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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HIV/AIDS, TRANSNATIONALISM,
SEXUALITY, GENDER AND ETHNICITY IN SELECTED ANGLOPHONE
CARIBBEAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE AND FILM

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APRIL 2012

STATEMENT

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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DPHIL

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SUMMARY

In this thesis, I demonstrate that the historical, and ideological, trajectories of HIV/AIDS discourses mirror the tensions between the local, global and transnational in my analysis of selected Anglophone Caribbean and South African literature and film. My methodology is adamantly a comparative studies approach as I overview the broader socio-historical narrative of HIV/AIDS whilst concurrently incorporating the idea of texts as *a/ways* inflected by the wider historical and ideological processes behind transnationalism. I then link the competing histories of HIV/AIDS with textual depictions of HIV/AIDS, Indo-Caribbean histories, black Atlantic histories, and same-sex desire whilst foregrounding the socio-historical backdrop of transnationalism since the colonial period.

A central thread running throughout is that transnational dialectics signify both the effects of the past on the present and the importance of comparative analyses for transnational textual engagements. Texts under discussion are the feature film *Dancehall Queen* by Rick Elgood and Don Letts, the novel *The Swinging Bridge* by Ramabai Espinet, the documentary film *The Darker Side of Black* by Isaac Julien, the feature film *Children of God* by Kareem Mortimer, the novella *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* by Phaswane Mpe, and the feature film *The World Unseen* by Shamim Sarif.

Given the concurrent focus in postcolonial/queer around specific regional histories, I pinpoint that the dialectics between local, global and transnational discourses convey more nuanced, yet also more contradictory, textual engagement(s) with HIV/AIDS, transnationalism, sexuality, gender and ethnicity than some of the dominant narrative threads and debates surrounding postcolonial/queer. This point is particularly stressed in light of how many

postcolonial/queer discussions readily fix the idea of the local as distinct from the global and the transnational. I thus re-read the contradictory registers of these discourses whilst foregrounding the relationship between these and HIV/AIDS discourses since the 1970s. I concurrently situate my transnational comparative approach within the broader field of postcolonial/queer theory and approaches.

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PREFACE

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I was lucky enough to go to an institution like University College Dublin where the staff and students have fierce interests in postcolonial literature and the debates surrounding the history of the past and the present. Thank you to those teachers and friends who made this a key time in my young undergraduate life. Thanks especially to my tutors and lecturers Ron Callan, Harry Clifton, James Corr, Noreen Doody, Anne Fogarty, Oona Frawley, Declan Kiberd, Padraig Kirwan, Frank McGuinness and Christine Thijs. The friendly advice and approachable teaching styles from all of ye at one time or another helped me on my way to Sussex and I appreciate this immensely.

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The various Queory seminars and other impromptu talks at Sussex provided engaging spaces for me and many others during my PhD. Thank you especially to Shamira, William J. Spurlin and Vincent Quinn for putting so much

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To my fantastic sister Niamh: Niamh, this PhD owes much to you being an above and beyond twin sister and friend. Thank you for being an unrelenting source of support all these years.

INTRODUCTION:

POSTCOLONIAL/QUEER COMPARISONS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN

In this thesis, I demonstrate that the historical, and ideological, trajectories of HIV/AIDS discourses mirror the tensions between the local, global and transnational in my analysis of selected Anglophone Caribbean and South African literature and film. My methodology is adamantly a comparative studies approach as I overview the broader socio-historical narrative of HIV/AIDS whilst concurrently incorporating the idea of texts as *a/ways* inflected by the wider historical and ideological processes behind transnationalism. I then link the competing histories of HIV/AIDS with textual depictions of HIV/AIDS, Indo-Caribbean histories, black Atlantic histories, and same-sex desire whilst foregrounding the socio-historical backdrop of transnationalism since the colonial period.

A central thread running throughout is that transnational dialectics signify both the effects of the past on the present and the importance of comparative analyses for transnational textual engagements. Texts under discussion are the feature film *Dancehall Queen* by Rick Elgood and Don Letts, the novel *The Swinging Bridge* by Ramabai Espinet, the documentary film *The Darker Side of Black* by Isaac Julien, the feature film *Children of God* by Kareem Mortimer, the novella *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* by Phaswane Mpe, and the feature film *The World Unseen* by Shamim Sarif.

Given the concurrent focus in postcolonial/queer around specific regional histories, I pinpoint that the dialectics between local, global and transnational discourses convey more nuanced, yet also more contradictory, textual

engagement(s) with HIV/AIDS, transnationalism, sexuality, gender and ethnicity than some of the dominant narrative threads and debates surrounding postcolonial/queer. This point is particularly stressed in light of how many postcolonial/queer discussions readily fix the idea of the local as distinct from the global and the transnational. I thus re-read the contradictory registers of these discourses whilst foregrounding the relationship between these and HIV/AIDS discourses since the 1970s. I concurrently situate my transnational comparative approach within the broader field of postcolonial/queer theory and approaches.

TRANSNATIONALISM AND COMPARATIVE APPROACHES

The decision to focus on Anglophone Caribbean and South African literature and culture is not a random choice. I chose these cultural contexts and texts because of the transnational comparisons that are reflected in the complex historical imbrication of colonial, postcolonial and neo-colonial processes *within* and *between* these two regions. Initially, this may seem counter-intuitive because the Anglophone Caribbean and South African contexts are often presented as unique and embroiled in the specific post-colonial dynamics of their respective contexts; even a cursory glance at political campaigns or literary debates within these regions attests to this. However, I conceptualise a comparative postcolonial/queer approach which allows a nuanced, and intricate, analysis of HIV/AIDS, transnationalism, sexuality, gender and ethnicity for my selected texts.

I begin with an extended analysis of the most recently published text in

my project; Ramabai Espinet's 2007 novel *The Swinging Bridge*.¹ I compare Espinet's engagement with HIV/AIDS and Indo-Trinidadian histories and I demonstrate that her narrative approach is fundamentally invested in a transnational conceptualisation of Indo-Trinidadian history and HIV/AIDS for Indo-Trinidadian familial narratives. I then suggest that the role of the Indo-Trinidadian woman writer as witness and recorder of Indo-Trinidadian history is instrumental, but *only* instrumental *rather* than completely recuperative, for the broader relationship between HIV/AIDS histories and Indo-Trinidadian histories within the text. My second chapter continues with an analysis of HIV/AIDS in post-apartheid South African literature. Here, I compare Mpe's engagement with Espinet's text as I contextualise *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* in relation to South African history and literary theory.² I conclude this chapter by highlighting the significance of literature as a critical medium, and metaphor, within the text for reflections on HIV/AIDS as a simultaneously local and global discourse. I also highlight that Mpe's text has received considerably more attention than Espinet's and that this is because of the different literary traditions of each area. I suggest that there are comparative similarities between the texts, especially in relation to writing as a critically necessary tool for analyses of HIV/AIDS. But I also suggest that the symbolism attached to HIV/AIDS within each text ensures that each articulates the specific local parameters of their respective context in a very distinct manner.

Following on from my analyses of HIV/AIDS in a single Anglophone Caribbean text and a single South African text, I then proceed, in my third chapter, to analyse the conceptualisation of Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic model.

¹ Ramabai Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge*. (Ontario: HarperCollins Publisher Ltd, 2003).

² Phaswane Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001).

Here, I analyse the conceptual weight of the Black Atlantic model for transnational approaches to Anglophone Caribbean sexualities. I situate the model as a cultural studies approach which delinks sexuality debates from nationalism, and I analyse the model through a close reading of Isaac Julien's 1994 collage style documentary *The Darker Side of Black* and Rick Elgood's and Don Letts' 1997 feature film *Dancehall Queen*.³ The third chapter contrasts with the initial two chapters which looked at HIV/AIDS in Anglophone Caribbean and South African literature and culture. But the focus on the transnational processes, which contribute to sexuality debates, is a central backdrop in this chapter and that these processes are intrinsic to the historical development of black popular cultural forms. Overall, my critical discussion of the Black Atlantic explicitly links to the previous analyses of local literary texts that are enmeshed with HIV/AIDS global histories.

In my final chapter, I compare Kareem Mortimer's feature film *Children of God* and Shamim Sarif's *The World Unseen* in relation to the idea of global cinema and the consumer politics of LGBTQ cinema as a genre.⁴ Within this chapter, a central idea is that reductive comparative approaches to queer films from different contexts, particularly contexts marked as exotic on the global stage, can easily reduce these texts, via the marketing of these films, to consumer goods. However, I foreground consumer dynamics whilst considering how the unique contextual dynamics of the Bahamas in Mortimer's film, and South Africa in Sarif's film, are not easily read within the idea of global cinema. I expand on this by suggesting that global cinema, much like interpretations of

³ Isaac Julien, "The Darker Side of Black," 55 mins. (UK Film Council: England, 1994). Rick Elgood and Don Letts, "Dancehall Queen," 98 mins, (Palm Pictures: Jamaica, 1997)

⁴ Kareem Mortimer, "Children of God". 108 mins, (Bahamas: Mercury Rising Media, 2010). Shamim Sarif, "The World Unseen". 91 mins, (UK: Enlightenment Productions Ltd, 2008).

the Black Atlantic model in chapter three, are not singular metaphors or texts. Thus, I conclude this chapter by considering the uneasy metaphors within queer and non-Western films for audiences who look to categorise films them as essentially fixed. Such readings, I demonstrate, repeat some of the most stereotypical characteristics of traditional comparative approaches and I will extend on this comparison later in this introduction. In my conclusion, I reflect on the limitations, and excitements, of new comparative postcolonial/queer reading strategies. I consider what may be a useful working definition of such an approach and if it will markedly shift in light of the shifting sands of comparative studies over the last fifty years.

Central to all of these chapters is the relationship to the transnational. Thus, I begin the initial two chapters of my thesis by comparing selected Anglophone Caribbean and South African literature *in relation* to the idea of the transnational and the historical legacies that are re-iterated in response to HIV/AIDS discourses. My first chapter examines how the 2003 novel *The Swinging Bridge* by Ramabai Espinet revisits many of the central tenets of Anglophone Caribbean literature by simultaneously rewriting Indo-Trinidadian history for the Trinidadian context via a re-examination of Indo-Trinidadian familial histories alongside HIV/AIDS. I consider the wider implications of the novel for Indo-Trinidadian familial narratives and what this entails for wider comparative approaches.

Thus, whilst acknowledging the wider role of postcolonial politics, this thesis places these regions vis-à-vis each other as I demonstrate that comparative postcolonial/queer approaches to literary and cultural debates broaden critical interpretations of Anglophone Caribbean literature or post-

apartheid South African literature as affected *only* by national and regional dynamics. In terms of the Anglophone Caribbean, this focuses mostly on the contexts of Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago but some of the broader comparisons within the thesis are applicable to the wider Anglophone Caribbean contexts, such as Guyana. Within South Africa, I largely focus on debates relevant to the general post-apartheid South African context though some debates do hold for the broader Southern African context, such as the industrialisation of Southern Africa in chapter two.

Moreover, I reference the debates surrounding the ‘new’ critical moment in Anglophone Caribbean literature, as coined by Alison Donnell, at points in order to contextualise my comparative approach.⁵ The ‘new’ critical moment refers to the proliferation of non-heteronormative representations in Anglophone Caribbean literature over the last twenty years, and the critical insights that these representations generate for broader understandings of sexuality in wider Anglophone Caribbean contexts. Donnell’s book is the central text that analysed the emergence of this moment but Thomas Glave’s anthology *Our Caribbean, a Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* also attests to this moment in Anglophone Caribbean literature.⁶ Indeed, the introduction to Glave’s text offers some particularly strong metaphors for the broadness of these debates particularly Glave’s admission that writing the anthology predominantly in English, versus other Caribbean languages and dialects, was an uneasy decision given that this limited the exposure of the

⁵ Alison Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature, Critical moments in Anglophone Literary History* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁶ Thomas Glave, *Our Caribbean, a Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). Glave’s text, in contrast to Donnell’s, is an edited collection of creative and critical writing, including his own writing which bridges the creative/critical ‘gap’, rather than a single authored literary theory study.

anthology beyond the Anglophone Caribbean.⁷

I begin chapter two by considering the debates surrounding the distinct characteristics of post-apartheid South African literature and what such considerations offer for explicitly comparative approaches to HIV/AIDS histories. In my analysis, I reflect on the continuities and discontinuities with the apartheid past, especially the *predominant* concern with social realism in most literary fiction during the apartheid regime, and how these debates are constantly foregrounded in literary and cultural interpretations of post-apartheid South African literature where HIV/AIDS is a central literary theme.⁸ As of late, relatively few of these debates consider the transnational histories that circulate within these debates. However, some notable exceptions include Andrew Van der Vlies' *South African Textual Cultures; White, black, read all over* but his text looks at literary texts *only* and not a wider comparative studies or transnational lens.⁹ Some social science analyses and cultural studies have included transnationalism in relation to the specific dynamics surrounding post-apartheid South Africa and sexuality, such as Ian Barnard, Neville Hoad, William J. Spurlin, and Andrew Tucker.¹⁰ Barnard in particular makes strong links between South Africa and the re-iteration of racialised discourses in the US. Spurlin also focuses on the links between HIV/AIDS activism in post-apartheid South Africa

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See the 2002 special issue of *Kunapipi* for an overview of some of the central debates surrounding the distinctiveness of post-apartheid literary texts. Anne Collett, ed, *Kunapipi, Journal of Post-Colonial Writing* XXIV nos 1&2 (2002). 'South Africa Post-Apartheid, Special Issue.'

⁹ Andrew Van der Vlies, *South African Textual Cultures; White, black, read all over* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Ian Barnard, *Queer Race: Cultural Interventions in the Racial Politics of Queer Theory* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2004). Neville Hoad, *African Intimacies; Race, Homosexuality and Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). William J., Spurlin, *Imperialism within the Margins: Queer Representations and the Politics of Culture in Southern Africa* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2007). Andrew Tucker, *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2008).

and western HIV/AIDS activism but his analysis does not position transnationalism as the explicit comparative focus. Nor does his analysis engage with literary or textual engagements as a *major* part of his analysis, apart from a very short section on an autobiographical collection written by Lesotho women.¹¹

Within these initial chapter analyses, I interpret historical processes as *dynamic* backdrops in my comparative postcolonial/queer analyses. I do not interpret these trajectories as unidirectional legacies that are *simply* in circulation in texts and cultural debates. Rather, I interpret these multifaceted historical dimensions as *produced* via textual and cultural engagement, and as *productive of* the multifarious representations and debates that have emerged from these regions. I particularly stress this in relation to the portrayal of HIV/AIDS history as global within my chosen texts as this is a central crux for the wider representation: HIV/AIDS within these texts moves from the local to the global to the transnational. The critical strengths of such an approach are especially apparent for texts that engage with the layered subjective experiences surrounding ethnicity, gender and sexuality. I extrapolate on this when I contrast my comparative analysis of the textual and cultural debates with approaches that *only* focus on the dynamics of national or regional debates, such as African-Trinidadian histories which only adhere to a singular version of Trinidadian history.

Following on from the relative lack of concern with wider transnational dialogues between both textual engagements in literature and films and wider cultural debates, I am particularly interested in the difficulties associated with

¹¹ K. Kimakatso Kendall, ed, *Basali! Stories by and about women in Lesotho*. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995).

critical interpretations of textual engagements and cultural debates that do not acknowledge wider contemporary and historical transnational dynamics. I elaborate on how this lack of engagement distracts from the importance of contemporary and historical transnational histories in literary texts, contemporary films and the debates surrounding HIV/AIDS discourses in the Anglophone Caribbean. I thus demonstrate that my specific comparative postcolonial/queer approach facilitates more nuanced analyses than approaches that are situated *predominantly* in relational to national or regional paradigms. The chapter three discussion on The Black Atlantic model elaborates this in the most detail as I consider the uses of a theoretical model from the 1990s which has been applauded and lambasted for its commitment to black cultural forms as dynamic and transnational. By the end of the thesis, these debates carry forward to a comparative analysis of Kareem Mortimer's *Children of God* and Shamin Sarif's *The World Unseen* where I assess the degree to which a transnational approach to queer cinema is critically available in light of marketing and aesthetic considerations.

Transnationalism is not utilised as a 'universal' term in this thesis. Instead, it is interpreted as a global phenomenon that is inflected by the *uneven* processes of globalisation, the role of consumer dynamics, the ensuing histories of colonialism *and* neo-colonialism, and the disorientating projections of the HIV/AIDS industry. Rather than rehash the now prolific definitions of the term transnational, I have chosen one succinct definition, which captures the central ideas that I explore in my postcolonial/queer comparative analysis:

A transnational perspective does not assume away the importance of the global and local, or the nation-state system form. It invites us to think about how these categories change when we don't assume that they are

automatically linked to particular types of territory or space. It pushes us to confront how taken for granted categories such as citizenship and identity, change when they are constituted across space.¹² Transnational, as a critical idea, is dynamic and subject to *changing* modes of interpretation whilst, at the same time, it is tied via a material relationship to the various local contexts of the Anglophone Caribbean and South Africa. I thus compare the specific narratives and discourses of my chosen texts, and the debates surrounding HIV/AIDS discourses in the Anglophone Caribbean and representations of HIV/AIDS in post-apartheid literary fiction, in relation to transnationalism as a complex textual and cultural *process*.

POSTCOLONIAL NATIONALISM AND POSTCOLONIAL/QUEER

INQUIRY

The dynamics of post-slavery Anglophone contexts, such as Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, especially the hegemonic identities largely shaped by slavery, form a critical backdrop at various points in this thesis. Particular attention is dedicated to the relative position of privilege occupied by certain African-Caribbean men during and *after* the abolition of slavery, and the dynamics that this entails for debates surrounding sexuality, culture and ethnicity in the Anglophone Caribbean. I begin the thesis by examining how Espinet's novel *The Swinging Bridge* foregrounds Indo-Trinidadian history alongside HIV/AIDS history and that this is particularly important for conceptualisations of what is Trinidadian history. I also consider how HIV/AIDS and transnationalism reshapes the Indo-Trinidadian familial narrative within the text and what significance this bears for comparative approaches.

¹² S. Khagram and P. Levitt, "Constructing Transnational Studies." In *The Transnational Studies Reader: Intersections and Interventions*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), p.4.

In a similar vein, one of the most central debates in post-apartheid South Africa has been to define what it is exactly to be South African in the post-apartheid era. This has been closely bound up with the processes of 'nation' building in post-apartheid South Africa. In a broad sense, the complexities of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) mirror the trajectories of post-apartheid South Africa as the commission has been lambasted by numerous groups for merely symbolising change rather than enacting it; one of the most controversial dimensions of the TRC was the amnesty granted to some senior ex-apartheid police.¹³ That the commission fell short of following through with the idea of reconciliation was not least because wealth redistribution in post-apartheid South Africa was not adopted as a policy. The ramifications of this for post-apartheid literary debates is discussed in chapter two as I foreground the extent to which Phaswane Mpe's 2003 novella *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* participates in these debates on a comparative level. A main concern is the degree to which Mpe's text is linked to these debates on a global, or transnational, level given the global history of HIV/AIDS and how this specifically relates to the post(anti-)apartheid literature as coined by John C. Hawley.

The complexity of postcolonial histories within South Africa and the Anglophone Caribbean and the emergence of queer theory within predominantly western metropolitan contexts are primary points of discussion throughout. Thus, I take issue with the idea of South Africa and the various

¹³ The intense complexities of the TRC are explored in Antjie Krog's novel *Country of My Skull* (London: Vintage, 1999). See also Richard A. Wilson's *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* for an analysis of the role of the TRC in relation to human rights and nationhood. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

nation-states within the Anglophone Caribbean as singular nation-state entities that can be represented via postcolonial nationalist discourses in seemingly unproblematic ways. The simplistic togetherness evoked by the Trinidad and Tobago national motto, 'All o' we is one,' and the Jamaican national motto, 'Out of many, one people', are clear examples of such discourses. The idea of national unity in Caribbean contexts has been critiqued from many critical angles, such as by Gerard Aching, who foregrounds that the complex political tensions in the Anglophone Caribbean contexts of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana are not easily discerned against the backdrop of nationalist rallying cries.¹⁴

I particularly focus on this in chapter three where I analyse Isaac Julien's *The Darker Side of Black* as a transnational text which revisits the idea of Black Atlantic history for contemporary debates surrounding black popular cultural forms. I also touch on this debate for Anglophone Caribbean cultural forms in chapter four where I compare Kareem Mortimer's *Children of God* and Shamin Sarif's *The World Unseen*. Here, I compare the more ignored debates surrounding black cultural forms in Mortimer's text in comparison to Sarif's text which foregrounds a specific interpretation of the impending apartheid era. My aim here is to demonstrate the importance of a comparative approach which considers the wider textual history of the Bahamas in *Children of God* alongside the political and aesthetic contrasts between Mortimer's film and *The World Unseen*. I argue that both texts are notably different productions, especially in how Sarif's film seems to exist solely within the fleeting time period of the film.

¹⁴ Gerard Aching, *Masking and Power, Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean*. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). See chapter two in particular.

This is a marked contrast with *Children of God* which has a much more open ending and a more apparent resonance beyond its immediate time frame.

The relationship between the local and the global, and between 'national culture' and tourist commercialisation, are central to this thesis in light of Aching's critique. I am particularly interested in the increased commercialisation of cultural forms, such as Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, in national, international and transnational forums. More specifically, I am critically interested in the role of commercialisation in transnational cultural consumption, where the dynamics of this consumption changes and promotes *certain* aspects of Carnival *over* others. The reliance of local cultures on transnational consumer dynamics, such as Carnival in Trinidad, seriously questions any idea that 'local' cultural forms are 'simply' about expressing one's 'national culture'. I discuss this in detail in chapter four when I contextualise the aesthetic politics of *Children of God* versus *The World Unseen* and I stress that this discussion has a marked relationship with how each film is selling its imagined cultural context.

Indeed, representations of post-apartheid South Africa as the 'rainbow nation' are on a par with the Jamaican and Trinidad and Tobago mottos and are equally problematised in the thesis given the use of the idea of culture in apartheid ideology and the ensuing effects of colonial and apartheid ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa. John Sharp's overview of the racial ideologies present in the plural use of terms like culture and ethnicity during *and after* apartheid informs this thesis at several instances in light of problematic national myths surrounding the 'rainbow nation'.¹⁵ This is especially relevant for my

¹⁵ John Sharp, "Ethnic Group and Nation: The apartheid vision in South Africa." In *South African Keywords: The Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts*, edited by E. Boonzaier and John Sharp, 79-99, (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip Publishers, 1988). The

second chapter discussions of post-apartheid literature and its relationship to the apartheid period and how this is affected by HIV/AIDS as a central literary theme. The term 'rainbow nation' was coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu during the final stages of apartheid and it has been utilised by some, notably Nelson Mandela, to foreground the multicultural realities of South Africa.¹⁶

Although Adam Habib notes that the term 'rainbow nation' "...soon took on a life of its own" once it was coined by Tutu, ideas of national unity in post-apartheid South Africa have both *exacerbated and alleviated* some of the most pressing socio-historical issues;¹⁷ namely the complex dynamics between class, sexuality, ethnicity and gender and the difficulties of addressing these dynamics given that post-apartheid South Africa is invested in neoliberalism. For many critics, the choice made by the leaders of Mandela's political party, the African National Congress, not to redistribute wealth in the transition to the 'New' South Africa, unlike in Zimbabwe, has not fundamentally challenged the legacies of colonialism and apartheid.¹⁸ However, the effects of structural adjustment programmes and the tenacious effects of neoliberalism on the South African context are beyond the scope of this thesis but both of these form a backdrop at points.¹⁹

The gap between representation and that which is being represented, or

continuities between apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa are particularly jarring for proponents of the 'rainbow nation'.

¹⁶ The portrayal of Mandela as the father of the South African 'rainbow nation' exemplifies the extent to which Mandela's presidency is linked to the founding of the post-apartheid 'rainbow nation'.

¹⁷ Adam Habib, "Myth of the Rainbow Nation: Prospects for the Consolidation of Democracy in South Africa." *African Security Review* 5 (1996) p. 1.

¹⁸ See Patrick Bond's *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* for an incisive account of the changing policies of the ANC from apartheid to post-apartheid. (London and Sterling, Vancouver: Pluto Press, 2000).

¹⁹ See Paul Williams' and Ian Taylor's article "Neoliberalism and the Political Economy of the 'New' South Africa" for a cogent analysis of the effects of neoliberalism on South Africa. *New Political Economy* 5 no.1 (2000): 21-40.

the signifier and the signified, especially between nationalist discourses and material realities, is part of the critique of the tokenistic gestures of nationalism. This post-structuralist focus on the gap between the signifier and the signified informs this entire thesis. At several instances, I discuss the unique trajectories of postcolonial/queer theories even though, broadly speaking, the overlap between these supposed 'different' schools of thought is indebted to early post-structuralist thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, and the revisions of these critics by contemporary critics such as Ian Barnard, Jasbir Puar, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.²⁰

Moreover, comparing some of the critiques made of queer theory with some of the critiques made of postcolonial theory reveals a great deal more about the similarities between these seemingly different areas of study: Many of the recent critiques of queer theory, such as it being too theoretical, too academic and too focussed on abstractions and the exclusive concern of western based, or western centric critics, were also made of postcolonial theory in the 1980s. Many of these critiques were directed at the postcolonial theorists Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak but in particular Bhabha whose theory of hybridity has been strongly critiqued for being obtuse and relying on ideas of 'race' in its formulation of hybridity. I demonstrate throughout my thesis that the supposed gulf between these areas of study is a political construction that actually simplifies the complex imbrication of ethnicity, sexuality, class, gender, and ideas of nationalism.

This thesis, thus, does not present 'postcolonial/queer' as the hedging of

²⁰ Barnard, *Queer Race: Cultural Interventions in the Racial Politics of Queer Theory*. Jasbir Puar, "Global Circuits: Transnational Sexualities in Trinidad." *Signs* 26 no. 4 (2001): 1039-1065. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999).

postcolonial studies with queer theory but instead, utilises the considerable potential of postcolonial studies and queer theory together. I consider that the idea that these two areas of study are opposed is an academic 'myth of origin' that *obscures* more than it reveals. William J. Spurlin cautions against the hasty use of the term 'postcolonial queer' as a distinct area of study as this may actually limit what such an approach entails and opts for the term 'postcolonial/queer' in order to avoid labelling widely different approaches under one label.²¹ Similar critiques have been made of feminist studies and postcolonial studies and the complex critiques which have emerged from postcolonial feminist circles form an important thread throughout this thesis.²²

In light of these critiques, queer is not utilised as a 'universal' mode of analysis but is adopted as an approach that enables a degree of self-reflexivity for comparative postcolonial/queer approaches. Whilst building on the idea of queering as an identity critique, queer is utilised as a concept that critically questions the ideas and associations that come with 'identity' markers. Queer is not, as is suggested in some rather simplistic readings of queer, a stand in for the identity terms homosexual or gay but is rather a mode of analysis which enables my comparative postcolonial/queer readings of transnationalism an adept but grounded self-reflexive approach. Queer thus critically pinpoints identities, positions and textual interpretations which destabilise the heterosexual-homosexual divide whilst foregrounding the active construction of sexuality in cultural contexts and textual interpretations. Such critical reflexivity

²¹ See Spurlin, William J., "Broadening Postcolonial Studies/Decolonizing Queer Studies: Emerging 'Queer' Identities and Cultures in Southern Africa," p. 190.

²² See the collection of essays *Feminist Postcolonial theory; A Reader* edited by Mills and Lewis for a range of approaches to the debates surrounding feminism and postcolonial contexts as these debates mirror many of the debates surrounding postcolonial/queer as a mode of analysis. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

is particularly adept for discussions of my chosen contexts and texts as queer, and the act of queering, foreground the contingent processes of subjectivity formation. Queering also allows my analysis to attend to the myriad cultural ramifications which arise when analysing gender, sexuality and ethnicity through a transnational lens.

Moreover, whilst I foreground the post-structuralist critique of representation, this thesis is focussed primarily on the *potential* of transnational comparative analyses of the construction of sexuality, gender and ethnicity *in contrast* to the limits of nationalist and regionalist interpretations. This is a central justification for my choice of texts and contexts as throughout the thesis, I map the specific importance of comparative approaches for postcolonial/queer debates in the regions and I consider why a comparative approach, versus a more strictly comparative literary approach, is aptly suited to these two regions. Leading on from this, postcolonial/queer, in this thesis, refers to the intersection between postcolonial studies and queer theory and it is a theoretical base in my thesis. Although I do not adhere to one central theorist, my interpretation of postcolonial/queer is that the intersection between ethnicity and sexuality has been a growing series of debates over the last twenty years. Thus, there are ample amounts of critical material on what the justification of this approach is. In my thesis, this is the need to acknowledge the complex nuances of colonial and postcolonial histories for contemporary understandings of sexuality.

Moreover, my overall focus is not exclusively on the gap between representation and the material but the importance of this gap, particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS, is central to the first two chapters. Thus, a central backdrop throughout the thesis is the singularity that is engendered in overly

determined nationalist interpretations and regionalist interpretations, and these are cast in sharp relief to the dynamic viability of postcolonial/queer comparative inquiries. Key examples of such nationalist and regionalist interpretations are that produced vis-à-vis the idea of the post-apartheid South African 'rainbow nation' or the idea promoted in some political forums, both inside and outside of the Caribbean, that the entire Anglophone Caribbean region is deterministically anti-homosexual and heteronormative. The latter is a particular focus of chapter three where I discuss the necessity of transnational approach to sexuality and ethnicity in Anglophone Caribbean films and sexuality debates.

Moreover, the terminology I utilise needs some explanation given the complexity of some of the ideas and modes of analysis employed in postcolonial/queer comparative analyses. The main concepts and terminology largely relate to queer theory and postcolonial theory but the main critical idea I utilise is the critical act of queering as a deconstructive mode of textual analysis. The primary reason I have chosen the terms queer and queering is because these terms do not simply re-iterate the connotations associated with the identity markers gay, lesbian or homosexual, even if this has been suggested by some critics, such as Vasu Reddy who equates gay and lesbian studies with queer studies: "In the last decade or so scholarship in gay and lesbian sexualities (now institutionalised as Queer Studies) has foregrounded sexuality as its methodological domain."²³ At points it is acknowledged that the use of the term queer does signify an act of reclaiming an originally derogatory word, and this has a significant bearing on the term being used synonymously in some popular and academic contexts. But the equating of gay and lesbian studies

²³ Vasu Reddy, "Sexuality in Africa: Some trends, transgressions and tirades." *Agenda, Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 2:1 no.62. (2004) p. 5.

with queer studies simplifies some of the major critiques that queer studies approaches have made of gay and lesbian studies.

Lisa Duggan analyses the potential benefits of queer theory approaches that attend to material and cultural histories and that this is a particularly salient characteristic of queer theory in comparison to more strictly materialist approaches in some of gay and lesbian studies.²⁴ Moreover, the emergence of queer theory in academia in the early 1990s has developed queering as an incisive mode of critical analysis *beyond* the act of reclaiming queer as a derogatory word for LGBT or those perceived as non-heteronormative. Queering as an analytical tool has been utilised to critique various institutional, disciplinary and activist blindspots since the emergence of queer in the early 1990s as a cultural studies critique in response to AIDS activism in the US context.²⁵ My analyses of both the blind spots, and uses, of the Black Atlantic approach in chapter three is particularly relevant for this discussion as I consider the renewed use and interest in Gilroy's model in light of the transnational interest in Anglophone Caribbean cultural forms and sexualities.

However, whilst I utilise queer theory as a mode of analysis, critiques of the use of queer theory as a 'universal' approach are foregrounded at several instances, such as in my final chapter discussions where I critiques the pitching of my chosen films as marketed to a global LGBTQ audience. The emergence of scholarship which has sought to explore the connections, and divides, between postcolonial theory and queer theory has thrown up more than a

²⁴ Lisa Duggan, "The Discipline Problem; Queer Theory Meets Gay and Lesbian History' in *GLQ, A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 2 (1995): 179-191. See also Joshua Gamson, "Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma." *Social Problems* 42 no.3 (1995) 390-407.

²⁵ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Guest Column: What does Queer Theory Teach us about X?" *PMLA* 110 (1995): 343-349.

degree of critical scepticism surrounding queer theory's supposed appropriateness as a 'universal' deconstructive tool or theory. Like many of the debates surrounding the emergence of some feminisms from within the dynamics of white middle class western circles, queer theory's emergence from within North American (and British) academic institutions has been loudly critiqued for replicating white middle class (male) western privilege. Ian Barnard incisively critiques hegemonic interpretations of queer that privilege sexuality as *the* primary identity marker in queer theory approaches.²⁶ Barnard specifically critiques interpretations of queer that relegate racial dynamics to the margins in most mainstream queer theory approaches:

The construction of sexuality is usually treated separately from the construction of race, as if each figuration of subjectivity could develop independent of the other. We see this aporia tellingly in queer theory: with few exceptions all the already canonized white queer theorists have failed to theorize queer race or to adumbrate the always already racialized nature of every queerness in the context of academic institutions and epistemological imperialisms from which queer theory makes its Western postcolonial advance.²⁷

Barnard's critiques reflect the influence of postcolonial feminist critics such as Chandra Mohanty who critiqued the neocolonial dynamics in some western feminist schools of thought.²⁸ Many other critics have followed in the wake of Mohanty's critiques of western feminism as replicating positions of privilege but her critiques were some of the first to explicitly deconstruct the processes through which some western feminism(s) replicate colonial ideas of gender, ethnicity, 'race', and class through supposed 'universal' feminist tools of

²⁶ Barnard, *Queer Race: Interventions in the Racial Politics of Queer Theory*.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 2.

²⁸ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." In *Feminism Without Borders; decolonizing Theory, practicing solidarity*, edited by Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 17-42. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

analysis.²⁹

Jasbir Puar is one such critic whose critiques reverberate with Mohanty's critiques. Puar focusses on the supposed 'neutrality' of queer theory as a critical approach and analyses the problematic idea that can be replicated in queer theory approaches which present *all* heterosexual identities as occupying similar positions of privilege.³⁰ Puar's critiques are similar to Ian Barnard and William J. Spurlin who point to the need to ground queer theory within the specific and concurrent histories of *both* postcolonial and western metropolitan contexts.³¹ Central to all of these critiques is that the idea of the universality of queer theory approaches may unwittingly replicate the blindspots of the universalism that went hand-in-hand with some of the worst atrocities of colonialism.

Parallels between queer theory approaches and the broader ideologies of colonialism are strikingly evident in David Turley's critiques of the Eurocentric idea of universality that underpinned the humanitarian antislavery campaigners in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³² A central idea in humanitarian campaigns was that black African slaves in the Americas were 'redeemable' in that they could adopt the 'universal benefits' of European culture but that they would need to forego their surviving African traditions in order to avail of this

²⁹ For a discussion of this in relation to postcolonial literary criticism, see Denise deCaires Narain, "What happened to Global Sisterhood? Writing and Reading the 'postcolonial' woman." In *Third Wave Feminism, A Critical Exploration* edited by Howie Gillis and Munford, 240-251. (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2004).

³⁰ See intro to Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008b).

³¹ Barnard, *Queer Race; Cultural Interventions in the Racial Politics of Queer Theory*. William J. Spurlin, "Broadening Postcolonial Studies/Decolonizing Queer Studies: Emerging 'Queer' Identities and Cultures in Southern Africa." In *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, edited by John C. Hawley, 185-205. (Albany: State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 2001).

