Article:
Ncube, G and van Klinken, A orcid.org/0000-0003-2011-5537 (2023) Abdellah Taïa and an Emergent Queer African Islamic Discourse: Texts, Visibility and Intimate Archives. African Studies, 81 (3-4). pp. 306-323. ISSN 0002-0184

https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2023.2200367

Abdellah Taïa and an Emergent Queer African Islamic Discourse: Texts, Visibility and Intimate Archives

Author accepted manuscript, to be published in *African Studies*

Gibson Ncube* and Adriaan van Klinken

*Corresponding author: gncube@sun.ac.za

Notes on contributors

Gibson Ncube is lecturer at Stellenbosch University in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages. He has served as the co-convenor of the Queer African Studies Association (2020-2022). He is the author of the forthcoming book *Queer Bodies in African Films* (NISC, 2022). ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6351-6114)

Adriaan van Klinken is Professor of Religion and African Studies at the University of Leeds, and Extraordinary Professor at the University of the Western Cape, in the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice. Among other publications, he is the author of *Kenyan, Christian, Queer: Religion, LGBT Activism, and Arts of Resistance in Africa* (Penn State University Press, 2019). ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2011-5537)

Abstract

This article discusses the work of Abdellah Taïa, the first openly gay Moroccan novelist to write his queerness, as a major contribution to an emergent queer African Islamic discourse. Bringing Taïa's work into conversation with diverse literary texts from elsewhere on the continent, the article makes two major interventions in the field of queer African studies. First, it centres Islam as a resource for queer agency, creativity and subjectivity in contemporary Africa. This addresses Western conceptions of queer politics and queer rights that operate on a largely secular, if not anti-

religious and specifically anti-Islamic basis. Second, it renegotiates the marginality of North Africa, and especially the Maghreb, in queer African studies. This addresses problematic historic divisions between North and sub-Saharan Africa, and acknowledges the political, cultural and intellectual unity of the continent. The article demonstrates that literary works make visible queer lived experiences on the continent. Drawing on Michelle Caswell's ideas of the 'archiving of the unspeakable' and Achille Mbembe's concept of the 'unarchivable', this article adopts a 'scavenger methodology' to argue that literary works are important in creating an emergent queer African Islamic discourse as well as an alternative archive of African queer lived experiences.

Keywords: Abdellah Taïa; affective solidarity; archive; intimacy; Islam; Muslim; queer; religion

Abdellah Taïa and an Emergent Queer African Islamic Discourse: Texts, Visibility and Intimate Archives

Introduction

Although a third of the world's Muslims are found in Africa, Islam on the continent remains overshadowed by the Middle East. Moreover, given its longstanding and widespread presence, and the unique form that Islam has taken in African contexts, it can in fact be seen as an African religion (Levtzion and Pouwels, 2000). Muslim societies, in general, have historically had a conflicted consideration of non-normative sexualities, often tolerating them in spite of general disapproval (Whitaker 2006, 2014). Interestingly, Islam in Africa is practised alongside colonial penal codes founded on largely Christian mores which have themselves curbed local sexual practices. Such a state of affairs has created a complex sociocultural space in which queer sexualities are existent and tolerated, albeit marginalised. This complex and contested reality of queer existence in African Muslim communities is reflected in a recently emerging queer African Islamic discourse as represented in literary texts, which we take to be intimate archives of queerness.

In this article, we use the literary work of Moroccan writer Abdellah Taïa as a prism through which to understand this emerging queer African Islamic discourse. We particularly focus on the largely autofictional novels *Salvation Army*, *An Arab Melancholia* and *Infidels*. We bring these novels into conversation with other texts from other parts of the continent, including *Fairytales for Lost Children* (2013) by the Somali writer Diriye Osman, *Confessions of a Gambler* by the South African author Rayda Jacobs, the autobiographical text *Being Queer and Somali*, by Afdhere Jama, and the anthologies *Invisible: Stories from Kenya's Queer Community* (2013) edited by Kevin Mwachiro, and *She Called Me Woman: Nigeria's Queer Women Speak* (2018) edited by Azeenarh Mohammed, Chitra Nagarajan and Rafeeat Aliyu. By considering the work of Taïa in dialogue with other literary texts, we are interested in mapping how works of literature have the potential of creating knowledge on how Islam and queerness intersect within the different geo-historical spaces of Africa. Existing scholarship has tended to engage with Taïa as a writer located in, and part of, Francophone North African, Middle Eastern, and/or Arabic socio-cultural milieus (Christensen 2021; Provencher and Bouamer 2021). Although these are legitimate ways of engaging his work, we contend in this article that reading Taïa as an *African* writer is

methodologically, epistemologically and politically innovative and important, at least for two reasons. First, because it interrogates problematic historic and geographical divisions between North and sub-Saharan Africa, and second, it acknowledges the political, cultural and intellectual unity of the continent, especially of its Islamic traditions (Barton 2021). Although we are not oblivious to the multiple and complex histories of Islam on the continent, for the above reasons in this article, we read Taïa, as a North African writer, alongside writers from sub-Saharan African Islamic contexts. This move is productive, as it allows us to demonstrate how he is part of, and makes a major contribution to, an emergent discourse that engages Islamic aesthetics and spiritual sensibilities as pivotal to queer African worldmaking. In our reading of Taïa's work alongside that of writers from sub-Saharan Africa, we are interested in forging a pan-African Islamic discourse. A 'queer pan-African discourse' (van Klinken 2020: 351) attends to the linguistic, cultural, historic and linguistic plurality of the continent. Bringing the work of Taïa into conversation with texts from other contexts of the continent attempts to highlight how queerness and Islam intersect in different parts of the continent and the kinds of embodiments and affects that this makes possible.

Drawing on Michelle Caswell's idea of 'archiving of the unspeakable' and Achille Mbembe's concept of the 'unarchivable', we argue that literary narratives, be they fictional, autobiographical or non-fictional, play a pivotal role in making visible and knowable a nascent queer African Islamic discourse as well as offering an alternative intimate archive of queer lived experiences on the continent. Considering that there is a considerably expansive body of scholarship on the intersection of queerness and Christianity in Africa (Robertson 2021; van Klinken & Chitando 2021), the overarching aim of the article is to centre Islamic traditions as pivotal to African cultural production creating unique knowledges of the intersections between queerness and Islam within different spaces on the African continent.

This article is composed of four main sections. In the first, we examine the diverse interventions in queer African studies with a particular emphasis on locating the present study within existing scholarly work. Second, we focus on the theoretical and methodological frameworks that we adopt for this article, especially the justification of the texts that we analyse as well as the 'scavenger methodology' that we use to draw connections in our analysis of the selected texts. The next two main sections examine the selected literary texts by placing attention on two important themes: the consideration of affective solidarity in Islam, and the rethinking of the practice and experiencing Islam.

