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Intimate Entanglements. Embodied, Ethnographic, and Theological Reflections on Intersectionality

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Abstract

Dieser Beitrag bietet eine Selbstreflexion zu Fragen von Intersektionalität und Positionalität im Bereich der Forschung zu Christentum und queeren Sexualitäten in afrikanischen Kontexten. Der Autor reflektiert insbesondere den Recherche- und Schreib-Prozess seines 2019 erschienenen Buches „Kenyan, Christian, Queer: Religion, LGBT Activism and Arts of Resistance in Africa", in dem er sich mit Fragen der Intersektionalität und Positionalität auseinandersetzt. Dabei entwickelte er erstens eine Methodik, die es ihm ermöglicht, nicht selbst kenianische oder afrikanische Queer-Theologie zu betreiben, sondern aufkommende queere theologische Diskurse aus den analysierten Fallstudien des kenianischen LGBT-Aktivismus zu rekonstruieren und diese mit Beiträgen afrikanischer Theolog*innen ins Gespräch zu bringen. Zweitens fügte er narrative Abschnitte ein, in denen er den ethnographischen Blick auf sich selbst als weißen Europäer und sich als schwul identifizierenden Forscher richtet, der mit queeren Gemeinschaften in Kenia arbeitet und über sie schreibt, und in denen er über sein verkörpertes ethnographisches und theologisches Selbst Rechenschaft ablegt.

In diesem Beitrag liefert der Autor eine methodologische Begründung der von ihm getroffenen Entscheidungen. Dabei spricht er nicht nur Fragen der Intersektionalität und Positionalität an, sondern auch der Interdisziplinarität, da seine Forschung und sein Schreiben – aufgrund der Natur ihres Gegenstandes – die Genres der Ethnographie, Theologie und Kulturwissenschaften auf queere Weise vermischen und einige der disziplinären Konventionen in diesen Bereichen überschreiten. In der Reflexion über den intimen und verkörperten Prozess der Bedeutungsproduktion, in den er und seine Forschungsteilnehmer verwickelt waren, geht der Autor insbesondere auf seine Entscheidung ein, seinen HIV-Status in seinem Buch offenzulegen. Dies war durch einige seiner Teilnehmer motiviert, die eine ähnliche Politik des Offenlegens betrieben. In seiner theologischen Reflexion verwendet er den paulinischen Begriff des Leibes Christi als Rahmen, um über die Möglichkeit einer theologischen Ethnographie in einer verkörperten und humanistischen Weise nachzudenken, die sowohl Unterschiede als auch Gemeinsamkeiten anerkennt und wissenschaftliche Ehrlichkeit, Vulnerabilität und Solidarität ermöglicht.

This chapter offers a self-reflective account of questions of intersectionality and positionality in research on Christianity and queer sexualities in African contexts. In particular, the author reflects on the process of researching and writing his 2019 book "Kenyan, Christian, Queer: Religion, LGBT Activism and Arts of Resistance in Africa", in which he addressed questions of intersectionality and positionality. He did so, first, by developing a methodology that allowed him not to do Kenyan or African queer theology himself, but to reconstruct emerging queer theological discourses from the case studies of Kenyan LGBT activism he is analysing and by putting these in conversation with contributions by African theologians. Second, he did so by including narrative interludes in which he turned the ethnographic gaze on himself as a white European gay-identifying researcher working with and writing about queer communities in Kenya, and in which he accounted for his embodied ethnographic and theological self.

In the present chapter, the author offers a methodological rationale for the decisions he made, not only addressing questions of intersectionality and positionality but also of interdisciplinarity as his research and writing – by the nature of its subject – queerly blends the genres of ethnography, theology, and cultural studies and transgresses some of the disciplinary conventions in these fields. Reflecting on the intimate and embodied process of meaning-making in which he and his research participants were involved, the author specifically addresses his decision to disclose his HIV status in his book, which was motivated by some of his participants who had adopted a similar politics of disclosure. Reflecting on this theologically, he deploys the Pauline notion of the body of Christ as a frame to think through the possibility of doing theological ethnography in an embodied and humanistic way that recognises both difference and commonality, and that allows for scholarly honesty, vulnerability, and solidarity.

