



# **Growing Queer:**

## Youth Temporality and the Ethics of Group Sex in Contemporary Moroccan & South African Literature

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Wish We Were Queer

Towards the end of October 2018, news stories surfaced about a targeted crackdown on gay people in Tanzania. Regional Commissioner of Dar es Salam, Paul Makonda, announced plans to form a government taskforce that would be devoted to pursuing and prosecuting LGBTIQ people, or those perceived to be on the spectrum (Amnesty International, “Tanzania”). This current onslaught on LGBTIQ citizens has already seen 10 men arrested, ostensibly for participating in a same-sex wedding (Ibid). While the Tanzanian foreign ministry distanced itself from the Regional Commissioner’s remarks (Burke), others have framed Makonda’s actions as a natural extension of president John Magufuli’s “morality crusade” (Amnesty International, “Tanzania”). After being elected to office in 2015, Magufuli achieved international acclaim for this ‘thrift and intolerance for corruption’ (Paget). However, Magufuli’s “morality crusade” quickly spiralled into authoritarianism, with a clampdown on freedom of speech and on opposition to his party, Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) (Ibid). The party has governed Tanzania since its independence in 1961 (O’Gorman 317). As Ahearne notes, it has become a situation where ‘any opposition is seen as “against the nation”’ since it has become ‘clear that Magufuli is following a nationalist agenda.’ Homophobic campaigns have been a common feature since Magufuli was elected in 2015, and sodomy still carries a prison sentence of up to 30 years in Tanzania (Burke). The current “morality crusade” is not that unusual, in other words, and it imagines sexual and gender minorities as outside the nation-state, as not quite citizens. This discourse is not new, and simply echoes similar declarations and crackdowns in other African countries that frame sexual and gender minorities as non-citizens.

While the focus of my dissertation is Moroccan and South African literature, rather than East African, the example of political homophobia in Tanzania illustrates a dimension of African post-coloniality, where nationalisms produced by liberation often clamp down on sexual and gender minorities.<sup>1</sup> This demonization of sexual and gender minorities demonstrates the ‘tendency’, which Mahmood Mamdani identifies, ‘of African governments [...] to play reform in one sphere against repression in the other’ (300). As Desirée Lewis contends, this tendency is connected to gender and sexual minorities in the African context through notions of ‘dignity’ (213). Beliefs about African heteronormativity intersect with ideas about individual and collective pride as ‘conferred through the fictive yet compelling sense of “tradition”’ (Ibid). Thus, dignity is paradoxically inscribed as both *product of* and *problem for* the decolonisation process: people seek dignity after the violence and ignominies of colonisation but simultaneously find the indignity of queer sexuality something they must distance

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<sup>1</sup> Aside from Tanzania, this pattern is also notable in Uganda and Nigeria where there have been a tightening of laws and punishments directed at LGBTIQ people since at least 2013 (Amnesty International, “Anti-Gay Laws in Africa”). Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Kenya have all had leaders declare homosexuality as “unAfrican”, and thus antithetical to notions of nationhood. According to the 2017 International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) report, “State Sanctioned Homophobia”, same-sex sexual acts remains illegal in 32 African countries (Carroll & Mendos 37).

themselves from in nation-building projects. On the one hand, then, queer individuals are often pushed out of national narratives because it conflicts with these notions of dignity.

On the other hand, their perceived inability to reproduce and be the future that the nation so often desires further casts queer people as “against the nation”. While some queer folk do reproduce, perceptions of queer people as sterile persist, marking them as unable to contribute to the nation in terms of population. Because of these perceptions of queer people as non-reproductive – where reproduction denotes the realisation of full adulthood – queer folk are thus suspended in a kind of youthful temporality that is deemed “not serious enough” for the future. While this tension between the nation and queerness is played out in different ways in the novels that I examine in my dissertation, they all recognise and respond to this set of socio-political and socio-sexual relations. Rather than reject this notion of queerness as youthful, Abdellah Taïa’s *Salvation Army* (2006), Ashraf Jamal’s *Love Themes for the Wilderness* (1996) and K. Sello Duiker’s *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) all advocate in different ways for the embrace of such temporality. While South Africa is often seen as the exceptional state because it offers constitutional recognition and protection on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation, both Jamal and Duiker’s texts highlight persistent tensions between the ideal of the nation and queerness.

It is precisely on this basis of perceived exceptionalism that I have constructed an archive that brings together South Africa and Morocco and puts them in dialogue with each other. Since both South Africa and Morocco are historically transnational spaces, my archive is putting that type of framework into practice. More importantly, in doing so, I attempt also to articulate a type of *de-nationalising* post-colonial politics that aligns with similar propositions made in both Taïa and Duiker’s work. These works seek to cross real and metaphorical borders, erasing them in the process, and to establish networks of solidarity across time and space. Other scholars have also thought of Morocco and South Africa as comparable, despite the fact that they are so geographically and politically disparate. For example, in *Living Out Islam* Scott Kugle documents a series of interviews with gay, lesbian and transgender Muslim activists – including South African and Moroccan subjects – that reclaim Islam in various ways to reconcile their faith and their nonnormative gender and/or sexuality. Of course, Morocco is historically a French colony and a predominantly Muslim country, while South Africa is a former British colony and is largely Christian, with a much smaller number of Muslim citizens, making them very different spaces. Yet there are interesting ways in which they are similar. In many ways, both of these countries are often seen as “less African” than other African states. This characterisation is true of Morocco because of its geographic position in the Maghreb, adjacent to Europe, and because it contains within its borders two Spanish autonomous cities, Melilla and Ceuta. The presence of these two quasi, extra-judicial spaces especially codes Morocco as “more European” than the rest of the African continent, even as this notion is a fiction. South Africa, similarly, is often considered or spoken about as an exceptional state because apartheid appears as an anomaly on the continent, for one, and because of the peaceful transition to democracy and the progressiveness of the post-apartheid Constitution. However, as Mamdani argues, it ‘is precisely because the South African experience is so different that it dramatically underlines what is common about the African colonial experience’ (31).

This discourse of exceptionalism that serves as one foundation for my archive, significantly, has a temporal dimension since these two geographical locations are not in the “right” historical frame. In other words, their exceptionalism places them somehow out of sync with the rest of Africa. Notably, the implication of a discourse of exceptionalism casts these spaces as supposedly “ahead” in time. By investing in the act of going backwards through their investment in different forms of youth temporality, the texts in my archive offer a counter-discourse to this particular form of exceptionalism through reversing, extending, or disrupting linear time, thus articulating the political possibilities of certain forms of queerness in African contexts. Moreover, these texts reveal these possibilities through their engagement with different forms of queer group and/or public sex as forms of self-stylized African subjectivity, following Achille Mbembe’s argument, defined by experiments in improvisational style, rather than in models of stable citizenship based on the nation (“African Modes” 272-3). These elements of the texts queer them in yet another way.

The novels I have chosen also invoke and work within the major generic templates of the novel form: the Bildungsroman and Künstlerroman. Both Taïa and Duiker’s novels fall into the former category, as they trace the development of individual protagonist, while Jamal’s novel is a Künstlerroman that tracks the development of its artist-protagonist, Adrian Stoker. All three novels, in other words, are invested in tracking a kind of youth to adulthood movement, whether of its individual protagonists or of an artist who finds his own form of self-development through art. However, the investment of these texts in different forms of youth temporality simultaneously disrupts the traditionally linear development of these coming-of-age genres. By twisting the literary conventions of the Bildungsroman and the Künstlerroman for their own purposes as part of their self-writing projects, these novels infuse the genres with a uniquely African content that queer the genres themselves. As a result, these texts also contribute to the process of decolonisation in queer ways by appropriating the conventions of traditionally Eurocentric generic forms of the novel, only to dismantle them to frame their own post-colonial politics.

Thus, one primary objective in this thesis is to show how these African texts employ queerness to unsettle the kinds of normative temporality that casts progress as simple forward progression, or what José Esteban Muñoz terms “straight time” in *Cruising Utopia* (22). Muñoz explains that this ‘autonaturalizing temporality [...] tells us that the ‘only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality’ (Ibid). Conventional understandings of time, in other words, are dictated by *normativity*, which presents as a linear or straight temporality that organises heteronormativity and fashions straight space. Instead, Muñoz argues that queerness ‘is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility of another world’ (Ibid 1). Time in the novels I examine is thus twisted in sideways directions that cannot be accounted for within the paradigm of “straight time”. These novels therefore construct a particular form of “queer time” that develops ‘in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction’ (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 1). Queer time, Halberstam argues, ‘squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand’ that can be located in subcultural lives that take



advantage of ‘an “epistemology of youth” that disrupts conventional accounts of youth culture, adulthood, and maturity’ (Ibid 2). Thus, Halberstam’s notion of queer time connects with moments of underground belonging through group/public sex in my own archive.

Public/groups sex appears, in the novels I examine, to outline a queer utopian horizon, revealing especially an “entanglement” between queerness and postcoloniality that can create queerworlds. Mbembe argues that ‘[as] an age, the postcolony encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another: an *entanglement*’ (*Postcolony* 14). He also argues that ‘there is a close relationship between subjectivity and temporality – that in some way, one can envisage subjectivity itself as temporality’ (Ibid).<sup>2</sup> This assertion is especially important in my thesis, where I consider queer subjectivity and youth temporality as tightly bound. The ‘discontinuities, reversals, inertias and swings’ of postcolonial time can thus be mapped onto Muñoz’s ‘queer utopian hermeneutic [that] wishes to interrupt the linear temporal ordering of past, present, and future’ (194). In other words, there is already an *entanglement* between the postcolony and queerness on the level of temporality. This entanglement, in part, is what I hope to flesh out in the works of Taïa, Jamal and Duiker.

The meaning of “queer” in this dissertation, therefore, is not limited to its use as umbrella term for gender and sexual minorities. To condense “queerness” to this narrow definition, I contend, is to miss the radical potential and politics of queerness itself. As Stella Nyanzi argues, there is a need to think ‘beyond the loaded westernized frame of the LGBTI acronym’ because ‘[t]o queer “Queer Africa”, one must simultaneously reclaim Africa in its bold diversities and reinsert queerness’ (66-68). Thus, I am less interested in “queer”, to borrow from Mel Y. Chen, ‘as a name that designates an identity or group’ and more interested in its use as ‘an analytic and method’ (58). I am interested in ‘forms of desirous embodied being’, as Carolyn Dinshaw contends, ‘that are out of sync with the ordinarily linear measurements of everyday life, that engage heterogenous temporalities or that precipitate out of time altogether’ (4). These ‘forms of being’, Dinshaw argues, ‘are queer by virtue of their particular engagements with time’ (Ibid).

My use of “queer” thus aligns with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s contention that the term can be twisted further ‘outwards along dimensions’ that cannot be ‘subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses’ (8). Sedgwick famously defines queer as ‘the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning’ (Ibid). As Chen argues more recently in the same vein, ‘queer animates too much, exacerbates rather than contains

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<sup>2</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty also notes that ‘[i]deas, old and new, about discontinuities, ruptures, and shifts in the historical process have from time to time challenged the dominance of historicism, but much written history still remains deeply historicist’ (23). In other words, attempts to disrupt the linear coherence of history ‘still takes its objects of investigation to be internally unified, and sees it as something developing over time’ (Ibid). This ‘passage of time that is constitutive of both the narrative and the concept of development’ is, Chakrabarty argues, ‘the secular, empty, and homogenous time of history’ (Ibid). Instead, Chakrabarty advocates for holding ‘the gap [...] that signals an irreducible plurality in our own experience of historicity’, an argument that similarly links subjectivity and temporality (Ibid 108). These ‘complicated time-knots of past and present’, Dinshaw argues in her own reading of Chakrabarty, ‘places [one] in the heterogeneity of the present and sensitizes [one] to its other times’, an effort I show is taken up in different ways by the texts in my archive (104).

frissons, soars beyond its bounds' (67). Puar also contends that '[q]ueerness irreverently challenges a linear mode of conduction and transmission' (xv), reiterating the nonlinear temporality made possible by "queer". For her, much like Chen, 'there is no exact recipe for a queer endeavour, no a priori system that taxonomizes the linkages, disruptions, and contradictions into a tidy vessel' (xv).

As a result, "queer" is not purely a noun but also a verb, a linguistic symbol with 'a history of meaning: to quiz or ridicule, to puzzle' (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 130). In this linguistic mode, the verb "queer" does the work of "quizzing" historical conventions, including the fluidity of its own meaning. Matebeni and Misibi note these productive linguistic overlaps when they contend that 'language is often instrumentalised as a tool for ridiculing and denigrating queer subjectivities', yet language 'opens up such opportunities [in the] ways in which people name themselves and their relationships' (4-6). Additionally, as Chen explains, '*verbs* are defined as processes, that is, they are structured on some *time* relation' and 'since things are dynamic: change is inherent to a verb' (71). The verb form of "queer", because it exists as a 'time relation', therefore exemplifies the kind of temporal 'dynamic' I try to flesh out in this thesis.

In particular, I am interested in how this archive of African queer literature appeal to this time relation made possible by "queer" to reanimate debates that have been side-lined, if not displaced, by an overly pragmatic turn in queer theory, which 'has dominated sexuality studies' since 'the post-civil rights era' in the Global North (Puar xiv). There has been a trend in queer theory, initiated by Jasbir Puar's work on homonationalism, critiquing this political turn in queer theory. Puar sums up this pragmatism as 'a fatigued debate about the advances and merits of civil legitimization – legalization of sodomy, gay marriage, and gay adoption' (Ibid xiv). In her critique, Puar argues that, in fact, 'homosexual desires' and their reorientation towards these forms of queerness that are acceptable to the nation – monogamous family units endorsed by marriage, for example – 'are foundational to the project of nationalism, as is the strict policing of the homo-hetero binary' (Ibid 49). Thus, she argues, 'nations are heteronormative because of, rather than despite, homosexuality' (Ibid). To put it succinctly, homonationalism, the folding into the nation of certain forms of queer identity, is therefore a normative project. Queerness, in this sense 'operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects' (Ibid 2). This folding-into-the nation of queer subjects, however, should be understood as 'a biopolitical project' and hence a normalising into nationhood that produces a set of discriminations (Ibid 22). For Puar, the 'emergence and sanctioning of queer subjecthood is a historical shift condoned only through a parallel process of demarcation from populations targeted for segregation, disposal, or death, a reintensification of racialization through queerness' (Ibid xii). Indeed, she argues that '[h]omonormativity can be read as a formation complicit with and invited into the biopolitical valorization of life in its inhabitation and reproduction of heteronormative norms' (Ibid 9). This counter-strand of queer theory has led me to consider how these Moroccan and South African novels and their focus on the ethics of group sex, and the meaning of democratic sexual citizenship, can be productive

for exactly the kinds of alternative projects proposed by theorists like Puar, which will move us beyond homonormative pragmatism.

Muñoz suggests that one way to overcome the stifling pragmatism of contemporary queer politics, and perhaps we can add postcolonial politics too, is to take a ‘posterior glance at different moments, objects, and spaces [that] might offer us an anticipatory illumination of queerness’ (Ibid). In doing so, in stepping back to look forward, and in imagining future queer utopias, the texts I have chosen illuminate an alternative to the pragmatic preoccupation with the political present that dominates much contemporary African scholarship on sexuality as well. This search for queer utopias – each of which are individual rather than monolithic – also disorientates the impulse to calcify diverse African sexualities in historically contingent categories of identity, advocating instead for forms of being/becoming that resist neat categorisation. These particular African texts articulate the possibility of stepping outside of the normative, of bending and twisting time, in such ways as to produce entirely novel ways of conceiving of normative conventions and categories – of gender, sexuality and especially temporality – effectively queering the schemes of intelligibility that construct temporality while creating new spaces for queer existence, or queer utopias. In this way, queer figures in African literatures speak back to queer and postcolonial theory, developing and extending its theorising of time and politics.

One of the ways that these texts formulate new ways to think about time is in their investment in moments of group and/or public sex, which I argue constitutes a mode of undercommons belonging. In *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013), Moten and Harney unravel the idea of the undercommons as an organic collectivity at the margins of academia, although it is a notion that can be extended and applied to all who occupy the margins of society more broadly. ‘Undercommons’ as a critical term describes the radical and utopian possibility of community formations outside of social norms; it is the potential for alliances amongst outsiders of various stripes. As Halberstam describes in the introduction to their book, the undercommons can be ‘black people, indigenous peoples, queers and poor people (“Wild Beyond” 6). It includes those who ‘cannot be satisfied with the recognition and acknowledgement generated by the very system that denies a) that anything was ever broken and b) that we deserved to be the broken part’ (Ibid). The undercommons is thus a ‘call to dis-order and this disorder or wildness shows up in many places’ (Ibid 7). Hence, the undercommons articulates a certain desire ‘to take apart, dismantle, tear down the structure that, right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its walls’ (Ibid 6). Inherent in the desire to ‘rely on the undercommons for protection’, Moten and Harney argue, is a kind of ‘fugitive impulse’ (40). The undercommons itself can thus be thought of as a ‘fugitive community’ (Ibid) that for Halberstam is ‘mostly about reaching out to find connection; they are about making common cause with the brokenness of being’ (“Wild Beyond” 5). This notion of the undercommons aligns well with the intention of queer theory and activism, and certain forms of feminism, that attempt to ‘dismantle’ the binarisms of heteropatriarchy, to ‘take apart’ the ways that heteronormativity structure our lives and living. Thus, queer theory can be one of the “wild places” where the undercommons shows up. Moten and Harney are also insistent that, rather than define the undercommons as belonging to the university

alone, ‘the concepts are ways to develop a mode of living together, a mode of being together that cannot be shared as a model but as an instance’ (105). For Moten and Harney, therefore, it is more important that the concept be ‘put in play’ in different circumstances and for different ideas and outcomes (Ibid 106).

While he does not directly attribute the idea to Moten and Harney’s undercommons, Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi’s idea of the ‘sexual commons’ is arguably derived from their theorising. Osinubi explains that ‘African queer representations [...] in African literature and film engage in a restorative project’ and that their politics

reimagine an African sexual commons I define as the presumed normativities and exclusions that underpin accounts of what constitutes proper sexuality in civic and private life and that have been posited as foundational in various acts of collective African self-writing. Although the notion of a commons is not traditionally invoked in relation to sex, it is now time to speak of a *sexual commons* composed of the corporeal practices, affects, emotions, propensities, and key symbols of social imaginaries that together constitute the diverse fields of sexuality across Africa. The stipulated arrangement of the commons determines our respective individual performances in that field. This notion of a sexual commons provides a useful rubric for [...] African queer representations because it positions the putatively normative and nonnormative together and *emphasizes their co-implications*. Emerging queer representations renovate our senses of the sexual commons (Osinubi viii, emphasis mine).

I find this idea of the ‘sexual commons’ useful – even as I complicate it – both in terms of the narratives I examine as well as the theoretical framework that underpins my study because it implicitly sexualises the *undercommons*. Hence, I draw from queer and feminist theory generated on the African continent as well as further afield as I consider the ‘co-implications’ of the ‘putatively normative and nonnormative’ from a Southern African perspective, as well as the co-implications of African and non-African queer and feminist theories. At the same time, I contend that Osinubi’s sexual commons under-theorises the outlier position of queerness within this African sexual commons. As I have already argued, queerness in the African context is marked by a certain at-oddness with the “nation”, which in fact composes the “commons”, and thus cannot be as easily reconciled as Osinubi seems to imply. Queerness, instead, occupies a kind of “fugitive” position in this context; thus I want to suggest that the queer modes of belonging and community that I interrogate can be thought of as a kind of sexual *undercommons*.

Specifically, I argue that the texts I examine themselves ‘put in play’ this idea of the sexual *undercommons* through their invocation of “fugitive communities” formed in instances of public and/or group sex (Moten & Harney 40). The impermanence and often covert nature of these moments, along with their disruption of the ‘putatively normative’, highlight their ‘fugitive impulse’ (Osinubi viii; Moten & Harney 40). These moments are themselves “instances rather than models” that stage a particular kind of ‘reaching out to find connection’ (Halberstam, “Wild Beyond” 5). Therefore, this sexual *undercommons* formed in moments of group sex instantiates, even temporarily, a kind of sexual democracy through which its participants try to imagine actual lived sexual citizenship in different degrees and formations. These instances thus forward a social poesis and ‘what could be an ethics of sexual behaviour’ aligned with that proposed by Michel Foucault:

It would be [an ethics] that would not be dominated by the problem of the deep truth of the reality of our sex life. The relationship that I think we need to have with ourselves when we have sex is an ethics of pleasure, of intensification of pleasure (Foucault, “Interview by Stephen Riggins”, 131).

In essence, Foucault’s ethics of sexual behaviour underscores a return to the material body (‘pleasure’) and a turn away from problems of truth (‘the deep truth of the reality of our sex lives’) and the particular problem of truth and its relationship to identity. In this sense, Foucault argues that pleasure has the potential to act as an equaliser between bodies in a way that identity and truthfulness cannot and never will, and that an ethics of pleasure would also be an ethics of sexual democracy. This is the nexus at which Foucault’s ethics of pleasure and the sexual undercommons meet: reordering and placing pleasure at the centre of debates about ‘actual, living sexual citizenship’ (Muñoz 35). This form of living sexual citizenship is also the connexion that Taïa, Jamal and Duiker’s texts dissect to discover the virtues, pitfalls, and potential utopic promises of these queer subcultures formed in moments of group/public sex.

For all the focus on the future and utopianism in this strand of queer theory, critics like Sharon Patricia Holland remind us that we cannot leave the past unresolved. Holland’s book *The Erotic Life of Racism* (2012) attempts to unpack exactly the kind of co-implications – between critical race theory, black feminism and queer theory – that Osinubi signals in his notion of the sexual commons. Locating her argument at the nexus of critical race theory and queer theory, Holland contends that, in the ‘desire ‘to move beyond, to get over, race is its reliance upon a future in which we will become, at least discursively, productive’ (17). This desire, she contends, requires a certain leaving behind of history without investigating or resolving the psychic life of this history (Ibid 58). Instead, she calls for a re-prioritisation of the black/white binary, insisting that this would reinvigorate unresolved debates about race, slavery, sexuality and their complicities. She contends that this reemphasis of the black/white binary does not signal a ‘return’ to these historical scenes but ‘rather [...] a more thoroughgoing and therefore intellectually challenging way of seeing ourselves – past, present, *and* future (Ibid 31). Addressing in particular the ‘sex wars’ of the 1980s, which revolved predominantly around the perceived clash between the practice of sadomasochism (BDSM)<sup>3</sup> and the anti-pornography movement within feminism, Holland notes that

[i]n essence, the debate about “sexuality” and black and colored bodies in feminist studies has yet to be concluded. Thinking through the very problem of s&m (in black and white) in the transition from one disciplinary home to another, points to a possible wrinkle in the ongoing queer theory project [...] In many ways, mainstream queer theory wants to leave history behind. I want to emphasize here that such desire is and can be fruitful, as the erotic scene can now move unencumbered by history’s power play. What I want to argue with is the extent to which such a leave-taking does little to unpack the purposefulness of the black/white interaction in this *historical* scene. This purposefulness is one that marks our unwillingness to grapple with the binary, our adept reiteration of queer history’s real

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<sup>3</sup> This acronym acts as a placeholder for a range of sexual practices that can be categorised as Bondage, Discipline, Sadism and Masochism, or any combination of these categories. Its practitioners include people of all sexual orientations and gender expressions. In BDSM communities, relationships and sexual encounters are guided by the principles of “safe, sane and consensual” (Newmahr 147).

trajectory, and our assignation of some histories to certain bodies (Ibid 58-59, original emphasis).

While Holland's critique is directed at Western and American queer theory specifically, her contention that these debates about the intersections between power and pleasure remain unresolved is particularly useful to my study since they intersect with other debates about sexual subcultures. In her book *Deviations* (2011), Gayle Rubin, who played a significant role in the 1980s sex wars, contends that some of the ideas collected in her book are dated and, yet, 'seem contemporary, and occasionally eerily prescient. We are still enmeshed in conflicts that have roots in the late 1970s and early 1980s' (29). At the same time that these debates around BDSM culture and pornography were raging, debates about bathhouses, cruising and other forms of public sex also abounded but – in the wake of the AIDS crisis and the turn towards politics of pragmatism – were never truly resolved. These incomplete strands in queer theory constitute the 'wrinkle in the ongoing queer theory project' and, as Holland contends, requires of us to step back and re-examine in order to determine other trajectories of queer theory.

It is thus significant that Taïa, Jamal and Duiker's novels engage these "forgotten" issues. In other words, these African texts are actively engaging a debate that the West should be having, but is not yet having. The literature in this African archive can, and needs to, unsettle queer theory that emanates mostly from the global North. As Warner contends, '[o]ne reason we have not learned more from [...] history is that queers do not have the institutions for *common memory* and *generational transmission* around which straight culture is built' (51, emphasis mine). This lack of historical consistency is particularly applicable in the African context since queer politics in these zones are still working towards building a sense of 'common memory' on the one hand, while contending with the 'generational transmission' from the West on the other. Whereas 'the most painfully instructed generation [in the U.S.] has been decimated by death' (Ibid 52), queer movements in contexts such as Morocco and other African nations are still battling for survival and recognition. Although South Africa seems like an exception to this norm, I have already argued that it is not and Duiker's text especially complicates this exceptionalism. Significantly, Warner shows that '[e]very new wave of queer youth picks up something from its predecessors but also invents itself from scratch' (Ibid 51-52). Thus, these authors' reclamation of unresolved debates about the ethics, virtues, and dangers of queer sexual subcultures, especially in group sex, signals this picking up from history, but in order to invent queerness in the African context anew. This going backwards, I must stress, does not mean that these texts are indicating that postcolonial spaces like Africa are behind the curve. Rather, they underline that, in the rush towards something that resembles "progress", something was *lost*. Moreover, the return to the past to recover this something is not only a political act, but one that can itself be thought of as a form of pleasure and future-making.

This connection between this act/art of recovery and pleasure is highlighted in Abdellah Taïa's novel, *An Arab Melancholia* (2008). The novel's genre of autobiography-cum-fiction, which is the same genre as Taïa's *Salvation Army* (2006), itself necessitates such a stepping back in time, a recovery of the past through memory in order to gain a capacity to shape the future. In the opening of *An Arab Melancholia*, Taïa explicitly draws attention to this motion through time. The first part of the novel is titled

“I Remember”, and thus takes the reader on this backward movement with the narrator, who is also named Abdellah Taïa:

I had passed on. Then I came back... I don't remember everything. To tell you the truth, I don't remember anything now. But it will come back to me. I know it will. I see words, I hear voices. I see this image... It's blurred. Eventually it will become clear. I'm waiting. I don't write anymore. I'm on my little bed. I'm trying to fill up the pages in my private journal. A future book. I'm concentrating. I'm forcing myself to go back to that moment, that racing off. That chase. I'm not breathing anymore. I close my eyes. I concentrate more. I curl up and try to distinguish those voices from another world that come to me with such racket, and then suddenly, stop, I go limp... It's starting to come back to me, back into my head, back into my memory, back into my body. Into my fingers. I can feel it, I can feel it. It's coming back, it's coming. I am happy. I am excited. My heart is thrilled. My skin loses its tension. I raise my head. I open one eye and look at what is coming down. It's me. A young me. A teenager back in the '80s. A large backpack pressed against my stomach, I move through time, seconds, minutes, at full speed (Taïa, *Arab Melancholia* 9-10).

In this extended narration on the processes of memory, there is a constant oscillation between the present moment of writing and a return to the past, as well as a return of the past to this moment. Significantly, Taïa's narration locates memory as something that is *in his body*, and the language fittingly has an orgasmic quality: short, bursting sentences that race and gather momentum. These bursting sentences culminate with the repetition of the phrases, ‘I can feel it, I can feel it. It's coming back, it's coming’, and registers as a moment that is ‘happy’, ‘excited’, ‘thrilled’, after which his ‘skin loses its tension’ and he looks ‘at what is coming down’ (Ibid). The narration thus replicates the processes of physical arousal, a gathering and building up of sensations that end in the euphoria and explosion of orgasm, of “c[u]ming” (Ibid). At the moment of climax, it is thus the memory that comes back, or comes down, indicating that pleasure acts as a kind of portal that allows the narrator to ‘move through time’, simultaneously offering us a hint of what a life of pleasure might mean, a type of going back in order to progress. This stylistic feature of the short, staccato sentences that capture the motions of memory – an eruption of short sentences – affirms the political potential of pleasure that Taïa hints at: pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure, has the potential to both amplify and elide difference – racial, sexual, gender, etc. – without denying that it exists. Thus, pleasure through memory can act as the basis of collectivity. Memory, for Taïa's narrators, is intimately tied to the body, and offers a sideways glimpse at the kind of pleasure politics that could constitute a queer utopia<sup>4</sup>. Importantly, the narrator of *An Arab Melancholia* also moves forward in time, indicating that his childhood journal will become a ‘future book’, perhaps the one I am quoting from here. This deliberate linking of the pleasure of reading to the pleasure of writing, the pleasure of memory, and the pleasure of sex is also the core focus of this dissertation.

In Chapter One, “Queer Prolepsis: Youth and Queer Praxis in the fiction of Abdellah Taïa”, I focus particularly on this Moroccan writer's earlier novel, *Salvation Army* (2006). I consider how it

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<sup>4</sup> This reliance on memory can thus be related to Muñoz's notion of ‘*queer utopian memory*’, which is ‘most certainly constructed and, more importantly, always political’ (35). The text itself therefore becomes an aesthetic remembrance, ‘a ritualized telling [...] having world-making potentialities’ (Ibid). As Muñoz further suggests, ‘these queer memories of utopia and the longing that structures them, especially as they are embodied in work [of] public sex mimic cultural production, help us carve out a space for actual, living sexual citizenship’ (Ibid), a point that is central to my discussion of Taïa's other novel, *Salvation Army*, as well as Jamal's *Love Themes for the Wilderness* and Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*.

employs the trope of group sex to stage a de-nationalised form of post-colonial politics. Here, group sex metaphorically redistributes the nodes of pleasure across physical bodies, and away from the genitals alone, so that it becomes a flatter network with various nodes of pleasure, effectively democratising this sensation. At the same time as instances of group sex on a train in the Spanish landscape and in a Swiss men's room dissolve the borders between bodies, they also dissolve the artificial borders of nation-states. In the process, queerness is revealed as a particular form of anti-normativity that is not, and likely never will be, part of the nation-state. Importantly, connected to Taïa's investment in excavating his own past, I argue, is an insistence that there is a need to return to debates about radical relational models, including group/public sex and BDSM culture. Taïa's work returns us to these debates that were such a critical part of the infancy of queer theory of the Global North but were discarded for more "normalising projects" of marriage equality and entrance into the military. The novel suggests that queer theory needs to go back in order to catch up to the kind of speculation done in queer African literature about the radical potential of such alternative relational models found in group sex.