³² David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (London: Routledge, 1991).

'universal' culture. Crucially humanitarianism declined in popularity from the mid-nineteenth century onwards and this coincided with the rise in racial science; the broad shift away from the idea of 'universal culture' that could uplift 'lower races' and towards the idea of 'race' being measured via 'scientific' means informs some of the broader debates within this thesis.³³ Specifically, it informs the neo-colonial trajectories in some global responses to the pandemic.

The effects of this Eurocentrism is foregrounded by Henriette Gunkel who critiques the tendency in some western queer theory approaches to view Foucault's theory of discourse as a 'universal' mode of analysis.³⁴ Gunkel's critiques have particular ramifications for postcolonial/queer approaches that aim to explore the junctures and overlaps between postcolonial studies and queer theory.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES AND POSTCOLONIAL/QUEER THEORY

Comparative approaches in postcolonial/queer analyses are relatively absent and although this may reflect the relatively new juncture that is postcolonial/queer analyses, comparative modes of analysis have typically, like postcolonial/queer, reflected a Eurocentric epistemological trajectory. Indeed, comparative literature and comparative studies, as umbrella term(s), are notably thin in terms of textual analysis of postcolonial literature *and* texts that engage

³³ See Alan Lester's "British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire," for an overview of the shift away from humanitarian views of empire as destined to improve 'lower racial stocks' to the rise in fixed ideas of 'racial difference' which were gradually underpinned by 'racial science' in the latter half of the nineteenth century. *History Workshop Journal* 54 (2002): 27-50.

³⁴ Henriette Gunkel, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*. (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2010). Gunkel's wider project examines the continuities between the colonial era, apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa via the policing of sexuality and the debates surrounding the boundaries that demarcate South African sexualities in the contemporary South African public sphere.

with sexuality and/or queer apart from the recent volume *Comparatively Queer: Interrogating Identity Across Time and Space*.³⁵ Notably though, *Comparatively Queer* does not focus on any postcolonial contexts or texts and this attests to both the *predominant* focus in comparative approaches on Europe and the US but also the difficulty of including postcolonial contexts in comparative postcolonial/queer approaches.

However, to state that comparative studies approaches to postcolonial literature and culture, and the complex trajectories within which postcolonial literature and culture are embedded, is somehow absent is a simplification of both the history and potential of comparative studies, and the specific dimensions of colonialism. Colonialism as a political, economic, ideological and cultural project premised itself on a complex idea of 'self' versus 'other' and centred around what I call a transnational comparative subjectivity. Edward Said's *Orientalism* is the 'classic' text which pinpoints the construction of 'self' and 'other' during the various colonial projects.³⁶ But, at the same time, Said has been critiqued for ignoring the role of gender and for presenting polarised positions rather than the complex power dynamics and shifting identity markers of the colonial period.³⁷ Catherine Hall in *Civilising Subjects: Colony and metropole in the English imagination 1830-1867* provides a more nuanced analysis of subjectivity formation during empire.³⁸ She focusses on the construction of hegemonic British identity along class, gender, sexual and racial

³⁵ Jarrod Hayes, Margaret R Higgonet and Spurlin, William J., eds, *Comparatively Queer: Interrogating Identities Across Time and Cultures*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

³⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003).

³⁷ Christine Anne Holmlund, "Displacing limits of difference: Gender, race, and colonialism in Edward Said and Homi Bhabha's theoretical models and Marguerite Duras's experimental films." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 13 nos 1-3 (1991): 1-22.

³⁸ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*.

lines during the nineteenth century and foregrounds the explicitly transnational dimension of colonialism. In Hall's study, the transnational contexts of colonialism connected the London metropole to the various colonial peripheries and these connections contributed to the *global* and *uneven* influence of the British empire. In Hall's scholarship, the metropole and the colony construct each other via a dynamic relationship.

In light of the transnational construction of 'identity' during the colonial period, the historical backdrop of colonialism is reflected in comparative studies as the emergence of comparative literature initially within Europe and the US needs to be contextualised in relation to the complex socio-historical conditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This thesis is not exclusively focussed on comparative literature but is more aligned with comparative studies which broadly speaking encompasses comparative approaches in literature and other media.³⁹

The 'traditional' comparative literature approach which emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries focussed on comparing *distinct European* 'national' literatures. Such an approach replicates a Eurocentric and nation-centric approach as it does not question the emergence of national boundaries as political boundaries.⁴⁰ The dominant characteristic of comparative literature approaches up until the end of the twentieth century has reflected this Eurocentrism. This is most apparent in the view that 'proper' comparative literature involves comparing different *European* languages or it

³⁹ See the intro to *Comparatively Queer: Interrogating Identities Across Time and Cultures* for an overview of the broadening of comparative literature to comparative studies to encompass visual media in the 1990s.

⁴⁰ Rey Chow, "The Old/New Question of Comparison in Literary Studies: A Post-European Perspective" for a succinct critique of the eurocentrism of 'traditional' comparative literature. *ELH* 71 no.2 (Summer 2004): 289-311.

involves comparing a *non*-European language with a European language where Europe is still the model for comparative approaches.⁴¹ The Eurocentism underpinning these ideas is a result of the emergence of comparative literature during an age where the idea of the 'nation' was emerging as *the* socio-political unit. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* analyses the emergence of nationalism in terms of the idea of the 'nation' as an 'imagined political community'.⁴² Anderson's critiques have generated much debate surrounding the emergence of nationalism from within late eighteenth century Europe as he has been critiqued for replicating Eurocentric approaches to history; some of the most notable critiques of Anderson have come from Partha Chaterjee who critiques Anderson for assuming that nationalism is a 'universal' mode which is simply replicated in contexts outside of Europe.⁴³

Indeed, other intellectual ideologies emerged alongside the emergence of the idea of the 'nation' as the socio-political structure. One of the most notable for comparative studies is the emergence in the eighteenth century of the *perceived* need to understand *different* national traditions in relation to each other. This idea focussed on the impetus to recognise the *universal* similarities and this was a fervent topic of discussion amongst those who were calling themselves comparative critics. This universalism, like that found in some feminist and queer theory approaches, may replicate the self-other dichotomy of colonialism.

⁴¹ Chow remarks upon this as well. Ibid.

⁴² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁴³ Partha Chaterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?" In *Mapping The Nation*. Edited by Anderson and Balakrishnan, 214-225, (London: Verso, 1996).

However, the following thesis demonstrates the vast potential that exists for more transnational comparative approaches which include more postcolonial and queer texts, and even the junctures between these seemingly oppositional fields. Although the Eurocentric approach to comparative literature is critiqued by Susan Bassnett amongst others, relatively few comparative readings focus on postcolonial literatures, queer theory and still fewer the juncture between postcolonial/queer theories.⁴⁴ The relative lack of focus on comparative postcolonial/queer approaches reflects the shifting political sands of comparative approaches as comparative approaches have reflected a predominant concern with comparing Europe with itself or comparing Europe with non-European contexts. However, the potential for comparative studies to encompass radically unorthodox and creative approaches is succinctly noted by Roland Greene who notes that the receptivity of comparative approaches to changing definitions of literature: "Receptive to changing definitions of 'literature' to a degree unmatched by any other literary field...comparative literature has a discontinuous history in which it is not always the protagonist."⁴⁵

Although Greene's overview of comparative studies reflects that as an area of study, comparative approaches is acutely affected by changes in definitions of what is literature, and thus acutely affected by the politics of *who defines* what constitutes literature, the following thesis utilises a comparative approach that does not seek to replicate the Eurocentrism of 'traditional' comparative literature nor the idea that 'proper' comparative literature is about

⁴⁴ Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993).

⁴⁵ Roland Greene, "Not Works but Networks; Colonial Worlds in Comparative Literature." In *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, edited by Haun Saussy, (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2004) p. 212.

comparing *different* national languages. Rather, the following thesis utilises the particular strengths for a comparative approach to Anglophone Caribbean and South African literature and culture whilst reflecting upon the possible limitations that arise in some comparative approaches.⁴⁶ I thus contextualise my chosen texts in relation to each specific socio-historical context whilst comparing these texts via a transnational postcolonial/queer lens.

My choice of texts, and theoretical approach, signifies my interest in widening the critical concerns of comparative studies whilst staying attuned to the textual life of each respective text. At points, I suggest that this is the particular challenge of comparative approaches which adopt a postcolonial/queer approach. Such as my analyses in chapters one and two of HIV/AIDS in radically different literary texts, though both texts engage with the symbolism of HIV/AIDS for their respective wider themes and character portrayals: Mona Singh in Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* in chapter one is compelled to revisit and research her own Indo-Trinidadian family history as a result of HIV/AIDS affecting her family. Similarly, in chapter two, Mpe's character Refilwe in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* wishes to write a story of a HIV positive woman but is thwarted due to her premature death. With these comparative engagements with HIV/AIDS in mind, I demonstrate the uses of a comparative approach for visual texts from the Anglophone Caribbean and South Africa in my final chapter and that such approaches need to be stringently aware of the political ramifications of *what* is being compared and *why*. My

⁴⁶ The potential redundancy of the term comparative approaches for approaches that compare texts outside of the US and Europe is a very real possibility given the difficulty of combatting the overwhelming Eurocentrism of 'traditional' comparative approaches. However, the predominant concern of comparative approaches with US and Europeans texts does not seem likely to shift in the near future.

chosen texts are analysed in relation to the specific contexts from which they emerge whilst foregrounding transnationality as engendered within ideas of the local and the global. Thus, I acknowledge both the *textuality* of my selected literary texts and films whilst foregrounding the *transnational themes* within the various texts.

Indeed, there is a relative absence of comparative studies approaches to texts from the Anglophone Caribbean and South African region and this is directly related to the dynamics of nationalism in both of these regions. Like other post-colonial contexts, the pre-dominant focus on the post-colonial 'nation' has subsumed more transnational approaches to these contexts. Some projects have begun to include a comparative approach to texts and cultural debates from these regions, such as Sonjah Stanley Niaah in *Dance hall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto* who compares the influence of Jamaican dance hall on South African kwaito music, a form very similar to dance hall near the end of her book.⁴⁷ However, Niaah's overall project is not primarily a comparative project as her main focus is the wider dynamics of dancehall culture beyond lyrical wordplay.

THE COLONIAL 'PRESENT' AND THE POSTCOLONIAL 'PAST': TRANSNATIONALISM AND POSTCOLONIAL/QUEER

Whilst grounding my transnational comparative readings at several instances against a backdrop of colonial history, and material and lived realities, I acknowledge that the emergence of the idea of the 'nation', and its attendant trajectories at the end of the eighteenth century, informs the textual analyses

⁴⁷ Sonjah Stanley Niaah, *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010).

within the thesis at the same time as I utilise transnationality to deconstruct the myriad effects of heteropatriarchy. Thus, the limits of 'nation'-centred approaches, and the particular insularity that is marked out in relation to the intersection between gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and 'nation' in postcolonial nationalist discourses, are foregrounded at several instances. I thus concurrently analyse the myriad effects of colonialism *and* postcolonial nationalism within South African and the Anglophone Caribbean literary texts, films and the local and global debates surrounding HIV/AIDS. Whilst overviewing the backdrop of colonialism to debates surrounding transnationalism, and the influence of the idea of the 'nation' on textual analyses, I also take critical issue with the idea that different disciplinary approaches adopt completely distinct approaches. Indeed, this critique is particularly important for my thesis given my analysis of both literature and visual mediums.

Whilst foregrounding the particular limits of nation-centric and regionalist approaches via a queer textual analysis, I analyse 'identity' markers against the complex cultural contexts of the Anglophone Caribbean and South Africa to illustrate the dominant, if shifting, socio-historical narratives that are circulating in these contexts. The construction of 'identity' markers is analysed via the complex historical matrix of both the colonial past, the postcolonial present and the tension between the presence of neo-colonial interpretations, on the one hand, and, on the other, creolised (Caribbean context) and post-colonial nationalist (Caribbean and South Africa) interpretations.⁴⁸ That all of these

⁴⁸ The term creole in most contemporary Anglophone Caribbean contexts is largely used to describe those of African descent though creole is used to describe those of French or European descent in some Francophone Caribbean contexts; this project focusses on

seemingly disparate historical overtones exist in both western centric, Anglophone Caribbean centric and South African centric texts and analyses is central to the thesis. Thus, a main premise in this thesis is the complex layers within which this comparative transnational study is embedded in light of the dialectic relationship between the past, present and future and the local, global and transnational. The importance of these dialectics are especially important for textual engagements and representations as these are *never simply rehashing* dominant historical or contextual narratives given that the act of reading is an act of interpretation.

Some studies have foregrounded the aptness of such an approach for studies of empire, such as Catherine Hall in *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*.⁴⁹ Here Hall analyses the relationship between England, specifically the London metropole, and Jamaica and demonstrates that this relationship was central to the emergence of the ideas of England and Britishness during the nineteenth century. Crucial to Hall's project is that hegemonic British identity relied on the construction of the 'other' at home and abroad and was thus facilitated by the transnational exchanges and encounters of empire. Hall particularly focusses on the transnational role of gender and class in this relationship and the positioning of white working class Britons in relation to white middle class Britons and the majority black African-Jamaican population in order to show the transnational construction of 'identity' during empire. In the wake of studies like Hall's, and

Anglophone Caribbean contexts so I will be employing the former connotation. The wider debates surrounding creolisation where creolisation refers to the particular yoking together of European cultures and African cultures during the period of racial slavery forms a backdrop at points.

⁴⁹ Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English imagination, 1830-1867*.

whilst foregrounding the importance of transnationalism in the historical narratives and 'identity' markers in these regions, I do not set out to define *the* analysis of these two complex regions. Instead I analyse a way of engaging with cultural production within these regions in light of the dynamic between the local, the global and the transnational as these are embedded within the tenuously titled field of 'postcolonial/queer' studies.

My critiques of the unambiguous nation-state ideal are linked to the utilisation of select queer theory approaches for the comparative analyses within the overall thesis. Thus, throughout I explicitly deconstruct the idea that queer theory is not relevant to contexts such as the Anglophone Caribbean and South Africa as I foreground the critical strengths of some queer theory approaches for comparative textual analyses. A central aim in adapting select tenets of queer theory alongside aspects of postcolonial theory is to draw attention to the role of transnationality in both facilitating and deconstructing postcolonial nationalist responses, especially those pertaining to heteropatriarchy. Heteropatriarchy, as a critical term, is interpreted as the specific intersection between heterosexuality and patriarchy and that this has notable effects on those who do not gain from either ideology. Jacqui Alexander offers a lucid analysis of the term for Anglophone Caribbean contexts.⁵⁰ Following on from Alexander, most discussions of heteropatriarchy, or heteropatriarchies, focus on the effects and processes of heteropatriarchies *as both a product* of a historical relationship *and as productive* of that historical relationship. Thus, heteropatriarchies are not interpreted in this thesis as ready-

⁵⁰ Jacqui Alexander, "Not Just Any(Body) Can Be A Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas." In *Feminist Review* 48 (Autumn 1998): 5-23.

made processes through which gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality and class simply pass through and are merely acted upon by heteropatriarchies. Rather, heteropatriarchies are interpreted as the specific processes that have emerged in the Anglophone Caribbean and South Africa due to the effects and responses to wider historical narratives.

The myriad reasons for why hegemonic African-Jamaican masculinity and hegemonic South African masculinity are over determined as exclusively heterosexual and opposed to the feminine, and specifically the effeminate 'nature' of homosexuality/same-sex desire, is directly linked to the colonial period, racial slavery, apartheid *and* the indigenisation of Christianity and the emergence of anticolonial (and anti-western) cultural nationalism. The critics Robert Carr and Anthony Lewis analyse the emergence of what they term hegemonic Afro-Creole masculinity in Jamaica since the institutionalisation of racial slavery and the ramifications of this for contemporary debates surrounding Jamaican-ness and sexuality.⁵¹ However, the era of racial slavery, and the immediate post-slavery period, are not the primary foci of this thesis but form a historical backdrop at several instances.

Relationships between transnationality and colonialism are central to these discussions at several instances given the primary role which colonialism had in initially configuring the transnational make-up of the modern world. Robin Blackburn analyses what he calls 'the making of new world slavery' and the role this played in the creation of what we now refer to as the advent of the

⁵¹ Robert Carr and Anthony Lewis, "Gender, Sexuality, Identity and Exclusion: Sketching the Outlines of the Jamaican popular nationalist project." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 3 no.2 (2009). <open access journal so no page number>

modern era.⁵² Moreover, I actively acknowledge that some postcolonial readings of history ignore the dynamics of the pre-colonial past in the wider historical development of the Anglophone Caribbean and South Africa beyond the focus on the colonial and postcolonial periods. Alan Lester foregrounds the limitations of approaches to the study of empire if European empires are taken as the *only* historical forces, or narratives, within those contexts.⁵³ Such approaches ignore the importance of the present constructing the past and also ignore what Spivak has called the multicultural realities that existed under colonialism.⁵⁴ However, the colonial period is the major backdrop for this project given that the advent of transnationalism global exchange is marked by the expansion of the various European empires through colonial conquest, and the concurrent emergence of the transatlantic slave trade during colonial expansion.

The ensuing effects of colonialism through the transnational processes of heteropatriarchy in postcolonial institutions and nationalist ideologies are crucial here as it is these that figure so strongly within my textual analyses and engagement. Alexander's 'Not Just Any(Body) Can Be a Citizen' pinpointed some of the transnational processes which engender heteropatriarchy in the overlap between postcolonial Anglophone Caribbean nation-states, neo-colonialism and global capitalism.⁵⁵ I am particularly interested in the debates surrounding the emergence of transnationalism during the colonial era in light of

⁵² Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery; from the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1998).

⁵³ Alan Lester, "Empire." In *Handbook of Political Geography*, edited by M. Low, K. Cox and J. Robinson, 385-407, (London: Sage, 2008).

⁵⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York, London, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2003)

⁵⁵ Alexander, "Not Just Any(Body) Can Be A Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas."

the tendency for some debates surrounding transnationalism to ignore the pre-twentieth century, or to fixate on terms such as transnationalism, globalisation or creolisation without reference to the past. Aisha Khan critiques the popularity of these terms for discussions of religion in the Caribbean in light of the hegemonic potential that is visible in some discussions of transnationalism, globalisation and creolisation.⁵⁶ Khan stresses that the popularity of these terms is apparent in academic publications and that academia is not averse to adopting terms that present ideas or trends as 'new' rather than as products of history and as *interpretations* of history.

Other critics, such as Sidney Mintz, draw attention to the fact that transnationalism was a primary and distinctive characteristic of colonialism since *at least* the end of the fifteenth century and thus transnationalism, and globalization, are not exclusive, or 'neutral' features of the twentieth and twenty first centuries.⁵⁷ However, Mintz does not deny that the rapid increase in transnational connections through mediums such as the internet are not distinct features of the late twentieth century. But, he is keen to stress that transnationalism and globalisation do not simply emerge from nowhere in the twentieth and twenty first centuries and that the transatlantic slave trade, the commodities produced via the trade, and the relations of commodity it engendered, significantly influenced the trajectories of the colonial era and thereafter.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Aisha Khan, "Isms and Schisms: Interpreting Religion in the Americas." *Anthropological Quarterly* 76, no.4 (2003): 761-774.

⁵⁷ Sidney Mintz, "The Localization of Anthropological Practice: From Area Studies to Transnationalism." *Critique of Anthropology* 18, no.2. (1998): 117-133.

⁵⁸ Mimi Sheller's analysis of the neocolonial dynamics of tourism within the Caribbean is a key text that explores the legacies of colonialism and transnational exchange for the Caribbean region. *Consuming the Caribbean, From Arawaks to Zombies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

Thus, with Khan's and Mintz's critiques in mind, the historical legacies that were engendered via the various European colonial projects complicate any straightforward reading of subjectivity through a transnational lens given that colonialism shaped the material and ideological conditions from which transnationalism initially emerged. Other critics such as Haskell present similar critiques where he pinpoints that the emergence of the antislavery humanitarian movement from the late eighteenth century was bound up with changes in the global market which led to the emergence of feeling a conscious relationship or feeling of responsibility towards distant others.⁵⁹ One of the strongest examples of the emergence of this feeling of responsibility is discussed by Ferguson where she points to the emergence of British (middle class) women's political involvement in Britain as part of the anti-slavery movement. In Ferguson's analysis, the emergence of white middle class British women into the public sphere was double edged as women are cast as mothers to slaves but are not allowed full political agency to the same degree as white middle class British men.⁶⁰ Any analysis of the emergence of British women into the political sphere thus needs to acknowledge that this transnational participation was premised on the privilege that was afforded to them in relation to their African slaves at the time.

At the same time, however, the historical legacies of colonialism are not interpreted as factors which completely fix the processes and interpretations of transnationalism. Whilst keeping the complex relationship between transnationalism and colonialism in mind, transnational, and the condition of

⁵⁹ T.L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the origins of the humanitarian sensibility, part 1." *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 339-61.

⁶⁰ See Margaret Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British women writers and colonial slavery 1670-1834* (London: Routledge, 1992).

transnationality, are interpreted throughout as *the movement of ideas* and concepts between contexts and *as a way of reading* the complex strands of cultural histories. Therefore a dominant strand is that texts and specific socio-historical contexts are rarely, if ever, convincingly represented through 'nation'-centric or narrow region-focussed narratives. I thus analyse the selected literary texts and films as *dynamic products* of specific socio-cultural histories and *as productive* of the particular juncture between postcolonial studies, comparative literature and approaches and the growing parlance of queer studies. However, I am keenly aware that the term transnationalism is loosely thrown around as a term which can refer to any process or event or person that moves across or through a 'nation'. Thus, at several points I make reference to transnational material processes which *underpin* my own readings of transnational and transnationality *as the movement of ideas* and *as a way of reading*.

In my conclusion, I assess the degree to which my comparative postcolonial/queer approach can counter some of the more neo-colonial trajectories of transnational approaches. I also offer some potential ways beyond the more polarised discussions surrounding sexuality, HIV/AIDS and transnationalism by foregrounding the importance of self-reflexivity in comparative postcolonial/queer approaches.

CHAPTER ONE: HIV/AIDS, TRANSNATIONALISM AND INDO-TRINIDADIAN

HISTORIES IN RAMABAI ESPINET'S *THE SWINGING BRIDGE*

INTRODUCTION:

The following chapter analyses Ramabai Espinet's 2003 Anglophone Caribbean novel *The Swinging Bridge* via the global histories of HIV/AIDS discourses since the late 1970s.⁶¹ Primarily, the focus is the intersection between HIV/AIDS histories as global and Indo-Trinidadian histories as transnational and the dissidence expressed, within Indo-Trinidadian familial narratives, as result of this confluence. Transnationalism is mainly interpreted as the nineteenth century migration of indentured labourers from India to Trinidad and the impact that this historical narrative has on the construction of Indo-Trinidadian identities as distinct from African-Trinidadian identities. The symbolic place of the sea passage from Trinidad to India, or the *kala pani*, roughly translates as 'the black waters of the Atlantic', according to Brinda Mehta, and it is central for Indo-Trinidadians within the novel's overall framing.⁶² Because of this, the place of Indian indentured labourers is foregrounded alongside global HIV/AIDS history.

On a broader comparative level, considering the place of indentureship alongside HIV/AIDS enables a critical assessment of the impact that HIV/AIDS has on the construction of Indo-Trinidadian group conceptions. But, it also

⁶¹ Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge*.

⁶² Brinda Mehta, "Engendering History: A Poetics of the 'Kala Pani' in Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge*," *Small Axe*, 10, no. 3 (October 2006), p. 20. The more strictly Brahmanical interpretation of the *kala pani* as a form of pollution is not a major point of discussion in this chapter though I am aware that symbolism of caste hierarchies is not a major focus in the novel.

allows an examination of how indentureship is negotiated, and also negated, within the Trinidadian national imaginary. Hence I contextualise the productive tensions between Indo-Trinidadian histories and HIV/AIDS histories and I locate this intersection as a pivotal moment within Espinet's text. Such an analysis is especially important because of the relative difficulty of representing poor and lower caste Indo-Trinidadian women, and queer Indo-Trinidadians, in light of dominant heteropatriarchal constructions of family history. Representational debates are a dominant motif in *The Swinging Bridge* and it is no coincidence that the contemporary and historical experiences of poor and lower caste women, and queer, Indo-Trinidadians is a primary theme.

Throughout, I focus on the central place of global HIV/AIDS histories for sexuality debates over the last thirty to forty years. Such histories are paramount when demonstrating that Indo-Trinidadian histories are inflected by transnational dialectics and materialities, and this is acutely displayed in representations of HIV/AIDS in the text. A key premise for how HIV/AIDS histories have been conventionally remembered is that dominant histories, such as those circulated by international organisations, like UNAIDS, are only a partial way into the layered complexities surrounding HIV/AIDS and regional Anglophone Caribbean histories. I am thinking especially of Philip Nanton who critiques UNAIDS' recommended best HIV/AIDS practices for the wider Caribbean region in light of how such recommendations play out in complex, and contradictory, ways for the Barbadian context.⁶³ Tracy's Robinson discusses similar issues when she focusses on the role that the various

⁶³ Philip Nanton, "The Impact of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic on the Development of the Discourse of Caribbean Sexuality," *Shibboleths: A Journal of Comparative Theory* 2, no.1 (Dec 2007) p. 34 - 42.

Anglophone Caribbean legislative systems play in contemporary law making and how this role affects citizenship and access to HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention programs.⁶⁴ Following on from this, I demonstrate that analyses of HIV/AIDS are an important part of the transnational imaginary of Anglophone Caribbean literature.

Furthermore, I recognise Sidney Mintz's point that transnationalism was a primary and distinctive characteristic of colonialism since at least the end of the fifteenth century and that transnationalism, and globalization, are not exclusive, or 'neutral' features of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty first centuries.⁶⁵ But I am focussing on the role of literary endeavours in these debates rather than the shifting, and immensely complex, migration patterns to Trinidad. With this overview in mind, it is not possible to chart here the full extent of the historical migration patterns to Trinidad, but transatlantic slavery and post-abolition indentured labour were not the only migration patterns though they were the largest and are the most prominent in Trinidadian history.

TRANSNATIONALISM AND INDO-TRINIDADIAN HISTORIES

The Swinging Bridge is a novel which focusses on Indo-Trinidadian history and the extent to which this history interacts with, and shapes, the experiences of the Indo-Trinidadian Singh family in contemporary Trinidad. We are introduced to the Singh family from the 1960s to the mid-1990s though some passages focus on the experiences of Indian women indentured labourers crossing the *kala pani* to Trinidad in the late nineteenth century. The

⁶⁴ Tracy Robinson, "The Vagaries of Justice: The Law Relating to Sex Crimes in the Caribbean," *Sexualities in Conversation: No. 1 Caribbean Sexualities* 1 (March 2008).

⁶⁵ Mintz, "The Caribbean Region," in *Slavery, Colonialism and Racism*.

latter passages, all entitled 'Kala Pani', punctuate the narrative at the beginning, middle and conclusion and these passages always focus on women indentured labourers.⁶⁶ Such a focus is central for the novel's main impetus as these women's lives are relayed via an omniscient narrator whose voice becomes gradually closer to the narrative voice of Mona Singh, the main protagonist and central character, as the plot develops. Indeed, Mona is instrumental for the interpretation of these women's lives as she repeatedly contextualises immediate life events in relation to her extended family's history. Such as her assessment of a film about Indo-Trinidadian history near the end of the novel: "I found myself ranting to her [Mona's mother] about the film and how much it vexed me that women's actions were so often erased."⁶⁷ It is significant for the subsequent chapter discussion that Mona is flagging the repression of Indo-Trinidadian women to her mother because, in a very direct way, a reader's growing familiarity with Mona, and wider representations of Indo-Trinidadian women, goes hand-in-hand with her emergence, as a main character, who records and writes Indo-Trinidadian women's lives.

Mona's nascent role as a character, and narrative voice, is also key in threading together the central themes. Such themes include, but are not limited to; the role of patriarchy in preventing certain women's, and queer, voices from being heard; the myriad politics of family life; the difficulties encountered in finding a written form that can encompass, without disembodiment, the lost and silenced histories of Indo-Trinidadian women; the fragility of reclaiming childhood in wider historical representations and; the perturbing effects that

⁶⁶ Three sections are entitled 'Kala Pani' and focus on the experiences of these women travelling to Trinidad. 'Kala Pani', p. 3-4, 'Kala Pani', p. 117-119, 'Kala Pani', p. 247-306.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

HIV/AIDS has on Indo-Trinidadian family life. I foreground the latter theme as I demonstrate that it is the most significant for the ensuing discussion surrounding Indo-Trinidadian history and HIV/AIDS histories. For example, the news that Mona's brother is ill compels her to revisit her Trinidadian past and family. Although Kello's illness is not named initially as HIV/AIDS, the following quote captures Mona's shock upon receiving the news and, crucially, we witness her registering the momentum of this life changing moment: "Those were the words I was writing in my notebook early one morning in January when the phone rang and everything in my life turned around."⁶⁸ Although a brief, and fairly reticent character response, the quote captures Mona's own recognition that her life has significantly changed. For my chapter analysis, her recognition is highly poignant because of how she revisits Indo-Trinidadian history via this family news, and that this part of her character's life is enmeshed with the shock of Kello's illness

Although the above quote is most definitely Mona's narrative voice, the merging of her specific narrative voice and the omniscient narrator within the wider text is not a coincidence as the Singh family have a more distant relationship to their Indian heritage than some of their wider relatives. Mona's role, as a character, largely focusses on closing the symbolic gap between indentured labourers' history and the Singh's family history.⁶⁹ A primary example of the gaps which the novel attests to is visible in the opening section. Here, the reader is introduced to the tentative place of Indian women indentured labourers in nineteenth century India via the suggestive and ominous dangers of the journey from India to Trinidad. Two lines in particular suggest the

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 89.

precariousness of their situation: “The gangplank cracks and swings precariously as the women scramble up onto the deck. Once aboard, those who are unattached keep their heads cast down as their name are checked.”⁷⁰ The explicit focus here is the lives of women and this recurs as a theme, especially the hardships faced by Indo-Trinidadian women, such as Mona's own traumatic teenage years where she is shamed by her father and family for her perceived transgressions whilst dating a Creole boy, named Bree.⁷¹ Mona's intense relationship to her family is also apparent here and this familial dynamic informs her entire character development.

Moreover, crucial for her character development, and linked to her family's disapproval of her romantic choices, is that her childhood and teenage years overlap with Trinidadian independence in 1962 as this markedly shapes her whilst growing up in Trinidad. A decisive example of this is when, as a child, she overhears her Aunt Vannie talking to her mother, nicknamed Muddie, about how her aunt was seriously sexually assaulted prior to her aunt's marriage.⁷² How the scene is pitched is formative for Mona's character as she is the one who predominantly pieces together the diasporal trajectory of Indo-Trinidadian history, largely via women's perspectives, and navigates these competing influences for her generation. Indeed, generational change is a major theme and Mona openly contemplates this whilst returning to Trinidad as an adult:

For generations the members of our family had all come to consciousness in the same place, rooted to the same spot on the island, seeing the same trees and streams and beaches, bound by the same

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 175. Bree is named as a Creole within the text and the term Creole in the Trinidadian context refers to someone of mixed heritage but specifically someone of predominantly African-Trinidadian descent. Although the text does touch on the issue of Indo-Trinidadians becoming part of the wider Creole culture in Trinidad, this does not fundamentally change relations between Indo-Trinidadians and African-Trinidadians in the text.

⁷² Ibid., p. 169

laws. Then, in my generation, everything had changed. Now Kello lay dying among strangers, with only a few family members around him.⁷³

It is not clear in the above passage, or even in the novel's conclusion, what generational change signifies, and crucially her brother, Kello, is intrinsic to Mona's reflections. It is certain by the end of the text that Mona's exploration of her own family history is tied to Indo-Trinidadian's women's history beyond her immediate family. Thus, Mona's character actively represents generational change and Indo-Caribbean women's roles as artists and researchers. As a result, her character facilitates wider understandings of Indo-Trinidadian history.

BILDUNGSROMAN NARRATIVES AND GENDERED EXPECTATIONS

It is apparent here that Espinet's characterisation of Mona is directly concerned with the place of Indo-Trinidadian women artists' and writers' in Trinidad's national imaginary. The linear plot underlies this focus as it circulates from Trinidad to Canada to Trinidad, and then finally back to Canada, and Mona's diasporal view of Indo-Trinidadian history is clearly the central thread running throughout. Indeed, migrating is important for Mona's development as an independent and active writer because she is afforded space from her Indo-Trinidadian family background in Canada. Her adult self, in a very direct way, acknowledges that her own perceived role within her family dovetails with her job as a freelance documentary film maker as an adult living in Canada. The ultimate culmination of this is Mona's wish to make a documentary film about Indian women's experiences crossing the *kala pani*.⁷⁴ Her choice to make such

⁷³ Ibid., p. 151.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 294.

a film is bound up with her subsequently learning that Kello is dying from AIDS related complications and that he needs her to return to Trinidad on his behalf. Hence, Mona's artistic and critical choices continually loop back to her family, and the role she occupies within her family.

However, one of the most striking elements of how her character becomes an active participant in Indo-Trinidadian family history are the resonant tensions between Indo-Trinidadian history and African-Trinidadian history. Such discord is arresting not least because on an emplotment level, the friction between the two largest Trinidadian ethnic groups is a constant part of how broader Trinidadian history is pitched within the text. Thus, it is no accident that Mona's youth is set around the moment of Trinidadian independence and, as readers, we see the contradictory place of Indo-Trinidadians in pre- and post-independence Trinidad mirroring the development of Mona's childhood and adolescence in Trinidad in the early 1960s, and her later adolescence and adulthood in Canada from the late 1960s to the mid-1990s. On an emplotment level, this is mapped out when Mona's immediate family decide to migrate to Toronto, Canada as a result of the unstable place of Indo-Trinidadians in post-independence Trinidad.

Indeed, the wider place of Indo-Trinidadians are poignantly examined via Mona's characterisation and her burgeoning self-hood, particularly via the day-to-day encounters between her and African-Trinidadian men. This is especially the case when sexual attraction between her and African-Trinidadian men is read as disrupting Indo-Trinidadian ethnic affiliation.⁷⁵ The forceful reprieves to

⁷⁵ The perceived social dangers surrounding sexual relationships between different ethnicities is a recurring theme in a number of texts in this thesis but specifically *The Swinging Bridge*, *Children of God*, and *The World Unseen*.

perceived mixed ethnic relationships within the text readily demonstrate how such tensions are experienced by the various characters but especially the women Indo-Caribbean characters. Significantly, this is most charged for Mona as the main character and central protagonist, and a young Indo-Trinidadian woman, where she is beaten and physically abused by her father for dating Bree during her teen years.⁷⁶ Her memory of this familial abuse becomes a powerful marker for Mona's active wish to distance herself from the gendered dynamics of her immediate family. But, like many literary and artistic interpretations, a major life event propels Mona out of the comfortable distance she enjoys from her family when she learns that her brother is seriously ill. Thereafter she ends up revisiting her family, and the attendant triggers she associates with her past family traumas.

