse at *The Club* that I witnessed between Shawn and the guy 'who was hunting'; the nods that I saw – and experienced – at *The Depot* by the 'computer users' and the elaborate network of coded signs and covert networks that was 'invisibly visible' at *The Spot* all seem to confirm that same-sex desires are conveyed through a rigorous, coded and sometimes a convoluted network. Therefore it follows that within a spatial structure – whether it's physical (*The Club, The Depot, The Spot*), temporal (day or night), or ephemeral (weekdays or weekends), queer subjectivities are made and remade.

In addition, these queer spaces gain the experiential quality through the sensorial and mobile inputs of its users. This is to mean that while the spaces regain their spatial quality, its power as a queer and queering space can only be achieved by the sensory elements and mobile characteristics of its users within it. People experience spaces differently occasioned mostly by their individuals' sensory elements. This particular sensorial experience in these spaces aligns - on an affective level – with Betsky's arguments of queer spaces as lonely spaces, and serves to explain more explicitly why my respondents, for example K, felt more at ease at *The Club* than in a restaurant in the city. I contend that the experiential quality of *The Club* made the world collapse into itself; the music and dance was a sort of recuperative and redemptive carnival. Nothing else mattered but the bodies that recognized themselves in one another and melded into each other. Spaces are always in a constant shift of meaning making that largely depends on who is occupying such spaces, what experiences they bring to such spaces and how they enter the spaces.

Now, if we believe that Deleuze's concept of 'becoming' holds water, then its true that queer spaces of Nairobi change meaning, morph into new spaces, subvert existing meaning of spaces and ultimately alter the thinking, identity and subjectivity of the users of the spaces. Therefore when privacy is aspired within a supposed public (in the case of K); when visibility can only be achieved through a veneer/façade of invisibility (in the case of *The Spot*) and when queer spaces create and recognize themselves through a mirror effect that demand that queer bodies see themselves in other queer bodies and therefore return to the self, then what are queer spaces but mourning spaces?

4.3 (iii); Queer Ob (scenes)

To make my point, consider the following ob(scenes):

Ob(scene) I

Think about the alley that connects Tsavo lane street with the inside of The Spot; the bodies that line up along the alley and watch you as you enter the tavern. Watch them as they watch you. This in-between space that is loaded with meshed and intimate possibilities. The play of passion and desire in the tavern itself. The collapse of boundaries in the tavern – in music that traverses generations; in patrons who represent different constituencies; in different queer bodies that suggest a broad range of probabilities. Look at the meshing of bodies through play – the slight nod of the head as a means of acknowledgement and the journey to the bathroom!

Ob(scene) II

The momentary lurk outside the building that houses the The Depot. The left and right glance on the streets. The quick dash into the café and the flight up the metal stairs. The quick glance across the many cubicles with computers. Heads raised up from the cubicles with your arrival. Take your seat. Fidget momentarily at an odd bottle of Nivea lotion and some crumpled tissue papers. Feel someone rubbernecking you from the next cubicle. Stare at him directly. See him smile. Smile too. Log into the computer. See someone across from you leave followed by another. Feel the room. The ritual. The raw energy of sex and passion and desire.

Ob(scene) III

Cross the busy avenue in the CBD and climb up the stairs of the Club. The blaring music hits you right up. Bodies huddled together dancing. Other bodies line up the wall watching. See yourself in the mirrors on the wall. See others see you in the mirrors on the wall. Walk to the balcony facing the busy street. See the big TV screens that are showing the music videos. See queers kissing at the corner. See one seated on top of the other. See everyone drinking beer while watching others. See the constant furtive glances. Walk to the bathroom and feel the looks of others on you. Feel the collapse of privacy. See the hand gestures, the head nods, the smiles, the quick and expert passing of little notes. Most probably telephone numbers. Walk back to the table. Finish your beer. Leave.

Within a rubric of community, pleasure and intimacy, these three scenes may – and should – cast a feeling of everyday performance of pleasurable playfulness and intimate connections. But in reality, it is what I call a 'dance of death.' Looked at keenly, queer spaces are primarily for sexual purposes. The space can either function as a site to fashion the body into a manifestation of a particular brand of sexuality – queer in this case– or for actual sexual negotiation/activity. This sexual inclined quality marks queer spaces as spaces of dying in the following ways: First, the uncanny ability to render obsolete the distance between the self and the other where the self sees

itself in the other through desire. Secondly, the intensity of the other to invariably become the self through the sets of gestures and bodily movement discussed above punctures the very fabric of intimacy. Finally, the desire of sexual intimacy and the possibility of sexual activity – whether in these spaces or outside- becomes an explosion of bodily experiences that collapses queer liveability and queer fungibility. To make it clear: queer spaces are intended for sexual purposes. The very act of sexual expression or activity is always a dying of sorts – in that it is the successful finale of the very reason for the existence of the queer space. Let me further explain: in these queer spaces, the most private and intimate part of our lives – for example the bathroom/toilet has been recast and re-enacted in public and has become a celebration – or the very least an acknowledgment – of queer desires and passions. Additionally, when queer bodies watch/observe/see/gaze other queer bodies and are in return watched/gazed/observed/seen by the same queer bodies, the collapse of emotions, affects, and intensities cannot go any further. The conglomeration of queer desires at the bathroom in *The Spot*, the collapse of queer intensities at the dance floor in *The Club* and the merger of forceful queer energies at the 'computers' in *The Depot* reach a 'dying point' at the very moment of acknowledgment, reciprocity and perhaps consummation. Since these spaces are not concrete – always unstable – this realization heightens the pleasure, the entertainment, the meshing of bodies, the grinding of bodies, the intimacy of proximity, and the very act of sexual intercourse.

The quality of a queer space to reinvent itself is a powerful trope in the living and liveabilities of queer bodies. What this reinvention does is to re-imagine the spaces –in this case city spaces - as a whole. It adds flair, purpose and function to the built environment and urban forms. This ephemeral characteristic and unstable nature becomes its most powerful quality. This dynamism is its foremost strength because it turns on its head the very inhibitive nature of the space itself. An example of this positive spatial inversion is the re-inscription of the 'computers' at *The Depot*, the bathroom in *The Spot* and the balcony in *The Club*. And its physical presence is always an escape from the self but invariably back to the self. Whilst spaces are generally meant to divide, these

Nairobi queer spaces unite - where the self and other come together; where the body and the city merge.

This chapter has shown that these connections are always of promise, of hope and desire. That Shawn, Michael or Sly, while recognizing themselves in others, play to a higher sense of queer affection and of affirmation through vulnerability, of acknowledgement through sensuality, of love even though momentarily and of community through passion. Also, these connections work through such negative affects as pain, loss, and loneliness that ironically, and more powerfully so, serve to affirm the queer body's longing for the other and in turn for and of the self.

In the last three chapters, I have relied on an ethnographic lens to the city of Nairobi and to queer existence and embodiment, which as I have outlined above has built a dynamic and multi-layered spaces which not only ensure queer liveability but also successfully manages to question and subvert regimes of power and control. In the next chapter, I continue with this ethnographic trope by reading *Stories of Our Lives*, the boocumentary project that captures through print the real lived experiences and embodied existence of queer individuals and how they navigate the subjectivities of being queer within the Kenyan imaginary. I examine the power of personal narratives and storytelling to capture the imagination of queer freedom and imagine the various ways queer messiness, anxieties and ambivalences can result in radical forms of queer world making in Kenya.

Chapter Five

5.0 Stories We Tell: Queer Narratives in '*Stories of Our Lives*'

> Stories have their infrastructures – a constantly expanding hardwiring of materials, senses, and signs. This is what allows for stories to take shape, to be conveyed.
>
> - Abdoumaliq Simone

> Dear Kenyan Queer:
> Even though we do not know you, and even though we didn't get to meet you and hear your story, understand what we mean when we say you are not alone, and this is your story too.
> - The NEST Collective.

In a blog post titled '*Stories we tell*,'[307] AbdouMaliq Simone, a Professor of Sociology and Urbanism asks: 'what kinds of stories can be told about those whose stories end up being expendable, wasted?' He continues: 'what might we pay attention to in the very process of story-telling that might enable stories to be heard in a world where there is both a surplus of sensibility and an impoverishment of imagination?' *Imagination* is key here and I choose to foreground it. I begin this chapter with him because, through his numerous writings on urbanism and the spatial environment, he opens worlds that have always remained shut. He unholds what has been, for a long time, held. Even in the above quotation, he insists on the primacy of stories to unravel lived realities. Alongside Abdoumaliq's provocations, Gathoni J. Blessol joins me, and I think with her too. In an article published in the online platform, *Pambazuka News,* she asks 'What does it mean to be queer… [in Kenya]?' She answers, 'being queer…means you get to be unique in a different

[307] This post is published on Simone's personal blog which can be found here: http://villes-noires.tumblr.com/post/153166345185/stories-we-tell

way.'[308] She summarises: 'being queer means you have to man-up – or be a woman and a half – to admit, embrace, and live your life with no regrets.'[309]

Simone and Blessol capture perfectly the preoccupation of this chapter. Following on the previous chapters, this one continues the trope of reading and analysing queer subjectivities, albeit from a different angle. Using a narrative approach I examine the kinds of stories that get produced, circulated and consumed about queer lives from a personal perspective. Here, I ask, what kinds of narratives do we build when we tell our queer stories? What kind of imaginative potential can we summon in order to tell our queer stories uniquely? Put another way, how do we engage with and through ourselves in ways in which socio-political life and collective histories constitutes individual subjects?

If it is true that stories have weaknesses, weak links and fault lines, then queer stories must have even weaker links and fault lines. How then do we sensitively and with some degree of kindness, navigate these weak links, sometimes even exploiting their very existence, in the process of telling our queer stories or those of people we know? Conversely, what kinds of queer stories do we tell, how do we tell them, why do we tell them, and where do we tell them in ways that make visible our individual subjectivities? These provocative suppositions signal a particular and different kinds of grammars of 'knowing' and 'knowability' that pervade the everyday lived experiences and liveability of queer lives. It is my wish in this chapter to extend the discourses that these various questions provoke. While the previous two chapters have been an unstable ethnographic and sociological mess, this chapter, to some degree aims to be a stable ethnographic mess. What I mean is that while these other chapters have been an active examination of the lives and times of queer selves in an uncontrolled environment which is the city of Nairobi, this chapter is implicated in a controlled and somewhat routinized environment within the same city.

[308] Gathoni, Blessol jr, *Pambazuka News*, 2000, p.1.
[309] Ibid, p.4.

Just like the previous chapters, and more specifically in this, given the nationalist rhetoric, religious fundamentalism, and Kenya's law and policy that rejects, denies, criminalises, polices, punishes, erases and prohibits queer sexualities, I am interested in how queer bodies narrativise their lives in the city of Nairobi in ways that potentially creates meanings, significances, mobility and negotiations to their subjectivities and what this negotiation and the meanings that accrue mean conceptually for a particular cognition of queer analysis and understandings. As I have earlier and rightly noted, the current conceptualization of same-sex sexual expressions is framed within an antinormative foundation of queer studies and politics. While they have, I acknowledge, illuminated the presence of same-sex sexual expressions, these antinormative frameworks, I have noted, have not been successful in capturing the contextual realities, and complex experiences of the queer lives and their multiple and various sexual expressions.

I respond to these provocative questions through a *narrative disassemblage* coined about by Musila in *A Death Retold.*[310] Writing about the much publicised case of Julie Ward's murder in Kenya, Musila wonders 'how narrative works as a critical intervention in understanding social reality'[311]. Here, she explores the demand of narrative to not only articulate reality, be it material or historical, but also to influence how they are interpreted. For my case however, and within the queer impulse described above, I seek to show how personal stories, individual accounts, subjective fashionings and images of the self can recast how we understand and articulate queer selves, bodies and expressions. To do this, I read *Stories of Our Lives*[312] (hereafter known as SOOL) to examine the nuances overshadowed by rigidly defined antinormative queer analysis. Published by the NEST Collective, *Stories of Our Lives* is an ethnographic archive of personal accounts of same sex desiring individuals in Kenya. According to its website, the NEST Collective is a Kenyan multidisciplinary collective working in Nairobi with the aim of exploring troubling modern

[310] Musila, 2015., my emphasis
[311] Ibid, p.4.
[312] The Nest Collective. 2015. *Stories of Our Lives: Queer Narratives from Kenya*. Nairobi: Uhai Trust.

identities, reimagining African pasts, and inhabiting mythical African futures. What is so powerful about this archive, at least in my estimation, is the way the narratives are centred on personal lived experiences without the sometimes blinding editorial intrusions and editing. The *Stories of Our Lives* project takes the form of interviews where individuals were left to tell their own stories which were left untouched. What this archival project does therefore, which follows J. Blessol's instigation, and this chapter will be sensitive to, is to expand the understanding of being queer in Kenya.

Rather than reading/viewing these narrative modes as 'truths' or 'facts', as narrated or recorded by the queer individuals, it is more helpful to think of these modes as literary equipment that position queer bodies within a structure of negotiated exchanges and processes and how these bodies build and rebuild conceptions of the self. Narrating the self provides a window into the lived experiences through a close relationship between body and space. This practice is in essence a practice of personalized geography; an exercise of inserting oneself within the cartography of space and how such spatial relations enable individual or collective agency.[313] Therefore, one can be tempted to think of this project as partly autobiographical and therefore actualization of the self.[314] I mean partly autobiographical because it is not a narration or recording of one's life but as a systemic process of 'becoming in the sense of lives'.[315] In a way therefore, it becomes a machine through which the body orients and re-orients itself in the quest for articulation and location. These narratives become his(stories) of 'lived space', 'spatial habits' and 'embodied geographies' and how they interact and how such interactions provide new ways of attaching meanings to queer bodies.[316]

[313] Gorman-Murray, Andrew.2007. Sexy stories - Using autobiography in geographies of sexuality. *Qualitative Research Journal.* 7(1):3 – 25.
[314] Moss, Pamela. (ed). 2001. *Placing Autobiography in Geography*. New York: Syracuse University
[315] Ibid, p.14.
[316] Gorman-Murray, 2007, p. 6.

Space is not peripheral to the production of narratives, it is central to it. 'Space invades the body and the mind to produce experiences.'[317] Therefore, the impressionability of space affects the body as self. Since space is a living organism that changes constantly, the body gets located in such precarious spaces and times. Hence, with the changing spatiality of location, the body changes too. Through such constant changes, new meanings are ascribed and attached to both the body and the spaces. While it is true that it is difficult to coherently articulate a queer self, this practice of queer narration must be understood as not an attempt at presenting a coherent body of selves, but rather it is a conscious rendition of the constant productions and reproductions of internal bodies as they interact with spatial externals. In the process, it becomes a site of new meanings for the queer bodies.

For example, Wainaina's acclaimed memoir *One Day I will Write About This Place*[318] fits neatly into this claim of not representing or recording facts but rather a constant grappling with the dynamic and multiple iterations of the self. A bildungsroman narrative, Wainaina in great detail explores growing up in Kenya and his relationship with his family as well as the nation state of Kenya. However, while he promises to tell a story, even, as the title suggest, write a story, he doesn't quite tell one, or, at the very least, he tells an incomplete story. Such silences, gaps or incoherence is important to craft a narrative that fits in with the demand of narratives bearing different registers and representing different selves. When Wainaina, therefore, came out as gay, and wrote the *Lost Chapter*, a confessional narrative if you may, then these different narratives must be read as they are: structural gaps and implicit silences that enable us to read his *Weltanschauung*.

As I have argued in earlier chapters, the major debates that underpin queer discourse and politics within the context of Kenya generate narratives and controversies that produce certain

[317] Pile, Steve. 2002. Memory and the city. In Jan Campbell and Janet Harbord (Eds.), *Temporalities, autobiography and everyday life* (111–127). Manchester, England: Manchester University Press.