1. Introduction

Several years ago, I carried out a research project on gay men in Zambia and the way in which they negotiate their sexuality and Christian faith. I was working on this project with a fellow researcher originating from Zambia, who was studying for her PhD in South Africa at that time, Lilly Phiri.[1] At some moment, she and I ended up in a conversation about questions of positionality, and I still remember her saying, somewhat jokingly but with a serious undertone: "But Adriaan, you are an outsider", the implicit suggestion being that she had an insider position.

Obviously, as a white European researcher who had been working in Zambia for several years but still did not speak more than a mouth-full of the various local languages, I was an outsider in terms of nationality, culture, and language. Also, my position as a middle-class academic gave me a socio-economic privilege, compared to many of the participants we were working with. Nevertheless, what I did challenge in my conversation with my colleague was the suggestion that she, as

1 Sadly, Lilly passed away in February 2017, and her passion, humour and intellect are greatly missed.

a Zambian researcher, could automatically and fully claim an insider status. Yes, with regard to nationality, culture and language she was. Yet, as a university-educated and heterosexually married woman, she also was, in some way, an outsider to the community we were working with. While I, as an openly gay-identifying person myself, shared an important aspect of the identities of our research participants – not only of their identities, but also of their lived experiences. Although from another continent and from a country often seen as liberal and progressive, I, too, had struggled to reconcile my own sexuality and the version of the Christian faith I had grown up with on the Dutch conservative Protestant bible belt. I, too, had felt marginalised in the context of church and school, and it had been a long journey for me to come out to my parents and siblings at home, and to my fellow students at university. Not only did my participants and I share similar experiences of struggle, but also the joys and pleasures of gay life: we would exchange stories of falling in love, going out, and discovering the gay scene, and we would tease each other about men we liked – the usual gay banter. In fact, my participants were very keen to take me to some of the clubs in Lusaka where they enjoyed themselves over the weekend, while they were hesitant to invite Lilly to join us on these occasions.

Lilly and I talked about these issues extensively, and we agreed that we were both simultaneously (but in different respects) insiders and outsiders to the community we were working with. In fact, this was one reason why it was strategic for us to collaborate in this project, as we complemented each other in the different ways each of us could engage and empathise with our research participants. Thinking back about these conversations, I realise that it is a missed chance that we did not address this issue more explicitly in the article we ended up co-authoring. The above anecdote illustrates one of the key themes of this volume, intersectionality, and the complex role it plays in the process of doing ethnographic work and reconstructing what Lilly and I conceptualised as a "grassroots African queer theology from urban Zambia" (Van Klinken/Phiri 2015). Referring to the multiple aspects of identity, social location and power, and the complex ways in which these intersect, theories of intersectionality complicate simplistic black-and-white understandings of insider and outsider status. Methodologically speaking, these theories highlight the ways in which a researcher can hold multiple, and changing, subject positions which may partly overlap, and partly contrast, with the communities they are researching. As Doyin Atewologun (2018) puts it, "the intersectional researcher's multiple positionality in their knowledge project is an important, and perhaps underutilized frame."

As a European academic with an active research interest in issues of religion, gender, and sexuality in African contexts, I have frequently faced the criticism that I am an outsider to the communities I am studying. My Zambian colleague made this point in a friendly way and was open to it being questioned. Yet at

