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**The Representation of Queer African Identities in *Fairytales for Lost Children* by Diriye Osman**

**Reprezentácia afrických queer identít v zbierke poviedok *Fairytales For Lost Children* od Diriyeya Osmana**

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**THE REPRESENTATION OF QUEER AFRICAN IDENTITIES IN  
*FAIRYTALES FOR LOST CHILDREN* BY DIRIYE OSMAN**

**REPREZENTÁCIA AFRICKÝCH QUEER IDENTÍT V ZBIERKE  
POVIEDOK *FAIRYTALES FOR LOST CHILDREN* OD DIRIYEA  
OSMANA**

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## **Abstract**

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The purpose of this MA thesis is to analyse the various queer African identities portrayed in *Fairytales for Lost Children* (2013) by Diriye Osman. For the purpose of my analysis I shall resort to the postulates of queer theory. Queer theory departs from a post-structural standpoint and from notions of in-betweenness and fluidity as determining the construction of one's sexual identity as a fluid process of construction against the rigidity of the binaries created by patriarchal heteronormativity. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I will offer an overview of the origins of queer theory and of its main postulates as well as an outline of queer studies and literature in Africa including a section about Osman's position in it. In the following chapter, I will focus on the literary analysis of the representation of lesbian women, children, young gay men, and transitional and transgender characters which inhabit the stories in the collection, all of them set in contemporary times, and will examine how they come to terms with their sexual orientation or gender identification. In the stories Osman narrates the struggles and difficulties faced by those characters as a consequence of their coming out as queer in Muslim societies based on heteropatriarchy and/or very traditional families. My conclusions will throw light about the biases and misinterpretations anchored in patriarchal tradition and in the heterosexual couple as a model of reference in Africa, which disturb the view of sexual identity as a fluid process of construction.

**Key Words:** Diriye Osman, Coming out, Queer, Africa, Fairytales.

## Abstrakt

GRANADOS BINTERNAGEL Jordi. 2018 *The Representation of Queer African Identities in Fairytales for Lost Children by Diriye Osman* [M.A. Thesis].- Centrum pre postgraduálne štúdium /Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach. Filozofická fakulta; Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky. - Školitelia - Supervisors: Dr. Patricia Bastida Rodríguez, doc. Mgr. Sona Snircova, PhD. Palma: CEP UIB /Košice: FF UPJŠ, 2018. 119 pp.

Cieľom diplomovej práce je analýza rôznych afrických „queer“ identít reprezentovaných v zbierke poviedok „Fairytales for Lost Children“ (2013) od Diriyea Osmana. Teoretický základ analýz je tvorený „queer“ teóriou. „Queer“ teória sa odvíja od post-štrukturalistických premís a vychádza z pojmov „in-betweenness“ a fluidita. V tomto chápaní je sexuálna identita výsledkom fluidného procesu konštrukcie, čo je v rozpore s rigidným charakterom binárnych opozícií vytvorených patriarchálnou heteronormativitou. Prvá kapitola sa venuje prehľadu pôvodu „queer“ teórie a jej hlavných postulátov. Taktiež prezentuje informácie o „queer“ štúdiách a literatúre v Afrike, vrátane informácií o Osmanovi a jeho pozícii v rámci „queer“ literatúry. Ďalšia kapitola sa zaoberá literárnou analýzou reprezentácií postáv, ktoré sa objavujú v poviedkach, lesbičiek, detí, mladých gejov a transrodových postáv. Práca skúma, ako sa tieto postavy vyrovnávajú so svojou sexuálnou orientáciou alebo rodovou identifikáciou v súčasnom svete, do ktorého sú príbehy zasadené. V tejto zbierke poviedok Osman rozpráva príbehy o zápase a ťažkostiach, ktorým čelia hlavné postavy v dôsledku toho, že prejavili svoje „queer“ identity v moslimských spoločnostiach založených na heteropatriarchii a veľmi tradičných rodinných hodnotách. V závere práca ozrejmuje predsudky a chybné interpretácie zakorenené v patriarchálnej tradícii a v Afrike dominujúcim modeli heterosexuálneho páru, ktorý narúša vnímanie sexuálnej identity ako fluidného procesu konštrukcie.

**Kľúčové slová:** Diriye Osman, coming out, queer, Afrika, rozprávky.

## Resumen

GRANADOS BINTERNAGEL Jordi. 2018. *La representación de las identidades queer africanas en Fairytales for Lost Children (2013) de Diriye Osman* [M.A. Thesis].- Universitat de les Illes Balears. Centro de Estudios de Posgrado / Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. Faculty of Arts. Department of British and American Studies. - Supervisors: Dr. Patricia Bastida Rodríguez, doc. Mgr. Sona Snircova, PhD. Palma: CEP UIB /Košice: FF UPJŠ, 2018. 119 pp.

El objeto de esta Tesis de Máster es el de analizar las diferentes identidades queer africanas retratadas en el libro de Diriye Osman *Fairytales for Lost Children* (2103). Para realizar mi análisis haré uso de los postulados que ofrece la teoría queer. Esta teoría parte de un posicionamiento posestructuralista así como de las nociones del espacio intermedio (*inbetweenness*) y de la fluidez como elementos determinantes en la construcción de la identidad sexual viendo esta como un proceso flexible en oposición a la rigidez que emana de las estructuras binarias creadas por la heteronormatividad patriarcal. En el primer capítulo de esta Tesis de Máster, presentaré una visión global de los orígenes de la teoría queer así como de sus principales fundamentos teóricos. Incluiré también una sección relacionada con los estudios y la literatura queer en África además de la posición que ocupa Osman en esta última. En el siguiente capítulo me centraré en el análisis literario de las representaciones de personajes queer tales como las de mujeres lesbianas, niños, jóvenes homosexuales así como las de aquellos/as en procesos de transición y transgénero que pueblan las historias de esta colección. Todos estos personajes relatan procesos de construcción identitaria en tiempos contemporáneos y mi propósito es explorar las dificultades y problemas a los que hacen frente debido a su orientación sexual o de género. En estas historias Osman escribe sobre las dificultades y obstáculos que estos tienen que afrontar como resultado de su “salida del armario” en sociedades musulmanas basadas en preceptos hetero-patriarcales y/o en el seno de familias muy tradicionales. En mis conclusiones podré poner de relieve el sesgo y los estereotipos arraigados en la tradición patriarcal así como en la pareja heterosexual como modelo de referencia en África, lo que actúa en detrimento de una visión de la identidad sexual como un proceso fluido de construcción.

**Palabras clave:** Diriye Osman, “Salir del armario”, Queer, África, Cuentos de hadas.

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on the short story collection *Fairytales for Lost Children*, published in 2013 by British-Somali author Diriye Osman, and it analyses the representation of queer African identities in it. The reason why I found this book interesting was that it offered a view of queer African identities gathered in a collection of stories that has no parallel as such in the literary sphere. During the process of research for this thesis I have found compilations gathering a combination of queer African poetry, prose, short fiction and academic writing such as: *Queer African Reader* (2013), edited by Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas; *African Sexualities* (2011), edited by Sylvia Tamale or *Walking the Tightrope* (2016) edited by Abayomi Animashaun, Irwin Iradukunda, Timothy Kimutai, Tatenda Muranda and Spectra Speaks, among others, but I have not found a compilation of stories by a single author such as that of Osman's. My interest in queer studies and in African literature stemmed from two BA courses I took on gender studies and postcolonial literatures at the University of the Balearic Islands. This combination of interests lead me to focus on LGBT literature coming from the African continent or from African diasporic writers. After deciding on what was going to be the subject of my thesis and initiating research on current queer African literature I came across Osman's book in the website *Africa is a Country's*. Then I became aware of the possibilities that a work such as that of Diriye Osman could offer from an academic point of view since I thought that the literary inscription of queer African identities deserves attention.

Diriye Osman was born in Mogadishu (Somalia) in 1983 and grew up in Nairobi and London. He studied English Literature, Linguistics and Fine Art at Birmingham University and Creative Writing at the Royal Holloway College, University of London. Diriye Osman lives and works in London. He spent part of his formative years in Nairobi, Kenya and moved with this family to the UK in 2002 when he was already seventeen. He occasionally writes for newspapers and online publications such as: *Prospect Magazine*, *Huffington Post*, *Vice*, and is currently working on a novel. As a diasporic writer, Diriye Osman connects with his Somalian motherland and refuge adopted land of Nairobi, Kenya, in some of the stories of the collection, reflecting on the longing for home, at the same time that he comes to terms with his new sense of belonging in Great Britain. Osman is also a prolific visual artist, painter and active blog commentator as well as a performer. He is well known nowadays for his transgressive looks and performances such as the one portrayed on the cover of the book. In addition, Osman's

presence on the internet is significantly helping him become an important African figure in the intellectual world. *Fairytales for Lost Children* (2013) is his first published work of fiction and has not received proper academic attention yet, although it was the winner of the Polari First Book Prize 2014 and was named *Guardian's* Book of the Year 2014. The collection reflects the need to come to terms with the problematics of being queer and coming out of the closet in contemporary times. In this respect Osman acknowledges that

[i]t was difficult to grow up as a gay teenager in Kenya because there was a culture of denialism and fear everywhere you went. [...] at the time homosexuality was so taboo you couldn't even utter the word without courting sparks. *Fairytales for Lost Children* is a reaction against repressive thinking but it's also an act of celebratory self-definition. (Whitmore 2013).

In his book, Osman addresses pressing themes such as sexual identity construction, the effects of living in the diaspora and the longing from home, the relation of family and friends to life choices in Muslim societies and the mental disturbances that homosexuality can produce in queer individuals when coming out of the closet.

This thesis opens with a first chapter devoted to the contextualisation and the theoretical framework, consisting of three sections. The first one offers a brief introduction to the field of queer theory which is the basis of my literary analysis. The second section traces a genealogy of gender and queer studies in Africa and the final section in the chapter discusses queer literature in Africa as well as Osman's position in it. The second chapter is devoted to the in-depth literary analysis of the different queer African voices portrayed by Osman in the collection. Culture, tradition, and survival are central themes interrelated to the core theme of sexual orientation. Family, religion and social rules determine the lives of Osman's characters.

My analysis will examine the mosaic of queer voices that Osman uses in his stories which include: lesbian women, children, gay teenagers and adults, and transitional and transgender characters. I will explore how those characters overcome their fears and come to terms with their own sexual identity despite social conventions. In this chapter there are four sections. The first one is devoted to the representation of lesbian identities as narrated in the stories of "Watering the Imagination", "Ndambi" and "Earthling". The second focuses on children with the story that gives the book its name "Fairytales for Lost Children". In the third one I discuss gay characters appearing in the stories "Tell the Sun not to Shine", "Shoga", "Your Silence Will Not Protect You", "My Roots are Your Roots" and "If I Were a Dance". Finally,

in the last section of this chapter I analyse the complexity of transitional and transgender characters appearing in the stories “The Other (Wo)man” and “Pavilion” respectively.

The lesbian women, children, gay, transitional and transgender young and adult voices, as well as family members, talk to us from Somalia, Nigeria and London and reflect diverse experiences: lesbian women whose families are supportive or completely against their sexual orientation; boys who feel the urge of love arising at kindergarten; or mature men who struggle to find peace and companionship in the era of digital dating. Not to mention transitional and transgender characters who offer their stories about coming to terms with their gender identity.

As Osman explains “Every piece of fiction [...] stems from a blend of lived experiences, research and imaginative thinking [...] The stories have an element of my own history but I’ve bent the facts to fit the form to such an extent that the final result is pure fiction” (Whitmore 2013). There are personal reflections and autobiographical elements in Osman’s stories which mirror the transitions he experienced as a queer individual or witnessed during his childhood in Somalia, his period as a refugee in Nigeria and his coming out as gay in Britain. As he says “[m]y writing will always be intimate and infused with my voice” (Jayawardane 2014) and he explains that “I started writing the stories when I was coming to terms with my sexuality, so my awakening and the writing of the stories happened in real time” (Whitmore 2013). Diriye Osman gathers a chorus of voices, in this first collection, representing African queer identities which, evidently, connect with his own personal experience on the one hand, and, on the other, represent possible voices facing a diversity of experiences.

Since the author uses a fairytale-like frame for his storytelling it seems pertinent to support my discussion with the work of authors that have explored the fairytale tradition as a genre with much potential from a postmodern literary perspective. Using the fairytale genre in a deconstructive way is a process that entails the re-interpretation of its formal aspects from a literary point of view. In this light, the work of Diriye Osman can be analysed from a postmodern approach. This creativity reflected in the use of the leitmotifs of the fairytale is a relevant aspect to be tackled in the chapter devoted to the analysis of the stories.

After the literary analysis, in my conclusions I will show how the various experiences that the characters face while coming out of the closet to their family, friends and to the world end up being a process of coming to terms with their sexual or gender orientation despite mainstream stereotypes and cultural and religious constraints. After rooting my analysis in the theoretical background provided I will be able to maintain the main thesis against the rigidity

of the patriarchal heteronormative model of gender and sexuality construction and, in turn, sustain the main contention of this thesis, which refers to the postulates of queer theory which claim for a view of sexual and gender identity as a fluid process of construction.

## **2. Contextualisation and theoretical framework**

In this chapter, I outline the basic theoretical framework which supports my literary analysis of Osman's short stories. For that purpose, I will first introduce the corresponding fields of academic enquiry and, accordingly, the authors that seem most pertinent to be included. In addition, I will refer to their theoretical contribution with which I shall focus on the analysis of the texts. The main contention of my thesis is that Osman's stories can be understood most fully under the postulates of queer theory, which perceives sexual identity as fluid as opposed to the rigidity imposed by heteropatriarchy. This will be the content of the first section included in this chapter.

The debate against heteropatriarchy begins in a time span between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries with a more openly debate in this last period with women and queer individuals raising their voices against the oppression that this model of social construction imposed upon them. They were voices which emerged in modern societies, in the second half of the twentieth century, mainly in the Western world and in North America, against the rigidity of this model of gender identification. This fostered the appearance of discussions and debates which gave rise to the first feminist, gay and lesbian voices which were heard in Europe (Jagose 2001). In addition, the 1969 USA's Stonewall riots became a landmark for the development of gay, lesbian and transgender rights. Queer theory appeared at the beginning of the 1990s in the USA offering a new perspective for debating sexual orientation in academic fields.

### **2.1. Queer theory and the critique of heteropatriarchy: Foucault, Butler and Sedgwick**

According to Annamarie Jagose (2001), queer theory, as a phrase, was coined by Teresa De Lauretis in 1991 (Jagose 2001, 127). De Lauretis introduced her theory in a context in which gay and lesbian liberation movements were seen as failing to represent all possible sexual orientations and gender identities. For her, the aim of the article "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities" edited for a special issue of the journal *Differences* (Jagose 2001, 127) was centred on "the speculative premise that homosexuality is no longer to be seen simply as marginal with regard to a dominant, stable form of sexuality (heterosexuality) against which it would be defined either by opposition or homology (De Lauretis, 1991: iii, quoted in Jagose

2001, 127). The author directs here attention to the core of the heterosexual model claiming the inequalities of such a discourse imposed upon societies for centuries. It is time, she says, to

examine, make explicit, compose or confront the respective histories, assumptions, and conceptual frameworks that have characterized the self-representations of North American lesbian and gay men of colour and white, up to now; from there we could then go on to recast or reinvent the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking sexuality. (De Lauretis 1991)

The author clearly states the need to re-think the scope of sexual orientation and gender identification in a context in which the rise of concern about the appropriateness of what gay and lesbian liberation movements were offering. At the same time, she questions the seemingly rigidity of the homosexuality/heterosexuality binary. De Lauretis is establishing the foundations of queer theory by seeing sexual identity as a process of construction that needs to be understood outside those structures. The basis of queer theory stems from the understanding that there are more identities inhabiting the inbetween space of the binaries. De Lauretis further notes that “it is not productive to represent lesbian and gay sexualities either as ‘merely transgressive or deviant vis-à-vis a proper, natural sexuality ... or as just another, optional “life-style”” (127). The author is pointing at the debates between essentialism and constructionism. In this line of questioning De Lauretis also claims that the conceptualization “lesbian and gay [...] delimits the theorisation of sexualities”, and that she wants queer theory “to function as a critically disruptive term: juxtaposed to the “lesbian and gay” [...] intended to mark a certain distance from the latter by now established and often convenient formula” (128). To disrupt the binary is to question its functionality; thus, the need to articulate a new, more inclusive, term.

Once a pejorative term, queer, in combination with theory, has come to be seen as a “positive self-description” (Jagose 2001, 103), and in a poststructuralist context it “marks both a continuity and a break with previous gay and lesbian feminist models” (Jagose 2001, 75). Jagose claims that the prospect of queer as a more inclusive term links with the disparities between sex, gender, and desire, in line with the postulates of Butler and Sedgwick as I shall comment on later. In this context the author also claims that queer “has been associated most prominently with lesbian and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery” (Jagose 2001, 3). Therefore, Jagose argues that “[w]hether as transvestite performance or academic deconstruction, queer locates and exploits the incoherencies in those terms which stabilise

heterosexuality. Demonstrating the impossibility of any ‘natural’ sexuality, it calls to question even such apparently unproblematic terms as ‘man’ and ‘woman’” (3). The theoretical framework of queer theory, as an academic field of study, is associated with the works of Foucault, Butler and Sedgwick. Foucault’s works *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1978), *The Use of Pleasure* (1984), and *The Care of the Self* (1984) provide an understanding of the construction and taxonomisation of sexualities seen from a time span running from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD to the rise of the “homosexual as a species” between the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Foucault extends his research and connects it with the rise of the Industrial Revolution and the influence of capitalism. Along with Foucault’s works, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), as well as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) are key texts contributing to further Foucault’s analysis. Butler’s performativity and Sedgwick’s minoritizing and universalizing views of homosexuality, and her triad of chromosomal sex, gender and sexuality, respectively, set the foundations for the fluidity that queer theory defends regarding sexual identity construction.