Interventions in queer African studies: Including North Africa and Islam

Over the past twenty-five years or so (since the mid-1990s), academia has witnessed the gradual emergence of a new field of studies, that has come to be known as queer African studies. A broad and interdisciplinary field, it is concerned with studying the histories of sexual and gender variety in African cultures as well as with the late-modern emergence of LGBTQ+ subjectivities, social formations and cultural expressions, and the political contestations about these, in contemporary African societies. A highly productive field of scholarship, numerous publications have appeared that seek to interrogate and complicate monolithic narratives of "African homophobia" and of African LGBTQ+ victimhood (Currier & Migraine-George 2016). Instead, they draw attention to what S.N. Nyeck (2020, 1) has aptly described as the 'resourceless-ness, resourcefulness, and resilience' characterising queer lives in Africa – that is, to African queer agency, creativity, visibility, struggle, and resistance.

As with any field of study that gradually reaches maturity, queer African studies has been subjected to a critical assessment of its methodologies and theories. For instance, Keguro Macharia (2015) has presented a 'litany of complaints', including the need to develop a methodology of queer archives in Africa, the importance of engaging with African feminist and postcolonial studies, and the need for trans-Atlantic work that intersects black and African queer studies. The present article adds two further complaints to this litany, while aiming to simultaneously address them through a twofold intervention. First, it draws critical attention to the marginalisation of North Africa in queer African studies, and advocates for a pan-African approach that stimulates conversation between different regions of the continent to map the contours of emerging queer cultural and social formations on the continent. Here, we build on Gibson Ncube's earlier argument that queer African studies, with its concentration in, and focus on, South(ern) Africa, suffers from a 'restrictive regionalism', and that 'the way forward for African queer studies lies in trans-continental and inter-regional dialogue that will allow for a fuller and all-inclusive imagining and thinking through non-conforming sexual and gender experiences in Africa' (Ncube 2018, 623). Although in recent years, the preoccupation of queer African scholarship with South(ern) Africa has been somewhat balanced by new work on the Eastern (Rao 2020; Rodriguez 2019; van Klinken 2019) and Western (Dankwa 2021; Homewood 2020; Otu 2022) parts of the continent, it remains

true that North Africa, and in particular the Maghreb[1], is largely overlooked, despite of the 'great potentiality to the understanding of queer experiences' that the region proffers (ibid). As Ncube (2018, 624) acknowledges,

> The omission of the Maghreb from queer African studies is as a result, to some extent, of the Maghreb's own conflicted relationship with its African-ness. Too "white" to neatly integrate with "black" sub-Saharan Africa, and at the same time not "white" enough to fit into the global north, and "too African" to belong to the Middle East, the Maghreb finds itself in a precarious position of liminality.

The perception that the Maghreb is not 'truly' African is reflected in some work on queer identities in North Africa, which is framed in relation to the Arab world, rather than to Africa (e.g. see Christensen 2021). However, the liminality that Ncube alludes to in the above quotation can be made productive in queer African studies, precisely because it invites a critical reflection on the concepts of Africa, African-ness, and queerness, and the intersections between these.

The second intervention this article seeks to make is drawing critical attention to the marginalisation of religion, and in particular Islam, in queer African studies scholarship, and outlining the contours of an emerging queer Islamic African discourse. In response to the oft-heard critique that queer theory is inherently western, and the subsequent calls for decolonizing queer studies, Adriaan van Klinken (2019, 14) has argued that,

> decolonisation must also address the secular assumption that underlies much of queer studies. In other words, a postcolonial intervention in queer studies vis-à-vis African contexts also entails a postsecular intervention. By this I mean an interrogation of the Western secular epistemological assumptions underlying much of queer studies, in which religion is often assumed to be conservative and therefore is antagonistically opposed to progressive, emancipatory politics.

[1] The Maghreb is a term frequently used for north-west Africa, including the countries Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.

Arguing that religion should be engaged as 'a site of African queer subjectivity and agency', van Klinken (2019, 15) specifically examines the ways in which queer activists and communities in Kenya creatively engage with Christian language, symbols and imagery. Although there is an emerging sub-field of religion and queer African studies, most of this scholarship focuses on Christian traditions and contexts (Ncube 2015; Robertson 2021; van Klinken & Chitando 2021). While Marc Epprecht (2013, 67) has commented that all the three major faith traditions in Africa – indigenous religions, Christianity and Islam – 'have historically been and remain more amenable to accepting sexual difference than is generally understood', attention to these traditions is not equally distributed. In particular, Islam tends to be overlooked (with a few exceptions, such as Gaudio 2009). This is not a coincidence, because Islam, even more than Christianity, is the Other to queer studies, with its Western origins and largely secular orientation (Massad 2015). Especially in the post-9/11 era, the world has witnessed the emergence of forms of homonationalism in North America and Europe, in which Islam is depicted as conservative, if not fundamentalist or extremist, as incompatible with liberal values, and thus as homo- or queerphobic (Puar 2007). However, without falling in another trap – of an orientalist gaze in which Muslim cultures are associated with significant levels of (male) homo-eroticism (Massad 2007) –, it is important to recognise the evidence of gender and sexual diversity in Muslim societies, both historically and today, in Africa and other parts of the world (Atshan 2020; Gaudio 2009; Habib 2010). This recognition is important for queer African studies, because Islam has a longstanding presence in Africa, having profoundly impacted cultures in various regions of the continent since its emergence and gradual spread from the 7th century CE.

Arguably, the two interventions this article seeks to make are closely connected, because by considering North Africa, with its established Islamic history and culture, as a vital part of queer Africa, Islam is automatically put squarely in the centre of queer African studies. As Ncube (2018, 626) points out:

> One other particularity of the Maghreb is that religion creates a geography of Africa that perceptibly differs from the distinction between North and sub-Saharan Africa. Although Islamic religious doctrine is unaccommodating to non-conforming sexualities, Arab Muslim societies of the Maghreb have tended to tolerate them, provided that they are kept within private spaces.

The ‘culture of discretion’ around same-sex sexualities alluded to here also existed elsewhere in Africa, such as in indigenous religious contexts (Epprecht 2004, 37). Both in the Maghreb and in other parts of the continent, these traditional cultures have become challenged in recent decades by emerging forms of queer sexuality centred on a politics of publicity. The openly gay Moroccan writer Abdellah Taïa, whose work is the focus of the present article, is an example of this. Yet he is not alone. By linking Taïa’s literary work to texts from elsewhere on the continent, that intersect Islam and queerness critically, creatively and imaginatively, we sketch the contours of an emerging queer African Islamic discourse. In this discourse, Muslim culture and Islamic ritual and belief enable particular forms of African queer world-making, negotiating the binary of private and public across the different geo-historical spaces of Africa.