Chapter Two, "Procrastination and Protraction: Extended Youth and Queer Transitions in Ashraf Jamal's *Love Themes for the Wilderness* (1996)", invokes the temporal category of "extended youth" to think through identity formation in the freshly post-apartheid moment of Jamal's novel. In this chapter, I consider how different arrangements of group and/or public sex form part of this temporal category and allow the inhabitants of this fictionalised Cape Town to imagine new forms of sexual democracy, thereby queering the time of transition itself. I pay particular attention to the novel's attempt to dissolve the couple-form that the nation-state relies on to renew its prominence. I also argue that Jamal's use of the term "queer", as something infinitely more complex and ephemeral than simply an umbrella term for gender and sexual minorities, is ahead of its time and opens a range of queer utopic possibilities. In this novel, fun, art and politics are entangled. The goal is just as much to build a queer nation within the "new" South Africa as it is about disrupting or queering the project of nation building itself and finding new ways of doing politics in unfamiliar territory. The novel's major failing, I suggest, is its erasure of the real effects that race and racism will continue to have in post-apartheid South Africa.

In my third and final chapter, "Regression, Reversal and Queer Connection: Imposed Youth and Metaphysical Sexual Communion in K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001)", I draw on a third notion of youth temporality: imposed youth. Unlike the youth and extended youth of Taïa and Jamal's novels that bolster agency for those who choose to take advantage of it, imposed youth denotes a stripping of agency. I show that this phase of youth temporality is most obvious in Tshepo, the protagonist, during a stay at Valkenberg mental hospital where his existence is regimented, and is later extended to poor, township dwelling South Africans as a product of racist capitalism. Tshepo finds a form of sexual healing when he joins the brotherhood of Steamy Windows as a male masseuse and sex worker. However, Duiker's novel complicates the utopic impulse found in Jamal's novel, revealing group sex's entanglement with enduring forms of racism, and as precarious when co-opted by labour capitalism in the aftermath of apartheid. The utopic ideals of the brotherhood, I show, are undermined by an inability to account for internal racism, revealing the brutality of racist capitalism. As a remedy,



Duiker offers other forms of implied group sex that are both physical and metaphysical, thus transcending the bounds and reach of the nation-state. The queer politics of this novel, I argue, is not in its embrace of sex work but in its portrayal of fertile and dynamic queer utopias outside of the sane and outside of the restrictions of straight time.

My chief exploration in this dissertation is the modes in which I consider group and/or public sex to be forms of undercommons solidarity that generate new ways of thinking about post-colonial futurity. This ‘collective potentiality’, to quote from Muñoz, is the ethical purchase of group sex as it is articulated in my archive (189). I conclude by exploring this idea further, along with a reflection on the androcentric visions forwarded in both Taïa and Duiker’s sexual undercommons as potential limit to their utopianisms. It is in this imperfection of their queer utopic visions that we see that ‘we are not yet queer’ (Muñoz 1). Still, what this archive demonstrates is that ‘queerness is not yet here but it approaches like a crashing wave of potentiality’ (Muñoz 185). ‘That wave’, Judith Butler argues, ‘figures feeling, the prospect of feeling under conditions where feeling has been mutilated within and by the heteronormative world (“Solidarity/Susceptibility” 13). She explains that ‘Muñoz tells us that sometimes we actively have to find the utopian, but at other times it comes at us, undeniable [...] It can carry us, but not alone; we must be willing to give way with others’ (Ibid). This willingness to give way with others, to feel the wave, ‘is ecstasy, which is precisely a form of standing outside oneself that is also standing with another, and so makes unanswerable the question of whose ecstasy this is’ (Ibid). I show that this wave of feeling, of unanswerable ecstasy, with others found in instances of group/public sex embodies a queer potentiality – one that finds us and that we can carry with us.

# CHAPTER ONE

## **Queer Prolepsis: Youth & Queer Praxis in Abdellah Taïa's *Salvation Army* (2006)**

In late September 2017, seven Egyptians were arrested on charges of “promoting homosexuality” after waving an LGBTQ+ pride flag at a packed concert for controversial Lebanese alt-rock group Mashrou' Leila (Walsh 2017). While there are no laws against homosexuality in Egypt, crackdowns on gay and transgender people have intensified. Since 2013 with as many as 274 people having been persecuted ‘under loosely-worded laws that prohibit immorality and “habitual debauchery”’ (Ibid). Popular in the Middle East, Mashrou' Leila rose to fame during the Arab Spring, and is fronted by an openly gay Arab man from a Muslim family. Their music addresses many subjects that are largely taboo in mainstream Arab culture: sexuality, homophobia, and misogyny. The band's candour has seen them banned from Jordan twice, and their movement across the Arab world is restricted (Walsh). In this sense, the band and Moroccan author Abdellah Taïa have much in common: like Mashrou' Leila, Taïa is frank in his approach to issues of sexuality in his writing, including his own homosexuality, and state-sanctioned homophobia in his homeland. But while Mashrou' Leila continues to perform periodically in Morocco, Taïa lives in exile in France. As one of the most prominent Moroccans to come out publicly, Taïa cannot freely return to live in his country of origin without risking his own safety. The politics of the spaces so central to both Taïa's writing and Mashrou' Leila's music – North Africa, the Middle East, the Arab world more broadly – are not places where LGBTQ+ people are bargaining with their regimes about the terms of their inclusion in the state.

Rather, in the absence of the politics of pragmatism and the preoccupation with fitting into the state-model so prominent in queer politics of the global North, which I discuss in my introduction, these artists and their work reveal queerness as a specific form of antinormativity, one that is not and is not likely to be part of the nation-state any time soon. In this sense, Abdellah Taïa's work, and *Salvation Army* (2006) in particular, offers an opportunity to return to older debates in queer and feminist theory centred on alternative relational models, including group/public sex and BDSM culture, that have been abandoned for more “normalising projects” in the West. These older debates have been pushed to the margins of theory currently, where they have largely disappeared, but, I contend, they are reappearing in the works of authors such as Abdellah Taïa. My chief position in this chapter, which engages with Sharon Patricia Holland's argument in her book *The Erotic Life of Racism* (2012), is that literature, and Taïa's in particular, returns us to these debates in order to look beyond the model of queerness *within* the nation-state, towards a *de-nationalised* form of politics, which includes but is not limited to queerness. This denationalized form of politics is the work that this literature is doing and theory, especially queer theory, needs to catch up to such literary speculations. The particular kind of post-colonial politics staged in this literature actively collapses the discourses of modernity and colonialism that constructs “progress” as forward motion, instead insisting that a politics that goes backward to unearth the past

does not equate a backwards politics. I propose that African queer literature especially can enable this (re)turn.

In tracing how young bodies in Taïa's *Salvation Army* (2006) traverse, accelerate, and defy the logic of normative, linear time, this chapter examines moments of queer prefiguring across time and space. I show that Taïa's text and his protagonist (also named Abdellah Taïa) manipulate time by drawing from the past to imagine a future. In *Cruising Utopia* (2005) José Esteban Muñoz argues that queerness exists as an ideal that can be extracted from the past to envision a future utopia. He contends that the utopian is marked by the quotidian, but that 'the utopian impulse is something extra to the everyday transaction of heteronormative capitalism' (22). This "extra", he argues, 'can be glimpsed in utopian bonds, affiliations, designs, and gestures' (22-23). Examples of these utopian bonds are found in descriptions of public sex, on a train and in a men's room, in *Salvation Army*. These instances are the result of quotidian activities (bodily functions, social circumstances, travel arrangements) yet they result in interactions that are ancillary to the 'the everyday' of heteronormativity. These bonds are also relayed through autobiography-cum-fiction's mode of memory, thus acting as an anticipation of what queer utopias *could be* since memory can be continually recalled, continually revised for uses in the present and future. As Muñoz suggests, 'these queer memories of utopia and the longing that structures them [...] help us carve out a space for actual, living sexual citizenship' (35). Thus, time itself and the act of stepping outside of straight time can be political events that form pockets of queer utopias within nations.

This concept of memory, particularly queer utopian memory, is salient in the context of both Taïa's *Salvation Army*, the primary focus of my analysis, and his later novel *An Arab Melancholia* since it is connected to the idea of queer *prolepsis*, or the narrative device of foreshadowing. Taïa connects this foreshadowing to the family as an institution in which queerness emerges. Moreover, the trope of public sex plays a significant role since its representation of utopian bonds prefigure the kind of queerness that, in Muñoz's contention, could shape actual, living sexual citizenship *beyond* narrative time. Simultaneously, Taïa's novels – and particularly *Salvation Army* – reveal the limitations of such utopian imaginations in the present time of the novel. In order to understand these tensions between what could be and what is, I draw on the notion outlined in my introduction of the undercommons and, specifically, the sexual undercommons that I contend is formed in these instances of public sex. I also explain why the figure of Michel Foucault appears as a spectre in *Salvation Army*, signalling the utopian possibilities of queer connections and its failures. In particular, I argue that Taïa borrows from the *roman à clef* form – a novel about real life with a façade of fiction – and that Foucault thus functions as the key to understanding the sexual politics that Taïa invests in. These sexual ethics are central to the organisation of Taïa's novel, which is grounded in a distinct "before" and "after" structure. The "before" in *Salvation Army* is organised around the family, which Foucault has argued and Taïa shows is a limiting and limited institution. The second part of the novel gestures towards the unfolding of an alternative queer life, what Foucault termed a "life of pleasure", where public/group sex functions as a metaphor for this life.

Importantly, it is in the potential of *de-nationalising* politics found in queer group sex that Taïa's own post-colonial politics develop. Drawing on Foucault, and in some sense correcting Foucault's

narrow focus on a small collection of European countries, Taïa attempts to break down the sovereign logic of sex, which implicitly contains an anti-nation state model of socio-sexual relations. Taïa is ‘not defensive of Arab sexual repression’, Georgis explains, ‘but neither does [he] position Western gay culture as the harbinger of freedom’ (57). Thus, the embedded critique in Taïa’s literature and politics is that Morocco as a nation-state is not, and might never be, useful for the queer subject but nor will the European model be useful. Instead, the queer subject will be on trains – in motion, criss-crossing borders and metaphorically dissolving them – and in sexual undergrounds where people connect in the sexual undercommons, in mobile collectives rather than hierarchies of state versus subject. Dissolving these physical borders dissolves not only the borders between bodies, but also the artificial borders put in place by the projects of colonialism.

Taïa’s dissolution of borders is also an attempt at overcoming the bifurcation of the state produced by systems of Indirect Rule under colonialism in African spaces. Mamdani argues that colonial rule in Africa produced a bifurcated state founded on indirect rule in the rural and direct rule in urban areas, ‘inhabited by subjects on the one side and citizens on the other’ (61). This ‘division between the citizen and the subject, the non-native and the native, was characteristic of all colonial situations’ (Ibid 48). However, “decentralised despotism” of customary law in rural areas and the ‘closeting of the subject populace in a series of separate containers’, was distinct to African colonialism (Ibid). In the case of ‘the Sherifan state of Morocco, where the social base of colonial rule was a landed class’, Mamdani argues, French ‘indirect rule was introduced alongside customary tenure in land’ (Ibid 142). Centralised despotism in urban areas, on the other hand, constructed civil society and citizens. Decolonial struggles attempted to eradicate decentralised despotism in favour of centralised rule, but the kind of nationalisms that emerged out of this struggle could not shake this social and political bifurcation. The result is what Mamdani calls ‘deracialization without democratization’ (Ibid 32, 288). In part this is because, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, ‘[c]oncepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, [...] the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty [...] all bear the burden of European thought and history’ (4). In placing his queer subjects on trains, Taïa offers what is also a kind of “container” but one that is motion and thus not specifically *located*, and no longer bound by this bifurcation between citizen and subject. For him, democratisation is connected to the kind of pleasure he finds in moments of group sex, which is radically different to the statist model. This revisioning of belonging through pleasure can be thought of as a form of Mbembe’s “self-stylized African conduct”, demarcated by experiments in style, rather than subjecthood and nationhood (“African Modes 272).

In its thinking through the problem of the nation, Taïa’s work can be situated within a tradition of ‘Maghrebian Francophone literature’, which Jarrod Hayes explains in *Queer Nations* dates back to the ‘eve of the various [anticolonial] struggles in the early 1950s’ (2). These literatures, he explains, ‘began to articulate a national identity, [and to] distinguish itself from the literary conventions of metropolitan France (and Europe)’ (Ibid). Moreover, ‘[i]n literary discourses at least, Algerian as well as Moroccan and Tunisian writers have envisioned [the Nation] as an inclusive space’ wherein ‘sexuality – especially

marginal sexualities, “sexual dissidence,” and gender insubordination – plays an important role in articulating national identity’ (Ibid 1). Traditionally, then, Maghrebian writing post-1950s and post-independence has been about imagining the nation-state where ‘nationalist narratives [...] often also attempt to affirm patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality as inseparable from national identity’ (Ibid 16). Taïa, however, is of a different generation of Maghrebian authors who ‘challenge sexual taboos [and] sexual normativity’ (Ibid). In this sense, Taïa’s work can be classified as the kind of ‘combat literature [that] confronts the literary with other discourses (such as official proclamations, the media, and political, academic, and religious texts) in dialogical encounters,’ and which Hayes argues is a ‘potential within all Maghrebian literatures’ (Ibid 2). ‘Within this discursive field,’ Taïa’s work specifically offers ‘the revelation of sexualities that should remain secret [and] contradicts the official discourses of nationality that deny the existence of nonnormative sexualities’ (Ibid). However, rather than attempt to fit nonnormative sexualities into this national framework, Taïa is attuned to the fact that such incorporation may never be achieved in spaces like Morocco, and might not even be desirable precisely because it would domesticate the radical potentiality of queerness. Instead, he reserves queerness as antinormativity, offering a form of de-nationalised post-coloniality that is not bound by identity as viable alternative to models of nationhood.

To date, very little of the body of critical writing on Abdellah Taïa’s work focuses on *Salvation Army*, and no scholar has provided an analysis of the novel’s investment in group sex or the importance of Foucault as shadow presence in the text. Badin (2016) and Ncube (2014) both undertake comparative readings of Rancid O. and Taïa, discussing the dynamics of masculinity and the protagonist’s filtered desires for his older brother in *Salvation Army*<sup>5</sup>. I contend, on the other hand, that Taïa’s engagement with more provocative aspects of queer culture, including group sex, shapes the utopian and the sexual undercommons, and in the process panics the normative. In her analysis of the film adaptation of the novel, Georgis analyses Abdellah’s youthful discovery of sexuality, and the breakdown of ‘queer knowledge’ at multiple levels (56). However, perhaps because Georgis’s analysis is tethered so closely to the film adaptation, she also does not acknowledge the queer sexual epistemologies that Taïa’s invocation of public/group sex nods to and (re)shapes simultaneously. My analysis further departs from hers in my consideration of Abdellah’s exploration of his sexuality as a kind of queer prolepsis that drives the protagonist forward, towards a kind of queer utopia. Georgis recognises Taïa’s protagonist as a ‘young man who is unable to fully comply with the terms of either Eastern or Western epistemologies, and therefore struggles to fully belong in either cultural context’ (64). I contend instead that this protagonist attempts a form of ‘desubjection’ away from these distinctions altogether, to reinvent himself as neither the subject of these epistemologies nor these states. This reinvention, I argue, is the political and post-colonial potential of the queer praxis of group sex in *Salvation Army*.

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<sup>5</sup> Other critics consider the Taïa’s work, and particularly *An Arab Melancholia*, in relation to the formation and negotiation of a gay identity in Francophone literatures from the Maghreb. See Spurlin (2016), Ncube (2013) and Smith (2012).

### Structuring Queer Utopian Memory: Orientation via Disorientation

The narrative development of the protagonist/narrator (also Abdellah) in Taïa's *Salvation Army* is figured as a journey, a trope that fits both the Bildungsroman genre and the mode of autobiography. Significantly, the narrative in *Salvation Army* becomes organised around a childhood train trip to Tangiers when his older brother, Abdelkébir, takes his two younger brothers on their first vacation. This trip acts as a kind of turning point, creating a distinct “before” and “after” structure in the narrative. The “before” is centred on a childhood awakening of sexual knowledge through the parental figures and a sexuality contained within the family as an institution. The family, in this sense, should be seen as an institutionalised version of what Muñoz terms “straight time” (22). Muñoz explains that this ‘autonaturalizing temporality [...] tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life’ and the ‘only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality’ (Ibid). Taïa's novels locate childhood/adolescence in 1980s Morocco where non-normative and queer individuals were especially bound to restrictive socio-political conditions, as well as the strict heteronormativity of a predominantly Islamic religious context. Scott Kugle explains that ‘Islam as practiced in Morocco can easily lead to curtailed freedom, systematic discrimination, and bodily harm sanctioned by religion and perpetrated by the state’ (21).<sup>6</sup> The construct of “straight time”, therefore, is as much a product of strict Muslim heteronormativity as it is a tool of oppression in the Moroccan setting of these texts. The “before” structures of these narratives thus offer us some insight into the workings of this straight time, while simultaneously beginning to dissolve this through the narrator's reference to being ‘naked in a group’, a subtle hint at an afterlife that is organised differently and, in the case of *Salvation Army*, including a different kind of being naked in a group in the form of group/public sex.

The “after” structure of Taïa's *Salvation Army* narrative thus focuses on a dissolution of the family organisation as ideal, and a turning away from the family towards sex with those outside the family ambit. This move away from the family is also key to the text's play on the Bildungsroman genre: the “crisis” of formation, in this case, can simultaneously be described as the crisis of childhood sexuality (rather than adult sexuality), as well as a co-implicated crisis in heteronormativity. Instead, following a turning point in the narrative, Taïa's texts begin to offer some sense of the anticipatory queerness Muñoz suggests can emerge by looking towards the past. For the narrator of *An Arab Melancholia*, the turning point is an attempted group sexual assault, an intricate moment of simultaneous desire and repulsion. After narrowly escaping this ordeal, Abdellah is forced to veil his sexuality in secrecy: ‘My life took a whole new direction. Something new, something interior and secret [...] I was forced to take that route’ (Taïa, *Arab Melancholia* 32). This change of ‘direction’ prompts a recognition of sexual orientation as a spatial metaphor, as Sara Ahmed also argues in her book *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). Ahmed further

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that Kugle specifically refutes the claim that intolerance of homosexuality is intrinsic to Islam itself. Rather, he argues that it should be viewed in the context of its practice. He further qualifies that ‘many Moroccan homosexuals lead their lives without coming to violent harm in prisons, without being persecuted by family or the neighborhood, without being condemned by religion. But they do so under the cover of silence, always in fear of being exposed to the discourses of power: family honor, religious respectability, and state authority’ (Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam* 29).

contends that ‘understanding how we become orientated in moments of disorientation’, such as this moment in *An Arab Melancholia*, ‘that we might learn what it means to be orientated in the first place’ (6). Abdellah’s description of this realisation links this narrative to that of *Salvation Army*, where the turning point is figured as a movement through space on a train trip. This similar structure of orientation-via-disorientation is replicated in the “before” and “after” narrative structures of these texts, thus solidifying these texts as narratives of formation, specifically of queer formation, and locating them in the genre of the Bildungsroman. However, since the train trip in *Salvation Army* and the attempted sexual assault in *An Arab Melancholia* constitute formative moments that create a more nuanced understanding of sexual orientation, the crisis that typically sets the narrative of the Bildungsroman into motion is itself queered. Because the genre is traditionally centred on a character of youth and their journey to ideal adult maturity, which is socially read as the achievement of heterosexuality, Taïa’s narratives disrupt the conventions of the genre by undermining the heteronormative conventions and aims of the Bildungsroman.

### **“Before”: The Family as Zone of Transference in *Salvation Army***

The “before” structure of Taïa’s *Salvation Army* sets the scene of familial intimacy that becomes intricately linked to his own sexual awareness from an early age. Abdellah’s childhood fantasies, in other words, come to act as important moments of queer prolepsis that foreshadow his queer praxis as an adult, as well as the possibility of the queer utopia or life of pleasure it hints at. Through its highly developed awareness of the workings of heterosexual sex, the text begins to collapse the divisions between conscious and unconscious sexual fantasy, placing the very idea of childlike innocence under pressure. The mode of fantasy becomes an intricate narrative device foreshadowing later events in the novel, while also indicating the young narrator’s complex, albeit unformed, awareness of his own sexual orientation as different from available relational scripts. Abdellah confesses that his ‘dreams at night weren’t sexual’ but that his conscious fantasies could be explicitly erotic:

[...] certain days my imagination would easily, and with a certain level of arousal, tread on torrid and slightly incestuous ground. I would be in bed with my parents. My father inside my mother. My father’s big, hard dick (it couldn’t have been anything else but big!) penetrating my mother’s enormous vagina. I’d hear their noise, their breath. At first, I wouldn’t see anything, everything would be black, but eventually I’d be there beside them, closely watching these two bodies that I knew so well and at the same time didn’t know. I’d be ready to lend a helping hand, aroused, happy and panting along with them. Mohamed would take M’Barka right away, sometimes without even undressing her. Their sexual coupling would last a long time, a very long time [...] A perfect sexual harmony naturally achieved. They were made for one another, sex was clearly the preferred language through which the image of the couple they formed could be expressed (Taïa, *Salvation Army* 16).

Rather than belonging to the surreal realm of his unconscious dreams, which remains in a pre-sexual, childlike state, Abdellah explicitly marks this fantasy as a creation of his conscious mind. The ease with

which Abdellah slides into this mode of incestuous fantasy further panics the concept of childlike innocence. Significantly, he does not see himself as omniscient observer but plays the role of *active* participant. His father's 'big, hard dick' and his mother's 'enormous vagina' become placeholders, metonymic of heteronormativity as a system and its pervasiveness. The 'sexual harmony' between the heterosexual couple is 'naturally achieved', with sex – and especially sex sanctioned by reproduction – being the 'preferred language' that solidifies the couple.

However, Abdellah consciously inserts himself into this dynamic, thus disorientating the heteronormative on two levels. Firstly, the perfect pair becomes a trio; and secondly he breaks the taboo that would foreclose such a sexual union, thereby marking this as a distinctly queer fantasy. Thus, this relation begins to dissolve the notion of the heteronormative sexual coupling as the 'perfect harmony' and hints at the multiplication of bodies as a possible and more pleasurable alternative to the couple-form. Furthermore, immediately after describing this fantasy, Abdellah depicts the aftermath of his parents' sex as a 'noisy uproar' marked by violent fights (Taïa, *Salvation Army* 16). In Abdellah's mind, heterosexuality itself becomes 'complex, violent, tortured' (Ibid). Therefore, this imperfect relation and this 'family reality' imbued with 'a strong sexual quality' opens new possibilities for the young, queer protagonist – but not in the direction of the couple-form (Ibid). The narrator links the heterosexual couple-form to violence and pleasure simultaneously, but takes something about group sex from this incestuous fantasy that he will put into practice in his adult life.

Because of the children's involvement in the sexual courtship rituals of their parents, and their need to intervene in the violent aftershock of their sex, for Abdellah 'it is as if we have all been one another's partners, we blended together ceaselessly, without guilt. Sex, regardless of who we have it with, should never scare us' (Taïa, *Salvation Army* 16). The family unit becomes a kind of fantastical orgy, forming perhaps the queerest image in Taïa's novel. At the same time, this image of the family "fucking" acts as a prefiguration of the scenes of public/group sex later in the novel, but in this case remains contained in fantasy and continues to be tainted by the limitations and the taboos of the kinship institution itself. Importantly, Abdellah describes the 'joy at rediscovering' as a young adult 'a kind of sexuality [he] had experienced in childhood and early adolescence' when he participates in an actual triadic moment of 'Group Sex' with two other young men (Ibid 140). With no other points of reference in the novel outside of this fantasy moment that would suggest Abdellah participated in group sex in his childhood, the implication is that this imagined moment is the one that he is returning to in memory. This blurs – erases even – the lines between the incestuous fantasy and the queer practice of group sex he participates in later. The family, in this way, becomes a zone of transference for new relational possibilities for Abdellah.

The narrator's incestuous infatuation with his older brother Abdelkébir especially becomes a point of departure for the formation of Abdellah's sexual orientation, a site from which he can transfer his sexual desire onto new objects. When Abdelkébir takes his two brothers, Abdellah and Mustapha, on vacation to Tangiers, the journey on the train figures a departure from the family. The three brothers share a compartment and, during the voyage, Taïa's fixation on his older brother is itself presented as



an expedition: ‘I journey across this body, seated right in front of me. For the entire trip [...] I had dissolved inside him and he never realized it’ (Taïa, *Salvation Army* 39-40). Abdelkébir’s masculine body – for he is ‘without question, a man’ (Ibid 43) – becomes a spatial metaphor: just as the train moves the three brothers through space, Abdellah’s desire “journeys” over his brother’s body. This movement through space on the train and over Abdelkébir’s body, in this sense, figures as movement through time since Abdellah’s growing awareness of his own sexuality coincides with the travel across space, thus accelerating (youth) time itself by bringing the young Abdellah closer to sexual maturity.<sup>7</sup> After their arrival in Tangiers, this fixation on Abdelkébir’s body, particularly around his ‘butt’, intensifies:

I’m lying on my stomach and I’m watching Abdelkébir who’s lying on his stomach too. His butt, wrapped in that black bathing suit, continues to call to me, irresistibly, and I don’t know what to do about it. It’s not that his butt is beautiful, it’s just that it’s part of Abdelkébir. This is insane. I’m insane (Ibid 46).

It is at this point that Abdellah begins to question his desire for his brother as “natural”, precisely because it becomes a more intense and consciously *sexual* desire. The desire that was safely contained in the domestic sphere becomes a concern for Abdellah because he must finally admit that he is ‘in love with Abdelkébir’ (Ibid 53). Once he is removed from the domestic setting, he is able to realise that his desire for his brother, rather than being merely a product of the sexual quality of the family, is instead both sexual and romantic desire for the *male figure*. While he had some sense of himself as outside of the heteronormative strictures symbolised by the family logic, indicated by his fantasy world, it is when he is orientated away from the family that Abdellah’s sense of self re-orientates. This realisation is solidified when he grasps that ‘something inside [him] ‘wasn’t working anymore, wasn’t working like it should’ (Ibid). This ‘something’ is the fundamental disorientation: his departure from the family drives him towards a discovery of his *actual* sexual orientation, and the first description of sex with an adult man.

In an earlier scene, when Abdellah describes washing his brother’s hair, he already hints at this transfer of desire when he notes that ‘[if he] love[s] napes today, it’s because [he] spent such a long time looking at [his] brother’s, long and thin’ (Taïa, *Salvation Army* 34-5). While he realises that his desire works outside of the family unit, Abdellah embeds its emergence in the family; he loves napes because he enjoys his brother’s. But Abdellah grasps that his own sexual agency does not require the heteronormative family logic; while he is ‘still traveling with [Abdelkébir], moving with his body’, this body becomes merely a vehicle for Abdellah’s realisation of his sexual orientation (Ibid 65). Moreover, napes are infinitely substitutable; napes are not specific or particular to one person, but to the male figure generally. This reference to Abdelkébir’s nape and, by extension, all napes, is also significant in terms of the kind of politics espoused in the later part of the novel: the earlier graphic description of his parents’ genitalia is replaced by a body part not normally associated with sexual attraction. In other words, there is already an indication at this point in the narrative that an ethical shift has occurred for

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<sup>7</sup> This acceleration of linear time can be likened to colonial discourses of space/time in which, according to McClintock, ‘imperial progress across the space of empire is figured as a journey [...] in time’, which can be either ‘backward [...] to an anachronistic moment of prehistory’ or ‘on the return journey to Europe [...] as rehearsing the evolutionary logic of historical progress, forward and upward’ (40).

and in Abdellah. Particularly, this moment signals the turn towards Foucault's notion of "degenitalisation" since it is *napes* that are eroticised – rather than penises or butts specifically – with Abdelkébir's body rather than his genitals acting as a space for the transmission of sexual desire.

The transference of desire and the realisation of an alternative sexual agency for Abdellah are simultaneously confirmed in two events later in the novel, both of which centre around the practice of public/group sex that appear in the "after" structure of the novel. These events recall the invocation of the train (and the toilet) as spaces of desire, pleasure, community, and youthfulness. In this third part of the novel, the predominantly linear time of Parts I and II dissolves to be replaced by a temporality that constantly shifts between Abdellah's present – his arrival in Geneva to pursue a scholarship in 1998 – and various events over the previous two years that finally led to his arrival. Just as the narrative moves forward and backward in time, it also moves through space since the events narrated in this part of the novel take place in Switzerland and in Morocco, and (briefly) in Spain, often abruptly shifting from one space to the other. This dissolution of linearity and locality along with the reiteration of publicly experienced sexuality and the recurring trope of group sex in this part of the novel, prompts a recognition of these descriptions of queer sex as more than frivolous experimentations of youth. In fact, they are imbued with political potentiality.

This political value is confirmed by the appearance of the figure of Foucault himself in the text who, though introduced only as a spectre of Foucault in the final part of the novel, plays an important role in situating this "before" family framework within Taïa's sexual politics and ethics. A life of pleasure, as Foucault would argue and Taïa's texts suggests, is very different from a life organised around the family and heteronormative social structures. The latter, Foucault argues, is a limited and limiting framework ("Social Triumph" 158). Taïa's childhood fantasy of group sex in the family, which is deliberately shocking, is linked to the politics of gay, male group sex that he practices as an adult in the novel. The lines between moments of incestuous fantasy and queer praxis are virtually invisible for the narrator. While there is no indication of actual group sex/incest in the family of the novel, it is something that Abdellah eroticises as a child; while imagined, it is part of his interior life. When he later narrates actual moments of group sex – on a train, in a hostel in Spain, and in a public restroom in Switzerland – he is reliving something that he learnt in his childhood, thus also queering the institution of education that is so central to the *Bildungsroman*. In essence, the novel illustrates through this dynamic that the kinship system, figured through the traditional family, which for Taïa is a failure, is ultimately tied to the sexual system. For Taïa, the only way to move forward and away from this system, is to go back in time. While the traditional kinship system is a productive site to start exploring alternative relational models, primarily because this is the starting point for the narrator – as it is for most people – it is not necessarily the only possible end-destination. The collapse of this model, suggested through the fantasy of incest, gives way to a lateral set of arrangements, a distributed network, which could and would be very different to this starting point. In Taïa's novel this is figured through moments of queer group sex. Thus, these moments are metaphorical of the multiplication of possible relations that invent 'new ways of relating, types of existence, types of values, types of exchanges between individuals which are really new

and are neither the same as, not superimposed on, existing cultural forms' (Foucault, "Social Triumph" 159-160). These moments of public/group sex are thus prefigured in Abdellah's childhood fantasies, but take on different meanings later in the novel, and thus in his adult life.

### **"After": Lives of Pleasure & The Metaphor of Public/Group Sex**

The "after" structure of *Salvation Army* is organised around the appearance of Foucault as figurehead for a particular kind of politics, and two scenes of public/group sex. Both instances of public sex unfold later in the novel when Abdellah, now in his early twenties, travels to Europe: the first takes place on a train to Madrid and in a hostel in this city when Abdellah is on his way to visit his Swiss lover, Jean, in Geneva and has group sex with two fellow travellers, Matthias from Germany and Rafaël from Poland. The second occurs when he moves to Geneva to pursue his scholarship and receives oral sex from a stranger in a public toilet, where other men are also engaged in sexual activity. This is the chronological order in which these events occur, yet in the plot they have been reversed. The manipulation of time is doubled in the way that these events mirror the trip to Tangiers: once again, Abdellah finds himself travelling by train, with Matthias and Rafaël taking the place of his two brothers. This trip thus acts as another turning point, this time in his relationship with Jean, and introduce him to new forms of expressing his sexuality: now outside of the family ambit but also away from the couple-form as the only possible relational model. This doubled choreography of time returns Abdellah to youth time by replicating this childhood trip with his brothers, even when he has (supposedly) physically transcended this period of his life by reaching sexual maturity. Therefore, in these moments, the logics of straight time have been defied, revealing time to be a malleable construct, rather than being solidified as linear.