[318] Wainaina, Binyavanga. 2011. *One day I will write about this place: a memoir*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press.

anxieties masked around questions of nationalism and religious fundamentalism. These anxieties, based on misinformations, build a grammar of exclusion, discrimination and criminalisation of queer individuals. To counter this, a reading of *Stories of Our Lives* against Musila's narrative disassemblage becomes extremely crucial. To adequately and forcefully locate same-sex sexual bodies, expressions, desires and spaces in Kenya, a spectrum that calls attention to the incoherence and unintelligibility of sexualities in nuanced complexities around lived experiences, spatial subjectivities and embodied existences is absolutely necessary.

Indeed, a possibility to and of rethinking the conceptualization and theorization of same sex desiring individuals is crucial in Kenya generally and Nairobi specifically because these are sites where multiple sexualities collide, state sanctions on non-normative sexuality are rife and nationalist discourse against queer bodies and spaces are painfully evident. An ambitious project of the NEST Collective, a multidisciplinary arts collaborative living and working in Nairobi, Kenya, the *Stories of Our Lives* project presents a good example of the need for a queer narrative analysis rooted in spatial logics and devoid of the limiting pressures of an antinormative framework. The NEST produced a documentary in 2014 and a book in 2015. In their website, the NEST Collective, who refer to themselves as a 'small army of thinkers, makers and believers', say of the motivation for the book:

> On June 30, 2013, we began collecting and archiving the stories of persons identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex from Kenya. We called this project 'Stories of Our Lives' and we wanted to do this project for many reasons, but mostly because we wanted to tell stories that are not often heard, stories that characterize the queer experience in Kenya.

Immediately, the NEST Collective in this statement signals a specific demand for the project: the need to 'tell stories that are not often heard'. Conflating this with the 'queer experience in Kenya' offers a reading of queer narratives in Kenya as essentially silenced and therefore marginal. And

because the stories are rooted or based in Kenya, it reveals the demand for an alternative articulation of marginalised and silenced sexualities.

Divided into seven chapters – *Memories; Childhood and First Times; Identity; Society and the Future; Coming Out; Love, Sex and Everything In Between and Religion and Spirituality - Stories of Our Lives* as a queer archival project narrates the everyday lived experiences of what it means to fall in love, what it means to explore one's identity and, ultimately, what it means to be human in a culture where one's existence is derided and repeatedly mocked as representative of the worst of Western traits. Before the book was circulated, a documentary was produced that has been severally nominated and won several global awards despite being banned in Kenya by the Kenya Classification and Film Board (KCFB), a government organization that regulates the production and circulation of media content. 'After several months of touring and collecting hundreds of vivid, compelling stories,' the NEST Collective website says of the documentary, 'we decided to turn some of these stories into short films,' and 'the resulting shots' they conclude, 'were strung together into this: an anthology film based on true stories about queer life in Kenya.'

It should be noted that this monumental project is by no means the first attempt at starting a conversation on same-sex sexual desires and expressions in Kenya. *Invisible Stories from Kenya's Queer Community*[319] was published in 2013 and it narrates stories of same-sex sexual expressions in Kenya. Unlike *Stories of Our Lives* which records verbatim the individual's thoughts and emotions without changing it, *Invisible Stories*, edited by Kevin Mwachiro, has been edited and packaged along a particular narrative mostly around funding. It was published by the Goethe Institut based in Nairobi. While *Stories of Our Lives* appears to have no noticeable thematic concern, which I find powerful and hence the motivation for its analysis, *Invisible Stories* has a thematic narrative that informed the selection of the individual stories that were ultimately published. Nonetheless, it significantly generated a conversation about being queer in a space that not delegitimizes queerness

[319] Mwachiro, Kelvin. 2013. *Invisible Stories from Kenya's Queer Community* .Nairobi*:* Goethe-Institut.

but actively denies it. In addition, in 2016, a Kenyan music group going by the name Art Attack, released a remix of Macklemore's 2012 song '*Same Love.*'[320] Shot in Kenya, the single, which depicts intimacies among Kenyans of the same sex drew a lot of attention, and generated important discussions when it was released. Predictably the song was banned by the KFCB, which, ironically only served to increase its reach.

These two artefacts serve as a background to the analysis of this book. The preface of the book also continues with the same narrative in the NEST Collective website: 'The book you are holding,' the authors begin, 'shouldn't exist, because the people in this book are said not to exist.' It continues, 'if you believe what you've read, seen and heard in the news, homosexuality does not exist in Kenya, and the stories collected in this book must be some grand fiction.' However, they aver, 'If you do believe that queer people exist in Kenya, then the people in this book might disappoint you.' This is an important point to make because it sutures the many fiction stories that are often told of same sex individuals in Kenya. While some say they are sex-crazed, others say they are devil worshippers. As they continue, they say that 'they don't fit into the narrow African Homosexual story that characterizes the African Homosexual.' The imperative, therefore, to excavate these narratives at once sets the archival project as a recuperative, teleological and on a grander scale an ontological praxis.

According to the managing partner at the NEST, George Gachara, who I interviewed at his office on several occasions in 2017, the narratives in the project reflect the entire experiences of the respondents. 'We decided to let them tell their stories without interruption' he says, 'because we realized storytelling allows them to be vulnerable without losing it.'[321] Read against the dominant narrative in Kenya, 'loss' here becomes an important infrastructural tool. Gachara's

[320] for the full version of this song visit: https://youtu.be/8EataOQvPII

[321] In the various interviews I had with George and some of his colleagues at the NEST, the question of loss and vulnerability was a recurring theme and it became important as a canvas with which I could map out the tenor and depth of the narrative processes in the book, SOOL.

provocative statements result in two leading questions that guide this chapter: firstly, how does one lose what was never gained in the first place? And secondly and of course related to the first, and more importantly, how does loss (or not losing it) becomes an agential tool to reclaim what was never there in the first place? For me, narrative processes provide a grammar of knowability, a form of being and a way of knowing because it allows for the fashioning of the self; or as George described it, provides room for vulnerability of the self, and by the self to not only be manifest but also become an infrastructure for recuperation and possibly freedom. And these sets of practices, as I have argued before, cannot and are not outside of the spatial logics of Kenya and its attendant sexuality discourses.

A major controversy, or debate, that has guided queer politics in Kenya is how same-sex desiring individuals identify. The various non-governmental organizations that operate in Kenya, which I discussed in detail earlier, have attempted to coherently package the various identities into a stable form, albeit with full recognition of this difficult endeavour. This debate runs through this chapter not in the ways that identity politics have always been framed but in the ways that the individuals in their subjective lived experiences not only problematize these current discourses but create new forms of imagination towards self-identity.

5.1 (Provocation 1): Identity

For starters, the question of how the individual respondents identify as is extensively dealt with in the book. While the respondents give multiple and disparate accounts of how they understand themselves and what meaning they attach to such understandings, the accounts point to a crisis of a name that is always at the heart of queer politics. Consider these three accounts

> *(a) Am I gay? I don't like the sound of it, it doesn't speak of me, because being gay is tied to a certain lifestyle, a certain way of being and expressing yourself…it's such a blanket*

description. I don't like the one size fits all LGBT framework. We are completely different people from different realities.[322]

(b) *I am gay, a homosexual; queer. I'm liking the word queer a lot these days. I never used to like it, but I like it now.*[323]

(c) *These labels- the way I see them- they cause problems. Butches feel like the man of the house. No. even the idea of masculinity, I don't want. Don't bring me those patriarchies here. I don't want them. Let's all just be women.*[324]

Tied to the question of loss highlighted above, what narrative strands do these three accounts string to and with each other? Asked differently, what do these three accounts signal with respect to narrative vulnerability? To answer these questions, the Kenyan 'queer' discourse needs to be unpacked in order to understand the archive which these accounts are drawn from. The assumption that all queer individuals are inherently the same and therefore can be categorized within the same rubric is challenged. The 'blanket description' the respondent raises immediately assumes the binary of 'us' vs. 'them'. When the respondent insists that 'we are completely different people from different realities', it speaks powerfully to the different lived experiences in different contextual realities which informs their different subjectivities. If George Gachara is right that storytelling allows for vulnerability, then what do the different queer stories of the different multiple selves mean for the collective excavation of a queer subjectivity? My argument is therefore, if queer individuals possess varied and multiple lived experiences, it follows that their subjectivity cannot be oriented and/or theorized using an epistemological framework that assumes a common background and/or standpoint. In the second account, the self-appropriation of the

[322] SOOL, p.200.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid, p.205.

term 'queer' is not only evident but non-specific. He explains that he's 'less bothered', that for him, labels are 'not an issue'[325]. Asked why he loves the word queer, he says because:

> *(d) You can't be shaped right. You can't fit in. You refuse to follow the program, and you can't understand why. Now I realize that all the books I used to read when I was a kid with eccentric professor characters who lived alone; queer. People who make new things; queer. James Baldwin; queer.*[326]

What is fascinating about this conception of queer is that it goes beyond the sexual to the realm of the social and historical materiality. As he says, 'You cannot recognize what it is, and it's not just about sex. I like that word'[327]. Queer zigzagging is evident here but also present in the other accounts. A bigger rubric is intentionally crafted that situates queerness within a narrative of novelty, independence of thought and uniqueness. A line is drawn that connects the refusal to either be 'shaped right' or 'fit in' with the eccentricities of 'professor characters' and even 'James Baldwin.' What this does, it answers, or rather confirms, the imperative of fashioning a vulnerable self within a frame of loss but situated in a larger framework that recuperates the loss as a tactic of and for queer subjectivity. In effect, it zigzags the queer self back to the self.

The zigzagging of the self, back to the self, summons another narrative impulse: the interplay between the power to be 'seen' and the power to be 'heard'. In other words, it asks of us the tools and grammars that we can use to fashion ourselves. To borrow from Grace Musila, it is the demand for a 'deployment of narrative as a tool for mediating truth(s) and knowledge(s)'[328]. Consider this other account: when the respondent is asked about his high school experience, he reminisces with nostalgia. '*Those four years were some of the best years*,' he said, '*so much happening, nothing ever in black and white, people just being themselves without explanation.*'[329] Another respondent describing

[325] Ibid, p.200.
[326] Ibid, p.201.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Musila, 2015. p5.
[329] SOOL, p.70.

the same experience says: '*in high school being gay wasn't an identity. It was me and my thing.*'[330] While, considering that at that age and time, there possibly could not be a grammar to articulate the experience, what is liberating about this understanding is what they both call a 'boy thing' or 'stuff guys did' without it needing an intelligent and concise explication. The second respondent continues:

> *(e) I think when you give it the language and the definitions, it loses its flavour and that's why I hated the idea of being called gay. I don't know how to express it, but yeah. I like it when it is not defined; it becomes something that you just do.*[331]

Critics might point out that a lack of a concise vocabulary to articulate the respondents' experiences could or might render the radical potential of queer politics impotent, however I insist that such vague and hazy narrative actually liberates queer politics to its full potential because it enables narrative accumulation of queer affects and subjectivities. Let me explain this point by pointing to a specific instance in the text: The same respondent narrates an experience he had had with another student still in the same high school:

> *(f) He asked if I wanted to touch him, and I touched him every so often. He touched me also. He had many girlfriends, and for him, what we were doing was never 'this is who I am'. For us, it was…not really caring or playing to definitions… I liked it because it was naughty and uncomplicated. When you start to give this thing a language, it becomes complicated and intense.*[332]

Again, this narrative accumulates different grammars to itself to string together a strand that immediately registers itself not only outside the received notions of normative sexuality but above the antinormative frameworks of queer studies, politics and praxis. So 'touch' and 'every so often' point to a habitual sexual practice outside the norm, however, that 'he had many girlfriends'

[330] Ibid, p.185.
[331] Ibid, p.186.
[332] Ibid.

and 'this is [not] who I am' immediately draws back the practice to itself. This is a deliberate fashioning of the self, that narrativizes an experience as loss (as in outside the norm) but immediately recuperates the same experience to itself through an accumulation of queer affects.

5.2 (Provocation 2); The In-Between

Aside from the crisis, or lack of, of identity and identity formation in Kenyan queer politics, the potential of interstitial spatial logics is evident in the book. Here, the place and location of same-sex desiring individuals within a framework that actively denies, routinely criminalizes and regularly polices sexuality becomes enmeshed in what I call the 'in-between'.

The question of the 'in-between' as articulated by Ana Luz[333], for example, and depicted by both Grosz[334] and bell hooks[335] is a concern. In her article, Ana Luz describes the in-between as a 'liminality and borderline.'[336] For her, and I build on her suppositions, the in-between is a 'status of margin or diffused boundary.' She continues to argue that 'the location of the in-between comes to existence in the exact moment when the boundary line is crossed, overcome and experienced.'[337] Within Kenyan queer sexual subjectivities, one can see the in-between in moments where clarity is not in sight while at the same time not being sought. I see the in-between as impulses where solid (or liquid) possibilities emerge in the crafting and mobilizing of Kenyan queer narrative resources for the articulation and expression of queer subjectivities. To illustrate my point, consider the following accounts:

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[333] Luz, Anna., 2004. *Places in-between: the transit (ional) locations of nomadic narratives*. In International conference, Culture Nature Semiotics, Locations IV-Tartu, Estonia.
[334] Grosz, Elizabeth. 2001. *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. London, Cambridge: MIT Press.
[335] hooks, bell. 1989. Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness. In b. hooks *Yearning: Race, gender and Cultural Politics*, 203-209. Boston: South End Press.

[336] Luz, p.143.
[337] Ibid, p.144.

(g) *The question of what I identify as has never been easy for me to answer. I identify as a person. I find myself attracted to men, but I also find myself attracted to women. However, I find myself more attracted to women, especially over the last five years.*[338]

(h) *I used to be gay but I am bisexual at the moment.*[339]

(i) *I was once bisexual, but for the last six months I've been gay.*[340]

(j) *I identify as straight right now. I don't really know what's happening right now, so I call myself straight.*[341]

(k) *I am currently dating a bisexual who is so into women… He is attracted to both men and women, but more women.*[342]

In and of themselves, and brief as they are, these accounts build up a narrative framework that flirts with, and aspires to 'confusion' that is the domain of the in-between. If we are privileging lived experiences of particular respondents, how then should we reconcile the shifting understanding of own subjectivities bearing in mind the fluid and flexible nature of the selves? If we are to believe the power of narratives to locate reality and its interpretive potential, then a framework that encapsulates the many variants of queer expressions becomes imperative. Following on Ana Luz[343], I draw on the mobility framework that is hinged on the video/audio iconography of *play, pause, stop, forward and rewind* buttons to situate the space of the in-between.

For her, the *play* button reflects the status of 'moving forward', the *pause* button as the 'moment of lingering, walking, stalling or slowing down' while the *stop* button indicates the 'condition of literally stopping over, staying longer, sitting or resting.' In this analysis, I extend the

[338] SOOL, p.59.
[339] Ibid, p.200.
[340] Ibid, p.202.
[341] Ibid, p.208.
[342] Ibid, p.281.
[343] Luz, 2006.

iconography to include the *rewind* button to reflect the process of memory and memory making, as in the condition of looking back to historical reality. These iconographies represent the process of narratives and narrative making. As relates to the *Stories of Our Lives* project, then there must be something to be said about queer narratives and what they tell us about lived experiences and contextualities. Additionally, and perhaps that which clearly crystallizes the above argument, is the kinds of conditions that mobility usually point to, or signal at, and also tell us in relation to queer liveability and fungibility.

In terms of mobility therefore, what does its condition tell us in relation to queer liveability and fungibility. In this provocation, therefore, the most important point to note are the kinds of archives that are built by the respondents when they fluidly transition between the various categories of sexuality that circulate within the imaginary of Nairobi. Apart from these categories are the kinds of knowledge(s) that the various queer bodies create by themselves, for themselves and in relation to others in these liminal and transitory spaces; as well as the kinds of queer flows that generate in the various moments of oscillation by the queer individuals.