### **2.1.1. Foucault’s theorisation on sexuality**

Foucault focuses on the various processes of construction that gave rise to the taxonomisation of sexualities. He often links those processes with the influence and the use of confession as one of the key elements that he associates with the construction of a discourse, thus, and according to the Foucauldian principle, with the production of knowledge and therefore with truth. Foucault claims that the narrative that was constructed regarding sexuality

set itself up as the supreme authority in matters of hygienic necessity, taking up the old fears of venereal affliction and combining them with the new themes of asepsis [...] public health [and] to insure the physical vigor and the moral cleanliness of the social body; it promised to eliminate defective individuals and bastardized populations [...] it justified the racisms of the state [...] it grounded them in truth. (Foucault 1990, 54)

Foucault is addressing here the very basis of a model created to serve the interest of those who held power. There seems to be a design sustained on arguments depriving individuals of their sense of identity by imposing a series of standardised rules regarding the appropriateness of sexual conducts in the name of society. In the first chapter of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* entitled, “We Other Victorians”, the author presents us “the repressive

hypothesis”, which is constructed upon the “mechanism of power that are brought into play in societies such as ours” (Foucault 1990, 10). Foucault argues that the “critical discourse that addresses itself to repression come to act as a roadblock to a power mechanism that had operated unchallenged up to that point (the seventeenth century)” (Foucault 1990, 10). It is therefore, a question of asking “Why has sexuality been so widely discussed, and what has been said about it?” (Foucault 1990, 11). And that because according to him “[a]t the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common [...] Sexual practices had little need of secrecy [...] one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit. Codes regulating the coarse, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century” (Foucault 1990, 3).

It seems that a shift towards the concern for those practices that were tolerated occurred during the end of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth. In this respect, Foucault claims that this may be linked with economic growth and with the rise of the Industrial Revolution. In this light Foucault argues that “one of the great innovations in the techniques of power in the eighteenth century was the emergence of “population” as an economic and political problem [...] at the heart of this economic and political problem of population was sex” (Foucault 1990, 25). With this problem came the need to control and elaborate census of births, marriages, and sexual conducts. Profiting from this need was the excuse to begin with a certain marginalisation of sexualities as we shall see later. Foucault also claims that in that same line of repression and interest of dealing with sexuality “there also appeared those systematic campaigns which going beyond the traditional means—moral and religious exhortations, fiscal measures—tried to transform the sexual conduct of couples into a concerted economic and political behaviour” (26). This is the very beginning of the taxonomisation of sexualities. In addition to this, one of the arguments that Foucault uses to sustain the concern about sexuality is that “if sex is [...] repressed, this is because it is incompatible with a general and intensive work imperative” (Foucault 1990, 6). Using the economy and the necessary well-being that it will provide to individuals is the very basis of the manipulative purpose discourse. By controlling and repressing sex, sexualities were directed to the selected model that supported economy and production: heterosexuality.

In addition, there was as well the use of the new scientific disciplines that developed in those centuries. Foucault claims that, in this respect “[w]e must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the

moment it was characterised” (Foucault 1990, 43). It was characterised because people were forced to speak about it and the traditions that held it as a kind of rite of passage such as those maintained for centuries by the Greeks began to be seen as depraved (Foucault 1990). Homosexuality, according to Foucault, “appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual became now a species” (Foucault 1990, 43). This species that Foucault speaks about becomes the germ of sexual taxonomies such as the ones we know today. The soul that Foucault associates with the interior androgyny is also regarded as a key aspect by Butler as we shall see now.

### **2.1.2. Butler’s theorisation on gender and performativity**

Judith Butler’s works *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993) are influenced specially by French structuralism and post-structuralist schools of thought (often associated with deconstruction), schools in which we find authors such as Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida among others. According to Cuddon (1999) post-structuralism “[i]n a sense complements structuralism [sign/signifier] by offering alternative modes of inquiry, explanation and interpretation”. This new school of thought “pursues further the Saussurean perception that in language there are only *differences without positive terms* and shows that the signifier and signified are as it were, not only oppositional but plural, pulling against each other, and, by so doing, creating numerous deferments of meaning, apparently endless criss-crossing patterns and sequences of meaning” (Cuddon 1999, 690-691).

Butler, following the post-structuralist line of thought, focuses repeatedly on the production of language and analyses discourse using speech act theories and psychoanalysis. One of her most influential arguments originates from post-structuralist French philosopher Jacques Derrida on the use of language and iteration (repetition). Derrida is also well known for his contribution to the post-structuralist theory which is used in literary practice with his [use of] deconstruction (Cuddon 1999, 691). He sustained the “belief in the incommensurable qualities of language (a form of inadequacy) [which] is basic to post-structuralist thinking. Hence the idea of indeterminacy (*q.v.*), which is an important element in deconstructive practice [...] The extreme position of post-structuralist theory is that meaning is inherently unstable”,

whereas a structuralist would hold that, “an explanation/understanding is conceivable and possible, provided that the conventions and codes of any literary text or cultural message are analysed” (691). Butler constructs her analysis on Derrida’s iterability providing one of the most influential, controversial and complex concepts to understand the process of identity as a constructed one: performativity. This repetition is produced on the body as well as on the soul and it is influenced by traditional gender discourses, a situation that produces gender trouble and questions the production of identity construction. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler argues that performativity

cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that ‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production. (Butler 2014, 95)

Butler works from “the effect of a structuring inner space produced through the signification of a body as a vital and sacred enclosure [to] the soul [which] is precisely what the body lacks; hence the body presents itself as a signifying lack” (Butler 2007, 184). To some extent there are similarities here with what Foucault claims in his work. In addition, Butler argues that “the soul is not imprisoned by or within the body, as some Christian imagery would suggest”, but “the soul is the prison of the body” (184). This view provides us with a dichotomy that is interesting to explore. The soul could be identified or linked with the sense of identity that individuals construct or relate with despite their physical attributions, the bodies they are born with. In this light one could relate to the gender trouble that many transgender individuals face when identifying with a different gender than their biological one. It is necessary to keep in mind this soul/body divide that Butler addresses as incarnating the dichotomy of gender construction since it will be useful for our literary analysis. Constructing the individual’s sexuality on what we could name as mainstream features is a process contrived, according to Butler, by several levels of “exclusions, denials and absences”. It is a result of, “intrapsychic processes in terms of the surface politics of the body [that] implies a corollary redescription of gender” (184).

Performativity is based on the various processes, repetitions, and conditioned stages that individuals face when addressing the construction of their sexual identity. Here we are still at

the stage where there is a process and a sort of necessary performance that is imposed on the bodies by cultural constructed stereotypes. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of “an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, throughout the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause” (Butler 2007, 185-86). Such acts, “gestures enactments, generally construed”, says Butler, are “performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (185-186). Furthermore, we should bear in mind that “the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (185-186). This also suggests that “if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface of politics of the body the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the “integrity” of the subject”” (185-186). In other words, “acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create an illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame or reproductive heterosexuality” (185-186).

This is an opportunity to demonstrate that the production of that norm, of those forced processes created by gender construction, are in trouble when they are challenged and utilised to produce other ways of performing identities using the same grounds, in this case the body. Performativity is how one understands and chooses those features that need to be used in life, the tools with which one builds oneself. Butler states that “Within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (Butler 2007, 24-25).

Along with Butler’s dissection of the Western construction of gender by inferring that it is a matter of performativity constrained by ideological interests, she claims that it is through gestures and acts that the subject creates this identity, that identity is produced. I will discuss how her arguments have some bearing with what Sedgwick proposes in her deconstruction of Western thought, which is extensively addressed and complicated in her book *Epistemology of the Closet* that I briefly outline in the next section.

### **2.1.3. Sedgwick's theorisation on binaries and gender construction**

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick claims that there is a need to question Western knowledge and culture from a twentieth-century point of view, since, according to her, it fails to represent all possible sexual identities. Sedgwick's work focuses on binary structures, complicating and extending her analysis beyond their postulates, and, in this case, she directs her attention to the homo/heterosexual. She says that this vision is outdated and non-inclusive of the real debates that must be articulated regarding sexuality and gender identification (Sedgwick 2008, 1).

In that same line of investigation, Sedgwick says that “virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (1). Sedgwick is aligning with some of the arguments that Butler also addresses in her work, directing their attention to the use of binaries and the rigidity they imply. Sedgwick abounds in that statement saying that “the appropriate place for the critical analysis to begin is from the relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory” (1). In this way, Sedgwick is articulating the basis of what queer theory seeks to provide by first avoiding binaries and rigid views of sexual orientation at the same time that she claims that those living until now on the margins must inhabit in the debate and construction of a new way of seeing and understanding the world.

For Sedgwick the epistemology of the closet is the “[i]dea that thought itself is structured by homosexual/heterosexual definitions, which damages our ability to think. The homo/hetero binary is a trope for knowledge itself. [...] Any analysis or understanding of any aspect of Western culture is incomplete and degraded if it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (Sedgwick 2008, 1). This definition is, following Sedgwick's line of thought, made up of minoritizing and universalizing discourses.

The central hypothesis from which Sedgwick will explore and analyse how identity is constructed is provided by her minoritizing/universalizing views regarding sexual identity construction. For the minoritizing view Sedgwick perceives the issue of homo/heterosexuality as the concern of a small, distinct, fixed homosexual minority whereas the universalizing view considers it as an issue of continuing importance for people across a continuum of sexualities. In other words, it could be argued that what Sedgwick is proposing with her minoritizing view

is, using linguistic arguments, a kind of synchronic view of the issue, if there should be one, of homosexuality, and with the universalizing view a diachronic perspective that affects all sexual and gender identities other than, or even including, the heterosexual.

The point of those views is what Sedgwick addresses when she proposes the need of questioning Western thought since it is her understanding that a big part of the population was excluded from that construction of knowledge but at the same time was raised by that same knowledge. It is a sort of conundrum that she addresses by asking: “[i]n whose lives is homo/heterosexual definition an issue of continuing centrality and difficulty? (Sedgwick 2008, 40-41), and finally, “[w]hat is the cause of homo [or hetero-] sexuality in the individual?” (40-41).

Sedgwick claims the recognition that chromosomal sex, gender, and sexuality, while related, should be seen as different layers of identity. This is what we can call Sedgwick’s triad of sexual identity construction layers. It is a relevant contribution since it will be helpful when addressing the complexity transitional and transgender characters appearing in Osman’s collection of stories. Transitional and transgender identities are reflected in this combination of aspects that are provided here. Any system, says Sedgwick, “with gender as its focus” will have an “inherent heterosexist bias, to the extent that female gender is constructed as a supplement or contrast to male identity; assumption of male/female roles in any kind of couple in this system” (Sedgwick 2008, 28-29). Sedgwick’s most salient opinions regarding sexual identity and how it may be understood as a constructed process relate intrinsically to the nature vs. nurture divide. The author views her contention as an “alternative one” from the terminological choice between the essentialist (one is borne) vs. the constructionist (one is made) arguments, by choosing those already mentioned above which make her most outstanding contribution the minoritizing and universalizing views.

After offering an introduction to queer theory and its origin, I will discuss in the next section queer studies in Africa. In the final section of this chapter I will contextualise the short story collection analysed in this dissertation by discussing the position of Diriye Osman within African literature and queer writing.

## 2.2. A genealogy of gender and queer studies in Africa

Since we are dealing with queer African representations, a word on the context of Africa is needed in relation with queer theory. In this respect it is worth noting that according to Clarke “[t]he West has set itself up as the authority on knowledge about the homosexual experience” (Clarke 2013, 177), and for that reason he argues that “Africa cannot make its own way without appealing to the knowledge (and hence) power of the West” (177). And furthermore, he admits that Africa is marginalised in Western queer theory, meaning that queer Africans are not being represented in the leading literature or theoretical frameworks to the extent that “African sexuality is being pushed past the margins into obscurity” (176).

The reality of queer identities in the African continent has produced an ongoing debate in the academic field. In the social sphere, queer identities in Africa are still in the process of fighting for their rights and on many occasions they do so despite the dangers of making themselves visible to the authorities. The theoretical and political support that queer theory provides to those in search for their right of defending and standing for their queerness has been questioned as partially unstable. There seems to be a certain bias according to some authors. Douglas Clarke (2013) argues that “there is a distinct lack of consideration for African same-sex desiring culture. It is as if Western queer theory attempts to erase both African-ness and African-centred homosexuality” (Clarke 2013, 173). He also claims that the purpose of the debate brought by this situation is to “

address this double erasure by calling into question the practice and motives of Western queer theory and how it applies itself to what I call the ‘African question’. For a theory that seeks to disrupt power and cultural normativity, Western theory is firmly rooted in the West’s historic and popular notions of what it is to be African and Afro-homosexual. (173)

It seems pertinent to note the relevance of Clarke’s assertions as well as the opportunity that his new articulated neologism implies in order to discuss the situation of queer identities in Africa. The ‘African question’ linked to the ‘African-ness’ that queer theory seemingly attempts to erase, as Clarke has pointed out, has been reversed by the fructuous acknowledging of this issue from literary and academic positions in Africa and other countries. Clarke continues to admit that between the construction of new ways of understanding the differences amid those worlds, and their concerns regarding gender and sexual identities other than the heterosexual,

the need to create an awareness by the term African-ness is to “demarcate its subject from African Americans or North American blacks” in an attempt to signal that “[i]n no way does this term mean to encapsulate and essence or essential nature of all Africans” (174).

Clarke points at the situation of Africa within the context of queer theory, claiming that the question of queer identities in the continent has a history of its own despite the biased assumptions exposed by many governments and political parties. In fact, he argues that in many African societies there are long traditions of homosexuality and queer relations but they had been somehow kept in a certain way closeted following a certain non-spoken agreement of silence about them (174-75). In addition, Clarke also admits that “Africa has a model of theory that is largely unexplored in the Western world”, and furthermore that, “Africa, long before the West came around, had a policy in place to tolerate homosexual activity so long as it was kept behind closed doors” (175). Despite this closeting Clarke also claims that “Africa, for all the debate and erasure that has happened, does have several strong queer advocacy groups which have come to light since the 1980s including the Jacaranda Queen contests (Black drag queens) and GALZ (Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe)” (175). It is relevant to note the importance of these assertions and the enlightenment that Clarke offers regarding the question of Africa and its visibility from a queer theory perspective.

Discussing changing roles their presence in literature and in women’s lives in the African continent takes me to address the conflicts that gender roles as social construction signify when talking about feminism and queer theory. The Eurocentric and North American approaches are insufficient, almost inefficient, to use in relation with the particularities of gender roles in African societies. That is basically because the mainstream assumptions have been based on a view of Africa from a Western perspective. The imposition of a Western perspective on gender roles upon African societies have resulted into an erosion of original more flexible which differed from those imposed by patriarchal heteronormativity.

Gender roles as social constructions in Africa did not follow the same pattern as those constructed and imposed by the empires that colonised the continent. The historical referents of societies with different views and traditions regarding the connections between gender, sex and power seem pertinent to address here. In this respect it is worth mentioning Ifi Amadiume’s *Male Daughters Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (2015) where she analyses gender attitudes and gender roles that were present in pre-colonial African societies.

Her work has been considered as a book that “frees the subject position of ‘husband’ with affiliation with men, and goes to do the same for other masculine attributes, dislocating sex, gender and sexual orientation” (Amadiume 2015). Furthermore, with her research she claims that gender in relation with sexual differences and roles as constructed in Western feminist discourses had no parallelism in Africa before the various processes of colonial invasion. Amadiume’s work contributes to question the Western construction of gender roles by analysing how those structures in African societies resorted to a more flexible model (Amadiume 2015).

In her book, Amadiume argues that one of her first concerns is to focus on the relevance and more humane sociocultural systems of women in Nobi society which followed a more flexible gender system both for the political and working roles of its society. Amadiume says that “[g]ender makes it possible for women to have such presence in the economic, social and political institutions of Nobi society” she further points to the fact that in this “theoretical framing [...] patriarchy and matriarchy would be juxtaposed” (Amadiume 2015, xii) but “the flexibility of gender allows for power, and mediates the seemingly dichotomous patriarchal and matriarchal dual system of men and women”(xii). The author is focusing on the oppression and ideological structure of patriarchy, and places the stress on acknowledging that there were, and still are, other forms of social construction in Africa, in which women play a significant role as do men in patriarchally based societies (Amadiume 2015, xii).