other occasions, the same point is sometimes made rather aggressively, suggesting that I do not have the right to do the kind of work I am doing. I do understand where these critiques are coming from: they are a postcolonial response to the problematic and ongoing histories of scholars from the global North studying and writing about Africa, extracting data from the continent to boost their own careers, and reinforcing existing inequalities in knowledge production in the global academy (e.g. cf. Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020). Acknowledging the validity of these critiques, in my own work I have become more explicit and creative in addressing and engaging the underlying concerns. Especially in the writing of my book, "Kenyan, Christian, Queer: Religion, LGBT Activism and Arts of Resistance in Africa", I made this a central part of the project (cf. van Klinken 2019). This chapter aims to offer an account of this journey and to reflect theologically on the methodology that I, somewhat intuitively, developed during the process of researching and writing this book. Thus, in what follows, I will discuss and reflect on the ways in which questions of intersectionality and positionality, as well as of interdisciplinarity, became central to the book's project, and how in this process the Pauline notion of the body of Christ emerged as a particularly meaningful frame for doing theological ethnography in an embodied and humanistic way that recognises both difference and commonality, and that allows for scholarly vulnerability and honesty. By weaving some responses my book has received into the discussion below, I also hope to demonstrate that although my methodology is not straightforward, its value and significance have been recognised by other scholars, theologians and non-theologians alike.

I should say at the outset that although I have a degree in theology, and do have some theological interests, my work is highly inter- and transdisciplinary, located at, and moving between, the intersections of religion, African studies, and queer studies. As a result, a repeated criticism that I face from theologians is that my work is not theological enough (or is "light theology", as someone recently put it, with good intentions), and from anthropologists and cultural studies folks that my work is too theological. Yet, I am comfortable with that and take some pride in it. If anything, my work is queer both in the themes I engage with and in the methodologies that I employ, using what Jack Halberstam (1998: 13) has called "a scavenger methodology" that borrows from various fields, blurs the boundaries between academic disciplines, and questions scholarly norms and conventions.

2. Accounting for Positionality and Intersectionality

My 2019 monograph titled "Kenyan, Christian, Queer" examines creative forms of Kenyan LGBTQ activism and explores the ways in which they engage critically and constructively with Christian language, narratives, and symbols. A central

aim was to use this as a starting point for a dialogue with African theologians about questions of sexual diversity, and hence to contribute to the development of African queer theology. Obviously, I was aware of the problem of my own positionality: coming from outside of the context, I cannot and do not want to develop a Kenyan or African queer theology myself. I addressed this problem in two ways.

First, by foregrounding the theological discourses that are present – sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit – in the case studies of creative LGBTQ activism, or artivism[2] as I prefer to call it, from Kenya that I was working with, and by putting these in a constructive conversation with the writings by African theologians on issues of gender and sexuality. Let me give two examples of how I try to do this in the book. One of the chapters reads the music video *Same Love (Remix)*, produced by the Kenyan hip hop group Art Attack (2016), as a theological text. Its quotation from the Bible – the famous Pauline passage about love from 1 Corinthians 13 – and its closing statement "God is Love, and Love is God" are interpreted as a queer theological claim, the significance and meaning of which I discuss and elaborate on with the help of Zimbabwean theologian Edward Antonio's (cf. 2010) treatise on a theology of eros in the context of the HIV epidemic. In another chapter, a collection of life stories of LGBT Kenyans, that was published under the title "Stories of Our Lives" (The Nest 2015), is read as an archive of narrative queer theology. The references to spirituality and faith, the Bible and God, that participants of this project weave through their life stories are queer testimonies. These are put in conversation with the autobiographical essay of Ghanaian feminist theologian, Mercy Oduyoye (cf. 1999), about childlessness, in which she makes a connection between homophobia and what she described earlier as "the phobia of childlessness" (Oduyoye 1993: 355) in Africa. Reading these two texts together allows me to articulate what I call a "queer theology of fruitfulness" (van Klinken 2019: 134).