It should be understood, from the beginning, that these moments are usually transient and momentary; fluid and sometimes fleeting. However, in their fleeting moments exists lived experiences. When the respondents are attracted to either gendered categories without naming or, caring to fix identities to them, it points to an unstable and shifting matrix that speaks to the very nature of the queer potential to affect and inflect reality and its politics.

The oscillation between different polarities- from gay to bisexual, from bisexual to gay and back to straight, - connects to the mobility framework of *play, forward, stop, pause, and rewind*. None of the respondents view their sexuality oppositionally but rather relationally that invariably turns back to itself. I liken this position to one who lingers just at the door frame in a house. At that moment in time, the assumption is always that the person who lingers has a choice of either getting into the house or leaving. The position he occupies just at the door is assumed to not exist. In

other words, it's simply a temporary space towards the other real spaces – into the house or outside. However, I insist that just at the door frame, the person exists and that space actually exists and where real experiences occur which may (should) shape the person's worldview and world making. When the person lingers for just two seconds, the time spent can point to an understanding of self or selves. Even in these accounts, when the respondents travel (play), transition (forward/rewind), linger (pause) or stop between different spaces of sexual knowability and experiences, their bodies produce and circulate queer narratives that invariably gets consumed as knowledges within selves.

This knowledge consumption is seen within sexual experiences. For example, one respondent narrates a sexual encounter with another man whom he identifies as straight. After the act, the straight man asks, '*So am I gay now, because I enjoyed that*?' With a chuckle, the respondent replied, '*No, you're just a guy who enjoyed having sex with another man. Don't complicate the issue!*'[344]. In this statement, queer expressions are framed within a lens that divorces the act from identity. Within that frame, queer expressions are liberated to the domains of pleasure and desire which I will explain further down.

The question of society and what society dictates cannot be ignored when it revolves around sexuality. In a heteropatriarchal society like Kenya, which privileges family and nation and therefore outlaws same-sex sexual expressions, the society tends to police individuals who identify as same-sex desiring or are suspected of the same. For example, as I have narrated in the second chapter, in June, 2016 in the coastal town of Mombasa, the High Court of Kenya ruled that anal testing, an examination of suspected homosexuals by doctors, was constitutional. This followed an application by two men suspected of being gay who were arrested by the police and subjected

[344] SOOL, p.235.

to this examination[345]. They argued that such examination was an infringement of their rights. While dismissing the case, Justice Mathew Emukule ruled that anal examination was the only way to gather evidence. The importance of this ruling is that individuals can be summarily arrested by the police or even by the public and subjected to the test. Against this backdrop, lie accounts of gender non-conformity and gender bending that creates a counter narrative that crystallizes the debate. Consider this account:

> (l) *I was born a man, but inside I know I am a woman. I am not attracted to women, so I say I am gay. But I always wonder whether I am okay with being a gay man, and whether I really am gay, or maybe I am a straight woman inside a man's body. Whenever I say that I am gay, there is a part of me that thinks otherwise.*[346]

Connected to the space of the in-between discussed above, the interplay of not only emotional struggle but also societal dictates is palpable in this account. What cannot be felt, however, is the obvious danger, physical and emotional, that this respondent goes through in the daily struggles of life. And in these daily struggles of life, experiences occur and life happens. Following on Simone's statement summoned in the introduction to this chapter, then, what kinds of stories can be told, and more specifically how can we tell it, of those whose stories end up being expendable? Conversely, how can they fashion their own stories, and what tools can they gather to and for themselves in order to faithfully tell their own stories? In this account, the negotiation that occurs between the disparate versions of the self signal the various grammars that are mobilized to and for self in order to make sense of the various knowledge(s) and truth(s) as articulated by Musila.[347] The different performances to the different publics when negotiating the everyday becomes

[345] Gettleman, Jeffrey. Judge in Kenya Upholds Use of Anal Exams for Men Suspected of Being Gay. *New York Times*, June 16, 2016. Accessed September 10, 2017 at: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/17/world/africa/kenya-gay-anal-exams.html

[346] SOOL, p.203.
[347] Musila, 2015.

another narrative tool to make sense of self and of others as well. And the different performances to the different publics generate multiple significances that constitute subjectivity.

These performances are not also limited to the social realm of the everyday. The connection between sexuality and spirituality is also a striking narrative tool employed in this project to make sense not only of self but also to complicate the discourse that queer individuals are godless, immoral, promiscuous and heathen. Consider this:

> (m) *When people ask if you're a lesbian, they don't really understand sexuality, they don't get the spiritual and emotional contexts. So I am a homosexual, and above all I am a Christian. My sexuality and spirituality don't have to balance out on a scale.*[348]

The conflation of 'homosexual' and 'Christian' signal a rupture of the current discourse propelled by religious fundamentalists in the country. Additionally, it points to a desire to reject the binaries that demanded that to be a Christian meant one has to be not only heteronormative, but also procreative. What this narrative trajectory does is to divorce sex as in the act from sexuality. This connection between sexuality and spirituality remains a recurrent theme in the *Stories of Our Lives* project. One respondent describes at length this connection. He says:

> *(n) I've always said that I'm going to live life as both sexes. When I was younger, I thought I'd grow up and do a sex change, but then I grew up and didn't want it anymore. I can strike that balance. I can be a man and a woman. Bethsheba is my inner woman…she's a powerhouse…she's my strength in a lot of ways…I understand I am still a man, but there's the Bethsheba side…I can feel her in my mind, and I can feel her in my spirit.*[349]

In Biblical mythology, Bethsheba was the woman whom King David had sex with after watching her bathe naked in the palace. She became King David's wife after he arranged for her

[348] SOOL, p.106.
[349] Ibid, p.199-200.

husband Uriah to go to the battle front and was subsequently killed, which resulted in her having a son for David, none other than King Solomon. In line with this mythology, the respondent says of her inner woman, '*she likes powerful men, perhaps because she has a better understanding of what she can do to them*'[350]. The invocation of a Biblical mythology within queer discourse in Kenya is quite powerful. For it creates a counter narrative that imbricates queerness and queer expressions within a tradition that has long been understood as anti queer: religion.

The call that Kenya is inherently heterosexual, and therefore alternative forms of sexuality are deviant and unnatural, and hence need to be punished and criminalized is discriminatory. The attendant metaphors of the nation as religious and that queer expressions are antithetical to these beliefs have been questioned time and again and its underlying premise found to be flawed. Additionally, the appeals to the traditional forms of nation building as intrinsically reproductive and therefore procreative have been problematized by the following accounts:

> *(o) I have only dated married men, so obviously I will have a family of my own one day. When I settle down, it will be with a woman, not a man.*[351]
>
> *(p) I'm gay but I'd like to get married. Of course to a woman.*[352]

From the outset, these two accounts could be viewed as being counterproductive to the queer project. The desire to have 'normative' families can be construed as being not only ironic but also defeatist. However, I argue that this becomes a tactical counternarrative strategy to turn on its head the impulse that demands of the family structure to be heterosexual and procreative. The terms 'obviously' in the first account and 'of course' in the second belie a particular subjectivity tied to their own lived experiences. While they consider and personally acknowledge themselves as having same-sex desire, their subjectivities as relates to their own individual experiences makes

[350] Ibid, p.199.
[351] Ibid, p.108.
[352] Ibid, p.206.

them have different understandings of what it implies to have same sex desires. The grammars around 'family' and 'marriage' which has always been a potent tool by the religious groups against same-sex desire gets complicated here. These two individuals desire families which as has been narrated by them do not go against their expression or recognition as same-sex desiring individuals. What I derive from these two accounts is that notions of identities are not only culturally and historically specific but also emanate from specific lived and embodied experiences which therefore mean that their intelligibility, as with the interpretive potential, is also contextually specific.

5.3 (Provocation 3); Pleasure and Desire

Apart from the discourses of identity and its attendant liminal quality, in theorizing same-sex intimacies and activities, some scholars have called for a narrative that privileges pleasure and desire rather than discourses on identity and identity politics[353]. For Matebeni and Msibi, in certain contexts, for example Kenya, where same-sex sexual expressions is fraught with punishment and shame, a re-thinking of how we understand sexuality in terms of pleasure and desire is recuperative. There is need to have a paradigm that conceptualizes and theorizes same-sex bodies in Africa beyond the current frame and conceptualization to involve knowledges of local realities and how such local knowledges condition and direct bodies within spaces. At the same time, we need to extend our understanding of sexuality in the continent from negative effects such as pain, suffering and mourning to liberatory practices of desire, pleasure and sensuality. When pleasure and desire are privileged, then we can conceptualize such expressions as not being against the norm or antinormative but positive declarations of other possible, radical and liberating forms of sexuality. The concept and prominence of desire is aptly captured in this account:

[353] See for example; Matebeni, Zethu & Msibi, Thabo. 2015. Vocabularies of the non-normative. *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity*. 29 (1): 3-9; Reddy, Vasu. 2004. African feminisms, Sexuality in Africa: some trends, transgressions and tirades. *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity*. 62: 3-11.

> *(q) I identify as someone who likes sex. I love pleasure. If you had asked me three or four years back I would have said I was a lesbian. But now I find that pleasure for me is not just limited to the context of a woman, or a man. I have become broader. The labels were good for me to understand myself, but the more I delve into life, I realize how these labels of sexual identification don't express the broadness of what it is to be a human being. I may choose a partner, or partners, or none.*[354]

I find this statement extremely helpful for its stance against what Macharia called the 'the burden of incarnating sex'[355]. In his argument, Macharia rails against the description of same-sex sexual expressions as acts of sex rather than expressions and manifestations of sexuality. He wonders why queer sexualities are reduced to sexual acts as opposed to the possibility of emancipatory sexual practices. The above account is insistence on sexual pleasure rather than the question of sexual acts/actors echoes Audre Lorde's famous treatise on the uses of the erotic. In her piece, Lorde collapses the differences between the heterosexual and homosexual erotics to 'promote such desire as a creative force for revolutionary change'[356]. She writes:

> Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives.[357]

This, as Lorde corroborates, cannot be more explicit as in the last sentence in the account above. It is particularly telling for it insists on the need to position/theorize sexual bodies beyond the discourses of identity and towards a more nuanced understanding of what bodies can actually do. When the respondent parallels being a 'human being' with choosing a 'partner', 'partners' or 'none', she signals a commitment towards building a narrative that privileges a range of

[354] SOOL, p.217.
[355] Macharia, Keguro. 2015. Archive and method in Queer African Studies. *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity*. 29 (1): 140-146.
[356] Lorde, Audre. 2007. The Uses of the Erotic: the erotic as power." In Lovaas, Karen and Mercilee Jenkins, *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader* (87-91). Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
[357] Ibid, p.90.

desires/pleasures outside of its constitutive sex-act appeal. Still on desire, and articulated by Audre Lorde, the following accounts reveal its powerful potential:

> (r) *I love this person. I don't love men, I love this person. I would defend my love for this person, not because he is a man but because he is my love. I don't like the dimensions that come with gay politics.*[358]
>
> (s) *I can't remember the first time it hit me that I like girls, but I do know for a fact that I've always been very fascinated by the female form. It's so soft and gentle. The chiseled chin and structure of a man is so harsh, so boxy. You know? But the female form is so fluid; I wonder what kind of day God was having when He made it.*[359]

These two accounts speak about love and desire without necessarily juxtaposing the gendered discourses of whom is being loved, how is love expressed and why is love being expressed. When the account asserts, '*I would defend my love for this person, not because he is a man but because he is my love*', the narrative shifts from burden of justification to the substance of emotion and against the object of emotion. The substance being the love expressed rather than the object being of the same-sex. What this does, therefore, is to disempower the rhetoric that constantly denies and erases same-sex sexual expressions as being outside of the lens of knowability and intelligibility. The other account also shifts the focus from the person being loved, who is a woman, to the feelings of the person showing the love. It returns the burden of knowability to self as opposed to other. When she says, *'I've always been fascinated by the female form. It's so soft and gentle,*' she speaks about what the form evokes in her rather than the object of her feelings. The witness of love becomes herself and the evidence is on her.

[358] SOOL, p.222.
[359] Ibid, p.298-299.

Contexts become particularly useful in the way sex acts are codified and theorized. Mary Jane Kehily[360] offers a way of understanding alternative sexualities that focuses on particularity and agential structures. Terming it sexuality as resistance, she says it 'focuses upon the ways people use sexuality within a repertoire of self-expression that responds to the normative and, in many cases, reacts against the pervasive sex-gender order'[361]. I argue that same sex desiring individuals in Kenya, and even across the continent, should be positioned along this analysis.

When Moraga and Anzaldua[362] insist that scholars need to problematize the imperceivable identity discourses in queer scholarship while at the same time Diana Fuss in *Inside/Out*[363] calls for an 'imaginative enactment of sexual redefinition, reborderizations, and rearticulations'[364] whose focus should be on the ambivalences and complexities of sexuality/ies and how such narrativised ambivalences produce new meanings and significances this is exactly what these narratives epitomize. The *Stories of Our Lives* project has laid bare the impossibility of having an explicit against the norm or an antinormative framework towards same-sexual expressions. Whether it's the respondent who refuses the term queer because its politics are problematic or the one who accepts that term and owns it personally; whether it is the respondent who oscillate between different sexual polarities without imagining either as stable or to the respondents who view their queerness as not at odds with Christianity, spirituality and family, then fundamental assumption about sexuality and queer sexuality specifically in Kenya gets challenged.

Through the narrative disassemblage reading of *Stories of Our Lives*, I have shown how queer stories, lives and experiences can offer recuperative potential in how knowledge production, circulation and consumption are embedded in queer individuals themselves. Ignoring these

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360 Kehily, Mary Jane. 2012. Sexuality In Nancy Lesko and Susan Talburt *Keywords in Youth Studies: tracing affects, movements, knowledges*, (ed), 223-228. New York: Routledge.
361 Ibid, p.226.
362 Moraga, Cherrie and Anzaldua, Gloria. (eds). 1981. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color.* New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color.
363 Fuss, Diana. 1991.*Inside/Out.* In D. Fuss (ed), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories.* New York: Routledge.
364 Ibid, p. 7.

differences, therefore, become counterproductive for it essentializes queer struggles within the heteronormative, homophobic narratives of queer individuals as being only sexual and also sexually deviant. As one respondent said about his mother's views about his sexuality, '*She sees homosexuals as these promiscuous, loose people. She never sees the struggle. She never sees the constant battle between what you're told is right and what you feel is right*'[365]. The queer struggle and 'constant battle' is located in the everyday life and demands recognition of queer individuals as social, political and cultural.

As it shall also be evident in the next chapter, narratives and stories that are excavated from texts offer us a window and an opportunity to map out the way that queer individuals not only resist the norm in the everyday but creatively build new ways of imagining the self within the everyday. The negotiations, ambivalences and self-fashionings all coalesce together for resistance of the oppressive structures on one hand and unique solidarity on the other. What is crucial, and worthy of our attention, is the capacity of these various individuals, and in their variegated lives, to keep on going despite the odds while at the same time opening up new ways of thought and action. I make one final point by coming back to where I started: with Simone. He concludes his post this way: 'stories that make easy divides, between 'us and them', 'here and there', what counts or doesn't count, may continue to be shortcuts providing orientation. But they no longer say much of anything about how places and people are connected to each other.'[366]

[365] SOOL, p.219.
[366] This post is published on Simone's personal blog which can be found here: http://villes-noires.tumblr.com/post/153166345185/stories-we-tell

Chapter Six

6.0 Queer Kenya in Urban Africa

This chapter enables me to return to my key foundational stakes which are queer subjectivities in urban spaces. It is a literary analysis of selected short stories in two queer anthologies collected from countries around Africa. The intention of this chapter is a literary spatial analysis of the short stories whose settings are in various city spaces in Africa. The short story as a genre enables us to gather intuitions of what it means to become queer in various geographies that articulate queerness differently. In this chapter I return to my broader claims on the potential of everyday existence in urban spaces to re-figure specific modalities of urban queer existence. For example, while the city of Johannesburg in South Africa can be read as more friendly to queer individuals as opposed to Lagos in Nigeria owing to the different legal frameworks in the two countries, some of the stories analysed here will show some dynamism that reflects urban Africa as constituted and constituting disparate and multiple queer subjectivities owing to a range of material archives and mobilizing actions. This I do in order to position urban Nairobi within the larger queer discourses that are circulating in the continent.