Literature and/as archives of the unspeakable: Theoretical and methodological underpinnings

Discussing the ‘culture of discretion’ that is prevalent in Muslim societies of the Maghreb, Abdellah Taïa explains in an article titled ‘A Boy to Be Sacrificed’, published in the *New York Times* in 2012, that in the Morocco of the 1980s where he grew up, queer sexuality did not exist. He begins this article with these words:

> In the Morocco of the 1980s, where homosexuality did not, of course, exist, I was an effeminate little boy, a boy to be sacrificed, a humiliated body who bore upon himself every hypocrisy, everything left unsaid (2012).

By stating that homosexuality did not exist, Taïa does not mean that same-sex practices did not occur, but that they were surrounded by social silence and indeed cultural discretion. Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe (1997, 17) affirm that the ‘formula “*todos hecho, nada dicho*” (everything is done, nothing is said) seems to be a circum-Mediterranean strategy for maintaining absolute moral prescriptions in principle by keeping silent about the vagaries of “human nature”’. Jarrod Hayes (2000) further develops this idea and states that although queer sexualities are prevalent in the Maghreb, they are hardly ever discussed openly. According to Hayes (2000, 8), ‘everyone knows about it and admits it. But speaking about them remains intolerable. The weight of sexual

taboo is without doubt the most insurmountable even at the discursive level'. This social and cultural silence also translates to a paucity of vocabulary in dialectic Arabic to speak of and name queer desire in a positive manner. By embracing silence, such Arab-Muslim societies give the impression that queer sexualities and gender identities do not exist. In a way, they set out to create uniform societies in which heterosexuality is the norm and, thus, the correct form of sexual expression. Queer desire, sexuality and gender identities thus continue to exist on the margins of Arab-Muslim societies in countries like Morocco. The same applies to other parts of Africa, as Epprecht's earlier cited study suggests. Moreover, knowledges rooted in, and generated from, African contexts work towards challenging what Currier and Migraine-George (2017, 133) term 'the abusive hegemony of Western ethnocentric discourses' which have not only othered non-Western queer experiences but have also 'objectified, erased, or even violated' (Currier and Migraine-George, Ibid) them. Thus, 'African knowledges' speak to the dismantling of Western-centred epistemologies which continue to inferiorise African knowledge production systems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018).

These ideas are evoked herein because literary and other cultural productions have played, and continue to play an important role in challenging this culture of discretion and silence on queer related issues in the Maghreb, as is indeed the case in the rest of Africa. Texts by authors such as Abdellah Taïa are important in that they create an archive of not just queer desire and sexuality but an emergent queer Islamic discourse on the African continent. The archive is considered, in this article, as an assemblage of all that is known and knowable about non-conforming sexuality and desire. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concepts of surveillance and governmentality, Dagmar Brunow (2018, 176) posits that there is an ambivalence of queer visibility in institutionalised or national archives. The appearance and visibility of queerness in these archives is in many instances shrouded in pathologising discourses. In addition to this ambivalence, it is worth acknowledging that archives are by their nature biased and selective in what they deem worth archiving. Achille Mbembe (2002, 20) rightly points out in this regard that 'archive, therefore, is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which, in the end results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents and the refusal of that status to others, thereby judged "unarchivable"'.

Given that queer lived experiences are either underrepresented or pathologised in institutionalised archives, it becomes necessary to forge alternative archives, which according to

Michelle Caswell (2014) capture experiences that are deemed 'unspeakable'. Caswell (2014, 7) argues that the creation of alternative archives makes it possible to 'counter the silences embedded in records'. Alternative archives of queerness provided by literary and other cultural productions make visible lived experiences which are otherwise marginalised. The literary work of Abdellah Taïa, read in concert with texts from other parts of the African continent, offers an important alternative view of queer Islamic experiences which have been marginalised and rendered insignificant. Ann Cvetkovich (2003, 8) finds that such alternative archives are worthwhile because 'in the absence of institutionalised documentation or in opposition to official histories, memory becomes a valuable historical resource, and ephemeral and personal collections of objects stand alongside the documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge'. This alternative archive, an intimate archive of queerness, embodied in literary texts enables the production of knowledge on non-conforming Islamic sexualities and gender identities.

As previously pointed out, this article sets to examine the literary work of Abdellah Taïa and other selected writers from the African continent as a prism to understanding the way in which queer and Islam interact within sociocultural space of Africa. Macharia (2019) points out that black and queer do not play well together. According to Macharia (2019, 5), 'they often inhabit the same spaces, even the same bodies, in uncomfortable ways'. This article complicates Macharia's conceptualisation of the enduring rubbing between black (read as African) and queer by adding to the equation Islam. We are interested in examining how queer, Islam and Africa rub against each other, in ways that are, or can be, productive. Languages, histories, regions and religions do not only shape queer Africans subjects. Their constant friction, or 'frottage' (Macharia 2019, 69) produces crevices that create generative spaces to consider what it means to be at once African, queer and Muslim. In bringing literary texts from different sociocultural and geohistorical spaces, this article seeks to understand how the practice of Islam in different African regions counters reductionist considerations of Islam. As'ad Abu Khalil (1997, 99) explains in this regard that,

> The tendency to speak about Islam is fraught with methodological hazards. First, the religion does not apply uniformly or universally to all Muslims and in all areas of the world. That Islam constitutes a closed, inflexible doctrine, or that all world Muslims form some monolithic bloc, is no more accepted by the academic community despite the efforts of

> stubborn orientalists who never give up on their attempt to revive the crudest version of classical orientalism.

By focusing on the Maghreb and other regions of Africa, this article pushes for a conceptualisation of 'African knowledges' in understanding the intersection of queer and Islam. The specific focus on Islamic queer knowledge forged through intimate literary archives addresses Western conceptions of queer politics and queer rights that operate on a largely secular, if not anti-religious and specifically anti-Islamic basis.