These two examples themselves also demonstrate intersectionality, in the sense that they identify and explore the "interconnections and interdependencies between social categories" (Atewologun 2018), in this case the experiences of people belonging to groups that face stigmatisation and marginalisation on the basis of sexuality, gender, HIV status, marital status, and reproductive status. Drawing attention to such overlapping and interlinked experiences is important, both epistemologically and politically, because it provides critical insight into the ways in which systems of power and social norms work, and because it provides a basis for common ground and joint action between different groups in the pursuit of social justice. One of the productive effects of the approach to read case studies

2 Artivism has been described as a "hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism" (Sandoval/Latorre 2008: 82).

of Kenyan LGBTQ artivism in dialogue with African theological writings was that it allowed me to identify the methodological and theological stepping stones that African feminist theologies offer to the development of queer theologies in Africa. Methodologically, this approach centred around the notion of life experiences and autobiographical storytelling as a theological resource and method – an insight long-established in African feminist theological scholarship, and indeed in feminist scholarship more broadly. As Sarojini Nadar (2012: 274) puts it with reference to the work of Oduyoye and others: "The work of feminist theologians in Africa bears testimony to this respect for story as a legitimate method and source of theology", and these theologians "have told their own stories of pain and patriarchal oppression as a means to analyse and overcome such oppression." My suggestion is that there are profound similarities between the stories of African women about the struggle with patriarchy and androcentrism, and the stories of African queer people about the struggle with homophobia and heteronormativity. In both cases, we encounter narratives of pain and trauma, as well as of resilience, hope and a quest for healing, liberation and justice; in both cases, we read about the struggle with dominant religious and cultural traditions, but also about the creative engagement with such traditions to reinterpret and reclaim them in liberating and affirming ways. Inspired by African feminist theologians who have told her-stories to develop her-theologies (cf. Nadar 2009; Phiri et al. (eds.) 2003), the telling of African queer stories appears to be a viable method of developing African queer theologies (cf. Van Klinken 2018). Theologically, this approach also capitalises on the profound theological significance of life stories. Mercy Oduyoye (2001: 21) has beautifully and aptly captured this, when writing:

> "The stories we tell of our hurts and joys are sacred. Telling them makes us vulnerable, but without this sharing we cannot build community and solidarity. Our stories are precious paths on which we have walked with God, and struggled for a passage to our full humanity. They are events through which we have received the blessings of life from the hands of God. The stories we tell are sacred, for they are indications of how we struggled with God. […] We share our stories with you as people who believe that true community thrives where there is sharing in solidarity."

Narrative theologies, inspired by stories 'of hurts and joys', thus become theologies of liberation, healing and justice as they put us – both the person telling their story, and those who listen and attend to it – on a shared journey of overcoming oppression and of claiming our full humanity in the eyes of God. This also means that such theologies require an intersectional approach, thinking together contemporary African experiences of marginalisation, in terms of decoloniality, socio-economic status, race, gender and indeed sexuality (cf. Yafeh-Deigh 2020). It underlines the need for African theology, as well as queer theology, not to be

narrowly concerned with one category of social experience or location, but to be a genuinely intersectional theology (cf. Kim/Shaw 2018). As the popular saying goes, "Justice denied to one is justice denied to all". African theology, which has often deployed the indigenous concept of *ubuntu* (a philosophy of human interdependence and co-existence), has a unique potential for intersectional thinking that includes queer experience. This potential has begun to be explored, for instance, by the late Desmond Tutu, whose theology centred around the concept of *ubuntu*, and for whom oppression in terms of race and of sexuality were interrelated (cf. van Klinken/Chitando 2021: 23–38). Oduyoye, in the above quotation, alludes to this, too, when she writes about the thriving of true community through sharing diverse stories of human hurts and joys, as this engenders solidarity. Thus, articulating incipient theologies that are embedded in creative forms of African LGBTQ activism, and linking these to existing theological discourses, was one way for me to address the problem of positionality. Instead of *doing* African queer theology myself, I am *reconstructing* already emerging, albeit still marginal, African queer theological discourses. In his review of my book, the sociologist Marian Burchardt (2021: 389) has identified this as one of the particularities of "Kenyan, Christian, Queer", and he acknowledges that "although I am unable to adjudicate the theological value of these pages, I learned how such [grassroots] theologizing is an important part of African cultural debate and conversation." This quote reflects some ambivalence with regard to the possibility of non-theological scholars engaging with and assessing these theological moments in the book, yet nevertheless it recognises the value and significance of it, which is exactly a key point I wanted to convey: how theology is not marginal but central to scholarship and activism on queer African sexualities. To paraphrase Oduyoye's earlier quoted words, African queer stories are 'precious paths' narrating how queer people have walked with God, and struggled with God, in a quest for their full humanity to be recognised and for the blessings of life to be received and enjoyed.