Amadiume’s account of an alternative gender order provides the grounds to address the singularities of Africa’s identities which help us support the need of addressing this aspect in the context of arguing against mainstream assumptions of patriarchal models as natural. Deconstructing the bases of the patriarchal model enables to question the assumed supremacy of men over women as well as its historical origin as seen from a Western perspective and destabilised from an African one. To include a different perspective when analysing gender roles supporting this with evidence of other ways of social organisations with more fluid models reinforces the contention of Western patriarchy and its heteronormativity as fabrication. Having matriarchy as a more inclusive model of social construction opens a debate about this

matricentric unit headed by mothers or male daughters or female husbands (and perhaps these days ‘male wives’ or ‘male mothers’) also contains subversive women and daughters on their own radical paths within the matriarchal umbrella, irrespective of prescriptive gender stereotypes. The

different ideological characteristics presented by these women either as scatter-headed daughters or goddesses of all types make for creative possibilities and feminist theoretical departures. (Amadiume 2015, xiii)

However, the author also points at the conflicts that Western patriarchy, colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism have created. Feminism has fostered the analysis of those influences in African societies concerning “women of all persuasions”, and, “importantly [among them], the issue of same-sex or gay marriage has come to represent not just a rights issue, but also a recognition of change” (Amadiume 2015, xv). Therefore, despite the difficulties, Africa is moving in a direction to restore a certain balance between original traditions and modern trends of gender roles and gender identification.

The studies and voices that ought to be included have to be so both from an academic and literary perspective since it is by studying and portraying those voices that their situation can be changed or restored to their right place of articulation. In this line of investigation, it is worth noticing what Amadiume claims when she says that for Western women and academics “the universal social and cultural inferiority of women was a foregone conclusion: ‘sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of human life’ [which is a] kind of global presupposition [...] itself ethnocentric” (Amadiume 2015, 4). She also claims that the domestic position assigned to Western women and their responsibility for procreation is a result of specific cultural and social traditions, not an intrinsic feature of women.

Following this line of questioning, the author tackles the “uniqueness of the Igbo gender system”, which for the first Westerners arriving at the area of Africa where this tribe resides, “seemed abnormal” because “the flexibility of the Igbo gender construction meant that gender was separated from biological sex. Daughters could become sons and consequently males. Daughters and women in general could be husbands to wives and consequently males in relation to their wives” (Amadiume 2015, 15). This flexible gender system offered the possibility for women to have “political status [...] in traditional Igbo societies and the political choices offered to them” (15).

In addition, this will take us to discuss its influence on other types of sexual orientation. There are several voices emerging from the African literary and academic spheres that argue against the mainstream assumptions in many African societies regarding queer identities. As it has happened to gender roles, other ways of understanding and feeling sexuality and gender

identities have seen the effects of colonialism and patriarchal policies which are strongly influenced by Eurocentric views.

It is worth noticing that this distribution of gender and the production of economy is fundamental but not exclusive of a specific gender in many African societies. Signalling the relevance of these aspects, Amadiume claims that “the development of a sexual division of labour and gender ideology [...] gave women a central place in the subsistence economy, while men sought authority through ritual specialization and ritual control” (27). The singularity of this distribution of gender roles seems to develop into a gender ideology that, “[a]ssociated with this were strong matrifocality and female orientation in this supposedly ‘patrilineal’ society” (27). Progressively, the information provided by Amadiume, shows the distinctive traces of a different social construction of gender roles. It is a relevant example that helps us understand the contradictions between the hegemonic rigidity of Western patriarchy vis a vis the evidence revealed here in the Igbo and Nobi societies of Africa.

To this day, it seems that in certain spheres and regions of the African continent, there are still reminiscent structures such as those analysed by Amadiume. Seeing the differences of these social constructions is a fundamental aspect to bear in mind in order to address the implications of the rigidity imposed upon African societies also from a queer perspective. One may assume that, if this rigidity was imposed on those grounds during the various process of Western influence regarding gender roles, the possibility of having imposed that on sexualities is also coherent.

In Osman’s collection of stories, the issue of religion is a recurrent element appearing in relation with sexual orientation; thus, it seems relevant to comment briefly on this aspect from an academic perspective. Queer identities in the African continent appear as un-African, according to some politicians and commentators. The bias against other sexual orientation identities becomes a theme of discussion. Nkiru Nzegwu’s article “‘Osunality’ (or African Eroticism)” (2011) claims that “[w]hatever erotic might have been in Africa’s cultural past, it has now been radically reshaped by the world’s two major patriarchal religions—Christianity and Islam— as well as by colonial modernity and capitalist ideology” (Nzegwu 2011, 253).

Western thought produced a knowledge of the world and of human sexualities that was a construction with which to undermine other identities in order to control them. Desire Lewis’s article “Representing African Sexualities” (2011) claims that “[i]n *Orientalism* (1978), Said laid the foundation for many post-colonial writers’ explorations of how legacies of colonial-

inspired knowledge systems have defined bodies, human subjects and social histories” (Lewis 2011, 199). This is relevant since the construction of histories and bodies from discourses imposed affect the identification too with one’s place in the world, and, consequently with one’s sense of being regarding sexuality or gender identification. Lewis continues by saying that to “explore African sexualities carefully means first exploring how they have been thought about; it requires [...] ‘a discursive space-clearing’ away from both acknowledging and analysing how others have historically been imagined” (Lewis 2011, 200).

Having said this, it seems evident that the influence of the West in the process of reshaping histories fostered the disappearance of other traditions and forms of understanding sexualities. In his article “Twice Removed: African Invisibility in Western Queer Theory” (2013) Douglas Clark claims that “[t]he West has set itself up as the authority on knowledge about the homosexual experience”, and that “[t]hose who are not part of the West can only benefit from the imposition of this structure” (Clarke 2013, 177).

### **2.3. Queer literature in Africa**

*Fairytales for Lost Children* can be considered the first compilation of stories devoted to the representation of queer African identities written by an African author. There are African authors and scholars who have written about African queer issues from a literary or academic standpoint, but a collection such as Osman’s is a singular example in the literary sphere. It seems a bold and creative attempt to offer readers such a publication that includes an umbrella of queer voices. To be a novel writer and focus on such a complex amalgam of identities appears as an example of the interest and the need to offer a space for them to inhabit. It also shows the relevance of such a contribution to the literary world since the literature produced in Africa or by African writers about same-sex relationships or queer identity construction is slim.

Jayawardane and Egoro’s article “Gay Sexuality and African Writers” (2015), claim in this respect that “African novelists have always been intrigued by same-sex relationships” (Jayawardane and Egoro 2015, 2-9). The imprint of literary writing about queer identities in the context of the African continent takes most critics and writers to speak about Wole Soyinka’s book *The Interpreters* (1965), which according to Jayawardane and Egoro’s is considered as “the critics’ go-to place for old-school representation of same-sex love” (1-9). In the same vein, the authors claim in their article that it is an early example of an attempt to write about same-

sex relationships, but “Soyinka’s treatment of homosexuality is cringe-worthy and extremely unsympathetic. Same-sex desire is caricatured”. In his book *Osman* offers a view of acceptance differing diametrically from the views provided by Soyinka. *Osman* does point to the Western discourse about gender using the voices of those who despise non-heterosexual sexualities other than the heterosexual and impersonates these discourses of rejection by family and friends. However, with respect to writing about queer identities nowadays they also say that

[t]hankfully, African writers have moved on from resorting to such ridiculous, caricatured depictions of gay people – who appear here and there only as props that aid in shoring up the masculinity and African-ness of the novels’ protagonists. Within the past five years, we’ve seen a sea change in attitudes towards homosexuality by writers, in part a response to virulent anti-homosexual legislation in key locations. Writers such as Chimamanda Adichie and Binyavanga Wainaina have been very open about their personal views on homosexuality and have gone on to challenge and change how homosexuality and same-sex desire is represented in fiction. (Jayawardane and Egoro 2015)

Adichie’s short story “Apollo” (2015) and Wainaina’s “I am a Homosexual Mum” (2014), which is a lost chapter of his book *One Day I will Write about this Place* (2012), are some of the works that offer new voices and narratives about same-sex relationships from the African continent. They address, in their own particular ways, gay issues in contexts that include African traditions and social conventions. I will analyse some parallelisms that can be found between Adichie’s story and *Osman*’s “Shoga”, included in *Fairytales for Lost Children*, in the following section. In addition to other author’s contributions, there are as well the works of Ugandan writer and 2007 Caine Prize short story winner Monica Arac de Nyeko’s “Jambula Tree” and Nigerian-American writer Chinelo Okparanta’s first book *Happiness Like Water* (2013), winner of the 2014 Lambda Literary Award for the “Lesbian General Fiction” category (Lambda Literary Foundation 2014), as well as her most recent work *Under The Udala Trees* (2015), both narrating stories about African lesbians. Some similarities have been explored between the latter and Jeanette Winterson’s first novel *Oranges are not the only Fruit* (Gillette 2015). Slowly dismantling the barriers of same-sex relationships is an important task carried out by some authors who contribute to give visibility to these voices that write from Africa or from the diaspora. In this same context I would like to point to Hasan Namir’s novel *God in Pink* (2015), winner of the 2016 Lambda Literary Award, as one of the first fictional works depicting gay Muslims in their attempt to come out of the closet in modern Iraq. The relevance

of Namir's work is that it refers to the issue of Islam and homosexuality, which is the conductive narrative line of the novel. This religious connection is also important in Osman's book since to be gay and Muslim is a source of pride as well as of problems for several of the characters who have to face conflicts related with patriarchal heteronormative interpretations of Islamic traditions.

There are other contributions that address the invisibility of queer African identities. In literary fiction I could mention the compilation of poetry and prose in the recent publication *Walking the Tightrope* (Animashaun, et al. 2016); similarly, *Jambula Tree and Other Stories* (The Caine Prize For African Writing 2008), as well as those that include fiction and academic writings such as *African Sexualities* (2011) edited by Sylvia Tamale, and *Queer African Reader* (2013), edited by Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas, which includes "Fairytale for Lost Children", one of Osman's short stories analysed in this dissertation. Mention has to be made too to Robert Aldrich's *Gay Life Stories* (2016), which offers a well-documented account of ancient historical and contemporary modern portraits of queer individuals, some well-known to the mainstream reader, but others that may surprise the public. However, as I said before Osman's book is a singular one and provides the grounds for others to follow with the example.

Osman's collection explores queer diversity and identity construction by giving the floor to a diversity of queer African identities that reflect the flexibility that can be understood from the post-structuralist debates between nature and nurture. Besides being the first African writer that devotes a full collection to queer African identities, it is worth noting the perspective that Osman uses. *Fairytales for Lost Children* utilises one of the foundational genres that Western thought has been using to reproduce the social construction of gender.

Diriye Osman's *Fairytales for Lost Children* received a wide welcome by the press, the critics and in the media. The book, according to Osman, helped him "realize that it was possible not only to respect cultural complexity but to revel in it. Ultimately, we are the only people who can give ourselves permission to live" (Osman 2014). Culture and tradition are some of the themes that are tackled in the stories together with the problematics of coming out of the closet. In an interview with Elmi Ali (2013) Osman acknowledges that both processes, writing and coming out, occurred at the same time (Ali 2013). He comments on his background and his past experiences at the same time that he admits that during the writing process "I not only accepted my identity as a gay Somali man but the book made me incredibly proud of the fact. Writing *Fairytales* allowed me to expand my perceptions and see things with a clear-eyed vision". With

his writing Osman has contributed to reach and give voice to those who are still struggling in many African countries because of their sexual orientation or gender identification. He says that from the moment he published his book he “received emails from young LGBT men and women from Somalia, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda telling me how much the stories meant to them, and how they felt a sense of solace knowing that I was telling these narratives without shame or fear” (Ali 2013). Shame and fear, says Osman, “are the most potent weapons in the homophobe’s arsenal. If one rejects the notion that one has to be ashamed of being gay or lesbian, then half the battle is won” (Ali 2013). The voice that he gives to all these people is also his voice, and he claims that “I want to be part of a chorus of voices who are shaking things up” (Ali 2013). Duncan (2013) says that in his book Osman presents us characters and stories with “a record of the physical, mental and emotional effects of conservative power, pressure and prejudice on his richly resistant and defiant characters” (Duncan 2013). In his attempt to give visibility to the lives of African queer individuals, Osman pays homage to the resilience that they have to endure for being queer and coming out to the world. The author of *Fairytales for Lost Children* shares those passages of difficulties at the same time that he gives them a chance of becoming who they are, keeping their dignity and showing the benefits of standing by one’s own rights.

In this section I have provided the theoretical framework and context that will be used for the literary analysis of Osman’s collection of stories. I have explored queer theory and provided a reasoning of its postulates that seem appropriate for my dissertation. I have outlined the main features of this field of academic knowledge that offers an approach based on the fluidity and inbetweenness of sexual identity against rigidity imposed by patriarchal heteronormative models of gender and sexual orientation. I have also provided a brief genealogy of gender and queer studies in Africa, and on African literature with reflections about Osman’s position in it. It seemed relevant to include such a section in this thesis, since, it is my contention that the work of Osman presents us with a singular and unique way of addressing the issues of being queer and African in twenty-first century literature. I would argue that the courage of doing so shows a great concern regarding the need of hearing the voices of those who struggle nowadays as a consequence being queer. Followingly, in the next section I am going to analyse the representation of queer characters including lesbian women, children, young gay men, transitional and transgender characters portrayed in *Fairytales for Lost Children*.

### 3. Queer African voices in Osman's *Fairytales for Lost Children*

The aim of this chapter is to explore the representation of the various queer African identities that appear in Osman's collection of short stories *Fairytales for Lost Children*. In Osman's book there are eleven stories that I will analyse following a specific order. The literary analysis will be introduced and discussed according to the queer African representation that the characters embody. Therefore, this section will be constructed following the order in which the characters appear in the book, starting with lesbian women continuing with gay children and gay young adults, to end with an analysis of transitional and transgender queer African individuals.

This section starts with the analysis of "Watering The Imagination", the first story in the book, about a mother and her lesbian daughter. Since the core of the story addresses lesbianism, I am incorporating to my analysis other lesbian characters appearing in the stories "Ndambi" and "Earthling". I shall then continue with another section addressing the discovery of queer identity by children in "Fairytales for Lost Children". Moving on, I will discuss how gay youngsters are portrayed in "Tell the Sun not to Shine", "Your Silence Will Not Protect You", "Shoga", "My Roots are Your Roots" and "If I were a Dance". Finally, I will explore the appearance of transitional characters in "The other (Wo)man" and transgender in "Pavilion". In sum, I will explore how queer African identities are portrayed in *Fairytales for Lost Children*, with the goal to analyse the umbrella of queer African identities appearing in Osman's book.

Accordingly, as it is the aim of this thesis, I will focus on examining the relevance of the main traits of each queer African identity represented with respect to: 1) their place of enunciation in: a) the motherland (in this case it can be Somalia, Osman's country of origin, or Nigeria, the country where he found refuge), or b) the diaspora (the author's actual place of residence, i.e.: London); 2) personal constraints in coming to terms with the process of sexual identity construction; and 3) how these individuals face the conflicts produced as they come out of the closet to their families, friends and to the world; or how they navigate the transitional stages that imply changes in attitude, crossdressing and identity construction.

As a result of coming out as queer individuals, characters, in some of these stories, face hostile reactions towards their queer identities. Often these reactions stem from specific religious, cultural, and socially acquired beliefs. Those contexts of struggle and prejudice open the debate on sexual identity construction, as well as on the conflict between nature and nurture, which correlates to the essentialism vs constructionism debates. The latter is an aspect that

provides the grounds to address the appropriateness of the use of queer theory as it has been introduced in the theoretical background section.

I will also comment on the stories in which mental health issues affect some of the characters, such as the hearing of voices, which reveal to what extent their suffering from distress is directly linked to culturally and religiously constructed stereotypes regarding same-sex desire. This mental condition seems to be overcome when those characters stand firm on their ground and claim their own distinctive sexual orientation. The struggles that these characters deal with are the result of the rigidity imposed by heteronormativity and represent most of the difficulties that queer individuals face at certain moments in their lives, certainly a problem in most African countries nowadays.

Throughout this analysis, I will also discuss how the process of sexual identity construction, as presented in some of the stories, is the result of a combination of factors that which contradict the use of rigid binaries that Western patriarchal heteronormative thought has constructed (Foucault 1990; Butler 2007; Sedgwick 2008).