In conclusion to this section, the idea of the '(un)archivability' of certain documents raises a vital methodological question of how we have decided, for the purposes of this article, on what texts to include in our discussion of the emergent queer African Islamic discourse. As pointed out in the introduction, the focus of this article is on Abdellah Taïa's literary oeuvre, from which we draw connections to, and enter into dialogue with other texts from beyond the geopolitical and historical purview of the Maghreb. These other African texts represent a diversity of genres and queer Islamic voices: some are fictional, others autobiographical, whilst others are memoirs, complemented by some ethnographic/empirical studies. Although such a selection might be viewed as a cacophony and as very random, it reflects the variety of genres, and the fluidity between them, that characterises Taïa's own work. Moreover, it embodies the qualities of queer as method which attend to fluidity and flexibility between and across the so-called stable and established boundaries and fields. Judith Halberstam (1998, 13) defines such a queer approach as a 'scavenger methodology' which,

> uses different methods to collect and produce information in subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence.

This 'scavenger methodology' speaks to the imperative need of the archive 'to be rich, varied and in a sense "eclectic" enough to bear the weight of different contested interpretations and to allow them to battle out their differences in relation to the different texts and inter-texts which the archive itself makes available' (Hall 2001, 92). As we read Taïa's work alongside, and at times against,

texts from other contexts in the continent, we acknowledge the urgent necessity to devise an archive of queer Islamic experiences within Africa.

Affective Solidarity and Islam as a sensuous religion

In the work of Taïa and other queer African Muslim writers, Muslim societies and Islam as a lived religion are represented as environments that are not necessarily hostile to queer folk. On the contrary, Muslim social spaces are depicted as allowing for physical intimacy and contact between bodies, especially – but not only – of the same sex. They are also associated with considerable levels of homosociality, and with tolerance towards homoeroticism. Moreover, Islamic practices of communal and individual prayer and other religious ritual and symbol are narratively recounted as creating aesthetic, ritual and mystical spaces in which queer bodies find intimacy, safety, nourishment and affirmation.

It might be tempting for scholars to clearly distinguish these various layers. However, in the literary accounts of Taia and other writers, they appear to be intertwined. What connects the diverse literary depictions of Muslim social and Islamic religious spaces is what Katrina Daly Thompson (2020, 878) conceptualises as 'intercorporeality'. By this, she means the corporeal contact and proximity that provides Muslims with 'opportunities to not only display but actually cultivate and *incorporate* (literally bring into their bodies) an affective solidarity with others who may differ from them in sex, gender, sect, religious interpretation, or dis/ability'. Although the wide scope of this solidarity alluded to here – across categories of sex, gender, sect etc. – might be influenced by the particular context of Thompson's research (in North American Muslim congregations associated with the 'progressive Muslim movement'), we contend that the concepts of 'intercorporeality' and 'affective solidarity' have a broader resonance with Muslim social and religious spaces as represented in the works of queer African Muslim writers.

To begin with Taïa, in the autobiographical novel *Salvation Army* he traces the sensuality that he experiences in Islam to his own upbringing in a big family where bodies shared small spaces and were compelled to be in constant proximity and contact:

> Four walls that didn't really protect us from outside noises. A small roof to live under, storing in our memory, beneath our skin, what made up our life, experimenting everything, feeling everything and later, remembering it all (*Salvation Army*, 14).

In addition to the close bodily proximity, Taïa describes how the contact was almost sexual:

> In my mind, my family's reality has a strong sexual quality, 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 (*Salvation Army*, 16).

Indeed, due to this intercorporeality, he and his siblings could hear their parents making love (as well as having fights), which sparked his imagination. Moreover, the young protagonist, Abdellah, could develop an attraction to his older brother, Abdelkebir. Years later, he still remembers how they glued together under the same blanket, with 'that delightful sensation my little body felt when it came in contact with his, big and hard' (*Salvation Army*, 33). According to Taïa, daily life in the family was characterised by a quasi-sexual contact of bodies in a way that was without guilt. He uses this memory from his youth to make a more general ethical statement about the freedom to enjoy sex 'regardless of who we have it with'.

The proximity of bodies in the intimate family space extends to the semi-public space of the hammam (public bath), which frequently occurs in Taïa's writings. Here, young boys are taken by their mothers to the women's bath, but when they get older they are supposed to frequent the men's bath. Both the female and male hammams are narratively depicted as spaces of homosociality, intimacy and eroticism. When first attending the men's hammam, Taïa is surprised: instead of men 'showing off their virility', he sees them 'in a new light: fragile, sensitive, handsome, and open to all experiences. An infinite tenderness passed between their bodies, through their strongly scented, intoxicating skin. They brushed against each other, they touched. Pure sensuality' (*Another Morocco*, 30). Where the hammam here is a space of affective solidarity between human (in this case, male) bodies, elsewhere Taïa writes about it as a space of spiritual purification, with 'the Angel without religion [who] comes to cleanse me, give me new life. A new name' (*Infidels*, 14). Yet, who is this mysterious Angel? It could well be another male figure, suggesting that the boundaries between the erotic and the spiritual, are in fact rather fluid.

Texts by other African authors, too, allude to homosociality in Muslim cultures as an opportunity for homoeroticism. For instance, a short story entitled 'To Be Muslim and Gay' in the anthology *Invisible: Stories from Kenya's Queer Community*, the protagonists relate how as an

adolescent he had his first homoerotic encounter 'with a gorgeous looking Muslim, Shia man' (Mwachiro 2013, 57) who was a family friend. Another example is the collection of short stories, *Fairytales for Lost Children*, by the Somali writer Diriye Osman, which includes narrative accounts of bodily intimacy, desire and pleasure across categories of age and class, such as between two young men who share a room as refugees ('Tell the Sun Not to Shine'), and between a teenage boy and the male househelp ('Shoga'). Striking in texts like these is that same-sex eroticism is not particularly problematised in religious terms. As the queer Muslim writer, Afdhere Jama (2015, ii-iii), reflects autobiographically about growing up in Somalia: 'I have never, ever, not even once heard negative thing being said about queer sexuality in a religious way. Everything I heard about *quaniisiinta*, or homosexuals, was cultural related. That is, I did not grow up with a negative idea of being queer. I would go to the mosque often and never did I hear a Friday Prayer focus on that subject.' Thus, these texts illustrate what Hassan Ndzovu (2019, 852) has described as 'the traditional existence of tolerance towards non-normative sexualities in African Muslim societies'. This is confirmed by a lesbian-identifying Yoruba-Hausa woman from Northern Nigeria, whose story appears in the collection *She Called Me Woman: Nigeria's Queer Women Speak*, in which she states: 'I know they're talking about this [homosexuality] a lot in the churches now, but you don't have a lot of talk in Muslim societies about any kind of sex, so we don't have the kind of dialogue that they do' (Mohammed et al, 2018, 79).