Second, I further addressed the earlier-mentioned problem of my own positionality by deliberately choosing not to remain invisible myself in the text, but instead to make my own embodied experiences explicitly part of the book. Thus, in between the four case study chapters in "Kenyan, Christian, Queer", I included four autobiographical interludes in which I accounted for my embodied ethnographic and theological self. The reasons for this were wide-ranging, but among others it was to allow myself to address issues of positionality and to demonstrate reflexivity in a more narrative style. This helped to address and hopefully overcome the othering of Africa and Africans that has long characterised Eurocentric scholarship. In the words of critical theorist Achille Mbembe (2001: 2), "Africa as an idea, a concept, has historically served, and continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West's desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world." This othering has shaped traditions of knowledge production about

Africa, including in ethnographic research of African communities and societies produced by Western scholars (cf. Rigby 2020 [1996]; Devisch/Nyamnjoh (eds.) 2011). It is particularly manifest in Western narratives about African sexuality, such as in relation to HIV and AIDS as well as homophobia, which frequently echo and reproduce colonial discourses, with African bodies and intimacies being subjected to a colonialist Eurocentric gaze (cf. Hoad 2007). In my view, narratives of othering are at odds with ethnography as, fundamentally speaking, a humanistic endeavour where the ethnographer is a "vulnerable observer" of the life of the communities they are studying and, to some extent, share in (Behar 2014). Thus, in response to Mbembe's (2001: 2) suggestion that "the theoretical and practical recognition of the body and flesh of 'the stranger' as flesh and body just like mine, the idea of a common human nature, a humanity shared with others, [has] long posed, and still poses, a problem for Western consciousness", I decided to subject my own embodied self as a researcher to a similar gaze as the embodied subjectivity of my research participants. This also allowed me to challenge the still prevalent conventions of academic writing as disembodied and detached, which I wanted to interrogate from a queer methodological angle (cf. Browne/Nash (eds.) 2010). Queer scholarship, after all, allows for affective, experiential, embodied and engaged research methods and writing styles, taking seriously that "the personal is political", as the classic feminist adage has it, and also intellectual. Last but not least, writing myself into the text enabled me to be honest about the ways in which my own life has become entangled with the lives of the queer Kenyans I was writing about, and with whom I had built close relationships over a period of several years. I am grateful that some of the reviews of my book recognise the methodological, ethical, and political significance of this step. For instance, theologian David Ngong (2020) observes that "by weaving his own story with those of the participants, the author overcomes a kind of voyeuristic ethnography, rendering himself accountable to the community he studies."

The resulting interludes are reflexive exercises that provide narrative insight in the earlier-mentioned complexity of insider and outsider status, and that reflect on queer ethnography and theology as relational, embodied, intimate and at times erotic processes. Thus, in the interludes I wrote about my experience of being subjected to a deliverance ritual where a Kenyan Pentecostal prophetess tried to cast out an evil spirit from my queer body; about my own diagnosis with HIV during the process of researching and writing this book; about the workings of desire and intimacy in fieldwork with queer communities. Each of these themes allowed me to explore the complex field of difference and commonality in relation to my participants, as well as to reflect on the role of my own embodiment as a researcher. It culminates in the fourth interlude where I reflect on the declaration by one of my participants that I am an "ambassador of the Kenyan queer community" – a statement that allowed me to address the role of social