Moreover, before the scenes of public sex are introduced to the reader in the plot, the shadow figure of Foucault is introduced, dissolving potential arguments that these scenes are merely promiscuity for promiscuity's sake. Instead, Foucault offers a *theoretical* foundation through which to view these moments, while Taïa's text offers in pseudo-autobiographical form the *practice* of that theory. Thus, these are instances of queer theory in praxis or 'queer praxis', to use Halperin's phrase (86). Abdellah encounters the night manager at the Salvation Army, who for him is the spitting image of Foucault:

At The Salvation Army, this man with a shaved head sat reading a novel I knew very well: *Adolphe* by Benjamin Constant [...] He looked up, and, wow, what a shock: the man standing in front of me was Michel Foucault. He did look like the French philosopher, looked just like him: his appearance, his shaved head, even the glasses. I was confused, excited. I was immediately taken in (Taïa, *Salvation Army* 88).

Critics writing on Taïa's work have almost entirely overlooked the significance of introducing Foucault at this juncture in the storyline. The novel that faux-Foucault is reading, however, should point the reader to the importance of the spectre of the real Foucault. Constant's *Adolphe* tells the tale of an isolated young man who falls in love with an older woman and is assumed to be a *roman à clef*: a novel genre that

superimposes a veneer of fiction onto real-life narrative. As autobiography-cum-fiction, Taïa's novel can thus be classified as a *roman à clef* – a form that inherently considers the *real* within fantasy. To this end, the form of the novel invites the reader to make direct connections between the work and ideas of the real Foucault – suggested by this spectre – and the politics espoused in Taïa's novel through scenes of group sex.

Over the years, Foucault argues for what he considers an ethics of sexual behaviour, which he sees specifically as one that would re-prioritise 'bodies and pleasures', a rallying call he also proposes in *The History of Sexuality* (157). Foucault remains somewhat vague about exactly what this ethics of bodies and pleasures would look like. However, he is most lucid in intimating it when he discusses what are to him the virtues of BDSM culture. According to Halperin, Foucault 'saw S/M as it was cultivated and elaborated in gay male urban enclaves [...] as part of a wider practice of subcultural *community formation*' (Halperin 87, emphasis mine). Therefore, I would argue, Foucault saw the BDSM "community formation" as one way in which the sexual undercommons *could* take shape. Central to Foucault's reasoning about BDSM is that, to him, the practice represents a "process of invention", particularly 'insofar as it detaches sexual pleasure from sexuality [...] and insofar as it frees bodily pleasure from organ specificity, from exclusive localization in the genitals' (Halperin *Ibid*). According to Foucault, BDSM represents

[...] the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure, which people had no idea about previously. The idea that S&M is related to a deep violence, that S&M practice is a way of liberating this violence, this aggression, is stupid. We know very well what all those people are doing is not aggressive; they are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body – through the eroticization of the body. I think it's a kind of creation, a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure. The idea that bodily pleasure should always come from sexual pleasure as the root of *all* our possible pleasure – I think *that's* something quite wrong. These practices are insisting that we can produce pleasure with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies, in very unusual situations, and so on ("Sex, Power, Identity", 165).

Here, Foucault continually places emphasis on 'the body'. He insists on a politics of sex that is about dethroning the genitals as the only possible zone of pleasure, and about re-centralising the body in its total form instead, rejecting sexuality per se as the ground for identity. As Halperin explains, Foucault's phrase "the desexualization of pleasure" has often been misinterpreted; rather than 'detach[ing] pleasure from all acts of a conceivably sexual nature [...] S/M detaches sexual pleasure from genital specificity, from localization in or dependence on the genitals' (88). Thus, the "degenitalisation" of sexual pleasure dissolves what Foucault terms 'the monarchy of sex', which prioritises genitals and particularly opposite sex genitalia and dynamics. Foucault's call for the 'decentralising, the regionalization of all pleasures' (cited by Halperin 91) involves redistributing the nodes of pleasure across the physical body so that it becomes a flat network and produces an 'eroticization of the body' as a whole (*Ibid* 88). In other words, as Foucault puts it, 'taking the pleasure of sexual relations away from the area of sexual norms and its categories, and in so doing making the pleasure the crystallizing point of a new culture', constitutes a kind of democratic potential that exceeds conventional identity categories linked to sex and sexuality ("Social Triumph" 160). This conscious citation of Foucault surfaces the

particular politics that Taïa's text is invested in, a politics illustrated through two separate accounts of public/group sex.

In the first instance, the act of group sex facilitates a reversal of time through shared pleasure, again figured through the train motif. At the same time, this destroys identity as a ground of sexual practice. It is significant that Abdelkébir pays for the trip to Geneva, implicating Abdellah's first object of desire once again as the vehicle to finding pleasure, while also confirming the transference of this desire onto new objects. Abdellah spends 'three days on trains: Rabat-Tangiers, Tangiers-Algeciras, Algeciras-Madrid, Madrid-Hendaye, Hendaye-Paris, Paris-Geneva' (Taïa, *Salvation Army* 137). Importantly, because this trip so closely mirrors the trip to Tangiers with his two brothers, years before, there is an indication that the forward trajectory of his first train trip has been reversed and, instead, Abdellah travels back in time to his early adolescence:

We had the compartment all to ourselves, just the three of us [...] Around midnight, just when we were supposed to get some sleep, the moment arrived, the single moment I think we were all waiting for, happened just like that, unplanned, no warning, and we took off our clothes and started to make love, all three of us naked together.

We didn't sleep. The hot night kept us awake, ready for love and its *pleasures*.

We were happy. Young and happy [...]

I loved being surrounded by two warm, naked bodies, by *four hands caressing* me. I let them have me, in the afternoon, at night, in the early hours. I forgot about anyone else, thought of only them, there with me in that city, *guiding me, leading me around, smiling at me [...]* *I was them*. I lived for them. And all three of us, by sharing this sensual and sexual love, became blood brothers, sperm brothers, *far from our own borders* (Ibid 138-140, emphasis mine).

The two '*sperm* brothers' here replace Abdellah's two *biological* brothers, the three lovers become the three brothers, and are reborn into their youth through their shared pleasure. Notably, this image of brotherhood and sperm brothers, specifically, solidifies the androcentrism of Taïa's utopic vision, a problem that plagues Duiker's utopia in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* as well. Abdellah refers to this moment as the 'joy at rediscovering with Matthias and Rafaël a kind of sexuality [he] had experienced in childhood and early adolescence. Group Sex' (Ibid 140). Thus, it is sex and sexuality that becomes a vehicle that allows Abdellah to return to his youth, this time with a more nuanced understanding of his sexual orientation towards *men*, and away from the family. Notably, at this point in the narrative the notion of "desires" – attached to the image of Abdelkébir – is replaced by "pleasures". This replacement again cites Foucault's insistence that rather than 'liberate our desire [...]' We have to create new pleasure. Then maybe desire will follow' ("Sex, Power, Identity", 166).

Group sex, because it returns Abdellah to the moments of his childhood and early adolescence, appears a regression of sorts and is analogous to an experience of 'desubjection': he "becomes" his lovers – 'I was them. I lived for them' (*Salvation Army* 140). His individual identity dissipates as he merges into this group, losing a sense of individual specificity, a kind of 'affirmation [of] nonidentity' (Foucault, "Gay Science" 400). Unlike desire, Foucault contends, pleasure is 'an event that happens [...] *outside the subject, or at the limit of the subject*'; it is 'neither inside nor outside' since it is 'neither of the body nor the soul' and, most importantly, it is 'not assigned, and is not assignable, to a subject' ("Gay Science" 389-

390, emphasis mine). Especially, Foucault sees the experiments of group sex in bathhouses as one place where the possibilities for maximising pleasure at ‘the limit of the subject’ could manifest. In such places, Foucault argues, there is ‘the exceptional possibility of desubjectivization, of desubjection’ afforded by the ‘important experience in which one invents, for as long as one wants, pleasure which one fabricates together’ (cited in Halperin 94).<sup>8</sup> Desubjection, in other words, dissolves identity as ‘the problem of sexual existence’ and as ‘the law, the principle, the code of [...] existence’ (Foucault, “Sex, Power, Identity” 166). Ultimately, it is sexuality that fuses ‘desire and identity into a unitary and stable feature of the individual person’ and establishes ‘the “truth” of the person’ (Halperin 95). This “true self” then ‘functions as an object both of social regulation and of personal administration’ (Ibid). In order to complete the process of desubjection, therefore, ‘it is ultimately sexuality itself that will have to be resisted’ (Ibid). Through sexuality, ‘[m]odern techniques of power [...] attach to us a personal identity, defined in part by our sexual identity; by attaching that identity to us, they attach us to themselves’ (Ibid). The political power of Abdellah “becoming” his lovers, therefore, is that this desubjection permits him to dissolve certain forms of ‘social regulation’. Through group sex, he is detached, even if temporarily, from the ‘modern techniques of power’ – and the nation-state in particular – replacing it with a notion of *democracy through shared pleasure*. At the same time, this desubjection constitutes a loss of identity, as grounds for sexual practice on one hand, but also as a “truth” imposed by the afterlives of colonialism, Islamic heteronormativity and straight time itself. It is a fundamental rejection of norms that have guided the narrator’s life until this point.

This moment crystallises the trope of public/group sex as a metaphor for pleasure as coming from different locations simultaneously, effectively dislodging the monarchy of genitalia and the symmetry of the couple. In this sense, Taïa’s description of group sex on a train and, later, in a hostel in Spain are moments of ‘fabricating other forms of pleasure, of relationships, coexistences, attachments, loves, intensities’ (“End of Monarchy of Sex” 218-9). This reverses ‘the trend of “always more truth in sex”’ that Foucault insists is ‘perhaps the end of this dreary desert of sexuality, the end of the monarchy of sex’ (Ibid). By multiplying the number of bodies involved, the zones of pleasure are decentralised away from a pair of genitals and/or traditional orifices, multiplying the potential for pleasure itself that is figured through the ‘four hands’ caressing Abdellah. It also reveals a kind of democracy since ‘all three’ participants together step outside of the “normal” framework through which sex is organized. The physical borders of space, as represented by the bodies of the three lovers themselves, are also dissolved in this moment and, at the same time, they are moving through space on a train. They are thus not *localised* in any traditional sense. This moment therefore becomes a moment of queer praxis for Foucault’s ‘decentralising, the *regionalization* of all pleasures’ (cited in Halperin 91, emphasis mine). Pleasure in Taïa’s imagination, thus, is able to collapse both time and space, and to *de-nationalise* both pleasure of the body – away from a preoccupation with the genitals – and space itself.

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<sup>8</sup> Here, I find Halperin’s translation of Bitoux’s interview with Foucault, “Le Gai Savoir”, more useful than Morar and Smith’s version, “The Gay Science”, specifically because the latter translation underplays the exceptional intensity of pleasure Foucault attributes to the desubjectivization found in bathhouses and saunas. This point, however, is central in Halperin’s translation of Foucault.

Embedded in this notion of de-nationalised pleasure is also Taïa's particular form of post-colonial politics, one that is defined by this sense of borderlessness. It is especially significant, therefore, that Africa (with Abdellah/Morocco as proxy) and Europe (Matthias/Germany and Rafael/Poland as proxies) meet in a scene that takes place in Spain. Itself a liminal space, Spain is historically Islamic, still European, and yet very much southern – a complexity that Abdellah reiterates:

The Spanish landscape hung like a frame around what surged in us and what we shared. Spain, the land of some of my ancestors [...] Spain, still Arab in certain places, despite centuries and all the destruction (Taïa *Salvation Army* 138).

Of the well-documented and 'real influence of Islam on Spain', as Payne notes, 'the most important consequence was to confer on Spain a historical role of frontier and periphery' (120). Therefore, Spain becomes the border (frontier) of "Europe" and that which separates it from what is "not-Europe"; simultaneously, it exists at the very outskirts (periphery) of the continent, both inside and outside of it. This is precisely the tension that Abdellah reinforces when he notes the remaining Arab-ness of Spain. As Payne elaborates, '[b]y the nineteenth century [...] there arose the only slightly more empirical notion of "oriental Spain", the only part of the West that was also somehow part of the East' (11), configuring Spain as this liminal space. However, Spain is also deeply implicated in the twin projects of imperialism and colonialism and 'all [of its] destruction' (Taïa *Salvation Army* 138). This fact makes Taïa's investment in the space that much more illuminating. The introduction of queer group sex into this space disrupts the borders, frontiers and peripheries put in place by systems of invasion and conquest, both colonial and otherwise. Using Spain as a crossing-point, a new 'frame', contributes to "denationalising" it as a space. Therefore, the pleasure that is *shared* and *surged* between the three lovers becomes regionalised across the flat network of the body, and the three 'blood'/sperm brothers' come to constitute a new logic of belonging that does not adhere to nationality or geography. As Foucault asserts: '[p]leasure is something which passes from one individual to another; it is not secreted by identity. Pleasure has *no passport*, no identification papers' (cited in Halperin 95, emphasis mine).<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the three sperm brothers form a separate queer allegiance – a brotherhood that later extends to other men that the narrator has sex with – that is not dictated by borders, passports or biology, even when it implicates the body, but is founded on a shared youth and on shared sexual pleasure instead.

At the same time as this new supranational bond distributes pleasure across the whole body and denationalises space, it also defies the impulse of straight time, forming a kind of queer ascesis. This scene of pleasure is only narrated at the very end of the novel, even though Abdellah's contact with Matthias and Rafaël happens several months before he finally arrives in Geneva to complete his studies. In real time, Abdellah only arrives at the Salvation Army, where he encounters Foucault, after this event. In Foucauldian terms, therefore, this experiment with group sex can be considered an instance

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<sup>9</sup> Instead of the concluding with pleasure possessing 'no identification papers', Macey's translation of Foucault concludes that pleasure has 'no identity' (364). The tension between these two translations, therefore, consolidates the collapse of identity as prerequisite for sexual practice, on the one hand, and of national belonging on the other. This collapse aligns with my own contention of an anti-nation state model embedded in both Foucault's thinking and Taïa's writing on the political potential for queer sexual practice.

of queer “asceticism”. Foucault’s term “asceticism” (*askēsis* in Greek), ascetics, or ethical work’, Halperin explains, describes ‘the arduous activity of cultivating, fashioning, and styling the self – of working on the self in order to transform the self into a source of self-sufficiency and pleasure’ (76). The term then, to Foucault’s mind, ‘means something like “training,” almost in an athletic sense’ (Ibid.). This form of “training” is evident in Abdellah’s group sex exchange with Matthias and Rafaël when he says that they are ‘guiding me, leading me around’ in the “almost athletic” act of group sex (Taïa, *Salvation Army* 140). For Foucault, asceticism is ‘an exercise of self upon the self by which one tries to work out, to transform one’s self’ (“Ethics of Concern for Self” 282). Homosexuality is itself a form of modern asceticism<sup>10</sup>:

To be gay is to be in a state of becoming [...] to place oneself in a dimension where the sexual choices one makes are present and have their effects in the ensemble of our life [...] it is also a certain manner of *refusing* the modes of life offered; it is to make a sexual choice into the impetus for a *change of existence* (cited in Halperin 77-8).

Abdellah’s journey throughout *Salvation Army* can itself be considered a ‘state of becoming’, one that places him in a ‘dimension’ where group sex becomes one of the ‘sexual choices’ available to him. The trio of participants becomes symbolic of this new ‘ensemble of [...] life’. It also signals a ‘refusal’ of the mode of life that is his family, and its prohibitions. As Bersani summarises, ‘consciously, deliberately playing on the surfaces of our bodies with forms or intensities of pleasure not covered [...] by the disciplinary classifications that have until now taught us what sex is’ constitutes a ‘counter-productivity’ (“Gay Daddy” 81). For Foucault, it is the ‘most effective resistance to [...] disciplinary productivity’ (Ibid.). This counter-productivity in Taïa’s novel is founded on the shared pleasure of group sex. For Osinubi, it also forms part of the ‘[e]merging queer representations [that] renovate our senses of the sexual commons’ (viii), while I would argue that they stage moments of sexual *undercommons*.<sup>11</sup> It is from this perspective, Halperin argues, that ‘fist-fucking and sadomasochism appear [...] as *utopian political practices*, insofar as they disrupt normative sexual identities’ (97, emphasis mine).

Taking into consideration Foucault’s own veneration of bathhouse culture, however, I would add public/group sex to Halperin’s list, precisely because it works as a metaphor for the ‘shattering force of intense bodily pleasure, detached from its exclusive localization in the genitals and regionalized throughout various zones of the body’ (Halperin 97). Like fist-fucking and BDSM, group sex engenders ‘a means of resistance to the discipline of sexuality, a form of counter-discipline’ (Ibid.).<sup>12</sup> In other words, group sex, should be considered ‘a technique of asceticism’ too, since it ‘decenters the subject and disarticulates the psychic and bodily integrity of the self to which a sexual identity has become attached’ (Ibid.). Thus, when one places Taïa’s novel in linear order, the scene of group sex that starts on a train in the Spanish landscape is itself a moment of asceticism, or training, for Abdellah’s other encounter in a

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<sup>10</sup> Importantly, the act of choosing to be gay – of coming out – is an act of asceticism, but one that plays into identity politics. That is, to be just “gay” is to become enmeshed into the games of truth that Foucault rejects. Instead, he appreciates how “gay” disorients the subject, at least briefly, but it can re-orient and re-place the subject. His ideal would be to never attain such re-orientation.

<sup>11</sup> I use sexual undercommons, as I note in my introduction, to describe the radical and utopian possibility of community formations outside of social norms and the potential for alliances amongst various types of outsiders.

<sup>12</sup> It is also precisely this counter-disciplinary nature that marks communities formed in instances of group sex as part of the sexual undercommons: they form moments that are “fugitive” from the norm.



public men's room in Geneva and for the queer utopian future both scenes hint at. In this sense, there is a direct relationship between Foucault's notion of *ascesis*, and Taïa's portrayal of group sex as a kind of *poesis*.

The arrival at this poetics through sex, rather than through the education that Abdellah has come to Switzerland for, queers the genre of Bildungsroman but, more importantly, opens new possibilities for social and sexual relations to him. Abdellah does not become "educated" through the university but, rather, through sexual encounters. Abdellah arrives in Geneva and finds himself deserted and homeless. The city is described as clinical, 'with respect for everything, for every rule and regulation' (102), a 'soundproofed country' (113), a 'cold, other world' (142). It is only once a stranger leads him to the 'la Placette [...] public toilets' that he discovers the truly human side of Switzerland:

Once inside, I realized the place was all about something the rest of Geneva didn't have: *intense poetic sexuality*. A dozen men of all ages were lined up in front of the urinals and were lovingly looking at cock. That really struck me. It wasn't like I was shocked but *more like I had just caught up with a bunch of my old friends*. These men expressed their desire without becoming violent, touched the penis in a very gentle courteous way. Inside this dirty, underground location, they played out a *sexuality that was both clandestine and public*. They *smiled at one another like babies*. They didn't talk. Instead they *let their lucky bodies do the talking* or them. They would masturbate with their right hand while touching their partner's buttocks with the left. These men were not paired up. They all made love together, standing up (Ibid 121-2, emphasis mine).

This world operates outside of the 'rules and regulations' of the public sphere in Geneva. In this space, the coldness of the city is replaced by tenderness and warmth, and again it is sex that collapses the divide between 'clandestine and public', as it always does. Taïa's investment here in bathroom sex, once more, indicates a particularly androcentric set of values, given that women are less likely to use (public) bathrooms as a fugitive space.<sup>13</sup> It is thus also sex that forms the common ground, a sexual undercommons, for an underground community of men. This scene gives Abdellah a taste of how '[t]hese relations short-circuit and introduce [love where there's supposed to be only law, rule, or habit' (Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life", 137). Moreover, their bodies make up the verse of this 'poetic sexuality'; it is thus both aesthetic (or ascetic) and harmonious, dependent on rhythm and metre making love together. This image of poetic, harmonious sex harks back to the imagined harmony of his parents' sex life, but the violence of their union is replaced by a 'gentle courteous' sexuality. In this sense, this group formation supplants the limited and limiting framework of the family logic and reveals instead a world of 'intense poetic sexuality', which appears to him akin to friendship, perhaps in the same way that Foucault saw friendship as part of the process of 'becoming homosexuals' ("Friendship as a Way of Life" 136). The space, in other words, allows for men 'to be "naked" with other men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie' (Ibid). This is also the foundation of the sexual undercommons: a poetic sexuality that facilitates a 'shattering of the subject of sexuality'

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<sup>13</sup> Public bathrooms for women tend to be a space of homosocial bonding, rather than the kind of homoerotic and sexualised space Abdellah encounters here. It is also important to note that public bathrooms are ambivalent – even hostile – spaces for trans and other gender non-conforming bodies precisely because these spaces are policed according to strict gender divisions. As spaces, gendered public bathrooms are thus often weaponised against gender-ambivalent and transgender bodies.

(Halperin 97), which is figured by the mass of bodies congregated for nothing more than ‘a mutual exchange of pleasure’ (Taïa *Salvation Army* 123).

Moreover, the playfulness that Taïa invokes once more disrupts notions of normative adulthood, which demands that frivolity and play be renounced in favour of serious, grown-up business. Taïa’s description of the men who ‘smiled at one another like babies’ is reminiscent of Gayle Rubin’s description of sex at the San Francisco sex club, The Catacombs, where ‘sex was often intense and serious, but it also had a playful, kids-in-the-sandbox quality’ (231). The supposedly regressive imagery of infancy/childhood (‘like babies’ for Taïa, ‘kids-in-a-sandbox’ for Rubin) is noteworthy since, for both writers, the very act of group sex disrupts straight time, facilitating a kind of return to youth. Rubin explains that ‘The Catacombs environment enabled adults to have an almost child-like wonder at the body. It facilitated explorations of the body’s sensate capabilities’ (Ibid). In allowing ‘their lucky bodies do the talking’ (Taïa *Salvation Army* 123), the men in the la Placette men’s room carve a space for a similar exploration of ‘the body’s sensate capabilities’ in a state of youthful awe. Through embracing *play*, the express territory of children, these men not only disrupt the normative through their sexual choices but also in their rejection of *straight time*. The latter can only conceive of time as a linear trajectory from childhood to adulthood where play is limited, if not entirely relegated to the children produced in an opposite-sex union. Through a shared and almost intractable youthfulness, the poetics of this sexuality is that it binds a kind of queer community – a sexual undercommons – where ‘even brief connections [are] handled with courtesy and care’ (Rubin 239). Rubin notes that the ‘kind of love’ that emerged in spaces like The Catacombs often ‘extended out into the everyday world’ and ‘facilitated the formation of important friendships and lasting networks of support’, a reliance on friendship and camaraderie most commonly linked with childhood and youth (Ibid). This extension into the everyday world is figured in Taïa’s narrative through the orange that Abdellah receives as gift after being ‘drained by pleasure’ (*Salvation Army* 123).

Abdellah later shares this orange with Samir, the Tunisian that faux-Foucault leaves as a ‘surprise’ in Abdellah’s room (*Salvation Army* 134). Since the ‘exquisite sweetness’ of the orange’s scent made Abdellah ‘shoot again’ earlier (Ibid 123), it becomes symbolic of the extension of this poetic sexuality into this everyday scene of two men in a foreign country, sharing a fruit. At the same time, this moment forms another transnational image that retraces the post-colonial and queer politics of the novel as a whole. Significantly, Samir remarks that Abdellah could be his ‘younger brother’, agreeing with the similarity in their appearance that faux-Foucault noted (Ibid 132). Once more, the two become brothers, just as Matthias and Rafaël replace Abdellah’s biological brothers as ‘sperm brothers’ (Ibid 140). This time, however, they are marked as “brothers” primarily because of their shared foreignness, racial difference, and assumed religious beliefs. Samir confirms this point when he retells the experience of his first morning in Switzerland where he experiences quotidian racism and xenophobia: he notes that, ‘here in the land of the rich, every citizen is a policeman’ after a Swiss woman yells at him that he is ‘not back in the boondocks anymore’ (Ibid 133). Evident in his first interactions with Swiss citizens is an attempt to police those who belong to and in the Swiss nation-state, and those who are Other (from

the ‘boondocks’). Clearly, the inclusivity of the sexual utopia that Abdellah finds in the la Placette restroom does not extend to the everyday streets of Geneva, indicating that as much as the Moroccan nation-state model is not viable for Abdellah’s queerness, the Swiss model is equally inhospitable to his and Samir’s racial and religious difference. However, in sharing with Samir the orange that is symbolic of shared pleasure, the two instigate a new form of belonging that is akin to the supranational bond of the three sperm brothers and the sexual undercommons of the la Placette men’s room. In this sense, their bond denationalises the borders of their previous homes, and they form a brotherhood, a queer utopian alliance of the undercommons that is not bound to and falls outside of the nation-state framework.

Furthermore, the gentility and courtesousness of the la Placette restroom sex and in Abdellah’s gesture of sharing his orange with Samir are contrasted with the sexual climate in places such as Morocco and Tunisia. In these spaces, as represented in the opening section of Taïa’s *An Arab Melancholia* as well as through Taïa’s own experiences, the threat of violent sexual assault on queer individuals appears a common occurrence. This contrast in Geneva, which itself is a ‘cold, other world’, along with his desire to ‘summon, one gray and very cold morning, an army for my own salvation’ could be considered the summoning of the poetic sexuality he finds in moments of group sex as, in fact, a political sexuality (Taïa *Salvation Army* 142, 143). The ‘army’, in this case, refers to the sexual undercommons that offers some ‘salvation’ for individuals like Abdellah. This poetic sexuality, of bodies and pleasures, therefore has the utopic promise of transformation across spaces, in this case including Morocco and Switzerland. However, the limitations of the transformative abilities of this kind of sexuality are also implicit in Taïa’s text. As Bersani contends, ‘socially sanctioned positions of power are fortified by the covert and always temporary changes of position offered by an underground culture’ (“Gay Daddy” 87). For Bersani, the radical potential of group sex cannot be sustained since the ‘covert and always temporary’ nature of ‘*underground* culture’ consolidate the sanctity of heteronormative power *above ground*. In Taïa’s text, it is especially the covertness and temporary nature of these scenes of pleasure that is evident. In the first case, Abdellah’s ‘joy at discovering [...] a kind of sexuality’ symbolised by group sex with Matthias and Rafaël (Taïa *Salvation Army* 140) is deflated when he arrives in Geneva for his visit with Jean, his Swiss lover. He is the one who tells Abdellah that they would ‘be friends, not salves to each other’ and that, because Abdellah is younger, he should ‘take advantage of life and the pleasures it had to offer’ (Ibid). Yet, he responds cruelly to the news that Abdellah had taken part in this experiment with group sex. Therefore, Jean seems to offer Abdellah the kind of friendship Foucault argues could be central to imagining and creating ‘a new relational right’ in a kind of “adoption” of ‘one adult by another,’ but does not do so in practice (“Social Triumph” 158). However, it is precisely the kind of opening up of the relational field via group sex that leads to the collapses the promise of his relationship with Jean. The relationship reverts to the kind of cruelty that Abdellah observed in his parents’ union, especially since Jean resorts to constantly reminding Abdellah that he is financially dependent on him and once more devalues the symmetry of the couple-form as the ideal.

The group sex of la Placette finally seems to have a more enduring effect – symbolised in the orange that becomes a shared object outside the world of public sex. This act of sharing – of the orange between Abdellah and Samir, and of faux-Foucault sharing Samir with Abdellah – hints at the opening of the field of relations between these three characters. This is perhaps a small gesture, but right at the end of the novel, Abdellah thinks that he will invent himself anew, ‘[l]ittle by little, re-examine [his] views about Arab culture, Moroccan tradition and Islam’ and ‘[l]ose [himself] entirely, the better to find [himself]’ (Taïa, *Salvation Army* 143). Abdellah thus articulates a kind of self-transformation, indicating that he has begun a process of ascesis in the Foucauldian sense. While the end of the novel is unclear on exactly how this mode of being will manifest, it is intimately tied to the future, one in which Abdellah’s ‘dream of being an intellectual in Paris will have become reality’ (Ibid 143). Thus, the queer prolepsis of the novel as a whole seems to prefigure a future and a future self that is transformed by the kind of intense poetic sexuality offered by group sex, insofar as it destabilizes the subject of sex and opens the field of relations to new possibilities and new pleasures. This vision seems to be the kind of queer utopia that Taïa is invested in, one without borders and not dictated by geography or temporality but by poetics. However, this also indicates that the queer utopia is a moving target, as Taïa acknowledges that ‘[i]t wouldn’t happen overnight’ (Ibid). Abdellah can only imagine this future fulfilled in Paris, limiting the reach of the vision since it re-inscribes the borders previously dissolved, on the one hand, while he also seems unable to map this vision onto the space of Morocco itself – and Africa by extension.

## Conclusion

Significantly, these moments of queer ascesis are also forms of queer prolepsis that hint at a kind of future utopia, constituted through mutual pleasure. As a metaphor for the regionalisation of pleasure across the body, Taïa’s memories of group sex and the structures of feeling that animate them, sculpt out space for a de-nationalised form of belonging that is not defined by passports or identification, but by shared pleasure as one form of ‘actual, living sexual citizenship’ (Muñoz 35). This de-nationalising impulse in Taïa’s work is deeply connected to his own scepticism of nationhood as a source of freedom. Just as the moments of queer praxis in his novel stage a rejection of sexual practice as grounds for identity, so too do they reject nationhood as potential basis for identity. Taïa locates his narrative at the nexus of past and present, a time frame that has taught us that when nationalisms calcify, they often turn hostile to sexual and gender minorities as the Tanzanian example in my introduction shows and, to some extent, is also the case in Morocco generally. Taïa’s investment in highlighting the connection between the kinship system, symbolised through the traditional family and its failures, and the sexual system underscores the outlier status of queer folk to these systems of reproductive futurity that the nation so fetishizes. In this system, Taïa shows, calcified nationalisms produces equally calcified binaries tied to sexual identity that can be, and has been, harmful to gender and sexual minorities.

However, '[b]y shattering the subject of sexuality,' Halperin explains, 'queer sex opens up the possibility for cultivation of a more impersonal self' (97). This "self", he contends, 'can function as the substance of ongoing ethical elaboration – and thus as the site of future transformation' (Ibid). Queerness, in other words, can reveal the fictions of the past and present, and break new ethical ground for 'future transformation'. And this is the political potential of queer sex that Foucault forwards and Taïa takes up, showing that this shattering of self is not only a form of *politics* but a sexual and social *poetics*. Therefore, the future that Foucault, Halperin and Muñoz variously gesture at in *theory* is found in *praxis* in Taïa's text. This poetics takes the shape of a sexual undercommons founded on mutual pleasure, rather than located within national borders. Taïa thus draws from Foucault's assertion that the ethics of bodies and pleasures can contribute to 'subcultural community formation' (Halperin 87). For Foucault, this happens when one 'use[s] one's sexuality henceforth to arrive at a *multiplicity* of relationships' ("Friendship as a Way of Life" 135). Through literally and metaphorically multiplying bodies and pleasures in the act of group sex, it stands as a queer symbol for this multiplicity of relationships and a particular kind of 'communal sexual life' (Foucault, "Gay Science" 396).