The idea of 'affective solidarity' is further explored in Taïa's literary oeuvre in which Islam, in its Sufi expression, is portrayed as a 'sensuous, sexual religion' (*An Arab Melancholia*, 98). Taïa uses this phrase in a narrative depiction of a pilgrimage site in Cairo, in his autobiographical novel *An Arab Melancholia*. At this religious site, practices of intense prayer, the reciting of religious poetry, dancing and touching create a ritual space of embodied intimacy and ecstasy where men and women, children and elderly, rich and poor, blacks and whites, Muslims and Copts are united into 'a dense crowd, a single unit welded together across all social lines, a crowd joined as one in the unorthodox expression of their unique love' (ibid). Taïa, at that time in a personal crisis of love and misfortune, narrates how he sang and danced along with the pilgrims, in the deep belief that 'the crowd moving around the Lady of Cairo would do me good, maybe even save me' (ibid, 99). Elsewhere in his oeuvre, pilgrimage sites dedicated to Sufi saints frequently appear, and they tend to be narratively depicted as religious spaces of intimacy and safety for Taïa in the process of coming of age and coming to terms with his sexuality.

Sufism has historically been and remains a widespread and popular form of Islam in Morocco and in other parts of Africa, to such an extent that it is frequently seen as representing 'African Islam' (Hassan 2020). The just-quoted writer Jama relates the relative silence – or, in Epprecht's words, 'culture of discretion' – on homosexuality to the dominance of Sufism in Somalia, which not only was relatively tolerant but also allowed for music and dance as part of Islamic practice. Likewise, Rudolph Gaudio (2009, 124) in his ethnographic study of the *'yan daudu* (men involved in same-sex practices) among the Hausa people in Northern Nigeria, suggests that the prevalence of Sufi Islam in the region created the 'relative tolerance' that this community historically has enjoyed, thanks to Sufism's 'flexible notions of morality'. Both authors suggest that this culture has changed in recent decades as a result of the emergence of salafi, or Islamic reform, movements. Thus, Taïa's idea of the sensuousness of Sufi Islam speaks to an idea that is not at all new. Classical literary texts such as *One Thousand and One Nights*, as argued by Frank Bosman (2021, 1), have grappled with the 'erotic playfulness' which has always been prevalent in 'the land of Islam'. Contemporary literary texts such as those that are examined in this article, therefore feed into, expand and indeed queer this classical archive that captures the diversity of corporeal, erotic and sexual expression in Muslim societies.

The earlier discussed familial closeness that Taïa writes about is particularly important in that it also exemplifies the intimacy of Abdellah's relationship with Allah and Islam. This closeness to Allah, as echoed by a character in the novel *Infidels*, resides in the ability to be in direct contact with him: 'They said I wasn't a good Muslim. What do they know? I know Islam better than anyone. I speak to God directly, no need for an intermediary' (*Infidels*, 21). This intimacy between the (queer) Muslim and Allah, in which protagonists learn, for example, the ninety-nine names of Allah 'by heart' signals the beginning of a queer relationship. This question of intimacy is further fortified by how in several of Taïa's novels, the call for prayers by a muezzin incites queer desire. In *Infidels*, there is a reference to how 'the calls to God excited them' (*Infidels*, 83). The novel *An Arab Melancholia* describes a scene in which Abdellah is about to be raped by a group of older boys. At that moment, a muezzin makes the call for the afternoon prayers. In this instance, Islam is framed as preventing violence against the queer body:

> He [the main rapist] was obviously a good Muslim. He feared God. He respected the Prophet Mohammed. He could never worship sex and God at the same time. Never. They

> each had their place. Despite the dim light in the room, God could see us. Five naked boys, penises hard and soft in their hands. And a sixth boy, nude and ambiguous, a boy about to be sacrificed (*An Arab Melancholia*, 27).

The protagonist explains that he, as well as his aggressors, were 'good Muslims' because they knew how to separate God and sex, the pure and the impure. Yet we propose a different reading of this passage beyond the superficial explanation offered by the juvenile protagonist. The voice of the muezzin in the background, embodying Islam, penetrates this dark and shady space in which bodies are queered and become queer. The naked bodies of the boys, their erect penises in their hands considered against the sacred voice of the muezzin, are a hint towards the fact there shouldn't be any conflict between sex, sexuality and religious practice, and no need for an existential separation of these. The protagonist in the above passage finds poetry and a form of sensuality in what should have been a scary situation. The protection he experiences from the voice of the muezzin, in this moment of physical aggression, fortifies the idea of Islam being a sensuous religion in which queer and queered bodies can also come into corporeal intimacy. Similar notions of Islam can be found in other queer African Islamic texts. For instance, Osman's *Fairytales for Lost Children* includes a story that references prayer as 'an act of pleasure, silence, stillness', which the protagonist engages in as a spiritual method to deal with experiences of homophobic abuse (*Fairytales*, 115).

The point of our discussion so far is that Muslim social spaces and Islamic practice, as experienced by Taïa and other queer African Muslim writers, are associated with various forms of bodily intimacy and eroticism that offer safety and affirmation to queer bodies. The suggestion is that Islam, at least its 'sensuous' Sufi expression, allows for intercorporeality and affective solidarity, and thus also for queer desire. Yet the traditional discretion around same-sex sexuality in Muslim societies, alluded to by various writers cited above, has come under threat in recent decades.

Rethinking Islam

Earlier in this article, we quoted Ndzovu's observation of a traditional culture of tolerance towards sexual diversity in African Muslim communities – an observation that has also been made by other scholars with regard to the Arab Muslim world. However, Ndzovu points at a recent shift, through

which ‘same-sex practice has become a public issue of concern’, with the earlier tradition of acceptance developing into ‘the contemporary condemnation of nonnormative sexual expression’ as manifested in Muslim societies on the continent’ (2019, 852). This politicisation of homosexuality in African Islamic contexts has been documented in countries as diverse as Egypt, Kenya, and Senegal (Broqua 2016; Ndzovu 2016; Tolino 2016). Obviously, this is a very complex dynamic, but it seems driven by two major developments. First, by the relatively recent global emergence of ‘reformist’, ‘radical’ or ‘fundamentalist’ forms of Islam which, in the words of Dina Siddiqi, are ‘bent on muzzling freedom of thought and action’ (Siddiqi 2019, 3). This development has progressively put in jeopardy not just queer rights but also the traditional discretion that we have alluded to in preceding sections in relation to Arab and African Muslim worlds. Second, within African contexts, the radicalisation of Islam has operated in tandem with the politicisation of queer rights which uses issues of sexual diversity to resist a perceived Western liberal, secular and/or queer imperialism that imposes ‘foreign’ sexual identities and practices onto African societies (Rao 2020). Sylvia Tamale (2013, 34) explains that ‘homophobia has simply become a political tool used by conservatives to promote their self-serving agendas’. Both Islamic and Christian discourses are utilised to construct a narrative of resistance against a neo-colonial threat to perceived “African” values.