### **3.1. Representing lesbian identities**

“Watering the Imagination” is the story of Suldana, a lesbian woman, as told by her mother. It is written as a first-person monologue and is the first story in *Fairytales for Lost Children*. The story, located in Somalia, is a reflection about life and freedom of sexual choice in which the unnamed mother speaks about her daughter’s way of life. The monologue describes the mother and daughter’s situation within the context of the mother protecting her daughter’s freedom of choice regarding sexual matters. Suldana’s mother tells us right at the beginning that she has never left her motherland. In fact, this is the only story that is articulated from Somalia although not from Africa (Osman places the action of “Fairytales for Lost Children” in Nigeria, his home during his life as a refugee). In the story that I am analysing here, the narrator describes herself as a story teller, someone who keeps the tradition going, honouring the cultural background of the Somalian people. She tells us that she is the one that “passes on tales of kings and warrior queens, freedom-fighters and poets” (Osman 2013, 3) to her daughter as is customary according to their tradition. According to Hawley— in his analysis of this story— she, the mother, “in recording why she does so [...] also suggests the motivation for Diriye Osman and other African writers to produce art that deals with sexual transgressions” (Hawley 2017, 123). Suldana’s

mother is confident about what she means when she says that “I tell these stories to remind my children and myself that Somalia is fertile with history and myth. The only seed that needs regular watering is our imagination” (Osman 2013, 3). The voice of Suldana’s mother tells us about her daughter’s lesbianism without any homophobic bias:

My eldest daughter, Suldana, is in love with another woman. She is eighteen and she spends her days working at our kiosk selling milk and eggs, and at night she sneaks out and goes down to the beach to see her lover. She crawls back into bed at dawn, smelling of sea and salt and perfume. (Osman 2013, 3)

After a first paragraph where she explains her position in the story, Suldana’s mother produces a poetic description full of beauty and celebration. It is an unusual protective position for a mother in the context of family relations in Africa, especially when dealing with mother/daughter relationships. In Pérez Ruiz’s *Lo Lejano y lo Bello* (2012) having as the main catalyser the role of women in African literature spanning to include Afro-American and Caribbean authors of British descent, the author writes about the mother’s role in Africa and its portrait in literature from various perspectives including several cultures and countries of the African continent and of North America. She points out the many aspects that a mother (in this context I speak about the African mother) must bear in mind when she has to take care of the family. Their roles, as women and mothers or mothers to be, are deeply embedded in the African social structure. When African women marry and become mothers, they must carry on with their duties and often, mostly in rural areas, have to take care of the land and cultivate it to produce and provide the families’ main food supplies. The question here remains whether this attitude regarding a mother and her daughter’s future in society is present in the literature available. Pérez Ruiz argues that

[i]n many African societies a person’s female identity is determined by the fact of being a mother and the family relationship is forged on the bases of the bonds that are established by births, not by marriage ties, being more important those ties that derive from the maternal line. [...] Especially in matriarchal societies: “the woman is revered in her role as the mother who is the bringer of life, the bearer of culture and the center of social organization”.<sup>1</sup>(Dove, 1998: 4 quoted in Pérez Ruiz 2012, 149-50)

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<sup>1</sup>(Although the original quote from this book is in Spanish, I have translated them into English for my dissertation. The original quote can be found in the footnotes.)

En muchas sociedades africanas la identidad femenina de una persona viene determinada por el hecho de ser madre y el parentesco se forja sobre la base de las relaciones que se establecen por los nacimientos, no por los vínculos

The position that Suldana's mother takes to defend and support her daughter's sexuality is not the dominant attitude in Africa, but it could be considered as a possible one following the above statement. Osman, by creating this new attitude outside of the dominant role and outside the common position of a motherly character could, in this case, be pointing at the possibility of having a relative who is supportive towards same sex orientation in Africa (an exception to the rule). Other cases are present in recent published works that need a brief mention. One of those appears in Chinelo Okparanta's novel *Under the Udala trees* (2015) and in Monica Arac de Nyeko's short story "Jambula Tree", winner of the 2007 Caine Prize for African Writing. In the former, Ijeoma, the protagonist, is attracted to women from an early age. Her mother finds out and radically disapproves. Ijeoma finds love with a woman but the situation is so dangerous for lesbians there that she finally marries a man conforming to tradition. After having her first child, she has a miscarriage and leaves her husband, unable to submit to a married life when she is constantly recalling the love she had found before. Returning to her mother's home she now finds an accepting mother and the opportunity of a life lived with the real love of her life, a woman. As for Nyeko's story it is constructed in an epistolary form. The unnamed narrator is a woman who writes to Sanyu, her first love from her African motherland. In the letters that seem not to have been sent, the story of the first love and sexual encounter is narrated in detail. The lovers' actions were discovered provoking the families to separate them, but this separation was overcome by love and the epistolary story begins as the writer learns that her beloved is coming back home.

In contrast to the above developments in stories concerning African lesbian situations, Osman's story, "Watering the Imagination", presents a proud mother defending her daughter's freedom of sexual choice right from the beginning. Women like Suldana and her mother seek to live their lives differently. Suldana's mother applies the freedom she thinks anyone should be able to enjoy by supporting her daughter. Both are in search of a way to claim their choice of a sexual identity that differs from the standard norm in a world dominated by patriarchal heteronormativity.

Suldana's mother goes beyond the dominant assumptions and cultural constraints regarding the common roles that are prescribed for women in Somalian society (a very strict

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matrimoniales, siendo los lazos más importantes los que se derivan de la línea materna. [...] Especialmente en las sociedades matriarcales «the woman is revered in her role as the bringer of life, the bearer of culture and the center of social organization» (Dove, 1998: 4 Pérez Ruiz 2012, 149-50)

one since it is governed by Islamic laws and Sharia)<sup>2</sup>. We learn this when she admits that she is not considering any of the marriage proposals she receives for her daughter, for example when she says that “[e]very day marriage proposals arrive with offers of high dowries, but I wave them away” (Osman 2013, 3); in fact, she acknowledges the complicity she has with her daughter about her sexual choices and cultural traditions when she states that “[w]e never talk about these things like mothers and daughters should; but I respect her privacy and I allow her to live” (3). Two aspects need to be noted here. The first one is how the mother addresses these issues using the first-person plural pronoun “we”; thus, including herself in that reflection and not only speaking about it. It is a significant change of attitude since it can be interpreted as a more conscious implication that is also crucial for her as a woman, and not only as a mother. As for the second, I need to point out that this attitude towards marital conventions in Africa is not a common one, let alone the freedom towards same sex orientation that the mother allows her daughter. Osman is portraying here an idealised mother-daughter relationship breaking with the standard rule and providing a fresh new story to be told.

It is a welcomed surprise to find such a strong and confident character placed at the beginning of the book, as it has been mentioned previously, and this can be analysed in light of this new understanding that the intention of the author by starting with Suldana’s mother is to offer a strong voice that will serve as a platform for other “bold new voices” (Hawley 2017, 123). Osman is preparing the reader for what is to come in terms of the queerness of the representations in the rest of the stories. To some extent, it could be argued that Suldana’s mother is presenting the leitmotif of the book by addressing some of the main themes appearing in other stories about family members reacting to issues related to sexual identity construction. It is also an example of Osman’s position towards homophobic or heteronormative and cultural interpretations, which in many cases also appear as the core of the conflicts between members of those families when for example Suldana’s mother says that

[i]n Somali culture many things go unsaid: how we love, who we love and why we love that way. I don’t know why Suldana loves the way she does. I don’t know why she loves who she loves. But I do know that by respecting her privacy I am letting her dream in a way that my generation was not capable

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<sup>2</sup> Currently Somalia is a Parliamentary democratic country with Islam as the official religion including a minority of Sufis in its population. According to the Somalian government website: <http://www.somaligov.net/>, the historical evidence about the country becoming an Islamic-based religious one is unclear, although the dates of its embracing it date from as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somalia#Religion>)

of. I'm letting her reach for something neither one of us can articulate.  
(Osman 2013, 3-4)

As is the case for many queer individuals, these unsaid things — taboos about same sex relationships among others — are what makes oneself the individual he/she feels is. However, those things are frequently difficult to articulate, and often cannot be fully explored due to the social and cultural constraints that dominate most societies, which are the direct result of the patriarchal heteronormativity rule regarding freedom of sexual orientation. Why should it be important to tell who one wants to love or why, or how does this way of loving differ from the norm? Coming out of the closet is not an issue here, as it is in many of the other stories that I will analyse. The question here is addressed from the point of view of letting someone choose, letting Suldana be free to love; a question of respect that is key in the process of building one's identity. Suldana can "reach", as her mother says, "something neither of us can articulate" (Osman 2013, 3-4).

Thanks to her mother the daughter will not have to face all the stages of conflict. She is free to choose. The relevant aspect here is the possibility she is creating for Suldana, for her to live her life and to realise her true sexual identity. She will be able to live her way of life in accordance with her true self, something that her mother's generation never had the chance to do. The complicity of the two women, when the mother speaks about building one's own story, seems clear in this new passage when the mother speaks about how the new story is going to be constructed and how they will endure life, by telling stories; thus, this is how Suldana and her mother act, reinforced in the story by the inclusive use of "we" when the mother says

[s]o, we take our voices and our stories to the sea. Every evening we walk towards the water and we write our hopes and dreams on scraps of paper. We wrap the paper around stones and tie it on with rubber bands. We then fling those stones that carry our hopes and dreams into the ocean. My mother and my mother's mother used to do this. To us it's a way of expressing some of the things we cannot verbalise. It's a way of sharing our most intimate secrets without shame or fear. In doing so, we have created our own mythology and history. (Osman 2013, 4)

Osman is not only playing, in a very creative way, with tradition and storytelling here by articulating those themes of telling stories and using old family traditions to express things that are difficult to say. The author is also creating new ones by using old traditions in order to

construct a new history, a new myth using the voice of the narrator in “Watering The Imagination”. Opening the book’s thematic content in such a way enhances the relevance of the storytelling tradition, as embodied in the mother’s character, and how it is a relevant element for the transmission of knowledge and cultural richness, as well as pertinent (in a deconstructive way for Osman’s purpose) to question the indoctrination tactics used by the patriarchal model. In this light it is worth returning to Perez Ruiz’s book (2012), where she explores the relationships between tradition and culture. In the chapter entitled “Literature and Maternity in Sub-Saharan Africa” Perez Ruiz addresses to what extent women’s identity are directly linked with the process of being a mother. In one of the sections she speaks about the role of women, in this case grandmothers, and how it is relevant in the transmission of traditions using storytelling. She says, quoting the work of Nah Dove *African Mothers. Bearers of Culture. Makers of Social Change* (1998), that

African mothers have always been «a positive model of courage, intelligence, support, integrity, endurance, responsibility and commitment for surviving under extreme conditions» and have played a key role in the important task of humanising their direct descendants, as well as the world that surrounds them. African mothers, as much as those of African background, are bearers of culture and the ones in charge of laying down the rules for their children for them to be able to understand and define their own humanity separate from the images built from Western thought: «Afrikan<sup>3</sup> mothers through time, from antiquity to now, have been the backbone of the preservation of the cultural memory and therefore the backbone of resistance» being in the African culture «the Afrikan mother; the bearer of culture and humanity, who will be the determinant of the fruition of our future potential”<sup>4</sup>. (Dove 1998, 231-234 quoted in Pérez Ruiz 2012, 151-152)

Storytelling and fairy tales share common traits in that they establish patterns and role models to be followed by boys and girls from an early age. Role models inherited from Western

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<sup>3</sup> The author points out that “With this term ‘Afrikan’ the author is making reference both to people from the Caribbean of British or African origins as well as of Afro-American ones as well as those belonging to the African continent” (Perez Ruiz 2012, 151).

<sup>4</sup> Las madres africanas han sido siempre «a positive model of courage, intelligence, support, integrity, endurance, responsibility, and commitment to surviving under extreme conditions» (Dove, 1998:171) y han jugado un papel primordial en la importante tarea de humanizar, tanto a sus descendientes directos, como al mundo que les rodea. Tanto las madres africanas como las de origen africano son portadoras de la cultura y las encargadas de asentar bases sólidas en sus hijos para que estos entiendan y definan su propia humanidad al margen de las imágenes construidas desde el pensamiento occidental: «Afrikan<sup>4</sup> mothers through time, from antiquity to now, have been the backbones of the preservation of cultural memory and therefore the backbone of resistance» siendo en la cultura africana «the Afrikan mother, the bearer of culture and humanity, who Will be the determinant of the fruition of our futures potential» (Dove, 1998: 231 y234 quoted in Perez Ruíz 151-152).

civilisation, as well as other cultures, are manipulated to establish and perpetuate a set of attitudes and behaviours regarding gender roles, social positions, sexual orientation, etc. Bacchilega's (1997) *Postmodern Fairytales* book provides some useful insights concerning the fairy-tale tradition and the role model patterns they establish. She claims that "we respond to stereotyped and institutionalized fragments of these narratives ["Snow White" or "Beauty and the Beast" and others]", and further states that, "[n]ot only are children encouraged to retell or dramatize them in schools, but college students encounter them again in across-the-curriculum readers and in courses on children's literature and folklore" (Bacchilega 1997, 2). In particular children of both sexes have been indoctrinated for centuries by being encouraged to follow the role models portrayed in fairytales. Bacchilega continues with this theme adding that "[t]his legitimizing of the genre has extended to several psychotherapeutical approaches and contexts" (2). Furthermore, she claims that

[c]reative writers seem equally inspired by the fairy tale, which provides them with well-known material pliable to political, erotic or narrative manipulation. Belittled, yet pervasive and institutionalized, fairy tales are thus produced and consumed to accomplish a variety of social functions in multiple contexts and in more or less explicitly ideological ways. (Bacchilega 1997, 3)

Gender construction, established through patriarchal heteronormativity, uses the frames of storytelling and fairytales to construct and support the discourse they want to transmit and perpetuate. All this, in order to persuade individuals with a narrative designed to project a single unified vision of gender roles and sexual identity constructed in accordance with Western patriarchal binary thinking. A constructed order that has been a structure sustained and forced in the minds of many generations as the only possible way to live in society. However, Suldana's mother in "Watering The Imagination" takes the chance to subvert in her own way the patriarchal order because she helps her daughter by encouraging her to be true to herself, as when she tells us that "Suldana must take that history and forge her own future". She continues by saying that "when she does go forth, I will honour my promise as her parent and go forth with her. We will not turn back" (Osman 2013, 4).

Suldana's mother is a bold and proud voice that speaks to us from Somalia, the author's motherland, and presents us with a positive narrative of freedom and endurance. Somalia becomes a place of possibility and of choice despite cultural rigidity regarding the prospect of same-sex relationships. The mother is given a very clear, articulate, voice in a very short story

(only two pages) that captures our attention. Suldana's mother is one of the voices of hope in the collection of stories and a very powerful one. Osman resorts to a similar choice of narration placed at the end of his book with the story "My Roots are Your Roots", another very short story that acts as a kind of epilogue while Suldana's story acts as an introduction. "My Roots are Your Roots" is a story about two gay men, both living in the diaspora, who support each other and talk about their traditions and cultural fashions in dressing which I shall analyse in the section devoted to young gay men.

It could be argued that these two stories are strategically placed to provide a happy beginning and a happy ending, in a way, reproducing in the layout of the book, a fairytale-like format. Osman's choice of tone and message in the first story is an audacious attempt to address his readers bringing forward a positive enunciation regarding freedom of choice in love relationships and ending the book in a similar manner. The author opens the way for the other stories in the book, in most cases less pleasing as they focus on issues that are not trivial and require a certain degree of dramatism. One could say, stories that are less idealised but not less relevant for the discussion of the representation of queer Africanness. By choosing to place these stories in these strategic positions within the book Osman gives the readers a strong sense of hope.

"Watering The Imagination" is a straightforward story of affection and determination that sets a special tone for the opening of Osman's collection. It is also the only one whose setting is supposed to be the author's motherland, thus making the author's background relevant: a certain sense of pride seems to permeate the whole story if we consider Suldana's mother's description of Somalia as a land of hope and freedom. Therefore, *Fairytales for Lost Children* starts with a story about the possibilities of making our own history. A story about love and freedom. It is Diriye Osman's choice of a female voice to articulate such complex themes that has to be remembered when reading and analysing the stories that follow: stories that are more elaborated and offer more details of the characters' lives, as well as a deeper exploration of the same themes but often with more pessimistic overtones.

"Ndambi" and "Earthling" are the next stories that I will analyse to continue with the discussion of the representation of lesbian identities in Osman's book. Both stories share several common traits. They are both first person narratives told by the lesbian voices of Ndambi in the first and of Zeytung in the second. These characters are also struggling with family members who question their sexual identity and use religious bias and misinterpretations of Islam as

weapons against them. Ndambi and Zeytung deal, in their own different ways, with the struggles in defending their sexual identity. Both stories also share the fact that they are articulated from their home in Great Britain. It needs to be noted how these two stories diverge from “Watering the Imagination”, where we have a mother supporting her lesbian daughter, in contrast to the attitudes of Nambdi and Zeytung’s families, as I will show in the various passages that I am going to analyse.

“Ndambi”, “which means most beautiful” (Osman 2013, 71), is the seventh story in the collection and the second whose protagonist, Samira, is a lesbian character. She adopts the nick name of Ndambi because of its meaning. Ndambi is a psychoanalyst who is currently in the process of readjusting to her new single status. The story begins with how she recalls the quarrels she had over the phone with her sister about relationships, marriage and in the end about her lesbianism. As a result of those arguments, cultural and religious issues come to the forefront forcing her to end the relationship with her family. “Ndambi” is the story of a person who tries to overcome pain and survive against her family’s prejudices. The story is divided into several sections in which the main character reflects upon her current situation and other aspects of her existence.