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Procrastination & Protraction: Extended Youth & Queer Transitions in Ashraf Jamal's *Love Themes for the Wilderness* (1996)**

While my first chapter considered the metaphor of public sex as a placeholder for a broader economy of bodies and pleasures, this chapter examines the concept of “extended youth” and its connection to group sex in Ashraf Jamal's *Love Themes for the Wilderness* (1996), which operates as a metaphor for South Africa's democratic adolescence. Set shortly after the election in 1994, Jamal's novel offers a queer and comic perspective on South Africa's transition to democracy. Different forms of group/public sex in the novel allow the inhabitants of this fictionalised-yet-real Cape Town to envisage new forms of sexual democracy. Imagining group sex in Jamal's novel works to break down the couple-form, facilitating a wider conceptualisation of sex and politics than what is accommodated in hetero- and homonormative “family values” validated by the state. To make this argument, I borrow from J.J. Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) to think through the concept of “queer time” and how queerness queers time itself by extending it beyond what “straight time” permits. “Straight time”, as I note in my introduction, is a term borrowed from Muñoz to describe futurity as limited to ‘reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality, the spectacle of the state refurbishing its ranks through overt and subsidized acts of reproduction’ (Ibid). Thus, the nation-state has a certain investment in the couple-form, a point that the novel highlights and begins to complicate.

As a temporal concept, straight time gains particular significance in the apartheid context where, Reddy argues, ‘as an institution, marriage was [...] the cornerstone of apartheid legislation where principally white, Christian, Malay, Jewish and Hindu marriages were regarded as the legitimate entry into family life’ (346). “Straight time” under apartheid therefore functions according to the logics of compulsory heterosexuality but also as a control mechanism for maintaining racial hierarchies that codify certain bodies as more “properly” belonging to the nation. Similarly, the Immorality Amendment Act, although repealed in 1985, entrenched the heteronormative impulse of the apartheid nation-state. The Act criminalised sex between people of different races, but also sex between men, and particularly between groups of men (Immorality Amendment Act, No.57 of 1969, 4). Jamal's novel is thus situated at a time where this “old” disposition and the attitudes it engendered still haunt the social landscape. Simultaneously, his novel is poised on the cusp of this new democracy and the kinds of sexual citizenship that *could be*, thus occupying a particular kind of “queer time”. Here, there is a playing with the porousness of past, present, and future as a kind of “in-betweenness” and queerness as a state of “becoming” rather than a place to arrive. It is this queer time that Jamal's novel inhabits, promoting art and sexuality as primary vehicles for disrupting apartheid's institutionalisation of heteronormativity.

Scholarship on *Love Themes for the Wilderness* is sparse, perhaps owing precisely to its less-than-serious take on South Africa's transition to democracy so soon after the end of apartheid, when literary culture was still preoccupied with ‘mourning creatively for the losses of the past with which we now live’

(Jolly & Attridge 12). Cheryl Stobie has written about the “Queer Celebratory” mode of Jamal’s novel, and Brenna Munro’s conclusion to her book *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come* also recognizes Jamal’s novel as an “unrequited utopia” (234). However, both Stobie and Munro employ “queer” as a synonym for sexual and gender minorities in their analysis; this use of ‘queer’, though, is too narrow a definition of the term because it does not leave room to acknowledge the term’s scope or the non-linear, non-identitarian spins it takes in Jamal’s novel or in current iterations of queer theory. Instead, I contend, the queerness of the novel must be understood as something more capacious and ephemeral, an aesthetic and performative *attitude* that theorises the limits and possibilities of queerness, transcending even queer theory’s engagement with the term “queer” in the early 1990s. The novel, in this sense, is also a proleptic novel that envisions new linguistic and political possibilities for queerness, some of which we recognise as queer theory today. I go on to consider how Jamal’s reliance on comedy queers the emergent post-apartheid literary canon; examine descriptions of sex as moments of indirect ekphrasis, or what I can “sexphrasis”, which suspends time in queer ways; think through the novel’s use of queerness as a direct critique of the institutions of marriage and capitalism; and end by examining how the novel’s Locker Room Project stages new ways of imagining pleasure in post-apartheid South Africa.

### **“QUEERNESS IS AN ATTITUDE”: Theorising Queer Temporality**

As I argue in my introduction, to reduce “queerness” to a singular definition for sexual and gender minorities is to miss the radical potential and politics of queerness itself, a point that becomes particularly clear in *Love Themes for the Wilderness*. Instead, the novel is more insistent that ‘QUEERNESS IS AN ATTITUDE’, and thus a broader orientation to the world (Ibid 170). Queer, in this sense, is something that is a ‘crazy happenstance’, something more transient, harder to contain (Ibid). Attitude, importantly, is not linked to a body; it is a disposition or point of view, it is not tied to an identity and is thus not political in any traditional sense. Jamal’s novel, therefore, is already envisioning queer as something wider; it is something one *does*, rather than an *identity*. From this perspective, queerness might continually shift and, as Muñoz argues, is thus something that we ‘may never touch [...] but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality’ (1). Muñoz’s ‘horizon’, a thing that is imminent and yet unreachable, stresses this notion of ephemerality so key to queerness in *Love Themes*. Jamal’s sense of the term as an *attitude* transforms queerness into an aesthetic and a performance, a way of being in the world that includes but is not limited to sexual orientation. Indeed, ‘[q]ueerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough’ but that ‘we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness is the realm of the aesthetic’ (Muñoz 1). This realm is revealed in the novel’s blurring of the lines between the erotic and the ekphrastic, which transform scenes of sexual pleasure into artistic performances; it is also evident in its blurring of the lines between fact and fantasy. This reiterates Muñoz’s argument that queerness is not just found in ‘the realm of the aesthetic’, but ‘is also performative because it is not simply a being but a *doing* for and toward the future’, thus an *attitude* (Ibid, emphasis mine). In this sense, the novel’s definition of “queer” already aligns with similar definitions by

theorists such as Mel Y. Chen and Jasbir Puar, outlined in my introduction. For these theorists, ‘queer [...] exacerbates rather than contains frissons’ (Chen 67), and ‘irreverently challenges a linear mode of conduction and transmission’ (Puar xv), reiterating the ephemeral and nonlinear temporality made possible by “queer”.

On one level, the novel’s use of queerness is closely tied to its engagement with a youthful temporality. In *In a Queer Time and Place*, Halberstam contends that queerness allows individuals to transcend, corrupt, or extend the limits of straight time by opting out of “full adulthood”. Thus, non-conformation to heteronormative ideals such as marriage and procreation – culminations of “adult life” – queerly extends youth. Adrian Stoker, the artist-protagonist, describes himself from the start of the novel as ‘going nowhere [...] like the highway *stranded in mid-air*, sodden with *arrested development*’ (Jamal 6, emphasis mine). This sense of going nowhere and arrested development essentially strands Stoker between childhood/adolescence and fully realised adulthood. Halberstam argues that part of the extended youth of queerness is the ability to be part of subcultures normally reserved for young people (*Queer Time* 152). Therefore, this notion of extended youth (or arrested development) can be connected to Stoker’s ‘arrested purpose’, and to the Locker Room Project event. This central event referenced in the novel, based on the still-existing Mother City Queer Project (MCQP), is also key to understanding the concept of extended youth precisely because it is to be a playful party for adults.

Thus, Jamal’s novel takes up the term “queer” and twists it in different, unpredictable, often sideways, directions. Jamal himself defines “queer” as

an intellectual model and socio-cultural agency, [which] reconciles the ordinary and the extraordinary in a manner that does not produce a synthesis, but that further aggravates the *discontinuous relatedness* of these seemingly opposed conditions [...] Queer, then, comes to exemplify what Bhabha defines as the double life of the postcolonial subject, a life which constructively perverts existent polarities [and] celebrates the constitutive perversity of the postcolonial condition as the source of a revisionary agency and not as the marginalised figuration of mere scandal (*Predicaments* 103).

The lack of ‘synthesis’ between the ordinary and extraordinary, and the ‘*discontinuous relatedness* of these seemingly opposed conditions’ that define “queer” as a concept for the author here is put into praxis in his novel. In *Love Themes for the Wilderness*, the many different shapes of “queer”, and the experimentation with the flexibility of the term itself, produce the very discontinuity that Jamal identifies here. This notion of discontinuity – both temporal and non-temporal – is important to the post-colonial framework of Jamal’s novel, especially as it links back to the problem of extended youth where temporality is not doing its linear work. This notion of discontinuity stresses the ways in which things do not link up in the linear ways they are expected to, producing a kind of arrested development tied to the novel’s sense of queerness. The novel particularly invests discontinuity in sex that transcends identity politics, as a form of *disfiguration* where queerness is about being, and doing, outside of normative categories, or a suspension in-between categories, rather than about the fixed identities that the nation desires.

Significantly, as I argue in my introduction, there is already an *entanglement* between queerness and the post-colony at the level of temporality, which is predicated on the basis such discontinuity. It is in the ‘swings that overlay one another’, between ‘discontinuities, reversals, inertias’ that create that



‘*entanglement*’ for Mbembe, especially, that I also locate queer temporality in Jamal’s novel, revealing a crossing point between queer time and post-colonial time (*On the Postcolony* 14). Thus, the term “queer” in this novel lines up with Sedgwick’s deft definition of queer as ‘the open mesh of possibilities’ and the ‘ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses’ (Ibid 8). While the novel’s engagement with race is negligible at best – owing perhaps to the hopefulness invested in the so-called “rainbow nation” – it unpacks a moment poised between the ‘identity-fracturing’ of apartheid’s legacy, and the ‘identity-constituting’ of democratic South Africa that establishes, simultaneously, a new kind of ‘postcolonial nationality’. It is through this liminality that the queerness of the novel should be understood, and indeed it captures the queerness of the nation. This liminal space, a state of betweenness, can thus be likened to a youthful state, a type of adolescence, in the South African national identity. It is important to note here that by “youthfulness”, I do not mean to suggest that the post-apartheid state, or indeed the post-colonial state more broadly, is in some sense infantile or primitive; I’m more interested in the liminality and the ephemeral *attitude* that youth as a temporal category makes space for in Jamal’s novel. In the novel, we see the deceleration of time in order to extend youth, thereby queering the concept of ‘transition’, whether from youth to adulthood and from apartheid to democracy, thus suspending the nation itself in ‘an open mesh of possibility’. Significantly, this breakdown of time does not function to slow down the transition to democracy but, rather, begins to dissolve the strict straight time of apartheid during which the masculinist/nationalist regime legislated sexual citizenship, and so institutionalised straight time. Thus, in its conceptualisation of what this new South Africa might look like and be lived, it places sexuality, and particularly queerness, at the heart of this national transition.

### **Arrested Development: A Protracted Protagonist in Queer Times**

Weaving real events into its fictional fabric, Jamal’s novel self-consciously creates its own kind of temporal logic as it stages three months in Stoker’s life, engaging multiple levels of this post-apartheid moment. The novel is also an example of a *roman-à-clef* that references real events and real people – the Locker Room Project/MCQP, James Phillips’ death, Andrew Putter, Tracey Payne’s painting – and is at the same time completely fictional. The novel is neither a strictly historical or realist novel, nor is it strictly a fantasy. This porousness between historical fact and fiction blurs, erases even, the division between fantasy and fact, disfiguring yet another boundary we usually patrol, creating in its place a space of *becoming*. The uncertainty of this phase of transition – using roughly five months of Stoker’s life as the lens through which to view it – is intimately connected to how the characters navigate a new sense of freedom, which is articulated as a fusion of artistic and sexual expression. Book One follows nineteen successive days of Stoker’s life, Book Two continues three months later, and the Epilogue picks up another month later. The linear logic of Book One is thus punctuated by these three-month and one-month gaps that effectively accelerate time. Hence, the formal organisation of the novel mimics a discord between time as it is conventionally thought of – as a simple forward progression – and Stoker’s

arrested development. This form of “queer time” anchors Stoker and many members of his circle in youth. Additionally, the novel’s queer take on South Africa’s transition to democracy places the nation itself as always on the cusp of “development” yet never truly fulfilling this promise. Since this project of transition and decolonisation to date remains incomplete, highlighted by recent student protests in the country, the South African nation itself can be argued to be suspended in a state of perpetual youth and thus as a kind of “queer nation”. Placing the nation-state itself in a form of arrested development, this allegory productively points to a particular circularity in the post-apartheid moment. Since “development” implies certain linear progress, the circularity between fact and fiction in the novel disfigures the binary contained in this idea of development, insisting instead that there is something deeply unfinished about the post-apartheid transition that Jamal’s characters keep circling back to, and that we will keep circling back to.

Stoker is the axis around which the cast of approximately 20 other characters in their late-twenties to early-thirties rotate. Together they constitute a small subcultural community. These characters are typically presented as a group of oddballs and artists who congregate to form an artistic hub in the Observatory suburb. While most of the members of this group are probably heterosexual – with the exception of Dean and Putter – this is a world in which sexual identities are either vague or entirely undefined. These characters thus conform to extended youth, that period of time when most people experiment with sexual identity in the process of defining that identity. Stoker himself epitomises the concept:

The people he met were people who took over, like Phyllis, like Olivieri, like the woman he’d seen at the gallery. Mostly he kept to himself. He wasn’t part of the art mainstream. He didn’t go to the right parties and restaurants. In most situations he was like a child on his first day at school – simultaneously intact and freaked because he didn’t know anyone (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 29).

By allowing people to “take over”, Stoker is at variance with definitions of dominating, masculine heterosexuality that presumes assertiveness. His chosen profession of artist is one that is not always deemed “serious work”, and for much of the novel is not very lucrative either. Stoker’s rejection of the ‘art mainstream’ in favour of an artistic underground and his inability to “network” places him on the margins of adulthood; he is a character that appears ‘intact’ and therefore fulfilling all the *biological requirements* for adulthood, yet he is ‘freaked’ by what he considers to be the *social prerequisites* of adulthood. He therefore remains ‘like a child’ in important ways.

Significantly, Stoker later reiterates this sense of ‘arrested purpose’ he locates in himself and extends it to his artistic-subcultural circle, ultimately connecting it to sexual relations. Discussing his friend Joan and her partner Waldo’s ten-year relationship, Stoker concludes that ‘[r]elationships as long-standing as [theirs] were rare’ (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 200):

Nothing lasted these days unless you were desperate to make things last, and then the desperation eventually fucked things up [...] People fell in and out of each other’s arms like there was *no tomorrow*. One would never guess that this was the ’90s and the Age of Disease. Big fuckin’ deal. Was there an age that wasn’t? Whatever... still it could be said that Stoker and his friends were the *emphatic* representation of the ’90s with all *the risk that came with a passionate commitment to adventure and self-discovery*. At least, that’s how things looked in a certain section of Cape Town. Like Joan said, Egyptian geese mate for life. Humans are another

story. Stoker couldn't begin to count the number of stories he'd heard of condoms fucking out (Ibid 200-201, emphasis mine).

This reflection on affairs in Stoker's small subgroup as having 'no tomorrow' places the characters of his world firmly in the realm of queer time. The temporal location of this in the '90s and the 'Age of Disease' is significant: this is when queer time becomes most 'spectacularly' visible (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 2). In the crisis of death, in this queer time 'the urgency of being [...] squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand' (Ibid). Halberstam locates these new possibilities in subcultural lives that allow us to reimagine the 'adult/youth binary in relation to an "epistemology of youth" that disrupts conventional accounts of youth culture, adulthood, and maturity' (Ibid). The markers of 'risk', 'passionate', 'adventure' and 'self-discovery', and because the characters are living in the midst of a sexual pandemic, they are categorically taking advantage of extended youth time. The emphasis on 'risk' is particularly noteworthy since opting into this suspended time is simultaneously liberating and precarious, as it risks permanent suspension. In terms of transition, from childhood to adulthood or from apartheid to democracy, permanent suspension means *failure*. However, embracing the possibility and reality of failure contained in this risk is a distinctly queer act. As Halberstam argues, 'failure can be a style', an attitude perhaps, that 'allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods' (*Queer Art* 3). Accepting the risk of failure, in other words, is itself a radical act that disrupts neat, linear development.

The rejection of heteronormative 'long-standing' monogamy as a kind of 'desperation [that] eventually fuck[s] things up', in favour of 'no tomorrow', illustrates a commitment to refusing linear time and the ideals of adulthood (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 200). The idea of 'no tomorrow' especially stresses queerness as a form of "becoming". Stoker deliberately concludes that '[e]veryone [he] knew was queer in some way or another':

Queerness was tied to the instability of things, the crazy happenstance way the world seemed to be working. Nothing made sense until it happened. And when something happened the sense changed (Ibid 170).

Queerness in this instance is specifically about unknowingness, or 'instability'. Stoker's claim that 'everyone [he knows] is queer in some way or another' (Ibid) importantly echoes Gloria Anzaldúa's oft cited essay "La Prieta" in which she envisions El Mundo Zurdo, the Left-Handed World, as created by 'the queer groups' or 'the people that don't belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures' (233). Stoker's assessment of nothing making sense until it happened, and the sense changing when it happened suggests a continual process of disorientation and re-orientation, bound by ephemerality. Queerness, in this sense, is also idiosyncratic of the very fresh post-apartheid moment in which a group of oddball characters redefine the term for themselves.

The text thus attempts to dissolve the institutionalisation of straight time so emblematic of the apartheid regime that was legislated through, amongst others, the Immorality Amendment Act (No. 57 of 1969). This Act not only criminalised sex across the colour line but would also prosecute any 'male person who commits with another male person at a party [of more than two persons] an act which is

calculated to stimulate sexual passion or to give sexual gratification' (Ibid 4). This particular act was ruthless in delimiting the contours of sex and sexuality in apartheid South Africa. Not only was it a prohibition on race, but it got caught up in 'the nationalist notion' that homosexuality signifies 'decadent, immoral high-living' after a 1966 police raid on a large gay party in Forest Town, Johannesburg (Gevisser 30-31). By most accounts, this was the largest gay party hosted in Johannesburg at the time, and it became the legal grounds for the "men at a party" amendment to the Immorality Act (Ibid 30). In other words, as a real legal document with real legal enforcement, the Act became specifically pivoted on groups and regulating non-group activities; queerness (i.e. same-sex sex) is marked as undesirable generally, but more so when it occurs in groups. The Immorality Amendment Act, consequently, becomes the precursor to contemporary South African homonormativity, which still values the couple-form and the traditional, nuclear family. The Act's definition of a "party" as 'any occasion where more than two persons are present' (4) becomes especially significant later in the novel when, increasingly, the couple-form dissolves in favour of different kinds of triads and group sex formations. The Locker Room Project is itself a playful take on this definition of a "party" since it is not only literally an art *party* but one that explicitly makes public sex central to the experience.

The novel thus begins to *destabilise* the heteronormative impulse of apartheid's straight time through its own shifting engagement with the term "queer". Indeed, Chen argues that '*queer*'s profusion into various parts of speech [...] sets its users up for a suitably messy governance, even an antigovernance' (Ibid 85). Hence, the novel's 'messy governance' of adult/straight time disrupts time as a normative category; "antigovernance" is therefore contained in the novel's investment in the ephemerality of youth/queer time and connected to the time of transition itself as messy. This idea of "antigovernance" is key to understanding the novel's hybrid use of the term "queer" as not governed by sexual identity alone. It also connects to its attempt to undo the seemingly unyielding effects of apartheid governance and the ways in which its regulation of bodies persists into the post-apartheid moment, precisely because the Constitution adopts the kind of homonormativity set up by legislation like the Immorality Amendment Act to begin with.

### **Queering the Ordinary: Literary Tradition & the National**

The sleeve of *Love Themes* describes its author as 'that postmodern hybrid', a description that reveals the kind of instabilities the novel itself is trying to unpack. Through its consistent reliance on intertexts such as Mike Nichol's *The Waiting Country*, Lionel Abrahams and Ingrid Jonker's poetry, the text situates itself as self-aware, of itself as a text and of its position in a country in transition. Jamal's novel thus deliberately locates itself inside this South African literary canon, while also writing against it in a number of ways. Chiefly, Jamal speaks back to the post-apartheid emergent canon's preoccupation with the tragedy and violence of apartheid and the early days of transition, focusing

instead on comic renewal.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, *Love Themes* echoes Njabulo Ndebele's infamous call for a politics of the ordinary, only to complicate it by offering "queer" as an alternative category.

In his famous essay "Rediscovery of the Ordinary" (1984), Ndebele stages a critical intervention in how literature does and ought to function in the push towards a post-apartheid South Africa. Ndebele urges particularly black South African authors, to redirect their energies away from "the spectacular" drama of apartheid wrongs, towards a "rediscovery of the ordinary". Ndebele thus establishes a dialectic between the spectacular that merely recaps the clash between the oppressed and the oppressor, and the ordinary as rooted in lived experience. For Ndebele, the "newness" of South African society 'will be based on a direct concern with the way people actually live' and that 'means a range of complex ethical issues involving man-man, man-woman, woman-woman, man-nature, man-society relationships' (52). However, Jamal argues that "the ordinary" has come to represent 'an epistemic and psychic limit' (*Predicaments* 88-90). For Jamal, this limit is contained in Ndebele's 'humanism' that operates as a normalising or 'civilising mission' (Ibid 90). Thus, Jamal offers "queer" as an important intervention, a third space beyond the spectacular and the ordinary, that he puts into practice in his novel. For him, queerness contests the hetero/homosexual binary, while agitating for inclusion of 'all non-heterosexual persons and categories', and thus 'precisely defounds the contraries of man-man, man-woman, woman-woman, by placing each pairing under erasure' (Ibid 90). Moreover, the novel's unfixing of "queer" from its associations with sexual identity, using it as an intellectual model instead, 'destabilises the constitutive binary that founds [Ndebele's] thought processes' (Ibid). As a 'rhizomatic concept', Jamal argues, 'queer best expresses the cracks and contradictions in contemporary conceptions of South African culture' (Ibid). Thus, in deploying queer as a 'rhizomatic' third space – one that resists chronology – Jamal disrupts the canon of the ordinary, both in terms of literary production and of the ordinary ways in which our lives are governed by normalising impulses and reductive binaries. Choosing the mode of *comedy* instead of tragedy, the spectacular, or the ordinary in the Ndebelian sense, goes against literary norms of the time. Thus, even in its constitution of itself as a novel, *Love Themes* embodies this attitude of queerness and antinormativity/antigovernance.

Simultaneously, however, this attempt to queer national literary tradition reveals one of the central ambiguities of the novel. The novel, paradoxically, tries to contain queerness within the nation-state project because of its thematic focus, but queerness itself chafes against that use. *Love Themes's* attempt to queer the nation, within the national framework, is thus a move imbued with contradiction. While this tactic forwards national inclusion of queerness, and thus queers the nation-building project, it also exposes the impossibility for these forms of queerness to be contained within the nation-state, a regulatory and normalising force. Indeed, the nation-state fantasises about the couple-form (two people in a marriage) in order to reproduce itself, a point that Jamal's novel actively tries to dissolve but perhaps cannot, precisely because of this contradiction. This paradox, then, becomes part of the fabric of the

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<sup>14</sup> Some of *Love Themes for the Wilderness's* most noted contemporaries include Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1993), Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf* (1994), Jakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995), J.M. Coetzee *Age of Iron* (1990) and, later, his much acclaimed and much critiqued *Disgrace* (1999), as well as Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998). Notably, Jamal's novel stands in sharp contrast to the ways in which these texts frame the violence and tragedy of apartheid and the transition to democracy. Rather than a text of mourning the trauma and indignities of apartheid, his is a text of celebration and comedy.

novel and must be acknowledged, even if it does not necessarily weaken the novel's theorisation of "queer".

In the first instance, the insertion of queerness in the nation, as Berlant and Freeman argues, 'appears motivated not by a satisfaction that already exists but by a collective desire to reclaim the nation for pleasure' (195). In this sense, Jamal's queer national framework functions much like the resurgence of national patriotism in 1990s America that Berlant and Freeman discuss (Ibid). For them, 'the transgression of categorical distinctions between sexuality and politics, with their typically embedded divisions between public, private, and personal concerns' is 'crucial to a sexually radical movement for sexual change' (Ibid 197). They argue that the 'outspoken promotion of a national sexuality', for them exemplified in the tactics of activist group Queer Nation, 'discloses that mainstream national identity' endorses an official 'subliminal sexuality' (Ibid 195). Moreover, the kind of marketing of 'a national sexuality' by groups like Queer Nation, 'makes explicit how thoroughly the local experience of the body is framed by laws, policies, and social customs regulating sexuality' (Ibid 195). Thus, inserting queer into the national reveals the heteronormative impulse of the nation-state, which for Berlant and Freeman is an essential step to breaking down this impulse and making space for other, queer forms of being in the nation.

However, theorists such as Lee Edelman and Jasbir Puar argue that nation-states are inherently normative, thus queerness cannot be contained in the national. Edelman argues that the 'political fortune may measure the social order's pulse, but *queerness*, by contrast, figures, outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order's death drive' (3). He contends that 'queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to [the death drive], accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social' (Ibid). Puar similarly argues that 'nationhood and queerness are both indebted to modernity, and modern sexual identities are built on the histories of colonialism, nation formation and empire, and racialization, the nation is founded on the (homo)sexual other' (49). Therefore, queerness is still 'inimical' to national heterosexuality, but there are exceptions to this norm when queer bodies are absorbed, 'temporally, historically, and spatially specific – when advantageous for the nation' (Ibid 50). Normative forms of queerness and homosexuality – contained by marriage, monogamy, and family life – can thus be validated by the state when deemed necessary or convenient to the nation. However, as I note in my introduction, this folding-into-the nation of queer subjects should be understood as 'a biopolitical project' and hence a normalising into nationhood that produces a set of problems or discriminations (Ibid 22). In South Africa, for example, the Constitution codifies queer life as viable, but in practice this queerness is circumscribed by race, class, and gender. For Puar, the 'emergence and sanctioning of queer subjecthood is a historical shift condoned only through a parallel process of demarcation from populations targeted for segregation, disposal, or death, a reintensification of racialization through queerness' (Ibid xii). In her analysis, 'queerly racialized "terrorist populations"' are thus folded out of life, while a homonormative subject is folded into life (Ibid). In South African, the "must lives" reinforce this homonormative script – white, cisgender, mostly male, monogamous – while the "must dies" can include the foreign Other from other African countries (*makwerekwere*), or the most vulnerable queer bodies themselves – black, lesbian, transgendered. If

queerness is going to have any real critical edge or social/political impact, these theorists contend that queerness is not going to sit in the nation-state.

It is my contention, at the same time, that this contradiction in Jamal's novel should be seen as productive, and as a tension between the decolonisation process and the remnants of colonial and apartheid discourses of sexuality. Specifically, the paradoxical relationship between national pride/dignity and beliefs about African heteronormativity, identified by Desirée Lewis and sketched in my introduction, where dignity is both a *product of* as well as a *problem for* the decolonisation process (213), functions antithetically in the South African context in some ways. Queerness was categorised as *undignified* under apartheid; giving some forms of queerness access to full citizenship *restores* dignity in the post-apartheid moment. However, as noted before, this is only because it is 'advantageous for the nation' (Puar 50), insofar as it forwards the Rainbow nation-building project itself, at the same time producing hostile conditions to other Others. What this reveals, however, is the status of "South Africa"/the nation as 'drifting signifier' rather than a 'bounded and determined site' (Jamal, *Predicaments* 91). This notion of 'drifting' in reference to the nation ties in with the circularity of *Love Themes*, where nothing is stable and the sense keeps changing, even the sense of the nation. The novel thus takes up Jamal's question of how we can 'think of cultural change both inside and outside the boundaries of the nation' and puts it to play in a number of productive ways (Ibid). For one of Jamal's characters, Putter, 'fun is a matter of discipline. Art. Fun is politics' (Ibid 182). Fun, art and politics are thus intertwined in the novel, and are equally about building a queer-nation within "new" South Africa as it is about disrupting/queering the project of nation-building itself; it is about finding new ways of doing politics in unfamiliar territory. The novel inserts queerness into the nation, only to reveal its at-oddness with the nation and, necessarily, does so to create a level of autocritique that keeps democratic sensibilities open and alive, keeps readers attentive to the openness that attends any commitment to freedom within society.

### **"Sexphrasis", *Ek-stasis* & the Erotic**

One of the most interesting intertexts in Jamal's novel, precisely because it disrupts normative binaries, is a detail of a Tracy Payne pastel-on-paper titled "Sebastian" (1994), the novel's cover artwork. Taken as a whole, this piece locates a sense of ephemeral transition on the *body*, and ties it to gender and sexuality. In the text, the artwork is attributed to Stoker's artist-friend Joan: 'Percy stark naked and writhing effeminately, his lips parted breathlessly, a cock-ring floating above his head like a halo' (Jamal *Love-Themes* 199). The full image is denied to us, both on the cover and in the text's description of it, representing a moment of suspended animation of especially any definitive gender assignment. The gender vagueness of the image thus forms another moment of liminality or "betweenness" since the figure seems to be mid-transition, not fully embodying any gender. This androgyny panics clear gender categorisation, pointing to the instability of such categories. The full image in fact straddles two genders, signalling an incomplete transition. The figure of Payne's "Sebastian", or Jamal's Percy, carries markers of femininity – fruity red lips, a lacy bra, heavy eye make-up – on an obviously male body, gestured by

the combination of a flaccid penis, a masculine right hand with a pair of handcuffs attached, and the prominent Adam's apple. "Sebastian"/Percy is thus neither fully male nor completely female, but both at the same time, the handcuff attached only to one hand and nothing else giving the sense that s/he is both chained and free. The gender-transition is incomplete, and might never be completed, just as the liberation or freedom project is incomplete, and might never be completed.

Payne's "Sebastian" self-consciously signals Saint Sebastian, often cited as a queer martyr, and his 'iconic combination of beautiful, homoerotic suffering' (James 11).<sup>15</sup> 'Sebastian's Renaissance pose of youthful, beatific, pious surrender to a grisly arrow-ridden fate,' Kaye argues, 'has proven to be of enduring fascination to writers and artists interested in non-normative forms of desire' ("Uses/Decadence" 11). Sebastian, '[u]nlike other Christian martyrs [...] suggested a different kind of martyr, one who had an inherent but ever-mutating perversity' (Ibid). For example, in a 2003 exhibition, "Sebastian: A Splendid Readiness for Death", a group of contemporary multi-media artists '[p]ersonified Sebastian' as 'a sado-masochist icon, a death-loving, androgynous dandy, the very embodiment of the exemplary suffering of the artist' (Ibid). Saint Sebastian thus captures a sense of ephemeral or 'ever-mutating perversity', a certain at-oddness with dominant scripts, that recasts him as a queer figure. Payne's "Sebastian"/Joan's Percy taps into this queer aesthetic by symbolically incorporating the 'surrender to a grisly arrow-ridden fate', but exchanges the arrows commonly read as phallic symbols for an actual phallus. Payne's version of Sebastian also hyperbolises the feminising of the martyr – here Sebastian is not feminised because of his exceptional willingness to be penetrated, but because s/he wears both masculinity and femininity *on the body*. "Sebastian"/Percy's facial expression is suspended somewhere between pleasure and pain, the closed eyes denying us eye contact to confirm whether s/he is 'writhing' in either or both. This image thus plays on the 'death-loving, androgynous dandy': the ambiguity of "Sebastian"/Percy's gender expression and facial expression destabilises both gender categories and, placed on the cover, signals that this kind of disruption or instability is built into the very texture of the novel.