I acknowledge that there has been a long history of queer-themed literary works coming out of the continent dating back to the seventies. For example, some of the classic literary works include Mbella Sonne Dipoko's *A Few Nights and Days* (1970), Camara Laye's *A Dream of Africa* (1970), Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence* (1971), Koffi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother* (1972), Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1972) and *Season of Anomy* (1973), Yulisa Amadu Maddy's *No Past, No Present, No Future* (1973), Rebeka Njau's *Ripples in the Pool* (1975), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), Ayi Kwei Armah's *Why Are we So Blest?* (1974) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979). Not to be left behind**,** contemporary African writers that have emerged in recent times and have tackled queer subjectivity in literary novels include Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*

(2001), Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High Flames* (2005), Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* (2005), Fred Khumalo's *Seven Steps to Heaven* (2007), Wame Molefhe's *Go Tell the Sun* (2011), Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* (2016), Chwayita Ngamlana's *If I Stay Right Here* (2017) and Olumide Popoola's *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017).

For the purposes of my intentions set out in this chapter, however, I read selected short stories from *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction* [367] (henceforth as *Queer Africa 1*) and its sequel *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* [368] (henceforth *Queer Africa 2*) in how the individual authors, the characters and the stories map onto spatial frames and geographical scaffolds through various queer loves, erotics and media. Still, within the African sphere I also acknowledge that as far back as the seventies and eighties, there emerged short stories that addressed same-sex sexuality and corporeality. For example Dilibe Onyeama's *Sex Is a Nigger's Game* (1976) and Edia Apolo's short story *Lagos Na Waa I Swear* (1982). Recently we have seen other short stories and anthologies emerge that include Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) and Diriye Osman's *Fairytales for Lost Children* (2013). Therefore, the two short story anthologies selected for this chapter continue a long and rich tradition of representing queer love and expression.

The question on how queer short story narratives latch onto spatial frames has been addressed in part before. For example, *In a Queer Time and Place* [369], Judith Halberstam gives an excellent examination on space and time in relation to queer texts. She gives a descriptive account on 'queer temporalities, postmodern geographies and queer subculture' in ways that illuminate the connection between queer lives as experienced in time and space (see also Edelman 2004; Muñoz 2009[370]). She offers an analysis 'to think about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities,

[367] Martin, Karen. & Xaba, Makhosazana. 2013. *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction*. Braamfontein: MaThoko's Books.
[368] Martin, Karen. & Xaba, Makhosazana. 2017. *Queer Africa 2: New and Collected Fiction*. Braamfontein: MaThoko's Books.
[369] Halberstam, Judith. 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press.
[370] Edelman, Lee. 2004. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press.; Muñoz, José. Esteban. 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.

imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices' which in and of themselves have a real 'potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space.'[371] This is really important because as one reads literary texts, and especially short stories, the potential of 'strange temporalities', of course imbricated within time and space, to 'open up new life narratives' is evident and creates possibilities to newer forms of life and being.

The short story genre has had a long history, as old as language itself, although the novel, and sometimes poetry, has tended to be more studied and analysed. That is not to mean that the short story is not as useful, or as relevant, as the novel. On the contrary, the short story offers us particular nuances and specificities that are usually overlooked in the novel. For example, in the analysis of its structure, the short story's concern with a single effect relayed in powerful and significant episodes become its most powerful substance over the novel. The short story always has a single focus, complex in nature and fully developed, makes it a critical force to study everyday lives of queer individuals. The short story genre also has a memorability feature that makes it distinct over other genres because of its impressionability as a result of its concise plot and fewer characters. In other words, it is easy to recognise ourselves and our lives in the short stories because of these qualities.

While the bulk of this thesis has been on spatial subjectivities in an urban context, precisely the city of Nairobi, I am conscious of the apparent disconnect with a fictionalized literary analysis in other spaces, of course urban, in the rest of Africa. This is not accidental; rather it is by design, for I am latching on the overall thematic concern that has been a central concern in this thesis; that of imagining an alternative epistemological framework that is contingent on space, in locating the myriad, varied and multiple queer subjectivities in the continent, without, of course, running the risk of essentialism.

[371] Halberstam, 2005, p.4-5.

Queer Africa 1, edited by Karen Martin and Makhosazana Xaba, contains incisive anthologies of short stories about being queer in Africa. It features stories about queer lives from different perspectives, and from different parts of the continent. For example Beatrice Lamwaka's much acclaimed story, *Chief of the Home,* which is written from the perspective of a woman about a man considered to have 'deviant masculinity', to Uganda's Monica Arac de Nyeko's *Jambula Tree* which recalls lesbian love in all its glory, pain and potential. This impressive literary work saw Gabeba Baderoon terming the anthology 'charged, tangled, tender, unapologetic, funny, bruising and brilliant stories about the many ways in which we love one another on the continent.' (ii) What is significant about Baderoon's iteration are the different emotions that these stories evoke in us. The 'tangled,' 'funny' and 'bruising' emotions all reflect the many ways we gather our different selves even as we navigate daily realities about being queer. These emotions sometimes gathered in one body, or collectively shared in many; reflect my argument in the second chapter about the significance of different emotions to creatively imagine newer worlds.

In the preface to *Queer Africa 1*, the editors lay out the perfect justification yet in the power of stories and storytelling to present glimpses about queer selves. 'In imaginative space,' they write, 'dominant narratives hold less sway; possibilities we haven't considered suggest themselves.' What this powerful narrative offers should not be lost on us. What Martin and Xaba point to is how stories, in the varied and multiple ways, in their ordinariness and sometimes mundaneness, they collect within themselves repertoires that offer us a way of looking at ourselves through others. 'We are confronted with our own prejudices and preconceptions,' they continue, 'and we may discover in others our own unrecognized selves.'[372] *Queer Africa 1* comprises eighteen individual stories, new and collected, that are strung together powerfully through an acknowledgement of diversity and fluidity of queer desires, expressions and actions. The individual writers powerfully 'challenge assumptions about what it means to legitimately represent a particular human

[372] Martin & Xaba, 2013, p.viii.

experience'[373] with clarity and poise that pays attention to the 'intimate stories about individual lives, deeply embedded in the complexities of their contexts and is sensitive to the discourse that envelops queer politics in Africa.

On the other hand, the sequel *Queer Africa 2,* also edited by Xaba and Martin, consists solely of twenty-six new and original short stories. In the introduction to this collection, Barbara Boswell avers that this collection 'is an array of interpretations of what it means to be fully human, queer and Africa – three categories of identity often misconstrued as mutually exclusive.' This tripartite framework – human, queer and African – is very useful to clearly analyse queer selves. She continues that the anthology offers a 'kaleidoscopic peek into the many ways in which African inhabit 'queerness', giving fine grained texture to the lives and experiences of those whose humanity is routinely denied.'[374] As she demonstrates, the strength and power of both anthologies lies in the privileging of the 'quotidian'[375], what in previous chapters I have evinced as the everyday lived realities of being and the ways of becoming queer.

What is interesting, and quite powerful, about both anthologies is the way the authors point towards a queer politics in Africa that is not predicated on queer experiences as being the same. 'Each of these stories,' Pumla Gqola writes in the introduction to *Queer Africa 1*, 'offers a slice of what it means to be queer in Africa'[376] without the usual mistake of assuming a blanket experience for all queer constituencies. Particularly, and this subject is recurrent in the second anthology, is the insistence on what queer means when it comes in contact with Africa, at least from a purely literary and aesthetic level. For my case therefore, I am concerned with how these various individual stories can illuminate the various lived realities of queer persons in Nairobi.

[373] Ibid.
[374] Martin & Xaba, 2017, p.1.
[375] Ibid, p.3.
[376] Martin & Xaba, 2013, p.1.

In this last chapter therefore, and extending the provocations of the previous one, I wonder how do stories - imaginative, fiction, experiential - tell of experiences within a context that is not only varied but also complex? Put otherwise, what do stories tell us when they are assembled from diverse backgrounds? And what do we hear, listen or read, when such stories are told? These stories open up a world that can be imagined separately but also together. They can also, and this is my thrust, be mapped onto other contexts and settings without erasing their specificities and subtleties. 'In the stories gathered here,' insists Gqola in *Queer Africa 1*, 'we see love, excitement, joy, heartbreak, transcendence, sorrow and a range of other feelings and experiences that make up the very fibre of human life'[377], while Boswell in *Queer Africa 2* contend that, 'their experiences, whether in coffee shops, classrooms, bedrooms or mosques, transport the reader to places we can only visit through fiction, allowing us to imaginatively inhabit these worlds.'[378] And in so doing, our own selves and experiences become much more clearer to us within these contexts.

I take up Gqola's notion of 'human life' and Boswell's thesis of 'inhabiting these worlds' very seriously in this context. Basically what they argue for is the foregrounding of the daily human experience that make up who we see as our/other selves and how that should bump against other publics. In suggesting how 'human life' and 'inhabiting worlds' can be excavated within the everyday, the possibility of how we occupy, inhabit, experience and consume different publics becomes really important. How, then, do we, in narrative and imaginative fiction, inhabit spaces? How do we understand selves (ours and others) in relation to the spaces occupied? What grammars of knowledge and tools of comprehension do spaces that we inhabit afford us? And finally, how do these tools and knowledges help us in the navigation and understanding of queer subjectivities and intensities?

[377] Ibid, p.3.
[378] Martin & Xaba, 2017, p.2.

For this very purpose, and to address some of these provocations, I choose Davina Owombre's *Pelican Driver*, Dolar Vasani's *All Covered Up,* and Rahiem Whisgary's *The Filth of Freedom* in *Queer Africa 1* to show how different publics and spaces offer an opportunity for the transgressive expressions that enable queer subjectivity in ways that other publics cannot. In *Queer Africa 2,* I limit myself to Amatesiro Dore's *The Day He Came*, Zukolwenkosi Zikala's *My Body Remembers: A War Cry* and Victor Lewis' *My Dad Forgot my Name* in the ways that these various publics, in and of themselves, afford the various bodies and subjectivities to not only flourish but be imaginably transposed and translated not only in real life but in other publics, real or imagined. In both anthologies, I reflect on the primacy of space to articulate the possibilities, potentiality and plausibility of queered flows and traversals and how, if at all, they fit neatly or otherwise to each and besides one another. This exercise to me is a canvas, a way for me to imagine the Boswellian 'new worlds' that can be transposed to the Nairobi (and Kenya's) queer life.

It has been argued that context plays a big part in the connection between literature and the urban context and this is visibly palpable in the two anthologies. Ato Quayson in *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism*[379] argues that any spatial referential logic in African Literature cannot be divorced from the social reality and its various logics, and that the social is dependent on 'nonliterary discourses' for example 'government policies and documents, media representations, opinions from everyday life, the colonial and historical archive, as well as the many discourses of orality that articulate both social realities and the epistemological orientations to such realities.'[380]At the same time, an urban logic that is narrated in any literary work depends not only on context, but also on language. So, for example, Tony Mochama's *Nairobi: A Night Guide through the City-in-the-Sun* [381] is quite different in terms of language to Meja

[379] Quayson, Ato. 2014. *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism.* Durham: Duke University Press.
[380] Ibid, p.213.
[381] Mochama, Tony. 2014. *Nairobi: A Night Guide through the City-in-the-Sun*. Nairobi: Goethe-Institut Kenya/Native Intelligence.

Mwangi's *Going Down River Road* [382] despite the fact that both texts are similar thematically. While *Nairobi: A Night Guide* takes on a more ethnographic, newspaper writing form in the depiction of the city, *Going Down River Road* employs a more traditional, ontological and philosophical assessment of the city.

For my own preoccupations with the selected short stories in the two anthologies, I use Ato Quayson's approach of 'spatial traversal' which for him is 'character's movement from one spatial location to another.'[383] Like Quayson, I am aware of previous iteration that consigned space in literary works as only a canvas or backdrop on which the characters developed. In my analysis, space is central to how the various characters move in and through them and how these spaces allow for such flights, literal or fanciful. Quayson, in this attempt, relies on 'sentiment' as a function of this traversal that signal a 'being-in-the-world.'[384] As I have argued in the previous chapters, queerness marks this same function of being-in-the-world or inhabiting worlds or more succinctly queer-world-making. Quayson's sentiment therefore brings together Gqola's notion of human life and Boswell's iteration of inhabiting new worlds to excavate queer subjectivities on a spatial canvas. And this world-making is always a province of an intricate spatial logic. Because being queer or inhabiting queerness means being legible and illegible at the same time. Here I mean being legible or readable for a target of and for violence and illegible or unreadable as part of an intricate and complex discourse of ethno-nationalism. To inhabit this liminal space, then, means to cross different spaces; to traverse several geographies, so to speak. And, therefore, in these literary works, to imagine the self (and the other in the process) in relation to the spaces that make manifest specific kinds of sentimental attachments. Also, in the same vein, to recognise and take account of how intensely dense while at the same time leaking these spaces are in the literary figurations.

[382] Mwangi, Meja. 1976. *Going Down River Road*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
[383] Quayson, 2014, p. 213.
[384] Ibid, p. 217.

6.1 (1); Queer Traversals, Queer Confessions

Pelican Driver (henceforth as PD) the first story in *Queer Africa 1* is set in Abuja, Nigeria and narrates the life of AJ as he straddles and navigates between three different but related spaces that make up his life: the music production studio where he is a DJ as well as a music producer, his sister's house where he lives and later a party at the Unicorn Palace Hotel. Written by David Owombre, the story recounts the queer erotics that circulate at the studio between AJ and his boss Louis; his relationship with Antonia at her house that was underlined by a queer subtext as a result of his inability to have a girlfriend and later his queer intimate moments with Pelican, a musician at the Unicorn Palace hotel.

These private intimate moments between AJ and Louis at the studio operate on a delicate, however contrite, assumption of different publics. While the studio is a professional space, which is immediately understood as a public space, it transmogrifies itself to an intimate erotic space by the two. 'These quick sessions with Louis didn't bother him [AJ].' Owombre writes. 'Hell,' he continues, 'he enjoyed giving Louis blowjobs: the tangy-salty taste of cum in his mouth still thrilled him – as if he were a first timer.'[385] The space of the studio that allows and even encourages such intimate encounters becomes an important resource to use. The merger of the desire for queer intensities in the space becomes evident when Owombre notes, 'they always forgot to make sure they were alone' which was, admittedly, an impossible task because 'the studio often had people passing through.'[386] It could be argued that it was a possibility that they wanted to be caught. The author reminds us that Louis was well known in the studio, and perhaps outside, that 'he swung both ways,'[387] which means he was sexually attracted to both the opposite and same sex. While the studio can, on its own, be read as an intimate erotic space, its connection to AJ's home and later

[385] Martin & Xaba, 2013, p. 9.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Ibid, p.10.

the Unicorn hotel becomes important to fully understand how the spatial logic in this story is prominent.