Ndambi’s story begins with the echo of a discussion in the form of a monologue in which she recalls the conversation with her sister “[m]y sister tells me I’m living in sin. ‘Tis true. But she doesn’t conk that is *my* sin. She tells me it is haram<sup>5</sup> for a woman to love another woman. ‘Tis also true. But I don’t need to hear it from her” (Osman 2013, 69). Basically, the conflict arising from the argument about her sexual orientation is the narrative thread of Ndambi’s story, a discussion in which religious bias in the form of sin and haram, are used against Ndambi’s lesbianism. In this case, for Ndambi her sexuality is something beyond discussion or questioning at this stage of her life. She is an adult woman fearless of social bias regarding her sexual orientation. However, it is a difficult moment in Ndambi’s life, being alone again —she has recently ended a relationship— and having to face her family makes things harder in that context. Yet, during the discussion they have her sister gets to the point of telling her that “I pray that the shatan leaves your spirit; I pray that you find a man because lesbianism can be cured. I pray that Allah cures you. I *pray*. All you need to do is to find a good man and

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<sup>5</sup> Forbidden by Islamic Law: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/haram> (Last accessed 01/04/2017).

settle down” (Osman 2013, 70). Ndambi has a lot of endurance when she listens to her sister’s comments. Despite the struggle she faces in the discussion with her sister, her sense of identity is reinforced regardless of the stereotypes pushed against her. In this context of religious bias, it is worth commenting that, as I will explain, there are no clear statements in Islam or in the Qur’an against same sex relationships. However, religious bias and misinterpretations, as we will see, are a recurrent element in Osman’s stories, an aspect regarding Islam and Muslim traditions that seems to be relevant nowadays.

In many instances for many individuals all over the world the issue of religion, in terms of their sexual orientation has played an important role, as well as in connection with their cultural, ethnic, social, and family background when coming out. The argument that any religion has specific passages where same sex desire is explicitly condemned has been refuted and rejected by many scholars and high religious representatives. Even the Pope, Francisco Bergoglio, openly admitted that he has no right to reject anyone to the Catholic Church in the name of God for their sexual orientation. It seems just fitting to acknowledge that the Pope said it all with his statement regarding homosexual love claiming “[w]ho am I to judge” (Donadio 2013).

Many confessions (Islam and Jewish among them) have been influenced by Christian doctrines, patriarchy and colonialism (Said 1987; Foucault 1990; Butler 2007; Sedgwick 2008). The issue remains in identifying those influences and the biased interpretations attached to the core of those teachings when they relate to same sex relationships. Bearing this in mind, it is worth mentioning to what extent Kugle’s *Homosexuality in Islam* (2016) provides an extensive analysis on the realities and the interpretations of Islam and of the Qur’an. In his book he argues that for many Islamic authorities

[h]omosexuality is categorically forbidden, but the reality is much less clear-cut. There are no verses in the Qur’an that unambiguously condemn homosexuals, and there are even some that suggest they can be tolerated in Muslim communities. In addition, reports from Hadith<sup>6</sup> that denounce homosexual and transgender persons are of dubious authenticity. The urge to condemn homosexuality among Muslims was reinforced by the Jewish and Christian traditions that surrounded them. Early Muslim interpreters relied upon Jewish and Christian sources to understand the story of Lot, sources that were already saturated with a culture of homophobia and misogyny. By relying on earlier interpretations of other Middle Eastern religious

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<sup>6</sup> Hadith are oral reports of the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings and behavior later written down as normative texts (Kugle 2016).

communities, early Muslims created a continuity of cultural prejudice that affected their interpretations and diluted the theory of abrogation. Their interpretation of the Lot story as condemning male-to-male sex acts relied more upon cultural presumptions than on a close and attentive reading of the Qur'an's words. (Kugle 2016, 62)

The author also claims that “[t]he body of traditional reports (hadith)”, which the Muslim community preserved, “offers us no incident in which the Prophet Muhammad punished anyone in his community for same-sex acts, either between two men or between two women” (62). Hadiths are, according to Kugle, “full of surprises of incidents in which the Prophet Muhammad said or did something that was observed by his followers and passed on orally until later written down. Hadith [...] raises various concerns and can be interpreted in several ways” (Kugle 2016, 73). The author acknowledges that Hadiths are difficult to use as proof of knowledge and requires academic experience and strict study of the Qur'an, and of the lines of oral transmission of each of those who followed or witnessed those events later attributed to the Prophet. Kugle also argues that “the Qur'an speaks to the issue of homosexuality only obliquely—not directly—and therefore the issue of how one interprets the scripture (with which principles, through which tools, by what assumptions) is of utmost importance” (Kugle 2016, 72). “There is no term”, according to Kugle, “in the Qur'an that specifically describes homosexual people or acts” (72). The author also points at the fact that “many classical scholars interpret some terms to forbid homosexual acts, but there is ambiguity in their method of interpretation and room within the Islamic tradition for alternative interpretations (both in the classical past and in the contemporary present)” (72).

Therefore, whether for convenience or for indoctrination purposes, or to subsume others in a general assumption of heterosexuality as the norm, the use of religious interpretations of the Islam and the Qur'an against same sex relationships in “Ndambi”, as we have shown, is just convenient. Ndambi's sense of identity and her connection to the families' cultural background is not something she rejects; on the contrary, she embraces her religious upbringing and uses it to contest some of the stereotypes and misinterpretations as when she says that

The Prophet once said that dreams are a window into the unseen. I have been told many times by family, friends, colleagues and strangers that I, a black African Muslim lesbian, am not included in this vision; that my dreams are a reflection of my upbringing in a decadent, amoral Western society that has corrupted who I really am. But who am I really? Am I allowed to speak for myself or must my desires form the battleground for causes I do not care

about? My answer to this is simple: ‘no one allows anyone anything.’ By rejecting that notion, you discover that only you can give yourself the permission on how to lead your life, naysayers be damned. In the end something gives way. The earth doesn’t move but something shifts. That shift is the change and change is the layman’s lingo for that elusive state that lovers, dreamers, prophets and politicians call ‘freedom’. (Osman 2013, 73-74)

It must be noted how Ndambi manages to connect and conceal so many different relevant identity issues in this passage through a religious reflective analysis of her cultural background. Here, Osman introduces a set of very relevant aspects to reveal the intersectionality that takes place in the construction of one’s identity. Religion, in the form of quoting the Prophet indirectly leads to family, culture and social relations. Race and ethnicity, the Africanness and queerness of Ndambi’s identity connection follow them. Mentioning the possibility of having been raised in an amoral corrupted decadent system, such as the Western one, is a result of the criticism she receives from her family’s point of view in the context of discussing her sexual orientation. Such a claim is contradictory to begin with, in terms of the construction of heteronormativity discourses, since most of the constraints dealing with same sex relationships stem mostly from the construction of that knowledge of the self, built over centuries of indoctrination from the West, as it has been noted in the works of Foucault, Butler and Sedgwick among others. In the next story we shall see how the same arguments about lesbianism being a “sin” and “haram” are wielded again to undermine the character’s queer identity, all in the name of cultural traditions and marriage. The use of religious stereotypes in *Fairytales for Lost Children* is one of the elements of connection between “Ndambi” and “Earthling”, the third story with a lesbian protagonist which I am going to introduce next.

The narrator of “Earthling”, the eighth story in Osman’s collection, is Zeytun. She is a Somalian woman who has been hospitalised several times due to a mental condition which makes her hear voices. At the time of the narration she is out of the hospital and in the process of starting to get in touch with her normal life again. Zeytun is in a relationship with Mari, a woman of mixed origins (Japanese and Somalian) who owns a coffee shop named “Earthling”. The beginning of the story is a presentation of facts that analogically connect with real passages of

the author's own mental problems<sup>7</sup> (Duncan 2013; Jayawardane 2014; Whitmore 2013). There are, as well, references to the family conflicts that Osman endured during his 'coming out' as gay to his Muslim family.

At the beginning of the narration Hamdi, Zeytun's sister, seems to support her sister's lesbianism, but soon after the first pages of the story things take a different turn and she faces Zeytun with a different discourse. Both sisters are embarking in new relationships, Zeytun with Maria and Hamdi with Libaan, a young Somalian man close to the family's clan. The concern showed by Zeytun's sister begins with her surprise when "Zeytun told her that [her new partner] was half-Somali half-Japanese." However, "even though she was still getting used to the idea of having a lesbian sister, she was supportive. Her new boyfriend, however, took a dim view. Two women 'fornicating', says Libaan, "was unnatural and repulsive, not to mention 'haram'" (Osman 2013, 79-80). We learn that Zeytun's sister is forced by her future husband to choose between her lesbian sister or himself in order to comply with the heterosexual standards of family traditions.

The rift between the two sisters continues with arguments from each of them regarding the suitability of their own independent sexual choices. The quarrel derives into a kind of ultimatum posed by Hamdi's husband-to-be: she has to choose between her sister or him. That makes both sisters argue about Zeytun's lesbianism, and that results in Zeytun confronting the argument using Hamdi's conservatism and forced choice of marriage in order to continue with the family's tradition and so abide by cultural tradition. That is how Zeytun sees her sister's reaction when she says that Hamdi "took a distinctly puritanical stance when she told Zeytun her decision", of wanting to marry Libaan, the man chosen for her. Hamdi reproaches Zeytun for standing up for her own sexual orientation and her choice of a relationship with Mari, when she says to Zeytun "'It's haram, Zey. It's against our beliefs'" (Osman 2013, 80). Standing strong Zeytun replies to Hamdi

'No! It's against *your* beliefs! Anyway, you're only saying that to justify choosing him over me! I didn't choose to be a lesbian. Life is hard enough as it is. If Mari had given me such an ultimatum I would have told her to fuck

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<sup>7</sup> In 2002 Diriye Osman was diagnosed with psychosis and institutionalised in a mental hospital. This condition worsened, and he began to hear voices and have breakdowns. He was sectioned in a mental ward for a long period and traumatized by the experience (Osman 2013).

off' [...] I love Mari because she makes me happy. You love Libaan because he validates you!'. (80)

Zeytun is making a clear statement concerning the position taken by certain family members with respect to traditions and marriage, and evidently regarding her sexual orientation. Marriage is an excuse Hamdi waves in front of her as the approved social weapon against her sister's sexual identity. Marriage as an institution is, according to Foucault (1990, 1992), one of the cornerstones in the construction of sexual taxonomies. It was a process prompted by the interest to understand sexual desires that grew and morphed into a constraint that resulted in the construction of the heterosexual couple as an example to be followed. This process started between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC and is identified by Foucault as the beginning of the couple as an institution to be fostered in Greek and Greco-Roman traditions (Foucault 1990, 72-85); (Foucault 1992, 16-199). It was later a process influenced and enhanced by what he calls the Christian Pastoral because, according to the author, the institution of marriage could serve to exercise a kind of control of the population. Foucault argues that this kind of control became more apparent during the Victorian Age

[s]exuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as a model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. (Foucault 1990, 3)

Marriage, as a model of social construction, stimulated the creation of a new ontology of the sexual being. The heterosexual couple became the standard, a reference to be followed with the objective to order and to dominate sexual behaviours. By complying with the *right norm*, the heterosexual design, the mind and the body were constrained, caged; thus, repressing other types of sexual orientation (Butler 2007; Foucault 1990; Jagose 2001; Sedgwick 2008). By describing the marriage of her sister as a means to validate her as a woman, Zeytun seems to be referring to the rigidity and the conditioned features of marriage, "the model" imposed that Foucault addresses in his work.

In the same vein, Pérez Ruíz (2012) presents a dichotomy of cultural traditions regarding marriage in Africa that is worth noting. In the chapter entitled "Woman's image in African literature" there is a section devoted to Gender and African cosmology. In it she begins by

analysing the cases of “women as a husband” which are not rare, actually she describes them as “typically African” (Pérez Ruíz 2012, 33). She expands on her analysis by saying that

Marriage among women is a practise carried out by the Nuer people of Sudan (with about half a million people), and the Ibo the third ethnic group in Nigeria (with more than 18 million inhabitants) among others. Those are working women with economic resources who also own land and take spouses. When women die, their properties are inherited by their spouses’ children. If a married woman who lives with her husband is not fertile, she can encourage him to marry a second wife, or maybe she will marry a wife. In that case it will be the woman who will pay the new bride’s price. Or she can choose to divorce. [...] In the case where it is the woman who marries a second wife, she will assume the masculine role in all social matters whether economic or domestic without the husband having any control in the marriage, even when he might be responsible for any pregnancy of the new wife’s spouse<sup>8</sup>. (Pérez Ruíz 2012, 33)

Ruíz says that African societies are “more inclined than the European ones to accept that gender can be more situational and prone to change according to the various stages of the vital cycle (paternal aunts that under certain circumstances enjoy a masculine status or the case of *female husbands* that is being discussed here), and continues with, “or even that gender can be simultaneously masculine and feminine” (33). This ability, says the author, “to conciliate the opposite poles of gender in the vision of the African world” is not only applied to gender roles but “it can also occur between the concepts of life/death, since there is an activity that can be simultaneously the giver of life and related with death in a vision of the world where frontiers are permeable” (Herbert, 1993: 220 quoted in Ruiz 2012, 33). Therefore, based on this new information we can assert that in Africa not only do women marry other women, but as Pérez points out, gender roles in that same continent do not follow the Western heteronormative pattern either. This pattern is destabilised with these examples of alternative marriage traditions.

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<sup>8</sup>El matrimonio entre mujeres se practica entre los Nuer de sudan y los Ibo de Nigeria, entre otros. Se trata de mujeres con recursos económicos, trabajadoras y con tierras, que toman esposas. Cuando mueren, sus propiedades pasan a los hijos de sus esposas. Si una mujer casada que vive con su esposo es estéril, puede animar a este a casarse de nuevo o bien ser ella quien lo haga. En este caso será la propia mujer quien pague el precio de la novia o pueda divorciarse, y por lo tanto reclamar lo pagado al contraer matrimonio, si no hay entendimiento con la otra esposa. Cuando es la mujer la que toma esposa asumirá un rol masculino en todas las cuestiones sociales, políticas, económicas o domésticas sin que el marido tenga control sobre este matrimonio aunque puede ser él quien se encargue de dejar embarazada a la nueva esposa de su mujer.

In the same vein, other instances of tribes besides the case provided by Ruíz, appeared in the press not long ago. Two of them seem pertinent to quote and I will discuss them briefly here, because both are also located in the African continent. In the article “In the tribe of women who marry women” Valdehíta (2016) explores the case of a tribe in the northern area of Tanzania called Tarime. It is the land of the Kurya, a tribe where amongst its traditions we can find that of the marriage between women. This tradition, says Valdehíta (2016), of straight women marrying other women is called “Nymba Ntobhu”. However, it is made clear that there are no sexual implications in this practice, as it is merely a way of maintaining their properties to pass to their children. Yet, they do admit that there are lesbians in the community (Valdehíta 2016). An example published is that of the Woodabe tribe, an Islamic community in the Sahara. The women of this tribe hold the power and govern their communities, and each year they choose their male partners in a festival where they parade (Clarín 2015).

It is revealing to learn about these traditions that deconstruct the main assumptions regarding gender roles, as well as others that generally imply marriage as common characteristics that may define societies around the world. Moreover, knowing that there are other gender role traditions<sup>9</sup> that do not follow the heteronormative pattern encourages the possibility to assume that the rigidity imposed by the patriarchal model can be (it actually is) challenged with the use of factual proof. These examples, so imbued in local customs with practices that totally dismantle the traditional understanding that we have of marriage and help us to come to terms with the fact that those Western patriarchal models regarding marriage excluded other non-traditional, standardised, approaches.

Here I am returning to the analysis of “Earthling” and Hamdi’s marriage decision, which Zeytun calls a “validating situation”, meaning that for her to become a woman in their traditional familiar standards she has to marry a man. In light of this perspective regarding non-traditional marriage practices, it could be argued that such a validation is just another opportunistic gender construction. Hamdi is perpetuating a tradition that is telling her she will be a woman after having married Libaan. To some extent it could be argued that marriage in this case turns to be the performative act that creates the agency of a woman in order to become one (Butler 2007). Zeytun’s resistance to abide by those roles and rules reinforces more if

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<sup>9</sup> As are the examples of gender roles attributes of the Sullawesi’s tribe in Indonesia (Graham 2007), or the five gender roles of the American Indians (Brayboy 2017) not to mention the exceptionally matriarchal tradition of the Mosuo tribe in China (Valdehíta 2016). In addition Kugle (2016) mentions the case of the Hijra: “a person [from South Asia] born with male sex organs and raised as a boy who identifies as female, taking on female behavior, name and dress, and voluntarily undergoes a ritual castration to remove both testicles and penis (Kugle 2016, 317).

possible the claim she makes about her own sexual identity. The argument between marriage and same sex desire reveals not only contradictions in the approach, but also a challenge to a single perspective. Queer identities sustain the claim of an umbrella of sexualities, and in the African continent these identities are not foreign even though some may think so or want to believe so.