The bildungsroman narrative is evident in this overview as the adolescent narrative, or coming-of-age narrative, is directly linked to burgeoning ethnic and national consciousness. Examples of the poignant effects of this literary form are when Mona notices the anxieties felt by her family, particularly her father, in the immediate post-independence period.⁷⁷ Strong echoes with broader Anglophone Caribbean literature are visible in the choice of the bildungsroman narrative with George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* being the most notable classic example.⁷⁸ On a wider comparative note, bildungsroman narratives hold particular resonance for postcolonial writers and contexts and not specifically for the Anglophone Caribbean; the Irish writer James Joyce's 1917 novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is a strong example of a

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.186.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 144 & p. 242.

⁷⁸ George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*. (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1953).

bildungsroman narrative and Joyce's work is often read as postcolonial.⁷⁹

Some critics suggest that the popularity of this form amongst postcolonial writers has to do with the fact this form allows the writer to focus on self-development and the emergence of postcolonial nationalisms.⁸⁰ This is also suggested by its use by other Anglophone Caribbean writers, such as Jamaica Kincaid, who utilises a bildungsroman in her novellas, *Annie John* and *Lucy*, to foreground the interrelationship between gender, nationhood, sexuality and subjectivity in post-independence Anglophone Caribbean contexts via the mother-daughter relationship.⁸¹

The gendered parameters of the bildungsroman narrative are highly important given how keenly gendered expectations are woven into *The Swinging Bridge*. One such example is when Mona reflects upon the racial undertones directed towards her and other Indo-Trinidadian school girls from one of her teachers: "We were hot coolie girls who had to be brought in line and who, at twelve or thirteen, were already showing signs of wantonness. As a young girl I had always admired Miss Lee, though even then I sensed an undercurrent that disturbed me."⁸² Mona's retrospective adult voice shines through here and importantly, for the later chapter discussion, Mona the child notices that she is actively policed because of the perceived 'wantonness' of her specific gender and ethnic background much more harshly than her brother Kello.⁸³ This is a constant source of tension for Mona as she grows up and

⁷⁹ James Joyce, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. (London: Penguin, 2000).

⁸⁰ Sheila Ghose, 'Brit Bomber: The Fundamental Trope in Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* and "My Son the Fanatic"', in *Empire and After: Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective*. (New York: Berghann books, 2007). p. 128.

⁸¹ Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John*. (London: Vintage, 1985). Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy*. (London: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1990).

⁸² Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge*, p. 145.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 203

moves away from the family home. Her family role is markedly difficult even in contrast to her brother, Kello, who is read as a queer and whose development of AIDS related complications, although never completely voiced as AIDS by his wider family, is a poignant source of grief and tension for his family, especially his parents.⁸⁴

Furthermore, the multiple levels of Mona's character are key for her later development as a writer of Indo-Trinidadian family history and this is bound up with the bildungsroman narrative. Although the bildungsroman form of the novel relies considerably on symbolic links between the Indo-Trinidadian past and Mona's instrumental role in writing Indo-Trinidadian history, the form of the novel is also key for how HIV/AIDS within the text is set up as a theme which is negotiated via the wider dynamics of the Indo-Trinidadian family. For the most part, this is most visible in how HIV/AIDS leads Mona back to Trinidad on her dying brother Kello's behalf and her return is a catalyst for her own understanding of her familial role and her self-perception as an Indo-Trinidadian woman recording Indo-Trinidadian history. Thus the importance of Mona's relationship with her brother, Kello, within the bildungsroman narrative, is highly pertinent for the intersection between Indo-Trinidadian history and HIV/AIDS as it is their relationship which links Mona's steady development as a writer.

Self-conscious textual references to bridging historical gaps especially attest to Mona's emerging role as a writer and interpreter of the complex matrix of HIV/AIDS and Indo-Trinidadian history. Such as when she discusses the elision of the more traumatic elements of Indo-Trinidadian history, particularly for

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 162.

women, with her cousin Bess.⁸⁵ Moreover, on a textual level, images of swinging bridges, often at emotionally charged moments, reinforce the metaphorical links between Mona's role as a character, wider Indo-Caribbean history and historical archives. One example is the image of the swingbridge in La Plata outside San Fernando when Mona is ten years old. She describes this to the reader: "The swingbridge hung over the river, suspended by delicate filaments above the water rushing downstream."⁸⁶ Mona's visual and sensual description contrasts with both the heated competition between her and her childhood peers to cross the bridge and also her parents' explicit instruction not to go beyond it.⁸⁷ Beyond her childhood, images of bridges represent the symbolic disjunctures felt by Indo-Trinidadians in both Trinidad and Canada as well as the gap that Mona feels between her family's expectations of her and her own self-perceptions, and the tension between her and her white Scottish boyfriend, Roddy, who Mona largely keeps at a distance.⁸⁸

For the purposes of this chapter, what the swingbridge image represents for Mona is directly linked to the role of historical archives as this imagery signifies her wider place, both materially and symbolically, as an Indo-Trinidadian girl growing up in Trinidad. Indeed, the title, *The Swinging Bridge*, can be read as a reference to both the material crossings of Indian women indentured labourers onto ships destined for Trinidad as well as the more symbolic idea of the tentative place of Indo-Trinidadians in wider Trinidadian history and Mona is key in bridging the material and the symbolic. Moreover,

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 282-92.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 85

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 218.

the connections between Mona and wider characters is instrumental for thinking about the link between her family role and her emerging role as a character as writer. Her relationship to her family becomes particularly important for how she negotiates the balance between historical representation and her brother's illness as we shall see in the intersection between HIV/AIDS and Indo-Trinidadian history. I foreground this when I consider Mona's relationship to her queer brother, Kello, and the importance of HIV/AIDS as a disruptive force for Indo-Trinidadian familial narratives. For now, I suggest that Mona's engagement with Kello's illness, as a result of AIDS related complications, is a key stage in her development as a writer, and this stage markedly informs her wider role as a contributor to Indo-Trinidadian history.

THE SWINGING BRIDGE AND REWRITING THE MIGRANT IMAGINARY:

HIV/AIDS HISTORIES AND SEXUALITY DISCOURSES

It is clear that Espinet is predominantly interested in Indo-Trinidadian histories but such histories cannot be written without analysing Trinidad's broader history, and more specifically, for this chapter, HIV/AIDS history. I am thinking especially of Cindy Patton's idea of HIV/AIDS as a metaphor for global processes since the late 1970s and also Paula Treichler's *How to Have a Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* where she foregrounds the importance of HIV/AIDS narratives as produced by particular socio-historical positions.⁸⁹ Thus, although a long standing critical appraisal of Anglophone

⁸⁹ See Cindy Patton's *Globalizing AIDS; Theory Out of Bounds* for a text which foregrounds the layered relationship between the local, global and transnational in the history of the pandemic. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). Paula Treichler, *How to Have a Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).

Caribbean texts, by critics such as Timothy Chin, is that migration and the processes of globalisation, are central to its literary canon, I am focussing on the significance of HIV/AIDS for transnational Indo-Trinidadian histories in *The Swinging Bridge* and how this complicates representations of the heteronormative Indo-Trinidadian family.⁹⁰

Comparing *The Swinging Bridge* with texts within and without the Anglophone Caribbean is crucial in situating HIV/AIDS as a comparative theme across different cultural contexts and across different textual mediums. This is because the strength of a comparative approach to HIV/AIDS as a literary theme, as noted by Patton and Treichler above, is that it facilitates close analyses of how the personal and the political are markedly interconnected. Indeed, the comparative treatment of HIV/AIDS in *The Swinging Bridge* is highly striking in light of how Espinet's text has not received as much critical attention as the South African novella *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* by Phaswane Mpe which I discuss in the next chapter. Crucially, this comparative difference is a marker of the specific literary contours of the broader South African context which has been enmeshed in debates surrounding HIV/AIDS since at least the beginning of the post-apartheid period. In the next chapter, I demonstrate that post-apartheid South African literature, such as Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, partakes in these debates at a relative distance and this is a significant contrast to *The Swinging Bridge* and Anglophone Caribbean literary debates. Thus, it is important to note that the relative lack of critical attention to HIV/AIDS in *The Swinging Bridge* informs the range of critical debates which I engage in within this chapter. This is most noticeable in how most of the critical debates I

⁹⁰ Timothy Chin, "The Novels of Patricia Powell: Negotiating Gender and Sexuality Across the Disjunctures of the Caribbean Diaspora," *Callaloo*, 30, no. 2 (2007) p. 535.

reference for *The Swinging Bridge* are not predominantly literary theory debates. For example, within this chapter, I reference the wider public and political discussions surrounding HIV risk groups in the broader Caribbean since the 1980s.

At a glance, most engagements with HIV/AIDS in Anglophone Caribbean literature and criticism has tended to focus on more strictly social science based approaches to HIV/AIDS versus literary engagements. Kamala Kempadoo's critical study *Sexing the Caribbean; Gender, Race and Sexual Labour* largely presents contemporary debates surrounding Anglophone Caribbean sexualities as interlinked with the codification of HIV/AIDS discourses, especially the marked silence surrounding sexuality, sex work and HIV in treatment and prevention programmes.⁹¹ For her wider research remit, this is bound up with Kempadoo's focus on women Guyanese sex workers and the importance of sexual health initiatives and their relationship to HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention programme which have been strikingly categorical in their engagement with HIV/AIDS and groups such as women sex workers.⁹² We can readily see this in one recently published collection of essays on HIV/AIDS in the Anglophone Caribbean where one essay out of twelve, by Paula Morgan, is dedicated to literary representations.⁹³ Even that essay is concerned with the largely didactic idea of what literary representations of HIV/AIDS can reveal

⁹¹ Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean; Gender, Racial and Sexual Labour*. (Oxford: Routledge, 2004).

⁹² See Kempadoo's review essay for the extent to which her research focusses on sex work as the primary lens through which to view the wider debates surrounding Caribbean sexualities. Kamala Kempadoo, "Caribbean Sexuality – Mapping the Field," *The Caribbean Review of Gender Studies, A Journal of Caribbean perspectives on Gender and Feminism* 1, no.3 (Nov 2009c).

⁹³ Paula Morgan, "Contemporary Plague and Discursive Minefield: Literary Representations of the Impact of HIV/AIDS on Caribbean Social Relations," In *Sex, Power and Taboo; Gender and HIV in the Caribbean and Beyond*, ed. Douglas, Reddock, Reid and Roberts. (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2009). p. 288-312

about the broader societal discussions surrounding sexual relations. Although such a debate on the merits of literature's wider relationship to society is of considerable interest here, such a narrow line of inquiry limits the extent to which we can gauge a range of responses to HIV/AIDS within Anglophone Caribbean literature.

With the relative lack of attention to HIV/AIDS in *The Swinging Bridge* within Anglophone Caribbean literature in mind, I reference three Anglophone Caribbean literary texts which engage with HIV/AIDS; Patricia Powell's 1994 novella *A Small Gathering of Bones*, Jamaica Kincaid's 1997 novella *My Brother* and Lawrence Scott's 1998 novel *Aelred's Sin*.⁹⁴ Beyond Anglophone Caribbean literature, I discuss Tony Kushner's 1993 American play *Angels of America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* and Johnathan Demme's 1993 Hollywood Blockbuster *Philadelphia*.⁹⁵ Kushner's play has been adapted for a 2003 mini-television series by Mike Nichols as well as an opera but I will focus strictly on the mini-television series when drawing comparisons rather than any single theatrical production of the play, the script or the operatic version.

What resonates clearly between all of these texts, including *The Swinging Bridge*, is that HIV/AIDS is a powerful lens for examining the specific juncture between male same-sex desire, cultural contexts and wider socio-political narratives. Kello in *The Swinging Bridge*, for example, is the main character who contracts HIV and dies of AIDS related complications and though Kello is Mona's brother, and his sexual preference for men does make him an

⁹⁴ Jamaica Kincaid, *My Brother*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997). Patricia Powell, *A Small Gathering of Bones*. (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2003). Lawrence Scott, *Aelred's Sin*. (London: Allison & Busby, 1998).

⁹⁵ Mike Nichols, "Angels of America." 337 mins. (California: Warner Home Video, 2008). Tony Kushner, *Angels of America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. (London: Nick Hearn Books, 2007). Johnathan Demme, "Philadelphia". 125 mins. (California: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1994).

outsider within his immediate family, he is not represented as a victim of HIV.

Textually, this is achieved in how Kello is represented as having a considerable degree of agency over his life choices at key moments. One example is the relatively controlled way in which his illness from AIDS related complications is relayed to Mona via his youngest, and most trusted, sister Babsie:

“Mona, you have to help me. We have to help Kello. You and I and Kello – we're in this together. It's just us.” She paused, then everything rushed out rapidly. “Kello is dying. He swore me to secrecy and you have to keep it secret too. He has AIDS, has had it for a while now. That's why he's in a hospice. He probably told me because I'm a nurse. Muddie and Da-Da, Johnnie and the rest of the family must never know – this is what he wants, all he wants. You must help me Mona, promise me that. We have to do this for Kello.”⁹⁶

Though the above quote shows Babsie sharing Kello's intimate private life without his due consent, there is a considerable degree of agency afforded to Kello here, even if this is tempered by a somewhat predictable family narrative and accompanying dynamic.

A similar moment which foregrounds Kello's agency is when Mona's describes Kello's migration from Trinidad ahead of the rest of his nuclear family: “In a strange way Kello was the glue that held our family together....Kello had always left his own stamp on the world. It was he who had given out parents the odd names of Muddie and Da-D as soon as he had begun to talk.”⁹⁷ Kello's migration is remembered by Mona as a marked shift in the wider family dynamic and this disjuncture is keenly experienced by Mona because, for her as a character, Kello represents both strength and individual choice. There is a degree of envy in Mona's longing to escape, like Kello, from Trinidadian island life and this is telling for where Mona situates herself in relation to Kello: “It would not be long now. I would live my own life. I would escape the way Kello

⁹⁶ Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge*, p. 47.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15-16.

had.”⁹⁸ From these brief quotes, we can gather that Kello occupies a complex place as the main character who stands up to his domineering and violent father, and he also has a larger degree of power than his sister, Mona, primarily because he is raised, and behaves, as a gender conforming Indo-Trinidadian man whilst in Trinidad. Kello is thus represented as enmeshed with the specific dynamics of Indo-Trinidadian family and social life and this is central for how his characterisation plays out.

THE SWINGING BRIDGE AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

A crucial point of reference for comparative analyses is that the 'literary' is not distinct from the 'non-literary' given that literature is embedded within historical moments, and vice versa. This is especially true of representations of HIV/AIDS given the extent to which personal, societal and political responses to HIV/AIDS are embroiled within specific contextual contours. Following on from this, given Kello's primary role within the narrative, it is especially significant that I read Kello as a queer protagonist who interrupts the Indo-Trinidadian family narrative in multiple ways. He does this in two main ways: Firstly, he is an outsider because his sexual preference for men disrupts family expectations, and, secondly, he wishes to reclaim a part of Indo-Trinidadian history with his sister Mona and this wilful act ties directly to the realities of HIV/AIDS.

The latter is especially crucial because, for him and his wider family, recuperating any imaginary family history is readily linked to Kello's own fractured displacement within the novel. Thus, Kello's place as an Indo-Trinidadian man gives him status largely because he is perceived as a gender

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 180.

conforming heterosexual Indo-Trinidadian man, even if he does not identify as heterosexual. But his sexual preference for men is complicated by a wide range of dense, and shifting, power positions and this, in turn, is complicated by his HIV positive status and his subsequent development of AIDS related complications.

A central link between Kello's subjectivity within the text, and the wider history of the Caribbean, is articulated through one of Mona's central research aims; the role of Western propaganda in promoting Haiti as a focal point for the HIV virus.⁹⁹ Although Haiti is officially not part of the Anglophone Caribbean, the wider Caribbean region was central to many of the most vociferous debates surrounding HIV/AIDS since the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is thus futile to completely separate the dominant issues affecting HIV/AIDS in the Anglophone Caribbean region from the wider region. One such example is the furore surrounding the creation of Haitians as a specific risk group category by the US centers of disease control since the late 1970s. There has been an ample amount of research conducted into the problematic connotations which arose with the creation of homosexuals and Haitians as the major risk groups. Myer and Young incisively critique how the creation of the term MSM (men who have sex with men) was unsuccessfully introduced to de-stigmatise the negative associations with the term homosexual in HIV/AIDS discourses.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, the widely circulated stereotype of HIV positive Haitians stemmed from the radical misperception that HIV/AIDS had travelled from Africa to the US via Haiti and the implementation of a ban on Haitian blood products to

⁹⁹ Ibid., *The Swinging Bridge*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ Rebecca M. Young and Ilan H Myer, "The trouble with "MSM" and "WSW": Erasure of the Sexuality-Minority Person in Public Health Discourse," *American Journal of Public Health* 95, no.7 (July 2005). p. 1144-49.

the US by the US centers for disease control was a strong expression of this institutionally sanctioned fear.¹⁰¹ Such reductive theories have now been thoroughly debunked but they reflect the necessity to critique the often circulated idea of science as 'neutral', particularly for National AIDS programs, and the need to contextualise health policies in relation to socio-historical trajectories. Steve Epstein analyses the dangers issues that arise when assuming that the role of science is politically or socially 'neutral' but Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge as intimately linked is especially relevant here too.¹⁰²

Critical here too is that the stereotype of Haitians as HIV carriers resonated with older colonial representations of Haitians as dangerous and reflected crude interpretations of African diasporic cultures as closer to 'savagery'. There is a long history of depicting African cultures as more 'savage' in comparison to European cultures and one of the most infamous is Thomas Carlyle's 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question.'¹⁰³ But the colonial paranoia and fear behind such depictions were particularly acute after the successful Haitian revolution of 1791-1804 as Haiti went from being represented as "La Perle des Antilles", or the pearl of the Caribbean, for the French empire to the only successful slave-led revolution in history. C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins: Touissant L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* is one of the seminal texts to analyse the dynamics of the Haitian

¹⁰¹ See the introduction to *The Caribbean AIDS Epidemic* for an overview of the portrayal of Haiti as the main epicentre of the HIV/AIDS pandemic during the 1980s. Edited by G Howe and A Cobley, xvi-xxii. (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2000).

¹⁰² Steve Epstein, *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism and the Politics of Knowledge*. (California: University of California Press, 1996).

¹⁰³ Thomas Carlyle, "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* XL (February 1849).

revolution and its relationship to the French empire.¹⁰⁴

However, at the same time as racial stereotypes of Haitians magnified wider colonial stereotypes, the fear and confusion generated around HIV magnified *existing* social prejudices within Caribbean contexts against Haitians from other Caribbean nations. Haitians were re-stigmatised in surrounding Caribbean contexts as well as in the US by the creation of Haitians as a specific risk category, and this is broadly comparable with contexts such as New York and London which were portrayed as having specific localities rife with HIV positive gay men in the 1980s US media.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, that the role of Western propaganda in promoting Haiti as a focal point for the HIV virus is a self-conscious theme only at the beginning of *The Swinging Bridge* and it is notable that HIV and Haiti do not surface together in the novel except for this brief reference. The portrayal of a woman Indo-Trinidadian writer recovering fragments of history is an explicit interest of Espinet in her wider work and Espinet is clearly interested in recording the lives of Indo-Trinidadian women by Indo-Trinidadian women.¹⁰⁶ Thus, HIV and Haiti are not Espinet's only concerns within the novel.

Despite the intense focus on Caribbean contexts by US centers for disease control in the 1980s, literary engagements with HIV/AIDS in Anglophone Caribbean literature have, up until the 1990s, been relatively scarce. One of the first literary texts to engage with HIV/AIDS was Patricia

¹⁰⁴ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Touissant L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. (London: Penguin, 1938).

¹⁰⁵ See Paul Farmer's *The Uses of Haiti* for a critical overview of how Haiti and Haitians have been negatively affected by geopolitical rivalries since the Haitian revolution at the beginning of the nineteenth century. (Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁶ Her interest in the visibility of Indo-Trinidadian women, and writers, is evident in Espinet's own research output as an academic critic. Such as her article entitled "The Invisible Woman in Indian Fiction," *World Literature Written in English* 29, no. 2 (1989): 116-126.

Powell's 1994 novella *A Small Gathering of Bones*, which was then followed by Jamaica Kincaid's 1997 semi-autobiographical novel *My Brother* and Lawrence Scott's 1998 novel *Aelred's Sin*.¹⁰⁷ Whilst all of these texts engage with HIV/AIDS as a theme, and Powell's and Kincaid's text are particularly important for how they were the first Anglophone Caribbean literary texts to broach HIV/AIDS and male homosexuality as serious themes, I will predominantly focus on Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* which was published in 2003. The aim here is though HIV/AIDS is a central concern within the work, HIV/AIDS, and the characters who are affected by it, are also imbricated within the transnational flows of Anglophone Caribbean histories.

Moreover, Thomas Glave notes that Anglophone Caribbean literature which looks at the romantic and erotic lives of men who love men had been strikingly absent in comparison to texts that explore relationships between women until the publication of Powell's *A Small Gathering of Bones* in 1994, which focuses on male homosexuality and HIV/AIDS.¹⁰⁸ One significant tension in setting up such a broad comparison is that the general lack of focus on the place of women who love women within the HIV/AIDS pandemic is not presented as a gap or a silence that should be explored. Makeda Silvera's critiques of the invisibility of Afro-Caribbean is relevant here, especially her focus on how the term lesbian in Afro-Caribbean cultures in Jamaica can be heavily played down in discussions surrounding homosexuality because of the

¹⁰⁷ Jamaica Kincaid, *My Brother*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997). I will elaborate on some of main comparisons between these texts and TSW in the ensuing chapter discussion.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Glave, "Introduction." In *A Small Gathering of Bones*. (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2003).

predominant focus on male homosexuality.¹⁰⁹ The silence surrounding women's sexual culture and sexual health is a much broader topic that is beyond the remit of this project but it does form a backdrop to my wider thesis at points.

TRANSNATIONALISM AND HIV/AIDS IN *THE SWINGING BRIDGE*

Timothy Chin notes that migration is central to many of the seminal Anglophone Caribbean literary texts, such as Samuel Selvon's 1956 Trinidadian novel *The Lonely Londoners*.¹¹⁰ Thus, whilst exploring the emergence of Trinidad's specific demographic makeup via transnationalism is by no means an original venture in Anglophone Caribbean literature, the unique place of transnational dialectics and materialities for HIV/AIDS, and the debates surrounding subjectivity which it raises, are relatively ignored in comparison to the more stark debates surrounding homosexuality as (un)Caribbean. Thus, although HIV/AIDS as a metaphor for global processes has been a fierce topic of debate amongst academics and non-academics alike for a number of years, there has been a relative lack of attention to the specific nuances of this for Anglophone Caribbean literature and culture, apart from a few journal articles and sub-sections in recent literary criticism.

Alison Donnell in her book *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature, Critical moments in Anglophone Literary History* suggests that

HIV/AIDS seems to mark the limit of literary works in terms of the structuring of representational agency, possibly even to mark a discursive crisis at the present moment in Caribbean – a region which is seemingly

¹⁰⁹ Makeda Silvera, "Man Royals and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians," *Feminist Studies; The Lesbian Issue* 18, no. 2 (1992): 521-532.

¹¹⁰ Timothy Chin, "The Novels of Patricia Powell: Negotiating Gender and Sexuality Across the Disjunctures of the Caribbean Diaspora," *Callaloo*, 30, no. 2 (2007) p. 535.

still dying not to speak about AIDS.¹¹¹ Donnell draws this critique from her assessment of *My Brother* and *A Small Gathering of Bones* where she ultimately concludes that neither text is able to envisage a way of representing AIDS without recourse to problematic stereotypes; particularly the difficulty of portraying AIDS in relation to the idea of homosexuality equals death and the loud silence surrounding AIDS in both texts. Diana Davidson analyses Kincaid's *My Brother* in a journal article in order to foreground the unrealistic expectations of setting up the public sphere as separate from the private.¹¹² However, there has been no sustained engagement or comparative engagement with the importance of transnationalism for textual depictions of HIV/AIDS in Anglophone Caribbean literature.

The structure of *The Swinging Bridge* heavily informs how we as readers understand the history that is being re-visited as each of the three sections of the novel takes a reader closer to Mona's childhood in Trinidad; Part One – 'Borrowed Time' from pages 1 to 114, Part Two – 'Manahabre Road' from pages 115 to 243 and Part Three – 'Caroni Dub' from pages 247 to 306. I will largely focus on Part One and Part Two as these are the main sections where Kello and AIDS are explored. The first main chapter, after the opening passage which introduces the women indentured labourers, presents us with both Mona and her wider family but especially the news that her brother Kello is ill. At this point in the narrative, it is not clear to a reader what illness is being discussed but we eventually find out that Kello has contracted the HIV virus and that he has

¹¹¹ Alison Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature, Critical moments in Anglophone Literary History*. (London: Routledge, 2005) p. 221.

¹¹² Diana Davidson, "Writing AIDS in Antigua: Tensions between Public and Private Activisms in Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*," *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial studies* 10, no. 1 (2003): 121-144.

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developed AIDS related complications.¹¹³ Significantly, as mentioned earlier,¹¹⁴ it is Babsie, Mona and Kello's younger sister, who informs Mona, and the reader, that Kello has developed AIDS. In other words, Mona is not privy to this side of Kello's life and this tension, or silence, between Mona and Kello in how he shuts her out from areas in his life, such as his reluctance to share his time with his partner Matthew with his wider family, remains throughout his life.¹¹⁵

Silences surrounding HIV/AIDS resonate with much wider representations of AIDS as unspeakable and it is notable that the first chapter section begins with this unsaying of HIV/AIDS. The social stigmas that have been associated with HIV/AIDS since the virus emerged in the 1970s are some of the most striking similarities amongst texts that engage with HIV/AIDS. One of the most widely known narratives that engages with HIV, the 1993 film *Philadelphia*, which was the first Hollywood blockbuster studio picture to engage with AIDS as a main theme, offers some powerful comparisons here.¹¹⁶ John Erman's 1985 TV film *An Early Touch of Frost* was an earlier engagement with homosexuality and HIV/AIDS but it did not have the same exposure, and thus in no way the same impact, as *Philadelphia*.¹¹⁷ For this main reason, I focus on the latter rather than *An Early Touch of Frost*.

The difficulties that arise for the main character Andrew Beckett in *Philadelphia*, who is played by Tom Hanks, in informing people that he has AIDS recurs throughout the film and such difficulties are echoed in *The Swinging Bridge*. One of the central motifs in the film which symbolises the

¹¹³ Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge*, p. 47.

¹¹⁴ See footnote 96.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 211.

¹¹⁶ Demme, "Philadelphia".

¹¹⁷ John Erman "An Early Touch of Frost". 100 mins. (USA: NBC, 1985).

stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS in general populations are the shots of various people looking questioningly at the main character's skin lesions. The stigma surrounding homosexuality and HIV is quite apparent in the film from these shots even if the film is a relatively safe portrayal of who is affected by AIDS. The more conventional side of the film is most evident in the choice of main character who is a successful white Anglo-American male lawyer and who is represented as prescriptively heroic throughout. Such depictions are most clearly seen in how Hanks' character dies just before he wins a major lawsuit against his former employers and how the portrayal of his character does not challenge some of the fundamental tenets of dominant narratives in Hollywood films; he is not just a white Anglo-American man, he is a *successful* white Anglo-American man; he is not just a respected lawyer; he is a *successful* lawyer; and, lastly, he is not just a white middle class gay man, he is a white middle class gay man in a *long term supportive partnership* who is *loved* by his family. The movie thus does not face some of the more invisible sides to HIV/AIDS, particularly the tendency for white, gay middle class men to be the main protagonists in HIV/AIDS narratives and the problems that this creates for analyses beyond white middle class America's preoccupation with representing itself.

The mini-television adaptation of Kushner's *Angels of America* also has a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) gay man as its main protagonist. Though Kushner's play, and the screenplay to an extent, are eager to engage with the dynamics behind such positioning and this is significantly different to *Philadelphia* which is more explicitly about engaging with a mainstream audience via the idea of the heroic, but palatable, main character. In the mini-

television series adaptation of *Angels of America*, this is seen in how debates surrounding 'race' is central to how much of the main plot develops and, indeed, some of the most heated debates in the film occur between a gay African-American man and gay white Jewish man over the place of 'race' in 1980s American society.

It is worth noting here that the television series deleted the sub-title 'A Gay Fantasia on National Themes' from the original title and was entitled *Angels of America*. It is not hard to imagine why the sub-title 'A Gay Fantasia on National Themes' was left out given that most television productions, especially of so called 'risky' themes, tend to leave out the more troubling, or stark, debates when appealing to a mass television audience. Lea Heiberg Madsen's review of the 2002 BBC adaptation of Sarah Waters' novel *Tipping the Velvet* assesses how the production team changed much of the explicit lesbian sex in the novel when adapting it for a BBC production.¹¹⁸ Madsen does, however, argue that the adaptation is not a major deflection from the original novel though her assessment of the choice to change aspects of the novel rests on a preconceived idea of the imagined boundaries of the BBC's wider audience.¹¹⁹ Moreover, whilst *Philadelphia* is marketing itself to a different audience than *The Swinging Bridge*, and this is not least because of the different audiences that Hollywood blockbusters and literary texts tend to inspire, the stigma surrounding AIDS is a strong point of comparison between

¹¹⁸ Lea Heiberg Madsen, "Lesbian Desire and Mainstream Media: Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* On the Screen," *Odisea* 11 (2010) 103-112. Andrew Davies, "Tipping the Velvet." 171 mins. BBC: England, 2002.

¹¹⁹ See in particular p. 108: "By re-producing, in large, Waters's depiction – respecting the centrality of the scene as well as its explicit erotic expression – *Tipping the Velvet* on screen arguably re-presents the lovers' first time as close to the original representation as possible (for a production aimed at a prime-time audience). This, consequently, makes it unnecessary to display in detail the many subsequent sexual encounters between Nan and Kitty."

the two texts.

However, I argue that the comparative strength of *The Swinging Bridge* as a text, in comparison to *Philadelphia* and Kushner's adaptation of *Angels of America*, is that it asserts the importance of a multi-layered engagement with Indo-Trinidadian histories. This is particularly because of how Espinet engages with the fragility of representing Indo-Trinidadian history as well as how she rewrites, and potential reclaims, the specific experience of Indo-Trinidadian subaltern voices in contemporary Trinidad and Canada. The idea of the subaltern here is largely in line with Gayatri Spivak's germinal article 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'¹²⁰ I do not completely agree with Spivak's assertion in her essay, where she suggests that it is more-or-less impossible to reclaim subaltern voices, particularly colonized women's voices in light of the difficulties of the archive. But I am actively foregrounding the narrative strategy within Espinet's work which largely focussed on rediscovering the absence of Indo-Trinidadian women's histories and the sheer difficulty of making this possible.

We have seen that Mona's development as a character in the novel can be read as culminating in her becoming an active member of representing wider Indo-Trinidadian history and specifically the history of marginalised women in her family. This is most clearly seen in how Mona wants to make a documentary film of the *kala pani* in the concluding section of the book where she explicitly articulates that she wants to find a way to tell the stories of these forgotten women:

I had suggested a short history of Gainder's life to accompany the display, but Bess decided against it.

¹²⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourses and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (New York: Columbia UP, 1994). p. 66-111.

“You see, Mona, the grand picture is still what everybody wants. The righteous Indian family, intact, coming across the kala pani together. Like the way migration is presented today. Not this story. Not a journey of young widows looking for a new life. Wife-murder? Beatings? You must be mad, they would say.”

That’s what they would say. Yet I believed there had to be a way, some other way, to tell this story of the courage and endurance of these forgotten women, even though, for Bess, it was too near, too risky altogether. I thought of how the first glimmerings of that perilous journey had come to me as a child, listening to the beggar woman, Baboonie, singing her grief on nights when it rained so heavily that the culvert near our house swelled to a river, sweeping everything in its path out to the open sea. It was Baboonie’s hooded figure, her music beaten out of nothing but pain, that shadowed this take that Grandma Lil had struggled to keep alive.¹²¹

There are obvious tensions in the above passage between Mona and Bess, and between Mona, the relatively privileged Indo-Trinidadian diasporal writer and practising artist, and, Baboonie, who occupies a very ambiguous place as a poor, rural but commanding Indo-Trinidadian woman singer who is always represented by someone else. In this case, Baboonie is represented via Mona, and, by extension Espinet, and the necessity of paying heed to the link between Mona and Baboonie is a crucial thread in the overarching narrative. That the word baboonie translates as 'young girl' is quite significant here as well because this nickname as a term of affection, or derision, may get easily lost in Mona's and Espinet's move to represent these characters.¹²²

The above passage resonates with the wider idea of trying to represent the agency of those left out of the dominant narrative of history and in the novel, this is bound up with the fraught place of Indo-Trinidadians in wider Trinidadian history due to the complex competition between African-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians in post-emancipation Trinidad. Earl Lovelace’s 1979 novel *The Dragon Can’t Dance* is the classic text which conveys some of the dominant

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 297.

¹²² Ibid., p. 114.

tensions between Indo-Trinidadians and African-Trinidadians during the emergence of Trinidad as an independent country from the receding British empire.¹²³ The primary Indo-Trinidadian character in Lovelace's novel, Pariag, tries to become part of the creole community but is continuously rejected.

Indeed, it is the fragile complexity of the overarching narrative thread which is a main concern of mine here as though the stark realities of contracting HIV/AIDS is meditated on in the novel, the effects of HIV/AIDS, and the silences and issues which it raises, are inseparable from the wider Indo-Trinidadian experience within the novel. Stuart Hall's statement that "the fate of Caribbean people living in the UK, the US or Canada is no more 'external' to Caribbean history than the Empire was 'external' to the so-called domestic history of Britain" echoes much of the themes surrounding migration within *The Swinging Bridge*.¹²⁴

Like *A Small Gathering of Bones*, *Aelred's Sin* and *My Brother*, there is one primary character in *The Swinging Bridge* who contracts HIV and dies of AIDS related complications. Similarly, in *The Swinging Bridge*, like the aforementioned texts, the character who contracts HIV is a man who has sex with men. However, the most significant contrast between Espinet's texts and the other two texts is firstly that Kello, who dies of AIDS related complications, is heavily invested in re-creating the transnational centre of his family history. Moreover, he is the only character, in comparison to the main characters in Kincaid's and Powell's, though not Scott's texts, to migrate outside of the Caribbean and die. For these reasons, Kello's place in the novel as the rebellious son, and the complexity of his character within the novel's plot, makes

¹²³ Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979).

¹²⁴ Stuart Hall, "Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad," *Small Axe* 6 (1999) p. 2.

him stand out as a notable character. He is the one who is able to argue with his father but he subsequently has to leave the family home due to tensions between him and his father, and he also buys back the family plot before he dies and all of this makes him instrumental to the plot of the novel. His reclaiming of the land allows Mona to begin to recapture, and revisit, some of the more contested aspects of their family history; Mona revisits the old family plot because Kello's entrusts her to complete the sale on his behalf and this propels her to engage with the difficult events of her past and the buried histories of her family's past. Kello is thus central for how Mona's re-imagining of the forgotten histories of Indo-Trinidadian women takes shape.