As Stoker suggests, the handcuffs belong to Percy's stash of 'S&M gear' (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 200). The matter-of-fact presentation of this information casts it as part of the natural progression of Joan's 'shift away from using media images and taking her own photographs for her drawings' to 'fucking Percy' (Ibid). The image, in its portrayal of suspension between states of sexuality and gender, of pain and pleasure, perfectly captures the spirit of the novel in which descriptions of art and descriptions of sex are presented in the same tone, with the same sense of aesthetic admiration, thus blurring the line between ekphrastic and ecstatic/erotic. In this sense, these descriptions are evocative of what Coetzee calls '*ek-stasis*',

a [state of] being outside oneself, being beside oneself [...] in which the linear propulsion of reason gives way to the unpredictable metamorphosis of figure into figure [and] yields a bliss that is the object of the desire of those most open to the promptings of desire (95).

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<sup>15</sup> For a historical overview of Saint Sebastian's adoption as gay martyr, see Kaye's "Losing his religion: Saint Sebastian as contemporary gay martyr" (1996).



The political value of this condition of self-dispossession is that, beyond self/other boundaries, it can open up new practices of freedom. Jamal discusses Coetzee's idea of *ek-stasis* under the banner of "Folly", arguing that this formulation draws on 'bliss as the object of desire' (*Predicaments* 113). Jamal connects this form of folly/*ek-stasis* with Foucault's ideas of 'revolution and pleasure' (*History of Sexuality* 7). From this perspective, the notion of *ek-stasis* can be connected to the ecstatic (pleasure), since sex too can be thought of as a state of 'being outside oneself, being beside oneself, where the 'linear propulsion of reason gives way' (Coetzee 95) to what Bersani terms 'self-shattering' (24). In the same way, ekphrasis in the novel forms moments of stepping "outside" the text, and being "beside" the text, especially in the case of Sebastian/Percy whose image appears both inside the text and on the text, but also exists outside of the text. Thus, Stoker's remarks of queerness being 'tied to the instability of things' (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 170) also aligns with the breakdown of self/other in moments of *ek-stasis*/ecstasy.

The natural progression of Joan painting Percy to Joan fucking Percy casts "Sebastian"/Percy as one such figure and symbol for 'the object of the desire of those most open to the promptings of desire' (Coetzee 95). In this way, the novel's use of the ekphrastic and the ecstatic become intertwined concepts, so much so that the descriptions of sex themselves can be thought of as moments of ekphrasis – or "sexphrasis" – in which the reader becomes the viewer. An example of this relation is a sex scene between Stoker and Phyllis, where the cinematic quality of their fantasies pull the reader in as voyeur. These moments, significantly, are also almost always ephemeral since, in the text, they are more akin to live performances or theatre than they are to immortalised pieces of art. At the same time, they are made permanent by the text itself and become absorbed into 'the realm of the aesthetic' (Muñoz 1). Here, Muñoz argues, 'we can [often] glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness' (Ibid). Key to Muñoz's formulation is that the 'queer aesthetic' must be witnessed to reveal its world-making potential. Jamal's novel plays on this need to be seen through including the reader as witness, but more importantly by incorporating eyewitnesses to moments of "sexphrasis", like when Dean and Putter sit in a tree and watch two men have sex through their apartment window.

The depiction of sex as ekphrastic/*ek-static* in Jamal's novel is thus supplemented by the fact that many of these descriptions include a third party who views the act. In this sense, these scenes begin to dissolve the ideas of morality so strictly defined by the Immorality Amendment Act by actively staging sexual gratification as the product of parties where more than two persons are present. These scenes do not necessarily involve two men, as per the preoccupation of the Act, but still dissolves the couple-form by introducing a spectator or additional figure.<sup>16</sup> While this third party does not necessarily participate directly, they become a participant figure: they come to act as an audience member, or a viewer, often portrayed as observing the action with great admiration, as if engaged in viewing art itself. Towards the

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<sup>16</sup> It is important to note here that, in the South African context, alternatives to the heterosexual couple form already exists – and has existed historically – in the form of polygamous marriages. Polygamy, as argued by Hoad in his recent article "Queer Customs Against the Law" are in tension as 'a contested part of African values and Evangelical Christianity in the debates around "African" homosexuality' (7). There were, in other words, normative, indigenous traditions of plural marriages all across Africa that had to be suppressed through the imposition of colonial national identity, and the postcolonial period does not resolve this tension. The intimation here, however, is that the kinship system created through polygamy forms a kind of publicly experienced sexual system, even if only between the members of said kinship, and can this be thought of as queer custom. See more on the meaning and possibility of African traditional practices in my last chapter.

beginning of the novel, Stoker feels conflicted when Phyllis is fellating him and finds that it is ‘the woman at the Seeff he’d been thinking about’, prompting him to ‘cancel[...] the blow-job mid-suck’ (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 21). Phyllis reassures Stoker that ‘[f]antasies are fine’ and shares her own Sylvester Stallone fixation (Ibid 22). Their sexual interaction takes a queer turn when Stoker agrees that Stallone ‘was great in *Lock Up*. All that brooding masochism, I love it!’ (Ibid 23). Phyllis neutralises Stoker’s anxiety, an angst tied to heteronormative sexual practices as both romanticised and contained in the couple format only, and the presence of this third person/party – albeit in fantasy – is introduced as both an attractive and authentic alternative sexual experience:

Thanks to Stallone, Stoker was able to maintain an honest hard-on. Phyllis and Stoker fucked into the late morning, Stoker intercutting with scenes from *Cliffhanger*, *Demolition Man*, *The Specialist*, *Judge Dredd*, *Assassins*, then back to the golden age of *Rocky*. They lay sated, winter light splashing across Phyllis’s flesh and Stoker’s skin and bone (Ibid 23).

It is purposely unclear whether Stoker maintains his erection because indulging Phyllis in her fantasy is arousing, or whether the fantasy of Stallone in particular arouses Stoker as well. However, the ‘*honest hard-on*’ connected to Stallone, and the lack of description of Phyllis’s reaction to Stoker’s cinematic intercutting, points to the latter. Stoker’s conflation of a very particular brand of hypermasculinity represented by action-men like Stallone, of *machismo*, with ‘*masochism*’ is significant. Stoker himself does not conform to this ideal of masculinity, with his ‘skin and bone’ body and his ‘thick glasses [and] short red hair’ and, intriguingly, meets the object of his own fantasy while on a quest to find some ‘gay graffiti’ in an abandoned warehouse (Ibid 6). This ambiguity suggests that trying to fit into such rigorously constructed ideals of masculinity is actually an act of masochistic labour. The fact that it is contained in the figure of Stallone, who *performs* this kind of masculinity in films but chooses to paint, like Stoker, in his private time reveals this hyperbolised masculinity to be always a performance in the first place (Ibid 23).

Locating this fantasy-world in film, significantly, also points to a flexible temporality since film can be paused, sped up, or slowed down at will. The film medium itself represents a temporal logic that is frozen in its particular time, a product of its time, thus freezing time itself. Introducing this medium also slows narrative time, since the narration of Stoker and Phyllis’s sex act is interrupted and then mediated through what can be called indirect ekphrasis and thus one kind of “sexphrasis”. Consequently, the narrative action is prolonged, metaphorically suspending Stoker and Phyllis in this moment, and constructing sex as another method of temporal extension like youthfulness. To be sure, the introduction of fantasy itself in their heterosexual relationship does not collapse heteronormativity and its gender binaries. However, the bisexual implications of this fantasy-world does begin to unsettle the strictly heterosexual couple by introducing another form of liminality – between heterosexual and homosexual, and yet occupying an important third space – and presents alternative formations as distinct, if distant, possibilities.

As the novel progresses, these distant possibilities become more tangible alternatives. At the fictional wake for real-life musician James Phillips, Stoker muses about the news of Bridge’s negative

HIV test after her rape earlier in the novel.<sup>17</sup> The interweaving of Bridge's rape and the death of one of the founders of anti-apartheid Afrikaans punk music, perhaps the end of a certain era for Stoker's group, explains why Stoker is 'sceptical' that much has changed in South Africa so soon after the end of apartheid (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 91). The air of cynicism, however, is soon disrupted by another ekphrastic account of sex, this time between two men. Shortly after Phyllis performs an 'exorcism' of the group's grief over Phillips's death, Dean is sitting in a tree watching two nearby neighbours reading in bed (Ibid 95). When the two men start 'fucking', Dean's bird's-eye view places him in position of voyeur (Ibid). The fact that this "performance" is mediated through a bedroom window, which acts as a screen of sorts, casts Dean as the viewer of an artwork:

'Can you see everything?'  
 'In fuckin' technicolour, man.'  
 Putter climbed the tree and joined Dean. In silence they sat and watched the couple fuck  
 (Ibid 95-96).

Describing the scene as a 'beautiful sight' reinforces its portrayal as a form of art that Dean and Putter view in silent admiration, as if viewing a film (Ibid). The reference to 'technicolour', a series of colour motion picture processes used in film production and especially prominent in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, further emphasises the cinematic quality of this scene. Technicolour's common association with Disney amplifies both the comedy and queerness of the moment. Relating the encounter to Stoker later, Dean tells him that '[t]hey fucked all night. It was an incredible privilege' (Ibid 153). Their *privileged* point of view in the tree thus becomes translated into a rite of passage for Dean, a special privilege that doubles the meaning of the word. Stoker's appraisal of the scene as 'virtual' rather than real is countered: 'This was live. It wasn't some frozen hackneyed picture of lust. It was interesting. I learnt a lot' (Ibid). The live quality of the moment thus transforms it again from a filmic moment to one of performance art. Dean's assertion that he 'learnt a lot' further sketches it as *educational*, indicating that his participation as voyeur changes him somehow and acts as a kind of catalyst for growth. Dean transcends his youthful melancholy, indicating a new sense of maturity, and seems 'happier' in a way that is unattainable to Stoker, who remains suspended in a kind of perpetual youth (Ibid).

The use of colour, as in the allusion to 'technicolour' above, is repeated at several points in the novel, linking colour symbolically to sexual expression. This connection recurs shortly after Stoker and Phyllis leave Phillips's wake to take a trip to the hot springs in Citrusdal, where it reformulates the notion of sex as art, while moving away from an androcentric focus on queer sexuality. Phyllis's former lover, Hedda, works at the hot springs. Stoker's retelling of the two women's affair figures it as a kind of journey, and sex between them as a healer-sufferer dynamic:

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<sup>17</sup> While Jamal's relocation of Phillips' death to 1994 (he died a year later in 1995) is technically an inaccuracy, it arguably relates to the kind of temporal fluidity the text is committed to. Phillips is often credited as the first South African punk artist. Along with musicians like Johannes Kerkerrel and Koos Kombuis, these artists became known as the '*Voelvry Movement*', meaning "free as a bird" or "outlaw" (Grundlingh 485). These "*boerepunk*" artists created anti-apartheid music in the 1980s, mainly aimed at Afrikaner youth (Ibid 486). Their music captured a kind of youthful resistance to apartheid, bred in its own Afrikaner backyard. Their 'rock and roll style criticised 'the state, Afrikaans political leaders, the South African Defence Force, the apartheid system, and white middle-class values' (Ibid 485). This collection of artists thus capture another form extended youth, especially in terms of their involvement in establishing an authentic punk movement critical of the status quo of apartheid, explaining the relevance of Jamal's reference to Phillips.

The affair had been brief. Their true journey was one which would be intermittent yet deep. Their lives had continued with the sweet memory of their lovemaking. According to Phyllis, Hedda had needed saving. They'd met at Magrawley's on Long about four years ago, Hedda seated at the bar, Phyllis singing a karaoke. These were their first coordinates [...] And Phyllis had taken Hedda to her flat [...] 'People have colours,' Phyllis had said. 'I will show you how to shine.' Phyllis's words during one of her reflections on past loves. Words Stoker had cherished because they said so much about Phyllis, her way with people, with lovers... I will show you how to shine... Phyllis's grand legacy (Ibid 107).

The use of '*people* [who] have colours' reinforces Phyllis's implied bisexuality, and the 'intermittent' nature of her affair with Hedda, along with Stoker's suggestion that this is 'her way with people, with lovers' in the plural, suggests that her sexuality is fluid. Thus, Phyllis's sexuality and her 'lovemaking', in particular, have the power to reanimate and the ability to heal past wounds, to let a light 'shine' where there was once a 'black cloud' (Ibid). This healing power suggests another correlation between sex and art, reinforced by Phyllis's assertion that people have colours: just as art is often considered as cathartic and therapeutic, the text proposes, so too can sex. Phyllis introduces Hedda to a range of alternative sexualities, as if they are nodes on a path to healing. This fluid sexuality is Phyllis's 'grand legacy', and thus something that is conventionally passed on through *familial inheritance* instead becomes passed on through *sex* between women, between people. The straight time of reproductive futurity, in other words, is disrupted and becomes instead a legacy of queer pleasure.

Stoker and Phyllis's trip to the hot springs establishes the next coordinate in the sexual journey, and, at this point, sex as a kind of performance art becomes solidified. The separation between performer and viewer, present earlier with the two men viewed from a distance, dissolves when Hedda becomes an active third performer as they make 'love in the warm stream':

In the flickering light of candles arranged around them he watched as Phyllis sang softly as she writhed above him [...] Hedda was seated by the fire, drumming in synch with the beat. Stoker was riveted to Phyllis's face, his hands holding her at the waist, her breasts swaying yellow in the light [...] Stoker listened to the low music emanating from the tape deck, to Hedda's steady drumming. He listened to Phyllis's sighs as she came, her sightless eyes lifted to the stars glittering through the trees, a faint drizzle falling upon her face. Stoker held on until she had released and then he came in turn, a low groan his only sound. Hedda eventually joined them in the water, the candles spluttering then dying in the rain, the night withdrawing a need for eyes (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 109-110).

The almost verse-like prose with its many alliterations in this scene ('hands holding'; 'sighs as she came, her sightless eyes lifted to the stars', etc.) turns it into a piece of performance poetry precisely because it emphasises the working of words, their very sounds as performative. Hedda's musical accompaniment makes her an active participant in the sex act between Phyllis and Stoker. In presenting this trio as an aesthetic moment, the text forwards its pro-sex stance and disrupts the normative heterosexual coupling, introducing a third partner whose presence is not portrayed as voyeurism but, rather, as romance. This disruption is doubled since the poetic language borrows from dominant tropes of heterosexual romance novels and films – music, candles, starlight – rendering the scene, as Stobie notes, 'romantic, sensual and delicate' ("Queer Celebratory" 12). Rather than Hedda, it is the reader that becomes a kind of voyeur viewing the action from a distanced position.

Phyllis taking the top, dominant position amplifies the playfulness of the moment, while placing Stoker in the subordinate position emphasises his earlier assertion that he exists to allow others to take over. Instead of feminising Stoker, however, his subservience ties into his extended youth. Phyllis plays her role as ‘bimbo-shaman’ to guide Stoker by acting ‘as the touchstone of the novel’s efforts to reconceptualise intimate connections’ (Stobie, “Queer Celebratory” 9), in this case devaluing the couple-form. However, it is not until Phyllis leaves Stoker that he is able to fully develop as an artist. It is the loss of this touchstone that enables him to channel it into his art, become successful and therefore somehow more “adult”. However, even his art continues to display his sense of suspension, ‘emblematic of a state of hovering, of being between things’ (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 217). While Stoker’s art is able to develop, it does so because it reflects his own state of suspension, of extended youthfulness discovered with Phyllis. Stoker’s inability to truly become “adult”, despite fathering a child, is confirmed at the end of the novel when he realises that he ‘didn’t want to fuck anyone. He was turning more and more into a wanker’ (Ibid 271). Stoker reverts to a more “juvenile” sexuality by relying on masturbation for sexual satisfaction and thus to a queerer form of sex since masturbation, lacking in procreative purpose, can be thought of as queer sex.

### **The Widening Queer: Critiquing Race, Capitalism & Heteronormative Marriage**

In these distant and actual possibilities of same-sex love, triadic formations, even masturbation, and the Locker Room Project, the queerness of the text can be located. Queer, in this sense is not tied exclusively to the sexual, but functions as method of critiquing the regimes of the normal, including those imposed by Empire, global capital, and the institution of marriage. While Stobie accuses the text’s use of “queer” as being too broad, I contend that her definition is too narrow, effectively undermining the potential of queerness as a category and the expansiveness of the term that current iterations of queer theory bear out.<sup>18</sup> The novel twists the term into a broader repudiation of “regimes of normal” (Munro, *Dream of Love* 234). Spinning the definitional possibilities of the term ever wider, through time and space, the novel builds an alternative archive of meanings for queerness when Dean states that ‘there’s nothing queerer than Empire’ (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 177), a statement that Stoker relives while facing a ‘giant statue of Cecil John Rhodes’ (Ibid 219). In entangling queerness with Empire and the figure of Rhodes, as relics of the past that persist into the present, the novel reminds us that the term “queer” is itself the product of the circuits of Empire. Reading Fanon, Sara Ahmed contends that ‘bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which makes the world “white” as a world that is inherited or already given’ (111). “Whiteness”, in this sense, refers to ‘the production of whiteness as a straight line rather than whiteness as a characteristic of bodies’ (Ibid 121). Ahmed contends instead that ‘we can talk

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<sup>18</sup> In her critique of the novel, Stobie assesses that, aside from the Locker Room Project Party itself, ‘the concept of queer as expressed elsewhere in the text is idiosyncratic, under-theorised and extremely broad’ (“Queer Celebratory” 12). She locates the reason for this analysis in a list of ‘aphorisms’ she finds in the novel, including the examples discussed here (Ibid). While I agree that there are a few things ‘queerer than permaculture’ (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 291), in the instances Stobie quotes she seems to miss the humour, irony and, in fact, direct critique of the very concepts she believes the novel disregards.

about how whiteness is “attributed” to bodies *as if* it were a property of bodies’, a process through which we can ‘describe whiteness as a straightening device’ (Ibid). In this sense, the whiteness conferred by ‘histories of colonialism’ forms one kind of “regime of normal”. This association between queerness, Empire and Cecil John Rhodes touches on this colonial history and, in so doing, queers the straight line of whiteness. This act of queering reignites the Muñozian feeling that ‘the world is not enough’ because ‘queerness is not yet here’ (1). The sense that this imperial history continues to stick as an ‘already given’, even after apartheid, drives the feeling of not-yet-here, not-yet-queer.

Putter reminds the reader that “fun” was the province of whiteness, of those who had the luxury to step out of the realities of apartheid for a while, perhaps to have a braai and watch a game of rugby, while others – people of colour, queer folk – could not. The Locker Room Project is thus about new ways to have fun since, as Putter explains, the ‘very thought of fun makes [him] want to puke [...] The whiteness of it all. The sunny skies, the braaivleis’ (Ibid 182). Fun under apartheid, in other words, was reserved for whiteness, reserved to keep the white world complacent and complicit with the apartheid state. Despite this critique of whiteness, the novel itself does not much engage with issues of race and actually falls into the trap of reproducing racial stereotypes – such as the objectification of the black, male body, in the case of Dean’s flatmate (Ibid 27). The rest of the cast of oddballs are all clearly marked as white, or left as racially ambiguous, but almost definitely are not black. Thus, in privileging whiteness, Jamal’s novel falls prey to similar shortfalls as the project of Rainbow Nation-building itself. The rush towards fulfilling this fantasy of the post-racial South Africa, in fact, ends up reiterating the racial hierarchies that we are still struggling to dismantle today. This glaring flaw in the novel’s construction is, perhaps, owing to its own desire to conform to the ideal of queerness as an inclusive voice, as Tucker suggests it was thought of in the 1990s (169). But eliding racial difference reveals an ideological blind-spot. This shortfall is one that becomes painfully obvious in K. Sello Duiker’s *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001), the focus of my next chapter, where issues of race continue to plague its protagonist.

While Jamal’s novel is less sophisticated in connecting “queer” to post-apartheid racial politics as it is at theorising sex and sexuality, it does spin the term outwards as a direct and nuanced critique of global capitalism through the novel’s reference to shadow economies that operate alongside global capital. When Stoker asks Putter what ‘Queer’ means, Putter’s response reflects this twisting of the meaning of queerness. For him, queerness is not only tied to sexuality or even to the Locker Room art-party but includes, for example, ‘the Caltex petrol station on Main’ where petrol ‘attendants are running a shebeen. Now that’s Queer’ (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 265). In this instance, Putter is linking queerness to forms of economic activity that are fugitive, on the sly, and part of the undercommons that takes the means of production and bends them to their own ends, rather than serving capital’s interests. This use of queer resurfaces a definition of the term that has dropped out of our discussion, found in the expression ‘*queer street*’ that Chen describes as a place where debtors and economic failures circulate as fugitives from capitalism, and find their own place (60).<sup>19</sup> Like ‘queer street’, the undercommons is guided by fugitive impulses that are about finding alternative projects of belonging. Shebeens, for

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<sup>19</sup> Chen draws definitions of the adjectival and verb forms of the term “queer” and the array of meanings captured in the *Oxford English Dictionary* to redeem the economic significance of the term.

example, have historically belonged in the sphere of the undercommons since they are themselves fugitive spaces. As an institution, the shebeen brings us back to the kind of porous, circularity that is key to the novel: shebeens are the product of apartheid governance that would not let certain people move in or out of certain areas, at certain times, thus producing these underground economies. The shebeen at the Caltex, itself a relic of apartheid spatial planning, is thus working within and against capitalism itself because it creates a sort of black market. But it is not that radical project of defeating capitalism. It is queer precisely because it recognises that capitalism is a much larger entity, but that there are moments when parts of it can be usurped for personal interests rather than the interests of capital. That sort of alternative world-making is exactly what the art projects in the novel are about: being an artist is to have an ambivalent relationship to capitalism in the same way that the petrol attendants and their shebeen do. While Stoker ends up commercialising his art, the novel and its protagonist still want to retain art as a fugitive practice. Putter's assessment of this underground economy as 'Queer' is reflective of its rejection of the 'regimes of normal' defined by capitalism, as is Stoker's practice of art (Munro, *Dream of Love* 243). In this instance, queer is delinked from its established sexual connotations and instead reflects the sense of "attitude" that the novel invests in. Queer is not tied to an identity but to a way of *doing*, in this case, a way of doing within and against capitalism.

Moreover, the novel's sense of doing within and against also critiques the heteronormative in multiple ways, both through the ekphrastic sex scenes discussed earlier and in its dissolving of the couple-form, despite Stobie's contention that it evades such criticism ("Queer Celebratory" 12). A more apt critique is the ending of the novel that relies so heavily on tropes of marriage and reproductive futurity. However, it is important to note that even these formations do not follow normative trajectories. The only actual marriage presented in the novel, aside from Lizzie and Klingman's wedding in the epilogue, is that of Mr Olivieri and his wife Beatrice. In the 'absence of progeny', Olivieri bequeaths his 'hardware store, the studio, his porn collection and his Beetle' to Stoker when he dies, once more confirming Stoker's position as a thirty-something "child" (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 240). The married couple also does not conform to conventions of marriage; Olivieri meanders the nudist Sandy Bay beach and brings home photographs of himself 'stark naked, standing next to an equally stark-naked Phyllis' to proudly display on their home refrigerator (Ibid 239). The space normatively reserved for drawings and photographs of children and grandchildren instead becomes a proud display of Olivieri's body and desires. Formulating a 'stark naked' Olivieri as "equal" to a 'stark naked' Phyllis dissolves the age distinction between the two characters in the photograph and the fact that the ninety-year-old man abuses his *appearance* of old age to make physical contact with a naked, younger Phyllis confirms that, like Stoker, he too is taking advantage of an extended youth.

Beatrice further destabilises Stoker's own ageist assumptions because the photo 'clearly didn't faze her as much as it did him' (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 239), thus breaking down distinctions between youth and old age and basing this disruption on sex and sexuality. Beatrice reveals her marriage to Mario was, in fact, built on the solid foundations of his love for pornography, and that she herself 'was quite a stripper in [her] day', evidence of which she proudly produces:

Beatrice had arranged the pictures so that they mounted in intensity. For starters there were shots of her sporting a feather boa, carrying a milk pail, against a fake mountainside by a fake stream [...] ‘Beautiful, no?’ Beatrice asked. She was definitely not interested in criticism. Stoker and Jay nodded in agreement as they silently riffled through more than a hundred images of Beatrice swooning, pouting, being fucked from every angle and in each and every orifice (Ibid 241).

Beatrice’s arrangement of the photographs is designed and curated, building up to a climactic revelation, as if it is a stop-motion film, returning readers to the cinematic element of sexual display. The initial description of the photographs make mention of an anonymous ‘dark-haired woman with a very beautiful body’, which then transforms into the ‘swooning, pouting’ *Beatrice* (Ibid). Therefore, this moment disrupts the linear, temporal logic of the novel by bringing the past depicted in the photographs into the present tense, but also by transposing the present Beatrice into her past form. The normative linear logic of marriage itself is ‘being fucked from every angle’ as Beatrice invites Stoker and Jay to take on the roles of voyeurs over her own celebratory sexuality. While these photographs are more virtual in nature than, say, the two men fucking and Phyllis and Stoker’s hot springs rendezvous, they detail a sex life that was once experimental, ‘explicit’, public, and very much contrary to the norm. In this way, their life lived through pleasure, public nudity, and group sex captured on film – as opposed to a life lived for children and in the private home – turns the Olivieris into the most overtly queer couple in Jamal’s novel. Beatrice’s gloating attitude towards this past life returns the photographs to the present, recoding them as artistic. This playful take on art, sex, and age forges a connection across time between Stoker and Beatrice, through sexuality, in the same way as is envisioned with the Locker Room Project.

### **Art Party: Public Sex & Queer Becoming in Post-Apartheid South Africa**

Throughout the novel, the Locker Room Project functions as the space where ‘queerness’ and its limits are tested in the newly democratic space of South Africa. The Mother City Queer Project (MCQP), on which the Locker Room Project is based, emerges as a product of South Africa’s new ‘bigger-biggest-best constitution’ wherein queer folk – perhaps somewhat unexpectedly – became officially recognised (Jamal, *Predicaments* 103). The party is also a way to celebrate this recognition in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In her critique of the party’s promotional booklet, Stobie contends that the novel ‘appeases and co-opts heterosexuality’ and that the ‘lack of political awareness is evident in the claim that queerness is an attitude’ (“Queer Celebratory” 13-14). Stoker tries to locate himself in this booklet:

He uttered the word Queer. Yes, that was the connection. His life was queer. But so was everyone else’s. The difference was Putter wasn’t getting strung out and upset, he was celebrating the queerness of things. Stoker resumed reading the booklet: “People – hetero and homo alike – are waking up to the fact that their sexual identity will always defy neat labelling. Although most Queer people are homosexual, not all homosexuals are Queer. In fact, some straight people are Queerer than some gay people. QUEERNESS IS AN ATTITUDE” (170).



While Stobie agrees ‘that people across a range of sexual preferences, desires and practices can identify as queer’, she takes issue with the ‘competitiveness implied by comparing some straight people’s degree of queerness with that of some gay people’ (“Queer Celebratory” 13). For her, this ‘suggests that identifying as queer confers membership of an exclusive, chic club’ while eliding the discrimination still faced by non-normative sexual minorities (Ibid). Although Stobie’s critique is valid, it is important to note that this booklet is actually an intertext: it is quoted directly from the MCQP manifesto (cited in Jamal, *Predicaments* 104). The booklet, then, represents another moment of porousness in the text, where the line between the real and the fictional blurs. Moreover, Stobie’s ‘single-oppression framework’ falls into the category that Cathy Cohen identifies as a misrepresentation of ‘the distribution of power within and outside of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered communities, and therefore limit the comprehensive and transformational character of queer politics’ (441). Cohen thus defends queerness as a broader category for coalition politics that is not limited to the LGBTIQ acronym within which Stobie locates “queer”. Additionally, Stobie’s analysis is not grounded in theories of homonormativity that would identify the adoption of certain forms of queerness into the nation-state as an extension of the rainbow nation-building project itself. This co-option into the nation, in others words, becomes a normalising impulse that sanctions certain forms of queerness. As Puar argues, ‘the production of gay and queer bodies is crucial to the deployment of nationalism, insofar as these perverse bodies reiterate heterosexuality as the norm but also because certain domesticated homosexual bodies provide ammunition to reinforce nationalist projects’ (39). In the case of South Africa, folding ‘gay and queer bodies’ into the nation-state contributes to the construction of South African exceptionalism, on the one hand, while also disarming queer politics in opposition to the state, effectively domesticating queerness. Jamal’s definition of queerness as an attitude, then, is trying to forward a future notion of queerness and queer politics that resists such neat domestication.

Thus, Stoker uses ‘queer’ to describe himself and his circle, not because he believes them to be ‘strange’ (Stobie, “Queer Celebratory 13), but because he is pushing against conventions through art. As Jamal contends, ‘MCQP announced the reflexive and *playful innocence of becoming* [and] this transmogrifying spirit of play announced a new era in which spectacle emerged not as the figure of oppression, but as the figure of liberation’ (*Predicaments* 104, emphasis mine). From this perspective, “queer” in the intertextual booklet refers to those who ‘lived creatively and critically, who took chances and pushed conventions’, like Stoker (Ibid). Queer, in this sense, can only be a “becoming”, a (dis)figuration, a process, and an in-betweenness rather than a fixed identity or category. Stoker’s circle of friends celebrate their non-conformity because they ‘accept terror as a necessary element within the absurdity of lived experience in South Africa’ and this, in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, confirms the ‘gravity which shaped the will to pleasure, or [...] a more radical and unbounded [...] will to joy’ (Ibid). The nominators of ‘play’ and ‘playfulness’, ‘absurdity’ and ‘pleasure’ that Jamal uses in his discussion of MCQP, figured by the Locker Room Project in his novel, confirms that this project is tinted with a certain youthful hue, just as the new democratic South Africa is in its infancy.

This spirit is the same one Putter conveys when Stoker asks him what ‘Queer’ is to him and he replies, ‘[u]nusual... playful... extraordinary... productive... off the wall... pleasure-loving’ (Jamal,

*Love-Themes*, 265). Putter therefore embraces his own extended youth in a much queerer way than Stoker, who still views it somewhat ambivalently. For Putter, this extended youth is a way of ‘thriving in the midst of death. About celebrating life for what it’s worth’ (Ibid 183). Moreover, the competitiveness Stobie critiques is, in fact, in the spirit of the party’s theme: a ‘Queer take on sport’ (Ibid 262). Sport in the new South Africa came to be a tool in the (Rainbow) nation-building project. Co-opting and simultaneously deconstructing the masculinist rhetoric of sport, putting a queer spin on it, thus speaks to a certain spirit of collectiveness in this context, which in this early phase might require a certain co-opting of heterosexuality as well. In the case of *Love Themes*, this collectivity is achieved through invoking elements of play, thereby highlighting a youthful – perhaps even naïve – optimism while also ‘constructively pervert[ing] existent polarities’ and refusing any ‘easy synthesis between such polarities’ (Jamal, *Predicaments* 103).