Against this twofold background, Abdellah Taïa’s literary work deals with the need to reconsider Islam especially within the contemporary period of post-Arab Spring. Taïa calls this a form of djihad that sets out to reinterpret certain Islamic codes. The protagonist of the novel *Salvation Army* explains in this regard, ‘Little by little, re-examine my views about Arab culture, Moroccan tradition and Islam. Lose myself entirely, the better to find myself’ (*Salvation Army*, 143). What this implies is that the rethinking of Islam is an existential process that takes place not *outside* of Islam but rather *within* it.

This reconceptualisation of Islam operates at different levels. At the very apparent level, it involves humanising the prophet and having an intimate relationship with scripture. One of the central characters of the novel *Infidels*, named Slima, narrates how when her adopted mother was dying she alluded to the importance of closeness to the word: ‘The saint’s words are still alive in me. I’m dying and I can still hear them. I’m leaving and his voice comes back to me, beautiful, pure, welcoming’ (*Infidels*, 17). These words highlight how the words of the prophet are beautiful, pure and also welcoming. The adjectives used to describe the word are particularly telling of the

way in which the attachment to the word is intimate and dear. Another character in *Infidels* explains further this intimate and close affiliation to the prophet and the prophet's word: 'we were immersed in the religion invented by this man without knowing who he really was. Of course, there were his hadith but they were codified, rigid, too sacred. In Medina, this abstract man became real – he had a grave. Mohammed had truly existed' (*Infidels*, 100). In this case, we see a movement from considering Islam, embodied by the prophet, as an abstract and metaphysical phenomenon to something that is tangible, palpable, and vulnerable. Mohammed's grave is the site in which Mohammed is humanised, the place in which the abstract is concretised, and therefore becomes a place of identification and of claiming recognition. In a somewhat similar way, the protagonist in one of Osman's stories ('Ndambi'), reclaims the saying of the Prophet that 'dreams are a window into the unseen', resisting the suggestion made by others that 'I, as a black African Muslim lesbian, am not included in this vision' (*Fairytales*, 73).

It is interesting in *Infidels*, that this concretisation of Mohammed functions in tandem with an intimate relationship with God. This is expressed in *Infidels* by the recitation of the ninety-nine names of Allah: 'I was not really a good Muslim but I still knew them by heart. Quietly reciting, chanting every single one of them each day, brought you closer to God, of course, and kept death away' (Infidels, 100). In this novel, the learning of the ninety-nine names of Allah 'by heart' is linked to the beginning of a homoerotic relationship. The spiritual intimacy with Allah seems to open up the characters to sexual and queer intimacy, and to subvert the kinds of desires that are considered incorrect and forbidden.

Once Mohammed is imagined more humane, Islamic faith is also open to being humanised and rendered less rigid. The same character in *Infidels* states:

> You come from far away, from another world, another culture, other customs. But you're like me, a human being. A human being. You are my brother. I'm your sister. I live again. I am reborn. I'm leaving. I'm changing. For your eyes, your desire, your enthusiasm, your sex, your skin, your smell, your mystery. Your silence. God who is in you. God who is in you' (*Infidels*, 94).

What we see above is how Islamic faith is framed as humane and intimate, and as the basis of embodied solidarity and recognition. In this affirming form of religion, human bodies, regardless

of their desire and sexuality come into direct contact with Allah because Allah is in them. This idea is further buttressed by Jallal, the gay narrator of the first part of *Infidels* who addresses his mother Slima and expresses a humanised conception of Islam in which there is more direct communion with God and the latter as well is more accepting:

> I'll never leave you. We'll ride together till the end. Sing and dance. Love and sleep. Still eat, in spite of everything. Together all the way to God. Until the Last Night. All the way to paradise. We'll climb the stairs of heaven. I'll help you. I'll carry you. When you're old, I'll still be there for you, though everyone, all the others have cast you out. I'll talk to God, He will forgive us. God already accepts us as we are. He made us this way. In this condition. In this situation. We accept His decisions. We listen to His voice (*Infidels*, 7).

Jallal is aware that he and his mother are considered infidels because of their sexualities. He is gay and his mother is a prostitute. Despite being considered infidels, they find that they can still have access to God and they can actually hear him speak and also speak to him. Once these characters come to the realisation that they have a connection to Allah, and thus a place within Islam, they find communion with other Muslims: 'There, before me, in Mecca, was all of humanity immersed in its most essential actions, searching for God, finding Him, speaking to Him, living and dying in Him day and night. … We entered into God together' (*Infidels*, 95). This is echoed by one of Osman's protagonists, for whom Allah becomes 'the God of Imagination', and thus also a source of comfort and peace (*Fairytales*, 20). In the collection *She Called Me Woman*, with stories of Nigerian queer women, one narrator cites the Islamic adage that 'Allah is full of mercy and forgiveness' to subsequently claim that 'I now know that God did not make a mistake in allowing us to love men and women' (316). What we observe here is that the rethinking of Islam from queer perspectives touches on the most foundational tenets of Islamic faith, and involves a fundamental and intimate knowledge of God, the Prophet, and the Quar'an.

This is further reflected in the idea that one's sexuality, queer or not, is part of how one is created by Allah. In the first place, this belief is the basis of pastoral affirmation and self-acceptance, such as expressed by one protagonist in *Infidels*: 'God already accepts us as we are. He made us this way. In this condition. In this situation. We accept his decisions. We listen to His voice. … But He, God, Allah, is not like them, isn't like the image they made of Him. God is in