As it relates to these scenarios, it is helpful to mention what Sokari Ekine (2013) claims in her article “Contesting Narratives of Queer Africa”, when she claims that, “[t]wo distinct, yet interlinked narratives dominate the discussions of queer African sexualities”; she argues that, “one claims that queer sexualities are ‘un-African’ and the other treats Africa as a site of obsessive homophobia” (Ekine 2013, 78). As for the first narrative it the author argues that it “stems from a mix of religious fundamentalisms, which insists on strict literal interpretations of religious texts (as Kugle also has argued), and a culturally essentialist position which pathologizes and denies the existence of queerness in the continent” (78). It is pertinent to highlight here the implication of Ekine’s view regarding religious interpretations, as well as essentialist approaches within the context of discussing queer identities in Africa. For the religious interpretations we reference the Qur’an because of the stereotypes implied in approaches that are used in its readings; and for the essentialist claim we need to consider what queer theory proposes i.e.: that sexual identity is built in-between the essentialist (one is born) and the constructionist (one is made) approaches. Ekine continues claiming that “[t]hese fundamentalists argue that queer sexualities threaten African social and cultural norms and claim that pro-queer initiatives in Africa by Western countries and NGOs are imperialist” (78). As for the second narrative on “African homophobia”, she says that it “is rooted in colonial discourses of deviant and peculiar African sexuality and in a contemporary neoliberal global ‘LGBT’ agenda which seeks to universalise white Euro-American sexual norms and gender expressions” (78). She continues in that vein arguing that:

The tensions posed by these two narratives present a serious strategic challenge for African queer anti-colonialist politics caught at various points between the meta-narratives of LGBT imperialism and homophobic religious fundamentalism on the one hand and indigenous contemporary constructions of sexuality and gender on the other.

The moral panic against homosexuality across the continent is systemic and indicative of an instrumentalised, well-organised campaign which exposes the cosy relationship between religious and fundamentalists asserted through vigorous nationalist political agendas. (Ekine 2013, 78)

African queer identities are, according to Ekine, currently struggling to find their place, and to articulate their voices in the continent. Despite these assertions, LGBT communities, organisations and publications are more and more visible and supported regardless of the constant pressure from political and religious institutions. Authors and academics, publishers and artists in general keep nourishing and providing useful platforms for the voices of the African queer community in the continent, in many cases facing threats and violence against them; or abroad in the diaspora, as is the case of Diriye Osman. Deconstructing those “contemporary gender constructions” is what Osman does with the stories in *Fairytales for Lost Children*. It is important to remember that this “moral panic” mentioned by the author in the above quote was also addressed by Foucault (1990) and by Sedgwick (2008), who speaks about it in her book *Epistemology of the Closet*. This panic is a perverse strategy sustained on the stereotypes and misuses of religious interpretations, as well as a political and sociological discourse to provoke the rejection of other ways of understanding sexuality.

In *Epistemology of the Closet* Sedgwick argues that “an understanding of Western culture must be incomplete and damaged to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (Sedgwick 2008, 34). The author expands on the need of “deconstructing binary structures beginning by the Heterosexual/Homosexual one which has a better deconstructive capacity as a dichotomy than male/female”; and so, claims that sexual orientation has a “greater potential for rearrangement, ambiguity and representational doubleness” (34). Sedgwick also points out the “deconstructive understanding of these binarisms that makes it possible to identify them as sites that are *peculiarly* densely charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation—through precisely the mechanisms of self-contradictory definition or, more succinctly, the double bind” (Sedgwick 2007, 10). The author talks about her intention to deconstruct those binaries, among many others that she provides in her work, for, as she argues, “their irresolvable instability has been continually available, and has continually lent discursive authority, to antigay as well as to gay cultural forces of this century” (10). The strategy for *Epistemology of the Closet* is that deconstructing binaries enables the vision of an in-between space, that space will then be occupied by those left on the margins, which in this case are all those included in the queer project. This in-between space that Sedgwick claims can be created by deconstructing those binaries.

The queer African lesbian representations of Zeytun and Ndambi in Osman’s book are claiming their right to occupy that space by confronting the rigidity of patriarchal

heteronormativity at the expense of having to break with family relationships. Both characters address the issue of lesbianism in different ways but with similar determination. Ndambi's strategy is built around her ability to connect the various layers of identity construction we have analyzed. We shall see that in "Earthling" there are similar approaches with Zeytun's narrative. However, before we get to Zeytun, I will like to make a point on the concept of home.

Home is an important element specially for diasporic authors. The construction of our world intertwines with the experiences related to the land we have been raised in, with its natural environment, its people and traditions. Leaving that "home", says McLeod, is a "source of problems" (McLeod 2010, 234-250) and I believe it is also a well of possibilities. Our concept of home is disrupted when we are faced with forced situations (political, social, cultural, etc.) that make us leave to protect our lives. Within the context of having to leave the motherland, people may be confronted with stereotypes and criticism (internal or external), while at the same time they get to reflect upon the possibilities that leaving that home brings, such as a new experience of ourselves and of the world. When speaking about home we rely on ideas, images and memories to build our new reality in those new surroundings. We come to terms with our differences and proceed to understand the conflicts that may arise from those confrontations. We continue to build up our identity with the original elements that conform it and with new ones that we are exposed to. It is in this process of construction, resulting from the intertwining of all those experiences, that conflicts can arise, with preconceived ideas, with traditions that were imposed on us. In this process one starts to question many aspects related to our culture, our family, our religion, our sexuality, our identity.

*Fairytales for Lost Children* is, according to the author, "an exploration of how those who are multiply displaced create family, stability, love, and home" (Jayawardane 2014). In "Ndambi" and "Earthling" home is Great Britain. Both narrations are, according to Osman, located in the "peripheries of London", where characters "experience a wide spectrum of dilemmas whether it is mental illness [...] immigration or complicated family histories" (Osman 2017). We have seen part of their complicated family histories and will see later their mental illness. For now, the point I want to make is connected to the element of home, how it is used by the author and how it is portrayed in the stories. Home for Ndambi is the place where she lives, which is filled with memories of her previous relationship. She holds those cherished moments as a reference to connect with her present. Those recent passages of communal living are recalled specially after the rift she had with her sister. Home is, for Ndambi, directly linked

with her sense of being and with freedom. She articulates how she feels about this in 'Freedom', one of the sections of the story: "I often dream of home. It is a place that exists only in my imagination: it is my Eden, my Janna. Sometimes I associate it with my father, my mother, my grandmother, my sister, all of whom have rejected me, all of whom I still love" (Osman 2013, 73). Sometimes, home is the motherland: "I regard Somalia, my birthplace, as home, as the land where my soul will eventually be laid to rest" (73), and other times as she says, "home is Kenya or London" (73). However, in the end Ndambi tells us

But none of these places or people truly embody *home* for me. Home is my hair, my lips, my arms, my thighs, my feet and hands. I am my own home. And when I wake up crying in the morning, thinking of how lonely I am, I pinch my skin, tug at my hair, remind myself that I am alive. Remind myself to step outside and greet the morning. Remind myself that it's all about forward motion. It's all about change. It's all about that elusive state. Freedom. (Osman 2013, 73-74)

Ndambi's statement about her sense of home is particularly interesting. She connects the concept of home with her body, with her sense of freedom, with change and the action of moving forward. We can link these feelings and statements to the flexibility of sexual identity construction proposed by queer theory. The in-between space inhabited by queer individuals is also where we can locate the speech of Ndambi. She articulates her sense of belonging with her emotions and her body. The concept of home as the body and with freedom in the case of Ndambi can be linked with how Zeytun's portrays her own. In "Earthling" Zeytun speaks about home in a passage where she is referring to her mental condition of hearing voices. She has the impression of people insulting her for being lesbian, she even thinks about the possibility of looking too masculine. Zeytun has been in and out of the psychiatric services in the south of London several times. She has endured her condition supported by Mari, her girlfriend. At this moment in the story, Zeytun has just returned home and the minute she closes the door behind her the voices start to diminish in intensity. She begins to wonder about them and then she realises that the moment she closes the door at home, where Mary's presence is felt everywhere, she understands that "She is the reason the voices can't attack me here. Thought Zeytun. The house was not the sanctuary, Mari was" (Osman 2013).

It is interesting to see how home, in both stories, is the secure place that Ndambi and Zeytun hang on to. It is also revealing that both, in the context of their struggle with family relationships, reach this conclusion. The safety of a loving relationship, whether past for the

former or current for the later, is the catalyst with which they both regain their confidence. Their sense of belonging and their resilience surface in the form of love. Despite social conventions, religious bias, fights with family and fear of being alone or insane, love represents the safe haven where identity and sexual orientation grow. Osman's representation of lesbian identities shows us how the debate of endurance travels through the stories, beginning with her Somalian motherland's narration in which Suldana's supportive mother speaks to us about the acceptance of her daughter's lesbianism and how she does so against the possible social consequences an African mother supporting her lesbian daughter may be confronted to.

The representation of queer African lesbianism is shifted by the author to the context of modern Great Britain in the difficult narratives of respect, religious interpretations and family relationships in the stories of "Ndambi" and "Earthling". Osman contrasts the optimism towards a discourse of beginnings coming from the Somalian motherland, to the resilience profiles of those who deal with the struggle of continuation in their adopted motherland of London. Osman's use of contrast in these three stories representing lesbian identities proves to us the various stages of identity construction that queer individuals may have to face in their lives. With a common thread, that of standing up for their sexual identity, whether directly from the characters' own first-person narrative, or indirectly by the mother who speaks about her daughter, all three are examples of possibility and resolution.

In the next section, where I will analyse the discovery of queer identity in children and connect it with the section of the coming of age of gay characters, we will see the different approaches to queer gay representations in the stories of *Fairytales for Lost Children*. Therefore, I shall start by analysing how the discovery of queer identity in children is narrated in "Fairytales for Lost Children" and proceed with how gay youngsters are portrayed in "Tell the Sun not to Shine", "Your Silence Will Not Protect You", "Shoga" and "My Roots are Your Roots".

### **3.2. The discovery of queer identity in children in "Fairytales for Lost Children"**

In this section I will analyse how Osman addresses the discovery of children's queer identity in the story "Fairytales for Lost Children", the third story in the collection. It is also the only one that deals with children's sexuality and one of the longest in the book. In Osman's story the

narration follows a structure that attempts to emulate the classical fairytale genre. In this story Osman focuses on gender roles and motifs of the fairytale genre with a deconstructive underlying intention. The author uses typical elements of fairytales such as the garden, thorns and the character of the prince in order to build a transgressive plan: to twist the tradition and question the patriarchal gender role construction imbued in the classical tales. I shall analyse and comment on those passages that can be read in that way in this section. Additionally, in this chapter I will include a brief examination of other relevant aspects related to the influence of fairytales, in the construction of gender roles for children, from a classical and postmodern point of view, as these aspects are more prominent in “Fairytales for Lost Children” than in any of the other stories in Osman’s book. Osman also resorts to the use of intertextuality —by quoting a key work by Ngugi wa Thiong’o— which I will further discuss in this analysis.

“Fairytales for Lost Children” is a story narrated from Osman’s refugee homeland of Nairobi, Kenya, where the author spent some time after fleeing from Somalia, his motherland. It is the only story in Osman’s book that addresses the issue of children’s sexuality. It is also the story that names the book. Stereotypes of well-known fairytales, the influence of Disneyworld, and contemporary family issues in Nairobi are some of the elements found in this story where we learn from Hirsi, a ten-year-old boy as well as the narrator of the story, about his first day at the Pine Tree kindergarten school. There, he will discover his queerness and experience his first struggles regarding his sexual identity construction. At the school, Hirsi falls in love with Ivar, a blond white boy with whom he starts to create romantic situations in his head. Osman takes an intersectional approach to build the story. Intersectionality, according to Awino Okech (2013) “Is an ‘analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organisation’” (Okech 2013, 24). The author also claims that intersectionality “[d]raws on postmodern theoretical discourse, in particular its critique of essentialism and the deconstruction of stable subjects, including a feminist subject (‘women’). It therefore poses a challenge to essentialist feminist theory and politics” (24). This approach helps understand how Hirsi’s process of identity construction is affected by several elements. Among some of those elements, besides sexuality, in this story there are those related to race, ethnicity, language and gender that influence the process of identity construction. Language and storytelling intertwine in the narration and become elements of political transgression as I will show when analysing how tales are used in

this respect, specially by one of Hirsi's teachers and a very relevant character in the story, Miss Mumbi.

When Hirsi starts going to the Pine Tree Garden kindergarten school, he feels at a loss and rebels against the new social and cultural conventions he has to abide by. Among those is the issue of having to learn English at school and not the language of Nairobi, which seems more important to Hirsi than English. Miss Mumbi, a teacher at kindergarten, takes advantage of the dichotomy between the language of the coloniser vs the national language and uses it in re-telling classical Western fairytales, twisting and renaming the traditional characters and using local ones, fostering a sense of national pride, while at the same time she exposes the conflicts of gender construction embedded in Western traditional fairytales.

The setting used by Osman to portray Hirsi's present location is described through a series of elements that evoke the typical fairytale which Osman enhances by starting the first line of the narration with the typical engraved first capital letter, a common format of the traditional fairytale genre. This element is repeated in each story of the book serving as a connecting thread. In "Fairytales for Lost Children", Hirsi describes his adopted home in the first lines of the tale

We lived in a sky-blue bungalow on Tigoni Road, right next to Aziza's Kindergarten, Little Woods. Although our house was on a decent plot of land the garden was neglected, and thorns and brambles had taken root. I knew fruit and flowers weren't on Hooyo and Aabo's minds. They were thinking bills and blood-relatives that needed beso. (Osman 2013, 15)

Using the garden as a point of departure is a perfect, and traditional, setting for the beginning of a fairytale. Moreover, the description of the current state of the garden emulates the bad omens one would expect as elements in a traditional fairytale story. Hirsi speaks about "thorns and brambles" in contrast with "fruit and flowers", exposing the differences between those gardens he has knowledge of which relate to his memories of his previous home and the current one. The context is obviously difficult, not only for how the current garden is presented as un-attractive, even dangerous because of its poor maintenance, but more so for how it is later connected to Hirsi's present family situation. Hooyo and Aabo are Hirsi's parents and at the time of this narration are worried about more important things than taking care of the garden. Yet, it is clear that the gardens and the differences amongst them are relevant points for the correlation that Hirsi makes between past and present. In a diasporic context, where individuals

go through a series of stages to ground themselves in new surroundings, remembering the place where you come from and making comparisons seems perfectly normal. It is also one of the characteristics of diasporic subjects which is frequently used in their writings as a way of dealing with their struggles of connecting with their new locations. Hirsi's reflections exemplify the debates of diasporic subjects by how his memories are significantly differing in content and form exposing internal debates of identity construction. He describes his motherland in an idealised way by comparing this new garden and his previous one "I remembered our garden in Somalia, with its guava and pawpaw trees, callas and azaleas. I often used to sit there and watch bullfrogs hunt insects" (15).

Osman explores the connection between these portraits by means of the frame of the garden scene where Hirsi narrates the beginning of the story, arising in the garden's comparison, which reflect part of Hirsi's experience of the world. Osman connects the image of Hirsi's current garden with the memory of the previous one to convey how one may see things differently depending on the context. How we idealise things that can only be found in our imagination. Osman's mirroring of images and portraits, translated as a contrasting technique, allows him to introduce references to well-known classic fairytales. First, the present garden is unattended and with thorns, both bad omens associated with the tale *Sleeping Beauty*, in contrast to the romanticised, beautiful description of the Somalian garden and its bullfrog, an allusion to the Grimm brothers' *Frog Prince* tale.

Osman takes advantage of this fairytale like situation using intertextual elements such as the garden, thorns, and frog to draw our attention to how Hirsi is dealing with a new conflict of identity. It could be argued that by borrowing from the fairytale genre, the author questions, in the following quote, the intrinsic messages traditionally embedded in those stories. This can be observed when Hirsi says that "[i]n Disney fairytales the bad guy always loses, but in reality, he is rarely thwarted. Whenever the bullfrog's tongue flicked out, it rolled back with its victim. I learnt not to mess with nature from an early age" (15). Hirsi is aware, from an early age, that there are dangers in life and nature, as well as of the possible misleading messages embedded in fairytales. To make a direct reference to Disney's fairytales as misleading, since they are not realistic, as shown by using the bull frog to link the stories, is a bold and creative move by Osman to illustrate the manipulative intentions imbued by those stories. This questioning strategy reappears later in other stories when Osman again resorts to well-known fairytales to highlight the deconstructive purpose of the author's collection.

*Fairytales for Lost Children* can also be analysed from a postmodern perspective if we follow Bacchilega's claim when she says that "postmodern studies have [...] played with multiplicity and performance in narrative, and struggled with the sexual gender ramifications of problematising identities and differences" (Bacchilega 1997, 19). Multiplicity and performance, sexual gender ramifications, and problematising identities are terms that, to a certain extent, describe the themes that Osman develops in the collection of stories and in particular in "Fairytales for Lost Children". The structure and content of the stories in Osman's book can be inscribed in such a literary movement, and in fact the story I am analysing here can be categorized as a postmodern fairytale. Literary postmodern features include a creative nonstandard approach to the norms of content and form. This means that conventional features of whichever type of literary style develop in a completely different way from traditional standards when written from a postmodern perspective. Some of Postmodernism's most remarkable authors (Garcia Marquez, Borges, Kundera, etc.) do indeed deconstruct and challenge traditional literary conventions.