The home space becomes a bridge between the erotic space of the studio and the Unicorn hotel, the other intimate space for AJ. What becomes interesting and therefore instructive, is that despite the home being an intimate zone of sociality and commonality, Owombre never lets us into AJ's home. The closest we get is on the veranda steps of his apartment where we are introduced to Pat, his neighbour, who becomes a mediator therefore between these two other spaces. Pat becomes a link between these two influential spaces that define and redefine AJ's subjectivity and positionality. One night after AJ comes back home and while seated on the steps, she asks how the studio was and AJ shrugs and asks for a cigarette that she was smoking. 'AJ inhaled,' Owombre narrates, 'He didn't really smoke, but the rhythm of pleasure hadn't stopped pounding through his body and he saw it as a window of opportunity to try anything.'[388] AJ succeeds in overshadowing the home space by superimposing the 'rhythm of pleasure' occasioned by his liaison with Louis in the studio and Pat's presence on the steps. Pat's presence and company on the steps of the apartment, and away from the confining home space becomes a canvas on which anything was/is possible. Pat becomes a both a metaphor for endless opportunities and a carriage for the opportunities as well. Pumla Gqola alludes to this very fact when she writes:

> Reading Davina Owombre's 'Pelican Driver' offers another encounter with the sexy, this time coupled with risk… Here we are witness to, and pulled into the transgression of , desire: masking, performing, playing in a story in which humour and risk are twinned.[389]

AJ, as a music producer, had produced *Shame On Me*, a music video by Tweeshock in which he appeared on it kissing another man. While Owombre reminds us that AJ's scene lasted no more

[388] Ibid, p.12.
[389] Ibid, p.7.

than two heartbeats, 'everybody would see two men smooching' [390] and this scared AJ because his sister would see it. This anxiety was especially heightened because she had been bothering him on why he didn't have a girlfriend and AJ's answer was always that he did not have the money to date 'an Abuja babe.'[391] While she wanted to tell Antonia, his sister, about the music scene when she appeared down the steps while seated with Pat, he thought otherwise because she asked him to escort her as she was stepping out. 'Walk me to the road.' Antonia asks AJ and while on the way, AJ wonders why she stopped asking him why he doesn't have a girlfriend. When Antonia emphasizes it's because he said he was too broke, AJ concedes: 'well, yeah, it's that and…'[392]

At the very moment that night, it seemed AJ wanted to confess but could not because Antonia's pick up arrived in a sleek Mercedes and she left. Two things are important about this scene: first, it is how Owombre problematizes the power and legitimacy of confession because he allows other extenuating factors to intrude and interfere with its process and logic. At the moment when AJ was about to 'confess', Owombre seems to suggest the space of the home lacks the queer gravitas to fully sublimate AJ's condition. Secondly, the primacy of 'ignorance' (its not about anything) as knowledge making infrastructure is introduced. That AJ does not have a girlfriend because Abuja girls are expensive becomes a short hand metaphor in this case. Therefore, the circulation of this metaphor by AJ and its eventual consumption by Antonia becomes a way of legitimating 'ignorance' as part of the rubrics of making sense of the world – or more appropriately as part of the queer world making.

It seems PD, in all its forms, operates on this rhetoric of 'ignorance'. For example, consider the following scene performed by AJ and Pat:

> 'Have you ever kissed a girl?' AJ asked.

[390] Ibid, p.9.
[391] Ibid, p.13.
[392] Ibid.

> Pat looked at him as if he'd been smoking something other than a cigarette. 'Of course not. What sort of question is that?'
> 'Just a question.'
> 'Have you ever kissed a boy?'
> 'No. But I've kissed a girl.'[393]

Pelican Driver in its diverse forms bears a slight resemblance to Shamim Sarif's *The World Unseen* [394]and its treatment of queer individuals whose sexual behaviour might be described as having sexual relations with both same sex and different sex. Set in the 1950s, *The World Unseen* narrates the story of a love affair between Amina, a co-owner of the popular *Location* café, a spot for rebellious individuals and Miriam, a freethinking married woman. Amina and Miriam feel stifled by the conventional sexist life and dictates of their times and are willing to defy all odds in order to be closer to each other. Through a powerful storyline and masterful narration, Shamim Sarif is able to show how the two women define and redefine their subjectivities in relation to the meanings they attach to sexuality as is produced, expressed and articulated in the everyday spaces that they occupy. What is powerful about the iteration of this queer form, and it can be seen in *Pelican Driver* as well, is its ability to affirm and resist itself at the same time. This 'dilemma' calls attention to itself, problematizing the received notions and understandings of sexuality while at the same time making itself invisible.

While the above quotation goes back to the process and technique of queer world making in the broadest sense, it functions on a more basic level as a background to and a way of introducing the most important space of all in this story: the Unicorn Palace hotel. Pat is invited to a party at the hotel and AJ tags along where he meets Pelican Driver, the musician whose video he produced 'sandwiched between two burning bunnies,…, while Tweeshock's *Shame on Me* ruled

[393] Ibid, p.15.
[394] Sarif, Shamim. 2001. *The World Unseen*. London: Enlightenment Productions.

the smoke filled room.'[395] This connection is hard to miss: AJ meets Pelican at the party while the music in which he appears in kissing another man is playing in the background. This serves not only as a filter to the 'window of opportunity' he alluded to earlier but highlights the caricature of the space being inhabited. The hotel, Owombre narrates, is a sex haven and spins a web that implicates all the characters in his story. In an attempt to introduce AJ to the hostess, Pelican takes AJ on a small tour of the hotel rooms. In one of the rooms they opened, Louis stepped out 'wearing a satisfied smirk and a skinny girl on his arm.'[396] In another room they opened, they found a man and a woman who as we are told 'were not having a little private chat.'[397] While in the third room, Owombre writes:

> A woman who looked like a darker Salma Hayek sat watching from a chair while a couple of babes locked lips and limbs on the bed.[398]

Frustrated at having failed to find the hostess, Pelican invites AJ to his room downstairs where they eventually have sex while *Shame on Me* was playing on the background. The song implicates as well acts as buffer to and connector for AJ's queer dense moments. Not only does he not produce the song at the studio, he appears in the video kissing a man and the song is prominently played at the hotel and in the room with Pelican.

Therefore, the hotel and the studio as spaces of dense sexual moments work on the same framework. They both have an implicit 'confessional narrative.' First, AJ and Louis never bothered to close the door at the studio, as if they wanted to get caught. And sure enough Pelican caught them as he tells AJ at his hotel room: 'I came back to the studio, you know… I saw you and your boss.'[399] Secondly, at the hotel, all the hotel rooms were deliberately unlocked as if they wanted to be caught thereby collapsing the various intimate publics into one confessional framework. This

[395] Ibid, p.16
[396] Ibid, p.17
[397] Ibid
[398] Ibid
[399] Ibid, p.19.

confessional narrative continues when later as they were leaving Pat finally tells AJ that she finally kissed a girl although AJ fails to tell her that he has actually kissed a boy. This failure is important because it lends itself to a host of other factors that twine the studio and the hotel as spaces of transgressive sexuality without the attendant societal sanctions that accrue in such spaces.

This confessional narrative trope implicated in spatial frames evident in *Pelican Driver* is not only confined to this story, but is also seen in *Queer Africa 2* in Victor Lewis' brilliant and gripping story *My Dad Forgot My Name*. In this story, the narrator visits a day spa, usually frequented by same-sex desiring males and in there, after having a session with a partner, he meets his father naked in the lounge. In a whirlwind of emotions, and drawing on the flashback motif to earlier times in his childhood, he seeks to reconcile with the fact that his father is just like him. The twist of the story comes at the end when he and his father decide to have sex together. Just like David Owombre's story, what is important in this story is the place and location of the spa, alongside the transitory tools that make the spa possible as a space for both father and son to explore their same-sex desires, not only on other partners, but also to and with themselves. The son's description of the spa is important and it bears repeating here:

> …the spa: ready sex, men walking around half naked – and some stark bollock-naked, carrying deep denial around with them like crosses; staunchly, and braced for sex with multiple strangers and then washing it all away till next time when the desire gets too strong.[400]

Such a space then becomes a fertile and potent ground for transgressive sexuality, even as far-fetched as love between father and son. It is a space that turns to itself and for itself, 'a world unto itself, a world without women, family.'[401] At the spa, the narrator's father stops being a father, a filial figure but is transformed to a sexual partner, a potential mate.

[400] Martin & Xaba, 2017, p.285.
[401] Ibid, p.286.

The spa then collapses the distinction between father and son, the kinship that connects the two. The distance, indeed the straight line, that follows from father to son is disrupted. Here, disruption means two interrelated things. The son departs from his father's trajectory by not reproducing his father through marriage and children. This is the queer impulse. However, something of greater gravitas happens. The son becomes his father, or rather both become one at the spa. In fact, this is alluded to earlier, when the son, recalling his mother's words to him says:

> Once when I was younger, around my late teens, my mother told me that I was the spitting image of my father at that very small age, just around the time they met.[402]

This earlier admission becomes a kept secret between son and mother as, even at that young age and time, she asks his son not to tell his father that he is gay after he confessed to her. So the spa becomes a confessional booth that requires no words. By virtue of their presence, the 'secret' comes out, but outside the family sphere (represented by the home). When the two kiss, they admit their respective guilt, and later when they have sex at the son's house, it becomes a confirmation of the viability and precarity of the spa as a space of transgression but also vitality. As he says, 'my failure is my father's failure too. I am the same as my father.'[403]

The spa's crucial importance in the creation and re-creation of sexual identities and expressions, especially queer identities, cannot be overemphasized. For McDowell [404], space is not a mere canvas on which human behaviours, interactions and activities occur, but rather a part of an assemblage that is constantly evolving. Focusing on these two characters, the built environment that is the spa and the narrative technique of the author, the net effect is a spatial logic that allows, extends and celebrates sexual experimentation, crossings, blurrings, expressions and identities.

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[402] Ibid, p.288.
[403] Ibid, p.287.
[404] McDowell, Linda. 1999. *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Another example drawn from the continent is the much acclaimed Alaa Al Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building,* [405] set in an actual building with the same name as the book in downtown Cairo, Egypt. While the building was specifically built for the wealthiest Cairenes, the 1952 revolution reengineered this vision and saw the building become plural and multiple in tenancies. Within the building, Hatim Rasheed, a newspaper editor, lives in a well-furnished apartment. At the same time, the newspaper that he heads has an office in the same building. His lover, Rabbuh, a police officer of modest means, lives on the roof of the building with his wife and child. In addition to the elite community in the building and the semi-independent poor community on the roof, their existed another community below the building in the basement: The Chez Nous club, a queer hangout spot and a favourite of both Hatim and Rabbuh. Aswany deliberately doubles down on this building by situating it within the everyday and making it accessible.

For example, the Chez Nous club is reminiscent of the spa in Victor Lewis' *My Father Forgot My Name*. The play of privacy but enacted in the public resembles the performance of sex and desire in Lewis' narration of father and son. Aswany describes the club in a way that bears repeating here:

> You feel as though you had gone into hiding from daily life in some way. This feeling of privacy is the great distinguishing feature of Chez Nous, which made its name basically as a meeting place for homosexuals.[406]

That the space of the club somehow provides a 'hiding from daily life', yet it is housed in the famous building and is famous for its queer proclivities is really important to unpack. The club, just like Lewis' spa, offers a site of visibility that demands recognition.

[405] Aswany, Alaa Al. 2004. *The Yacoubian Building*. London: Fourth Estate.
[406] Ibid, p.35.

If we take seriously Gloria Anzaldua's claim that the borderlands are always-in-transition spaces which lack clear boundaries then all these characters – Rabbuh, AJ, father and the son – must be understood as occupying productive spaces that are both sexually multiple and complex that resist not only linear understanding of occupying spaces but also simplistic definitions of sexuality.

6.2 (II); Queer Sites, Queer Mourning

Another pointed claim I want to make is that the spa represents a site of and for mourning – not only of queer love but the (im)possibility of the same. When son meets father, 'it felt like death.'[407] The fact that father and son had to meet in the spa represents, in all its facets, the fertile possibility of queer love in the spa. However, that they had to consummate this love outside of the spa (and in the son's home) means something quite different, and in the son's words, he longed to die.[408] What I mean is that the collapse of the spa as a site of queer transgression and the son's home as a heteronormative domicile points to a possibility of the collapse of bounded walls of what is appropriate and inappropriate but also shows the sheer impossibility and therefore mourning of queer love in this triad.

The trope of space as a site of queer mourning and death is also evident in *The Filth of Freedom* written by Rahiem Whisgary in *Queer Africa 1*. This story best exemplifies the in-between position that queer bodies are usually caught up in a manner that successfully demonstrates the innate potential and crucial significance of this space. James Drummond, the queer protagonist, fights with the horror of being a disappointment to his parents, Mr and Mrs. Drummond if and when they find out about his sexuality. On the other hand, the Drummond's domestic worker Margaret has a son, Thabo, who grew up with James and the family and is aware of James' sexuality

[407] Martin & Xaba, 2017, p.282.
[408] Ibid, p.294.

and uses this knowledge to behave superior to James. James' personality, that sets the pace for this gripping story is laid bare in the first paragraph:

> James Drummond doesn't dream of a dutiful and loving wife by his side, a warm home, with laughing children and a furry brown dog leisurely curled up at the foot of the couch… No. Engulfed in the warmth of his down-feather duvet, smothered by the comforting quiet of the night, James dreams of his death. (emphasis mine)[409]

Death, just like in *My Father Forgot My Name*, is a metaphor. Following on the title, it is a metaphor of and for freedom but not the kind that liberates or sets free. As the title suggests, it is a *filthy kind of freedom*: that which does not necessarily offer the full benefits or dividends. Caught in the inbetween; on the one hand a constant disappointment to his parents while on the other a conniving and spiteful 'brother' James finds his house suffocating and stifling. Despite its opulence, it is a cage that he cannot get out of on his own. The home, representative of a heteronormative procreative sexuality, cannot offer him comfort. The turning point occurs when a fight breaks out between James and Thabo, and James' mother reminds Thabo that he is not part of the family despite spending his whole life with them. In anger, Thabo writes a letter outing James to his mother. On learning that his mother knew of his 'secret':

> A sinking feeling overtakes James and he turns and runs. His chest caves in as he stumbles along the corridor, down the stairs, and drunkenly staggers his way outside. Unaware of where he is going, of what to do, *he simply needs to get out of the stifling bounds of the house.* A gulp of fresh air fills his lungs as he steadies himself against the wall outside. His head spins, and he collapses onto his haunches, the thick grass cushioning him. Unsteadily, he takes a cigarette and the bright red lighter from the box. And before long, James inhales the smoky filth of freedom (emphasis mine).[410]

[409] Martin & Xaba, 2013, p.79.
[410] Ibid, p.89.

This final paragraph twines quite well with the first paragraph for it reflects the development of James outside of his own will and power. He desires to *die* in the first paragraph for it offers a respite to the space that he occupies. His house represents that death. As it is described, the house was 'stifling.' Crucial to note however was that there was no space that was not stifling or that enabled his freedom. The 'smoky filth of freedom' that he inhales outside the house represents this liminal space that offers neither rest nor respite. However, what it does, it offers greater opportunities and avenues for the eventual exploration of the freedom that one desires or deserves. The cigarette becomes another metaphor that is tied to the death metaphor for it opens a window for manipulation of the existing spaces within the normative spectrum. In his room, for example, when Thabo confronts him about the many cigarette stubs on the floor that made the room filthy, Whisgary writes that they were 'acknowledgement of his faults, of his disobedience, of his dishonour, not only to himself but to his family, to his parents.'[411] This scene when read carefully resembles both in form and structure Gloria Anzaldua's seminal on the borderlands. Anzaldua describes the borderlands as 'unstable, unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries.'[412] Juxtaposed to this scene therefore, James occupies a productive space that is both multiple and complex and he straddles between, through and across the supposed boundaries representative of the demands of the home and his subjectivity. The descriptive terms of 'faults,' 'disobedience,' and 'dishonour' that Whisgary gives to James reflect this boundary that he constantly crosses back and forth.