However, Kello's role as the son who reclaims the family plot touches on the dominance of patrilineal narratives in wider Trinidadian history and this reclaiming is a notable contrast to the painstaking efforts within the novel by Mona, and also Bess, to represent the lost voices, or places, of women within history.¹²⁵ Mona comments on this and ponders to herself from how she sees how men in her family relate to land ownership:

I wondered to myself about the men of the family and their very different responses to land. Pappy had felt all along that our land should never have been sold, while Da-Da, always reaching for the big kill, had seen that country property as an impediment to his mobility upwards and townwards. Of course, the land was no longer in the countryside, so Kello was showing good business sense. But beyond that, I thought, he was manifesting a powerful masculine drive to possess, to control, even in the face of a terminal illness.¹²⁶

Furthermore, as suggested earlier, Kello's place in his family as a gender

conforming Indo-Trinidadian man, in contrast to Mona, endows him with a level of power in comparison to her. The depiction of Mona's childhood being more marked by the social rules surrounding what is appropriate for Indo-Trinidadian

¹²⁵ Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge*, p. 282.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55-6.

girls, in comparison to Kello's relative freedom, is an ongoing tension between them when she visits him in the hospice when he is dying of AIDS related complications.¹²⁷

What I want to focus on her explicitly is the tensions and silences that are elicited from the characters in response to Kello contracting HIV and that these tensions are bound up with the dynamics of transnational dialectics and histories. I have mentioned that it is Babsie, Kello's and Mona's younger sister, who grew up in Canada, unlike Kello and Mona who grew up in Trinidad, who is initially entrusted by Kello with the fact that he is dying of AIDS. Babsie's experiences of growing up in Canada are markedly different to Kello's and Mona's experience of growing up in Trinidad and this is particularly marked in terms of how Babsie expresses a strong discomfort about how dark skin colour is viewed in Canada: "You're grounded, Mona – you and Kello came from somewhere, but I had to start from scratch like Horatio. Imagine growing up in a French city with his dark skin."¹²⁸ Moreover, Babsie's familiarity with Canada seems to allow Kello to see her as willing to hear that he has AIDS without divulging it to all and sundry.¹²⁹ From this, it is obvious that the tensions surrounding Kello contracting HIV, and developing AIDS related complications, are enmeshed with his place in the family and Mona's role in fulfilling his wishes. Mona's and Kello's parents deny what Kello's illness is in their own ways: "Muddie clung to the lymphoma lie, but I knew Da-Da better than that. He wordlessly refused it."¹³⁰ Mona, moreover, wonders about whether Kello came out to his wife when Kello met his partner Matthew, and she reflects on

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 203.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 230.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 230.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 158.

her own place within the family in relation to Kello's ability to think of himself.¹³¹

Kello's HIV status and AIDS related complications, thus, place a magnifying glass over Mona's family and this is complicated further by the narrative device of Mona as an Indo-Trinidadian women who is recuperating the symbolic family plot on Kello's behalf. Thus, though Kello's illness shocks the very core of Mona's family, his agency as a gender conforming Indo-Trinidadian man challenges the stereotype of homosexuality equals death and complicates Mona's focus on recovering forgotten women's voices as this search is bound up with his illness. I want to focus on the familial bonding between Mona and Kello during Kello's time in the hospice from hereon to demonstrate the inextricable connectedness between Kello's experience of AIDS and the depiction of Mona as a practising Indo-Trinidadian artist. This link, I argue, is central to the re-imagining of Indo-Trinidadian history as transnational for Mona, and, by extension, Espinet's wider impetus in *The Swinging Bridge*.

Mona and Kello demonstrate a close filial bond during Mona's re-telling of her childhood and this comes to the fore when Kello is in the hospice. This is most clearly expressed by Mona when she says that "When [her and Kello] were alone now, Kello took to hugging me often."¹³² However, Kello is careful to keep Mona, and his wider family, away from the time he spends with his partner Matthew in the early evenings. Mona realises this when she arrives at the hospice one early evening when she finds them together:

Kello told us that the early evening was the worst time of the day for him, but I showed up one day after supper even though he had asked us to leave him alone then....That was the night I met Matthew, and finally I understood everything.....I looked up at my brother, propped high on his

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 160.

¹³² Ibid., p. 158.

pillows, his breathing laboured, and noticed that he was staring at me grimly, waiting for something. I moved to the doorway and he made no attempt to stop me.¹³³

Although Mona's response to witnessing Kello and his partner Matthew

demonstrates a recognition of the close warmth between the two men, I am particularly interested in the contrast between this observation and the previous quote, on page 64, where Mona focussed on the competing egos of the men in her family. In the above passage, Mona is a witness to the relationship between Kello and his partner and this is not usually something that Kello allows his biological family to share. But Mona interprets Kello's vulnerability in this scene as something akin to how she understands love:

I wanted to tell Kello that I knew something about love, that I too had risked much to understand it. I knew that loving brought us fully to life, forced us to risk ourselves, and I was so happy for him and Matthew. One afternoon when I was alone with my brother, I began talking about how I found Matt to be a beautiful person. But Kello only stared at me in silence.¹³⁴

What is crucial in this exchange here is the power of Kello's silence in the presence of Mona. Although Mona's character acts as the eyes and ears of her family, particularly in how her mother relies on her to balance the demands of different family members, the refusal of Kello to share Mona's point of view, or at least acknowledge it, is a significant tension for Mona, and for Espinet's wider novel, in what it cannot represent. Here, this is specifically the silence surrounding same-sex relationships for the transnational Indo-Trinidadian family. The scene is central for both the development of Kello's character in the wider narrative, where we the readers get to see one of Kello's most intimate and vulnerable relationships, and for Mona's development as a narrator. In this scene, Mona cannot know, or easily represent, every aspect of her diasporal

¹³³ Ibid., p. 163.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 163-4.

family and this is in tension with Kello's contraction of the HIV virus which spurs Mona to begin her search for Indo-Trinidadian women. Thus, though the bond between Mona and Kello is a strong factor for why Mona begins to re-imagine her family history, her role as the one who represents others, and by extension Espinet's, involves recognising the contradictions of her transnational family bonds.

CONCLUSION:

Though Ramabai's *The Swinging Bridge* is an ambitious text in how it engages with the myriad complexities of Indo-Trinidadian history, there is a central contradiction in the text because of how one of the main characters, who sets in motion Mona's search to re-present marginalised women's voices, is markedly silent. Thus, though neither HIV/AIDS, nor homosexuality, is equated with death in the book, the power of Kello's silence attests to the dense, and, at times, unsayable contradictions of Indo-Trinidadian histories: That the search for transnational Indo-Trinidadian histories is bound up with the closeness, and difficulties, of filial and familial bounds.

CHAPTER TWO:POST(ANTI-)APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE, HIV/AIDS AND
TRANSNATIONALITY: THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL IN SOUTH AFRICAN
LITERARY FICTIONINTRODUCTION:

The following chapter analyses literary depictions of HIV/AIDS in Phaswane Mpe's 2001 fictional novella *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* which is set in the immediate post-apartheid period between 1991-1998.¹³⁵ I am interested in the place which the local, global and the transnational, and the relationship of these to HIV/AIDS as a theme, occupy within the text in light of the relative lack of engagement with HIV/AIDS in post-apartheid South African literary fiction. By focussing on the uneven, interconnected relationship between the local and the global, I demonstrate that Mpe's engagement with textual representations of HIV/AIDS is part of a wider postcolonial/queer debate surrounding the dialectic between the local and the global. In conclusion, I focus on Mpe's explicit, and multi-layered, exploration of HIV/AIDS in relation to what John C. Hawley has deemed post(anti-)apartheid South African literature.¹³⁶ I then consider if HIV/AIDS is a dominant concern in contemporary South African literature and culture and what bearing this has on newly emerging comparative literature approaches.

Throughout, I foreground the socio-historical background to the post-apartheid context, as well as highlighting the potential for texts, like Mpe's, to

¹³⁵ Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*.

¹³⁶ John C. Hawley's "The Emerging Fictionalization of AIDS in Africa," *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas* 21 no.4 (2004), p. 40.

broaden the predominant focus in comparative studies, which take the US as the starting point, *and* the dominant social realist approach in most South African literary fiction prior to the official 'end' of apartheid in 1994.¹³⁷ Such an approach offers viable alternatives given the impasses which have become attached to HIV/AIDS in South Africa and beyond, especially the altercations between the ex-South African president Thabo Mbeki and his opponents. Moreover, this analysis addresses the difficulty of moving away from the perceived role of literature as protest during the apartheid era, and the complex legacies such a particular literary role has bequeathed to the post-apartheid period.

SOUTH AFRICAN LITERARY FICTION, HIV/AIDS AND METANARRATIVES

Welcome to Our Hillbrow charts the lives and deaths of several South African characters who either live in, or are connected to, the bustling Johannesburg inner-city district of Hillbrow in the immediate post-apartheid period.¹³⁸ Migration is central to the unfolding of the plot as the main protagonist, Refentše, a black South African man in his early twenties, migrates to Hillbrow from Tiragalong in 1995 to study at the nearby University of Witwatersrand, or Wits as it is colloquially referred to within the text and contemporary South Africa.¹³⁹ The focus on a migrant is significant for the

¹³⁷ Apartheid was the South African political system of white minority rule from 1948-1994 though unofficially it did break down prior to 1994. F. W. De Klerk's announcement in 1990 that he was going to unban South African political parties is widely perceived as the 'official' beginning of the end of apartheid. BBC 1950-2005 archives, February 2nd 1990: *De Klerk Dismantles apartheid in South Africa* 1990 [cited February 15th 2012]. Available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/2/newsid_2524000/2524997.stm

¹³⁸ Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*.

¹³⁹ Tiragalong is located in the northernmost South African province of Limpopo. Hillbrow is an inner-city area of Johannesburg and Johannesburg is located in the Gauteng province. Both the Gauteng and Limpopo provinces are in the northern part of South Africa where Gauteng

context of Johannesburg because the nineteenth century industrialisation of South Africa introduced the migrant labour system to the region, and Johannesburg was one of the initial sites of this development due to the discovery of gold.¹⁴⁰ It is thus no surprise that Refentše's life and death are pitched as encased within the narrative as his life, and afterlife, connect the various other characters throughout the ensuing narrative.

Refentše's ethnic background is not foregrounded apart from the fact that he is a Sepedi speaker and that he is aware that publishing in Sepedi in post-apartheid South Africa is significantly more difficult than publishing in English.¹⁴¹ In omitting ethnicity labels, Mpe may have chosen to deliberately ignore some of the more heated ideas of ethnic difference between some black South Africans as this was a major feature in violence leading up to the end of apartheid. In brief summary, certain ethnicities became linked with political parties during apartheid and this became particularly heightened in the 1980s. Associating Zulus with Inkatha is the most poignant examples of ethnicity being mapped onto political divisions during apartheid and post-apartheid but some critics argue that the intense focus on ethnicity as an identity marker is a characteristic feature of globalisation in the late twentieth century. Morris Szeftel, for example, assesses the dynamics of ethnicity within South Africa as mirroring a more global process.¹⁴²

Mpe's wish to move away from such tensions is also visible in how the

is south of Limpopo. Limpopo was the author's place of birth and Mpe also migrated to Hillbrow in the mid-nineties to study at the University of Witwatersrand. He remained living in Johannesburg until his death in 2004.

¹⁴⁰ The meaning and etymology of the word 'Johannesburg' aptly foregrounds its history as the word Johannesburg translates as 'place of gold' or 'city of gold'.

¹⁴¹ Sepedi is one of the eleven official languages of post-apartheid South Africa

¹⁴² See Morris Szeftel, "Ethnicity and Democratisation in South Africa," *Review of African Political Economy* 21 no. 60 (1994) p. 185-99.

main contrasts between the characters are cast as rural versus urban, and South African versus other African nationalities. The latter is arguably directly linked to the ethnic and political tensions of post-apartheid South African politics. Merle Lipton, for example, charts South Africa's foreign policy to Zimbabwe in the post-apartheid period and remarks that it is noticeably conservative in contrast to the ideals of the anti-apartheid movement.¹⁴³ Arjun Appadurai's central argument in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions in Globalization* chimes with this argument where he argues that the local politics of ethnicity is inevitably enmeshed with globalisation, if even via an 'us versus them' globalisation model.¹⁴⁴ For the South African context, these discussions, as demonstrated by L. Vail in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, need to acknowledge the creation of tribal identities via missionary discourses and the subsequent embrace of these as identity labels.¹⁴⁵

Refentše's life, and the circumstances leading up to his death, are the predominant focus of the first section of the book 'The Map.'¹⁴⁶ During this section, the omniscient narrator, and Refentše's own first-person narrative, chart his arrival to Hillbrow, his brief happiness as a University tutor at Wits until he finds out that his lover, Lerato, has cheated on him after which he commits suicide. The remaining sections of the text loosely follow Refilwe, also a migrant from Tiragalong to Hillbrow, and an old school friend of Refentše's, who

¹⁴³ Merle Lipton, "Understanding South Africa's Foreign Policy: The Perplexing Case of Zimbabwe," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 16 no. 3 (2009) p. 331-346.

¹⁴⁴ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions in Globalization*. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁵ L Vail (ed), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. (London : Currey ; Berkeley : University of California Press, 1989). Vail's broader argument is the necessity to foreground the creation of colonial ideas of 'difference' for understandings of ethnicity and identity in South Africa from the nineteenth century.

¹⁴⁶ Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, pps. 1-28.

migrates to Oxford, England to study after spending a few years in Tiragalong. She eventually returns to Tiragalong after completing her studies in England where she dies, at the very end of the text, from AIDS related complications soon after returning from Oxford to Tiragalong. I argue throughout that the main contrasts within the text tie directly to the idea of HIV/AIDS as the central literary theme in this post-apartheid text.

It is important for my analyses of HIV/AIDS that Refilwe discovers that she has contracted the HIV virus when she is abroad as HIV is a global issue beyond the immediate South African context within the text and the chapter discussion. For example, how she contracted HIV is cast as ambiguous at best as her Nigerian lover in England, whom she meets abroad while in Oxford, also discovers that he has contracted the HIV virus. But, it is not clear if either person has contracted it from the other, or if they have contracted it before they migrated to England. Furthermore, it is significant that the final section revolves around deaths due to AIDS related complications as there is an impending futility in the text concerning how to represent HIV/AIDS, particularly by characters such as Refilwe who wishes to write a story of a HIV positive woman. The story-within-the-story trope foregrounds the importance of meta-narratives within the text and will be discussed later in the chapter.

Directly linked to the idea of meta-narrative is the central place Refentše occupies within overall narrative and the connection between his life and death and the unfolding plot. As readers, we are introduced to his life and death in the opening line but importantly he is evoked in relation to the hustle and bustle of Hillbrow via the elegiac tone of an omniscient narrator: "If you were still alive, Refentše, child of Tiragalong, you would be glad that Bafana Bafana lost to

France in the 1998 Soccer World Cup fiasco.”¹⁴⁷ Lizzy Attree and Rob Gaylard remark that one of the text's most striking characteristics is that the opening section informs the reader that the central character is dead.¹⁴⁸ However, at the same time as the narrator draws attention to this, the line also attests to the *ambiguousness* of Refentše's place within Hillbrow *and* the overall narrative as we are introduced to Hillbrow at the same time as we are informed that he is dead. Refentše is thus presented as tied to Hillbrow but the uncomfortable closeness between his life and death is synonymous with a reader's introduction to Hillbrow. The elegiac tone of the omniscient narrator adds to the narrative complexity of this opening section as a reader is invited to see Hillbrow as a bustling urban place against the backdrop of a deceased character.

More importantly, for the following chapter discussion, after the stark introduction of an already dead main protagonist, the ensuing text charts where he came from and uncovers why his choice to commit suicide in Hillbrow is not the result of any one factor. His life is portrayed as a combination of his life choices and life chances in Hillbrow, his rural homestead, Tiragalong, and the amalgamation of the past and the present in South Africa within which Hillbrow is imaginatively re-created. Some of the text's themes testify to the specific complexity of Hillbrow within the post-apartheid 'nation'; intense xenophobia towards to non-South African migrants in Hillbrow and Hillbrowians in Tiragalong; the pressures of living in the densely populated inner-city district of Hillbrow; and the universally invasive effects of HIV/AIDS in Hillbrow and wider

¹⁴⁷ Bafana Bafana are the South African men's national soccer team. Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, p.1.

¹⁴⁸ Lizzy Attree, "AIDS, Space and the City in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*." In *Words Gone Two Soon*, ed. Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, (Pretoria: Umgangatho Media & Communications (Pty) Ltd, 2005), p.190. See also Rob Gaylard, "Stories and Storytelling in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*." In *Words Gone Two Soon*, p. 180-186.

South Africa in contrast to the popular myths surrounding the cause and spread of HIV. Other themes are quite representative of the stark realities of *wider* post-apartheid South Africa beyond the specific Hillbrow and Johannesburg context, such as the themes of rural-urban divide and the ambiguous relationship to place.

A circular narrative style is apparent here from the brief overview of the plot, but, so is the importance of moving outside of not just Tiragalong but also wider South Africa to England then returning to Tiragalong. This is also evident in how Refentše does not disappear in the later sections but rather looks down from 'Heaven' within the text at the lives of those still living in Hillbrow and Tiragalong. 'Heaven' appears throughout as a space where Refentše, and other deceased characters, continue to witness life on earth and can comment amongst themselves, and to the reader, about events happening on earth in Hillbrow and the wider contexts within the narrative. Indeed, one of the sections focuses predominantly on the deceased characters' afterlives in 'Heaven'.¹⁴⁹

The space of 'Heaven' is thus a central narrative device because as well acting as a reflective device for the reader, it also acts as a narrative glue by offering a contrast to the linear temporal plot which, although expands beyond South Africa and back again, is still defined by the limits of linearity. Mpe thus utilises a circular narrative as characters do not simply disappear after their deaths but reappear in the afterlife where they are able to profess their opinions on life on earth whilst in 'Heaven'. Moreover, the existence of 'Heaven' allows a reader, and the plethora of deceased characters, to reassess linear time and death, particularly given the unexpected passing of so many of the central

¹⁴⁹ This is section two 'Notes from Heaven'. Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, p. 29-62.

characters whose deaths often constitute many of the key narrative turning points. Alongside Refentše dying and looking down from 'Heaven' on the remaining characters, Refentše's lover Lerato and Refentse's best friend also die and appear in 'Heaven' where they are reunited with Refentse.¹⁵⁰

The specific effects of the circular narrative links closely to a central theme in the book. This is the difficulty of communicating the harsh day-to-day realities of post-apartheid South via oral and written stories and the possible issues which arise when certain nuances in both oral and written stories are left out in order to present an easy to listen/digestible story.¹⁵¹ For this reason, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* contains much self-conscious meta-narrative as we the readers, and the characters themselves, are embroiled in both the circular narrative mode and the theme of story-telling. Crucially, story-telling in the novella is a primary mode of representing events but the politics of story-telling, in both the publishing world and the more mundane day-to-day level, is a central tension within the wider narrative. Moreover, HIV/AIDS, and the wish to write a life story of a person affected by HIV/AIDS, is a central unresolved theme within the novella and this will be discussed throughout the chapter.

LITERARY SILENCE(S) AND TRANSNATIONAL HIV/AIDS DISCOURSES

It may appear from the above overview that HIV/AIDS is a major theme within South African literature. However, John C. Hawley remarks on the relatively slow engagement with HIV/AIDS in South African literary fiction since the 1980s apart from a small, but growing, body of autobiographical

¹⁵⁰ Sammy is stabbed on page 52 and Lerato kills herself on page 66.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 61.

accounts.¹⁵² On one level, such reluctance is intertwined with the rigorous censorship of artistic, critical and political material during the apartheid regime where literary silence(s) are, in part, a product of the broader South African context since 1948. The South African born writer Bessie Head's life and work attests to the effects of such censorship and the concomitant need, as was perceived by those critical of the apartheid regime, for South African literature to protest against the apartheid state. Like many of her contemporaries who critiqued the apartheid state, Head fled to neighbouring Botswana where she remained there until her death in 1986. Her work was predominantly pitched in relation to the idea of literature as protest and this was most visible through her deployment of magical realism and political themes in one of her most recognised literary works; the 1973 novel *A Question of Power*.¹⁵³

A major contrast between Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and Head's *A Question of Power* is that the former was published in the post-apartheid period and was not subjected to the same form of scrutiny as the latter. But the effects of censorship have influenced how HIV/AIDS has been negotiated as a theme to date in post-apartheid texts, such as Mpe's, and Hawley's above critique underscores this. This is particularly apparent in not only how literary fiction has been directly affected by censorship, but how the emergence of the idea of literature as protest during apartheid continues to affect the perceived role of literature in post-apartheid South Africa. Literary fiction thus reflects the conditions, and effects, of the apartheid period and the role of censorship is central when analysing the silence(s) surrounding HIV/AIDS in literary fiction

¹⁵² Hawley, "South African Writing in English."

¹⁵³ Bessie Head. *A Question of Power*. (London: Heinemann, 1986).

since the 1980s.

Within *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, there are specific references to the barriers faced when publishing in the post-apartheid period, and the effects of apartheid censorship are premised as a major cause of this.¹⁵⁴ A large part of the blame is attributed to the marginalisation of non-English languages, and the gap between publishing houses and the day-to-day realities of post-apartheid South Africans. There are also references to the censorship of explicit language during apartheid and the knock-on effects of this for writers:

Now, for nearly fifty years, the system of Apartheid had been confusing writers in this way. Trying to make them believe that euphemism equals good morals. That if you said shit, you were immoral and an unsuitable writer for school children, with their highly impressionable minds.¹⁵⁵

The third person narrative voice here is didactic and frank but also critically sympathetic to the effects of apartheid for writers. But, what is most important is that the indictments of apartheid link the text directly to literature produced during apartheid.

Alongside the self-conscious allusions to apartheid-era censorship, sex is also a major theme, particularly the perceived sexual promiscuity and, as referenced in the above quote, the perceived 'moral depravity', which accompany the urban inner city context of Hillbrow. The following quote is taken from the opening section and presents a strong judgement of the urban locality of Hillbrow in Johannesburg where the novella is set: "There were others who went even further, saying that AIDS was caused by the bizarre sexual behaviour of the Hillbrowians. How could any man have sex with another man? They demanded to know."¹⁵⁶ The perspective here is from someone

¹⁵⁴ Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, pps. 55-58.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56-57.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

living outside of Hillbrow, and Mpe is clearly diverging from apartheid censorship with the inclusion of sex as an extended theme. At the same time, there is a distinct South African history being referenced as a central debate in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century South Africa was the effect of urban city contexts on indigenous African groups, especially with respect to sexuality.¹⁵⁷

These concerns were underscored by a paternalistic and colonial gaze which was linked to the idea of South Africa as an emerging 'white nation' and the perceived need to control the movement of black African migrant labourers.¹⁵⁸ Such anxieties are examined by the critics Marc Epprecht and William J. Spurlin who explore the effects of the migrant labour system on the development of erotic bonds between male migrants during the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁹ Deborah Posel also presents a cogent and comprehensive analysis of the politicisation of sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa, particularly in terms of how ideas of 'tradition' have been recast as fixed and authentic.¹⁶⁰ Andrew Tucker offers similar critiques when he focusses on the campaign which led to introduction of gay marriage in South Africa as this campaign evoked quite polarised responses to the idea of homosexuality and its supposed incompatibility with ideas of 'tradition'.¹⁶¹ Ideas of tradition, in light of these

¹⁵⁷ Saul Dubow, "Race, Civilisation and Culture: The Elaboration of Segregationist Discourse in the Inter-War Years," In *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, ed. S. Marks and S. Trapido, (London: Longman, 1987) p. 75.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.85.

¹⁵⁹ Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005a). Spurlin, *Imperialism within the Margins: Queer Representations and the Politics of Culture in Southern Africa*. Both critics present a broadly similar critique of the heteronormative lens of earlier studies of mine marriages between some of the male mine workers but they have quite contrasting interpretations of the significance of the male-male erotic bonds in other respects.

¹⁶⁰ Posel, "'Getting the Nation Talking about Sex': Reflections on the Politics of Sexuality and 'Nation-Building' in Post-Apartheid South Africa."

¹⁶¹ Tucker, *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*.

various critiques, are bound up with the wider dynamics of power and this is acutely visible in debates surrounding sexuality since the late nineteenth century. Mpe's text, for these reasons, is clearly engaging with a wider South African historical narrative.

However, the link between sex and the urban city context is also part of a wider modernist discourse surrounding the dangers and excesses of the modern city. The text readily partakes in these discussions and the most important are the distinct identities attached to ideas of sex in the Johannesburg urban city, such as the widely circulated stereotypes of AIDS being spread by foreigners, loose women and homosexuals.¹⁶² Although HIV/AIDS is a distinct post 1945 concern, the anxieties surrounding the effects of urban environments on people's 'moral characters' was a visible theme in many emerging modernist texts. James Joyce's 1922 modernist novel *Ulysses* focusses on the late nineteenth century urban Dublin environment, and the psychological pressures experienced by literary characters within Dublin as a British colony and a urban city context.¹⁶³ Comparing Joyce's text with Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* demonstrates the salience of the urban city context for global literary debates.

Indeed, within *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, there is a distinct reference to Irish literature for Irish people. Refilwe, a primary character and narrator within the book, proudly shares Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* to an Irish man who is interested in Irish literature when she is studying abroad for a Masters at Oxford Brookes.¹⁶⁴ The scene is framed as about the merits of discussing different national literature:

¹⁶² Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, p. 4.

¹⁶³ James Joyce, *Ulysses*. (Paris: Shakespeare and Company, 1922).

¹⁶⁴ Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, p. 107. Zakes Mda, *Ways of Dying* (New York: Picador, 2002).

The owner of the pub was a well-read Irishman [sic]; well-read at least in Irish literature. He was able to engage in complex discussions on Irish literature and nationalism and was willing to listen and be informed on literatures from other parts of the world.¹⁶⁵

There is thus a self-conscious awareness of literature and its role in both raising debate and setting a precedent for transnational connections within the book.

Moreover, Refilwe's friends and comrades when she is abroad are presented as a group of foreigners who bond because they are not of the majority:

None of the five was a native of Oxford, nor of any part of England. They were South African, Indian, Irish, Spanish and Greek – a United Nations of sorts. Which was why it was easy for them go start a conversation at their first meeting.¹⁶⁶

Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is thus engaging with the idea of difference on both a local level in South Africa but also a global or transnational level.

For these reasons, a major consideration in this chapter is the extent to which post-apartheid South African literary fiction does not break from the past as I discuss the contrasts between *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and previous literary texts and traditions in both local South African contexts and wider global discussions, such as modernism. A particular focus is that the stereotyping of urban environments as synonymous with perverse subjectivities is easily tied to the distinct reading of Africans in cities from the late nineteenth century but it is recast under HIV/AIDS discourses as something 'new'.

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE 'NEW' SOUTH AFRICA

Whilst recognising that South African literature both pre- and post-apartheid engaged with the specific conditions of apartheid censorship in creative and varied ways, it is important to recognise that the apartheid regime did not only target literary writers. Moreover, it is necessary to recognise the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 105.

wider political economy for any robust contextual analysis of HIV/AIDS in literary fiction, even if the effects of the apartheid-era are readily apparent in literary engagements with HIV/AIDS. The interrelationship between political economy and textual depictions is central for the broader thesis argument but, more specifically, for this chapter, the concept of political economy pinpoints what Wamsley and Zaid describe as “the interrelationship between structure of rule (polity) and a system for producing and exchanging goods and services (economy).”¹⁶⁷ Although an admittedly broad definition, I utilise the concept of the political economy to demonstrate that literary fiction is *produced* by the wider political economy and, moreover, that literary fiction is also *productive* of that wider political economy. I stress that this is particularly true for my analyses of HIV/AIDS within the text which repeatedly allude to wider debates surrounding South African subjectivities in discussions of HIV/AIDS.

A main place to start with the political economy is the public sphere. In contrast to literary fiction, debates surrounding HIV/AIDS in the public political sphere have been markedly vocal and have, at times, occupied the central foci of political concerns in post-apartheid South Africa. Such debates have occurred at both the national and grassroots levels and have directly involved ideas surrounding HIV/AIDS since the auto-immune disease began to be formally medicalised in the 1970s and 1980s. The most high profile of these exchanges was between the Treatment Action Campaign, or TAC, during Thabo Mbeki's presidency from 1999-2008.¹⁶⁸ Most of the antagonistic claims over the

¹⁶⁷ Gary L. Wamsley and Mayer N. Zaid, “The Political Economy of Public Organisations,” *Public Administration Review* 33 no. 1 (1973) p. 63.

¹⁶⁸ TAC have pressurised both international pharmaceutical companies and the various post-apartheid governments to address material inequalities, and the effects of this on the health care system, within South Africa. See their website for a history of TAC and their

years, such as the dichotomous tirades between the supporters of Mbeki and his political opponents such as TAC, together with the fact that HIV/AIDS was characterised as a global disease pandemic, point to the layered and resonant difficulties which surround HIV/AIDS in the South African national context. I am referring to critics such as Cindy Patton when I refer to HIV/AIDS as a global disease. Patton characterises the naming of HIV/AIDS in the 1970s and 1980s, and the evolution of its aetiology, as a process which reflected the marked divisions of the modern global order, especially how this played out in the emergence of risk groups and geographical incidence maps.¹⁶⁹ Patton characterises this specific moment of HIV/AIDS as both created, and heightened, by global forces and for her, this intense demarcation of the globe into a global pandemic is the most symbolic legacy of the advent of HIV/AIDS. I largely concur with Patton on this though, notably, most of her findings are drawn from western contexts and studies though this is a reflection of HIV/AIDS studies more broadly, and Patton is often critically mindful of her research gaps.

For the South African context, the most poignant assessment of these debates is made by Daniel Macintosh. He characterises the main tension between the differing sides as TAC viewing HIV/AIDS as a health crisis, particularly the ready availability of Antiretrovirals (ARVs), whereas the South African government represented HIV/AIDS during Mbeki's presidency via the idea of race and racism, the specific effects of apartheid on the South African health care system and the material inequalities of post-apartheid South Africa.¹⁷⁰ However, it should be noted that Macintosh's review of the South

contemporary presence in South Africa: <http://www.tac.org.za/>

¹⁶⁹ Cindy Patton. *Globalizing AIDS*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

¹⁷⁰ Daniel Macintosh, "The Politicisation of HIV/AIDS in South Africa: Responses of the

African government's response is gleaned from a vast range of responses.

There is a notable lack of transparency in the South African government's response as would be expected in an overview of ten years or so, and although I generally agree with Macintosh's analysis, it is difficult to overview the response during Mbeki's presidency as transparently as he outlines. Moreover, the most predominant and striking characteristic of Macintosh's analysis is the lack of a clear policy on HIV/AIDS by the South African government from 1999-2008. Indeed, what is as equally crucial as the lack of a clear policy is that decisions as to what constitutes HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention programmes continue to envelop local and national South African contexts.¹⁷¹

Though representations of HIV/AIDS in literature differ markedly from these debates, it is worth noting that a significant added pressure on post-apartheid literary texts, which resonates with the public political debates, are the contentions surrounding what is the 'New' South Africa or the rainbow nation. The phrase the 'New' South Africa was used to symbolise the break from the apartheid past in the early 1990s. In tandem with this, the term 'rainbow nation' was coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, during the final stages of apartheid, and it has been utilised by some, most notably Nelson Mandela, to foreground the multicultural realities of South Africa. The portrayal of Mandela as the father of the South African 'rainbow nation' exemplifies the extent to which Mandela's presidency is linked to the founding of the post-apartheid 'rainbow nation'.

Recent newspaper coverage of the ailing Mandela still refers to him in tandem

Treatment Action Campaign and South African Government, 1994-2004 – A Literature Review". CSSR Working Paper. No. 244. March 2009. Available at <http://www.cssr.uct.ac.za/sites/cssr.uct.ac.za/files/pubs/WP244.pdf>

¹⁷¹ TAC, for example, continue to campaign for the implementation of universal access to HIV treatment and prevention programmes as well as campaigning for other local health related issues See TAC's website for a detailed outline of the past and present campaigns. <http://www.tac.org.za/campaigns/build-local-and-provincial-leadership-hiv>

with the idea of the 'Rainbow nation' though some are markedly critical.¹⁷²

However, Neville Alexander critiques the myth of national unity propounded in the 'rainbow nation' as, for him, this myth has deflected attention away from the complex legacies of apartheid.¹⁷³ Alexander specifically critiques that "non-racialism is the founding myth of the new South Africa" as this myth making ignores much of the past prior to the official end of apartheid.¹⁷⁴ I would add that it also distracts from more heated critiques in the post-apartheid period and *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is one way in which we can see this. For example, the violence of the urban context of Hillbrow is attested to throughout the narrative and it is presented as part and parcel of an urban context in post-apartheid South Africa. Such as the casual violence expressed during the 1995 world cup in the opening lines which is presented as traumatic and casual:

If you were still alive, Refentše, child of Tiragalong, you would be glad that Bafana Bafana lost to France in the 1998 Soccer World Cup fiasco. Of course you supported the squad. But at least now, you would experience no hardships walking to your flat through the streets of Hillbrow.¹⁷⁵

Throughout my chapter, I utilise the phrase 'New' South Africa rather than the 'rainbow nation' primarily because many literary critics have focussed on responses to the 'New' South Africa in literary fiction. Njabulo Ndebele has focussed on the move away from spectacle in apartheid literature, particularly spectacle as linked to political oppression, to what he terms 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary' in his synonymously titled book of essays.¹⁷⁶ Ndebele's

¹⁷² Anonymous, "Mandela father of the Rainbow nation," *AFP* (June 24, 2013).

¹⁷³ Neville Alexander, "'The Moment of Manoeuvre': 'Race,' Ethnicity and Nation in Post-Apartheid South Africa,'" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 15 no.1 (1995).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁶ Njabulo S.Ndebele's *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings on South Africa* prefigures many of the soon to emerge 1990s South African literary debates. (KwaZulu-Natal: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006).

articulation here brings to the fore the importance of literature as a critical medium for understanding the symbolic place of HIV/AIDS in the 'New' South Africa. This is most clearly reflected in how differing conceptions of what is new in the 'New' South Africa are an integral part of post-apartheid literary fiction, such as *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, and for this main reason, literary fiction is an important part of the articulation of what many call the 'New' South Africa in the post-apartheid period. The aforementioned debates within the text surrounding story telling are strong examples of this, especially stories surrounding HIV/AIDS in the post-apartheid period: "You, Refentše, had written the story of your fictitious scarecrow heroine in an attempt to grapple with the profound questions of euphemism, xenophobia, prejudice and AIDS, to which Tiragalong pretended to have answers."¹⁷⁷ Importantly, there is a clear correlation here with *The Swinging Bridge* where writing has a particular link to interpreting life's major questions. Indeed, both texts self-consciously reflect on the writer's role, and limits, in the face of these challenges.

Moreover, analyses of the resonance between literature and wider debates within South Africa reveals how central literary depictions are for gauging what is the 'New' South Africa. The animosities expressed during Mbeki's presidency which were couched in quite symbolic and effervescent language, and pitched around heated charges of western racism versus political ineffectiveness, merely scratched the surface of the complex milieu surrounding HIV/AIDS in the post-apartheid South African context.¹⁷⁸ Further analysis of the

¹⁷⁷ Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, p. 59

¹⁷⁸ Some of the coverage of the XIII International AIDS conference in Durban in 2000 exemplifies the heightened tone of these debates. Sarah Boseley, 'Mbeki Insists Poverty Causes AIDS'. *Guardian*. Monday 10th July 2000: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2000/jul/10/sarahboseley1>

symbolic tensions reveals that what is really being contested are differing conceptions of what constitutes the 'New' South Africa in the fragile post-apartheid period.

Within my chapter discussion, the phrase the 'New' South Africa is predominantly used to refer to the specific dynamics of post-apartheid cultural production in post-apartheid South Africa though it is also attributed to Mandela's and Tutu's vision of South Africa in the immediate post-apartheid period.¹⁷⁹ The 'New' is in brackets because there is a considerable debates surrounding to what degree post-apartheid South Africa breaks from the past. I utilise the phrase 'New' South Africa to raise these debates rather than asserting that the idea of a 'New' South Africa is a fixed reality. Moreover, I am utilising the term 'New' with a degree of critical scepticism, particularly in light of the contested idea of what is the 'New' South Africa and 'New' for whom and what exactly differentiates it from the 'Old' South Africa.

Indeed, an important characteristic of *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is that it does not propose a solution to the myriad difficulties of the 'New' South Africa. Instead, it overviews some of the difficulties which face South Africans in the 'New' South Africa whilst acknowledging the wider relationship between South African and other African migrants and the relationship between South Africa and the wider global world. A key way in which the text does this is partly because of the connotations attached to Hillbrow as a distinct area within Johannesburg: Hillbrow was one of the first areas in South Africa to become an unofficial non-whites city district during apartheid or was one of the first areas, as Neville Hoad puts it, “to go gray” during apartheid and it also became a

¹⁷⁹ See the introduction for an outline of the specific tensions for the 'New' South Africa as the 'rainbow nation'.

destination for many African migrants in the early post-apartheid years.¹⁸⁰

Moreover, Hillbrow was one of the only areas to put forward a pro-gay rights candidate in the whites only apartheid elections in the late 1980s. This adds another level of complexity to this area which was in a position to be socially engineered along apartheid lines in the way that other areas were, such as Sophiatown. Sophiatown, a largely black suburb of Johannesburg in the 1950s, was forcibly dismantled in 1955 under the apartheid regime in order to re-shape the area as a whites only district as it was thought to lie too close to the white suburbs given because it was mostly composed of black Africans. It was renamed 'Triomf' after 1955 but its original name was restored in 2006; Triomf translates as triumph.¹⁸¹

However, that a pro-gay rights candidate was put forward in the elections is not meant to suggest here that Hillbrow is an area that is somehow inherently 'subversive'. Daniel Conway in 'Queering Apartheid: The National Party's 1987 'Gay Rights' Election Campaign in Hillbrow' argues that the campaign which led to a *white* pro-gay rights candidate being put forward only makes sense if the intersection between 'race' and sexuality are analysed in a spatially and historically specific way.¹⁸² The campaign to elect this candidate, in other words, reflects the power of the status quo in late 1980s South Africa where the marketing of a gay friendly candidate was framed largely in relation to the idea of protecting 'white rights' within Hillbrow given the increasing number of black

¹⁸⁰ Hoad, *African Intimacies, Race, Homosexuality and Globalization*, p. 113. That Hillbrow was becoming an area open, if not officially accepting, to non-white groups is significant as urban areas during apartheid were restricted to mostly whites.

¹⁸¹ Niekerk's novel *Triomf* explores the plight of the poor white Afrikaners and indeed her book has been critiqued for possibly skipping over some of the debates surrounding representations of poor white Afrikaners by middle class Afrikaners.

¹⁸² Daniel Conway, "Queering Apartheid: The National Party's 1987 'Gay Rights' Election Campaign in Hillbrow," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no.4 (2009) p. 849-63.

Africans who were moving to the area in the 1980s and this changing demographics was pitched against the idea of gay rights as white rights. The fielding of a pro-gay rights candidate thus reflected the idea of protecting gay rights by protecting white rights.

The association of Hillbrow with a LGBT population in both pre and post-apartheid, though in post-apartheid South Africa this has dramatically decline, is a theme touched on in the novella though only in relation to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Sexuality and questions of queer desire, though not of queer characters interestingly enough, are strong themes within the novella and push the characters' ideas of themselves and others often beyond breaking point. The aforementioned quote on the judgement which comes with living in Hillbrow is a strong example of this, especially the judgement directed against a person's perceived sexual orientation.

With the specific historical connotations of Hillbrow in mind, I want to focus here on HIV/AIDS debates reflecting the material and symbolic shifts from the apartheid to the post-apartheid periods. Indeed, the reluctance to engage with HIV/AIDS in literary fiction may be an effect of navigating the post-apartheid South African context. In other words, significant challenges remain for HIV/AIDS responses and the difficulties/silence(s) surrounding HIV/AIDS in the South African context reverberates in literary fiction. At the same time, the widely perceived need for South African literary fiction during apartheid to address politics directly means that any literary engagement with HIV/AIDS in the post-apartheid South African context, such as via Phaswane Mpe's 2001 novella *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, will be read, on some level, as compelled to respond to the wider South Africa political landscape and particularly the stark

politics of HIV/AIDS discourses. Although South Africa is not unique as a context in that there is not a clear separation between literary fiction and politics, and postcolonial literatures may be under particular duress in this respect, the pressure to respond to political oppression is a striking characteristic of literary fiction in South Africa. Thus, it is not unusual that the tensions surrounding HIV/AIDS debates are projected onto literary fiction. Bessie Head mentioned earlier was under pressure to perform politically as a writer and Athol Fugard's texts during the apartheid period, for example, were read primarily as addressing social and political concerns.¹⁸³

SOUTH AFRICA AND COMPARATIVE APPROACHES TO HIV/AIDS LITERATURE: THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

From the above overview, acknowledging the role of political censorship in South African literary history is necessary for any critical appraisal of Mpe's novella as a post-apartheid text. But, the blurred line between textuality and politics is a much broader theme in the global history of HIV/AIDS beyond South Africa. Furthermore, critically considering literary fiction's relationship to HIV/AIDS gives us a strong case for comparative analyses of HIV/AIDS in South African and Anglophone Caribbean literary fiction. The potential for such analyses is readily underpinned by research on the globalizing process of the HIV/AIDS pandemic since the 1970s. Cindy Patton's critiques of the intense debate and panic which have enveloped media responses, medical responses and local activism across global contexts since the late 1970s are especially

¹⁸³ His play *Master Harold and the Boys* is a classic example of this kind of treatment. (USA: Viking Penguin Inc, 1984).

relevant for comparative analyses.¹⁸⁴ She pinpoints the globalizing trajectories of HIV/AIDS since the 1970s via the emergence of the concept of 'global health', which is now monitored and routinely updated and reconstructed by organisations such as UNAIDS.

Indeed, directly related to contemporary animosities in the South African context is the fact that HIV/AIDS was characterised as the first truly 'global' disease pandemic because it was perceived as the first disease which knew no borders. A clear example of this is seen in a 1980s HIV prevention poster by the British government.¹⁸⁵ The poster foregrounds the universal threat of HIV/AIDS by presenting the word 'AIDS' in large, grey, text alongside a smaller caption in capitalised, white text which reads: 'HOW BIG DOES IT HAVE TO GET BEFORE YOU TAKE NOTICE?'. The aim here is clearly to force the viewer to see the significance of AIDS. For the South African context and beyond, however, there are ample contradictions in the aims and messages behind such campaigns, not least the creation of specific high risk groups in the 1980s as distinct from 'majority' populations. A clear remnant of these 'risk groups' is visible in the caption under the poster which states 'Gay or Straight, Male or Female. Anyone Can Get AIDS from Sexual Intercourse'.¹⁸⁶ The irony here being that in trying to present the idea that everyone can be affected by AIDS in a campaign poster, there is a distinct need to spell out that specific identity positions cannot protect one from being affected by AIDS. Thus, there is an indirect allusion to the stereotyping of certain groups in trying to universalise its message.

¹⁸⁴ Cindy Patton. *Globalizing AIDS*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

¹⁸⁵ See 'Appendix One'.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid

In a broad sense, this is apparent in how the South African past is constantly being replayed in the contested HIV/AIDS debates and this point is crucial for the ensuing literary analysis; the aforementioned quote on AIDS and the perceived bizarre sexual behaviour of Hillbrowians is a case in point from *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*.¹⁸⁷ But beyond Mpe'e text, critics, such as Neville Hoad and Didier Fassin, have foregrounded the trenchant racial ideologies which readily surface in these debates.¹⁸⁸ Fassin, in particular, explores the effects of the wider historical narrative of South African history on the bodies of South Africans in light of the heated debates surrounding HIV/AIDS as he aims to foreground that "the mark of apartheid is still deeply inscribed in bodies".¹⁸⁹ Zackie Achmat, a founding member of TAC, also foregrounds the importance of looking through a wider historical lens, which is not circumscribed by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for analyses of contemporary South Africa. For Achmat, there is an impetus to look at the shaping of South Africa prior to apartheid and colonialism and that this plays out in particular ideas of 'tradition' which are presented as 'fact' in post-apartheid South Africa.¹⁹⁰ This is most powerfully expressed in the furore surrounding HIV/AIDS where ideas of 'tradition' have been uncritically celebrated as bastions of national pride which has resulted in some blind political decision making on behalf of Mbeki's governmental response to the pandemic. Henriette Gunkel's analysis of Zanele Muholi's works and wider discussions of 'tradition' in South Africa is also

¹⁸⁷ See footnote 156 on p. 79.

¹⁸⁸ Neville Hoad, "The Intellectual, the Archive, and the Pandemic: Thabo Mbeki's AIDS Blues," In *African Intimacies, Race, Homosexuality and Globalization*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). Fassin, *When Bodies Remember; Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*.

¹⁸⁹ Fassin, *When Bodies Remember; Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*, p.28.

¹⁹⁰ I was present at an impromptu talk which Achmat delivered at the University of Sussex in January 2012 where he gave a brief critical history of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. Achmat is one of the founders of TAC as well as a member of the ANC.

relevant here, especially her critiques of how a particularly virulent form of homophobia in post-apartheid South African nationalist discourses is strikingly absent during the apartheid regime.¹⁹¹ Gunkel does not focus specifically on HIV/AIDS but many of her critiques resonate with debates surrounding HIV/AIDS.

Notwithstanding the specific national parameters of South African society, there are correlations between HIV/AIDS discourses and debates in local South African contexts and the wider global context. Indeed, the blatant ideological reading of South Africa, along with the wider African continent, since the emergence of HIV/AIDS as a global pandemic, as 'naturally' inclined to develop HIV/AIDS has had a marked, and continuing, effect on local and global discourses surrounding HIV/AIDS in South Africa and beyond. Epstein and Packard outline the racist projections that were mapped onto disparately African contexts in the 1980s under the rubric of 'African AIDS'.¹⁹² The term largely emerged due to the supposed 'differences' between HIV cases in Africa where, in contrast to how HIV transmission was characterised as predominantly affecting (white) homosexual men in western contexts, HIV in various African contexts was cast as contracted predominantly via heterosexual transmission.¹⁹³

Crucially, however, the supposed difference of 'African AIDS' hinged around the idea of the 'perverseness' of African sexualities and sexual practices and these possible explanations for the rigid, blanket stereotyping of African

¹⁹¹ See particularly the introduction to Gunkel's *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* and also my review of her book: www.darkmatter101.org/site/2012/05/23/the-cultural-politics-of-female-sexuality-in-south-africa/

¹⁹² N: Randall Packard and Paul Epstein, "Medical research on AIDS in Africa: A Historical Perspective," In *AIDS: The Making of a Chronic Disease*, ed. Elizabeth Fee and Daniel Fox (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). p. 346-376.

¹⁹³ Ibid

sexualities are bound up with the historical portrayal of Africa via the colonial gaze. Epstein and Packard succinctly critique the projections behind the neo-colonial gaze of Western AIDS researchers:

Th[e] lack of social and medical knowledge [on the part of western AIDS researchers in the 1980s], combined with the suspicion that the key to understanding AIDS in the West might lie in Africa, contributed to a great deal of speculation about the epidemiology of AIDS in Africa and encouraged researchers to construct hypotheses that were often based on extremely limited data. It is therefore not surprising that stereotypic images of Africa and Africans entered into the discourse on the epidemiology of AIDS in Africa.¹⁹⁴

Such readings of Africans, and the African continent as a whole, mirrored earlier scientific, and accompanying political, readings of who was affected by diseases, such as Tuberculosis (TB) from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries, and, perhaps more importantly, *why* they were affected: Africans were portrayed as contracting, and spreading, TB because of their supposed 'perverse' sexualities and these same preconceptions of African sexualities resurfaced in HIV/AIDS debates and discourses.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, the emergence of the idea of 'African AIDS' within (pseudo) scientific discussions was one of the major examples which was held up as evidence of a western centric approach to HIV/AIDS in the political gulf between Mbeki and his opponents.¹⁹⁶

Paula Treichler's succinct coining of the idea of HIV/AIDS as an 'epidemic of signification', which was discussed in chapter one, is key here for any analysis which seeks to contextualise the relationship between the local and global in HIV/AIDS discourses in the South African context. Treichler

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 359.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 349.

¹⁹⁶ See Cindy Patton's *Globalizing AIDS (Theory Out of Bounds)* for a complex extrapolation of the ideologies which bio-medical discourses gave an intellectual home to during the early period – late 1970s to early 1980s – of what is now referred to as a global HIV/AIDS pandemic. Patton's book was discussed in relation to the Anglophone Caribbean context in Chapter 1.

incisively reminds us that HIV/AIDS discourses, and the debates surrounding them, are culturally embedded.¹⁹⁷ Thus, any analysis of these discourses necessarily involves an acknowledgement of the subjective engagement with the dynamics of culture. The main contextual background that I wish to foreground here, with the idea of an 'epidemic of signification' in mind, is that the supposed gulf between Mbeki and his opponents demonstrates the simplifying tendencies of both western media approaches to Mbeki's lack of engagement with HIV/AIDS and the dangers of obstructionist positions, such as Mbeki's, who refused to engage with the immediate material realities of HIV/AIDS in South Africa during his presidency. HIV/AIDS discourses in South Africa are thus both a product of the past and of the complex local-global relationship. Moreover, this relationship is composed of both pre-apartheid, apartheid and post-apartheid historical legacies.

With Treichler's idea in mind for the South African context, I wish to focus more directly here on the antagonistic, but clearly tangible, relationship between the local and the global for HIV/AIDS discourses in post-apartheid South Africa, and the importance of this for HIV/AIDS depictions in Mpe's novella, rather than exclusively focussing on the contentious politics of HIV/AIDS discourses. I am keenly interested in the critical ramifications of how earlier HIV/AIDS discourses from the 1970s and 1980s have been shaped by the temporal and contextual meanderings since moving beyond the predominantly western urban metropolitan contexts and the contextual background will be a primary undercurrent in the overall chapter discussion. But I am not equating politics with literary fiction. Instead, I am considering the tension between the local and

¹⁹⁷ Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS*.

the global in Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and what this reveals about comparative literature approaches and analyses to HIV/AIDS.

WELCOME TO OUR HILLBROW AND FICTIONALISING PLACE: THE
AMBIGUITY OF THE 'NEW' SOUTH AFRICA

The relatively explicit portrayal of HIV/AIDS in Mpe's novella in comparison to the relative absence of depictions of HIV/AIDS in South African literary fiction to date apart from a growing body of autobiographical accounts, as noted by critics such as John C. Hawley, is of central significance in the following chapter.¹⁹⁸ A concurrent aim here, besides the breaking of the ice surrounding literary depictions of HIV/AIDS, is to attest to the important role of fiction in countering the narrow approach to statistics in some accounts of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. In so doing, I build on existing literary criticism, such as by Lizzy Attree, who has commented on the myth busting of HIV/AIDS in the novella as being intrinsically connected to the 'literary tradition of city-spaces': "...in Phaswane's novel, he simultaneously explodes the myth of AIDS as a local urban-based phenomenon, whilst also locating it in his own work as a feature of the literary tradition of city-spaces."¹⁹⁹ For Sarah Nuttall, who also echoes Attree's comment on the literary tradition of the city, the perambulatory style of the novella intrinsically reflects the development of the 'modern figure of the city':

Mpe used story-telling and character-led narration, which inhabits both the space of memory, that of the spiritual world and that of the earthly

¹⁹⁸ John C. Hawley remarks on the relatively slow engagement with HIV/AIDS in South African literary fiction apart from a small, but growing, body of autobiographical accounts. John C. Hawley, "South African Writing in English." In *English Postcoloniality: Literatures from Around the World*, ed. Mohanram and Rajan, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996). p. 53-62.

¹⁹⁹ Attree, "AIDS, Space and the City in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*," p.188.

present simultaneously, to evoke the complexity of feeling and experiences of modern life. Nuttall describes this trend as part of the development of the modern figure of the city, for whom “there is no linear progression, only moments, episodes, fragments. Time no longer structures space.”²⁰⁰

The dual exploration of HIV/AIDS and city-spaces demonstrates, as the critics Achille Mbembe, Sarah Nuttall and Lizzy Attree mention, that Mpe's thematic exploration of HIV/AIDS is part of a wider engagement within the text where the narrative style challenges the reader's perception of HIV/AIDS, place and story-telling, as linear narratives. The idea of the Hillbrow city scape as an explicit theme within which to explore ideas of social change is a central backdrop in the following chapter discussion given that Mpe's novella is unique because Hillbrow, within the text, is mapped as a literary text where Hillbrow becomes a living and breathing character; such a textual engagement has not been attempted in the same way as other areas in Johannesburg, such as Soweto.

The 'literary tradition of city-spaces', moreover, links the novella to broader global literary history, but especially the portrayal of cities as reflecting the emergence of modernity and the city as a living and breathing character. *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* thus resonates with features of fin de siècle and modernist literature since the late nineteenth century; particularly the tradition of the flâneur (and to a lesser extent the flâneuse).²⁰¹ This hybrid literary style of Mpe's novella ensures that it presents as both a *local* text that heavily focusses on Hillbrow as a particular city-space within Johannesburg *and* a global text

²⁰⁰ Attree, “AIDS, Space and the City in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*,” p.190. Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, “Writing the World from an African Metropolis,” *Public Culture* 16, no.3 (2004), p. 353.

²⁰¹ See John Jervis' *Exploring the Modern: Patterns of Western Culture and Civilization* for an overview of the wider cultural shifts of modernity which were reflected in the emergence of the flâneur in the late nineteenth century. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). See also Janet Wolff's 'The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity', for a forceful reprieve to the tradition of fin de siècle and modernist writings which overwhelmingly centered on the white middle class flâneur at the expense of the flâneuse. *Theory, Culture & Society* 2, no. 3, (1985) p. 37-46.

which constantly evokes the local-global dynamic. Indeed, the wider national and global contexts beyond Hillbrow are intrinsic to the characters' lives and the overarching narrative structure goes full circle from Hillbrow-Tiragalong-Oxford-Hillbrow. With the idea of the text as both local and global, and the overarching narrative structure as encouraging readers to look at South Africa as part of a bigger whole, the concluding discussion focusses on HIV/AIDS as a theme which both moves from the local to the global *and* simultaneously transcends both the local and the global.

POST(ANTI-)APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE AND HYBRID LITERARY FORMS

The focus on a specific place and time period within South Africa in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* may, however, suggest that the text is exclusively focussed on the local. Furthermore, the predominance of social realism in South African literature in the period leading up to the official end of apartheid, which Hawley and Ndebele carefully chart, may suggest that Mpe's book will reflect the dominance of social realism.²⁰² However, the text is *both* a local *and* a transnational literary text in that it does not just re-iterate the dominant social realism of much South African literature prior to apartheid to echo Ndebele here. Indeed, the text often blurs the relationship between fact and fiction. Moreover, the book engages with ideas of the global-local but not in a simplistic celebratory way but it also engages with *some* tropes of social realism. The title

²⁰² See John C. Hawley's "South African Writing in English" for an overview of the dominant trends in South African literature up until the end of apartheid. See also Njabulo Ndebele's *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* for a cogent discussion of the predominance of social realism in South African literature in English up until the official end of apartheid in the early 1990s. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture*.

of the book succinctly showcases this as the 'our' in the book title is not readily interpretable as an inclusive group identity; the use of 'our' at several points in the book encourages the reader to question what is meant by 'our' and brings to the fore whether the use of 'our' encompasses all individuals within the book and what community or locale is being included/excluded in the use of 'our'. This is interpretable as a commentary on the idea of community within South Africa and the relationship between this and the reading experience. Carrol Clarkson demonstrates the importance of this stylistic trope when she comments on the recurring use of 'our' and 'you' in the book:

Mpe's novel is relentlessly written in the second person, and in its explicit address to 'you', the narrative has the disorientating effect of simultaneously distancing, but engaging the reader in the implied community *signalled* by the 'our' of the novel's title: the question of answerability, I shall argue, thus extends to the reader as well.²⁰³

The way in which the reader is addressed throughout the book thus reflects that the text is concerned with questioning who the reader identifies as and why; this very much extends to the relationship between the local and the global throughout the book which we will see further on in this chapter.

The complex relationship(s) which the book sets up between the local and global foregrounds Mpe's novella as what John Hawley entitles a "post(anti)-apartheid text."²⁰⁴ It does this primarily by attesting to the dynamic relationship between the global and the local whilst not denying the role of the past in creating this relationship. Hawley utilises the term 'post(anti)-apartheid' to pinpoint the particular engagements in texts, such as *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, which attest to the shift away from group identity to the predicaments

²⁰³ Carrol Clarkson. "Locating Identity in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*" *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2005) p. 452.

²⁰⁴ See John C. Hawley's "The Emerging Fictionalization of AIDS in Africa," *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas* 21 no.4 (2004) p. 40.

of individuals in post-apartheid South Africa.

However, at the same time, Mpe's text is neither reducible to dominant themes within South African literature nor easily read as symbolic of (global) HIV/AIDS literature. The text engages with some of the more dominant debates surrounding postcolonial/queer, such as the extent to which sexuality is framed as an 'identity' marker in light of the colonial mapping of racial difference onto sexual proclivities; such as the previous quote at the beginning of the chapter from a non-Hillbrowian who remarks on the sexual promiscuity of the urban Hillbrow context. But the book does not discard the more complex debates surrounding the recent South African past and the importance of apartheid in shaping the present as it focusses on the less easily represented dimensions of post-apartheid South Africa; AIDS, poverty, crime, rural/urban divide, xenophobia and the damage which gossip and community policing can do to people who fall foul of the judgement of the community.

The book, from this brief overview, does not fit into any set way of reading the 'New' South Africa nor does it take a narrow political line on South African history. But the effects of South African history are essential to what has contributed to the emergence of Hillbrow and its characters within the book. The critic Gugu Hlongwane stresses the apartheid legacies which have created the dominant characteristics of Mpe's novella and rebuffs critics who point to *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, and films like "Tsotsi," as not focussing on the issue of 'race' in South Africa.²⁰⁵ The opening pages of the book support Hlongwane's point as the reader is introduced to Hillbrow, a bustling and crowded suburb of Johannesburg in post-apartheid South Africa, during the football world cup

²⁰⁵ Hlongwane, "'Reader, be assured this narrative is no fiction': The City and its Discontents in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*," p. 70.

where jubilant football celebrations are spliced with the image of a young girl being hit by a hit and run driver: “You would recall the child, possibly seven years old or so, who got hit by a car. Her mid-air screams still ring in your memory. When she hit the concrete pavements of Hillbrow, her screams died with her.”²⁰⁶ Such intermittent violence is a dominant theme which carries through the entire book but violence in the book is mostly linked to complexities which arise when individuals are read as disrupting the ‘them versus us’ paradigm.

Indeed, that the omniscient narrator, and the continual use of the word ‘you’ in the book, directly addresses the reader is an important narrative framing device. In addressing the reader as ‘you’, the narrative sets up a more direct relationship with the reader than some narratives that mostly utilise the omniscient narrative voice. In this way, the use of ‘you’ to address the reader acts as a narrative voice but one that is not easily characterised as first person, second person or omniscient. The hybrid form of the novella is also visible in other characteristics such as the epigraphs which Mpe places before the main narrative text of the novella: “Reader, be assured this narrative is no fiction”.²⁰⁷ The use of an epigraph by the African-American writer W.E. du Bois, according to Gugu Hlongwane, where the epigraph is directly addressing the reader and attesting to the authenticity of the story – a device which was utilised by various African-American writers in slave narratives²⁰⁸ – “speaks volumes about South Africa’s fledgling independence” and nods to “the delicate line between fact and

²⁰⁶ Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, p. 2.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. v.

²⁰⁸ See Harriet Jacobs, “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” for one of the central slave narratives texts which presents its ‘authenticity’ to the reader. (Middlesex: Penguin, 2000).

fiction" in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*.²⁰⁹ Hlongwane 's points have strong resonance here but the use of an African-American writer also attests to the transnational connections which the text is making and that the use of an epigraph from du Bois is an apt intro for a novella exploring the 'New' complex reality of South Africa.

The complexity of the novella is aptly demonstrated again after Refentše's death where the first person narrative voice is taken up by Refilwe until her death at the end of the book. However, the omniscient narrator interweaves between Refentše and Refilwe's narrative voices throughout so that the different narrative voices present contrasting accounts. The interweaved narrative style of the book is a central stylistic device which connects the different themes within the book. This is most clearly foregrounded through the idea of 'Heaven' in the book which is presented as parallel to the land of living and is the connecting place for the different narrative voices: The first person narrative voices of Refentše and Refilwe become second person narrative voices when they meet in 'Heaven' and the omniscient narrator voice takes a back seat during the 'Heaven' scenes because the representation of 'Heaven' within the book allows for more direct conversations/reflections between the characters than the land of the living; deceased characters meet each other after their deaths in 'heaven' and retell some of the events which led to their deaths and also watch and comment on the lives and blunders of the living. The space of 'Heaven' contrasts with the land of the living in the book where most of the characters are embroiled in

²⁰⁹ Gugu Hlongwane, "Reader, be assured this narrative is no fiction": The City and its Discontents in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 37, no.4 (2006) p. 69.

some kind of crisis or difficult scenario. The narrative trope of 'heaven' allows the characters to watch the lives of the living whilst reflecting on their own lives/deaths and enables Mpe's text to present the past within the book as intrinsic to the present; the present of 'heaven' is presented as happening concurrently to the land of the living but not just in a purely metaphorical way.

To some critics, this links Mpe to other African writers where the link between the living and the dead – and the role which this relationship plays in the narrative as a whole but more specifically the relationship which it plays in relating the past to the present in the post-apartheid context – are direct and not split into the idea of life and afterlife as the dead are connected on a daily level with the living. For Carrol Clarkson, the use of the pronouns 'I' and 'we' in the book link Mpe's book to some traditional African conceptions of self where the individual person – or I – is not separate from the wider community as ideas of self and group identity are more closely connected and implied in the 'polite' use of we instead of 'I' in 'polite' discourses:

Yet even further, the performative force of this 'we' is more radical in a traditional African context than in ordinary Western uses of the word. It does not simply mean 'myself and others whom I identify as the subject of my sentence'; instead it announces the self as an intersection of social relations. That is to say, individual identity is conceived as being intrinsically relational.²¹⁰

One could argue that the use of I to imply 'an intersection of social relation' is a particularly strong narrative device when portraying the interconnected realities which characterise HIV/AIDS. Indeed, this may be one of the book's strongest characteristics. Another effect of the use of the 'I' voice in this way is a reminder to the reader to read critically or at least self-consciously and thus to not adopt a passive reading approach to the novella.

²¹⁰ Clarkson, "Locating Identity in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*," p. 453.

Following on from the impetus within the narrative style to read critically – or at least sceptically – a central theme within the book is how the different character's predicaments are created by the dynamic between individual choice and community social codes. The extent to which community standards go to punish individuals within the book is striking and the novella forcefully portrays this. Indeed, community codes have the last say in many characters' lives and this is often in the form of a severe judgement. The first main narrator, for example, is judged by his rural community for firstly moving to Hillbrow and associating with Hillbrowians and then secondly for getting involved with a non-Tiragalong woman. Moreover, although the book does not explicitly foreground why the rural/urban divide plays such a salient part in Refentše's life, the creation of the divide between urban and rural spaces is a crucial backdrop to the emergence of Hillbrow as a distinct area within Johannesburg. Like *Children of God* and *The World Unseen* discussed in the final chapter, there are multiple audiences implied within the text but unlike the two films, Mpe's novella challenges some of the more dominant trends surrounding postcolonial/queer and HIV/AIDS; particularly the stereotypical associations of HIV/AIDS with stigmatised groups and the idea that public visibility is the most politically salient – and thus effective – position with which to address inequalities. For these reasons, Mpe's novella is similar to other post-apartheid texts, such as Zakes Mda *Ways of Dying* and K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*.²¹¹

²¹¹ Mda, *Ways of Dying*.

SOUTH AFRICAN HIV/AIDS LITERATUREAND WELCOME TO OUR HILLBROW

The debunking of stereotypes is a particularly salient characteristic of the book and links strongly to one of Mpe's overarching themes in the book: The politics surrounding representations of HIV/AIDS in South Africa and the difficulty of publishing work in languages other than English and the legacies of apartheid which have largely contributed to this quandary. A quote from the novella which foregrounds parts of a story which Refentše is writing demonstrates the myriad difficulties which arise when publishing in the 'New' South Africa:

The woman of your fiction, Refentše, was writing in 1995, one year after the much acclaimed 1994 democratic elections....In 1995, despite the so-called new dispensation, nothing had really changed. The legacy of Apartheid censors still shackled those who dreamed of writing freely in an African language. Publishers, scared of being found to be on the financially dangerous side of the censorship border, still rejected manuscripts that too realistically called things by their proper names – names that people of Tiragalong and Hillbrow and everywhere in the world used every day.²¹²

There is a clear metanarrative commentary in sections, such as this, because Mpe's novella is commenting on the act of writing through the act of writing. However, the story which Refentše is writing is a central theme within the book and not just in terms of how writing and publishing the story is embroiled with the messy and enduring aftermath of apartheid as Refentše's story is taken up by Refilwe after his death. The ending of the book, which sees Refilwe returning home to Tiragalong to die from AIDS related complication, having

²¹² Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, p. 57.

studied abroad at Oxford Brookes for a year foregrounds one of Mpe's most central and arguably most multifaceted debates: The idea of the story within the story as a metaphor for writing in the post-apartheid Hillbrow context.

Refilwe was interested in writing a story in Sepedi on a HIV positive woman and Refilwe was inspired to do this from reading Refentše's story in English on a HIV positive woman (who wished to publish her story in Sepedi but runs into numerous insurmountable barriers) which she read before Refentše died. There are thus layers of representations within the novella surrounding HIV and this can be read as commenting on the difficulty of not just publishing on HIV in the 'New' post-apartheid South Africa – and the difficulty of doing this if you are HIV positive given the effects which this can have on one's life span in South Africa – but also the difficulty of raising HIV/AIDS as a topic within different South African locations given the stereotypes which are readily associated with it by various characters and given the tangible and multifarious effects of apartheid on South Africa in the immediate post-apartheid period. Mpe's text, in this respect, although a relatively short novella, foregrounds one of the most searing effects of apartheid on post-apartheid South Africa; the sheer difficulties of engaging with HIV/AIDS representations within the South African context where apartheid legacies strongly reverberate in day-to-day life and one of the strongest way to see this is through discussions surrounding HIV/AIDS within the text which often re-iterate ideas which were initially circulated via apartheid ideologies:

Migrants (who were Tiragalong's authoritative grapevine on all important issues) deduced from such media reports that AIDS's travel route into Johannesburg was through *Makwerekwere*; and Hillbrow was the sanctuary in which *Makwerekwere* basked. There were others who went

even further, saying that AIDS was caused by the bizarre sexual behaviour of the Hillbrowians. How could any man have sex with another man? They demanded to know.²¹³

The stereotypical associations of HIV/AIDS with migrants and queer men foregrounds the power of stereotypes in casting HIV/AIDS as an affliction of the 'other'. However, as the novella maps out, nearly everyone in the book is affected by HIV/AIDS on some level. Thus the naïve logic of the gossips is increasingly represented as hollow as the novella progresses.

Notably, HIV/AIDS cuts through all of the characters' lives in the book and when it does crop up as an explicit topic of discussion within the book, HIV/AIDS is presented as an affliction caused by foreigners, perverted/fallen people or by witchcraft. HIV/AIDS, for this reason, often breaks down supposed divides between 'different' communities as HIV/AIDS within the book is represented as knowing no boundaries and as surpassing people's expectations. It is also striking that HIV/AIDS and the act of story-telling within the novella recur together at several instances; the main character/protagonist, Refentše is represented as wishing to write a story in English where his main character is a HIV positive woman. This story is admired by his ex-girlfriend Refilwe who ends up wishing to write her own story of a HIV positive woman in Sepedi whilst Refilwe discovers near the end of the book that she has HIV/AIDS herself.

CONCLUSION:

Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* does not rehash the dominant social realism of much South African literature during apartheid. Instead, it

²¹³ Ibid., p.4.

foregrounds the shifting and complex relationship between the local and the global and the importance of acknowledging this in the trials and tribulations of the 'New' South Africa. Although HIV/AIDS is a central theme within the novella itself, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* does not shy away from presenting some of the more harsh material realities of HIV/AIDS. Indeed, stories within stories are some of the most powerful overarching themes in the book. For this reason, Mpe's novella asks the reader to engage with the dense and at times, unsayable, metaphors of the 'New' South Africa whilst recognising that the 'New' South Africa is not a static idea. The relationship between the local and the global, and the embeddedness of these in each other, is a salient characteristic of the novella but it is a relationship which is not easily represented. The 'story within a story' trope within the novella represents the crux of the complex realities of HIV/AIDS but it is a trope which is never fully realised as the story of a HIV positive South African is never actualised within the novella. *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, in this sense, presents a complex questioning of the 'New' South Africa to the reader whilst leaving space for gaps in historical representation.

CHAPTER THREE: QUEERING THE BLACK ATLANTIC STUDIES MODEL: TRANSNATIONAL CARIBBEAN SEXUALITY DEBATES

INTRODUCTION:

In comparison to the previous analyses of literary engagements with HIV/AIDS in Anglophone Caribbean and South African literature, this chapter focusses on Paul Gilroy's 1993 Black Atlantic model as facilitating transnational readings of sexuality and masculinity in Anglophone Caribbean black popular cultural forms. I focus on two visual texts when considering the model's theoretical reach; Isaac Julien's 1994 collage style documentary *The Darker Side of Black* and Rick Elgood's and Don Letts' 1997 feature film *Dancehall Queen*. I explore the conceptualisation of black popular cultural as diasporic in the Black Atlantic and I relate this to the collaboration between Gilroy and Julien in *The Darker Side of Black*, and the broader debates surrounding sexuality in the Anglophone Caribbean. I briefly discuss *Dancehall Queen* because of how it engages with ideas surrounding gender and sexuality in dancehall performances and the social codes of dancehall spaces.

The potential for comparative approaches here is striking because the Black Atlantic model broadens heteropatriarchal interpretations of African-Caribbean culture which have become linked to a specific idea of sexuality as narrowly heterosexual. This is the model's most critical insight for Anglophone Caribbean cultural production. I argue this despite that the model takes African-Caribbean and African-American cultures as its starting point and, thus, does not challenge some of the more dominant debates surrounding what constitutes

Anglophone Caribbean culture(s), such as the marginalisation of Indo-Caribbean cultures, as discussed in chapter one. But, I propose that the Black Atlantic's central metaphor of 'routes' over 'roots' is useful for getting beyond some of the dominant nation-centred and regional limits of the debates surrounding same-sex desire. This chapter focusses predominantly on African-Caribbean histories in contrast to my first chapter but this is necessary in order to fully contextualise Gilroy's model. I then assess the contradictions surrounding diaspora, 'identity' and the Black Atlantic given the recurrent focus on homophobia, violence and black male, *masculine* bodies, in Anglophone Caribbean sexuality debates. Finally, the chapter explores the potential of queering the Black Atlantic in terms of the potential and the necessity of this for opening up for much needed (trans)national comparative debates surrounding sexuality.

I assert that the Black Atlantic model is uniquely suited to transnational readings of sexuality in recent Anglophone Caribbean literary and visual texts because, when it is read in light of the complex national and transnational dynamics of sexuality, it actively foregrounds the contingent dynamism of cultural forms. I also foreground the importance of the transnational background of *The Darker Side of Black* which focusses on the US, the UK and the Anglophone Caribbean through the (trans)national embodiment of predominantly black popular cultural forms, such as dancehall and hip hop. Thus, this chapter reads the Black Atlantic as a model that is attuned to the dynamics of cultural forms, and this, in turn, helps to succinctly approach the over-determined legacies which envelop some discussions of sexuality in Anglophone Caribbean literature and culture.

HISTORICIZING THE BLACK ATLANTIC AND (TRANS)NATIONAL
COMPARATIVE READINGS

Paul Gilroy's 1993 book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* has predominantly been read as challenging essentialist approaches to ethnic, racial and national identities.²¹⁴ The transnational focus of Gilroy's model is most often interpreted as its main challenge, particularly in how Gilroy situates both the *production* of black cultural forms, or what he calls 'new world cultural forms', alongside the *emergence* of modernity as *dynamic and transnational* processes. Such an idea of cultural processes emerging in tandem with modernity was read as a challenge to ethnic absolutist and Afrocentric ideas of 'identity' promoted through *some* black cultural nationalisms in the UK and *most* mainstream British nationalist discourses during the late 80s and early 90s. Viewed in response to Eurocentric ideas of modernity, the dialectic between black cultural forms, and the complex moment of modernity in Gilroy's Black Atlantic, counters the idea that modernity involved only European actors. Moreover, this conception not only unsettles the biased trajectories of modernity as exclusively white European, but it *also* deconstructs the idea of a transhistorical essential 'black' identity.

New world cultural forms as dynamic processes is represented in Gilroy's conception of the Black Atlantic via an image of a ship journeying between Europe, Africa and the Americas. Moreover, the image symbolises the specific historical conditions of west and central African slaves who were physically shipped to the Americas via the transatlantic slave trade.²¹⁵ It is important to

²¹⁴ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

²¹⁵ The transatlantic trade emerged in the late fifteenth century and was eradicated in the British Empire in 1838. Other empires eradicated it at later dates and many British humanitarians

note that slavery as a system of exchanging people for goods and money was not invented by the European colonial empires; slavery as a practice has existed across different centuries, and was institutionalised during ancient empires, such as the Roman empire. But what *is* crucial about the slave trade during European colonialism is that the idea of 'race' begins to emerge as a hierarchical way of reading different cultures. Prior to the majority of slaves being comprised of either slaves taken from Africa, or those descended from Africans brought to the Americas, indentured servants from Europe were employed as well as a tiny number of Amerindians. These sources of labour start to peter out in the sixteenth century as slaves from west and central Africa are increasingly seen as a more viable way of profiting from plantation ventures.²¹⁶ It is this specific mapping of 'race' as a Eurocentric idea, which makes the transatlantic slave trade become synonymous with racial slavery as the idea of being a slave is interchangeable with being black by the end of the sixteenth century.

From this overview, it is clear that the black in the *Black Atlantic* is explicitly foregrounding the emergence of this racial slavery as part of the complex moment of modernity where slavery and the modernity are intertwined. Furthermore, the ship image works as a metaphor for the processes through which these cultural forms emerged where they were *shaped* by the transnational movements of modernity, particularly through journeys on the slave ships from Africa to the New World. Such forms thus *responded* to the

prided themselves on being the first empire to ban legal slavery. The hypocrisy of such narratives of benevolence are critiqued by David Turley in *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860*.

²¹⁶ See Robin Blackburn's *The Making of New World Slavery; from the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* for a thorough historical account of these shift towards the making of racial slavery.

metaphorical trajectories of modernity where they *reflected* the complex transnational mixing of European and African influences. New world cultural forms are not passively replicated but perform an *active* role in responding to the emergence of modernity in Gilroy's view of this Black Atlantic. In this chapter discussion, dancehall music and dancehall spaces are the main cultural forms, particularly how dancehall gets read as a deterministically local text.

Gilroy is not offering a new theorisation of Anglophone Caribbean historical processes and cultural forms in his conception of the dialectic between the transatlantic slave trade and modernity. This a classic point of discussion in many critical discussions of Caribbean history, such as Robin Blackburn in *The Making of New World Slavery; from the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*²¹⁷ and Catherine Hall in *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*.²¹⁸ Both of these authors conceptualise the London metropole and Anglophone Caribbean contexts as intrinsic narratives within the wider narrative of empire and that racial slavery was a central process, which led to the emergence of modernity.

However, the focus on the idea of 'routes' versus 'roots', which is central to the ship imagery, where culture is a *travelling process*, distinguishes the Black Atlantic from other models, such as the black power movement, the *négritude* movement and black cultural nationalisms, all of which rely on the idea of a transhistorical essential 'black identity'.²¹⁹ Importantly the *négritude* movement was conceptualised as a global movement but in a very different

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²¹⁹ Aimé Césaire's *Discourse On Colonialism* is often taken as one of the iconic texts of the *négritude* movement. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

vein to the Black Atlantic. This is largely due to the distinct historical conditions of when each model emerged. Négritude, broadly speaking, emerged around World War Two whereas Gilroy published his Black Atlantic theory in 1993. The later period is notable for the high use of theoretical approaches within postcolonial studies, and Gilroy's model, broadly speaking, fits within this broad description.

For Anglophone Caribbean theory, the vision of cultural processes connecting seemingly 'distinct' national or geographical places resonates with Stuart Hall's articulation of the connections between the Caribbean and the 'centre' of empire. Hall states that "the fate of Caribbean people living in the UK, the US or Canada is no more 'external' to Caribbean history than the Empire was 'external' to the so-called domestic history of Britain."²²⁰ The concurrent history of new world cultural production as responding to both the wider trajectories of empire *and* modernity is central to Gilroy's model and one can clearly deduce a genealogical link with Hall's critiques.²²¹

The transnational focus in the Black Atlantic is in step with Gilroy's previous critical work *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Processes of Race ad Nation* which focussed on the racial connotations of British national discourses.²²² In this critical work, he linked domestic British political campaigns to broader colonial narratives and ideologies *and* also challenged black cultural nationalist discourses which projected an essential 'black' identity in this text. However, the particular challenge of Gilroy's Black

²²⁰ Stuart Hall, "Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad." *Small Axe* 6 (1999) p. 2.

²²¹ Hall is Gilroy's predecessor and mentor and this is most apparent in the fact that Hall was Gilroy's PhD supervisor at the now defunct Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University.

²²² Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (Routledge: London, 1987).

Atlantic model, in comparison to his previous works, is that there is no authentic 'black identity' given the *transnational production* of black cultural forms. Gilroy thus contextualises the emergence of black popular forms in relation to the emergence of modernity and transatlantic slavery as *simultaneous* moments which *produce* each other via transnational cultural processes.

Despite that the Black Atlantic model actively foregrounds the dynamic processes of cultural forms, analyses of the Black Atlantic in relation to the multifarious debates surrounding Anglophone Caribbean sexualities, have been relatively absent. There has been one study which has explored the Black Atlantic in relation to sexuality and the middle passage. Natasha Omise'eke Tinsley explores the potential for Gilroy's model to imaginatively reconnect with queer histories of the middle passage.²²³ However, Tinsley's focus is more exclusively on the potential re-readings of the middle passage, which the Black Atlantic model can engender than on transnational analyses of sexualities. The middle passage is the name given to the journey from West Africa to the Americas in the triangular trajectory of the transatlantic slave trade. The 'middle' part signifies the middle section of the overall triangular route where the journey begins in Europe and then sails to West Africa, continues from West Africa to the Americas (middle passage) and finally sails to Europe. Like Gilroy's interpretation of the middle passage as a metaphorical process, many literary and artistic responses to the middle passage foreground both the trauma and the metaphors through which the middle passage can be symbolised. One such text is Toni Morrison's 1997 novel *Beloved* whose main

²²³ Natasha Omise'eke Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic; Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14 nos 2-3 (Summer 2008): 191-215.

character is a mythical representation of the traumas of slavery.²²⁴

The relative lack of interest in Gilroy's model for transnational reading of sexuality is striking given that many analyses of the modern Anglophone Caribbean nation-state, such as M. Jacqui Alexander's incisive coining of the term heteropatriarchy, have pinpointed that transnational consumer markets play a major role in shaping the *registers* and *contradictions* of nationalist discourses.²²⁵ The transnational possibilities which a model, like the Black Atlantic, may hold for analyses of Anglophone Caribbean sexualities is thus largely under explored. The absence of such approaches is striking given that the Black Atlantic model, in its conception of 'identity' and cultural forms as (trans)national, is very apt for (trans)national readings and approaches to Anglophone Caribbean sexualities.

In light of the lack of attention to Gilroy's Black Atlantic in relation to sexuality in Caribbean contexts and cultural forms, I demonstrate that the particular overlap of heteropatriarchy and cultural nationalism in some Anglophone Caribbean contexts makes the Black Atlantic model uniquely suited to moving away from the more polarised debates surrounding sexuality.²²⁶ This is especially because, as Robert Carr and Anthony Lewis illustrate, the over-determined legacies of colonialism have contributed to the masculinist and heteropatriarchal trajectories of *most dominant* Anglophone Caribbean nationalist discourses.²²⁷ The Black Atlantic, in contrast, moves away from

²²⁴ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Vintage, 1997).

²²⁵ Alexander, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: Anatomy of Feminist and State Practice in the Bahamas Tourist Economy," p. 65.

²²⁶ I am thinking particularly about the adoption of Jamaican dance hall songs by Jamaican politicians where the idea of being a homosexual becomes unthinkable in light of the use of these songs to prescribe African-Jamaican masculinities via a *narrow* heteropatriarchal narrative.

²²⁷ Robert Carr and Anthony Lewis, "Gender, Sexuality, Identity and Exclusion: Sketching the

these trajectories as it draws attention to the limits of nation-centred traditions *and* the Eurocentric view of modernity as a strictly European moment which only involved European actors.

The few projects which do explore a comparable approach to the Black Atlantic are the collaboration between Paul Gilroy and Isaac Julien in Julien's 1994 documentary "The Darker Side of Black", some smaller film and visual projects by Campbell 'Inge' Blackman, Richard Fung and Elspeth Kydd, and Kareem Mortimer's 2010 feature film *Children of God*.²²⁸ It is the collaboration between Gilroy and Julien in *The Darker Side of Black* which is a main focus of this chapter discussion. Although it would be simplistic to say that Gilroy and Julien are adopting the same approach to 'identity', and this is somehow 'obvious' in Julien's film, the fact that Gilroy's and Julien's texts are coming from a similar critical moment in the early 90s, and that they collaborated together in *The Darker Side of Black* is a major focus in this chapter. I argue this is because a transnational approach to sexuality in Caribbean contexts reveals some often ignored transnational contextual dynamics in discussions surrounding sexuality and Caribbean histories.

Although there has been relatively little engagement with the Black Atlantic model and sexuality, apart from Tinsley's article and Julien's documentary, there have been numerous critiques of some of the model's more noticeable blindspots. Although the image of the ship as representative of 'New World' cultural forms attests to the primary role which transatlantic slavery (and

Outlines of the Jamaican popular nationalist project." *The Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 3, no.2 (2009). [Open access journal]

²²⁸ Campbell 'Inge' Blackman, "Ragga Gyal D'bout!" England. 12 mins, 1994. Isaac Julien. "The Darker Side of Black". Fung, Richard. "Orientations". USA. 56 mins, 1986. Kydd, Elspeth. "Stone Street". Currently in Post-production. Expected release date late 2012. Mortimer, "Children of God". Mortimer's film is discussed in the fourth chapter alongside Shamim Sarif's film *The World Unseen*. Sarif, "The World Unseen."

to a lesser extent indentureship) played in the advent of modernity, Gilroy's model is not feasibly able to capture all suggested socio-historical nuances, and, at the same time, some critiques of the model focus on its weaknesses at the expense of its strengths.

Some readings, for example, do not question the unwillingness of national and Marxist critiques to approach cultural forms as transnational. Laura Chrisman's critique of Gilroy's Black Atlantic model is a clear example of the latter where she critiques Gilroy for segregating "...diasporic from nationalist and Marxist critical perspectives" but she does not take into account the heteronormative trajectories behind the majority of nationalist and marxist critical perspectives.²²⁹ Although Chrisman does highlight the *lack* of focus on the dynamics of class, and the specific trajectories of nationalism in the Black Atlantic model, and this is a notable absence in light of how central slavery was to the advent of capitalism, she ignores the central idea of culture as a transnational travelling process in the model. This idea is quite fundamental to the model as ignoring this distorts what Gilroy's model is envisaging; it is not trying to replicate nationalist perspective strictly speaking so it is rather unhelpful for Chrisman to suggest this.

There are, however, some critiques which pinpoint some significant blindspots, such as Neil Lazarus's critique where he questions Gilroy's "choice of Atlanticism over [capitalist] world system as the preferred unit of socio-historical analysis."²³⁰ Lazarus here is critiquing the focus in the 'Black Atlantic'

²²⁹ Laura Chrisman, "Black modernity, nationalism and transnationalism: The challenge of black South African poetry." In *Beyond the Black Atlantic: Relocating Modernization and Technology* edited by Walter Goebel and Saskia Schabio, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 30.

²³⁰ Neil Lazarus, "Is a Counterculture of Modernity a Theory of Modernity?" *Diaspora: A Journal*

model on the triangular trade map where the map prefigures transnational routes of modernity *and* acts as a symbol for the complex trajectory of 'New World' cultural forms. Clearly for Lazarus, the transatlantic focus of the Black Atlantic does not allow for critiques of the broader capitalist world system and Lazarus's critique reveals a notable blindspot of Gilroy's approach. However, Lazarus's critique may *over* emphasises the focus on capitalism as he does not acknowledge that Gilroy's model is primarily concerned with the *processes* of cultural forms and that class is a parameter within this but it is not the *only* parameter. Lazarus's in this sense is not engaging with the *symbolic* value of Gilroy's model.

Gayatri Gopinath also offers notable critiques of the Black Atlantic.²³¹ Her critique focusses on how the model replicates the black-white binary in its focus on 'Black' diasporic formations and naturalises a gendered and heterosexist reading of diaspora. Gopinath is specifically critiquing Gilroy's lack of attention to groups who do not fit with the model's focus on slave trade as this does not recognise the cultural fusion, and eclecticism, of other groups besides black Africans who became linked to the 'New World' through the various processes of modernity.²³² Her critique of the gendered idea of Black Atlantic is difficult to counter, and for this reason it is not a surprise that Julien's documentary *predominantly* focusses on African-Caribbean or African-American men. But I question the idea of his model naturalising a heterosexist reading of diaspora as I think the idea of diaspora set out in Gilroy's model enables a

of Transnational Studies 4, no.3 (1995) p. 333.

²³¹ Gayatri Gopinath, "'Bombay, U.K., Yuba City': Bhangra Music and the Engendering of Diaspora." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 4 no.3 (1995): 303-321.

²³² This critique is especially relevant for the next chapter and is an important caveat for any suggestion that Gilroy's model is somehow universal and neutral.

significant degree of flexibility. Natasha Omise'eke Tinsley would also question Gopinath's critique as too much of a blanket statement.²³³

Gilroy's model has also been read ambiguously in Anglophone Caribbean literary studies, particularly studies which focus on queer Anglophone Caribbean literary debates. Alison Donnell critiques Gilroy's idea of the Black Atlantic in how it may privilege routes over roots and that the Black Atlantic may, like some writings on diaspora, tend to favour 'new' cultural forms over the specificity of place.²³⁴ Donnell's critique resonates with how many writings on diaspora *have* ignored ideas of place and the historical relationship between the specificity of place and cultural forms. Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* is probably the most well-known example of a text which has been simplistically interpreted as privileging hybridity and 'new' cultural forms over the specificity of place.²³⁵

However, I argue that Gilroy's model does still provide a useful metaphor for explorations of the way in which cultural forms were caught up in the multiple processes of modernity. This is particularly apparent in Gilroy's Black Atlantic model which seeks to move beyond nation-centred and Eurocentric approaches. This is particularly insightful for readings of Isaac Julien's film *The Darker Side of Black*, as this text advocates a need to move beyond the equating of the 'nation' with national borders in light of the debates surrounding sexuality and the 'nation'.

I will now outline how *The Darker Side of Black* intervenes in these

²³³ Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic; Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage."

²³⁴ See chapter 2 'Global Villages and watery graves: Recrossing the Black Atlantic' in Donnell's *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* for important critiques of Gilroy and the tendency for some writings on diaspora to privilege 'new' cultural formations over the specificity of place.

²³⁵ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

debates by illustrating the complex transnational dynamics that are at play. This is specifically because Julien's documentary focuses explicitly on the debates surrounding homophobia, misogyny, nihilism and black popular cultural forms, in particular Jamaican dancehall. Thus, it participates in debates surrounding sexuality both within and without the region.

THE DARKER SIDE OF BLACK AND PAUL GILROY'S THE BLACK ATLANTIC

Isaac Julien's 1994 documentary *The Darker Side of Black* explores the potential reasons for why recent black popular cultural forms such as dancehall, rap and hip hop have departed radically from earlier forms, such as reggae, in that they tend to stress violence, anger, nihilism, misogyny and homophobia. Although approaches which recognise these themes in black popular culture are not by this stage new, the most striking feature of Julien's film is the sheer number of people who speak on dancehall, homophobia, rap, misogyny, violence and black cultural forms as the film features academics, politicians, dancehall DJs (both male and female), rappers, priests, representatives from GLAAD,²³⁶ people shopping in music shops in New York, queer black men in New York, Jamaica and Britain and fans of dancehall and black cultural forms.

Linking on from the sheer variety of participants within the documentary, the project clearly demonstrates the dedication of Gilroy and Julien to recuperating the dynamic creation of cultural forms: The film does not establish a central black identity, or subject, but instead explores black popular musical forms via a wide range of themes and inter-disciplinary perspectives. The opening shot of the film is a clear example of this as the film opens with a vista

²³⁶ GLAAD, ²³⁶ Gays and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation

shot of Kingston, Jamaica with Paul Gilroy narrating that the history of slavery in Jamaica “remains close to the surface of everyday life” and this us quickly linked to the specific power which the body is afforded in forms, such as dancehall.²³⁷

The importance of history in Jamaica is immediately foregrounded via this shot and sets the scene for the ensuing discussion of black popular forms. Although the film is not exclusively dedicated to black popular cultural in Jamaica, or to popular cultural forms in the Anglophone Caribbean, the dominance of dancehall as a cultural form is central to the whole documentary. Thus Jamaica, and the polarised debates which have sprung up surrounding the alleged extreme homophobia of dancehall, is a central motif running through the film. I am particularly interested in that dynamics specific to inner-city Jamaica, which is where dance-hall emerged originally are abstracted from most discussions of dancehall. Julien's film may, at points, unwittingly re-iterate this when the film sets up a critique of dancehall, and black popular cultural forms more broadly, without actively foregrounding class and the raw energy of dancehall as central to the package of dancehall as a genre. But I also argue that this is a central dialectic within these debates as locating dancehall as purely working class Jamaican limits the fluid complexity of it as a multi-faceted cultural form.

As mentioned earlier, a collaboration between Gilroy and Julien is not surprising given that the film's subject matter is the transnational reach of black cultural forms, a topic which Gilroy has written on extensively which is why this particular academic coupling so unsurprising. However, Julien's film does push

²³⁷ Opening shot, “The Darker Side of Black”.

beyond Gilroy's model in how it challenges the heteropatriarchal limitations of the Black Atlantic. At the same time, "The Darker Side of Black" represents Jamaica and the dancehall genre, especially the role of male dancehall DJs. Julien's film, in relation to both local Jamaican actors and participants and the various Caribbean diasporas. Moreover, the documentary also gives space to certain global North gay rights groups such as GLAAD and OUTRAGE! to dancehall who have declared dancehall to be purely homophobic, and by extension wider Jamaican society, as the film includes a representative speaker from GLAAD. Though notably is a gap as to why local Jamaican human rights groups do not participate in the film.

For this reason, the film is reflective of the time period within which it was produced as more recent debates surrounding dancehall, masculinity and Jamaican society has begun to engage with the complexity of same-sex desire. Indeed, how the film encapsulates the dynamic history of dancehall and current Jamaican popular cultural forms is problematic at points. as less important than the need to voice disapproval of the small number of dancehall artists who advocate violence against gays and lesbians in their songs. Paige Schilt criticises how "The Darker Side of Black" potentially marginalises Jamaican dancehall DJs who defend the idea that homosexuality is unJamaican and this is a particularly problematic aspect of the film.²³⁸ Schilt's critiques Julien's portrayal of the Jamaican DJ Buju Banton as a 'boy' when he wrote the now infamous *Boom Bye Bye* dancehall hit may imply how Banton's song, and by extension Banton, can be ignored as immature, confused and written off as the

²³⁸ Paige. Schilt, "Queering Lord Clark: Diasporic formations and travelling homophobia in Isaac Julien's *The Darker Side of Black*," in *Post-colonial, queer – Theoretical Intersections*, edited by John C. Hawley, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001). p. 165-184

folly of youth. Julien's exploration of the debates around dancehall and the homophobic overtones that go with it is questioned if his film/documentary is deliberately shutting down the debates. Thus, although *The Darker Side of Black* voices some important critiques and enables a complex dialogue to develop between some DJs, rappers, film makers and academics, and is one of the only documentary style films that explores dancehall and homophobia in a critically questioning way, Julien's film is not able to escape the potential labelling of dancehall and Jamaica as always already homophobic.

Despite some of these major blindspots, however, the film does raise some incredibly nuanced debates surrounding same-sex desire in the Caribbean. One such debate is raised by Campbell 'Inge' Blackman where she highlights that black lesbians, particularly in England, are able to engage in dancehall to create erotic and sexual spaces. The possibilities that dancehall offers to black lesbians directly contradicts the simplistic reading of dancehall as purely homophobic. However, at the same time, the space that is available to women in dancehall is notably different to the space available to men as women make up the majority of dancehall audiences in the UK and Jamaica and this obviously plays a part in the public expression of same-sex attraction and erotic pleasure in dancehall.²³⁹ Moreover, men and masculinity in Jamaican dancehall spaces and in wider Jamaican society are heavily policed, just like the way men and masculinity have been increasingly policed in the public sphere since the age of colonialism. This impacts on the different public spaces that lesbians, gay men and same-sex desiring people have been able to occupy. Robert Carr in 'On 'Judgements' Poverty, Sexuality-Based Violence and Human Rights in

²³⁹ Sonjah Stanley Niaah, *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto*. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010).

21st Century Jamaica' discussed the vulnerability of working class gay men and poor Jamaicans to homophobic violence.²⁴⁰ Thus, although it is a now rather common critique to hear that gay and queer men and queer male subcultures, on a very general level, occupy more public space and enjoy more broad privileges than gay and queer women and queer female subcultures, dancehall reveals how the more public and powerful position of male same-sex space is in no way universal or readily applicable across all contexts.

Julien's approach in the *The Darker Side of Black*, is typical of his dense, thoughtful and visually intriguing style and the film overall raises some complex and discursive issues and this is characteristic of Julien's oeuvre as a whole. *Young Soul Rebels*, *Frantz Fanon* and *Looking for Langston* are three of Julien's most well-known films and, like *The Darker Side of Black*, are visually stunning – almost excessively so – and explore some complex and uncomfortable issues. *Young Soul Rebels*, for example, explores the resurgence of British nationalism during late 1970s Britain and that the emergence of black music forms in Britain both combated racism and exposed the racial/sexual stereotyping of the British police. Many of Julien's films draw attention to how black male bodies are objectified by the white male [queer] gaze and are repeatedly objectified by the history of colonialism and the continuing legacies of racial/sexual constructions and stereotyping. *Frantz Fanon* is perhaps the clearest example from Julien's repertoire where the camera in the film is constantly moving between different images and floods the viewer with juxtaposition after juxtaposition.

²⁴⁰ See Carr "On 'Judgements' Poverty, Sexuality-Based Violence and Human Rights in 21st Century Jamaica" for a discussion of the vulnerability of working class gay men and poor Jamaicans to homophobic violence.

Unsurprisingly then *The Darker Side of Black* is highly stylised and complex in how it juxtaposes powerful images with interview clips. The richness of the shots and image collages read as visually stunning; for example, the partial shot of the slave in chains on the seashore who is juxtaposed with a figure who is reading the bible. The image suggests both the role that the bible played in slavery and also the potential that the bible offered to the enslaved. Images suggestive of African-Christianity recur throughout the film and these images highlight the undeniable complexity of African-Christian traditions in Jamaica and in the wider Caribbean. The importance of Christianity in Jamaica is acknowledged in the film from the very beginning. Gilroy the narrator declares that slaves and ex-slaves worked on the only cultural forms that were available to them; Christianity and surviving African musical and dance forms

The film, moreover, intersperses juxtaposed images and interviews with shots of Jamaica, dancehalls in Jamaica and New York and shots of cruising areas in Jamaica. However, the shots of the cruising areas are very subtle and probably elude many of viewers because of the way the film presents the scene as matter of fact. The ease with which such cruising scenes can be missed points to the complexity of Julien's work and the ease of missing some of the visual cues that are contained in the film due to the sheer visual denseness of the film. The (in)visibility of the cruising scene to the unaware or unsuspecting viewer also demonstrates that queer Jamaican men are not as easily read or seen in light of the debates around homophobia and dancehall because of the heightened register of these debates: The existence of a cruising spot in the Jamaican harbour is almost lost on the viewer because of the heightened portrayal of violence against gays in the film a still from the film at this point

might help focus the discussion here. This may be one of the major shortcomings of Julien's film; despite the subtle shots of the potential cruising scene, the focus on the violence of homophobia and misogyny in dancehall and rap in the film distracts from the possibility that queers in Jamaica live a day-to-day existence. Thus, although it is acknowledged both inside and outside of Jamaica that queers and particularly gay men are targeted by violence in certain situations,²⁴¹ the cruising grounds shot speaks to the existence of a latent subculture. This is despite that the public political realm in Jamaica cannot at this moment in time acknowledge queers as part of wider Jamaican society, but, the cruising shot acknowledges the existence of a visible subculture if only to the attuned viewer. The Jamaican born writer Kei Miller's short story collection *Fear of Stones and Other Stories* contains a story entitled 'This Dance' that also alludes to the existence of queer male dancehall spaces in Jamaica. Miller's story is keenly aware of the history that dancehall is bound up with and the story challenges Julien's rather limited scope on the dance hall genre and dance hall spaces, even if the story does not culminate in an actual queer dancehall space.²⁴²

Although Julien's style in *The Darker Side of Black* is quite unique both in his style of narrative and in his choice of topic, the film, in many ways, is obviously influenced by Jennie Livingston's 1990 documentary film *Paris is Burning*. This similarly styled collage documentary depicts drag ball culture of New York City in the late 1980s among the African-American, Latino/a and transgender communities who participate in these balls. The brief cruising scene shot in *The Darker Side of Black* is reminiscent of some of the shots in

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Kei Miller, *Fear of Stones and Other Stories* (Oxford: Macmillan, 2007).

Paris is Burning of the ball goers before and after the balls, particularly the shots of queer black men together as a group in the street. Inevitably, Julien, like any filmmaker, critic or artist is a product of his time and there are clear parallels between the films though, arguably, *Paris is Burning* allows the various drag queens and ball goers far more space/room to articulate themselves than what Julien concedes to dancehall DJs and rappers particularly dancehall DJs from Jamaica.

However, although Julien's film does aspire to overview the complexity of the dancehall and homophobia debates, Julien, as noted earlier, marginalises dancehall DJs in his film, particularly Buju Banton, and the film closes with a priest uncritically informing the audience that a reinterpretation of the term Boom bye bye could allow black people the chance to challenge the real systems of oppression. Although such an idea holds merit, to suggest that dancehall be neutralised by a religiously motivated desire to challenge systems of oppression does not acknowledge that dancehall reflects a particular history and is not easily cast aside. Julien's film although provocative and highly skilful in that it asks the viewer to make their own connections, the film instead allows a certain censorship of dancehall and promotes a problematic view of Jamaica and male dancehall DJs.

“THE DARKER SIDE OF BLACK” AND “BOOM BYE BYE”; LOCAL AND GLOBAL (MIS)PERCEPTIONS

Isaac Julien's “The Darker Side of Black” engages with some of the heightened stakes surrounding discussions of sexuality and black popular culture in Anglophone Caribbean contexts, particularly homosexuality, and the

debates surrounding dancehall songs such as “Boom Bye Bye!2 by Buju Banton. However, many of the debates surrounding the place of Caribbean cultural forms illustrate the specific demarcations of *what* does not get discussed in the popular culture and *who* is performing that discussion. Thus, although the dynamics of the debates surrounding popular culture attest to the historical and contemporary dynamism of Caribbean popular culture, these debates also demonstrate that popular cultural forms, like cultural nationalism, are premised on ideas of exclusion and inclusion.²⁴³ Popular cultural forms, such as carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, have reflected powerful moments of group resistance to authority but have also reflected the emergence of ideologies that resonate with colonial ideas of 'difference' *and* hegemonic patriarchies, such as African-Caribbean nationalisms, which reiterate neo-colonial dynamics. Milla Riggio in 'Resistance and Identity: Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago' gives a succinct historical overview of how Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago has gone through several historical moments, each of which has involved some degree of public reclamation of space although in a much more commercial sense in recent years.²⁴⁴

Although Caribbean popular cultural forms reflect the exclusion-inclusion dynamic of cultural forms in numerous other contexts, the dyad is a specific characteristic of cultural forms that are linked to *group* protest in Anglophone Caribbean contexts. This is because the relationship between popular protest and popular cultural forms reflects that the importance of group protest is

²⁴³ Anthony Cohen in *The Symbolic Construction of Community* argues that community is constructed symbolically in the minds of its members (London and New York: Routledge, 1985).

²⁴⁴ Milla C. Riggio, “Resistance and Identity: Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago.” *The Drama Review* 42 no.3 (1998): 6-23.

underpinned by a heteronormative ideology of 'race' in numerous Anglophone Caribbean contexts. The specific role of heteronormativity during the colonial era in firstly constructing the idea of a homogeneous black 'identity' is crucial here. It is this colonial construct where a specific idea of heterosexuality underpins a specific idea of 'race' which is interpreted as intrinsically Jamaican in popular cultural forms, such as dance hall. Strong examples of the continuity between colonial constructions of 'race' and postcolonial cultural nationalism is strongly reflected in representations of Jamaican-ness in dancehall where ethnicity is sexualised and sexuality is ethnicised.

Representations of sexuality in popular cultural forms strongly reflect the dual construction of sexuality and ethnicity where the specific relationship reiterates heteronormative ideas of 'race' as underpinned by heterosexual intercourse. Even a cursory glance at the title of Banton's song "Boom Bye Bye" foregrounds that the song premises itself on the inclusion of heterosexuality at the expense of the exclusion of homosexuality; the 'boom' in its title mimics the sound of a gun-shot and the 'bye bye' is addressed to those gay men who are being shot by this gun. However, the extent to which Banton's song can be read as excluding gay men *on a literal level* has led some critics to debate whether the gun in the title, and the violence explicitly outlined in the overall song, can be interpreted as metaphorical *rather than* literal. The debates over the place of the literal versus the metaphorical have focussed on the performative nature of dancehall as a popular cultural form which foregrounds explicit themes such as domestic violence, drugs, misogyny, homophobic violence, poverty, racism, sex and violence. But also that dancehall *enacts* aggressive themes in a relatively contained space via a

cultural form that foregrounds the *centrality* of the body. Carolyn Cooper has replied to accusations that “Boom Bye Bye” is advocating literal violence against gay men by stressing that Banton’s song is a lyrical gun and *not* a literal gun.²⁴⁵ Cooper’s critiques foreground the centrality of *metaphor and performativity* of dance hall and this is notably ignored in many critiques by western LGBTQ groups.

However, the ideologies of masculinity that “Boom Bye Bye” perpetuates needs to be contextualised *in relation* to the wider power of heteropatriarchy in Jamaica. Thus, although it is simplistic to say that Banton is responsible for those who interpret his song as advocating violence against LGBTQ, and this is an explicit critique made of Banton in campaigns, such as ‘Stop Murder Music’, the song’s lyrical gun needs to be contextualised in relation to the place of wider heteropatriarchal power dynamics in Jamaica.²⁴⁶ Cornell West in “The Darker Side of Black” explicitly pinpoints the *masculinist* power that is expressed in popular cultural forms such as dancehall, hip hop and rap.²⁴⁷ According to Cornwell, the power expressed in dancehall, hip hop and rap over women’s bodies reflects the lack of access to power in many black communities. West is primarily referring to African-American experiences in the US but his critiques of the desired power over women’s bodies in black popular cultural forms extend to dancehall as a cultural form that has primarily emerged from Jamaica.

²⁴⁵ Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*. (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1993).

²⁴⁶ ‘Stop Murder Music’ is an international campaign that advocates for the boycott of artists whose songs are interpreted as explicitly homophobic. Dance hall artists form quite a substantial number of the campaign’s targeted boycotts.

²⁴⁷ Masculinist here refers to the representations or ideologies where male or masculine power is cast as ‘natural’. West pinpoints this idea of masculinist power when he critiques the construction of women’s bodies as objects in some black popular forms as a ‘natural’ right. It is worth noting that masculinist approaches are not confined to heteropatriarchal representations. Some lesbian representations which present a butch gender identity as the superior to a feminine gender identity is an example of the flexibility of masculinist registers.

Indeed, some critics have commented on the suggestion in some dancehall music that to be a rapist is to better than to be a homosexual. Again, these lyrics, and the ideologies that they project, need to be interpreted as the performance of heteropatriarchal masculinity which *requires* the exclusion of homosexuals and the inclusion of women as *available sexual objects*.

However, I am not stating here that Banton's song is inherently homophobic but the song does focus on the killing of gay men in order to reify heteropatriarchal masculinity which is held up as an ideal in the majority of dancehall songs. Moreover, I am not reading the song as the cause of homophobic violence nor I am I saying that the song is simply about projecting homophobia onto the bodies of those perceived as homosexual as the song is a performance of heteropatriarchal masculinity. Nor am I claiming that the song is neutral as this is dependent on the context as is seen by the use of "Boom Bye Bye!" by some Jamaican politicians during election campaigns where the explicit homophobic ideas contained with the song are utilised for political purposes. However, the construction of this particular idea of masculinity in relation to the homosexual 'other' and the bodies of women is an issue that foregrounds the power of heteropatriarchal ideologies in popular cultural debates. Moreover, at the same time, the focus on African-Caribbean women, and specifically their bodies, in Jamaican dancehall is premised on the idea of excluding other groups, such as Indo-Caribbean groups who constitute a sizeable proportion of the population in Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago. The exclusion-inclusion dyad as a central organising feature in many popular cultural forms and dance hall illustrates that popular cultural debates are largely over determined by the focus on the us versus them dichotomy.

THE BLACK ATLANTIC AND MOVING BEYOND THE 'NATION' IN
CARIBBEAN FILMS

Isaac Julien's 1993 film documentary "the Darker Side of Black" explores the debates surrounding black popular cultural forms such as rap and dance hall and the vociferous debates surrounding the lyrics and perceived aggression expressed towards women and queers within these forms. The film, is one of the only documentary style films to explore the relationship between dance hall and homophobia in a critically questioning way. It explores the debates surrounding homophobia, the body and misogyny in dance hall and rap by drawing attention to the performativity of dance hall lyrics and performances across national borders. There are some smaller lower key film projects that look at the complexity of dance hall such as Campbell 'Inge' Blackman's *Ragga Gyal D'bout!*²⁴⁸ However, Blackman's film focusses on women and dance hall in England and although black women who participate in dancehall are rarely given the space to say why they participate in dancehall, "Ragga Gyal D'bout!" does not explore the debates around homophobia and dancehall. This may be because the film is a short film, and thus does not have the space to be able to explore dancehall in such a broad fashion. However, it is important to note that the song that sparked the homophobia and dancehall debates, Buju Banton's "Boom Bye Bye", did not cause a stir in Jamaica the way it did in the West.²⁴⁹ Blackman's film acknowledges the more complex nuances of dance hall culture and that it is not just about homophobia, but, can provide a space for positive

²⁴⁸ Campbell 'Inge' Blackman, "Ragga Gyal D'bout!" 6 mins, (England: The Arts Council of Great Britain and Carlton Television. 1994).

²⁴⁹ The lack of response to "Boom Bye Bye" within Jamaica is also noted in "the Darker Side of Black".

self-expression for black women in England.

Peter Blake's and Stephen K. Amos's documentary "Batty Man" is another documentary that looks at homophobia in black popular cultural forms in England and explores the possible influences from dancehall on the homophobia and violence inspired by dancehall songs.²⁵⁰ Although "Batty Man" is interesting in that it draws attention to the superficial stereotyping of gay men, it ends up focussing largely on Amos's decision not to hide his sexuality and is less ambitious than both Julien's and Campbell's films: Amos's opinion in the documentary is really what the documentary focusses upon, even when Amos is in Jamaica. The overall approach within it does, however, highlight the over emphasis on male dancehall DJs in homophobia and dancehall debates but Amos's journey to Jamaica in the documentary is predictably short, inconclusive and gives only a snap shot of the complexity of sexual expression and dancehall in Jamaica. Thus, even though Amos identifies as being affected by homophobia in black cultural forms, the documentary and he as its main protagonist, is not able to contextualise dancehall as a complex genre. The main focus in the documentary is trying to pin down homophobic views and whether certain figures will admonish their views on homosexuality. Such a focus, in light of the production of this documentary for national TV in the UK, limits the potential of the documentary so the focus becomes dancehall *and* all Jamaicans, as homophobic rather than the historical reasons for why this may be the case in certain dancehall songs or attitudes towards homosexuality. Timothy Chin's seminal article "'Bullers' and Battymen: Contesting Homophobia in Black Popular Culture and Contemporary Caribbean Literature" is particularly

²⁵⁰ Peter Blake, "Batty Man." 55 mins. Channel 4 productions, 2008.

insightful here as Chin argues that what is needed in the debates on homophobia and dancehall is “a cultural politics that can critique as well as affirm.”²⁵¹ Chin's article was one of the first academic articles which pinpointed the silence in Anglophone Caribbean literature surrounding same-sex desire where he pinpointed the need to critique heteronormative ideas of black culture, specifically readings which do not problematise the idea that homosexuality is a foreign and 'unnatural' aberration within the Caribbean. It is very difficult to locate an indigenous Caribbean critique of homophobia and the heteropatriarchy of nationalism and dancehall for many reasons, one being that many artists and critics who address homosexuality and homophobia need to travel outside the Caribbean to find work opportunities and this is one of the major consequences of colonialism. Thus in a way, the polarization of dancehall and homophobia debates is a consequence of colonialism.

Neither Blackman's nor Julien's films draws attention to the role of class or downtown culture in dance hall. This draws attention to that debates on dancehall often preclude direct engagements with class. Indeed, the lack of engagement with class indicates the difficulty of engaging with dancehall and homophobia in a complex and nuanced way as although dancehall in Jamaica is read by many of its explicit supporters as symbolic of 'downtown' culture that resists both middle-class Jamaican's definitions of culture and the hegemonic power of global culture, dancehall in both Blackman's film and Julien's film is not read as strongly reflecting class issues in the Jamaican context. Blackman's film is particularly contradictory in this respect as although her film focusses on black women in England actively participating in dancehall, all of the women in

²⁵¹ Timothy Chin, “Bullers” and “Battymen”: Contesting Homophobia n Black Popular Culture and Contemporary Caribbean Literature.” *Callaloo* 20 no.1 (1997) p. 128.

the film occupy privileged middle class positions. This is clearly signified in that all of the women in the film advertise their education and their professional positions.²⁵² This raises the issue of why class is rendered invisible in debates on dancehall as although Blackman and Julien do explore some key issues of dancehall and its history, both productions do not wholly engage with class struggle in Jamaica as a major theme in Jamaican dancehall. Indeed, this important theme gets lost in some transnational discussions of dancehall and may be the particular blindspot of transnational portrayals of dancehall in visual media. Carolyn Cooper's writings on dance hall as a local cultural form which actively resists the global hegemonic dominance of western capitalism is a clear critique of where class in dancehall is often subsumed under wider discourses of resistance. This is particularly visible through analyses of dance hall having a complex, and at times difficult, relationship with depictions of inner city Kingston. Cooper's writings are some of the first academic publications to deal with dancehall at the academic level but Cooper's discussion of dancehall does elide some of the more difficult and arguably most local aspects of the debates; namely queer Jamaicans responses to dancehall.²⁵³

There is a forthcoming documentary on dancehall, homophobia and Jamaica entitled *Taboo.... Yardies*. by film maker Selena Blake which challenges the ideas that all Jamaicans are homophobic, but, Black's documentary, like most locally set projects in the Caribbean, including Mortimer's *Children of God* which will be discussed in chapter four, struggles to find financial support

²⁵² This is most pronounced by how all of the women foreground their education.

²⁵³ The elision of class in dancehall debates is discussed in more detail in chapter 5 – second last chapter – in relation to the tendency of some transnational comparative readings of local cultural forms which privilege the idea of resisting global hegemony without an analysis of how the local is nearly always already in a relationship with the global.

because of the severe lack of funds for locally produced films in the Caribbean in comparison to the bigger metropolitan centres in the 'West'. It is no surprise, for this reason, that Julien's film and other film makers who focus on the Caribbean, such as Blackman, Elspeth Kydd, and Richard Fung are based outside of the Caribbean and fund their works through their day jobs or their positions as academics in the case of Kydd and Fung. Mortimer's film, for example, although set in the Bahamas, is financed by companies based outside of the Bahamas. Many of the film's actors are not from the Bahamas because of the need for aspiring actors in the Bahamas to seek work outside of the Bahamian islands due to the very few film projects that are actually filmed in the region.

THE LIMITS AND LIMITATIONS OF CARIBBEAN POPULAR CULTURE

DEBATES

The fixing and ordering of difference along gender, racial, sexual, national and class lines during colonialism, and the concurrent racial anxieties and fears which survived into the post-emancipation and post-independence era, are legacies that continue to affect present day Anglophone Caribbean contexts. These legacies markedly inform the debates surrounding sexuality and, most obviously, in debates, or 'sound clashes' to use Carolyn Cooper's metaphor, surrounding same-sex desire and practices.²⁵⁴ The title of Cooper's 2004 study of Jamaican dancehall culture *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* pinpoints that dance hall can be read in a number of ways and these myriad interpretations reflect the main debates surrounding dancehall as

²⁵⁴ Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

a popular cultural form: It is seen as in opposition to the respectable Eurocentric Jamaican middle class dominant group *and* as subversively transnational in its challenge to global hegemonic culture. These multiple interpretations of dance hall demonstrate that, on one level, the potential resistance of dancehall as a cultural form to uptown Jamaican culture reflects the competing value systems of Jamaican society *and* reflects a form of resistance to global hegemony, particularly in that it travels beyond the traditional 'borders' of Jamaica.

However, on another level, the debates surrounding dance hall reflect what counts, and what does not count, as Jamaican culture, especially when the idea of local cultural forms are pitched as in complete opposition to the global. Although Cooper's title is effective in succinctly portraying some of the controversies and verbal plays of dancehall, critics of Cooper, such as Niaah Stanley, pinpoint that she reifies heteronormativity and may prioritise the lyrics of dancehall over the wider experience of dancehall culture beyond the lyrics.²⁵⁵ This is a salient critique of Cooper given that dancehall is not solely about lyrics and is as much about the body, reclaiming public space, music and a particular stance against colonial and neo-colonial ideas of censorship as it is about the power of the DJ's lyrics. Stanley Niaah analyses dancehall with a more spatial and considered approach in light of wider dancehall culture beyond lyrical wordplay. Denise deCaires Narain, Denise Noble and Norman Stolzoff, moreover, all critique Cooper's take on the subversive power afforded to working class Afro-Jamaican women in dancehall.²⁵⁶ deCaires Narain pinpoints

²⁵⁵ Stanley Niaah. *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto*.

²⁵⁶ Denise deCaires Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry; Making Style* (London and New York; Taylor and Francis Group, 2002). Denise Noble "Postcolonial criticism,

that the power which women *may* acquire through participating in dancehall needs to be read alongside the way in which dancehall space is still primarily controlled by men and that this seriously questions the 'liberating' space of dancehall.²⁵⁷ deCaires Narain proposes that if Afro-Jamaican women's bodies are read as symbols of Creole cultural resistance in dancehall, then this reading does not challenge that women's bodies in dance hall are exist in a space that is still primarily controlled by men:

The violent homophobia and misogyny of raga culture cannot be satisfactorily explained away by invoking black working-class men's oppresses status. Neither can the display of women's bodies in dance hall culture be read a simply celebrating female sexuality. Cooper is right in saying that the spectacular and famously revealing clothing worn by dance hall women challenges inherited, middle-class definitions of femininity, but this class is not necessarily the primary audience for such display. When this erotic display is read in the immediate arena of the dance hall itself, it is much more difficult to interpret this display of the female body as a display of female power. The documented reality suggests that is it is raga *men* who control what women are actually allowed to do with their bodies. The display by raga queens of sexual power dramatized in the dance hall remains, precisely, *a display of power* as long as men control the circumstances in which that power can be *acted out*.²⁵⁸ [author's italics]

Don Letts' 1997 feature film *Dancehall Queen* which is set in contemporary Kingston, Jamaica foregrounds that the performance of heteronormative roles and themes, where ethnicity and sexuality are simultaneously constructing each other, is central to dancehall as a genre.²⁵⁹ The central protagonist, Marcia, is introduced in the film as a poor street vendor in Kingston with no long-term future prospects for her or her two young daughters. Marcia becomes involved in dancehall culture and eventually wins an important dancehall queen

transnational identifications and the hegemonies of dancehall's academic and popular performativities." *Feminist Review* 90 no.1 (2008): 106-127. Norman Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

²⁵⁷ deCaires Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry; Making Style*, p.101

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

²⁵⁹ Elgood and Letts, "Dancehall Queen."

competition. Although winning the competition cash prize does not completely change Marcia's life, winning the competition, and the confidence that she exudes as a dancehall queen, enables Marcia *a degree* of self-expression that is not available to her as a street vendor.

Crucially the erotic power that Marcia embodies in the dancehall spaces is ambivalent, in light of critiques of dancehall spaces as a primarily controlled by men, even if her power as a dancehall queen enables her to access broader life choices for her and her children; her erotic power is gained by accessing a space that is largely dominated by expectations of erotic display as heteronormative *only* where the majority of dancers are women and the majority of onlookers are men. How Marcia is viewed throughout the film, and that she succeeds in performing as an outwardly confident dancehall queen is what gives her status; not the expression of an agency outside of dance hall culture.

However, the existence of dancehall events that enable spaces for black lesbian audiences in the UK is also worth mentioning here as this is often left out of most discussions of dancehall. Campbell 'Inge' Blackman is interviewed in Isaac Julien's "The Darker Side of Black" where she attests to the potential which dancehall spaces have for black lesbians in the UK as dancehall can allow these women to get openly sexual with each other on the dance floor. It is noticeable that this feature of dancehall is *not* focussed on in most discussions of dancehall. But given that the majority of dancehall spaces in Jamaica do not offer a space for same-sex desire to be publicly acknowledged, even if it does occur, and this is bound up with the construction and policing of 'identity' since the colonial period in the Anglophone Caribbean, Blackman's comments do not overturn the heteronormative dynamics of most dancehall events. But her

comments do attest to the transnational potential of dance hall culture *outside* of Jamaica.

The dynamics of cultural nationalism in postcolonial contexts is a central backdrop here as postcolonial national projects are some of the most glaring examples where the gendered idea of the nation as 'mother' reduces women to symbols who have no agency of their own but who stand in for the nation's 'most precious resource'. The central focus on women's bodies in dance hall is glaringly similar to the focus on women as symbols of the 'nation' since the late eighteenth century. A comparative glance at geographically diverse postcolonial nations, such as India and Ireland, where the idea of the nation as 'mother' has prominently featured in both countries' long and still ongoing decolonization projects, demonstrates that nationalism in postcolonial struggles is shot through with reductive ideas of a gendered binary. Jamaica, and the Caribbean region, are thus not the only contexts where ideas of gender, culture and nationalism are imbricated within postcolonial and (neo)colonial ideological trajectories.

CONTEMPORARY ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN SEXUALITY

DEBATES

The debates over dance hall culture, and specifically whether black women's bodies are read as symbols of resistance but not afforded individual agency, attests to the complex historical trajectory of the construction of sexuality in the Caribbean. This is most apparent in the debates surrounding sexuality within the region as these are enmeshed with both historical and more obviously recent contextual debates, such as the region's relationship with transnational capital and consumerism. Alexander's seminal critiques form an

obvious background here where she outlines the overlap between neocolonialism, the global political economy and postcolonial Anglophone Caribbean nation-states as constructing ideas of nationality.²⁶⁰ The extent to which colonial and neocolonial legacies continue to affect representations of sexuality both *within* and *without* the region is particularly clear in the obsessive focus on African-Caribbean heteronormative performance. This has had profound effects on the debates surrounding homosexuality and non-heteronormative practices as this narrow focus has simplified what can and, more importantly, what cannot be included in the debates surrounding sexuality.

Indeed, the singular focus on homophobia and African-Caribbeans in public discussions around same-sex sexuality in the Caribbean and in some western media reports on the Anglophone Caribbean has, quite apparently, has not only narrowed the scope of the debates surrounding sexuality; it has also given rise to an obsessive focus with African-Caribbean heteronormative performance.²⁶¹ The agreement between some Christian church leaders, political figures and dance hall artists in the Caribbean over the 'unnaturalness' of homosexuality is perhaps the strongest example of where heteronormativity is constantly affirmed in the public sphere without much attention to some of the more subtle debates happening in other contexts. The strengthening of the punishment for the crime of sodomy in Trinidad in 2002, and the frequent threats to do the same in Jamaica, are some of the most obvious examples where wider public opinion has overwhelmingly agreed with the need to entrench anti-homosexual laws.

²⁶⁰ Alexander, "Not Just Any(body) Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Post-coloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas."

²⁶¹ Mention overturning of sodomy laws in some areas of the Caribbean and the withholding of fund from Britain over the last year from commonwealth countries.

However, the strengthening of sodomy laws needs to acknowledge when and how sodomy laws came into existence in the first place. Tracy Robinson and Yasmin Tambiah offer important critiques of the legal system in the Anglophone Caribbean and stress that the need to understand the history and volatility of the particular legal systems is key for any discussion of homophobia and heteronormativity.²⁶² Robinson, in particular, stresses that sodomy laws, and the particular legal systems within the Anglophone Caribbean, are not deterministically heteronormative but reflect the particular colonial and postcolonial trajectories of the various nation-states. Alexander's seminal critiques again resonate here where she critiqued Anglophone Caribbean nation-states and legal systems for both *resisting* and *cooperating* with western transnational capital dominance and neocolonialism and that this is a key issue for any discussion of heteronormativity and legal systems within the region.²⁶³ HIV/AIDS initiatives, moves to combat gender based violence and the debates which have arisen in Caribbean literature and literary theory over same-sex desire within the Caribbean and non-heteronormative desire and practices are some of the most thought provoking debates which have emerged surrounding Caribbean sexuality debates over the last thirty years and which have been overwhelmingly drowned out by the more polarised debates.²⁶⁴ Moreover, it is

²⁶² Tracy Robinson, "Authorized Sex: Same-Sex Sexuality and Law in the Caribbean." In *Sexuality, Social Exclusion & Human Rights*, edited by C Barrow, M de Bruin and R Carr, 3-22. (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2009). Yasmin Tambiah, "Creating Immoral Citizens." *The Caribbean Review of Gender Studies, A Journal of Caribbean perspectives on Gender and Feminism* 1 no. 3 (Nov 2009). <open access journal>

²⁶³ Alexander, "Not Just Any(body) Can be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas."

²⁶⁴ See Alison Donnell's *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature, Critical moments in Anglophone Literary History* and Thomas Glave's *Our Caribbean, A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* for two recent and important contributions which attest to the sheer range of literary texts and criticism which deal with Caribbean queer and same-sex experience.

worth noting here that the extent of these debates is not easily gauged given the more extreme homophobic, racialised, classist, misogynistic stances which tend to dominate the debates surrounding sexuality. But on a general level, the most obvious contexts where these debates have become polarised are popular culture, political and legal contexts and responses to indigenous LGBTQ organisations and HIV/AIDS initiatives.

It is worth noting here that the casting of homosexuality as 'unnatural' in media and political discussions largely focusses on African-Caribbean men and *not* women. The focus again here is *mainly* on African-Caribbean people and not any other ethnic group which raises the issue of the media possibly ethnocentrising discussions of sexuality by always focussing on African-Caribbean men. Reading same-sex practising Afro-Caribbean men as the primary transgressors reflects, in many ways, the particular pressures surrounding African-Caribbean masculinity but also reflects that the sexual agency of Afro-Caribbean men and African-Caribbean women is read differently. Furthermore, the predominant focus on African-Caribbean masculinity invisibilises African-Caribbean lesbians and same-sex practising women as Makeda Silvera critiques where she overviews some of the possible pitfalls of Afro-Caribbean lesbians/same-sex practising women remaining invisible.²⁶⁵ Silvera's central argument is that the predominant focus on African-Caribbean men erases the agency of African-Caribbean women who may prefer erotic relationships with women. Silvera's wider argument mirrors the desexualization of lesbians in comparison to gay men in some media and public health representations where lesbians are often represented as not 'at risk' in

²⁶⁵ Makeda Silvera, "Man Royals and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians." *Feminist Studies* 18 no.2 (1992): 521-532. *The Lesbian Issue*.

comparison to gay men. The role of gender in representations of gays and lesbians where gay men are pathologised as sexual predators and lesbians are desexualised, or, at worst, represented as the equivalent of frigid spinsters, foregrounds that gender and sexuality need to be analysed together.

CONCLUSION:

Although Paul Gilroy's transnational approach to identity and black popular culture forms an obvious backdrop to Julien's film, some of the debates raised in Julien's do not withstand rigorous critical analysis. This is largely due to how* although Julien's film clearly recognises how important the transnational circulation of black popular culture is, the difficulties which arise when trying to contextualise homophobia in Jamaica halts the potential of Julien's film as homophobia in Julien's film becomes a characteristic of Jamaican dancehall DJs rather than a complex product of socio-historical circumstances. Thus, although the film is full of potential in how it seeks to highlight the transnational contexts which are enmeshed in the debates surrounding black popular culture and sexuality, the tendency to isolate homophobia as something possessed by Jamaican male DJs, without a discussion of some of the more local debates surrounding class and cultural production, severely limits the potential of *The Darker Side of Black*.

CHAPTER FOUR:
TRANSNATIONAL DIALOGUES IN KAREEM
MORTIMER'S *CHILDREN OF GOD* AND SHAMIM SARIF'S
THE WORLD UNSEEN

INTRODUCTION:

Apart from some brief suggestive critiques by critics who are mostly based outside of the Anglophone Caribbean and South Africa, comparative analyses of same-sex desire in visual and literary texts from these regions are notably absent.²⁶⁶ This chapter redresses this void by comparing the 2010 feature film *Children of God* by the African-Bahamian film maker Kareem Mortimer and 2008 feature film *The World Unseen* by the British Indian film maker and writer Shamim Sarif.²⁶⁷ I demonstrate that comparative analyses of these two films facilitates more nuanced engagements with ideas of same-sex desire than approaches which anchor desire and same-sex practices specifically within regional or nationalist models of Caribbean and South African sexualities and desires. More specifically, this chapter analyses the dynamics surrounding the consumption of these films given that they are both feature films available to a transnational audience. I argue that the global consumption of these films brings to light the disturbing, and perhaps, unavoidable dynamics of globalisation and assesses whether the very anxieties within which these films are embroiled enables a space for future debates surrounding sexuality to emerge. I moreover analyse the comparative differences between the films in relation to ideas of private versus public in the book where I suggest that the

²⁶⁶ Henriette Gunkel compares her own 2010 ethnographic study *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* with Gloria Wekker's 2006 ethnographic study of working-class Surinamese women but very passingly. *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006). Both of these studies are more focussed on the ethnographic and sociology side of analysis than on literature and visual texts though Gunkel does focus quite strongly on Muholi's work.

²⁶⁷ Mortimer, "Children of God". Sarif, "The World Unseen."

more ambiguous relationship between Amina and Miriam in Sarif's film enables a greater degree of reflexive choice for the two women lovers in comparison to Jonny and Romeo in Mortimer's film. I suggest this allows for a queering of the idea of transnational consumption as although the consumption of these films reflects the demands of a predominantly western audience, these films can be read as more than simply consumer goods.

CARIBBEAN FILM-MAKING AND QUEER VISIBILITIES

Kareem Mortimer's 2010 feature film *Children of God* focusses on a small, interconnected group of Bahamians in the present day Bahamas and explores the impact that fundamentalist Christian ideals, family pressure(s), homophobia and the policing of heteropatriarchal gender roles have on its myriad cast over a short two to three week period. The main narrative thread in the film is the blossoming sexual and romantic relationship between the troubled characters of Jonny, a young white Bahamian man in his early to mid-twenties, and Romeo, a young African-Bahamian man, also in his early to mid-twenties, who meet by accident on a boat trip and become increasingly attached to each other. The film loosely focuses on the ups and downs of their developing relationship as we follow their time together on the island of Nassau.

Both characters are presented as searching for something though both overcome this to a degree by the end of the film. Jonny is presented as struggling on both a day-to-day level and an artistic level for inspiration for his fine art degree and for a way to deal with his relatively marginalised position as a white, relatively poor, closeted and effeminate gay man who is actively 'outed'

and targeted as a “batty man” by a local group of African-Bahamian men.²⁶⁸

Romeo, on the other hand, is presented as searching for a space away from his intrusive family and fellow band-members whilst he struggles with the scrutinising heteropatriarchal expectations of his friends, family and the domineering judgement of the local Christian fundamentalist church. Although both characters have the chance to connect to each other at various points during the film, neither character fully finds what they are looking for in the space of the film. This is poignantly illustrated in the ambiguous ending of the film where Jonny lies dying from wounds inflicted by an ex-lover whilst he fantasises about an idealistic encounter between himself and Romeo on an empty beach in the Bahamas. The significance of the viewer being privy to Jonny's fantasies as Jonny dies is discussed later in this chapter, particularly in relation to the role of deserted Bahamian beaches in the stereotypical tourist imaginary.

Despite that the film's main focus is a developing relationship between two men, their relationship is firmly intertwined with the wider cast of the film. In this respect, the film is not simply a carbon copy of the stereotypical Hollywood film which focuses on two main (usually) heterosexual characters who 'fall in love' as here the different lives of the characters are inter-woven throughout *Children of God*. The interwoven narrative(s) is one of the film's main strengths as it enables the film narrative to portray not only relationships between the characters but also connections between the different characters' lives and predicaments. This is clearly illustrated in the developing relationship between Jonny and Romeo where their troubled realities are mirrored by the complex

²⁶⁸ ‘Batty man’ is a slang term for a male homosexual and it is a highly offensive term within the film.

contradictions which surround dominant and marginalised sexualities as familial and socio-cultural contradictions are portrayed as affecting all of the characters' lives and *not* just Jonny and Romeo.

The opening shots of the film aptly demonstrate this with shots of Jonny and a male African-Bahamian lover in bed together and also of Lena, an African-Bahamian woman and a fundamentalist Christian campaigner, at a doctor's office. The two different shots convey an evident discord in the characters' lives where there is a clear distance between Jonny and his lover, with Jonny seen leaving the bed and moving away from his lover, and with Lena expressing vehement disbelief when she is told by her doctor that she has contracted syphilis. We later learn that Lena has contracted syphilis from her African-Bahamian husband Ralph who, in his public role as a fundamentalist Christian preacher, speaks openly about the 'unnatural vice' that is homosexuality and firmly keeps his wife in adherence with the gender norms of heteropatriarchy, but in his private life he enjoys random sex with men.

The dominance of heteropatriarchy in Ralph and Lena's relationship is clearly demonstrated when Ralph labels her a 'whore' when she tells him that she has syphilis, even though it is steadily implied throughout the film that she has contracted it from him and that he has contracted it, unbeknown to her, through casual sex with men he meets in bars. The ethical debates which are raised by this particular representation of a closeted African-Bahamian man 'on the down low' who infects his wife with syphilis is an under explored issue in many reviews of the film and points to the limits of the idea of political visibility which is represented by some western, though not exclusively western, LGBTQ groups as 'universal'. Andrew Tucker's critiques of the importance which is afforded to sexual visibility as the most desired political gain in the public sphere

by some queer LGBTQ groups is especially relevant here.²⁶⁹ Although Tucker focusses on South Africa, his critiques are relevant for the Anglophone Caribbean context, particularly Tucker's critique that gender, class and ethnic dynamics can rarely, if ever, be sensitively foregrounded in representations of global 'gay' culture or in representations of Cape Town where queers are homogenised as white, middle class, English-speaking and male.²⁷⁰

For space reasons, however, the debates surrounding ethical representations and campaigns of STDs and the historical representation of bisexual men or African-Caribbean men 'on the down low' as the 'vices' of the supposedly homogeneous 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' communities are not discussed in this project. However, it is important to note that although the terms 'on the down low' or 'down low' initially emerged in the US to refer to African-American men who identify as heterosexual but who have sex with men, the term is now being used to analyse the particular pressures on those African-Caribbean men who may be married and/or identify as heterosexual but who also have sex with men and who steadfastly do not identify with mainstream ideas of homosexuality; namely queer subculture(s) and a gay 'identity'.

Andil Gosine extrapolates on the dynamics surrounding naming, power and sexual desire in the Anglophone contexts where he critiques the uses (and abuses) of terminology and identity terms for researching sexual minorities in the Caribbean amongst other contexts.²⁷¹ P.H. Collins' *Black Sexual Politics: African-Americans, Gender and the New Racism* offers a useful comparative

²⁶⁹ Tucker, *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*.

²⁷⁰ Tucker specifically critiques the emergence of global visibility for LGBTQ and same-sex desiring people in the South African context.

²⁷¹ Andil Gosine, "'Race', culture, power, sex, desire and love: Writing in 'men who have sex with men'." *IDS Bulletin* 37 no. 5 (2007): 27-33. Keith Boykin in *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies and Denial in Black America* also provides an introduction to the difficulties of opening up a discussion surrounding 'the down low' subculture. *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies and Denial in Black America* (New York: Carroll and Graff, 2004).

study of hegemonic gender dynamics and African-American communities in the contemporary US context.²⁷² Although Collins does not focus exclusively on the idea of 'down low', and does not focus on Anglophone Caribbean contexts, her work critically explores many of the socio-historical factors which have contributed to the existence of 'down low' as a subculture, especially the role which hegemonic gender ideologies play in the maintenance of racial, gender, class, national and sexual hierarchies. I need to stress here that I am not advocating the US context as *the* preferred reference point for the Anglophone Caribbean context. However, I am suggesting that there are some comparative similarities between some sexual subcultures in the US, such as men 'on the down low', and some sexual minorities in the Anglophone Caribbean, such as men who are perceived as effeminate or who engage in sex with men *without* identifying with mainstream queer subcultural identities such as LGBTQ.

At the same time, however, I am wary of relying too quickly on the idea of comparative readings especially when some comparative approaches do not actively interrogate the potential difficulties which arise when comparing two quite distinctive contexts or debates. Susan Bassnet in *Comparative Literature* overviews the particular historical emergence of a specifically Eurocentric and English language centred approach to comparative literature which is easily replicated in some comparative approaches, particularly in comparative approaches that always use Europe or the US as the starting points for discussion.²⁷³ However, Robert Carr in *Black Nationalism in the New World; Reading the African-American and West Indian Experience* critically compares black nationalism in North America and the Caribbean. His book illustrates the

²⁷² P.H. Collins' *Black Sexual Politics: African-Americans, Gender and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge. 2004).

²⁷³ Bassnet, *Comparative Literature. A Critical Introduction*.

insights which can emerge through contextually sensitive comparative approaches so rather than dismissing an English language comparative approach here, I utilise my comparative lens very selectively.²⁷⁴

As well as drawing attention to the debates surrounding visibility, same-sex desire and LGBTQ, the character Ralph also poses a challenge to the steadfastness of fundamental Christian beliefs. This is another strength of the film and it is poignantly displayed when Ralph admits to an anonymous male lover that he picks up in a bar that his public decrying of homosexuality as a preacher does not reflect his personal preferences but has to do with the Bahamian context and the demand from the public on him as a preacher “to give them something to [unite] in hating.”²⁷⁵ The myriad contradictions which the character Ralph represents point to the complexity of the Bahamian context, specifically that Christian beliefs and ideals are not so much opposed to homosexuality but are utilised by some for personal, political and moral gain. The contradictions which Ralph is embroiled within, moreover, alludes to the disharmony and acute dilemmas which are triggered by rigid policing of gender, ethnic and sexual norms.

These contradictions and disharmonies carry through to the ending of the film where Jonny ends up dying from stab wounds received from an ex-lover whilst dreaming about an ideal encounter with his lover Romeo. The ending follows suit with the interwoven narrative flow of the film and mirrors the complexity of the Bahamian context as even though the friction between the characters is challenged intermittently, the film closes with Jonny dying whilst imagining an alternative existence where he and Romeo can co-exist

²⁷⁴ Robert Carr, *Black Nationalism in the New World: Reading the African-American and West Indian Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

²⁷⁵ Mortimer, “Children of God.”

peacefully. The stolen moments between Jonny and Romeo are quite heightened given the violence directed at Jonny at times. But what is more noticeable is that they are always alone when are openly physically intimate, even when they dance and swim together. This may be both the power and contradiction of the film's central visual shot of Jonny and Romeo dancing.²⁷⁶ The 'fleeting' power of the film's central image arguably attests to the liminal public and private spaces which are available to Jonny and Romeo. It is also important to note that Romeo is nearly always the more active partner when Romeo and Jonny interact apart from the dancing scene where the film's central shot is taken from.

However, the degree to which Jonny and Romeo can act outside of heteropatriarchal narratives is questionable, particularly given the relative freedom which Romeo has to make advances towards Jonny because Romeo can take cover in always being read as embodying a 'heterotypical' masculinity. I use the term heterotypical here to refer to someone who is read as embodying a typical idea of heterosexuality. For Romeo, he is read as embodying an African-Bahamian heterosexual masculinity and this is largely out of his control as he is read via the dominant lens of his society. What is considered heterotypical is bound up with the socio-historical context. The issue of visibility, and the interpretation of performative masculinities is crucial here as the film both *over* states and *under* states the complexity of masculinities. Jonny is automatically read as effeminate throughout the film despite that he, in terms of his and Jonny's relationship, is the one who makes specific demands. Jonny being read as feminine is most definitely bound up with the combination of

²⁷⁶ See Appendix Two for the central shot of the film; this shot is the front cover of the DVD and has been used in most of the film festivals brochures to encapsulate the film.

Jonny's perceived femininity together with him being read as white man in a predominantly African-Bahamian context. Romeo, on the other hand, does not have to combat being 'read' as a homosexual or effeminate and in this was his queer-ness is under read. However, he is constantly over read as heterosexual and this is complicated by his confident ease with dealing with conflict in comparison to Jonny.

THE POLITICS OF AESTHETICS AND GLOBAL 'QUEER' CINEMA

In spite of Jonny's brutal, and perhaps somewhat stereotypical death, given that he is a marginalised, and, some would argue, tragic representation of a white feminine queer Bahamian man, the film does not end on a completely hopeless note as it ends with Jonny dreaming of entering the Bahamian sea hand-in-hand with Romeo. The visual aesthetics of the closing shots where Jonny is finally able to say what he wants to Romeo on a Bahamian beach where the two of them can swim is accentuated by the fact that Jonny is dying whilst imagining this idyllic scene. At the same time, the politics of the closing scene is acutely fraught given that the main vision of harmony between the two male lovers is imagined as he is dying, and also given that Jonny's artistic vision in *Children of God* re-iterates some of the wider consumer dynamics surrounding the Caribbean.

A glaring example is the choice of a white feminine Bahamian man as the visionary (queer) voice in a Bahamian context who envisages an idyllic encounter between himself and his lover on a conveniently empty Bahamian beach. Such a representation raises the issue of who gets to speak as a queer person in the film and why but it also raises the issue of the culpability of the viewer and the role of the gaze in re-producing Caribbean bodies as consumer

products; representing Jonny as a white Bahamian and as a socially marginalised queer figure in the Bahamas may allow most white western viewers to imaginatively identify with Jonny's place in the film. In this respect, even though Jonny's death at the hands of an ex-lover may allude to dominant homophobic representations of queers, especially gay men, as expendable, it may also speak to the relatively untold stories of homophobic violence in a Bahamian urban context but from the perspective of a white Bahamian rather than the less easily represented perspective of the African-Bahamian characters who are on 'the down low'. That Jonny is the vehicle through which the responses to homophobic abuse is expressed is acutely problematic in a Bahamian context where other characters, such as Romeo and Ralph, are not given such a primary spotlight, particularly in contrast to Jonny's artistic vision which he is finally able to articulate when he is dying.

The particular conundrum of why Jonny is represented as a verbally inarticulate, weak and quite tragic figure raises many serious questions as this particular representation raises the debate over representations of queer desire in *Children of God* given that the most vocal queer character dies and imagines an idyllic encounter with his lover Romeo. Jonny's death does echo the essentialist and tragic representation of queers, at least on some levels, as the overall film trajectory mirrors Jonny's search for his artistic and personal voice. The closing scene neatly demonstrates this as Jonny is introduced in the film as not being able to realise his artistic vision but Jonny's newly emerged artistic vision closes the film narrative.²⁷⁷ This is readily seen in critiques of the teleological idea of the 'closet' especially in critiques of some gay and lesbian 'coming out' stories which can project a quite tragic and essentialist idea of what

²⁷⁷ See Appendix Two.

it is to desire someone of the same-sex. Esther Saxey's *Homoplot* incisively critiques some coming-out narratives which essentialise identity, in particular what is to 'identify' as gay or to desire someone of the same sex.²⁷⁸ However, the particular life choices which Jonny has as a white, relatively poor, and effeminate gay man in the Bahamas does complicate the generic paradigm of most 'coming out' stories as Jonny is represented as relatively marginalised by the dominance of African-Bahamian culture.

The choice to set the film in the Bahamas also complicates any easy comparison with the bildungsroman form which was favoured by many seminal Anglophone Caribbean writers, such as George Lamming as well as Espinet in chapter one. Lamming's seminal text *In the Castle of My Skin* is a strong example of an Anglophone Caribbean literary text that utilises the bildungsroman form.²⁷⁹ Some critics suggest that the popularity of this form amongst postcolonial writers has to do with the fact this form allows the writer to focus on self-development and the emergence of postcolonial nationalisms; this suggestion may be particularly fraught for texts which engage with sexuality given the tensions surrounding nationhood and sexuality in contexts such as the Bahamas. Moreover, the film may mirror both the 'coming out' genre and the bildungsroman both and neither at the same time. Indeed, a comparative analysis of the film and the preference for many early Anglophone Caribbean writers to use a bildungsroman form would reveal some fascinating dynamics behind the various engagement with sexuality in different Caribbean textual media.

Despite that the film may, on some level, complicate the typical

²⁷⁸ Saxey, *Homoplot: The Coming-Out Story and Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity*.

²⁷⁹ Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*.

trajectories of the coming out genre and the bidilungsroman adopted by many Anglophone Caribbean writers, the film does re-iterate the problematic essentialism which surrounds LGBTQ, and particularly lesbian and gay, 'coming out' stories. This is particularly true in the choice to focus on a white queer man, especially given the ready consumption of a film like *Children of God* by western audiences.²⁸⁰ This paradox of the film echoes Ian Barnard's critiques in his book *Queer Race* where Barnard actively foregrounds that race and sexuality constantly construct each other but he highlights the immense difficulties that are involved when challenging the essentialist discourses which surround sexuality, ethnicity and race.²⁸¹ A comparable dynamic constantly surfaces in *Children of God* as although the film does challenge the dominant public discourse surrounding homosexuality in some Anglophone Caribbean contexts, it does not diverge markedly from some of the more subtle and arguably more tenacious stereotypes surrounding queer and racially 'other' characters.

However, the degree to which any feature film can diverge from audience expectations requires a significant level of debate. Thus, I am interested in *why* the film predominantly focusses on a relationship between a white Bahamian man and an African-Bahamian man, both of whom are similar in age, instead of a relationship between two African-Caribbean men of different ages, such as Ralph and his noticeably younger lovers. The marketability of young beautiful bodies is clearly an issue which plays into film-making in every context. But, for a film on the Bahamian context, the choice to foreground Jonny and Romeo

²⁸⁰ The film opened the 2009 Trinidadian film festival and the 2010 Bahamas international film festival but most of the film's screenings have been outside of the Caribbean and specifically in Europe and the US. The film website gives an overview of the screenings: <http://www.childrenofgodthemovie.com/www.childrenofgodthemovie.com/Screenings.html>

²⁸¹ Barnard, *Queer Race: Cultural Interventions in the Racial Politics of Queer Theory*.

raises the issue of whether such a relationship 'sells more easily' than a relationship between two African-Bahamian men especially to a western audience who are, for the most part, the main consumers of this film. Arguably this is an obvious yes on some level, given the fantasies that are easily projected onto Caribbean contexts, such as the Bahamas. However, in more subtle interpretations, it is not easy to package this film as *purely* for consumption by western audiences as it is the first feature film that focusses on homosexuality to emerge from the Anglophone Caribbean and it does attest to some degree to the range of people who do not fit into the prescriptions surrounding heterotypical African-Bahamian masculinity.

REVIEWS OF CHILDREN OF GOD AND ITS MESSAGE OF 'UNIVERSAL' LOVE

Despite the harsh, and not unproblematic, ending of the film, it was greeted with relative critical praise at LGBTQ film festivals and the popular press upon its release both within the Anglophone Caribbean, where the film is set, and abroad. A review in the Boston review described it as “Despite the heavy-handedness and an abrupt, melodramatic plot turn, Mortimer achieves some genuine tragedy and triumph.”²⁸² The film also opened the 2009 Trinidad and Tobago film festival and this is significant as it is simplistic to think that this film is only consumed by the 'West' or global north.²⁸³ The most recurring appraisals have focussed on the 'universal' power of love which the film supposedly attests to and the visual beauty of the film, particularly the shots of

²⁸² Peter Keough, “Fear and Loathing in the Bahamas.” *The Boston Phoenix*. May 4th 2010. Available at <http://thephoenix.com/boston/movies/101666-children-of-god/>

²⁸³ The simplistic debates which the binaries west versus the rest and global and local give rise to are discussed in the introduction and the conclusion.

the white sandy beaches and blue seas of the Bahamian landscape.²⁸⁴

Although it is fair to say that the romance between the two male leads is a central focus of the film, and frames the nexus of the whole film, the overwhelming focus on the film as a 'universal' love story and the visual beauty of the film, simplifies both the context where the film is set and that the film is *not* simply an affirmation of the 'universal'. Indeed, the film is making much more complex points about the power of love than the simplistic idea of 'universal love'; the film is also attesting to the potential pitfalls of love given that Jonny dies having mustered up the courage to confront his attackers and this confidence is bound up with his wider relationship with Romeo. The ease with which the film is packaged as a 'universal' love story is visibly apparent in the following quote from one of the more robust and balanced reviews of the films where it is suggested that the film is not yet able to be a simple love story precisely *because of* the context where it is set: "But the real tragedy of *Children of God* is that a Caribbean film about male lovers can't be just a simple love story — not yet."²⁸⁵ Although the quote suggests that the film is somehow more than just a love story, it contradictorily implies that not to be just a simple love story is the film's real tragedy. The film thus poses a critical problem as it is somehow not the 'equivalent' of simple love stories and yet it is interpreted as striving towards the ideal of the simple love story; it is both less and more than what it is striving to become.

The blatant marketing strategies and romance labels which present the idea of the 'universal' love story and the film as a 'visual feast' have been

²⁸⁴ These particular 'strengths' are foregrounded on the film's own website:
<http://www.childrenofgodthemovie.com/www.childrenofgodthemovie.com/Welcome.html>

²⁸⁵ Laughlin, Nicholas. "Could you be loved." *The Caribbean Review of Books*. September 2010. Available from <http://caribbeanreviewofbooks.com/crb-archive/23-september-2010/could-you-be-loved/>

broadly critiqued as ethnocentric, simplistic and promoting ahistorical readings of desire, gender, sexuality, and consumption. Critics such as Jacqui Alexander incisively critique the ramifications of these debates in the Anglophone Caribbean context when she extrapolates on the cultural nationalism and global capitalism in some Anglophone Caribbean contexts and the role which the nation state has in the continuation of colonial legacies via gender, racial, class and sexual ideologies.²⁸⁶ Mimi Sheller advocates a similar critique in *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* where she foregrounds the need for a *detailed* analysis of the relationship between consumption, tourism, colonialism and neocolonial exploitation.²⁸⁷ Anne McClintock's seminal *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* critiques the emergence of domesticity alongside ideas of sexuality, race and gender and pinpoints that this matrix was fundamental for Afrikaner cultural nationalist discourses and later apartheid history.²⁸⁸ McClintock's critiques reverberate with Alexander's critiques of the power of heteropatriarchy in the public sphere and that heteropatriarchy, especially when linked with ideas of 'national culture', ascribes particular gender roles to men and women and relies on the divide between the public and the private.

At the same time, however, although all of these critiques give an insight into the politics of representation within which the film is embroiled given the promotion of the film as an (almost) paradise, the film attests to the specific difficulties which arise when producing and marketing an Anglophone 'Caribbean' feature film on same-sex desire between men in a Bahamian

²⁸⁶ Alexander, "Not Just Any(body) Can Be A Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas."

²⁸⁷ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*.

²⁸⁸ McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*.

context. This is particularly apparent given the avid consumption of the broader Caribbean as a region and 'idea' in both contemporary and historical socio-cultural contexts, the power of heteropatriarchy in contexts such as the Bahamas as critiqued by Alexander, and the over determined idea of 'Caribbean homophobia' in some discussions of same-sex desire in the Caribbean by some LGBTQ organisations and western rights groups over the last twenty years or so. Critics such as Yasmin Tambiah foreground such difficulties when she critiques the simplistic readings of the Caribbean legal system in Jacqui Alexander's seminal "Not Just Any(body) Can Be a Citizen Article."²⁸⁹ Tambiah critiques what she thinks is Alexander's possibly too hasty reading of how lesbian sex was criminalised in 2002 in Trinidad and focusses on the possible pitfalls which arise when homophobia in the Caribbean is cast as a universally understood idea. Tambiah's thesis argument is that the term homophobia, especially when used in the phrase 'Caribbean homophobia', is often used to simplify the myriad factors which contribute to the marginalisation of same-sex desire in Caribbean contexts.²⁹⁰

Clearly in light of these contradictory pressures and debates surrounding same-sex desire and homophobia in the Caribbean there is a demand for a film, like *Children of God*, which addresses the virulent polarities surrounding representations of same-sex desire in the Caribbean. However, particular difficulties arise when marketing a Caribbean feature film on same-sex desire, especially between men, given the (hegemonic) power of 'global' consumer culture and the contradictory legacies surrounding sexuality in an Anglophone

²⁸⁹ Alexander, "Not Just Any(body) Can Be a Citizen Article." Tambiah, "Creating Immoral Citizens."

²⁹⁰ Tambiah echoes Kamala Kempadoo's critique in her book *Sexing the Caribbean* where Kempadoo highlights the role which the sexualisation of race and vice versa has played in the construction of the Caribbean region as a mythical idea in the minds of tourists.

Caribbean context, such as the Bahamas. This is clearly seen in the dominant ideas of what constitutes 'acceptable' sexuality or sexual expression which have been largely over-determined in the Anglophone Caribbean public sphere and popular culture debates by the predominant heteropatriarchal ethno-sexual norms which are ascribed to masculinity. The polarised positions which have emerged from the debates over same-sex desire in political, popular cultural and religious spheres attest to the strength of hegemonic masculinities in most, if not all, public debates surrounding sexuality.

Children of God, at several points, alludes to these wider debates surrounding homosexuality through the inclusion of public speeches from some fundamentalist Christian figures who speak against the unnaturalness of homosexuality such as the opening credits at the beginning of the film. Indeed, a central scene in the film focusses on a Christian meeting on homosexuality as an 'unnatural' vice where Jonny passionately asks why such a debate must happen which shows that the film does take on some of the more vocal critiques of homosexuality and same-sex relations in some Caribbean contexts. The film soundtrack also features ragga music but importantly homophobic lyrics, and the debates surrounding ragga lyrics are *not* a main focus of the film. This is an important contrast with some engagements with ragga and homophobia, as ragga in the film is presented as a local musical form and not just the result of the over commercialisation of the global market.

Mortimer's film, in light of these specific regional and global dynamics surrounding masculinity, same-sex desire, and the Bahamian context, and the lack of feature films made by Caribbean film makers generally – and on same-sex desire more specifically – faces considerable critical, aesthetic, and 'moral' challenges given the heavy expectations to re-present the Caribbean. Indeed,

many of the reviews of Mortimer's film focus precisely on the fact the film represents Bahamian sexual minorities as this somehow ensures that the film is essentially a 'good' film as it attempts to positively represent sexual minorities in a Bahamian context. However, many reviews (unsurprisingly) skip over the specificity of the film's narrative and focus instead on the love/affection between the men instead of the contextual complexity of the Bahamas despite that the largely favourable reviews of the film have picked up on the film as the first feature length film made in the Caribbean by a Caribbean film-maker on same-sex desire.²⁹¹

This is a central contradiction in reviews of the film as the tendency to promote texts from contexts, such as the Bahamas, as 'universal' blurs the relationship between the mainly western audience and the context where the film is set. Furthermore, although most reviews have tended to convey the importance of this film as the first feature length film to explore same-sex desire in a Caribbean context, very few reviews offer a balanced assessment of the film as a textual engagement with that context. One of the only reviews to mildly critique the film is by Angelique Nixon who appraises the film's portrayal of same-sex desire, given the dearth of visual texts which have done so from a Caribbean perspective. But she simultaneously critiques the lack of diverse representation in the film as in Nixon's eyes, the film does not go beyond the main relationship between Jonny and Romeo.²⁹²

Following on from critiques such as Nixon's, and the critiques of reviews

²⁹¹ Mortimer's film is the first feature length film made by a Caribbean born film maker but it is not the first visual engagement with same-sex desire in the Caribbean. Isaac Julien's film *The Darker Side of Black* was discussed in the last chapter but there are other smaller projects such as *Paradise Lost* by Campbell 'Inge' Blackman, Richard Fung, and Elspeth Kydd. Mortimer's film, however, is the first commercial film on same-sex desire in the Caribbean.

²⁹² Angelique Nixon, "Review of Children of God." *Black Camera* 2 no.2 (Spring 2011): 159-162.

which propose ahistorical readings of desire and romance, the ensuing chapter discussion is interested in how the parameters of the film echo some of the wider global trajectories which surround same-sex desire and the Caribbean; namely, how to convey same-sex desire in a Caribbean context without alluding to simplistic ideas of what it is to be read as 'gay' or homosexual. I am also interested in the ambiguity of the domestic context in Sarif's film and the potential transnational comparisons between her text and wider representations of the domestic context.

SHAMIM SARIF'S *THE WORLD UNSEEN* AND TRANSNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Shamim Sarif's 2008 film *The World Unseen* focuses on the years immediately following the enactment of official apartheid in 1948 and explores on the difficulties encountered in the lives of a small group of Indian Muslim South Africans. The film is based on her novel of the same name and this fact contributes to the different qualities of the film's script in comparison to *Children of God*; the script dialogue in *The World Unseen* is quite conversation heavy whereas the *Children of God* script is much more bare and feels quite strained at points in comparison to Sarif's film. Mortimer's film relies more obviously on the landscape of the Bahamas and this may be a deliberate choice on his behalf and may impact the lack of necessity for dialogue at points; though the poignant tragedy of Jonny's death, and the violence directed at him in the film overall, may require less dialogue in the overall narrative, especially the ending. Sarif's film, in contrast, rarely relies on the South African landscape apart from some passing shots. Most central scenes in *The World Unseen* take place in domestic contexts or in a small shop or café whereas in Mortimer's film, more

conversations take place in public settings.²⁹³ The film, like *Children of God*, focuses on the interconnected lives of a small group of people, though the dominant focus of the film is on the Indian Muslim community in and around Cape Town and the Western Cape. The main narrative thread is the developing romantic and sexual relationship between two Indian Muslim women; Amina and Miriam.

The possible attraction between the two characters is hinted at early on the film particularly through the portrayal of Amina as a young independent muslim Indian woman in her late twenties who is read throughout the film as not 'fully' Indian. She is read as not 'fully' Indian because her maternal grandmother was raped by a black South African man and because, by comparison to more conventional women in her own community, she is a 'rebellious' Indian woman because she refuses marriage and manages to run a 'mixed race' café business in plain sight of the South African authorities whilst engaging directly with the increasing harassment of the police at her café. Miriam, in contrast, is portrayed as a (seemingly) stereotypically tame and devoutly traditional Indian Muslim housewife in her early twenties who grows increasingly attached to Amina throughout the film.²⁹⁴

A central shot in the film focusses on how Amina's grandmother was forcibly separated from Amina's mother by her grandmother's family where it is implied that her grandmother never saw her child again because of the community's deep resistance to sexual relationships with *black* South Africans. Crucially, the overall film narrative presents sex in relation to a particular set of

²⁹³ A more in-depth analysis of the comparative differences between the visual in this two films is outside of this project remit.

²⁹⁴ The implications of to what extent gender dynamics is foregrounded in responses to films such as "Fire," "The World Unseen," and "Children of God" is discussed in the final chapter.

Indo-Muslim prejudices which are, in turn, set against the wider picture of apartheid. Amina's paternal grandmother unashamedly expresses these prejudices when she arrives from a train into Cape Town and says to Amina's parents that "blacks are all just trouble" and "are only good for labour."²⁹⁵ In contrast to these quite paternalistic and colonial views, Amina's maternal grandmother acts as an absent but present figure throughout the film and this is most clearly seen when Amina, and some of the other characters, comment on a framed picture of Amina's grandmother in Amina's café entitled 'Location Café'. In *The World Unseen*, maternal bonds between mother-daughter relationship is portrayed as communicative and the power of maternal bonds, and the pride in remembering the ignored histories of one's family in *The World Unseen* may have to do with the degree of self-expression which is available to Amina as a rebellious Indian woman. She is cast, at various points, as both not 'knowing her place' as a less than 'full' Indian woman and as a 'perverted' queer. Many characters openly admire Amina's courage and entrepreneurial spirit, such as Miriam, Amina's father and her café colleagues throughout the films. But at times it is not clear why she is admired which does raise the issue of exoticisation, especially the exoticisation which is associated with being a mixed race queer Indian woman in the film. The racial dynamics of *Children of God* are less obviously polarised than *The World Unseen*. This may have to do with how gender and rape in Sarif's film is represented as part of South African history. Gender dynamics in *Children of God* seem to police racial boundaries much more explicitly whereas in *The World Unseen*, the uneasy status of Indians under apartheid is constantly invoked.

The film, in contrast to *Children of God*, is more like a stereotypical

²⁹⁵ Sarif, "The World Unseen."

Hollywood romance in its plot development where the predominant focus is, for the most part, on the 'love story' between the two main women characters. The film soundtrack also mirrors Hollywood romance films as the film uses warm classical music scores to tell the viewer how to feel at several key moments; there is no emphasis on local music. However, the film does focus on the wider cast of characters at times. This is largely because marriage is so central to the context of the film, particularly for the women, who, for the most part are heavily defined by the domestic context and whether they are married (or not).

The importance of the domestic context in Mootoo's, Mehta's and Sarif's texts problematises the stereotypical focus on public visibility as the political aim of same-sex and LGBTQ people world-wide. However, this is not to esteem the domestic context in these texts as a viable challenge to heteropatriarchal power but more to allude to the false divide of the public and the private and how this is evident in Sarif's film say more here. The singular ideas of identity and rights which is promoted by some western and non-western groups almost has no basis in Sarif's film and this raises the issue of *how* to engage with same-sex desire when the history of same-sex desire cannot account for homoerotic desire in a domestic context. The specific relationship between culture, Indian women and the domestic context is also crucially important here but is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the representation of the Indian woman as representing the cultural sphere and specifically representing it within the home context is an important critical backdrop for any discussion of the domestic context.²⁹⁶

The budding relationship between Amina and Miriam is interwoven with

²⁹⁶ See Ruth Vanita's collection *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* for some textual engagements with the domestic context and representations of woman as embodying culture. (New York and London: Routledge, 2001).

wider developments in South Africa as there is constant talk about how apartheid is going to affect peoples' lives in South Africa, especially the fragile stability that some South African Indians enjoy. One of the major parallel story lines with Amina's and Miriam's relationship is Amina's sister-in-law who escaped South Africa because she married a white South African man. The police harassment of Amina's sister-in-law mirrors Amina's own harassment from the police for running a café that serves both Africans and Indians, despite that is contrary to the tightening apartheid logic. This is an interesting contrast to Mortimer's film where the Bahamian context and the multivarious debates surrounding sexuality are strictly framed in relation to the Bahamian context in the present day. There is very little sense of where the Bahamian context and the characters in Mortimer's film fit with the historical context of the Bahamas. Arguably this has to do with the different narrative approaches of these films where Sarif's film is focussed on South Africa in the late 1940s, and the effects of this time on a certain community.

In contrast, in *The World Unseen*, the broader historical markers of apartheid are constantly invoked; through the fear of Miriam's sister-in-law being caught for marrying a white man; through Amina nearly losing her café because it serves black Africans and Indians in the same building and also; through the constant interruptions of the South African police who harass Amina and her customers on an increasingly daily basis. Mortimer's film focusses on a much more historically recent context where debates about the historical past are not being cast as part of the film's backdrop. Though the film contains some scenes which foreground the role of fundamental Christians' role in framing the debates surrounding homosexuality, these scenes do not form a broader historical narrative that is recognisable in the same way as the apartheid

context is in *The World Unseen*.

GLOBAL TRAJECTORIES AND TRANSNATIONAL DIALOGUES

The debates over what it is to be read as gay or homosexual in light of the global trajectories surrounding the 'universal'/global consumption of *Children of God* are also relevant for *The World Unseen*. Sarif's film is not as obviously loaded with the 'burden of representation' as Mortimer's. The debates surrounding same-sex desire between Indian Muslim women in South African are less polarised in comparison to the furore over homosexuality between African-Caribbean men in the Anglophone Caribbean.²⁹⁷ Despite the more obvious differences between Mortimer's and Sarif's films, both face similar issues in light of the demand for these films and also given the ambiguous consumption of these films as 'representative' of same-sex desire in non-western contexts.²⁹⁸

Moreover, the different contexts of the two films is crucially important as it affects how these films are consumed; Mortimer sets his film in present day Bahamas whereas Sarif sets hers in late 1940s South Africa. Sarif's film, as already mentioned, has a more obviously Hollywood romance theme attached to it than Mortimer's. This may, as already mentioned, have to do with the lack of vociferous debates surrounding same-sex desire between Indian muslim women in South Africa in comparison to homosexuality debates in the Caribbean. Thus a romance theme can work more playfully than in *Children of God* where Jonny is constantly being threatened with violence. Sarif's film, for

²⁹⁷ A fuller discussion of this debates would require another separate chapter given the different responses which queer relationships between women elicit in public discourses/space in both the Anglophone Caribbean and South Africa.

²⁹⁸ The term non-western context can be incredibly unhelpful but I am utilising it here to make a comparative point about transnational consumption.

this reason, may have the space to move away from the more vociferous debates surrounding sexuality in the public sphere and towards a more Hollywood style romance even though her film ends on a more much ambiguous note; nobody has died by the end but equally no one has had more than a tentative erotic encounter, or managed to escape the daily harassments of apartheid.

However, the relationship between the women does not develop into a relationship where the two characters have the space to connect with each other uncensored by their wider communities, unlike Romeo and Jonny who can interact with each other in secluded, if short lived, contexts. This begs the question of the power of ambiguity in the Sarif's film, particularly surrounding sexual desire between the women, as unlike *Children of God*, where vocal declarations against homosexuality frame the entire film from the beginning of the film, same-sex desire in Sarif's film are not so markedly present, except through the vilifying of Amina as 'a dirty queer' by a South African police man. Moreover, Amina and Miriam's relationship is framed nearly entirely through close domestic encounters or in Amina's car where Amina is teaching Miriam how to drive. Jonny and Romeo, in contrast, have much more public interactions and *Children of God* has a much more violent and tragic ending in contrast to *The World Unseen*.

The parameters of the domestic context in *The World Unseen* once again mirror the private spheres in Mootoo's and Mehta's texts. But the domestic world of Amina and Miriam, a world which is potentially hinted at in the film title *The World Unseen*, also attests to the transnational comparisons between Mehta's, Mootoo's and Sarif's texts. Moving beyond the strictly local context to this transnational lens, the salient comparisons attest to both the *ambiguous*

necessity for visibility and the necessity for decolonising monolithic representations of desire, ethnicity and gender. Amina and Miraim are afforded a certain *degree* of relative privilege given the potential which the domestic sphere can offer to them as women who are viewed as belonging in a domestic context; they can escape the more direct policing of the public sphere by inhabiting the private. The idea of public political visibility would not be able to reference this position given the centrality of the private sphere for these particular women. Moreover, the freedom which Amina has as an Indian muslim business woman in South Africa, enables her, and by extension Amina, to engage in a relationship without always being within the domestic context where anyone can intrude; Miriam at the end of the film, has accepted a role as a cook at Amina's café and this scene closes the film. But, on a more stark note, their relationship is tenuously supported by the freedoms which the wider Indian South African community have because of the apartheid regime's definitions of Indians as above black South Africans but below whites. Thus, although they may relish the *relative* freedoms offered by the domestic context, this is constantly in danger of being violently tempered by wider societal shifts within apartheid South Africa. What this reveals, or does not reveal, about the future of Amina's café which will become part of the apartheid structure is not explored in the film.

There is a comparative dialogue between the films in relation to how gender constantly re-frames Amina's and Miriam's relationship, and Jonny's and Romeo's relationship, in relation to the wider communities' expectations; Jonny is targeted because he does not fit with a heterotypical idea of African-Bahamian masculinity and this ultimately gets him killed. Amina, in a similar position, to Jonny is the one who is physically assaulted by the South African

police forces and she is the one who is vilified for dressing 'like a man' and for not being 'Indian enough.'

This makes us ask what place does the idea of global visibility have in these texts. This is particularly relevant for Sarif's text where ambiguity allows a degree of sexual freedom if *mostly* within the domestic context, though the potential space of Amina's café is hinted at in the film. This works to accentuate the idea of Amina and Miriam as a potential couple, either as romantic friends or as lovers, in the film as it allows them a new space with which to relate to each other. Mortimer's film reflects the policing power of the heteropatriarchal public sphere on all men in the film but the film also asks us to question what is the difference between the heteropatriarchal public sphere and the private sphere given that his first visible lover in the film is the man who kills him not far from his home. The idea of a global gay visibility in these texts thus cannot account for the sheer complexity of these texts or contexts. However, the ideas surrounding the consumption of these films, and the role which gender and audience expectations play in the creation of ideas of gay visibility reveal some intriguing transnational comparisons between the films. This suggests a possible way forward than debates which simply re-iterate colonial, nationalist and neo-colonial trajectories of desire and consumption.

CONCLUSION:

COLONIAL LEGACIES AND (RE-)READING IMPERATIVES; 'NEW' COMPARATIVE POSTCOLONIAL/QUEER READING STRATEGIES

My thesis has presented a postcolonial/queer comparative analysis of selected texts from the Anglophone Caribbean and South Africa via the specific themes of HIV/AIDS, transnationalism, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. Transnationalism was the central symbol which held the corners of my critiques together. In so doing, I foregrounded the rich potential for comparative approaches to postcolonial texts and contexts. As suggested in my introduction, the uses of such a critical approach may have initially seemed counter-intuitive given the protracted and complicated narratives of Anglophone Caribbean and South African literature, culture and histories. However, I also outlined the continuing Eurocentric bias in comparative literature and approaches. I then suggested that the galling absence of less Eurocentric approaches to comparative studies has critical potential for both comparative studies, and, also, the wider intersection between postcolonial studies and queer studies.

However, I am not suggesting that my thesis approach has solved the wider consternations of comparative approaches. But this thesis has demonstrated the fruitful analyses which are borne from a comparative approach that is not presenting an inherited map of 'the discipline' of comparative approaches. Various scholars, and literary critics, have drawn our attention to the colonial impetus behind eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial map making. Marlene Nourbese Phillip in *Looking for Livingstone*

replies to the literal mapping of Africa by Dr David Livingstone by imagining the subjective silences which were mapped as a result of such colonial figures, and she considers the potential to imaginatively reclaim these via literary encounters with Livingstone.²⁹⁹ Although Nourbese Philip is imagining a poetic revisioning of Africa prior to Livingstone's quite brutal naming and claiming of Africa, and there is an inherent political statement within her vision, her textual approach is resonant with comparative approaches which wish to challenge the Eurocentric bias, and focus, within most comparative literature and approaches.

With Nourbese Philip's vision of reconceptualising comparative literature and approaches, I assess the degree to which my chapters have facilitated a considered discussion of the potential of comparative approaches. In conclusion, I will suggest that comparative approaches are considerably mapped by the specific socio-historical, and cultural, conditions within which they are composed; my thesis is not different, in this sense. But, I stress, that this does not mean that comparative approaches are doomed to critically fail because they are deemed as far removed from wider debates in other literary approaches, such as postcolonial studies and queer studies; both of which I have readily enveloped in my conceptualisation of my comparative approach. But comparative approaches are bound by conventions and this is directly tied to the author's methodology, which, in turn, is marked by the author's own specific form of politics, or, position of politics. With this in mind, Roland Greene's quote, in my introduction, reads differently here than at the beginning: "Receptive to changing definitions of 'literature' to a degree unmatched by any other literary field...comparative literature has a discontinuous history in which it

²⁹⁹ Marlene Nourbese Philip, *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*. (London: Mercury, 1991).

is not always the protagonist.”³⁰⁰ Greene is acknowledging the potential, and accompanying malleability of comparative literature, and comparative approaches more broadly, such as my analyses of film. I want to stretch Greene's analysis by suggesting that the potential for critical analyses, such as comparative approaches, which straddle the complexity of identity markers in postcolonial/queer studies is a notable strength for my thesis approach. I will demonstrate this with an outline of my respective chapters.

MAPPING THE FIELD OF COMPARATIVE POSTCOLONIAL/QUEER APPROACHES

I opened my thesis with a specific examination of Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* and the important juncture between HIV/AIDS and Indo-Trinidadian familial narratives and the role which transnationalism played in the disruptions between these metanarratives. I also remarked upon how the text was not as commented up by critics in comparison to Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and that this was a comparative difference between the Anglophone Caribbean context and the South African context, and the relationship between these contexts and literary fiction.

What was most striking in this chapter for my comparative postcolonial/queer approach was that Espinet's text was so invested in transnationalism as symbolic of South Asian indentured histories and the specific condition of Mona as a writer a recorder. Moreover, the intersection between HIV/AIDS and Indo-Trinidadian family was a notable moment in the text where both Indo-Trinidadian history, via a seemingly heteronormative family

³⁰⁰ Roland Greene, “Not Works but Networks; Colonial Worlds in Comparative Literature.” In *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, edited by Haun Saussy, (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2004) p. 212.

narrative, and HIV/AIDS, via Kello, enabled a conceptualisation of transnationalism within the text, as symbolically formative and materially vulnerable. This was the most resonant critical strength of my analysis as I read the text, largely due to Espinet's focus on the Indo-Trinidadian woman writer, as considering the repercussions of transnational migrations for Indo-Trinidadians and the specific fracturing of women's lives, and queer lives, in the Singh family in light of Kello's illness.

My second chapter analysed HIV/AIDS as a local, global and transnational representation in Phaswane Mpe's South African novella *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. More specifically, this chapter analysed Mpe's engagement with HIV/AIDS as neither explicitly factual nor explicitly fictional whilst placing the text in relation to the wider contextual background of South African history, global HIV/AIDS history and cultural debates. I was particularly interested in how the local, the global and the transnational were not positioned in opposition to each other as all of these points of view contributed to a kaleidoscope representation of Hillbrow in Johannesburg.

A significant part of this had to do with Mpe's unique skill as a story teller whose text both reflects the immediate post-apartheid South African period whilst also reproducing a particular vision of the complexity of South African reality. I contrasted Mpe's engagement in this chapter with Espinet's in the previous but I also considered the degree to which writing was a symbolic tool in both texts, especially in light of HIV/AIDS as so dangerous and present for the respective characters. I also considered the role of literature in representing the historical gaps in South African history, especially in light of the predominance of realist writing during the apartheid regime and the place of Mpe's contribution to debates which push representation beyond local realist

representations.

My third chapter considered the critical uses of Paul Gilroy's conceptualisation of the Black Atlantic as a transnational formation of black cultural forms. I analysed two visual texts alongside the model in order to assess the textual appeal, and critical merits of the approach. A significant benefit of the model is that it enables me to consider the wider literary debates alongside wider popular debates. The model worked to some degree but Julien's portrayal of some dancehall DJs in the film was notably problematic.

My fourth chapter considered the strengths, and purposes, of a comparative approach to global queer films from the Anglophone Caribbean and South Africa; Kareem Mortimer's *Children of God* and Shamin Sarif's *The World Unseen*. Whilst I noted that the global consumption of these films is bound up with the tricky market dynamics of how these films are sold as exotic and queer, I also considered the strengths of such productions which attest to the specific socio-historical conditions of the Bahamas and South Africa. Moreover, I also considered the relative freedoms which Amina and Miriam had in comparison to Jonny and Romeo and I suggested this is bound up with both the particular productions of the films, and the aesthetics of their respective contexts which are sold very differently: The Bahamas is largely presented as a backdrop to a rather torn relationship whereas South Africa, and the Western Cape is more of an active part of the domestic lives of these women. The domestic setting for these women, although potentially always over romanticised, does offer them a form of home, if a fleeting one. This contrasts quite markedly to Nassau in *Children of God* which is presented as much more claustrophobic and directly macho.

In conclusion, I see a comparative postcolonial/queer approach as

critically nuanced but this is bound up with the choice of texts and contexts. Although my chosen texts and contexts did mesh together, I attempted other texts previously which I had to abandon; notably Shani Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter* and *Out on Main Street*. These texts did not enable me to present a direct engagement with transnationalism as the domestic space in these texts did not offer my analysis much room for comparison. Moreover, film productions offered an interesting contrast to literary analyses, especially as I was interested in comparative approaches from the beginning of this project.

The postcolonial/queer lens of my project is notably subtle in comparison to other critics who adopt a more definite approach to queer as gay and lesbian. But queer in my project referred to a textual questioning and disruption of wider structures. In essence, this is what a comparative postcolonial/queer approach facilitates.

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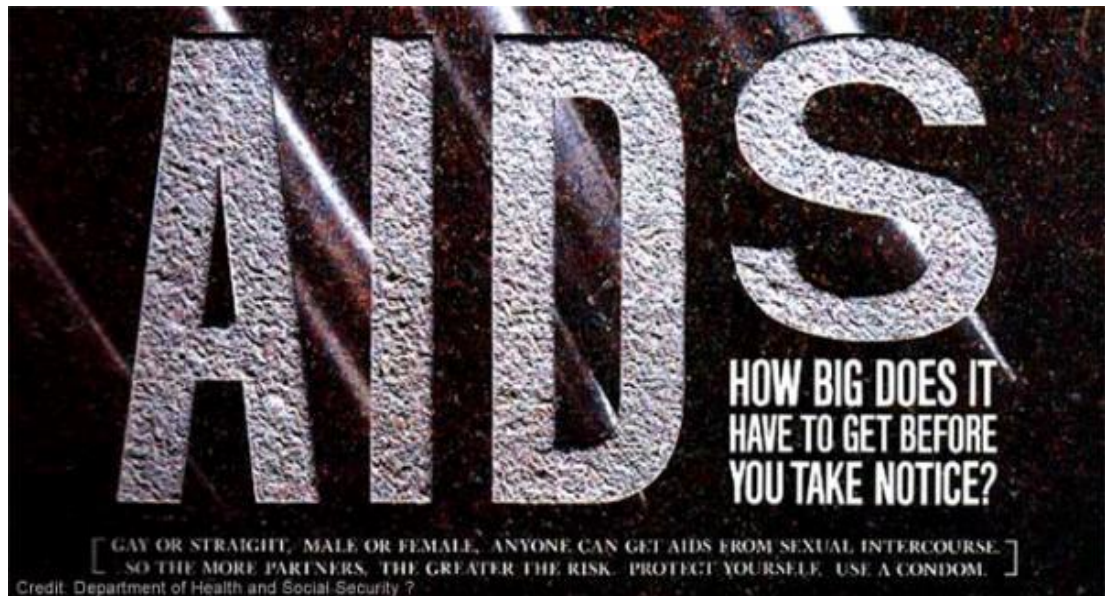
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APPENDIX ONE: British Government HIV/AIDS Prevention Poster (1986)



APPENDIX TWO: Still image from *Children of God*