advocacy and activism in my scholarship. In writing these interludes, I took inspiration from the insight by Argentinian queer theologian, Marcella Althaus-Reid, that hetero-patriarchal theology can be radically un-shaped by queer theologies. She describes the latter as being necessarily first-person theologies, "diasporic, self-disclosing, autobiographical and responsible for its own words," as well as embodied theologies since "sexuality and loving relationships are not only important theological issues but experiences" (Althaus-Reid 2003: 8). This insight allowed me to bring my own 'first-person theology', as a gay-identifying person living with HIV myself, into conversation with the first-person theologies of my Kenyan participants, most of whom also identified as gay or otherwise queer, and some of whom were also living with HIV. I found the theological symbol of the body of Christ to be particularly productive to reflect on, and make sense of, the intimate entanglements between myself and my queer and stigmatised body, and the queer and stigmatised bodies of my Kenyan research participants.

3. Intimate Entanglements in the Body of Christ[3]

As a strange coincidence of sorts, in the process of researching and writing "Kenyan, Christian, Queer", I was diagnosed with HIV. Obviously, this was something I had to come to terms with personally, but also intellectually and politically, given that I had been writing about the religious and theological aspects of HIV and AIDS, and about the importance of interrogating the related societal stigma, from the early years of my academic career. My diagnosis caused a writer's block, because the questions I had been latently thinking about – regarding ways of addressing my positionality, and the style of writing I wanted to adopt in the book – suddenly became much more pertinent. Although HIV was not intended to be a central theme in this research project on Kenyan LGBT activism, several of my Kenyan research participants were HIV positive and some of them – most notably, the literary writer Binyavanga Wainaina, and the gospel artist George Barasa – had disclosed their status in public. Thus, a politics of disclosure was their way of addressing and overcoming HIV-related stigma and was an inherent part of their embodied queer activism. Reflecting on their decision to disclose their status, I had been reminded of Judith Butler's (2004: 20) insight that "each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies – as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed." Not much later, I was reminded of this poignant insight, again, in the process of coming to terms with my own diagnosis. As I was impressed by the way in which some of my Kenyan participants assertively claimed their bodies as

3 Parts of this section draw on material I have published previously (cf. van Klinken 2020).

a site of publicity, turning their vulnerability into strength, I realised that I, too, needed to let my body speak truth about desire and love – even if this truth transgresses (as it often does) heteronormative standards of decency and respectability.

The just-quoted words by Butler suggest that vulnerability is inherent to our embodied human existence, and that the recognition thereof can be a critical basis of solidarity and community between different people and groups of people. A very similar key anthropological insight is captured in St Paul's writing about the body of Christ as a theologically imagined community. Here, Paul states that when one member of this metaphorical body suffers, all members suffer together (1 Corinthians 12:26). In other words, the body of Christ is a space of what Anselm Min (2004) has called "solidarity of Others". The notion of solidarity between members of the body of Christ has been deployed by several African theologians to make an ethical plea for solidarity in the face of the HIV epidemic. They have paraphrased Paul's notion by saying that if one member of the body of Christ is HIV positive, all members are positive, and indeed the body of Christ itself is HIV positive. For instance, Musa W. Dube (2007: 76), a biblical scholar and HIV activist from Botswana, writes:

> "1 Corinthians 12, which defines the church as a body with many parts, is cited as a key part of the foundation of compassion. If one member suffers, we all suffer with him/her. If one member of the church is infected, the church cannot separate itself. If one member is suffering from AIDS, the church cannot separate from his/her suffering. […] The church, in other words, should not shy away from saying, 'We have AIDS.'"

Dube builds here on a long tradition in black, feminist, queer and other liberation theologies which are concerned with bodily experiences of marginalisation, exclusion and injustice as they relate to social categories of difference, such as race, gender, sexuality, disability, to which she adds HIV status (e. g. cf. Copeland 2023 [2010]; Cornwall 2014; Mount Shoop 2010; Wendel/Nutt (eds.) 2016). The notion of the body of Christ has been deployed in these theologies, exactly because it allows for a rethinking of difference as something that not necessarily separates us but that can create commonality and enable solidarity – in Min's earlier quoted words, a 'solidarity of Others'. Thus, the body of Christ becomes, as Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart (1998: 51) put it, "a living and breathing reality of people striving to live justly – justice that has to be striven for in the concrete stuff of their lives, not simply in neat theological declarations."