Therefore, the Locker Room Project, both as the actual themed MCQP-event in 1994 and as referenced in Jamal’s novel, is an attempt at queer *collectivity* building. Stobie too draws out this connection, in brief, by relating the art party project to the American based Queer Nation activist movement of the early 1990s (“Queer Celebratory” 14). The tactics of this movement, according to Berlant and Freeman, were ‘to cross borders, to occupy spaces, and to mime the privileges of normality – in short, to simulate “the national” with a camp inflection’ (196). The space, in this case, that is to be occupied is the Observatory River Club, ‘[a] late colonial building’, which places ‘Queer culture in the heart of Empire’ (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 177). As Stobie argues, the ‘crossing of borders’ in The Locker Room project pertains to its subversion of masculinist, heteronormativity through its queering of sport, especially given the communal South African obsession with rugby, cricket and soccer (“Queer Celebratory” 14). Given that sport, and in particular the 1995 Rugby World Cup, was incorporated by the state in an attempt to forge unity and build the Rainbow Nation ideal, this notion of youthfulness and queerness also collide to describe the new South Africa: a democracy in its youth trying to speed towards reconciliation.

In addition, this is not simply queering a tradition of machismo, but also playfully revealing the queerness already present in this tradition. Sport, after all, is conventionally gendered and thus constitutes forms of homosocial bonding. The Locker Room Project transforms *homosocial* into *homoerotic*:

In the lovely long jump lounge a team of leaping latex lesbians will lick lashings of lugubrious liqueur. In the Ra-Ra-Rugga-Bugga Bar moffie mountaineers will mingle with gorgeous goalkeepers and terribly terrific tennis-players, while outside the raving rollerbladers will race raucously round and round and round and round (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 262)’.

The ‘appalling alliteration’ in Putter’s description, as Stoker ironically calls it, highlights the playful nature of the event while also borrowing its strategy from children’s literature (Ibid). This alliteration and the minimalist punctuation creates a sense of speed and urgency and further imbues the description with a youthful energy, also denoted by descriptors such as ‘leaping’, ‘raving’, ‘raucously’ and the repetition of ‘round and round’. The speed created in this rhetorical excess suggests that there is urgency in crossing metaphorical sexual borders, creating a ‘blur of movement as multiple simultaneous sports

are played indiscriminately and the senses are bedazzled by alcohol and desire' (Stobie, "Queer Celebratory" 14). These multiple sports can thus be linked to Phyllis's notion of people having multiple 'colours', and the blurring of movement and boundaries to the fluidity of sexuality.

The Epilogue synthesises all these narrative strands, bringing together sex, sexuality, art as spectacle, an 'art party', and a playground all at once (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 265). At the same time, this synthesis also creates a porousness between history and fantasy, of the real MCQP party and the novel's Locker Room Project. According to Jamal, MCQP 'sought to break with the solemnity of resistance culture and institute a culture of play: a culture *as* performance' (*Predicaments* 103). This energy of performance is perhaps best embodied by Putter himself:

Putter, who naturally had his own agenda, appeared in ten inch silver-spangled heels that put Phyllis's gold shoes to shame. He also wore a sequinned wig that bore a striking resemblance to candyfloss, a silver tennis outfit with an enormous bust, and an eighteenth-century pancake face riddled with beauty spots. He tottered and towered over everyone else, regally swatting the masses with his silver-spangled tennis racquet (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 295).

Putter's extravagance captures the playful excess of the art party. Moreover, his ensemble brings together a collection of past moments – from the colonial reference in his 'pancake face' to the candyfloss of youth – in a parody of gender norms as well as temporal norms. In collecting these spectres of the past in a single performance, which is also at odds with the sports theme of the party, Putter acts as a kind of rupture to the fabric of time itself and to normative logics, including the logic of the party's theme. The fact that this rupture is achieved through the heightened comedy of this ensemble turns Putter into a kind of paradox through which 'any anxious or pathological attraction to perversity [...] is instantaneously converted into mockery and laughter' (Jamal, *Predicaments* 104).

This is the spirit of the party itself; it is a rupture with the overdetermined straight time of apartheid towards a youthful embrace of desire and difference in democratic South Africa:

Stoker saw a team of day-glo mountain-bikers, a team of parachutists with the parachutes miraculously floating above them like glowing clouds. There were hairy pom-pom girls, two lecherous geriatrics decked out in togas and purple grapes and gauges for measuring cocks. There were a group of buoyant balloonists, a gamut of aquatic sportists and, in a ditch alongside the rosy pink and mauve lane, a couple of fist-fuckers fist-fucking. The assailant wore industrial strength rubber gloves. Both the victim and the assailant wore T-shirts advocating safe sex. In a clump of bushes further along, Stoker spotted a young man skin-clad from head to toe in pink plastic. The man was amorously sucking the pectorals of a blow-up doll. The overall effect was startling yet chastening [...] Stoker had never seen so much urban wisdom and colour, so many preposterous and dazzling extensions of selves (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 295-6).

The 'dazzling array of costumes' emphasises the culture of performance that Jamal advocates for. The addition of the 'lecherous geriatrics' confirms that youth is not just for the temporally young but can be extended in queer ways, reminding us of Beatrice and Mario's legacy. The fairytale-like quality of the scene is confirmed by the alliteration of the 'fist-fuckers fist-fucking', while also being unsettled by the abruptness of this graphic depiction of non-normative sex. As Sedgwick contends, fist-fucking 'as a sexual phantasmatic [...] can offer a switchpoint not only between homo- and heteroeroticism, but between allo- and autoeroticism [...] and between the polarities that a phallic economy defines as active

and passive' (100). The fist-fuckers thus effectively dissolve the distinction between the self and the other, creating a porousness between self and other instead, between the performers and the viewers, thus forming another instance of "sexphrasis" where the ecstatic becomes ekphrastic. As Rubin argues, 'fisting [itself] is an *art* that involves seducing one of the jumpiest and tightest muscles in the body' (230, emphasis mine). Importantly, as an artform, the practice is not defined by sexual identity and can criss-cross hetero- and homosexualities. The emphasis on the 'effect' as both 'startling and chastening' reinforce the notion of this as performance art intended to generate a reaction, both in its viewer and in the reader of the text. The 'rosy pink and mauve lane' and the ditch alongside it mimetically represent the colours of the anus, effectively turning the lane into a projected admiration of this orifice. Because of this "pretty" description, it simultaneously shocks and soothes the reader; it startles and chastens. The "performers" are merely referred to as 'victim' and 'assailant', and indeed they are genderless – forming exactly the kind of switchpoint Sedgwick argues fist-fucking to be. Because they are 'neither in private nor completely in public', as Stobie contends ("Queer Celebratory" 16), they are both a sexual phantasm – an illusion or a ghostly spectral – and real/live in the same way that Dean thought of the two men he viewed fucking from his position in the tree. The notion of 'colour' recurs in the scene, along with the repetition of actual colours ('purple', 'rosy pink', 'mauve', 'pink'), and is now overtly connected to 'extensions of selves' in the queer space of the Locker Room. Thus, it is in this space and at this time that people reveal their true colours, as we imagine Phyllis might see them.

The fist-fuckers' safe-sex promotional t-shirts remind the reader that their performance is 'thriving in the midst of death' (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 183). The ditch, then, can be thought of as an allusion to a grave, a playful take on Leo Bersani's infamous question "Is the rectum a grave?" For this couple, and in this scene, fist-fucking is neither a 'disgusting sexual practice because of the cultural revulsion attached to the rectum', nor is it a grave – yet it is both (Stobie, "Queer Celebratory" 16). This performance is an acceptance, even a celebration, of 'terror as a necessary element within the absurdity of lived experience in South Africa [and] the will to pleasure [...] within an indissolubly contradictory experience of life' (Jamal, *Predicaments* 104). At the height of the AIDS pandemic, connotations of terror and fist-fucking reached a climax. According to Rubin, the first recommendations for safe-sex in the U.S. were 'based on educated guesswork' and 'all the guidelines listed fisting as unsafe', revealing something 'deeply irrational in the way fisting has been treated' (236-7). However, it is precisely this irrationality that the figure of Jamal's fist-fuckers counters through a tactical celebration of irrationality itself in the Locker Room Project.

In this sense, the invocation of the image of the fist-fuckers plays an important role in imagining a reinvented postcolonial/post-apartheid sexual agency, one that once more harks back to Foucault's ideal of bodies and pleasures. As Macey notes, Foucault is often credited as 'the French *savant*' that Edmund White praises for observing that 'fist-fucking is our century's only brand-new contribution to the sexual armamentarium' (370).<sup>20</sup> For Foucault, Halperin argues, the 'production of new pleasure is

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<sup>20</sup> This is not counting, of course, 'the fin-de-siècle discoveries of phone sex and fax sex', as Halperin notes (92), or the myriad forms of virtual and cybersex invented since access to the internet became mainstream and smartphones became permanent accessories to our daily lives.

[...] a significant achievement in its own right, and it testifies powerfully and thrillingly to the creative potential of gay praxis' (92-3). Furthermore, the 'transformative power of queer sexual practices [...] reveals something of its political efficacy':

through the invention of novel, intense, and scattered bodily pleasures, queer culture brings about a tactical reversal of the mechanisms of sexuality, making strategic use of power differentials, physical sensations, and sexual identity-categories in order to create a queer praxis that ultimately dispenses with "sexuality" and destabilizes the very constitution of identity itself (Ibid 95-6)

Thus, the two fist-fuckers in *Love Themes* form part of this project of queer praxis that attempts a 'tactical reversal of the mechanisms of sexuality' under apartheid's rule and to dispense with its identity categories. Importantly, fist-fucking evades identity politics, and imagines pleasures and bodies in a new order; the sense of porousness in the act means that the self and other have interpenetrated to such a degree that identity categories are fractured or break down, even if briefly. This once more reiterates the notion that queerness is a "becoming" rather than an identity, a *doing* shaped by attitude. In this image, in other words, we see "queer" operating as 'the source of revisionary agency' of the 'postcolonial condition', as Jamal conceives of the possibility of the term (*Predicaments* 103). At the same time, as discussed earlier, this image is in tension, if not outright contradiction, with queer nation-building since this kind of queerness cannot be contained by the nation. The nation wants identities and categories – i.e. the lists in the Constitution – but fist-fucking goes elsewhere, figures something else. The kind of limitlessness epitomised by fist-fucking is a disfiguration of neat categorisation since it can be performed by and on anyone, thus symbolising the idea of "in-betweenness" so central to the novel as a whole; it is something that is not yet anywhere and is not clearly going anywhere, a state of "becoming" rather than being. Dressing the fist-fuckers in safe-sex t-shirts and 'industrial strength rubber gloves' (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 296) testifies to the hope that this revisionary agency adapts even in the face of 'terror'. The 'utopian longing' in this moment, in other words, 'is neither a nostalgic wish nor a passing fascination,' as Muñoz phrases it, 'but, rather, the impetus for a queerworld' and a 'culture of sexual possibility' (48). This queerworld, however, as the above contradiction suggests, is, once more, a horizon that might never be touched.

## Conclusion

The ending of *Love Themes for the Wilderness* comes full circle, restating its notion of sex as both ecstatic and ekphrastic and repeating its claim about people as colours, which dissolves any clear labelling of hetero- or homosexual identity. Instead, the reader becomes spectator to a radical reimagining of pleasure in South Africa. This circularity of the novel emphasises an infinite repetition, a loop with no beginning, no ending. It is arrested development. However, from our contemporary perspective, some of the limitations of this reimagining become glaringly obvious. Perhaps Stobie is correct in arguing that the novel under-theorises the true implications of queer as a way to think of South Africa's transition to democracy. This undertheorising could be why the original aims of MCQP, an 'initiative

to “deform” an existing order [...] and celebrate difference’ as portrayed in the scene of the Locker Room Project, has been displaced ‘by “lame domestication of desire”’ (Putter cited in Jamal, *Predicaments* 118). This ‘domestication of [queer] desire’ is, in fact, a product of its legal inclusion in the nation-state since, as Puar has shown, certain forms of homonormativity are ‘complicit with and invited into the biopolitical valorization of life in its inhabitation and reproduction of heteronormative norms’ (9). It is thus somewhat ironic, or perhaps not at all, that the novel itself ends with Lizzie and Klingman’s wedding, albeit a ceremony performed by ‘a screamingly camp friend of a friend’ and the heavily pregnant Phyllis ‘guid[ing] the group’ (Jamal, *Love-Themes* 287, 297). The promising ending epitomised by the Locker Room Project is slightly diminished by the reliance on tropes of the wedding-ending and the promise of reproductive futurity, even if these are also subject to queering. In the rush to move away from the dark cloud of apartheid and its straight time, towards the Rainbow Nation, time seems stuck. Jamal’s novel reveals time to be hybridised, unresolved, unsettled, an observation perhaps even more palpable now, 23 years after it was published. It is only Stoker who is still ‘at odds with the crowds’ and ‘recede[s] before the glare’, indicating that he too is suspended in his extended youth (Ibid 295-6).

During the spate of student protests that erupted countrywide at the end of 2015, one of the recurring slogans on protest posters reads: “Our parents were sold a dream in 1994. We’re just here for the refund.” The fact that these protests initiated and sustained by youth harken back to student protests in 1976 indicate that the reimagining of South Africa as an all-inclusive, Rainbow Nation has failed. These protests contradict the idea that the 1994 setting of Jamal’s novel ruptured past and present, inaugurating a newer and freer state. This historical circularity, going back to 1976 and back to 1994, like Jamal’s own circular narrative, stresses that whatever was accomplished in those moments was never actually accomplished. That cyclicity also reveals something deeply unfinished and unrepresented about the transitional, post-apartheid moment. Indeed, that “something” may evade proper representation. Instead, we are in a moment of suspended animation as to what *will be*. The nation may not be able to accomplish the work that the student movement and Jamal’s novel poses as important – which is to be suspended, to find and valorise spaces in-between categories. That is also the queerness of it all. The infancy that was the dream in 1994 is now a teenager, always on the cusp of change and growth but never truly achieving it; South Africa as a nation too remains in a phase of extended youth, and therefore a distinctively Queer Nation.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Regression, Reversal & Queer Connection: Imposed Youth & Metaphysical Sexual Communion in K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001)**

Released in South Africa in early 2018, the much acclaimed film *Inxeba/The Wound* (Tregrove 2017) sparked controversy from the outset. The film explores the annual meeting of two caretakers, Xolani and Vija, who guide young initiates through *ukwaluko*, or ritual circumcision, an important rite of passage for young Xhosa men. The two caretakers also happen to have a sexual relationship, portrayed in sideways angles and scenes shrouded in semi-darkness. Theirs is a secret affair of stolen moments of intense pleasure and often pain, rather than a shared queer identity. But their secret is threatened when Xolani is hired to guide young Kwanda, a 'soft' initiate who flaunts his wealth and does not shy away completely from his implied queer identity (*Inxeba*). Vija accuses Kwanda of being 'here to fuck up our ways'<sup>21</sup> (Ibid). This is the same accusation detractors directed at the film itself and its creators, which eventually led to a drawn-out classification debacle<sup>22</sup>: same-sex desire and sex does not belong in the sacred, hypermasculine space of the mountain, and it certainly does not belong in "our" cinemas. At the heart of this accusation is, perhaps, thinly veiled homophobia disguised as cultural sensitivity. More importantly, however, the backlash the film inspired highlights the fact, already well known by queer South Africans of colour especially, that the hard-won constitutional and state protections of sexual orientation is often little more than lofty words on paper. On the ground, queer people and their existence are still policed, questioned, and often persecuted – whether by "benign" prejudice or, on the more extreme end, by corrective rape and even death. Queer utopia, in this instance, is still primarily white territory; even if some room in the margin has been cleared for queer people of colour, the price of entry is prohibitively high. Written and published 17 years before the release of *Inxeba*, it is this reality and the price of entry that South African novelist K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) confronts in many ways. In its construction of both straight time and queer temporalities, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, I contend, is here 'to fuck up [the] ways' that blackness and queerness intersect with racist capitalism in contemporary South Africa. Duiker's novel, moreover, illustrates how characters like Tshepo create queerworlds outside the constraints of straight time.

In this chapter, I show that Duiker's novel complicates the utopic impulse of Jamal's *Love Themes for the Wilderness*. In my analysis, Duiker's novel reveals group sex as entanglement with enduring forms of racism and as dangerous when co-opted by labour capitalism in the aftermath of Apartheid. As a

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<sup>21</sup> Translated from isiXhosa, as that translation appears in the movie's subtitles.

<sup>22</sup> Shortly after the film's release, several traditional councils and organisations lodged complaints with the Film and Publication Board (FPB), accusing the film of exposing the secret and sacred rituals of *Ukwaluko*. The Appeal Tribunal of the FPB pulled the film from cinemas and its 16 LS (language and sex) changed to an X18 – the same as hardcore pornography, which meant that it could only be shown in places that sold or played pornographic material. Effectively, this resulted in an outright ban in mainstream cinemas. The decision was later overturned by the High Court in Pretoria, changing the rating to 18SNL (sex, nudity, language), but not before significantly and permanently derailing the film's reach in South African cinemas. For more on the legal aspects of the ban, see De Vos (2018).

remedy, Duiker offers other forms of implied group sex that are both physical and metaphysical, thus transcending the bounds and reach of the nation-state. Of particular interest to me is the text's engagement with different forms of youth temporality – through mental illness, sex work, and queer communion. Here, I offer the temporal category of imposed youth, an anachronistic “error” that can be likened to my earlier conception of extended youth, but instead implies *external* rather than *internal* agency. Thus, in this final chapter, I explore the intersections of the body (sex, sexuality, race) and the mind (psychology, pathology), and the concept of “imposed youth” as an infantilization of individuals suffering from mental illness, as well as the poor people that Angelo-Tshepo encounters in the last part of the novel. For the novel's protagonist, time is reversed as he is forced to regress to a childlike state and yield to authority when he suffers a mental breakdown. However, he often expresses complex relations towards the convention of time itself, whereby time is contracted, extended, or inverted in other parts of the novel; he is thus both suspended *in* and emblematic *of* queer time. In the sexual subculture of the Steamy Windows brotherhood, queer time is perhaps most obvious. However, I also show that the brotherhood's inability to account for its own racism transforms their utopic vision into a myopic one, which highlights how the reinvention of conceptions of time does not extend equally to everyone. This internal racism at Steamy Windows, along with its commercial underpinning, becomes damaging to people of colour like Tshepo/Angelo/Angelo-Tshepo.

As well, Tshepo/Angelo's relationship with forms of youthful temporality becomes foundational to his own sense of subjectivity, especially evident in his phase of imposed youth where he is stripped of the agency to determine this sense for himself. In his essay “African Modes of Self-Writing”, Mbembe argues that ‘[a]ttempts to define African identity in a neat and tidy way have so far failed’ and is likely to continue failing ‘as long as criticisms of African imaginations of the self and the world remain trapped within a conception of identity as geography – in other words, of time as space’ (271). According to Mbembe, ‘African identity does not exist as a substance’ but is, rather, ‘constituted, in varying forms, through a series of practices, notably *practices of the self*’ and ‘[n]either the forms of this identity nor its idioms are always self-identical’ but are instead ‘mobile, reversible, and unstable’ and subject to an ‘element of play’ (Ibid 272). Mbembe's invocation of the term “play” itself denotes a kind of ‘practice of self’ defined by a certain youthfulness.

Duiker's protagonist exemplifies the sense of mobility, reversibility and instability that Mbembe argues is key to finding new ways of imagining African identity. Mbembe argues that ‘[o]nly the disparate, and often intersecting, practices through which Africans *stylize* their conduct and life can account for the thickness of which the African present is made’ (Ibid 272-3). Duiker's novel is thus particularly useful since Tshepo, as the main protagonist, acts as a threshold figure who holds the various categories of youth I discuss in my previous chapters, as well as this category of imposed youth, and sometimes simultaneously. Through Tshepo/Angelo/Tshepo-Angelo, the sense that Mbembe notes of ‘the time we live in [as] fundamentally fractured’ is almost palpable (“African Modes” 272). At the end of the novel, however, Tshepo taps into new ways of ‘*stylize[d]* conduct’ in the form of queer, metaphysical communion – through sex and/or intimacy – and other forms of undercommons



solidarity (Ibid 273). This ‘transforms his [...] own subjectivity and produces something new – something that does not belong to the domain of a lost identity that must at all costs be found again, but rather something radically different, something open to change and whose theory and vocabulary remain to be invented’ (Mbembe “African Modes” 269). I return to Mbembe’s notion of African styles of the self at the end of this chapter, when we reach the end of Tshepo/Angelo/Angelo-Tshepo’s journey into selfhood and the end of the novel itself.

Duiker has garnered somewhat of a cult following in literary circles, with a growing body of scholarship devoted to his work. Much of the critical responses to *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, however, focus on the depiction of the city/urban space and foreigners (see Samuelson 2007; Pucherova 2009), representations of race (Viljoen 2001), and its engagement with post-apartheid masculinity (see Crous 2007; Gqola 2009; Tsehloane 2010). Stobie (“Double Rainbow” 2003), Munro (“Queer Family” 2012), Carolin and Frenkel (2013), and Carolin (2013), respectively offer some analysis or insight into the representation of sex and sexuality, particularly same-sex desire, in the novel. Carolin and Frenkel note that ‘Duiker explores same-sex intimacies in a way that refuses to legitimize the fixed categories of gay and straight’ (38), a dismissal of binary taxonomy that Higginbotham extends to ‘racial and national identity’ (85). While both Stobie and Munro invoke the discourse of queerness, as I note in my previous chapter, they tend to reserve the term for as an umbrella for gender and sexual minorities and attempt to fit its use into a nationalist framework. Higginbotham, on the other hand, shows that queer ‘resists fixed borders, insisting upon a queer sense of solidarity’ (85). I too explore the notion of solidarity, or undercommons, in the latter part of this chapter when I think through Tshepo’s sense of belonging among African immigrants in Hillbrow and his experiences of the transcendental/metaphysical elements of sex, which both facilitate queer forms of communion. Thus far, no scholar has examined the various forms of youth temporality invoked in Duiker’s novel, and none of them consider the novel’s engagement with group sex and how it fundamentally changes Angelo/Tshepo’s relationship to sex. I show how these experiences shape the protagonist’s disillusionment with commercialised sex, which for Duiker cannot be liberating, while setting the stage for the kind of queer belonging that functions outside and out of reach of nation-state, which Tshepo finds at the end of the novel.

My theorisation of the novel offers different phases of time and youth temporality marked by the different names or stages of Tshepo/Angelo/Angelo-Tshepo. In the beginning of the novel, Tshepo is a student who is admitted to Valkenberg, a tertiary psychiatric hospital in Cape Town, where he is subsequently diagnosed with ‘cannabis-induced psychosis’ (Duiker 3). Tshepo describes his treatment at Valkenberg as regimented by authority figures – much like parental figures – effectively suspending him in a state of imposed youth. Considering that Tshepo is exposed to sexual trauma at two vulnerable moments in his life – as an adolescent, and again after his release from Valkenberg – this suspension gains a significant sexual dimension, one that is effectively relived as a persistent trauma. He can only overcome this once initiated into the queer utopian brotherhood at Steamy Windows, a secret affiliation/bond that also denotes a kind of youthfulness and is imbued with pleasure as opposed to pain. Significantly, at this point of his narrative, Tshepo is split and doubled into two identities: Tshepo

dominates the first part of the novel and becomes Angelo, the pseudonym he adopts when he joins the all-male massage parlour as masseuse and sex-worker. He then oscillates between the two before Angelo takes centre stage for a short time. These versions of the same identity are each situated at a different developmental points and thus exhibit different relationships to time itself. The Tshepo of the first half of the novel is confined to imposed youth due to his crumbling mental state in Valkenberg. Angelo, however, takes full advantage of his extended youth until a shift occurs, significantly, after he participates in group sex activities. At this point he is split into Angelo-Tshepo, suspended between these two “phases”. Here, the Steamy Windows brotherhood is also revealed as a false utopia. Finally, leaving ‘Angelo behind’, he transitions to a more mature Tshepo in the final chapter of the novel (Duiker 603).

This polyvocal novel does not follow a conventional structure; however, these versions of Tshepo structure the novel roughly into four temporal categories: imposed youth, extended youth, imposed-extended youth and, finally, adulthood/maturity since the novel functions as a Bildungsroman of sorts. Still, despite the chronological organisation of the overall narrative, these categories effectively disrupt the Bildungsroman genre: in this novel, there is no sure footing, no neat resolutions, or clear conclusions, no final achievement. The linear trajectory from childhood to mature adulthood emblematic of the Bildungsroman, often concluding in heterosexual marriage, is instead ruptured. Tshepo is continually poised between “imposed youth” and the various categories of youth that construct temporality in Taïa and Jamal’s novels. These temporal intersections illustrate how characters like Tshepo create worlds outside of the sane and outside of the bounds of straight time that are rich and potent queer utopias. Rather than in its embrace of sex work, it is here that the queer politics of *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* are located.

### **Imposed Youth: “Perhaps it is childish to be an adult”**

The opening chapters of Duiker’s novel capture the first temporal phase of Tshepo’s development: imposed youth. In this part of the novel, he struggles with his diagnosis of ‘cannabis-induced psychosis’, which eventually leads to his admittance to Valkenberg hospital (Duiker 3). Tshepo’s inability to accommodate cannabis in a space where ‘[m]ost students’ consume it and where ‘talking about dube is like asking for a Kleenex or bumming a cigarette’<sup>23</sup> already casts him as the odd-one-out (Ibid 8). Coupled with his ‘uneasiness [...] about sex’, even if his friend Mmabatho cannot quite ‘put [her] finger’ on the meaning of his unease, simultaneously connects his outsider status to his sexuality (Ibid 9). Tshepo’s position as outlier is thus concurrently tied to the question of his sexual identity and to his psychological state, both falling outside of the norm and casting him as a queer figure. Tshepo, in this case, exemplifies Halperin’s sense of queer as being ‘*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant’ (*Saint Foucault* 62, original emphasis).

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<sup>23</sup> “Dube”, pronounced “dooby”, is a colloquial slang term for marijuana/cannabis.

This at-oddness becomes connected to Tshepo's sense of temporality itself and his place in it when he indicates a sense of being outside of the normative bounds of time as well, as if he is suspended in time. He narrates:

It's too exhausting to be like this all the time. I'm tired, hungry. Washed-up at twenty-three, I keep thinking and try to force myself to do something. *But I can't. Time is against me.* I feel seconds ticking in my veins as I breathe. Minutes are outnumbering the hairs on my body. Hours are disappearing with each nail that grows. Forever. And ever. *It's frightening. Time is frightening.* It's like dominoes endlessly falling into oblivion (Ibid 5, emphasis mine).

There is a disjuncture between internal and external time, between the time of the body and the time of the mind. While Tshepo's body continues to perform its physiological functions – his heart beats, his hair and nails grow – and he appears to be in control of his mind (he 'keep[s] thinking'), his mind appears unable to control his body, to will it to move through time. With each successive sentence, time moves further out of reach for Tshepo; at first it is within him, in his veins, but as seconds become minutes it relocates to the outside, to the hair on his body, then eventually reaching the furthest extremities of his body when the hours disappear out of his growing nails. Tshepo thus feels this depressive state as a suspension of time in his body, as if his mind is moving forward while his body remains stuck, only performing involuntary functions. This rhythm is duplicated in the short, biting sentences (emphasised above) that accelerate the speed of reading and replicates this sense of physical "stuckness" in the reader, whose mind continues to read at a quick pace even as nothing happens in the novel's action. While the repetition of 'frightening' and the dominoes analogy could be likened to a child's thinking patters, Tshepo's awareness of the complexity of his relation to time indicates a mature perceptiveness of his mental state. This fractured sense of time can be thought of as a chronological error between his body and his mind, as one seems to remain stuck while the other moves forward.

As his mental break intensifies, Tshepo's entry into a state of imposed youth becomes increasingly evident. His friend Mmabatho takes it upon herself to see to it that Tshepo seeks help. She studies 'his face for any clues of well-being and find[s] nothing', instead observing '[t]races of madness [beginning] to creep into his gestures' (Duiker 11). When Tshepo 'starts crying' Mmabatho must remind herself that she is not his 'mother' or 'nursemaid' (Ibid 11-12). Despite trying to resist the impulse, she catches herself automatically tying Tshepo's shoelaces (Ibid 13). Thus, her actions already infantilizes Tshepo, placing him in a childlike position relative to her station of superiority and control over *his* actions. This pattern shapes Tshepo's engagement with others for the most of the first part of the novel and reaches a climax when he is admitted to Valkenberg Hospital.

Once in Valkenberg, this construct of imposed youth is solidified since '[u]nder the doctor's gaze [Tshepo] becomes a child again' (Duiker 17). Importantly, Valkenberg is a government-funded tertiary psychiatric institution, and thus an extension of state power. Rather than purely a treatment facility, Valkenberg exists – as Zebon notes – '[s]o people can sleep safe at night when they rest because the really sick people are locked away' (Ibid 52-53). The 'really sick people', however, become more like 'objects that breathe' (Ibid 32); they often lose 'hope of full recovery and integration into society' (Ibid 56). They become, in other words, wards of the state rather than full citizens. This notion that they are

like wards of the state show that the institution imposes youth on Tshepo and others. It is important to note at this point that there is a structural difference between the kind of youth time discussed in my previous chapter and the kind assigned to Tshepo here. Jamal's characters take advantage of an extended youth, which opens queerworlds to them; Tshepo is forced backwards in time, which limits his personhood. Thus, he is not merely confined in the mental institution but also confined to the status of a *child*. Childhood and youth, while often considered synonymous, take on differing temporal meanings here: youth suggests freedom to experiment with the limits of temporality itself, while this form of imposed childhood forecloses such possibilities. Tshepo must surrender his bodily and mental agency to his caretakers, who take on parental roles, in the name of recovery. The constant surveillance by nurses and staff 'recording things' and the strict rules – 'where to sit, when to go to the toilet, which nurse you can trust' – reinforce Tshepo's lack of agency in this space (Ibid 18). It is ironic and almost comical that Zebron, despite and perhaps because of his role as antagonist and his violent nature, is the one person in the institutional context that pushes Tshepo towards discovering and affirming a sense of agency.

The polyvocal narrative strategy allows the reader to view the institutional context from both Tshepo and Zebron's first person perspectives, and creates a relational understanding of each character's mental state as the reader shifts perspectives. Tshepo is the newcomer and Zebron – from his own perspective – takes on a quasi-brotherly role because, as a regular patient, he has been educated on the rules and regulations of the mental institution. Zebron acts as an informant for the reader's benefit, providing inside-information that similarly schools the reader in the codes and conventions dictating this world. He confirms that once a person 'get[s] certified [...] they can't drive, they can't vote, they can't open a bank account, they might as well be called children' (Duiker 56). These strict limitations return patients like Zebron to imposed youth, or childhood time, and marks their loss of full citizenship. This is exactly what Zebron rebels against and attempts to protect Tshepo from in his own way. Zebron's boredom drives him to goad his fellow patients for 'fun' (Ibid 32-33), and to 'make things hard for [his psychologist] by refusing to communicate much' (Ibid 47). Although he is thirty-nine, Zebron acts like a rebellious teenager, ironically, in retaliation to feeling as if he is treated like a child in the institution. He thus becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy.