Bacchilega points out with respect to postmodernism that "[w]hether we like it or not, postmodernism has affected many of today's configurations of Western culture and its hierarchical distinctions among disciplines and genres, especially literature, popular culture, and folklore" (19). In the chapter entitled "Postmodern Fairy Tale and the Performative" she also claims that "though conflicting interpretations of postmodernism have almost succeeded in theorizing it out of existence, several of its versions still attest to its vitality" (19). Bacchilega's research on the genre leads her to discuss the re-vision of fairytales as being a productive field for postmodern writers. According to her discussion, which is partly fuelled by Walker's (1995) *The Disobedient Writer: Women and Narrative Tradition*, the re-vision of the fairytale "is not merely an artistic but a social action, suggesting in narrative practice the possibility of cultural transformation" but only those rewritings which "expose or upset the paradigms of authority inherent in the texts they appropriate" are "disobedient" (Walker 1995: 6-7 quoted in Bacchilega 1997, 23-24).

Following this lead, it seems pertinent to take the opportunity and look at Osman's work under this postmodern light as his writing points at a strategy of re-visiting the fairytale genre in similar terms as those postulated in Bacchilega's work. Osman is transgressing the boundaries; he disobeys and appropriates the genre to his own purpose. The cultural transformation is more evident throughout the development of the story, as we shall see how in

the development of this genre from a postmodern approach “multiple permutations produce postmodern transformations of fairy tales because their simultaneously affirming and questioning strategies re-double in a variety of critically self-reflexive moves” (Bacchilega 1997, 23) Furthermore, for the author it is clear that

[i]n every case, though, these postmodern transformations do not exploit the fairy tale’s magic simply to make the spell work, but rather to unmake some of its workings. Postmodern fictions, then, hold mirrors to the magic mirror of the fairy tale, playing with its framed images out of a desire to multiply its refractions and to expose its artifices. Frame and images may vary, but gender is almost inevitably the privileged place for articulating these de-naturalizing strategies. And while this play of reflection, refraction and framing might produce ideologically “destructive,” “constructive” and “subversive” effects, the self-reflexive mirrors themselves are themselves questioned and transformed. (Bacchilega 1997, 23-24)

Osman plays with these transformations and the destructiveness and constructiveness that Bacchilega mentions. Offering a subversive approach concerning to the fairytale genre coincides with this postmodern view. Osman does not only exploit the fairytale genre, but he digs in it and deconstructs it by questioning and reframing the very bases of its foundation, as shown by replacing the traditional white male hero with an African boy incarnated by Hirsi as the narrator of the story. I will explore how this frame is constantly subverted and challenged by the author in several passages.

The most relevant scenes take place at Hirsi’s new school, where he feels at a loss. He seems not to fit there and that creates an identity conflict for the young boy. Hirsi’s teacher at the Pine Tree Garden kindergarten school, Miss Mumbi, is a character utilised by Osman to convey elements related to the traditional and cultural knowledge of Hirsi’s new location. This character places special emphasis on the use of language. Hirsi tells us that she is teaching them Mau Mau words. These words used by Miss Mumbi are linked to a well-known episode of resistance in the period of Kenya’s colonisation by the British. The Mau Mau were a “militant African nationalist movement originated in the 1950s among the Kikuyu people of Kenya [they] were banned and declared as terrorists [...] Despite the government actions, Kikuyu resistance spearheaded the Kenya independence movement” (Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica 2018). Hirsi’s teacher’s attitude does not pass unnoticed since he tells us that Miss Mumbi was “a militant nationalist posing as a pre-school teacher. Clad in a kanga, she saw the alphabet as the perfect way to decolonise our Disney-addled minds” (Osman 2013, 18-19).

This is one of the examples of intertextuality that I have pointed out at the beginning of this section. Intertextuality is a literary technique used in cultural products in general that enriches the texts by borrowing and using quotes and phrases from other authors. Within the context of Miss Mumbi and her teachings at the Pine Tree kindergarten school, Osman is directly referring to a key work in African literature, *Decolonising The Mind* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), which became a landmark in postcolonial and African studies. Thiong'o's concerns regarding the use of language can be summarised in part by how he explains that for him

[t]he question is this: we as African writers have always complained about the neo-colonial economic and political relationship to Euro-America. Right. But by our continuing to write in foreign languages, paying homage to them, are we not on the cultural level continuing that neocolonial slavish and cringing spirit? What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages? (Thiong'o 1986, 101)

Language, whether your own or in this case as Thiong'o points foreign, the use of words and concepts and its influence on the mind as elements of discourse construction are especially relevant here in the context of storytelling and school. They are also key aspects in the development of the individual's identity construction. Some prominent theorists such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler or Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argue that language and the meaning of words are the catalysts of knowledge. Within the frame of story-telling, the implications of the messages that fairytales may convey through the use of language are clearly an aspect to bear in mind. Traditional gender discourses have been instilled in the minds of children for many centuries through the use of language and the definition of their roles accordingly. The fresh minds of children are easily shaped by the use of specific language. Osman points out how language and gender roles are both core constructs of Western heteronormativity, a message conveyed by Hirsi's teacher.

Hirsi continues by telling us that “[t]he only English word she used was ‘Queen’. She turned to the girls and said, ‘You’re all queens, my dears.’ To which an Indian boy piped to general laughter, ‘Can I be a queen, too?’” (Osman 2013, 18-19). The relevance of the use of language in this case, as well as the response of the little Indian boy who also wants to be a ‘Queen’, shows how gender roles as we know them are the result of a previously assigned category to the subject. Butler (2007) would probably argue that it is understandable that a boy

feels like being a ‘Queen’, since he is not yet influenced by those pre-assigned roles that inflict on the body, on the mind, the constraints that will impede the individual to feel free about his/her understanding of gender construction.

It is through storytelling, and especially through fairytales, that children’s minds, at early stages, can be shaped and oppressive gender roles perpetuated in them. Osman is confronting in a single passage all those conflicts about ideology, sexuality and gender identity construction. Children’s minds are not shaped yet by the narrowness of associating certain words with gender roles as the question by the Indian boy shows. Osman’s interest in writing stories, particularly within the context of addressing issues of sexual orientation, take him to acknowledge that

[a]s a gay man of Somali descent who has experienced homophobic oppression within his own community, I think of the young gay children growing up in a culture that opposes their very existence – how those children are forced to become hideously conflicted between their own nature and the way they’re nurtured.

This is why I write.

To paraphrase the late, great Chinua Achebe, as writers we are citizens of the world. As such, we have a moral duty to speak out against inequality – no matter which dehumanizing form it takes. (Burston 2013)

On the one hand, Osman positions himself against the constraints of patriarchal heteronormativity while, on the other, he is defending the compromise of writers to gain a space in which those constraints and inequality can be dismantled and questioned. Moreover, he claims and upholds his view on the individual’s freedom of choice of sexual orientation. Osman points at his own experience and the difficulties he had to endure. He also confesses his concerns regarding the problematics of children growing under the constraints of having to be conflicted between their nature and nurture way of feeling. Those debates recall the same essentialism vs. constructionism stances mentioned previously and relate as well to the flexibility supported by queer theory. Through the character of Hirsi and the Indian boy Osman exposes the nature and the inherent flexibility of children’s minds regarding sexual orientation. They show how contradictory those assumptions, infused in the children’s mind’s through the depiction of conventional gender roles in fairytales, turn out to be.

The character of Miss Mumbi, carefully chosen by Osman for this story, is the one who embodies the freedom of sexual orientation that Osman wants for children, lesbians, gays, and

queer individuals in general. Through Miss Mumbi's attitude and use of storytelling, we see how the author transgresses the boundaries of the classical fairytales, using some of their strategies in a deconstructive way. She uses story telling as a counter-indoctrination vehicle at the same age in which the minds of children are most malleable. With this approach in mind Osman, through Miss Mumbi's contributions at school, provides a wider view of the possibilities, from a postmodern perspective, to transform the fairytale genre making it inclusive of queerness. This is evident in how Hirsi's story continues with a passage where he comments on Miss Mumbi's transgressive and creative approach when he says that for her

[e]ven Story Time was political. Miss Mumbi infused each fairytale with Kenyan flavour. She illustrated these remixes on the blackboard. 'Rapunzel' became 'Rehema' a fly gabar imprisoned in Fort Jesus. Rehema had an Afro that grew and grew. Her Afro grew bigger than her body and she looked bomb. The Afro became so strong that it burst through the ceiling of the fort. It exploded into the sky and reached the stars. The Afro wrapped itself around the moon and pulled Rehema out of the fort. (Osman 2013, 19)

Miss Mumbi re-tells fairytales by replacing universal Western characters with local ones, even changing the plot. She tells the class the story of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* making it her own by transforming it into *Kohl Black and the Seven Street Boys*. She is re-visiting and re-interpreting traditional fairytales to produce her own version of the stories so that children at school can identify with some of the characters. She does that by changing characters and plot and introducing local features and contexts. This can be construed as an act of transgression and of appropriation of the genre with a clear political purpose. Miss Mumbi transgresses the conventions of the traditional fairytale story. She fosters children to have the freedom to relate with whomever they feel they want to relate to.

Hirsi's teacher embodies other central aspects, besides being a defender of the local language and questioning gender roles, which make her a freedom fighter. Osman chooses her as a messenger of another key element for the author's writing: the need of telling stories and passing them through. As her version of *Rapunzel* with the creation of *Rehema* shows, Miss Mumbi includes in it relevant traditional cultural elements such as the passing of information from generation to generation, a key aspect of the African storytelling tradition when she explains to the children that "[w]hen Rehema grew up", said Miss Mumbi, 'she told the story to their children, and they passed it on to theirs. Even after her death, the Afro lived on'" (Osman 2013, 19). Miss Mumbi reinforces the need of storytelling and its passing on for the children to

bear that feature of their cultural background in mind as an element of their identity too. This aspect of passing stories and telling your own or creating your history is also present in the first story I analysed. In addition to this, and according to Bacchilega it should be noted that regarding fairytales

[s]ome postmodern revisions may question and remake the classic fairy tale's production of gender only to re-inscribe it within some unquestioned model of subjectivity or narrativity. Other postmodern tales expose the fairy tale's complicity with the "exhausted" forms and ideologies of traditional Western narrative, rewriting the tale of magic in order to question and re-create the rules of narrative production, especially as such rules contribute to naturalizing subjectivity and gender. Still other tales re-place or relocate the fairy tale to multiply its performance potential and denaturalize its institutionalized power. (Bacchilega 1997, 23-24)

This is precisely what Osman is doing. He utilizes some of the most popular fairytales, questions them and produces new narratives of inclusion and equality. Miss Mumbi is the messenger with whom Osman creates and transmits the other possibilities that fairytales offer from a postmodern perspective. Miss Mumbi is the catalyser of the new re-telling and re-writing of fairytales for Osman's purposes. The setting chosen by Osman, that of his refugee adopted land of Kenya, is strategically placed in the story as it helps him transgress and transform patriarchal stereotypes and the traditional gender role constructions embedded in Miss Mumbi's new fairytale versions of *Kohl Black and the Seven Street Boys* and *Rehema*. We could say that we witness the coming of age of a new way of understanding fairytales by how they are re-invented by the author, since Osman places them in a cultural context other than the West, illustrating how difference and flexibility can be infused into them from the margins. This new personal revision of the classical fairytale traditions demonstrates the subjectivity of fairytales. Other references to fairytales appear in the story as Hirsi takes refuge from the wild surroundings of the school where there are Baboons that make him afraid and he heads to the library

where shelves were stacked with Disney buugaag [books] that made me ache. I ran my hand across the spine of each title, savouring its elegance. To me they were holy texts, each idea and image sacred. These stories were about love, loss, fear, innocence, strength. The real God was Imagination. I was Muslim but fiction was my true religion. (Osman 2013, 20)

That Hirsi venerates the library for its contents is clear in how he describes them; such words can be understood based on the accepted fact that children are attracted and influenced by these stories. He tells us about his imagination and how it has become his religion as he equates his Muslim background with the relevance of fiction in his life. The portrait of Hirsi develops into a much more mature individual by how he uses language and relates ideas and feelings that differ from those typical of a child of his age. The fact that a ten-year-old child uses such mature language in connection with his process of identity construction seems quite relevant. Fairytales have helped him to create a sense of belonging. Hirsi delves in this influence further when he tells us that for him “[t]he God of Imagination lived in fairytales” and that “the best fairytales made you fall in love” (Osman 2013, 20). The point made by Osman here is evident in relation to the sheer influence that fairytales may have in the construction of children’s identities. However, at the same time, Osman also questions this as he alternates the importance of fairytale messages with passages in the story of Hirsi’s discovery of his sexual identity and how he reflects upon it. The author uses a balance of pros and cons in an attempt to show us the path of realisation that Hirsi goes through.

It is in the context of Hirsi being at the library, sharing his reverence to every book he touches, that we arrive at the climax of the scene “[i]t was while flicking through *Sleeping Beauty* that I met my first love. Ivar. He was a six-year-old bello ragazzo with blond hair and eyebrows. He had bomb-blue eyes and his two front teeth were missing” (20). Ivar is the classical portrait of the blue prince in a fairytale story. Traditional Western features and likeness to a Disney boy which Osman immediately deconstructs by ridiculing him, humanising him too, by noting his missing front teeth. From this moment on, the structure of the story becomes more complex. First, we have the previous fairytale recreation of *Kohl Black and the Seven Street Boys* and the remake of *Rapunzel* with *Rehema*, both by Miss Mumbi. Now, we have the story of Hirsi meeting the first love of his life at school as embodied by a blue-eyed blond Ivar with no front teeth. At this point Osman resorts to the use of a monologue that Hirsi makes when he realises that his feelings for Ivar are too complex to be attainable and tells us that

[t]he road to Happily Ever After, however, was paved with political barbed wire. Three things stood in my way.

1. The object of my affection didn’t know he was the object of my affection.
2. The object of my affection preferred Action Man to Princess Aurora.
3. The object of my affection was a boy and I wasn’t allowed to love a boy. (Osman 2013, 20)

Osman deals here with fairytale motifs, such as the frog, the prince, the garden, contrasting them by resorting to the image of the barbed wire, a dreadful metaphorical reminder of the present refugee status Hirsi and his family live in. The author also resorts to enumerating the difficulties that Hirsi is facing with the discovery of his queerness by mirroring the use of the number three, a figure often used in classical fairytales. Osman's combination of figures and images is powerful and effective. Additionally, one has to admit the maturity of the statements Hirsi makes about the difficulties of loving Ivar. Maybe the narrator is the protagonist as an adult, remembering his childhood, a common device in *Jane Eyre* for example, which will explain the maturity of his reflections. He faces identity conflicts that are very well articulated for a boy of his age. He understands that his feelings position him against the mainstream view regarding sexual identity. For the first time in his life, Hirsi is directly confronting the effects of heteronormativity and gender construction. However, he feels that there are still chances and possibilities to follow one's feelings. Love is stronger than thought, knowledge and conventions and this is how he tells us about it

[b]ut I was allowed to dream. And in my dreams Ivar became my prince, hacking at the thorns that hemmed me in. He slew dragons, fought fire with a shield and sword, all to a Tchaikovsky score. The boy was Michael Jackson bad. And he would kiss me to break the spell. He would kiss me but all that'd break would be my heart. He could never be mine. (Osman 2013, 20)

Hirsi still finds confidence in himself and somehow fulfils his desire through dreams. He has the prince acting and playing his hero like role described in performing the traditional actions of fighting in addition to a classical musical score. Osman resorts again to fairytale classical elements with a twist of his own deconstructive imprint by introducing an anachronic character. It may seem remarkable how Osman makes a ten-year-old boy articulate his feelings and further sustain, unknowingly, some of the views and theories endorsed by queer theory. There is a place, as Sedgwick (2008) and Butler (2007) argue, within the individual's, biological and chromosomal features, as well as those aspects influenced by traditional and social ones, that creates the subject's sense of identity. It is in this in-between place where resistance towards rigid structures appears and it seems that it is here that Hirsi is finding his strength to overcome stereotyped assumptions of sexual identity.

In the next passage Osman resorts to the use of a frame narrative —*mise en abyme*— a story within a story. The family is at home and there is a problem with the police, so they all

hide in the mother's closet in fear of deportation as instructed by Hirsi's father. As they lay in hiding, Hirsi's sister asks him to tell her a story in which he will copy some of the strategies of political and cultural references that Miss Mumbi had used at school. Kohl Black is the character Hirsi decides to narrate the story of *Kohl Black and the Seven Street Boys*. Osman applies a great creativity to deconstruct and reproduce, in the mind of Hirsi, a character imbued by the influence of fairytales and a perfect setting to delve in stereotypes. Hirsi starts telling his version of the story following the classical story-telling beginning using the opening line "[o]nce upon a time". The description of this African Snow White is that of a woman that according to Hirsi "was plumpness personified: thick thighs, lips, Afro. Her Eyes were the colour of coffee. Her skin was darker than liquorice" (Osman 2013, 23). After this comes the reference to the wicked stepmother "Immaculate", who "considered her (Kohl Black) subhuman, 'a walking, talking whale" (23). This is how Hirsi leads us to the connection with the character of the wicked stepmother who is further described in the next lines

Immaculate, as her name suggested, was obsessive. She obsessed about her size and skin-tone, about her home and hygiene. She bathed in milk even though there were shortages around the country. She nourished her skin with eggs, avocado and bleach. She wore shoulder-padded blouses and wigs made from the finest horsehair. (Osman 2013, 23)

Hirsi's description and re-construction of characters demonstrates how stories can be told from different perspectives. It is also evidence of the possibilities, from a postmodern perspective, of re-visiting tales and producing a creative and attractive result. Osman resorts to building this tale from the perspective of a child who uses all his imagination and creates an image that refers to the classical tale using the cultural views of Hirsi's background. The seemingly grotesque details, stereotypes and references to race and manners coming from his childish mind produces lightness at a critical moment of the story. To further connect with the portrait of the stepmother, Hirsi develops this character by adding details about her life, family relations and a mental condition. Immaculate, the wicked queen, is treated by a family doctor who replaces the traditional character of the magic mirror, another important leitmotif in the classical tale, where Snow White's stepmother looks at herself every day. The magic mirror connection is evident as the doctor who has arrived to take care of Immaculate, deals with her "[t]he doctor didn't tell Immaculate that she too suffered from 'Envyitis'" (a diagnosis rather pertinent for the character). Hirsi continues the story and tells us that "Immaculate always

asked, ‘Daktari, daktari, who’s the finest of them all?’” (23). With these lines Hirsi gives us definite proof that the tale he is narrating is a re-visited version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Osman’s banalisation of the fairytale genre is at its best here. He accomplishes several goals by having Hirsi re-tell the story and allowing him to do so in his own naïve way through stereotypes that also connect with his own cultural reality at the time he tells the story. The story ends abruptly in a strange manner since, though we hear the beginning of the story as told by Hirsi in the context of hiding in the house closet, now we learn that it was Miss Mumbi who was narrating the story. It is unclear whether this is a narrative technique or just a slip in the construction of the tale.