This metaphor of the body of Christ with HIV and AIDS has travelled with me throughout my academic journey. It was the topic of my first-ever peer-reviewed article, written at a time that I was a PhD student and informed by my observations from participating in a Theology and HIV/AIDS programme in South Africa, which included volunteering in a home-based care programme for people

living with, and dying of, HIV. That is where I learned from experience what doing contextual theology means in practice. The metaphor has become even more meaningful to me in the light of my own diagnosis with HIV, several years ago, which in a way brought about a paradigm shift in my scholarship. I keep returning to this metaphor, because it is such a profound and productive theological symbol. It has helped me to think through the work I do with communities that are marginalised because of their sexuality, and indeed their HIV status, in contemporary African contexts. Within the body of Christ, one could argue, I-theology becomes we-theology – not to transcend the particularities of I-theologies, but to acknowledge the interconnectedness of experiences narrated in these theologies.

Thus, theologically speaking, conceptualising my ethnographic research process as occurring within this space of the body of Christ, allowed me to become a "vulnerable observer". "The Vulnerable Observer" is the title of a beautiful book by the anthropologist Ruth Behar (2014), in which she develops a new theory and practice for what she calls "humanistic anthropology". That is, a form of anthropological enquiry that transcends the othering often found in ethnographic scholarship, with its orientalising gaze. Behar proposes an anthropology that is lived and written in a personal voice. By this she means that the embodied experiences of the ethnographer, including their vulnerabilities, as well as the complex relationships that they develop with their research communities, should be made part of the narrative account. This helps to avoid a presentation of clean research findings, and instead acknowledges the messiness of the journey through which these findings and insights were generated. In my own book, I have put this into practice by writing honestly about, and reflecting critically on, the relationships I developed with the community I was studying and, for the period of my research (but also thereafter), to some extent became part of. Participant observation, as a method of sharing in the life of this community, involved worshipping with Kenyan queer Christians in a Nairobi-based LGBT church on Sunday afternoons, but also joining them for drinks in a bar after the service, hanging out with church leaders and members during the week, being invited to join them for workshops and activist activities, as well as for clubbing and partying over the weekend. In such a context, research relationships become social relationships and, in some cases, friendships; the boundaries between various forms of relationality and levels of intimacy easily become blurred as fieldwork, quite literally at times, becomes "bodywork" (Hoel 2020). In one of the interludes, I discuss a case where one of my participants addressed me as "darling" and declared me to be an "ambassador" of the Kenyan LGBT community, and I ask what this tells about affection, intersubjectivity and power in my fieldwork practice.

Behar's humanistic anthropological theory helped me to think about fieldwork as a practice of intimacy. Thinking about this theologically, I was again inspired by the metaphor of the body of Christ. Building on postcolonial theorist

Homi Bhabha's (2010: 19) notion of interstice, I suggest that the body of Christ can be considered an intervening space that engenders "interstitial intimacy," that is, an "intimacy that questions binary divisions through which […] spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed". This concept is powerful, in relation to my discussion here, because it simultaneously recognises the entanglement of bodies, and the different social locations and subsequent experiences of these bodies. In my case, the notion of the body of Christ as queer and as living with HIV created a space where I could share with my Kenyan research participants the experience of queerness and of living with a potentially life-threatening virus that is still associated with strong societal stigma. The notion of the body of Christ not only allows for sharing this experience, but also empowered me, and them, to address societal stigma by engaging in strategies of disclosure, visibility, and activism, thus reclaiming our own vulnerable bodies – as part of the body of Christ – as "sites of a publicity", to use Butler's earlier quoted words. Yet, as much as the body of Christ was a space of solidarity, it also allowed me to acknowledge that in spite of significant commonalities, other relevant spatial divisions remain, such as between those who have access to anti-retroviral treatment and those who have not, and between those who can be open about their status without fear of serious repercussions and those who cannot. So even though I could come out as HIV positive myself, the interstitial intimacy within the body of Christ continues to make me aware of the very different social and bodily experiences within that body, which relates to location, class, race, economic privilege, and the varying scales of sexual oppression and freedom. Subsequently, I could turn this vulnerability into a basis for embodied solidarity and for collaborative theologising – not in a way that ignores the differences between me and my participants, but that recognises these while acknowledging that there are fundamental commonalities in our shared human embodied existence.