me. He's also in you' (*Infidels*, 13). However, in the second place, this deeply rooted belief to be created, and therefore accepted, by Allah as queer, also serves as the basis to speak back to Muslims who express homophobic attitudes and who, doing so, misrepresent God. The same rhetoric move is made in one of the autobiographical stories in *She Called Me Woman*. Referring to the hate she has experienced from fellow Hausa Muslims, this Nigerian narrator says: 'I want to let them know this is just the way we are. We are good people. This is how God created us. We are not the ones who created ourselves. They should not judge us with what other people say. They should know that it is only God who can judge' (65). The language of creation that is used here is deeply rooted in Islamic traditions. For instance, in the *Qur'an* surah 49:13 refers to humankind, consisting of different peoples and tribes, as being created by God. And the Hadith asserts that Allah created Adam in His own image, which has been interpreted as that 'Adam, as the Archetype of Man, embodies the Divine Presence' (Morrow 2014, 61). In Christian contexts, this notion of the *imago Dei* has been used to argue that sexual diversity is part of God's design of humankind, and that sexual orientation is innate (van Klinken and Phiri 2015). Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle (2010, 2) makes a similar argument in his pioneering work on Islamic theology and homosexuality, arguing that sexual orientation is 'caused by divine will', and that therefore 'homosexuals have no rational choice in their internal disposition to be attracted to same-sex mates'. In their discussion of LGBTQ+ Christians in the context of Zambia, Adriaan van Klinken and Lilly Phiri (2015, 46) point out that this understanding of *Imago Dei* 'is based on a deeply religious sense of the self: a sense that they, like other human beings, have been created by God, and in the image of God.' This, then, forms the basis for accepting one-self, because one believes to be accepted and affirmed by God. It appears from the above discussed texts that the claim of being created by God serves a similar affirming purpose for queer Muslims and is important in articulating a queer Islam. For instance, in Rayda Jacobs' novel, *Confessions of a Gambler* (2003), about a South African Muslim woman whose son is gay and dies of AIDS, the latter says: 'My feelings never changed. God gave me these feelings, Mummy. I was born with them' (31). This religious sense of self is thus also the basis to resist stigmatisation by others, on the basis of sexuality, gender performativity and, in this case, HIV status.

What this section has shown, is that it is possible to think of a new form of Islam that is freed from inflexible readings of sacred texts and traditions, and subsequently becomes an intimate space of freedom and love. As explained by a character in *Infidels*, 'Islam could be something

besides prohibitions on thinking, existing, freeing yourself. Mahmoud and I gradually reinvented Islam. We found love there. Love. In our own small way, we made progress' (*Infidels*, 114).

Conclusion

Lived experiences have an impact on how queerness within Islam in understood. In this article, we have argued that there in an emergent queer African Islamic discourse that is informed by cultural specificities as well as religious practices. Reading literary texts as a way of understanding Islam and its consideration of queerness in Africa, we have shown that Islam can be viewed as a queer religion. It can be a queer religion in that it is possible to locate within it, practices that are accommodating of diverse, non-normative sexual and gender identities. Taïa's novels, in conversation with other texts from the African continent, show that it is possible to rethink Islam in order to find within it freedom of being and expression: 'You'll reinvent your freedom. They won't dare spit at you' (*Infidels*, 26). Taïa articulates a restorative and liberatory process in his novel which focuses on (re)inventing freedom. This very idea of (re)inventing intimate freedom, from within Islam, forges a decisive other which makes it possible to commune with Allah whilst functioning but not restricted by dogmas of Islam's monotheism.

Putting Taïa's novels in dialogue with texts from other parts of the continent, allowed us to identify emerging common themes and patterns, and also to make a case for reading Taïa as an African writer. The various texts discussed here are rooted in their respective local contexts and histories, but together they give a rich impression of how Islam does allow for queerness on the continent, both historically and to date. Where much of the literature about religion and queerness in Africa has focused on Christianity, sometimes implicitly reinforcing the notion of Islam as a more homophobic Other, this article helps to balance the picture by exploring and foregrounding the multiple ways in which queerness and religiosity in African contexts are interconnected, critically and productively. Further work is required, for instance to explore how the representation in literary texts relates to the lived experiences of queer Muslims on the continent more generally. The question to what extent, and in what ways, literary texts, even if (semi)autobiographical, can be read as ethnographic is a complex one. However, one major anthropological study of queer Muslim lives in an African context – Gaudio's *Allah Made Us* (2009) – does confirm an important insight that has emerged from our reading of Taïa's and other literary writings: the notion that belief in Allah, and the practice of Islamic ritual and faith, does not have to be at odds with queer

African existence, but can instead affirm it. Admittedly, this insight might not reflect the experiences of present-day queer African Muslims who may well face considerable levels of religiously inspired homo- and transphobia. Yet, this discrepancy demonstrates exactly the significance of creative and literary writing, as a resource for not only representing, but also critiquing and re-imagining religious realities and how they impact everyday lives and embodied experiences.

Acknowledgement

Research for this article was conducted in 2020 while Gibson Ncube enjoyed a virtual research fellowship at the University of Leeds under the LUCAS/LAHRI fellowship scheme for African academics, during which time he worked with Adriaan van Klinken on the project "Queer, Muslim and African: Abdellah Taïa's literary work as an ethnography of the conflict between religion and non-normative sexuality in Africa".

References

Abu Khalil, As'ad. 1997. 'Gender Boundaries and Sexual Categories in the Arab World', *Feminist Issues*, 15:1/2, 91-104.

Atshan, Sa'ed. 2020. *Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bosman. Frank G. 2021. 'I am not good at any of this' Playing with Heteroeroticism in The Arab Nights. *Religions,* 12:480, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070480

Barton, Karen S. 2021. 'Geography, Islam, and Africa', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Islam in Africa*, edited by Fallou Ngom, Mustapha H. Kurfi, and Toyin Falola. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 133–148.

Broqua, Christophe. 2016. 'Islamic Movements against Homosexuality in Senegal: The Fight against AIDS as Catalyst', in *Public Religion and the Politics of Homosexuality in Africa*, edited by Adriaan van Klinken, Ezra Chitando. London: Routledge, 163-179.

Brunow, Dagmar. 2018. 'Naming, Shaming, Framing?: The Ambivalence of Queer Visibility in Audio-visual Archives', In *The Power of Vulnerability*. Manchester University Press.

Caswell, Michelle. 2014. *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia.* Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Christensen, Tina Dransfeldt. 2021. *Writing Queer Identities in Morocco: Abdellah Taïa and Moroccan Committed Literature*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Currier, Ashley, and Thérèse Migraine-George. 2016. 'Queer Studies / African Studies: An (Im)possible Transaction?', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 22:2, 281-305. https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-3428783

Currier, Ashley and Migraine-George, Thérèse. 2017. 'Lesbian'/Female Same-Sex Sexualities in Africa. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 21:2, 133-150. https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2016.1146031

Cvetkovich, Ann. 2003. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Dankwa, Serena Owusua. 2021. *Knowing Women: Same-Sex Intimacy, Gender, and Identity in Postcolonial Ghana*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Epprecht, Marc. 2004. *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa*. Montreal: McGill Queens University Press.

Epprecht, Marc. 2013. *Sexuality and Social Justice in Africa: Rethinking Homophobia and Forging Resistance*. London: Zed Books.

Gaudio, Rudolf Pell. 2009. *Allah Made Us: Sexual Outlaws in an Islamic African City*. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell.

Habib, Samir, ed. 2010. *Islam and Homosexuality* (vol. 1 and 2). Santa Barbara : ABC-CLIO, LCC.