The collapse of the public and private intimacies that I had alluded to in *Pelican Driver* is also in prominent display in Dolar Vasani's story in the same anthology. While *Pelican Driver* shows how the studio and the hotel are collapsed in intense queer sexual moments, *All Covered Up* by Dolar Vasani explores queer love and its cataclysm at the spatial interstices of the 'exotic'. *All Covered Up* reads like queer tourism as it recounts the escapades of Dr. Carmen Fernandez, a

[411] Ibid, p.83-4.
[412] Anzaldua, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute.

Tanzanian-born, Geneva-based United Nations consultant who travels to Zanzibar for a work assignment. Vasani, writing as Dr. Fernandez, infuses the queer tourism discourse when she describes her initial reactions as she touches down in Zanzibar: 'The swaying coconut trees in a sea of green vegetation, and the red earth, immediately infuse an air of exotic fantasy.'[413] During the first meeting, the queer exoticisation trope of the island of Zanzibar continues when she is introduced to Fatma as her 'escort' and as one who will 'take care of all your needs.' 'The word escort stirs my imagination,' Dr. Fernandez thinks, 'and I wonder if this is what Zanzibari hospitality mean.'[414] While colloquially, the term escort could have several meanings, the most prominent one is that of a sexual partner often procured for pay. So, while Dr. Fernandez fantasizes about the open possibilities of the appropriation of the word within the 'exotic' Zanzibar, it recalls the potential of space as open to malleability, exploration and experimentation. It is also interesting that she wonders about 'Zanzibari hospitality' that is always a reciprocal gesture. Fatma's performance is also instructive so as to achieve the reciprocity that this hospitality demands: 'Fatma smiles and winks at me,' Dr. Fernandez writes, 'and our eyes lock in a disconcerting, fixed gaze.' She continues, 'I find it alluring and start wondering how the week will pan out.'[415]

Dr. Fernandez and Fatma immediately develop an intimate attachment that sees them cancel several important meetings and instead go to the beach, attend dinner parties and spend every time apart thinking of each other. What I want to foreground in this story is the relationship between the professional spaces that both Dr. Fernandez and Fatma operate on and their private spaces, for example Dr. Fernandez' hotel room that is mediated by the taxi rides between the two spaces. The taxi, I conceptualize, proudly manifests sexual innuendos and possibilities. Just like in *Pelican Driver*, the queer energies and fervour in the professional and intimate spaces are collapsed.

[413] Martin & Xaba, 2013, p.68.
[414] Ibid, p.69.
[415] Ibid.

On one occasion, for example, after growing tired interviewing government officials, they leave the meeting and hail a taxi and 'head northwards to a place that is meaningless to me.'[416] What is striking about this remark by Dr. Fernandez is her apparent lack of interest to the destination of their journey while her immediate concern is the space that they both occupy, which is the taxi. What is also of note is how she collects these dense moments in the space she occupies using a sexual or erotic grammar that makes visible the immense possibilities of the space. She says:

> In the taxi…, Fatma's hand glides across the back seat and she starts playing with my fingers. I cannot look at her, and I just enjoy the tactile contact. Her forwardness is titillating and a shock to my system, forcing me to challenge all my preconceived notions and stereotypes.[417]

The taxi as a space functions as an interlude to Dr. Fernandez hotel room at Tembo Hotel where the intense sexual energies are finally released between her and Fatma. What is interesting is how Fatma and Dr. Fernandez are able to use the public space that Zanzibar offers as a site of visibility of non-normative sexualities and how such reterritorialization demands recognition. As Phil Hubbard [418] argues, space, especially public spaces, are usually organized around particular forms of appropriate sexual behaviours and expressions which are realized through notions of citizenship through such discourses of exclusion and inclusion. Here, acceptable sexual behaviours are encouraged and accepted while inappropriate, dissident and 'abnormal' sexual behaviours are discouraged, policed, discriminated and otherized. Sexual bodies that engage in good sexual behaviour are described as good sexual citizens and this usually is a code for the traditional heterosexual, procreative unions. On the other hand, sexual dissidents like homosexuals, sex workers, single mothers, divorcees are denied citizenship or kinship in particular spaces. In a heteronormative and Islamic space as Zanzibar, Fatma and Dr. Fernandez manage to transgress

[416] Ibid, p.71.
[417] Ibid.
[418] Hubbard, Phil. 2001. *Sex Zones: Intimacy, Citizenship and Public Space. Sexualities* 4 (1): 51-71.

these notions of citizenship, inclusion and exclusion thereby attaining a unique subjectivity on their multiple and fractured selves through making and being made by the spatial logic of sexual practices, categories and expressions.

Sentimental affect directs the actions of bodies either to 'act, to feel or desire' and all this organizations and re-organizations usually occur within spaces. How spaces are mobilized to encourage and promote certain sexual expressions and activities over time and how spaces are structured to provide access and inclusion to certain sexual rights and innuendos is extremely important. For example, on the last day of her assignment, as she is packing her bags for the airport, Fatma knocks on her room and 'like a magnetic surge heads straight to the open balcony.'[419] The open balcony, just like in the Nairobi examples in previous chapters, function on two related levels: First, it reveals the immense possibilities of sexual spaces to be read and translated using various logics of sexuality and second, and more importantly, it introduces the intense moments that are always anticipated. In this case, the moment is established when Dr. Fernandez and Fatma have sex. So when Fatma tells Dr. Fernandez that 'I want you'[420] and 'You taste exactly like I thought'[421] and in response Fernandez opines that 'I've been wanting to kiss you since the first day',[422] all function on a sexual grammar predicated on space as backdrops to and for queer transgressions and expressions.

Even within other contexts, there are available literary texts that confirm this. For example, Tendai Huchu's *Hairdresser in Harare*[423] is one such text that calls for a problematization of the inherent assumptions that underpin queer discourse. The novel offers a general perspective on modern day Zimbabwe choked with corruption, social inequality and class stratification and how individuals negotiate them. Amidst these, Tendai Huchu manages to offer a different lens from

[419] Martin & Xaba, 2013, p.75.
[420] Ibid, p.75.
[421] Ibid, p.77.
[422] Ibid, p.76.
[423] Huchu, Tendai. 2015. *The Hairdresser in Harare*. Ohio: Ohio University Press.

which we can read these anxieties through a lens of gender relations and how they are experienced and given meaning. The novel tells the story of Dumisani, a hairdresser at the Khumalo Hair and Beauty Treatment who grapples with and negotiates with his same-sex desire, in an intolerant Zimbabwean society. The novel records Dumi (as he is fondly called) as having romantic affairs with several people including Mr. M_, a powerful member of the Zimbabwean government whose wife, Mrs. M_ is a cabinet minister. While it is easy to counter the nationalist rhetoric using this vignette, Huchu, in this description offers us an opportunity to capture the tension and anxieties that encapsulate the discourses of same-sex realities and desires within a context that untangles and renders the narrative anxious.

6.3 (III); Queer Freedoms, Queer Revolutions

The next two stories in *Queer Africa 2* not only speak of travels, journeys and passages both literal and figurative but also freedoms and revolutions that manage to render same-sex realities and desires in messy and anxious ways. Amatesiro Dore's *The Day He Came* and Zukolwenki Zikalala's *My Body Remembers: A War Cry* evokes powerful sentiments of voyages not only of bodies but also of feelings, images, sounds and archives and artefacts memorialized in practice and aesthetics.

The Day He Came is a story of Larry (nicknamed Laura) who is in love with his former secondary school bully, turned University colleague and roommate, Michael, who as it turns out, is in a relationship with one pair of famous identical twins on campus, Peter. Larry, the only son of a wealthy Chief Judge in Nigeria, cannot believe that Michael fell in love with Peter whose parents are incidentally also wealthy evangelists, while he ignores him despite the fact that he supports him. In the University, Larry gave Michael his car to drive because in that University having a car meant the difference between being visible or invisible to the extent that the unofficial

motto for the University was '*No Moto, No Toto.*'[424] He also provided him with a room to stay as well as meals that he could not afford otherwise. This rejection once drove Larry to jealousy causing him to drive, one morning, to Peter's home while the latter's deeply religious parents (his father was a famous pastor while his mother was a famous gospel musician) were at home and warned them to ask their daughter (he meant Peter) to stay away from his man (Michael):

> Warn your daughter, Peter, to leave my man alone or this world will not contain all of us. [425]

Set in Nigeria with a classic jilted lover plot, this story is hardly unique nor does it, in terms of plot analysis and character development, reveal any spectacular nuance as it concerns queer subjectivity and/or grounding. However, when analyzed from a spatial structure, and how the characters (particularly the Larry-Michael-Peter triad), oscillate in all the spaces, then does the full simulacrum (of the signifier and the signified) emerge. For starters, the setting of the story is in the University (with its attendant alluded subterranean locations: the football pitch, the hostels. Lecture halls and Mama Cass, the eatery). Also invoked and which is quite crucial to the spatial realization of queer subjectivity is Peter's home (when Larry barged to warn his parents); the place and location of Michael's car (when he and Michael first had sex) and Larry and Michael's shared room on campus. This spatial mapping is of course incomplete, but serves to complement the character triad of Larry-Michael-Peter. Also alluded to and important as background information is Larry and Michael's former high school that sets the stage for us to understand the genesis of and reason for Larry's actions at the end of the story. Larry reminisces of Michael in secondary school:

[424] Martin & Xaba, 2017, p.47.
[425] Ibid, p.58.

> He appeared in all your secondary school memories because he stood guard at the gates of your closet, taunting you to come out, to admit you weren't a mere fag but a woman in a man's body. [426]

Michael keeping guard at the gates of Larry's closet becomes an important spatial transference between legibility and illegibility for Larry's queerness as well as carriage of significations for Michael's queer subjectivities. For while Michael was same-sex desiring, he was often spotted on campus with a string of girls. Larry recalls:

> At the end of his first year, he was hooking up with a steady string of girls. None lasted longer than a one-night stand, and everyone accepted him as the incredible footballer allowed to drive your car around campus. [427]

So, as same-sex desiring, while at the same time practicing heteronormativity, but also as a footballer (the ultimate macho sport), Michael's taunts and put-downs in secondary school were simply a reflection of himself. While standing guard, metaphorically at Larry's sexuality gates, he was also in effect standing guard at his own gates trying to manoeuvre the implication and consequence of his own desires. Secondary school memories are summoned in order to give credence to the spatial triad I allude to. Larry's constant search for Michael is always a narrative of play making that seeks to recapture the secondary school scenes that bind them together.

The day that Michael and Peter meet, is also the day Michael is playing football and after the match he is named man of the match having beaten the College of Engineering (the three were in College of Law) to win the VC Cup. The same day, they both have sex in Michael's car by the roadside and Larry eventually found them. It should be remembered that Larry and Michael shared a room and while they had not had any romantic relationship, Larry secretly wanted one and the reason he was looking for Michael that night was to confess his feelings for him. At the end of the

[426] Ibid, p.54.
[427] Ibid, p.55-6.

story therefore, his intrusion to Peter's home is read as a denouement, a culmination of sorts to queer desire traversals. The traversals shifts from himself to Michael only to be rejected as a result of the sexual activity between Michael and Peter. While this rejection of queer desire by Michael is then transferred to Peter and can be read as hatred, it should be understood in its context. It is an emotion towards Michael. Therefore, Larry's intrusion into Peter's house musts be read as a queer transference, a declaration of love towards Michael and not hatred towards Peter, although both emotions are hard to separate effectively.

The spatial connection between the car (here understood as both place and space) that couples Michael and Peter; the campus hostel that unites Michael and Larry; and finally Peter's home that implicates the three are both phenomenologically and ethnographically corporeal and surreal. Especially for Larry, as he traverses the three sites, it becomes really compelling to understand his psyche in the ways that these spaces have on his subjectivity. On the night he sees them by the roadside, Larry recalls in a stream of consciousness and narrative style:

> [Y]ou drove back to the dark and lonely road. You parked at a distance and sneaked to his car. You heard them before you saw them. Michael and one of the holy twins were oblivious to your jealous eyes… You hoped it was just a fling because God knows what you would do if anyone stole Michael from you.[428]

The threat evident in this excerpt is realized of course at the end of the story when he intrudes into Peter's home and warns his parents.

While *The Day He Came* ends on a militant note, on the other hand, Zikalala's story, *My Body Remembers: A War Cry*, begins on a militant note in the University space (presumably Wits University), with a struggle song. It is the quintessential bildungsroman motif, of, just like Amatesiro's, a high school love which, unlike, Amatesiro's was consummated. Zikalala's reads like a letter to his high school boyfriend who, incidentally, and just like Amatesiro's, finds himself in

[428] Ibid, p.57.

the same University with his beloved. Recalling the high school rigour and discipline that was designed to forge men out of boys, the story weaves an intricate web of how the spatial transference from high school to University renders this cause of forging men out of boys unintelligible and inherently a failure.

The narrator and Buzwe, his high school compatriot, while in the University space as students, are confronted with the militancy of student politics and the implications to their own subjectivity. While he, the narrator, (and one might be tempted to think the author as the narrator) has no time for it, preferring instead to concentrate on his studies, Buzwe on the other hand is an active and vocal member of the student representative council urging students to vote. This seems a linear trajectory for Buzwe because, as the narrator tells us, he was a captain in high school. Zikalala paints a vivid picture of how a spatial spectral frame draws in unlikely comrades in the face of queer love. Buzwe, a militant student activist, and the narrator, find themselves confronting their past in high school and the demands of 'being men with iron hearts and fighting and winning' [429] and the present where the intensities of contemporary consciousness refuse to be blacked out by the throes of queer erotics.

Two scenes in this stream-of-consciousness narrative style by the narrator buttresses my point which I need to repeat: the first, as he is describing his chance meeting with Buzwe as he is leading other students in a militant song, while the other, desirous of his attention and care outside of the queer frame. He says:

> We arrive on the stairs outside the Great Hall and you're standing at the top of the ledge facing us, well actually facing your comrades, leading them in song. Hands clapping, betwixt the rhythm of feet stomping the ground, betwixt tenors and sopranos beautifully woven into baritone. [430]

[429] Ibid, p.167.
[430] Ibid, p.164

> […]
>
> […]
>
> I wonder if you see me now. Look my way Buzwe. I also want to be led by you in public like the others, not just when you take the lead in fingering my bumhole in bed, or when we suck revolting moustaches. [431]

Two things to note here: the intertwining of queer love with student militancy smacks of some sort of revolution. It is a powerful reminder of the possibilities, vast and multiple, of queer energies and potential and disproves the many discourses of queer love as antithetical to not only nationhood but also meaningful social change. Secondly the desire by the narrator to 'be led by you [Buzwe] in public' is also an admission of the futility of the oft-repeated public/private binary. If one could read this scene as a 'longing', 'desire' or 'wish' of the narrator to be 'acknowledged' by Buzwe in public, one would be wrong. This, rather, is an admission, a public avowal of the impossibility of these two binaries and a celebration of not only the private as possible in the public but also as public being in and around the private. Both Amatesiro' and Zikalala's stories traverse the different spatial frames of high school and University but with enormous dexterity that not only collapses the bildungsroman motif evident in this traversals, but shows with critical analysis the immense awakening of queer erotics that gets drawn in when the characters occupy particular spaces.

For example in *The Day He Came*, when they are not in close proximity, say for example in the campus hostel, or when Larry sees Michael and one of the twin in the car or when he barges Peter's home or in Zikalala's *My Body Remembers*, when the narrator and Buzwe are in the bedroom, or when the narrator sees the high school captain give a speech in the assembly hall or when he sees the militant student activist give a fiery speech on 'Black consciousness' at the steps of Great

[431] Ibid, p.169

Hall, the energies and intensities of queer love permeates the distance and resonates in the spaces that they inhabit even if they are momentary or ephemeral.