In the inverted world of Valkenberg, where Tshepo concludes that '[p]erhaps it is childish to be an adult' (Ibid 156), Zebron's role is to try and help Tshepo to not give in to institutional infantilization entirely. However, this pedagogy is cut short when Tshepo learns of Zebron's probable participation in Tshepo's own rape, and the rape and murder of his mother. For Tshepo, therefore, it is Zebron who comes to symbolise the quiet violence of the mental institution but, paradoxically, it is also Zebron that allows his self-realisation and thus eventual release from Valkenberg. Tshepo's growing awareness of the contradictory relations of power in Valkenberg forms part of the paradoxical formulations of the novel as a whole. Even the supposedly utopic brotherhood of Steamy Windows has a rotten core, an underbelly of racism and sexism, that ensures that there is no sure ground in this novel.

### Steamy Windows: Aesthetic Sex & the Queer Utopian

Following the distress of Valkenberg and a traumatic gang rape in Sea Point after his release, Tshepo seeks healing and connection in the brotherhood of Steamy Windows, which introduces the next temporal phase of the narrative arch: an alternative/extended youth. This space, in contrast to that of Valkenberg and the Sea Point apartment, allows Tshepo/Angelo to take possession of his body and sexuality and offers him a (temporary) sense of belonging. Although Tshepo is twenty-three, this temporal phase should be thought of as an alternative or extended youth, rather than youth alone. Before his stay at Valkenberg, Tshepo had completed a degree in journalism at Rhodes University and was in the process of pursuing another degree, a timeframe that could thus be described as youth proper. Secondly, the normative trajectory of youth-turned-adulthood is disrupted by Tshepo's stay at Valkenberg, where he is returned to an earlier stage of youth. He briefly manages to transcend his state of imposed youth into a form of maturity after he leaves Valkenberg, even if this mature temporality is once more disrupted by his roommate Chris's authoritarian abuse. Therefore, I interpret the post-Valkenberg, post-Sea Point period as an entirely new temporal phase.

Moreover, the fact that Steamy Windows forms a kind of sexual subculture, comprised of the members of the brotherhood who take their work very seriously (at times) aligns this phase with that of extended youth discussed in my previous chapter. At the same time, the primary endeavour of the massage parlour consists of sex work, where the workers are capitalising/making wealth for their futures, an adult activity that designates the space as adult province. However, the fact that the brotherhood confers membership in a queer subculture establishes them as taking advantage of an extended youth. West describes the simultaneous earnestness of the sex work and the sense of subcultural belonging to Tshepo when he first reports for duty:

That is the job. People look at us and think that is all we do – fucking. But I'm telling you with the things we have done and seen, we could do anything. I could be president one day [...] This is the last place for men. How can I say? A bastion [...] Our fathers don't have anywhere left for them, where men can be on their own without women. You know what I mean? This place is like a club, an exclusive men's club [...] We are screening you. You see it isn't so much that we want guys that look good or have nice bodies. Anyone can have that. We are looking for something deeper, something real, someone who wants to do something with his life. And you passed [...] I'm not bullshitting; this stuff is for real, genuine [...] What we do, it is very serious, you know. We are not just fucking these men for money. That is what I wanted to tell you. We are doing important work here. You will see that. They are showing us things for the times ahead (Duiker 322).

The claim to 'father' figures infers that the workers are brothers and thus part of a family network. The frame of reference for their bonds, in other words, is kinship. The use of a kinship system to describe the sense of belonging and community at Steamy Windows amplifies the queerness of the brotherhood. Not only does this subvert the heteronormative family form, confirmed through West's allusion to father figures that are normally associated with the heterosexual couple/family unit, but because the brothers also sleep together, this analogy acts as a double subversion. Furthermore, West's description of it as a 'bastion' also situates it as a particular *institution* as opposed to the institution of Valkenberg. While

Valkenberg as an institution aims to normalise the deviant through psychiatric treatment, Steamy Windows aims to subvert the normative through queer sexual contact.

The return to youth confirms the Steamy Windows subculture as a form of extended youth, effectively suspending the members of the brotherhood in queer time that is neither fully realised adulthood, nor completely childlike. Notably, however, Steamy Windows is still a capitalist business; it is thus not sex work itself that is subversive, but there is subversion in how some of the brotherhood interpret that work as ‘something deeper, something real’ (Duiker 322). The description of the work as ‘serious’ and ‘important’ portrays it as adult territory, but West’s childlike and naïve-sounding assertion that he ‘could be president’ blurs the distinction between adult time and youth time (Ibid). Later in the novel, West restates that the ‘brotherhood is another chance to be a child again and discover the world with fresh eyes’ (Ibid 431). The suggestion here is that, for Tshepo at least, the true healing that he never found at Valkenberg will be available to him at Steamy Windows, but through *sexual* treatment. In this sense, sex is forwarded as a way of healing psychological scars. This notion is realised towards the end of Tshepo/Angelo’s tenure at Steamy Windows when West ‘mak[es] love’ to Tshepo and he describes it as intense ‘enough to bring back happy memories of childhood’ (Ibid 487). Sex, in this case, overwrites Tshepo’s memories of trauma and heals some of the scars of his ‘incomplete childhood’ (Duiker 156). Therefore, the brothers are in fact ‘not just fucking these men for money’, but actively practicing this form of extended youth as a unique queer utopia where they can heal and simultaneously learn about adult matters, such as IPOs and stock trading, from their clients (Ibid 389, 538). As Sebastian puts it later the same night: ‘It is sex in its most liberated form because you’re not answering to a wife or a partner. What the client does in there, what you do, is fleeting, it has no restriction, no agendas’ (Ibid 328). The ‘fleeting’ nature of the bond between the brother and the client is the utopic product, precisely because of its impermanence and its ephemeral quality that is not bound by conventions such as monogamy and marriage.

This kind of valorisation of sex as utopic product receives aesthetic treatment because the novel links it to art and artistic production. Persistent references to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as foundational to the Steamy Windows brotherhood reinforces this aesthetic connection. A bond is established between the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood and the Steamy Windows group through the artwork exhibited in the Steamy Windows space, such as the print of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “Astarte Syriaca” that hangs in the lounge (Duiker 337). The keystones of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood are built into the infrastructure of the space, as it is built into the ideological basis of the Steamy Windows group. Sebastian explains to Tsepho on his first night at Steamy Windows that the Pre-Raphaelites ‘saw themselves more as artistic revolutionaries, attacked social injustices and celebrated the values and quality of life in the past’ (Duiker 388). Formed in ‘the summer of 1848’ (Hilton 10), the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was ‘bound together by their friendship, by their dissatisfaction with the art establishment, and by their indefinite aspirations’ (Ibid 32). The artists that composed the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, the ‘horny and a little ambiguous’ artists ‘Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti’ (Duiker 338), thus displayed a sort of aesthetic investment in group culture and beauty, on the one hand, and in antiquarianism on the

other. As Rosenfeld explains, ‘with this notion of a brotherhood linked to past artisanal traditions and pseudo-nostalgia for medieval communal practices, the pre-Raphaelites sought to romanticize the cooperative modern experience’ (67). Bullen similarly notes that early criticism of the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic tended to focus on ‘the influence of modern German Nazarene or medieval Italian art’ and accused the artists of ‘harkening back to the “infancy” of art’ (11). Not only then was the Pre-Raphaelites composed of a group of ‘very young men’ (Hilton 35), but their art reveals a certain investment in returning to the past, to a state of youthfulness, through their art. To the untrained eye, their paintings are easily mistaken as something that belongs to an era that predates its actual production since much of the art is intended to present itself as belonging to a bygone era, as a kind of nostalgic yearning for a romanticised past.

The Steamy Windows sex workers’ project of trying to create a form of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood can thus also be related to Muñoz’s claim that taking a ‘posterior glance at different moments, objects, and spaces [that] might offer us an anticipatory illumination of queerness’ (22). Just as the Pre-Raphaelites were ‘reacting against the unimaginative painting of the time’ (Duiker 338), so too are the Steamy Windows brotherhood responding to the unimaginativeness of heteronormativity. While the Pre-Raphaelites explored ‘new ideas, new standards in their work by expressing genuine ideas’ through art (Ibid), Sebastian explains, the Steamy Windows brothers explore new ideas and new standards through queer sex:

The inspiration of the Pre-Raphaelites is like our foundation, you know. It’s like our motto, our mission statement, it’s very important. It gives us a direction, a vision, somewhere to go, something to work towards. Without it we would be just another massage parlour. Sex is so ugly today, so basic, so stripped of anything beautiful, transcendental or aesthetic... We’re trying to move beyond that. We’re also artistic revolutionaries but of a different sort. That’s why we stand out from the other massage parlours. Because we offer a different service (Ibid 338-339).

By using the Pre-Raphaelites as a foundation from which ‘to work towards’, Sebastian implies that queer sex as practiced within the Steamy Windows brotherhood is about a particular kind of queer futurity. This futurity is both ‘transcendental’ and ‘aesthetic’, and moves beyond the rigid identity categories that inscribes sexuality in the present. Queer sex, in this case, can establish a radical revolutionary revision, setting new standards for being. Tshepo notes this connection when he says that Shaun, as the boss, ‘isn’t really part of the brotherhood precisely because he only gives a straight massage with no extras, no risks’ (Ibid 376). While signifying that Shaun does not participate sex work, on the one hand, marking such work as ‘straight massage’ denotes that straightness itself, as in heteronormativity, lacks imagination and does not involve ‘risks’ (Ibid). Shaun’s straightness is a neutral or normative position, while ‘the extras, the risks’ define the rest of the brotherhood’s ‘commitment to being sexual visionaries with the fervour of artists’ (Ibid). The ‘unspoken password that makes [them] part of something bigger’ (Ibid), in this sense, is the practice of *queer sex*, rather than just sex work itself.

The description of sex in the Steamy Windows brotherhood as ‘being free and creative’ (Duiker 388) once again reiterates the claims about the celebratory aspect of queerness captured by The Locker Room Project/MCQP in *Love Themes for the Wildemess*. While Duiker’s text does not invest as directly in

the discourses of queer politics as Jamal's text does, this connection is forged through its capitalisation on art, through which it suggests that sex – and queer sex in particular – has the same revolutionary potential as art does. Moreover, sex is an aesthetic insofar as it gives pleasure through beauty. This pleasure through beauty, according to the Steamy Windows brotherhood, is the political revolutionary potential and the utopic possibility contained in sex. Muñoz's contention that 'we are not queer yet, that queerness, what we will know as queerness, does not yet exist' is echoed in Sebastian's sentiments (22). Queerness, Sebastian suggests, is 'aesthetic' precisely because of its potential to go beyond plain sex and tap into 'transcendental' elements of connecting (Duiker 388). Because it is transcendental or metaphysical, rather than purely physical, this mode of connection is out of reach of the normalising impulse of the nation-state and its investment in categories and identities, an idea that is picked up later in the novel when Angelo-Tshepo realises this potential with Nasuib and with the men he meets in Johannesburg. In this sense, the brotherhood portrays itself as a kind of queer utopia, founded on extended youth, where the limits of future queer politics in South Africa can be tested. Simultaneously, however, this radical potential for queer futurity envisioned in the Steamy Windows is consistently undermined by its own internal limits – racism, androcentrism, sexism – and by the fact that it remains a capitalist enterprise.<sup>24</sup>

### **“White Haven”: On Being Black in Queer Places & Blurring Tradition**

One of the primary limitations of the brotherhood is its inability to transcend race, racism and the racial politics of post-apartheid South Africa, especially in Cape Town. This inability forms one of the most important paradoxical formations of the novel; as soon as one feels that Tshepo/Angelo has found a sense of belonging, a 'sense of family' even (Viljoen 50), this footing falters and, in the process, reveals the very quotidian nature of racism within and outside the brotherhood. As Viljoen argues, the 'impulse towards wanting to live beyond race, in a truly non-racial conglomerate', in Duiker's novel, 'is constantly frustrated by the intrusion of racism and questions of "race"' (51). While not clearly articulated as such, racism as expressed in Viljoen's reading is thus quotidian rather than spectacular, a point that Sharon Patricia Holland emphasises in *The Erotic Life of Racism*. Holland argues that 'racism is not anomalous to quotidian life' but, rather, 'orders some of the most intimate practices of everyday life' (19-20). So, while Viljoen argues that racism and 'questions of "race"' make *intrusion* on the lives of

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<sup>24</sup> The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood itself is often criticised for favouring an androcentric and inherently sexist collective, revealing its own limitations. As Orlando notes, the artists' female models and muses 'were regularly depicted as sleeping, sickly, or sentenced to silence' (613). Furthermore, '[w]hat makes these representations of women as fainting, dying, swooning *objets d'art* all the more troubling is that history often forgets that the majority of these Pre-Raphaelite models were themselves artists' (Ibid 615). Marsh similarly notes that, despite much critical and scholarly attention, the 'women who moved in the Pre-Raphaelite circle [...] have been viewed exclusively in relation to the men' (1-2). Despite its idealism, then, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood tended to marginalise women, even as they formed part of their artistic movement. Thus, Duiker capitalises creatively on the idea of the Pre-Raphaelites because of their own investment in beauty and because they represent the creative possibilities of brotherhood. Simultaneously, the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood's treatment of women also poses a critical problem, which Duiker's text also exploits to reveal the impossible utopianism of the Steamy Windows brotherhood with its internal sexism and racism.



Duiker's characters, Holland would argue that it *shapes* their very lives and that it is deeply implicated in the erotic, informing the ways that desire functions within the brotherhood and their clientele.

This kind of quotidian racism becomes clear in a scene where Tshepo visits a gay bar in Green Point where two white bartenders refuse to return his change after he pays his bill. Their behaviour towards Tshepo is not only dismissive but also infantilizing, as one of them suggests that he is a troublemaker (Duiker 457). Tshepo becomes acutely aware of his blackness in a space that, like the gay club Biloxi, is a 'white haven' (Ibid). He is 'disillusioned' by the realisation that 'gay people are [no] different. They are white people before they are gay' (Ibid 458). Shortly after this interaction, he discusses West's dismissal with Cole and mentions this moment at the bar. Cole appears nonchalant about both, indicating to Tshepo that '[t]his whole brotherhood thing is very convenient' because '[p]eople want to believe in that sort of thing' (Ibid 462). He points out that at the core of Steamy Windows is a 'racial hierarchy [...] with a white, straight man running the business, while men of various races and sexualities work for him, making the business lucrative' (Higginbotham 92). Marking it as 'convenient' and something that 'people want to believe in', something that thus has an aspirational quality, places the brotherhood firmly within the discourse of capitalism (Duiker 462). This, as Higginbotham notes, 'undermines the utopic possibilities of this fraternity since it exists within a socio-economic framework of not just Steamy Windows as a commercial venture but Cape Town as a city where white people monopolize economic and political power' (92).

The whitewashing of the Steamy Windows operations is significant since Cole's reflections connect to a conversation between Sebastian and Tshepo on his first night at Steamy Windows that reveals the brotherhood as a site of pink-washing too. Sebastian explains his valorisation of same-sex desires among men above heterosexuality, drawing on 'discourse of apparent naturalness in order to claim legitimacy for same-sex intimacies' (Carolyn 50). According to Sebastian, 'so-called primitive people understand gender roles and the ambiguities of sexuality better than Western people give them credit for' (Duiker 329). Sebastian's rhetoric, importantly, mirrors the 'conjuring [of] idealized or exoticized Natives, Primitives, and other Others' by early European ethnographers and anthropologists documenting African societies and sexualities 'that helped to create an understanding of "normal" and "modern" by way of contrast and edification' (Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa* 34). Sebastian's assertion that these 'so-called primitive people' have a better sense of the complexity of sexuality seems to dislodge colonial and Western impositions that calcify African sexualities in a heterosexual-as-natural paradigm.<sup>25</sup> However, Sebastian actually selectively co-opts and appropriates the meanings and

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<sup>25</sup> In *Heterosexual Africa?*, Marc Epprecht argues that, during the 'industrial and scientific revolutions of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries [...] Africans figured significantly in the debates in Europe about nature versus civilization, and virile versus decadent' (38-40). This timeframe also coincides with intensified colonial projects in Africa. According to Epprecht, '[t]he prevailing prejudice was that Africans were uncivilized and close to nature' (Ibid 40). He explains that ethnographic work on the continent needed to imagine Africa as always already heterosexual, 'derived from a set of normative beliefs' and from 'the ethnographic [...] opinion of what African sexuality should be' (Ibid 35). At the same time, sexuality in industrialised Europe was absorbed into discourses of 'self-control' (Ibid 39). 'Sexual self-discipline,' Epprecht explains, 'became a marker of the right to hold and exercise power' (Ibid). Imagining African sexualities as 'close to nature' and lacking in self-control, and homosexuality as 'anomalous to nature', was thus used to justify the exercise of power over African societies and the civilising mission of colonialism (Ibid). Decolonising or post-independence moments absorb this part of colonial ideology, based on colonial scientific racisms, even though earlier ethnographic work shows that there is much more sexual diversity and complexity on the continent.

complexities of African traditions for his own ideological agenda, and to maximise the profit of his sex work, making him responsible for a form of ideological distortion. This early conversation indicates that the ideality or potentiality of queer sex as sold by Steamy Windows is, in fact, not “new” or “revolutionary” in the way that Sebastian in particular advertises it to be.

Tshepo interjects and defends black culture from Sebastian’s ‘essentialist beliefs about black male potency’ (Gagiano 820), making his own claim about urbanised black culture explicit:

I mean, people always say that black culture is rigid and doesn’t accept things like homosexuals and lesbians. You know the argument – it’s very unafrican. It’s a lot of crap. In my experience that kind of thinking comes from urbanised blacks, people who’ve watered down the real origins of our culture and mixed it with notions from the Bible. It’s stupid to even suggest that homosexuality and lesbianism are foreign to black culture. Long ago, long before the whites, people were aware of all this (Duiker 329).

On the one hand, as Pucherova argues, at this point ‘the homophobia of black nationalism is exposed as the damaging effect of colonialism’ (937). On the other hand, Tshepo highlights and foreshadows simultaneously his own disillusionment with capitalism itself, which drove colonialism and produces the distinction between urban and rural that, for him, is significant in how South African sexuality is defined. Tshepo’s distinction of ‘urbanised blacks’ in particular echoes Mamdani’s claim that the colonial system of Indirect Rule in South Africa resulted in ‘rural areas [being organised differently] from urban ones, that the state was Janus-faced, bifurcated’, and that the post-colonial and the post-apartheid states could not shake this dynamic (18). ‘Urban power,’ Mamdani explains ‘spoke the language of civil society and civil rights, rural power of community and culture. Civil power claimed to protect rights, customary power pledged to enforce tradition’ (Ibid). Duiker’s text thus implies that an in-between space emerges, between civil power and customary power, between rights and tradition that forms an important third space filled with queer possibility.

It is important to note here that there is a slight but significant difference in this passage between the first and second editions of Duiker’s novel. In the first edition of the novel, the final line reads: ‘Long ago, long before the whites, people were aware of *the blurs*. *They must have been*’ (Duiker [2001] 250, emphasis mine). This notion of ‘the blurs’ in categories of sexual practice is significant. By connecting the “blurs” to ‘homosexuality and lesbianism’ as examples, the text reveals how ritual or social practices that are expressly *non-Western*, dating back to the pre-colonial (‘long before the whites’) and which persist into the post-colonial – in the in-between/third space created by the bifurcated state – can harbour queer practices in “blurry” ways (Ibid). Thus, the blurs highlight sexual practices that do not fit normative models about African (hetero)sexuality. What is interesting about this exegesis of the blurs in Duiker’s manuscript is that it points to Duiker’s own awareness of the debates around the meaningfulness of the categorisation of queer and same-sex desires as ‘unAfrican’, opening up a critique of Sebastian’s agenda and the ideas that he incorporates into his practices at Steamy Windows as pink-washing. Instead Duiker invokes, albeit very indirectly, “the blurs” as different kinds of traditional African practices that defy Sebastian’s essentialising claims and produces an awareness of African sexualities as richer and more complex.

The “blurs”, in this sense, can be connected to a range of ‘[i]ndigenous sexual conduct’ that escaped the strict policing of colonial law and thus persisted in different ways beyond colonialism and apartheid (Hoad “RE: Rethinking Sex” 121). Hoad explains that ‘the emerging colonial apparatus in southern Africa had neither the will or the capacity under policies of what was called Indirect Rule to implement its norms all the way through the social body of the societies it was colonizing’ (Ibid). Instead, ‘matters of civil law were left to be left to the customary law of these societies’ (Ibid). In South Africa, Hoad argues, the inception of this kind of customary law can be traced to ‘Theophilus Shepstone’s drafting of an ordinance recognising Nguni customary law in 1894’ (Ibid). ‘Indigenous sexual conduct’, Hoad goes on, ‘was left to customary law except in instances where it was found to be repugnant to the colonizer’s gaze’ (Ibid). Under the legal system of Indirect Rule, practices that offended colonial sensibilities were codified in ‘repugnancy clauses’ (Ibid). Hoad explains that these repugnancy clauses in colonial jurisprudence ‘generally managed to ignore heterosexual so-called offenses – pervasive premarital sex, polygamy, and male circumcision practices’ (Ibid). Because these practices were not clearly, at least to the Westerner’s eyes, the kind of ‘indigenous homosexual practices’ that colonial law ‘got worked up over’ (Ibid), certain forms of traditional, African practices that fell under customary law in fact held practices that could be considered queer. These are the “blurs”, which fall somewhere in-between the colonial jurisprudence and customary law of the bifurcated state and thus managed to survive into the present, that Duiker’s text stresses.

One example of such traditional practices that exemplify a state of blurriness are the conventional youth practices amongst women in Lesotho. Judith Gay documents ‘the practice of lengthening the labia minora’ among young women in Lesotho, which is performed in the service of heterosexuality since it is believed to ‘enhance sexual pleasure during intercourse’ with men (37). The ritual of stretching the labia can be performed ‘alone or in small groups’ and ‘appears to provide opportunities for auto-eroticism and mutual stimulation between girls’ (Ibid). Noting this practice and others like it amongst Basotho women, Kendall argues that, because these practices are performed in the service of heteronorms, ‘these activities are not considered to be “sexual” [granting] Basotho women the freedom to enjoy them without restraint’ (231). In other words, because these practices are not marked by a language that codes them as “sexual”, they escaped the gaze of colonial legal systems and managed to persist into the post-colonial. At the same time, the practice of stretching the labia minora allows women to manually stimulate each other, and thus a kind of queer sexual practice could emerge within this tradition, even if temporarily. This practice is an important example that decentres the male-centric discourses of African tradition and patriarchies, as well as the androcentrism in texts like Duiker and Taïa’s. Practices like the labia stretching among girls in Lesotho and many others documented on the continent, which involve intense forms of homosocial bonding but are still contained within heteronormative logics, thus gained a paradoxical kind of freedom that could facilitate a bleed/blur into the homoerotic – as it does in the film *Inxeba* – or into other forms of queer practice.

In order to think about the uses and meanings of indigenous rituals as potential queer sites within South African culture and literature, I turn briefly to Thando Mgqolozana’s novel *A Man Who Is*

*Not A Man* (2009). Mgqolozana's novel details the failed circumcision of Lumkile who goes to the mountain to undergo the *ukwaluko* ritual, but whose circumcision is botched. Like Duiker's novel, Mgqolozana also explores various distinctions between urban and rural masculinity. Both novels, even though temporally separate, share an interest in non-Western forms of ritual practice that can harbour certain forms of queerness, showing these as sites where the "blurs" emerge. One scene especially shows this queer blur through a particular type of group sexual interaction, referred to as 'the house of the lamp', that forms part of the *ukwaluko*/circumcision rite of passage (Mgqolozana 162). After the completion of the *ukwaluko* on the mountain, selected members of the community, including the men and unmarried young women, gather in the village in the house of the lamp. The men in the room are arranged according to seniority – i.e. when they completed their own circumcision ritual – and each are assigned a female partner (Ibid 160). The men repeat the refrain, 'if a cat holds its tail up high, you must know it is wet on the posterior' (Ibid 164). An interaction between a young woman, Sindi, and one of the men, Nduku – during which she refers to herself as his 'cat' – confirms Lumkile's suspicion that this is a group sexual encounter (Ibid). The scene, therefore, fictionalises a traditional ritual centred around a publicly experienced sexuality that, while temporary and contained by heterosexuality, is a recurring feature in this community.

In this sense, the practice of 'the house of the lamp' as detailed in Mgqolozana's novel is comparable to polygamy itself; while polygamy does not necessarily involve group sex, though it certainly can, it does constitute a publicly experienced sex life, at least within the family unit itself that can be thought of as queer practice.<sup>26</sup> This scene in Mgqolozana's novel and the real practice of polygamy are not without their own sets of ethical problems, especially where women's agency is concerned. However, what they do highlight is that 'long before the whites' (Duiker 329), 'forms and rituals in what could be shorthanded as African family values' (Hoad "Queer Custom" 7)<sup>27</sup> contained queer elements. These practices and their blurs contradict the notion of queerness as indisputably 'unafican' (Duiker 329)<sup>28</sup>.

In Duiker's novel, Sebastian problematically reads such traditional practices – perhaps like 'the house of the lamp', polygamy, or the labia minora lengthening among Basotho girls – as belonging to 'primitive people', as opposed to his own 'sanitised' Western culture (Duiker 328). In this case, Sebastian uses the nominator of 'primitive people' as placeholder for the 'black people whom he met when visiting Port St John's in the Transkei' (Carolin 50). Sebastian expresses admiration for these people's warmth and openness towards sex, and gratitude for acknowledging his preference for men rather than flatten him to an identity category, such as "ahh moffie" (Duiker 329). As Carolin notes, however, Sebastian's 'encoding of the naturalness of same-sex intimacies within the glorification of an apparent naturalness and a racist discourse of primitiveness is little more than reductionist' (50). Tshepo's interjection

<sup>26</sup> South Africa is the only country, as Hoad also notes, that grants legal protection and recognition to both polygamous and same-sex marriage ("Queer Custom" 16n). For more on the legislative tensions in polygamy, see Stacey and Meadow (2009).

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that, while they remain contested, these practices are legitimated because they are contained within a heterosexual matrix that was less contested by the colonial gaze, as Hoad points out. Polygamy as a practice is also not contested in traditional South African contexts and thus carries different kinds of social and cultural capital than homosexuality, or queerness more broadly, which is often viewed ambivalently if not with hostility.

<sup>28</sup> Msibi similarly contests this notion in his piece "The Lies We Have Been Told".

temporarily ‘destabilize[s] the constructs to which Sebastian has given expression’ and ‘subvert[s] the cohesion of his attempts to frame same-sex intimacies in this way’ (Ibid). However, these early interactions are imbued with a sense of forewarning about the brotherhood’s inability to fully grapple with the complications of racism and race, and the complexities of African sexualities, as part of their utopic vision. As Vijoen notes, ‘racism exposes that sentiment as fraudulent, as just another ploy to keep up efficient production and profits’ (51). Rather than fulfilling the ideal of utopia, the inability of the brotherhood as a whole to account for race and racism within their ranks, along with the commercial imperative of Steamy Windows that pink-washes Sebastian’s selective appropriation of African traditional practice, taint the brotherhood with a sense of myopia instead.

### **Liberation vs Commercialisation: The hard limit to group sex ethics**

Even as it tries to consider itself an aesthetic/sexual subculture functioning *outside* of the logics of capitalism – and in some sense it does – the Steamy Windows brotherhood is still driven by profit and therefore exists on the *margins* of capitalism. This reality, along with the racism that creeps into the brotherhood, deflates some of the revolutionary and liberating potential of the sexual politics of the brotherhood. This fact is painfully and significantly brought to light for Tshepo through two instances of group sex. In the second-to-last chapter from Tshepo’s perspective, before he transitions to complete adoption of his pseudonym Angelo, a white same-sex couple hires him for a threesome. This encounter is Tshepo’s first experience of consensual, transactional group sex. During the session, the two men repeat the ‘same stupid pillow talk one finds in gay porn videos’, which puts Tshepo off (Duiker 415). Instead of ‘feeling like psychologist, a confidant’ afterwards, as he usually does and as the ideals of the brotherhood suggests he would, Tshepo feels ‘empty, like a whore’ (Ibid). In this transaction, the revolutionary potential of sex dissolves and it becomes more like the ‘ugly’ version of sex that Sebastian criticises in his praise of the brotherhood and its social function (Duiker 339). The resemblance Tshepo finds between this encounter and ‘gay porn videos’ (Ibid 415) highlights the commercialised nature of sex with this couple, and within the brotherhood more broadly. Commodified group sex in Duiker’s novel thus reveals the potential difficulty of the revolutionary and utopic possibility celebrated in both Taïa and Jamal’s instances of group sex. Duiker’s novel, instead, reveals the darker side of the ethics of group sex and it recurs later in the novel when a wealthy client, Oliver, hires Angelo for an overnight stay.

The extended narration of Angelo’s transaction with Oliver is one of the more graphic descriptions of sex in the novel and reveals simultaneously the political potential and the ethical shortcomings of group sex. From the outset, Oliver and his friends treat Angelo as an object that exists for their pleasure. Angelo describes them as ‘difficult with waiters as a matter of course, to the point of being childish’ (Duiker 494). This description of their behaviour exhibits Tshepo’s reflection back in Valkenberg that ‘[p]erhaps it is childish to be an adult. There’s nothing graceful or encouraging about adults’ (Ibid 156). Spoilt by wealth, these clients slide into an alternative mode of extended youth, one

that is not childlike but childish instead, thus imbuing the temporal category with a negative connotation. Like the staff at Valkenberg, their ‘snide remarks, bad tempers, insensitivity [...] surely cannot be characteristics of fully matured people, fully realised and prospering’ (Ibid 156). In his interaction with this set of clients, Tshepo and the novel itself do not equate financial prosperity with actual prosperity, valuing instead genuine connection above monetary wealth, a point that becomes clear at the end of the novel. This group of wealthy clients lack a sense of critical awareness of their own privilege, financial and otherwise, which is especially evident in the way that they treat Angelo as if he is the inferior and an object interchangeably. When Oliver keeps asking, ‘[i]sn’t he gorgeous?’ in reference to Angelo, ‘one of the guys’ responds that ‘I could eat him up whole’ (Ibid 494). The guy’s response is something one would say to a small child or animal, while Oliver’s fixation and remarks on Angelo’s appearance as if he is not there, places Angelo in object position. This ‘entourage of eight people’ (Ibid) therefore reveals that not all forms of extended youth are positive, and by extension that not all forms of queerness need to be celebrated.

Despite their problematic behaviour, the lengthy description of the actual sex scene still fits within the queer, utopic dynamic in similar scenes in Taïa and Jamal’s novels. The scene is narrated by Angelo in a matter-of-fact way and, during the climax of the scene, Angelo stops observing and becomes a participant in his own narration:

The etiquette is easy, a simple nudge or signal, and you don’t have to accept. A blond guy signals to me. I look at Oliver and he motions for me to go. We join the couple on the floor. The woman begs me to fuck her. While I fuck her the guy begs me to let him fuck me. I let him and get lost in sensuous pleasure. He is skilled and she is wet. The atmosphere is not aggressive or threatening, I moan shamelessly. The wave of a hand discourages another guy from fucking another woman in the arse. Her clean pink anus is exposed as she gets fingered by a guy with long thick fingers and a hairy groin.

We go at it for a while before all the guys eventually come on the three women. They lie on the floor while we wank on them. Afterwards we move to a large indoor pool in another room. We splash about in the water and don’t really swim. They soon start their antics again, coupling, licking, fucking. Oliver tells us he wants to go to bed (Ibid 495-496).

The scene, while graphic, does not slide into the pornographic as Tshepo’s earlier threesome had and, instead, has the poetic quality of pure pleasure. The short, punchy sentences with sparse punctuation has an organic flow, supplemented by frequent repetitions at the end of one line and the beginning of the next line (‘The woman begs me to *fuck her*. While I *fuck her* the guy begs me to *let him* fuck me. I *let him* [...]’). This creates a rhythmic reading experience, replicating the motions of the participants and drawing the reader in. Moreover, this patterned repetition visually replicates Foucault’s claim that ‘[p]leasure is something which passes from one individual to another; it is not secreted by identity’ (cited in Halperin 95). The ‘sensuous pleasure’ passes from the woman Angelo is fucking, to the guy fucking him, and is not determined in this moment by their positions as wealthy clients and hired sex worker. This particular ‘etiquette’ reinforces the idea that there is a set of strict, polite behaviour governing the group’s activities, which is presented as a positive aspect of the interaction since it reinforces democratised pleasure within the group. The lack of threat or aggression in this moment and the seamlessness of consent both contrast the violence of the gang rapes that Angelo’s alter-ego has been

subjected to in the past. The ‘sensuous pleasure’ and ‘shameless’ abandon that Angelo is permitted to experience reveal the positive potentiality of the group sex activity. However, Angelo, as Oliver’s purchased object, must ask permission to participate instead of being allowed complete agency in the situation. The fact that he is purchased into something that appears, at first glance, to be democratic somewhat complicates this dynamic and the truly ‘liberating’ potential of it (Duiker 497). Nevertheless, this does not detract from the queerness of the moment since, in this intermingling, sexual orientation and race become seemingly irrelevant while bodies and pleasure take centre stage.

What does diminish the queerness of this formation, however, is Oliver’s revelation the following morning that ‘[i]t’s all the rage in Europe’ (Duiker 497). Thus, while the text takes a decidedly pro-sex stance, it is critical of this group’s seeming engagement in queer forms of sex simply because it is perceived as fashionable, and therefore *purchasable*, especially as it conforms to Eurocentric trends. Group sex, in this instance, is less liberating and more *commercial*. Oliver’s subsequent treatment of Angelo, in contrast to the ‘deep feelings’ shared between him and his friends, further diminishes the liberating force of the group sex dynamic (Ibid). When Oliver decides that Angelo is too ‘big on questions’, he becomes ‘moody’ and uses his wealth to degrade Angelo:

“Ah yes, even prostitutes have to eat.” He sniggers and takes out a long wallet from the glove compartment.

“That should be enough for you not to worry your pretty little head,” he says and gives me two thousand rand in crisp two hundred rand notes (Ibid 499).

In the harsh daylight, Oliver resumes his role of the petulant child and makes sure to put Angelo in his place. To Oliver, Angelo is an object for purchase and he makes sure he is aware of this. The phrase ‘pretty little head’ is meant to simultaneously emasculate and infantilize Angelo, revealing once again the darker side of imposed youth as opposed to extended youth. The latter insists, or should insist, on personal agency, while the former strips agency. In this case, commercialised group sex cannot be liberating in the ways that Taïa and Jamal imagine it to be. Angelo’s objectification through commercialisation turns him into a “thing”, diminishing agency and harkening back to forms of enslavement that cannot sit well within the ethics proposed by Taïa and Jamal respectively, and does not sit well with Duiker either. The fact that this instance of group sex is transactional and that the liberating force supposedly embedded in this form of queer sex does not extend the perimeters of the transaction both reveal the limitations on the ethics of group sex. There is an embedded critique of the capitalist adage that “sex sells” in Duiker’s novel, in other words, while it also highlights that, as long as sex is just another form of consumption, it cannot fulfil promises of liberation that have been part of the discourse around sex since at least the 1960s in the West, and sold as part of the liberation narrative of 1990s South Africa. The hard limit to the ethics of group sex, therefore, is that it can be corrupted and co-opted through the circuits of capital.

### **“Wretched Lives” & Queer Communion: Brutal Capitalism & Transcendent Sex as Alternative**

Significantly, up until the narration of this scene of group sex and the encounter with Oliver, the protagonist oscillates between the consciousness of Tshepo and Angelo, as if they are two separate consciousnesses. However, when he is next introduced, he becomes Angelo-Tshepo, simultaneously split and doubled and fundamentally changed by the group sex encounter itself. Five chapters are written from the perspective of Angelo-Tshepo, representing a kind of climax in the overall narrative. In this section of the narrative, Angelo-Tshepo’s father dies, sending him into a kind of psychosis that takes up much of the latter part of the novel. The hyphenated Angelo-Tshepo thus visually replicates the split/doubled consciousness of his mental state, on the one hand, while representing a stage of transition on the other. The unique temporal logic of this section, spanning altogether two or three days of Angelo-Tshepo’s life, extends time in complex ways. During this psychosis, Angelo-Tshepo wanders around Cape Town, eventually ending up in Nyanga, one of Cape Town’s many sprawling townships where the divisions between the haves and the have-nots are most striking. During this split/double, importantly, his awareness of the brutality of capitalism is intensified and his notion of imposed youth is extended to include poor, township-dwelling South Africans. Just as Angelo’s objectification diminishes his agency in his encounter with Oliver, these people’s agency in his mind is diminished by the system of capitalism itself. For Angelo-Tshepo, the rampant inequality he witnesses in Nyanga is intimately tied to temporality and capitalism:

Perhaps inside they are bruised, feeling forgotten, progress going at lightning speed while poverty takes them at a snail pace [...] We lived through ’76, Casspirs, detention, Botha, and now this, everyone grabbing as much as they can for themselves, they seem to say. Perhaps we are not that different from the rest of Africa, our leaders are just better thieves. Too much money and a small ruling elite, are we that far from the rest of Africa? [...] Everywhere I go I look. I feel like I’m decoding the madness, wrapping my brain around it, facing it, making it easier to see, to understand, giving it a name. Maybe it’s called capitalism, making money for the sake of making money rather than building communities. With capitalism it seems someone has to lose, someone has to be the underdog, someone has to play the poor bastard that holds the structure, so that the rich can be rich. Maybe the problem isn’t capitalism, maybe it’s the elites who run the structure. Maybe it is the stifling class system that keeps us all in our places, everyone behaving. Maybe the poor are more powerful than they imagine, a whole system, a way of being depends on their wretched lives, their complicity (Duiker 574-577).

The distinction between the time of globalisation and capitalism, of ‘progress’, and the time of ‘poverty’ is significant here and harks back to Tshepo’s own sense of ‘[t]ime [as] against [him]’ in the beginning of the novel (Ibid 5). The suspension felt in his own body then, which only performs involuntary functions – pumping blood, growing nails, etc. (Ibid) – is here replicated in the body politic. The poor populace remain stuck at a ‘snail pace’ while ‘progress’ moves at ‘lightning speed’ (Ibid 574) for those ‘with money as well as social capital in the suburbs’ (Higginbotham 95).

The time of poverty can thus be likened to another form of imposed youth or arrested development. Importantly, it is the ‘different temporalities and trajectories that racist capitalism creates’ (Ibid) that Angelo-Tshepo finally recognises are true ‘madness’. The time of apartheid – of 1976 student



uprisings, indefinite detention, apartheid police brutality, States of Emergency under P.W. Botha – is placed alongside ‘now’, indicating that it is particularly for the poor, black population of South Africa that very little has changed under democracy. The very idea of “nation” collapses, as Duiker implies that neither the apartheid nation-state nor the “new” South African nation-state have served these people; they continue to live ‘wretched lives’.<sup>29</sup>

Questioning prevailing ideas of South African exceptionalism, Angelo-Tshepo instead repeats that ‘we are not that different from the rest of Africa’, hinting at the importance of cross-continental allegiances that he builds in the final part of the novel. Notably, therefore, it is ‘building communities’ that, at least for Angelo-Tshepo, will overthrow this ‘whole system’ (Duiker 577). In particular, it is communities not bound by the notion of a nation-state, but operate on a de-nationalised impulse – much like Taïa’s sperm brothers – and a particular kind of pan-Africanism that becomes key to Duiker’s vision of futurity. Tshepo finally puts this theory into practice in the final chapter of the novel, when he moves to Johannesburg, and builds a particular kind of sexual undercommons, in part through his association with foreigners from other parts of Africa and in part founded on metaphysical communication through sex.

Towards the end of Angelo-Tshepo’s journey through Nyanga, he meets Nasuib, an ‘Indian guy’, who acts as a spiritual guide in the final phases of Angelo-Tshepo’s transition (back) to Tshepo (Duiker 585). The two travel back to the city by train, but Angelo-Tshepo loses Nasuib in the rush of Cape Town Station and wanders on his own to Sea Point. Angelo-Tshepo cannot remember where he lives, but it is significant that he travels back to Sea Point, the site of his traumatic encounter with Chris in the first part of the novel. When he mysteriously runs into Nasuib again in Regent Road, they travel by foot from Sea Point back to his flat in Gardens, passing by Biloxi on the way. Their journey, therefore, metaphorically retraces Tshepo/Angelo/Angelo-Tshepo’s narrative arch, confirming it as a kind of pilgrimage and Nasuib as a spiritual guide. They end up at an Ethiopian restaurant in the city centre, where they spend the night. It is at this point that Nasuib showcases his ‘strange ability to communicate without a voice’ (Duiker 593), an ability that appears to be channelled through sex:

Soon he is inside me. But it is not making love. It is a process of communicating. I read things in his breath, his thrusts, the way he holds me. We go on for a long time. When he comes, he ejaculates for what feels like five minutes.

I don’t come, but for me satisfaction is not important. My mind buzzes with questions. What did he just give me? I had so many thoughts as he was coming (Ibid 594).

In this moment, Angelo-Tshepo is finally able to tap into ‘the communicative element of sex, a metaphysical sense of communion through sex’ (Higginbotham 90). This communicative function of

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<sup>29</sup> As Higginbotham also notes (94), this is a clear reference to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). In his foreword to the 2004 edition of Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, interestingly, Homi K. Bhabha notes that Fanon ‘introduces a temporal dimension into the discourse of decolonization’ (xiv, original emphasis). For him, there are ‘two histories at play in *The Wretched of the Earth*: the Manichaeian history of colonialism and decolonization [...] against which the book mounts a major political and ethical offensive’ and the history of the Cold War ‘which constitutes the ideological conditions of its writing’ (Ibid xv). In this sense, Bhabha argues, Fanon’s book ‘provides a genealogy for globalization that reaches back to the complex problems of decolonization [...] and it could be said, both factually and figuratively, that *The Wretched of the Earth* takes us back to the future’ (Ibid). This notion of ‘back to the future’ is one that has animated much of my own project, as characters like Tshepo, Angelo, Angelo-Tshepo recognize the force of the past in the present, on one hand, and attempt to forge a different, perhaps even queer, futurity.

sex is a recurring idea presented through both West and Sebastian at various points in the novel. West tells Tshepo on his first night at Steamy Windows that '[w]e are not just fucking men for money [...] We are doing important work here. You will see that. They are showing us things, telling us things for the times ahead' (Duiker 322). He goes on to explain that beyond the pleasure of 'an orgasm and feeling nice you'll realise that it is a way of communicating, a way of saying things' (Ibid 323). Subsequently, he notes that 'sex is just the beginning. It is like an improbable vehicle that we must take to get to a certain destination', reiterating the idea of sex as a means to an end and, thus, a form of communication (Ibid 387). He later dismisses the analogy between a gun and a penis, noting that 'that is not how [he has] learned to communicate, how [he has] learned to use this thing' (Ibid 431). When Angelo visits West in Somerset West, he initiates sex by insisting that '[m]aybe this is the only way I can say what you mean to me, what our friendship means to me' (Ibid 487). Here, sex is not a way of showing Angelo how he feels, and thus an action, but a way of *saying* something. Similarly, Sebastian tells Tshepo that '[t]elepathy is a reality, you know. It's just that the world isn't ready for it yet' (Ibid 380), effectively foreshadowing this encounter with Nasuib. Later, he also tells Tshepo that he should spend more time talking to his clients because he would be 'surprised by what they tell [him]', establishing another link between sex and communication (Ibid 397). Importantly, while both West and Sebastian *tell* Angelo/Tshepo of this queer potential of sex, he himself is not able to *experience* it until he is freed from the commercial imperative that underpins sex in the Steamy Windows brotherhood.

Significantly, Angelo-Tshepo notes that sex with Nasuib 'is not making love' but, rather, a higher metaphysical communion (Duiker 594). As Higginbotham notes, this is 'a queer vision of sex between men since its significance is not organized around the expression of desire', but on this kind of transcendental sexual communication (90). In this moment, the stasis felt in Tshepo's body earlier in the novel, and replicated in the body politic in Nyanga, dissolves as both the body and the mind are implicated in this form of communication. Time is also felt in the body as Angelo-Tshepo notes the feeling of Nasuib's ejaculation inside him as being longer than expected, thus suggesting a stretching of time itself. This extending of time can thus be thought of as an acceleration of Angelo-Tshepo's final transition to the Tshepo of the novel's end, and therefore a hastening towards the particular form of adulthood/maturity that he embodies in this part of the text. It is only once Angelo-Tshepo completes this pilgrimage with Nasuib that Duiker's text reveals the liberating possibility of queer (group) sex that correlates with ideas proposed by Taïa and Jamal respectively, as Nasuib tells Angelo-Tshepo that he 'will meet many men in Johannesburg and they will all have secret gifts to give' (Duiker 394).

The final chapter of Duiker's novel is focalised through Tshepo, who 'left Angelo behind in Cape Town, still roaming the streets and exploring its underworld' (Duiker 603), confirming that the transition to a form of adulthood is complete. At the same time, Tshepo's version of adulthood/maturity in this final chapter does not conform to the traditional ending of the Bildungsroman, which normally ends in (heterosexual) marriage. Instead of an alternative kinship system, Tshepo finds a sense of belonging in a different kind of undercommons, with primarily foreigners who have immigrated from other parts of Africa and who live alongside him in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. Composed of Congolese,

Senegalese and Nigerian immigrants, Tshepo's new community reveals a kind of de-nationalised, post-colonial politics comparable to Taïa's formula of the sperm brothers discussed in my first chapter; in this case, it is simultaneously supranational and pan-African (Ibid 605). Duiker's investment in this particular form of allegiance, between a gay man and African immigrants, is significant. Notwithstanding constitutional protections in the "new" South Africa, homophobic and xenophobic sentiments continue to surface in South Africa – as evidenced by the recent responses to the film *Inxeba*, and periodic surges of xenophobic violence. These attitudes, Duiker's text suggests, are both problems for and products of post-apartheid nationalism, as much as it is a product of racist capitalism. These minority communities (queer folk, immigrants) are a problem for the nation because they do not reproduce the nation in its purest form, or cannot reproduce the nation at all, thus generating these phobic discourses. Despite its claim to exceptionalism where gender and sexual minorities are concerned, Duiker emphasises that South Africa is 'not that different from the rest of Africa' (Ibid 574-575), where calcified nationalisms have resulted, and continue to result, in often violent crackdowns on LGBTIQ people.

Duiker's novel suggests that one way to counter these attitudes is through allegiance politics between African immigrants, or 'what black South Africans call *makwere-kwere* with arrogance' and queer minority communities (Duiker 604).<sup>30</sup> Importantly, Hoad argues that the 'homonymic relation' of the slang term *makwerekwere*, which refers to mostly African immigrants, 'to the English word *queer* cannot go unnoticed' (*African Intimacies* 81). Hoad notes that this is a significant 'reversal' since 'it is not queerness that is foreign' as claims of homosexuality as unAfrican would have us believe, 'but foreignness that is queer' (Ibid). Tshepo's sense of at-homeness with these 'foreign guests' (Duiker 605), as a gay man, amplifies the queer association between himself and the 'makwere-kwere'. Instead of resisting such this connection, however, Duiker's novel advocates for its embrace: a merging of the undercommons and the sexual undercommons as a form of self-stylized African subjectivity, in the Mbembian sense, defined by experiments in improvisational style, rather than in models of citizenship based on the nation.

Tshepo's experiments in self-styled subjectivity in the final part of the novel takes the communicative quality of sex, first experience with Nasuib, to its logical conclusion: a kind of extension of his primary pilgrimage that takes the form of implied group sex. This stage of the novel solidifies the sexual undercommons aspect of Duiker's coalition politics. While the Tshepo of the end of the novel has supposedly reached a form of maturity, he strikingly still takes advantage of a kind of extended youth as he notes that '[o]nce a week [he goes] for a night out in town. Sometimes [he goes] to clubs, sometimes bars, sometimes bistros, it depends on [his] mood' (Duiker 607). Tshepo frames this a ritual activity, one performed once a week, imbuing it with a kind of spiritual energy. It is not that places he visits are

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<sup>30</sup> There is a growing body of scholarship on the uses and effects of political homophobia and national boundary patrolling in different nation-states on the African continent. See, for example, Ashley Currier (2010; 2014), Mark Epprecht (*Sexuality and Social Justice* 2013; "Africa's New Political Homophobia" 2014), Thoreson (2014), Bosia and Weiss (2013), De Vos (2015), Kekanda (2015), as well as the ILGA's report on State Sanctioned Homophobia (Carroll & Mendo 2017). While my interest here is not in homophobia per se, the linkage that Duiker creates between queer constituencies and African foreigners importantly highlights how both queerphobia and xenophobia are used to patrol the nation-state, an important point that the above theorists and scholars also make about political homophobia in different African states.

expressly places *for* youth, but rather that it sits in opposition to his role as caretaker at the children's home by day. This role marks him as mature and "father-like", and is governed by 'the normative scheduling of daily life' and an 'imagined set of children's needs [related] to beliefs about children's health' (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 5). On the other hand, as Halberstam argues, an 'extended adolescence' offers a contrast to this kind of regimented existence since it is composed 'of nonreproductive queer subcultural participants that facilitates community formation and offers alternative life narratives' (Ibid 175). Halberstam shows that 'the queer "way of life" will encompass subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance [...] and those forms of representation dedicated to capturing these wilfully eccentric modes of being' (Ibid 1), much like the kinds of connections Tshepo forms with the men he is intimate with.

Both Tshepo's allegiance with African immigrants and his continued visits to clubs and bars contribute to his sense of extended youth, but at its core is the way that he connects both practices to his own sexuality, and the ways in which he imagines the communicative element of sex will contribute to a particular kind of queer futurity:

But I always meet special men who come from different places. They have gifts for me as Nasuib told me they would. I don't always sleep with them, but intimacy of some sort is part of our ritual. They offer me *blueprints for survival, for building a new civilisation, a new way of life*. I have met bankers, architects, poets, builders, miners, diplomats, engineers, labourers, waiters, sailors, firemen, soldiers, farmers, preachers, men worth their salt and men of integrity. They all go about the quiet business of telling me their secrets, sharing their wisdom. We have so much to learn from each other. There are better ways, they keep telling me, capitalism is not the only way. We haven't nearly exhausted all the possibilities, they say. *We know that the future depends on everyone working together. I have developed a few unique abilities that I didn't think were humanly possible. My horizon is broadening.* When I am with these men I realise how fragile we are, how complete our destruction will be. The truth will rescue those who need it, those who have earned it. Other people will suddenly find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong crowd. And then it will be too late. But those who know their way around life will survive. Survival of the fittest, it is a test we will all be subjected to (Duiker 607, emphasis mine).

While Tshepo is not clearly stating that these interactions and intimacies take the form of group sex, the possibility cannot be excluded. In particular, Tshepo's consistent use of the pronoun 'we' emphasises a type of group sensibility in his experimentations with different forms of sex and/or 'intimacy' that is vital to the reimagining of community in this passage. The logic of belonging in this case is built on the communicative component of their intimacy and, for Tshepo, contributes to his new sense of subjectivity. The communicative sex can thus be thought of as a mode of writing the self and self-stylization. As Mbembe argues, '[t]hrough sacrifice, the African transforms his or her own subjectivity and produces something new' ("African Modes" 269). Tshepo/Angelo/Angelo-Tshepo/Tshepo's pilgrimage can be thought of as one form of sacrifice, as it is marked by loss – of his parents, of his sense of belonging with the Steamy Windows brotherhood, and of his former sense of self(s). The intimacy he finds with these 'special men' is the "something new": it is 'something that does not belong to the domain of a lost identity that must at all costs be found again', as indicated by Tshepo's contentment with leaving Angelo behind in Cape Town, 'but rather something radically different, something open to change and whose theory and vocabulary remain to be invented' (Mbembe "African Modes" 269). The fact that

Tshepo's abilities are more than he thought 'humanly possibly' is significant since it marks these interactions as simultaneously physical and *metaphysical* (Duiker 607). The 'quiet business' of intimacy, in this sense, gains a political valence precisely because it escapes the bounds and reach of the nation-state: it is not just corporeal – policeable, tangible and controllable – but, vitally, also incorporeal and thus transient and untouchable in a way that cannot be bought or sold, framing the anti-capitalist stance of Duiker's novel.

# CONCLUSION

## We Are Not Queer Yet

Throughout this dissertation, I have assessed the alternative modes of sexual citizenship, figured through group sex and its democratising possibilities, in the works of Taïa, Jamal and Duiker respectively. This Foucauldian project of valuing *bodies and pleasures* rather than identities is precisely the kind of sexual citizenship that seems to be on the political horizon of these texts. Because the nation-state is so interested in producing identities and categories, the texts and their authors reject the nation as model, and instead invest in connecting bodies *without identities* as the foundation for belonging, modes of connection founds in subcultural worlds and practices. Thus, the preceding chapters may be interpreted as an attempt at extracting queer ideality from literature and theory, to unpack the kind of future they are trying to envision for us. In the closing gambit of *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz argues that '[w]e need to engage in a collective temporal distortion [...] a stepping out of time and place, leaving the here and now of straight time for a then and there that might be queer futurity' (185). In stepping back through literature, I have tried to consider queer figures beyond an identity politics – past and present – that marks African queer figures as tragic, in order to salvage the kinds of utopian ideals embedded within these queer literatures instead. Tragic, in this sense, because of the supposed powerlessness of queer folks against the force of straight time and reproductive futurity, bred and fuelled by post-colonial nationalisms in the African context. However, the categories of youth temporality that these novels invoke facilitate new ways of stepping through time, or 'stepping out of time and place', thus dislodging the authoritarian restrictions of "straight time" and heteronormativity more broadly, opening up queerworlds and relations that have gone untouched or that have been forgotten in queer theory for too long.

The novels I have chosen to examine in this dissertation all deal with this tension between the past, present and future in unique ways, but all of them place different forms of pleasure at the centre of imagining these new queerworlds. In this way, they exemplify Muñoz's claim that '[q]ueerness's time is the time of ecstasy. Ecstasy is queerness's way' (187). 'Taking ecstasy with one another, in as many ways as possible,' Muñoz argues, 'can perhaps be our best way of enacting a queer time that is not yet here but nonetheless always potentially dawning' (Ibid). Taïa, Jamal, and Duiker's novels take up this mode of ecstasy 'in as many ways as possible' through their invocations of various forms of queer group and/or public sex. Ecstasy, in this case, also figures a way of doing outside of the bounds of both straight time and the nation-state.

In Taïa's *Salvation Army*, the ecstasy of group sex metaphorically collapses borders between bodies and the borders of nation-states simultaneously, staging queerness as a uniquely post-colonial anti-normativity. The 'communicable excitation', to borrow from Butler, in this novel 'holds the potential for solidarity in the service of a utopia that is not an end to be realized but an open-ended experiment in reconfiguring time and space' ("Solidarity/Susceptibility 8). Butler's reading of Muñoz's

utopia as ‘an open-ended experiment’ in particular aligns with Taïa’s borderless, sperm brotherhood. Jamal’s *Love Themes for the Wilderness* deploys ecstasy, or *ek-stasis*, as a radical reimagining of pleasure in the newly democratic South Africa. This novel broadens the political potentiality of queerness and disfigures the couple-form that the nation-state fetishizes, figuring new ways of doing ecstasy, and revealing that ‘attitude is a crucial resource’ (Butler, “Solidarity/Susceptibility 12). The circularity of Jamal’s novel uncovers that the dreams we were sold in 1994 have not been realised, that instead we are suspended in what *could be*. Finally, Duiker’s *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* offers us a direct critique of the here-and-now of post-apartheid South Africa, where the roots of racist capitalism run deep and are harder to shake than Jamal might have imagined. Duiker shows us that when queerness is grounded purely in a gender and/or sexual identity, it becomes recruitable; it is absorbed into the very system that queerness is meant to resist, as is the case with the Steamy Windows brotherhood. As remedy, Duiker proposes metaphysical forms of queer, sexual communion that are not policeable by a nation-state. Like Muñoz, Duiker wants to preserve queerness as something that is not recruitable into capitalism and cannot be easily reconciled with the hetero- and homonormative aims of the South African nation-state.

As much as these novels work to reshape the relational fields available to queer African figures and to break new ethical ground, these queer utopic visions have limitations. I have noted already Jamal’s inability to account for the unyielding effects of race and racism in the post-apartheid moment as one such weak point. Duiker recognises and takes up this pitfall, showing racism’s enduring complicity in matters of desire during the aftermath of apartheid. However, both Duiker and Taïa’s work remain constrained by the androcentrism of their respective visions. In *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, Tshepo reprimands Sebastian for his ‘pro-male rhetoric’, noting that ‘any woman listening to [Sebastian] would think [he is] a misogynist’ (Duiker 335). Sebastian’s response, momentarily, seems to acknowledge the potential allegiance between queer bodies and femme bodies when he notes that ‘[w]omen work twice as hard as men in corporate structures. The same is true of gay people [who] are constantly having to prove themselves, work harder, achieve, achieve, achieve’ (Ibid 335-6). However, his initial philosophising of women’s role in the future he envisions relies on tired stereotypes that mark women as ‘the wise mothers’ who ‘understand that there is strength in weakness, strength in being woman, spiritual, intuitive’ (Ibid 335). Even after Angelo-Tshepo leaves the toxic environment of Steamy Windows, Nasuib warns him to ‘be very careful around [women]’ (Duiker 594). Nasuib tells Angelo-Tshepo that his ‘body is a receptacle but not like a woman’s’, suggesting that women are unreceptive to the communicative elements of sex, on the one hand, while also reinforcing damaging ideas of women as walking wombs (Ibid). This notion is exemplified in Mmabatho, the only female narrator/protagonist in Duiker’s novel, who undergoes a two-dimensional development throughout the novel, and ends up as the quintessential single-mother figure. While Duiker’s text effectively critiques the Steamy Windows brotherhood for its complicity in the brutality of capitalism, and imagines a pan-African alliance, it is less effective at envisioning a queer utopia that is not phallogentric, as Tshepo’s world continues to be shaped by his interactions with ‘special men’ (Duiker 607).

Similarly, Taïa's narrators seem unable to see women beyond the figure of the mother, offering no place for non-male bodies in its vision of the sperm brothers. The figure of M'Barka, the mother of both the narrator in *An Arab Melancholia* and *Salvation Army*, indeed haunts the first parts of both of his novels; a stifling presence, a 'strong, human, disturbing, possessive smell' that lingers in the narrators' consciousnesses (Taïa, *An Arab Melancholia* 10). The first parts of these two novels carefully detail the ways in which the same systems of straight time and strict, Islamic heteronormativity that affect Abdellah, also touch M'Barka. However, Taïa's utopic vision of brotherhood, especially in *Salvation Army*, seems unable to recognise the ways in which this utopia and the freedom it imagines could extend to M'Barka and other figures like her. Perhaps this is because M'Barka is too deeply entwined in the kinship system that for Taïa is such a failure. Nonetheless, his novel collapses the physical borders that construct our world but ends up fortifying borders that construct gender. Jamal's queer utopia cannot account for the complexities of race, but Duiker and Taïa's queer utopias, seemingly, do not extend to a range of other identities – transgender, gender non-conforming individuals, femmes, butch, women and/or lesbians – that compose the queer spectrum. While the androcentrism of Taïa and Duiker's visions runs the risk of re-essentialising the kinds of binaries these novels attempt to dissolve, and diminishes the utopic impulse contained in these novels, I still maintain that the utopic is not flattened or erased. Indeed, they simply show us that 'we are not yet queer', but that there is hope on the 'horizon' (Muñoz 1).

This particular problem in some of my texts can hopefully offer a productive site for future elaboration that would broaden and revive our sense of the queer utopia beyond the male-centric vision of these authors, especially the structures of feeling and modes of relating that animate bonds across difference. Currier and Migraine-George argue that '[a]s queer studies and African studies engage in renewed transnational and cross-disciplinary transactions,' like the one I have attempted to recreate here, 'the most productive parts of this encounter might lie in the moments and points of friction, dissonance, tension, and disarticulation between these two field formations, in these temporal and spatial instances of destabilization that render their *agencement* both fragile and temporary' (298). Currier and Migraine-George's 'brittle temporality' (Ibid) is thus comparable to the kinds of ephemeral youth temporalities and their 'disarticulation' of straight time that I have fleshed out in this thesis. It is in this kind of brittle temporality, Currier and Migraine-George argue, that the 'field formations [of queer and African studies] have the best chance of resisting' the repetition of authoritarian 'epistemes' – of colonialism, post-independence nationalisms, homonationalisms – that might inevitably rewrite themselves into 'even the most unruly and dissident discourses' (Ibid). It is essential, therefore, that we as scholars return to the youth phase of queer theory itself, both to resurrect and revise the ethical norms that have come to govern our own field, and to resolve the debates about queer sex that have gathered dust in the rush towards state-mandated visibility and inclusion. I have shown that, despite their inherent limitations, African texts can and do facilitate such a return. The current pre-occupation with the socio-political conditions and politics of pragmatism that restrict queer African lives – while necessary – stifles our sense of futurity. Visibility, Taïa's texts and the author's own life suggest, can be dangerous rather



than ideal, while inclusion under hostile regimes will remain a zero-sum game.<sup>31</sup> Duiker and Jamal, on the other hand, reveal that inclusion alone does not guarantee lived, sexual citizenship. It is thus critical that we take these literary and artistic products seriously so that we can broaden the relational fields of our own studies and contribute to a range of undercommons studies that includes the sexual undercommons. If ‘queerness is not yet here but it approaches like a crashing wave of potentiality’ (Muñoz 185), these texts suggest that it is up to us to ride that wave.

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<sup>31</sup> In *Out in Africa*, Ashely Currier views ‘visibility and invisibility as fluctuating qualities’ (1) that are interdependent rather than ‘static positions that a person, group, or social movement occupies indefinitely’ (7). Both, or either, visibility and invisibility can thus be strategically deployed ‘at particular times in particular contexts’ (Ibid 8). Currier shows that on the African continent, and in her Southern African focus, a politics of ‘the closet’ persists and can offer protection to queer individuals and activists when it is necessary, or it can be transgressed strategically for political gains (Ibid 6). At the same time, visibility can function as a normalizing impulse ‘when activists equate visibility with assimilation’ (Ibid 7), producing the kinds of homonormativities and homonationalisms that Puar identifies, which I discuss in my introduction and second chapter. ‘According to this logic,’ Currier argues, attaining a certain type of visibility can depoliticize and demobilize LGBT activists’ (Ibid). It is this latter dynamic in the South African context, where the inclusion of certain forms of “acceptable” queerness into the nation runs the risk of domesticating queer politics, that Jamal and Duiker’s text grapple with.

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