Halberstam, Judith. 1998. *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Hall, Stuart. 2001. Constituting an Archive. *Third Text* 15:54, 89-92. https://doi.org/10.1080/09528820108576903

Harrow, Kenneth W. 1991. *Faces of Islam in African Literature*. London: James Currey.

Hassan, Hamdy A. 2020. 'Sufi Islamic Discourse in Africa: From the Greatest Jihad to the Establishment of the African Caliphate', *Religions* 11, no. 12: 639. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11120639

Hayes, Jarrod. 2000. *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Homewood, Nathanael. 2020. 'Leaky Anuses, Loose Vaginas, and Large Penises: A hierarchy of sexualized bodies in the Pentecostal imaginary.' In *Routledge Handbook of Queer African Studies*, edited by S.N. Nyeck. London and New York: Routledge, 113-128.

Jama, Afdhere. 2015. *Being Queer and Somali*. Los Angeles: Oracle Releasing.

Levtzion, Nehemia and Randall Pouwels, eds. 2000. *The History of Islam in Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Macharia, Keguro. 2015. 'Archive and method in Queer African Studies', *Agenda*, 29:1, 140-146. https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2015.1010294

Macharia, Keguro. 2019. *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy across the Black Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press.

Massad, Joseph A. 2015. *Islam in Liberalism*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Massad, Joseph A. 2007. *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Mbembe, Achille. 2002. 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits', In Carolyn Hamilton (ed.) *Refiguring the Archive*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 19-26.

Migraine-George, Thérèse, and Ashley Currier. 2016. 'Querying Queer African Archives: Methods and Movements', *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, 44:3 & 4, 190-207. https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2016.0042

Mohammed, Azeenarh, Chitra Nagarajan, and Rafeeat Aliyu (eds.) 2018. *She Called Me Woman: Nigeria's Queer Women Speak*. Abuja: Cassava Republic.

Morrow, John Andrew. 2014. 'Perfection', in Islamic Images and Ideas: Essays on Sacred Symbolism, edited by John Andrew Morrow. Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 60-66.

Murray, Stephen O. and Will Roscoe. 1997. *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*. New York: New York University Press.

Mwachiro, Kevin. 2013. *Invisible: Stories from Kenya's Queer Community*. Nairobi: Contact Zones.

Ncube, Gibson. 2015. 'To Be Black, Christian and Gay: Nakhane Touré's *Brave Confusion*', *Muziki: Journal of Music Research in Africa*, 12:2, 37-52. https://doi.org/10.1080/18125980.2015.1127622.

Ncube, Gibson. 2018. 'Renegotiating the Marginality of the Maghreb in Queer African Studies', *College Literature*, 45:4, 623-631. https://doi:10.1353/lit.2018.0036

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo. 2018. *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization*. London and New York: Routledge.

Ndzovu, Hassan J. 2016. '"Un-natural", "un-African" and "un-Islamic": The Three-Pronged Onslaught Undermining Homosexual Freedom in Kenya', in *Public Religion and the Politics of Homosexuality in Africa*, edited by Adriaan van Klinken, Ezra Chitando. London: Routledge, 78-91.

Ndzovu, Hassan. 2019. 'Islam in Africa South of the Sahara'. In *The Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*, edited by Howard Chiang, 851-856.

Nyeck, S.N. 2020. 'Introduction.' In *Routledge Handbook of Queer African Studies*, edited by S.N. Nyeck. London and New York: Routledge, 1-11.

Obermeyer, Carla Makhlouf. 2000. Sexuality in Morocco: Changing Context and Contested Domain. *Culture, Health & Sexuality,* 2:3, 239–254. https://doi.org/10.1080/136910500422232

Osman, Diriye. 2013. *Fairytales for Lost Children*. London: Team Angelica.

Otu, Kwame E. 2022. *Amphibious Subjects: Sasso and the Contested Politics of Queer Self-Making in Neo-liberal Ghana*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Provencher, Denis M., and Siham Bouamer, eds. 2021. *Abdellah Taïa's Queer Migrations: Non-places, Affect, and Temporalities*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Puar, Jasbir K. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Rao, Raul. 2020. *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Robertson, Megan. 2021. 'Queer Studies and Religion in Southern Africa: The Production of Queer Christian Subjects', *Religion Compass* 15:1, https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12385

Rodriguez, R.M. 2019. *The Economies of Queer Inclusion: Transnational Organizing for LGBTI Rights in Uganda*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Siddiqi, Dina M. 2019. Exceptional Sexuality in a Time of Terror: 'Muslim' Subjects and Dissenting/Unmournable Bodies. *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 20: 1-18.

Abdellah. 2009. *Salvation Army*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

Taïa, Abdellah. 2012. *An Arab Melancholia*. translated by Frank Stock. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

Taïa, Abdellah. 'A Boy to Be Sacrificed', *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/opinion/sunday/a-boy-to-be-sacrificed.html?_r=0U

Taïa, Abdellah. 2016. *Infidels*. New York: Seven Stories Press. Tamale, Sylvia. 2013. Confronting the Politics of Nonconforming Sexualities in Africa. *African Studies Review*, 56:2, 31-45.

Thompson, Katrina Daly. 2020. Making Space for Embodied Diverse Bodies, and Multiple Gender in Nonconformist Friday Prayers: A Queer Feminist Ethnography of Progressive Muslims' Performative Intercorporeality in North American Congregations. *American Anthropology,* 122:4, 876-890. https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13478

Tolino, Serena. 2016. 'Discourses on Homosexuality in Egypt: When Religion and the State Cooperate', in *Public Religion and the Politics of Homosexuality in Africa*, edited by Adriaan van Klinken, Ezra Chitando. London: Routledge, 49-62.

van Klinken, Adriaan. 2019. *Kenyan, Christian, Queer: Religion, LGBT Activism, and Arts of Resistance in Africa*. University Park: Penn State University Press.

Van Klinken. 2020. 'Queer Pan-Africanism in Contemporary Africa', in *The Routledge Handbook of Pan-Africanism*, edited by Reiland Rabaka. New York: Routledge, 343–354.

van Klinken, Adriaan, and Ezra Chitando. 2021. *Reimagining Christianity and Sexual Diversity in Africa*. London: Hurst & Co.

van Klinken, Adriaan, and Lilly Phiri. 2015. In the Image of God: Reconstructing and Developing a Grassroots African Queer Theology from Urban Zambia. *Theology & Sexuality*, 21:1, 36-52, https://doi.org/10.1080/13558358.2015.1115598

Whitaker, Brian. 2006. *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Love in the Middle East*. London: Saqi Books

Whitaker, Brian. 2014. *Gays without God*. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace.