

ence member asked Makhosazana Xaba whether politics or aesthetics weighed heavier in the selection of the short stories for *Queer Africa 2* (following on *Queer Africa: new and collected fiction* published in 2013). Xaba answered that while her and Martin's project is political, they want the stories to "seduce" the reader into being immersed in the different perspectives represented by the various stories. Their agenda is therefore political *and* aesthetic, undermining the idea that the two are opposed.

This, then, is a different strategy than that adopted by writers who popularised queer writing in the 1980's and 1990's, such as Kathy Acker or (Afrikaans short story writer) Koos Prinsloo. Far from seducing the reader, they aimed at shocking her or him out of complacency. Some stories in *Queer Africa 2*, most prominently "Philip" by Barbara Adair, "Mirage of War" by S. van Rooyen and "My Dad Forgot my Name?" by Victor Lewis do employ a strategy of challenging readers' moral preconceptions.

Most stories, however, are gentler, subtly transporting readers to the everyday lives of queer people in Africa. This in itself is radical considering the violent and bureaucratic suppression they are often faced with. "Perilous Love" by Jennifer Shitna Ayebazibwe tells the story of the relationship between Ugandan Tibahitana and German Ilsa, and the decision they must make on whether to stay in Uganda given that they could face up to fourteen years in prison (144). It is one of the stories that most successfully combines delicate descriptions of the specific details that

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At the February Lectures on Queer Life in the Global South at the University of South Africa in Pretoria in 2018, an audi-

make up people's lives—"They were lying face up on the intricately patterned mat, heads resting against folded arms, the valley laid out below them. Smoke rose lazily in the distance, a cow mooed somewhere, breaking the silence" (143)—while conveying the danger of their situation. Another story that successfully follows this approach is "This Tomorrow Was Christmas" by Juliet Kushaba, dealing with the character of Siima's attempt to introduce her family to her life partner. Coincidentally, both these stories are set in Uganda—or perhaps it is not a coincidence, considering the severity of Uganda's anti-homosexuality laws.

From the perspective of literary studies, the stories that are not particularly challenging are still innovative, in the sense that clichéd tropes and narratives associated with both queerness and Africa are challenged. Even just juxtaposing these two supposedly incompatible terms in the title ("queer" and "Africa") can be considered a queering of dominant oppressive discourses.

As should already be clear from the descriptions of "Perilous Love" and "This Tomorrow Was Christmas" some of the tropes associated with narratives with a LGBTQ+ theme are present in the collection: coming out stories, tragic unrequited love, etc. The sheer variety of the stories, however, defy such easy classification. Like Nick Mulgrew's "Ace", smartly placed at the beginning of the collection, they refuse to be "shaped and gnarled into new postures" (6).

Like "Queer", "Africa" also evokes certain expectations. As with queerness,

these expectations are both embraced and resisted by certain stories. "Chebov's Light" by Nancy Lindah Ilamwenya is written in a social realist style that calls to mind the writing of Chinua Achebe and Mariama Bâ (amongst others) and like them she focuses on the cultural capital of motherhood in some African communities. By depicting the ancestrally sanctioned marriage of a woman unable to have children to a woman with children (18), Ilamwenya locates same-sex relationships at the centre of an African tradition, rather than at odds with it. The same is true of "Àwúre Ífẹ̀ràn" by Rafeeat Aliyu, in which lesbian desire is (implicitly) engineered by the love potion of a babalawo, a traditional healer.

Another story that experiments with African literary structures is "The Stone" by Matshepo Thafeng, which plays with oral storytelling in unexpected ways. "Mirage of war" by S. van Rooyen can also be read in dialogue with the Afrikaans genre of the *grensverhaal* (stories set during the South African border wars of the 1980's).

Several stories allude to attempts to find a home, a place to build a life, at the intersection of being queer and African. In "Pub 360" by H. W. Mukami, such a fictional home is created in the shape of a pub that the protagonist buys in order to find herself and where she can "speak [her] soul out so freely to strangers" and where "ostracised women" can connect (243). In "Pampers" by Olakunle Ologunro falling in love is described as "the sensation of arriving home from a long, weary journey" (277). In a similar

way *Queer Africa 2* is, especially for queer readers, a home, fostering a pan-African community that does not necessarily have contact with each other outside of literature. In this sense, the collection can be considered a “homespace” as bell hooks (42) describes it: “one’s homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist”.

Work Cited

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