Elaborating on the radical incarnational notion that God became fully human in Jesus Christ, and that therefore all of humankind is embraced in Christ's body, the womanist theologian Shawn Copeland (2010: 83) has stated that "the only body capable of taking us *all* in as we are with all our different body marks is the body of Christ" [emphasis original]. I included this quote in "Kenyan, Christian, Queer", and one of the anthropologists discussing the book commented that as a "nonbelieving anthropologist I frankly have no idea what I am supposed to make of that" (Kulick 2020: 632). This response demonstrates the difficulty of writing for, and being understood by, different disciplinary audiences. In my understanding, Copeland's statement is powerful and relevant, not only for debates about ecclesiology (how we imagine the church), but also for the questions I have explored in this chapter, and which are central in this volume. Biography, identity, social location, and context matter for doing theology and for doing theological ethnography. Yet, within this space of the body of Christ, our multiple biographies, iden-

tities, locations, and contexts become intimately entangled. Within this space, we become "vulnerable observers" of one another, while Christ's body holds us together in solidarity. I am grateful that one other discussant, although not a theologian either, was able to recognise how this notion is reflected and made productive in the text. According to Chisomo Kalinga (2020: 624), "Van Klinken managed to do something that we, in African studies, are told isn't possible. He took very real and very tangible complex sociocultural, religious, and theological critical theories of Kenya and framed them in a reimagined African setting where love was viable." Kalinga's generous feedback beautifully affirms how writing from this ethnographic space of the body of Christ can render love viable as an ethical and political category through our scholarship.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed and reflected on intersectionality in relation to my research into queer sexuality and Christianity in African contexts. Intersectionality operates here at three levels. First, in relation to the interconnections between various social categories and experiences. The title of my book "Kenyan, Christian, Queer" clearly conveys this, capturing the complex dynamics between national and geopolitical identities, religious identities, and sexual and gender identities. The point of my analysis is not that at the intersection of these categories one new coherent identity emerges, but rather that the frictions between these categories engender an innovative meaning-making that provides insight into the complexity of human life. Second, intersectionality is conceived in relation to me as a researcher, as I have utilised "the intersectional researcher's multiple positionality" (Atewologun 2018) as a key epistemological and methodological starting point. I opened this chapter with an anecdote about how a colleague and collaborator, the late Lilly Phiri, once made the interjection to me, saying, "Adriaan, you are an outsider". I have responded to this suggestion by drawing attention to the multiple aspects of self that I as a scholar, and as a person, bring to my research, some of which position me as outsider, but others as insider, in relation to the communities I study. The conversations about insider-outsider status I had with Lilly, and with other colleagues since then, have put me on a trajectory of thinking about questions of positionality in much more depth and with greater criticality, and they formed the beginning of me carving out a path to address such questions with more creativity and substance than the usual obligatory paragraph often found in the introduction of a scholarly monograph or article. The self-reflective narrative exercises that I included in "Kenyan, Christian, Queer" demonstrate my own intersectional positionality and reflect on the ways in which this shapes my research process. Doing so, a third meaning of intersectionality

becomes visible in the book, which is the intersectionality between the researcher and the communities they are working with and writing about. Making sense of this theologically, I have proposed the Pauline notion of the body of Christ as a frame to think through the possibility of doing theological ethnography in an embodied and humanistic way that recognises both difference and commonality, and that allows for scholarly honesty, vulnerability, and solidarity. 'Intersectionality' is but a social scientific term for what can be described theologically as the intimate entanglements in the body of Christ.

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