If I could explain further. In *My Body Remembers*, this is clearly evident when they meet at the steps of Great Hall and Buzwe informs the narrator that he would 'come through later to get my textbook' and he answers, 'sure no problem, just let me know when you're coming' [432], he remarks poignantly in the characteristic stream-of-consciousness mode:

> Like beer housed in those blue barrels at funerals, weddings and funerals, I am fermenting right now. You and I did not walk out of the high walls and cobble-stone quads, having become men. We did not walk out of there with iron hearts, with the pride and the dignity of being made men, whatever that means. *We're not old boys, we're black boys. We play different tunes with our tongues to crowds, to teachers, to friends, to taxi drivers, to pastors and parents, to ourselves.* Yet the bangs of your desires have no song. But I know this: you will come to my room later to collect your textbook and then probably rock my soul in your bosom, maybe one last time (emphasis mine). [433]

E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen's arguments in the introduction to *Queer Times, Queer Becomings* [434] are crucial to understanding this very concept in Zikalala's story. They argue, 'living on the margins of social intelligibility alters one's pace; one's tempo becomes at best contrapuntal, syncopated and at worst, erratic, arrested'[435]. It is through this prismatic lens that enables Buzwe and the narrator's relationship. So, the different spaces that the two traverse-in and of themselves- act as a canvas- geographical, critical, political, literal and cultural- on which the narration of their queer lives, experiences and politics is rehearsed and acted upon. This is especially so when he confesses that they play different tunes to different publics, including themselves.

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[432] Ibid, p.171.
[433] Ibid, p.172.
[434] McCallum, E. L. & Tuhkanen, M. 2011. (eds). *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
[435] Ibid, p.1.

The Day He Came and *My Body Remembers* are both stories of movements – a queer temporality if you will. Both stories are a discourse on how particular spaces work as arches or entrances to other possible and varied spaces, which can be traced to the first particular space – for example, the high school sojourn. High school is the original space that becomes a site for the production of multiple other stories on sexual possibilities, expressions, identities and experimentations that bump up against each other in multi-layered and diverse ways all of which are written on the bodies of Larry, Michael, Peter in *The Day He Came* and, on the narrator, and Buzwe in *My Body Remembers*.

The various spaces discussed above are captured in what Ranka Primorac[436] terms as a 'complex shifting and travelling of meanings' as a result of the constant interactions between its inhabitants and itself. This spatial logic foregrounds the repertoire and potential of the subjective entities inherent in bodies to configure and reconfigure spaces they inhabit in addition to being sites of endless reconstructions in relation to sexualized bodies.[437] The dynamism offered on display in the campus hotel, the universities in both stories, or the home, are ideal to articulate disparate bodies of desire. These spaces are multicultural, multiracial and offer a diverse nature of bodies that intersect in imaginable and novel ways. In addition, as Knopp [438] asserts, the architecture of the various cities, be it Lagos, Nairobi or Johannesburg where the stories are located, both as physical and relational, imply that much more sexual diversity is resident within it than in other spaces. Space, in this case, and how it is negotiated are important for how sexual bodies situate and resituate themselves.

[436] Primorac Ranka. 2013. *African City Textualities*. New York: Routledge.
[437] Baydar, Gilsum. 2012. "Sexualised Productions of Space." *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*. 19(6): 699–706.
[438] Knopp, Lawrence. 1995. *"Sexuality and Urban Space: A framework for analysis*." In D. Bell and G.Valentine. (eds), *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexuality* (149-161). New York and London: Routledge.

In their varied forms, the various spaces become sites of 'endless possibilities'[439] and of becomings. Bodies of desire position themselves to affect and be affected with these spaces in ways that situate and resituate their materiality. The spaces, indeed, show scopes of heterogeneity and bodies become sites for multiplicitous contestations.

In this chapter, I desire to show how literary narratives can be latched onto real lived experiences in spatial frameworks in order to show how queer individuals within the city of Nairobi perform and disperform their queer subjectivity. For example, reading AJ in *Pelican Driver* or Larry in *The Day He Came*, one can easily recognise my various respondents in the previous chapters in the ways that they negotiate their respective selfhoods within the spaces they occupy or navigate. It is also important to realize that while we can read our various selves in these fictional accounts, what remains of paramount importance are the ways in which these various recognitions of our multiple selves reflect the myriad of ways our embodied existence relies on the spatial logics and artefacts implicated within the spaces that we inhabit. Additionally, the ways in which both the spatial transference in the short stories can be superimposed on our everyday realities means that the experiences of queer individuals both in the narratives and in the everyday align to the various codes of queer liveability through the Boswellian discourse of queer world-making. Finally, in linking the narrative strategies in these short stories and the experiences of the various queer constituencies in the previous chapters, one can easily construct a familiar pattern that recognises the ways in which they negotiate and situate their selfhoods within the different geographies that they inhabit and shows why queer conceptualization needs more nuance and depth.

[439] Simone, AbdouMaliq. 2004. *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Chapter Seven

7.0 Time Binds: Against a Conclusion

To close read is to linger, to dally, to take pleasure in tarrying, and to hold out that these activities can allow us to look both hard and askance at the norm.

Elizabeth Freeman.[440]

I begin this concluding chapter with a long excerpt from the *Stories of Our Lives book*, which I think, encapsulates, in varying degrees, the arguments I have been making in this entire enterprise:

> *Coming out to my family was death and rebirth at the same time. I had dreaded having to do it almost my life, from the moment I knew I was gay. I did everything I could to escape having to have that conversation with my family.*
>
> *I always considered myself to be very close to my family, but after coming out – everything became different. I started by telling my brother. I couldn't face him, so I called him and told him I was gay. He sounded shocked, and asked me how I knew, how long I had known. Then he shocked me by saying he still loves me, and is still my brother. We're not that kind of family. We don't use the word 'love' with each other. This was the first time I'd ever heard him use that word near me, and to me. He asked to meet me about a week later and we had a very adult conversation about it. It sounded like he'd taken the week to think about it, and speak to his wife and his pastor about it. He told me his wife said she had always known. I wasn't surprised. I always knew she had solid gaydar. She used to give me a knowing look, but never said anything.*
>
> *Then I geared to tell my parents. I read articles online: 'How to Come Out to Your Parents'. Most of these articles were written by Americans, with cute tips about asking your parents to join the local PFLAG chapter. We don't have those here. But the one thing most of the articles said was to listen. Listen to them and let them express themselves. OK. I will listen.*
>
> *So I drove to my parent's house one Sunday morning, telling myself that the only courage I needed was the courage to walk into the house and say, 'I have something to tell you.'*

[440] Freeman, Elizabeth. 2010. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham: Duke University Press.

That's all. If I could do that, the rest would happen by force. So I walked in and told my parents. It was hell. So many tears, so much drama. My mothers face crumpled when I told her. Like I was dead or something. My father held his head in his hands and moaned like he was in pain. Because it was a Sunday morning, they were going to church. So we wouldn't talk for long. I guess that was my plan. I knew they'd never cancel their trip to church unless I was bleeding.

'We'll talk,' they said.

And I went home, exhilarated at myself for having said the thing that I'd dreaded saying for years. A few days later, my mother asked to meet me. I sat in her car while she wept, and wept, and wept, and said all kinds of ridiculous things to me. Listen. Remember to listen, I told myself, willing myself not to interrupt her.

'I knew we shouldn't have sent you to a boarding school. I always used to tell your father, will he OK?'

Listen. I passed her some more tissues; the ones she was holding were soggy with tears and mucus.

'It's unnatural, and you know God wouldn't allow it, because humanity would end.'

Listen. The last time I saw her cry so hard was when her sister died. She was mourning me, and I'm sitting right there. Death. Rebirth.[441]

Several important points come out of this excerpt which is closely tied to Elizabeth Freeman's quote above on close reading as an intimate exercise in troubling the norm. Freeman invites us to imagine the affective potential of close contact to texts and how they bump into and against the varied non-linear temporal forms. Throughout this project, I have endeavoured to show that slow reading helps us to engage with the various queers texts' complexities and to develop novel, just and freer ways of locating queer subjectivity, liveability and expressions. In the above excerpt therefore, the various complexities evident and which I have highlighted in the previous chapters helps making this conclusion easier. First, the prominent juxtaposition of family, sexuality and religion is clearly a famous trope that has been in circulation in Kenya for a long time.

[441] SOOL, p.261-262.

So it is not surprising that both parents of the respondent are portrayed as the major proponents. On the other hand, the respondent's comparison of his coming out as both death and rebirth is particularly interesting even as he likens his parent's disappointment about his sexuality to a mourning ritual. The exercise of mourning, therefore, is quite crucial because as I have argued before, it reflects a space of liminality that at the very least guarantees an opportunity for newer forms of being to emerge and thrive.

My own interest in queer sexuality and subjectivity was triggered and nurtured as a result of the multiple episodes that have occurred before but that emerge in the excerpt above. The relationship between himself and his brother seems only to grow stronger after 'confessing' his sexuality to him is one such episode. I use the word confession intentionally because it aligns with my argument in the previous chapters about confession being emblematic of queer renewal. Therefore, the use of the affective word of 'love' only testifies to the various opportunities for newer forms of queer becomings/renewal to emerge. With his parents however, other affective forms of becoming occasioned by sadness, mourning and sometimes hurt also indicate the ways in which queer sexuality is always implicated in other discourses that do not necessarily intellectually inform this debate within the Kenyan public. For example, when his mother mourns that 'humanity will end,' and juxtaposed with his brother's 'positive' attitude after a conversation with his wife and pastor, reflects a kind of queer ambivalence and complicity that I have dealt with in previous chapters. Rather than see this complicity in strict terms, Dina Ligaga's[442] iteration is helpful to contextualize it. While she writes about the 'good time girls' in Kenyan popular culture, her theorization of this complicity is apt here. This complicity, she says, should be 'understood as a complex subject representative of competing discourses on gender and sexuality in Kenya'[443], what I term as queer ambivalence within the Kenyan polity. At the same time, Ligaga shows how

[442] Ligaga, Dina. 2014. "Mapping emerging constructions of good time girls in Kenyan popular media." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 26(3): 249-261.
[443] Ibid, p.259.

using different mediated platforms such as texts, newspapers, rumours, and social media, narratives and the process of narrative making gets complicated both in terms of theorization and in teleological queer analysis.[444] Subtly echoing Freeman, she concludes that such wide use of different mediated texts only helps us to come into close intimate contact with them and provides us an opportunity to find not only others but also ourselves.

While on the 'field' with my respondents and also with my interaction with the various literary and textual materials and archives, I seem to encounter the various ways in which queer sexuality is always enmeshed in discourses of love, belonging, kinship, sentiment, attachment, desire on one hand while on the hand arguments about nationhood, citizenship, legal frameworks and until very lately in Kenya indifference. Initially, my own failure was in relating these two disparate discourses. It was until very late that I understood that the two actually depend on each other or rather one of the two relies on the other in order to recognize itself. In other words, within the Kenyan several publics, these two arguments were integral in the construction and consumption of the queer figure. Hugo Canham has brilliantly discussed these affective economies when he writes about queer movements within the city of Johannesburg. He connects emotion, geography and identity to show how they 'transcend interiority to illustrate their production in the interplay between and among people and geography.'[445]

What I have done here is to describe queer subjectivity and expressions within the spatial frame of Nairobi and place it in wider queer political context especially in how queer lives and expressions are framed both in epistemological and political terms. In other words, I have described how queer lives navigate and negotiate the multiple urban spatial logics and as a result the ways in which they construct their self-hoods. This I have done in two ways, whose examples

[444] Ligaga, Dina. 2017. "Thinking around Genre: The Moral Narrative and Femininity in Kenyan Popular Media." *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Inquiry*, 4(3): 222-236.
[445] Canham, Hugo. 2017. "Mapping the Black Queer Geography of Johannesburg's Lesbian Women through Narrative." *Psychology in Society* 55: 84-107.

run in all the previous chapters. First, is the negotiation between what I have called queer liveability on one hand and queer fungibility on the other. Second, is on the conscious production and eventual circulation of what I call queer ambivalences, which as I have noted multiple times before, ensures the successful navigation between liveability and fungibility. The previous chapters have attempted a troubling of the various understandings of what it means to be queer; the kinds of attachments and emotions that being queer evokes, and ultimately the kinds of imaginative forms we might employ to better present the being and becoming of queer. This as I have attempted to show can be better done once we privilege space as a spectral frame and epistemological base.

I have examined a wide range of materials ranging from the numerous interviews I attended to the events and functions that I was invited to in Nairobi. From the literary texts that I read to the many hours I spent with the various archival documents, newspaper articles and online materials. Not only did these materials take a lot of time to read through and analyze, I now discover that the consequence is that while offering my concluding remarks, it is hard to offer a non-messy account owing to the various ways in which queer lives in Kenya have long been theorized. Because I was reading all these materials as textual installations, the result is that they provided me with multiple, often contradictory, ways of interpreting queer lives and expressions in Kenya that a neater narrative can be said to be impossible. While I must admit that I was not looking for a neater account of queer lives in Kenya, in retrospect I find the analysis offered in this project to be sufficient to not only problematize the various queer theorizations but it offers different and multiple ways to read and locate queer expressions from different and multiple perspectives and contexts which is not only ideal but helps to imagine newer and better ways of being-queer-in-the-world. The analysis further troubles the various theorizations of queer lives. For example I have problematized the universalizing theories originary from other contexts and also the antinormative principle that marked the birth of queer inquiry.

If you can recall, throughout this project, my preoccupation had been with the three nodes of analysis namely:

- Sexuality
- Space
- Everyday subjectivity

And, if you can recall again, what ties these three nodes of analysis is what I called: *consumption*. At the very precise moment of the three nodes intersecting, the various debates on queer ambivalence emerge and flourish. In this regard, I am inclined to have a graphic presentation on this intersection. It is easier to draw a triangle that connects them as can be seen in the figure below:

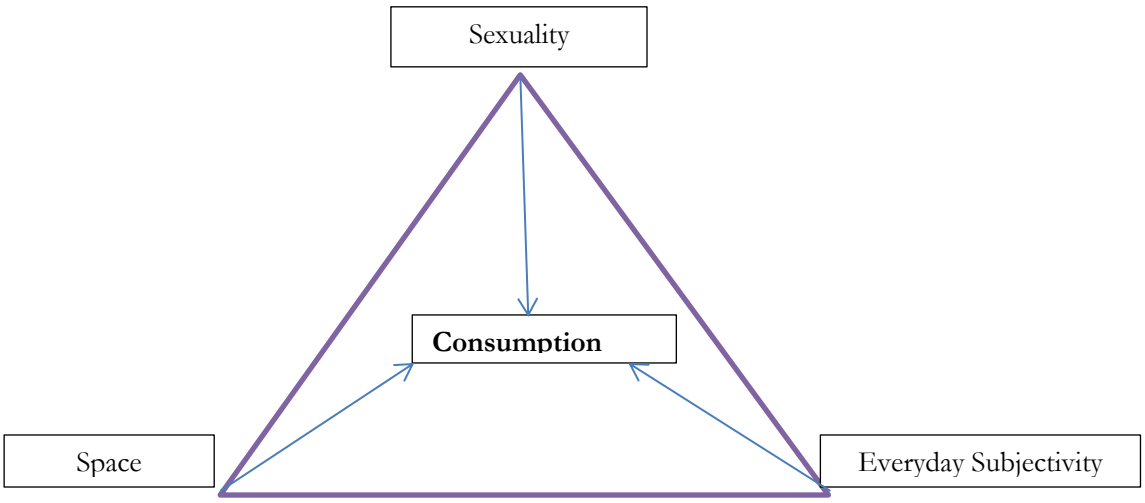

Figure 7. 1: Queer ambivalence matrix

In all the chapters, I have situated my analysis at this point of intersection and in their various and multiple variations. In the materials that I chose for this project I have privileged certain ideas, discourses, arguments and genealogies, which can be summarized here using the following terms:

- Entanglements
- Resistance

- Accommodations
- Difference
- Materiality
- Dynamism/ephemerality
- Transits
- Fluidity
- Becoming
- Freedom

These terms are at the intersection of the consumptive potential evident in the triad. Queer subjectivity emerges at this intersection and a different queer spectrum is mapped out in ways that they trouble the current understandings of queer expressions. For example, in the *Stories of Our Lives* excerpt, these various symbols powerfully emerge. The kinds of ways 'entanglements' and 'resistance' are laid side by side and the ways in which 'difference' and 'materiality' are portrayed makes it easier to create a different way of theorizing queer lives within this specific context.

I have termed this chapter 'Against a Conclusion' because of my own admission at the impossibility of making 'concluding remarks' to this subject. A conclusion is supposed to wrap up; a (the) last word of sorts, borrowing from the famed African literary critic Taban Lo Liyong. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a conclusion as a 'summing up of an argument or text.' But, how does one sum up or make a final argument when the argument as it were refuses such a demand? Queer discourse, politics, praxis and subjectivity in Kenya continues to productively evolve especially as it straddles with the queer ambivalence I have described. A particular example for this evolution was in February of 2018 when a civil case was brought before the High Court of Kenya that sought to decriminalize and legalize queer relations and expressions:

> ***Nairobi, Kenya (CNN)*** *Kenya's High Court began hearing a case that may decriminalize homosexuality. It's a significant step in East Africa, where homosexuality is illegal in almost every country in the region and in 38 countries in total across the continent, according to Amnesty International. 'The fact that we are being heard is an indicator that our democracy has come of age,' said Eric Gitari, a Harvard-educated lawyer and founder of the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, one of the organizations, which brought forward the case in 2016. The case opened Friday in a crowded Nairobi courtroom. The judges had to change to a different*

> *room to accommodate the large crowd. 'The judges know the entire world is watching,' Gitari said. Kenyan law currently prohibits 'carnal knowledge against the order of nature,' labeling it a felony that is punishable with 14 years in prison. The case argues that this law, which can be traced to British colonial law from the turn of the century, is unconstitutional. 'We are hopeful,' Gitari said. 'The judgment is going to give guidance to countries across Africa. It's going to encourage activists in so many African countries; it's going create a ripple effect.*[446]

These new and very interesting developments within the Kenyan imaginary promises to be of importance not only for those who identify as queer, but particularly with regard to my arguments in this dissertation, because it is a culmination, a conclusion of sorts for all the work put in. As this dissertation has been concerned with sexuality and more specifically queer sexuality, the everyday lived experiences and the erotics, ecologies and politics of space and spatialized geographies within Nairobi as well as in selected literary geographies, therefore, the outcome of this case is something well worth waiting for.

The claims made by Deleuze and Guattari about becoming are worth being rehashed in relation to this case but I argue that within particular contexts and locations, these claims become invisible and in the event that they are not, the objects of their claims are rendered invisible. A close reading of Deleuze, as has been stated, is quite useful to understanding the use and limits of these artefacts on queer lives and how they perform and disperform corporeality. In the multiple and various spaces that I have described, the most enduring and visible thematic strand is their malleable, liminal and in-betweeness quality. How these spaces allow the queer users to move in, through and out of in ways that not only enhance their subjectivity and selfhood but, in more concrete and theoretically dense ways, invoke the Deleuzean resource of becoming. Frieda Beckman in *Deleuze and Sex* lays out this strategy thus:

> So while post-Deleuzean feminist – and queer theory has certainly engaged with sexuality in various ways, much remains to be done – that is, research on sexuality

[446] Duggan, Brian. Case to Legalize Homosexuality in Kenya, CNN, February 23, 2018. Accessed May 2, 2018 at: https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/23/africa/case-legalize-homosexuality-kenya/index.html

> that does not (necessarily, or primarily) aim at questioning the organization of genders, but rather explores sexuality as practice, as creation, and as a revolutionary machine.[447]

This call by Beckman to imagine sexuality as 'practice' and as a 'revolutionary machine' has been an active concern in this project for it invites us to create other ways of seeing the sexual, the sexed and the sexuated. At the same time McCallum and Tuhkanen, while extending this thesis, invoke Butler's arguments about queer becomings as unbecomings.[448] They write:

> For what are our accessories as unbecoming subjects but things like time and space, history and politics, gender and its noncomitant identity – regulating categories, aesthetics and ethics.[449]

Read together therefore, Deleuze and Guattari and McCallum and Tuhkanen seem to suggest that the various texts that I have studied in this project need not be an exercise in highlighting what is legible or illegible or what can be visible and invisible. Rather it is a project that problematizes the notions of space and time and collapses the various teleological historiographies between the past and the future. As McCallum and Tuhkanen continue, it reflects 'the difficulties of interpretation, the moments of textual resistance or of unintelligibility'.[450] In other words, between 'what is' and 'what should be', which as I have said before it is a province of 'imagination' and 'freedom.'

In fact this play of invisibility and visibility is not only tied to queer politics and praxis, but also within myself as a researcher. The impulse against a conclusion also draws me into a conversation about my own positionality in relation, at this very moment, in the kind of knowledge that I claim to have produced. In this regard, Macharia offers me a language to think with. In his

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[447] Beckman, Frieda. 2011. What is sex? An introduction to the sexual philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. In F. Beckman, ed, *Deleuze and Sex*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p.3.
[448] For more on this concept see: Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge; Butler, Judith.1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge and Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.
[449] McCallum and Tuhkanen, 2011, p.10.
[450] Ibid, p.11.

brilliant article, 'A Litany of Complaint', he wonders aloud about his positionality as a queer scholar in Africa, or as others have argued an African queer scholar:

> I am queer scholar. By which I mean to say, I am trained in and identify with a field that does not exist in my present geography. A sense of deracination overwhelms me. But I say this with trepidation, because deracination has so often been fetishized, if not celebrated, in queer studies.[451]

Important to note in Macharia's trepidation is the inability to locate the self within a location that inherently lacks the language to articulate itself in ways that are familiar or legible to him. This has been a recurrent theme in the previous chapters of this project because in the various ways, I have shown the ways that queer individuals in the various cartographies imagine queer worlds not only differently but offer counter narratives and create counter sites. In the same article, Macharia crystalizes this world making by insisting that queer individuals, 'imagine worlds, inhabit ungeographies, and produce fugitive temporalities, not simply 'other' or 'alternative' or even 'counter' modernities but different configurations of time altogether…'.[452] For him, it is a refusal towards and for any sort of coherence.

At the same time, another queer scholar, Taiwo Osinubi not only agrees with Macharia but also makes pointed claims that reinforce my arguments in the previous chapters. He avers:

> The frictions around the production and circulation of African queer representations emerge from multiple arenas of debate and necessitate a series of discursive interventions that respond to the differently situated definitions and contestations of the relationship between politics and representation. African queer representations operate within such negotiations of political and artistic representations just as much as they revivify or intersect with other historical

[451] Macharia, Keguro, 2016, p.183
[452] Ibid, p.184-5.

> debates that are more overtly entangled with cultural politics about Africa, Africans, and (self) representation.[453]

For the both of them, the various narratives on queer liveabilities, fungibilities and the everyday negotiation are not simply a speaking-to or counter narratives against the dominant narratives about queer life, rather they reflect and confirm the weaknesses inherent in these dominant narratives. They not only question these narratives that are outspoken and loud, but they also provoke the many repertoires of silent narratives that refuse to engage with queer discourses. So the various narratives analyzed here are attempts at engaging not only against the dominant narratives but also actively unmask the hidden ones as well as voice the silent ones.

In the introduction to this project which I titled **'in the beginning'**; I laid out a justification for the need to study and locate queer theorization within the context of not only Kenya but within the Global South. I argued about the contextualization of queer theory and queer politics that ignored the complexities and nuances of the specific space that Kenya occupies. I argued that the current conceptualization of queer sexual expressions in Kenya is still framed within an explicitly antinormative foundation of queer studies and politics. And while it has illuminated the presence of same-sex sexual expressions, these frameworks have not been successful in capturing the contextual realities, and complex experiences of queer expressions, subjectivities and realities and their multiple and varied sexualities. I showed how queer epistemologies still use particular theoretical and analytical frameworks and structures to articulate same-sex sexual expressions and position same-sex desiring bodies which have been conceived and designed in the global North, while assuming a universalizing principle that covers the global South. Such universalizations, I argued, are not only misleading but also deadly inaccurate as no two cultures are ever similar. I proposed that local Kenyan realities and nuances need to be considered in the theorization of queer sexuality that is predicated on space and everyday subjectivity in queer knowledge

[453] Osinubi, Taiwo. 2016. Queer Prolepsis and the Sexual Commons: An Introduction. Research in African Literatures. 47(2): vii-xxiii.

production. I contended that using the Deleuzean resource of 'becoming', we can adequately and forcefully locate same-sex sexual bodies, expressions, desires and spaces in the continent. Further, a theoretical spectrum that calls attention to the incoherence and unintelligibility of sexualities in nuanced complexities around lived experiences; spatial subjectivities and embodied existences can be productively built.

In the second chapter, aptly titled **'Nairobi is a Shot of Whisky'**, I introduced Nairobi as an empirical site from which to read and locate queer expressions, figurations and iterations. Using the selected spaces of a tavern, nightclub and a cyber café, I showed how these everyday spaces allow and/or disallow particular queer expressions through the myriad ways of entanglement and adaptation. I described the multiple forms of play and pleasure embedded in these spaces and how they create radical forms of queer subjectivity especially because of the contradictions that Nairobi as a site, and Kenya as a whole, presents between queer fungibility and queer tolerance. These were crucial because as sites of queer consumptions, they were necessary to the realization of the various ways that queer expressions are embedded and are performed within these different publics. What was of note, however, were the ways in which these various sites expressed different ways of performing and becoming queer still within the same space of Nairobi.

'A Fluid Disposition' is the third chapter. I situated this chapter within the popular – and sometimes unpopular – queer discourses – past and present within Kenya generally, but specifically within urban Nairobi. I excavated queer anxieties using a range of multiple archival materials that included newspaper articles, literary novels, popular media, rumour networks, and public utterances by political and religious leaders. Using these systems, I showed how these various queer anxieties and discourses are assembled together into the queer ambivalence matrix that reflects the consumptive potential of queer Nairobi. Additionally, these various materials exposed the queer ambivalences that are resident within the queer Kenyan imaginary and reflected the anxiety and complicities between queer liveability and queer fungibility. In this chapter, I showed how these

plays of performance between liveability and fungibility helps queer individuals to navigate the various spaces that they occupy and in the process construct their selfhoods and subjectivity in relation to these deft and crucial navigations.

In **'Queer (Ob) Scenes'**, using an ethnographic lens, I read the queer users who actively inhabit, use, kidnap and navigate the selected spaces in Nairobi and I locate the different ways that they map their queer subjectivity in the everyday lived experiences. I showed how in the ways that they occupy, subvert, control and manipulate these spaces, new practices of the queer selves emerge. Offered as textual installations, I described how the users narrativise their queer selves while new patterns of queer embodiment emerge as a result of the entanglement with the different topographies of the everyday spaces. This was crucial because it revealed the many ways and the different configurations that queer individuals in Nairobi emerge to grapple with the ambivalences resident within the city and in the spaces that are complicit for queer world making.

Continuing with the ethnographic lens of the previous two chapters, in this chapter titled **'Stories we Tell'**, I read *Stories of Our Lives*, a boocumentary project that captured the personal and real life experiences of queer individuals and how they navigate the subjectivities of being queer within the Kenyan imaginary. Through interviews and narrativisation, I analysed how the power of personal narratives and storytelling captured the imagination of queer freedom. I also examined the various ways queer messiness, anxieties and ambivalences can result in radical forms of queer world making in Kenya. In this chapter I focused on how storytelling and narrativization helps to capture new ways of becoming queer within a space that is not only complicit in both queer freedom and queer violence but also in making either visible or invisible queer expressions and spaces.

In the **'Queer Kenya in Urban Africa'** chapter, I departed from the Kenyan public, but still remained enmeshed within the African public, I read *Queer Africa 1: New and Collected Fiction* and its sequel, *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* as literary artefacts to map the cartography of queer

lives/expressions/subjections which are made visible/enacted/performed within the everyday. I relied on the notion of traversal through spaces as a tool through which queer individuals make sense of the multiple forms of subjugation and subordination and redistribute their sensibilities. In part, I superimposed these anthologies onto the Kenyan public and insisted that the various embodied existences of queer individuals are ways of grappling with and making sense of consumptive potential of queer ambivalence. What was important about this chapter is that it located the Kenyan imaginary within the larger African, and also Global South, public. As I had argued in the introduction chapter, the dominant queer theorization from the Global North has assumed a universal queer understanding of the Global South. Therefore, in locating the Kenyan urban public within the rest of the continent, I argued for a contextualized theorization of queer Africa based on specific contexts and situations based on spatial logic and infrastructure.

So I end where I started, with the poem by Omar Mismar titled **'A Hands Routine'**:

> *'He is driving and I am sitting next to him, sometimes I reach to his side and put my hand in his, other times he reaches to my side and puts his hand in mine. We roam, we talk, and we look. Holding hands becomes a risk, a secret act, fun for being dangerous. We hold and unhold, depending on where we are, who is next to us, and what is next to us. The holding is interrupted: by a traffic light, a higher adjacent car, a rose seller, a beggar, a delivery boy, a passer by, a heated conversation, a jealous gaze...*
>
> *As a translucent gay space, the car is vulnerable and exposed. The city and its people become a threat. 'Revolt' does happen every once in a while by keeping the hold even when everything around us (and everything we learned and internalized) tells us not to. We could say it is a form of resisting. We contribute to the interruption of our handholding as much as everybody out there does. The cause for unholding might be internal: a conversation, a dispute, a sweaty hand... The routine is by no means consistent. It depends on our mood and how alert we are to the outside even when encountering the same threats. It seems that we are threatened by everything and nothing simultaneously.'*

Space, and the attendant urban logics, is crucial at this epoch to correctly theorize queer sexuality and subjectivity. This is because different contexts and spaces impact differently on

different individuals. More so, on queer individuals in spaces that denies their existence and mete out violence – physical and legal – on them. In this poem, the two gay lovers show how the act of inhabiting spaces become a way of constructing queer subjectivity. As they are in the car, the act of holding hands is described as an act of 'revolt' as it depends on what 'intrudes' in their space and becomes 'everything and nothing simultaneously'. Holding hands is dependent on the spaces they inhabit, navigate or kidnap and reflects the potential, and opportunity of these spaces to disrupt the teleological and temporal nature of the current understandings of sexuality. It also reflects the potential of 'revolt' – and in my arguments consumption and freedom – to create new ways of building newer queer worlds and community.

In this poem – and in the entire thesis – I have shown how queer experience of space and queer spatialization troubles normativity and enables newer just worlds to emerge. I have shown how the city and the urban together with their multiple artefacts – and in their various iterations – can and has produced queer communities that manage to subvert the current violent state and religious bio power.

I started with Danai Mupotsa'a ideas about consumption as well as Keguro Macharia's iterations about freedom and how they tie together with queer sexuality in everyday spaces. Grace Musila's arguments about mediated everyday networks as well as Stella Nyanzi's theorizations of sex and sexuality were crucial to make the arguments that I made. While I still insist on the impossibility of presenting a coherent argument about Kenyan queer sexuality, I hope my unstable and messy arguments in this thesis invite us to think about the ways in which queer theorization is hinged on how queer individuals inhabit, navigate, kidnap and – maybe invade – spaces, how they sexualize the spaces that they inhabit as well as the ways they spatialize their own queer sexuality.

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