We arrive now at the final stage of the story in which, following the fairy tale genre tradition, Osman places Hirsi in the most relevant scene where he faces the loved one (Ivar) and they speak to each other. The scene is destabilised (in its traditional classical conception of being the ideal moment in any tale, the love scene) by the fact that Ivar asks Hirsi whether he is a refugee, thus breaking the magic spell of the love encounter. Being identified as a refugee is a constant source of worry for Hirsi and he fears that his condition implies a rejection by Ivar, which he translates as not being loved back by his “object of affection” (Osman 2013, 20).

In the next passage, Hirsi and Ivar go to the park outside the classroom to talk. Osman is directing us towards a classical end; here, the two boys have a moment alone at the school’s garden. Using the garden, Osman creates a perfect setting for the anticipated traditional final passage. However, once in the garden, the author has Ivar climbing a tree where he is attacked by some Baboons that make him fall to the ground and die. It is a reversal of a traditional fairy tale ending with a tragic death scene with two little boys. Hirsi finds himself at the scene realising that

[h]e was Sleeping Beauty and I was the prince who had to save him. So, I pressed my lips against his and kissed him. I kissed him until I tasted blood [...] But this wasn’t *Sleeping Beauty* with its Happily-Ever-After. It wasn’t even *Kohl Black and the Seven Street Boys*, a story with a beginning and no ending. None of the fairytales I had read prepared me for this. (Osman 2013, 30)

Hirsi had been using fairytale stories in his own way before to cope<sup>10</sup>, and he is resorting to this strategy again despite the dramatic situation he finds himself in. The sheer amount of resilience that he shows is breath-taking. He reflects on what has happened and feels a kind of burden that comes from observing the monkey that made Ivar fall “I couldn’t tell whether it was hungry [...] or whether he was mocking me, laughing at the monkey on my back” (30). This can be interpreted as a metaphor for the burden a child such as him must overcome when dealing with death and love at the same time. In this case death has other connotations since is the death of a boy Hirsi was in love with. However, one could also understand it as the burden of the numerous obstacles found by queer individuals in their vindication of their sexual identity.

With the appearance of Ivar in the role of the Blue Prince, the author of “Fairytale for Lost Children” is resorting to a classical fairytale element, that of the hero, which entails several layers of information that seems pertinent to address. Zapata Ruíz (2007) points to the use of the hero figure as a traditional feature of the fairytale genre. In her research the author analyses the origins of some of these elements and finds that

[i]n the tales we often find the same “initiatory path of a hero that has to accomplish in order to make come true the fabulous and announced destiny” which mythic narrations also include. With the difference that in the tales the hero is not helped by a divine character but on the contrary by one with magical powers.<sup>11</sup> (Zapata Ruíz 2007, 87)

The appearance of the character of Ivar in the story does not only cover some of the aspects that need to be included to identify the story as belonging to the fairytale genre; it also suits the purpose of deconstructing the tradition of the genre. Osman is resorting to the use of this character for his transgressive approach to the classical tale structure. This is evident in the final passage of the story when this feature is challenged by how Hirsi is the one who is forced to play the hero upon Ivar’s death. Related to this Ruíz expands in her investigation of the inclusion of mythical elements, realising that “myths have aroused by the necessity of mankind

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<sup>10</sup> This brings reminiscences of *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (1980), by Jeanette Winterson, also about homosexuality, a lesbian coming-out novel. Probably Osman had read the novel and resorts to the use of fantasy tales as a way to cope with reality.

<sup>11</sup> Se encuentra con mucha frecuencia en los cuentos, además, el mismo “recorrido iniciático que debe llevar un héroe para realizar un destino fabuloso anunciado”, y que presentan también los relatos míticos. Con la diferencia de que en los cuentos el héroe no es ayudado por un personaje divino, sino por un personaje con dones mágicos. (Zapata Ruíz 2007, 87)

to explain life, natural phenomena as well as the rule of social, ethical and religious functions” (Zapata Ruíz 2007, 88).

In this same line of analysis, the author claims that “In fact they [the tales] are linked to human reality since they are a cultural testimony of the recurrent question related to the cosmic meaning of [human] existence; and therefore, they are linked to the imperative necessity of providing coherence to social life”<sup>12</sup> (88). The relevance of the information that Ruíz provides within the context of the analysis of this final passage in the story relates directly with the need to initially include the role of the hero in the figure of Ivar.

The role of Ivar as the hero, the Blue Prince, and the effect that he has on Hirsi are relevant for the interpretation of “Fairytale for Lost Children”. In order to understand the use of the hero in the story, it is necessary to consider the cultural implications behind such a strategy. That there are needs to explain social, ethical and religious aspects in the traditional fairytales seems only fitting to comment on since we are dealing here with a re-visiting of the classical tale in which the author is using this genre to deconstruct it by having queer African individuals as characters in the stories. It is also relevant to point at the initiatory aspect that Ruíz claims forms part of the role of the hero that in this case Hirsi is impersonating instead of Ivar. He faces his destiny in a terrible and tragical last scene where he must come to terms with death and with his sexual identity at the same time. The magical help that Ruíz mentions is totally absent, the tale’s final loving end; the happy ending turns out to be a tragic one, leading to a harsh reality in the life of a ten-year-old child.

Osman’s attempts to address same sex orientation by placing this action in the skin of a boy is transgressive as it confronts the fairytale tradition in both form and content. It is also a clear attempt to destabilise the ideological constraints of patriarchal heteronormativity. By deconstructing the stereotypes of characters in fairytales, making the love affair be that of a couple of boys at school and adding a tragic death to it, Osman makes story telling his own device having a queer voice and a different way of seeing and understanding sexuality. He brings the theme of early same sex desire to the fore making us see the diversity of sexual identity construction and the struggles that this process may imply. He uses the fairytale frame

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<sup>12</sup> Lo que podemos ver es que los cuentos tienen algunos fugaces rastros de elementos míticos. Y que los mitos han surgido de la necesidad del hombre por explicar la vida, los fenómenos naturales, las pautas de funcionamiento social, ético y religioso. En esta medida, surgen de la realidad, están vinculados a la realidad humana, en tanto son un testimonio cultural de la insistente pregunta por el sentido cósmico de la existencia, y por la imperiosa necesidad de dar coherencia a la vida social. (Zapata Ruíz 2007, 88)

to question cultural constraints. Osman continually shifts the role of characters and makes storytelling a game with not happy-ever-after ending. The character of Hirsi faces a tragic episode in which he comes to terms with reality and his sexual identity.

After having tackled children's discovery of sexuality, I will continue to analyse how young gay characters are represented in *Fairytales for Lost Children*. Osman produces a series of stories in which gay youngsters come to terms with their queerness in various contexts. These stories will provide additional elements of discussion regarding the process of sexual identity construction.

### **3.3. The coming of age of gay characters**

There are four stories representing gay African identities in *Fairytales for Lost Children*, which appear in the following order in the collection: "Tell the Sun not to Shine" is the second, "Shoga" is the fourth, "Your Silence Will Not Protect You" is the ninth and "My Roots are Your Roots" is the last one. In these stories we learn about the struggles of gay individuals in various contexts. These difficulties range from life in a small village in Nairobi as a refugee, to stories of the experiences of young gay African men in Africa and Great Britain. "Shoga" is the only story narrated from the African continent (Kenya), while in "Tell the Sun not to Shine", "Your Silence Will Not Protect You" and "My Roots are Your Roots" the action takes place in Peckham, South London. The connecting thread between the experiences of these characters is how they come to terms with their sexual orientation. In these stories, Osman focuses on conflicts related to the reaction of family members towards the character's coming out, where homosexuality and religion are often waved as arguments against them. Their cultural traditions are as well utilised by some family members to sustain the rejection of gay identities. This is an exploration of how the coming of age of African gay characters is represented in terms of how they defend their queerness, as well as how they endure and overcome those tough passages in their lives. All the protagonists chosen by Osman are young, some are teenagers, and others more mature. In this way we can see a progression in their coming of age with respect to their coming to terms with their sexual identity.

Waryaa, the narrator of “Shoga”, is a young Somali man who lives as a refugee in Nairobi Kenya, with his grandmother. In the story he has an affair with the houseboy that the grandmother employs to help with the house chores. The encounters between both men develop in vivid and intimate episodes of explicit sex and heart opening confessions of fear and hope regarding future projects in life. The affair does not last long as the grandmother finds out pretty soon, but it does give us the possibility to learn about Waryaa’s identity as a young gay man who will face his grandmother’s homophobic bias. Waryaa’s reaction towards his grandmother’s rejection will break the family bond and both will live apart from that moment on.

In “Shoga” Osman gives, as we shall see later, a refreshing boldness and clarity of speech to Waryaa regarding sexuality within a context and location that does not specifically embrace same-sex relationships. Osman will use Waryaa’s voice in some passages where he will be addressing a debate in which homosexual relationships between men are not foreign to Africa. Sexual orientations other than heterosexual existed in Africa before colonialization, a process that profoundly affected the continent’s social traditions regarding gender roles and homophobia, a debate that has taken much attention from scholars, academics and writers both from the African continent and the West.

In the previous section I introduced the arguments used by Sokari Ekine in her article “Contesting Narratives of Queer Africa” (2013), where the author discusses the un-African debates that circulate in those religious and politically-interested narratives apropos queer identities. The way Waryaa uses the term “Queer Nation”, in a passage of “Shoga”, points to other interesting debates that are tackled in Osman’s compilation. Douglas Clarke’s article “Twice removed: African Invisibility in Western Queer Theory” (2013) also addresses some of the main questions that arise in academia with respect to the appropriateness and inclusiveness of queer theory. The fact that this academic field of research comes from Western countries rises not a few questions regarding the inclusiveness of other cultures and identities that this field of knowledge focuses on. The debate reflects the need to focus on the problems and the individualities of queer individuals of the African continent. In the context of Western academic debate Clarke claims that “[t]here is a distinct lack of consideration for African same-sex desiring culture. It is as if Western queer theory attempts to erase both African-ness and African-centred homosexuality” (Clarke 2013, 173).

The author discusses the need to “[a]ddress this double erasure by calling into question the practice and motives of Western queer theory and how it applies itself to what I call the ‘African question’” (Clarke 2013, 173). This links to Clarke’s emphasis on the fact that “[f]or a theory that seeks to disrupt power and cultural normativity, Western queer theory is firmly rooted in the West’s historic and popular notions of what it is to be African and Afro-homosexual” (173). The lack of perspective of queer theory, when it comes to include African-ness in its articulation, is being criticised. Clarke asserts the need to recognize a particular queer African identity in the representations of individuals seeking to embrace the flexibility of queer theory to support their own queerness without relinquishing their own cultural specificities. Following this line of thought, Clarke proposes a neologism to tackle these questions of ‘African-ness’ which he claims is needed in order to “create term to demarcate its subject [in the context of queer theory discussions] from African Americans or North American ‘Blacks’” (Clarke 2013, 174). The author explains further that

[i]t should first be stated that Africa has given the world a form of queer theory that largely remains invisible or ‘unsaid’ [...] Africa, surprisingly, has a long history of homosexuality and queer relations. Many of those queer relationships have remained quiet as they have contravened a not-so-secret, unspoken agreement of silence between ‘polite’ Africans. It is transphobia, a fear not of same-sex relationships but of the lack of discretion. What can be read in this transphobia is a tolerance of homosexual activity although not a respect for it. What I mean by tolerance is just that, a bearing with or permissive attitude that exists so long as these activities do not become public knowledge [...] Especially in Zimbabwe there was the attitude of turning a blind eye to ‘discreet, eccentric or “accidental” homosexual acts provided the proper compensation and social fictions were maintained.’ (Clarke 2013, 174-175)

Pointing to an already existing African queerness, in the form of the ‘African-ness’ postulated by Clarke, helps us to understand how, at the same time, there is a similarity of unspoken tolerance of homosexual acts which appear to be culturally embedded in some places. Clarke is referring to a situation of closeting similarly observed and extensively analysed by Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* (2008). Clarke admits that “Africa, long before the West came around, had a policy in place to tolerate homosexual activity so long as it was kept behind closed doors” (175). At the same time Clarke claims that “Africa is marginalised in Western queer theory, which means that queer Africans are not being represented in the leading literature or theoretical frameworks dealing with sexuality” (Clarke 2013, 176). It could then

be argued that Osman's *Fairytales for Lost Children* together with other stories and writers already mentioned in this thesis are changing this deficiency at least in the literary world. Representing queer African voices is paramount, says Clarke, for Africa to find its voice in the spheres of queer theory and literary production.

Osman is one of the authors providing a platform to include those voices in the queer theory spectrum of the African continent. The explicitness and openness of Waryaa's sexual orientation, the frankness of his statements articulated in a narration that takes place in a country that is known for its anti LGBTQI policies (Ekine and Abbas 2013); (Tamale 2011), is an attempt to bring attention to these 'African-ness'.

"Shoga", the story of Waryaa, begins with a scene in which his grandmother is doing his hair. Waryaa wants to have braids done in it but his grandmother refuses provoking an argument right at the beginning where the issue of homosexuality is mentioned in a joyful context. From the start we learn that Waryaa is aware of not fitting in society because of his queerness, nonetheless he is happy being gay as he affirms "[m]y grandmother did not know that I was gay. I've always loved being gay. Sure, Kenya was not exactly Queer Nation<sup>13</sup> but my sexuality gave me joy. [...] There was no place for me in heaven but I was content munching devil's pie here on earth" (Osman 2013, 33-34). The tone that Waryaa conveys is reassuringly positive while at the same time he expresses an underlying acceptance of negative connotations as humourlessly illustrated by making fun of his gayness.

As previously mentioned, the story takes place in Nairobi, Kenya, an Islamic country, where conditions for same sex relationships are harsh; thus, when analysing gay life in Islamic African countries it seems pertinent to comment on what Chimaraoke O. Izugbara (2011) argues in her article "Sexuality and the Super Natural in Africa" where she points out that "[m]ainstream Islam forbids homosexuality. In some Islamic African countries (including Mauritania and some states in Nigeria), sharia Islamic religious law prescribes the death penalty for consensual same-sex relations. Other African countries punish homosexuality with fines, jail or lashes and social stigma" (Izugbara 2011, 551). It could be argued that Waryaa's "devil pie" may be a reference, a euphemism, for the punishments commented above. In this case we could assume that the young man is demonstrating an unusual courage and a certain defiance

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<sup>13</sup> Queer Nation is a direct-action group dedicated to ending discrimination, violence and repression against the LGBT community. (<http://queernationny.org/>)

to the established religious and traditional laws, showing a maturity that will be very helpful for his continuation in life as a queer individual.

In the story we learn that Waryaa has arrived at Nairobi with his family after fleeing from war in Mogadishu, Somalia, and while his parents are starting to build a new life for the family they rely on the grandmother to educate their children. To help her with the care of the children, the grandmother decides to employ a houseboy called Boniface whose job is to take care of certain routines and chores and keep an eye on her grandchild. He knows that his grandmother wants someone strong to help with house duties but he sees a “prime beefcake [Papi]” (Osman 2013, 35) Waryaa’s bold character, very straight-forward and open about his sexual needs and habits, is clearly exposed as soon as Boniface is introduced in the story. Osman also gives us a clear illustration of this boldness when Waryaa admits that “I was seventeen and I specialised in two things: weed and sex. And there was only one person in my neighbourhood who served both those dishes on a steaming plate for me. Boniface” (Osman 2013, 34). As soon as Boniface enters the scene Waryaa sees clearly that he is attracted to him.

At this stage of the story Osman holds its development and begins to narrate the circumstances of how Waryaa and his family ended up in Nairobi. It is a raw description of events in a flashback form also known as analepsis, where the rhythm of the story is momentarily altered. In addition, it has to be noted that the beginning of the story was written using prolepsis, anticipating events, which is also a prominent feature of the traditional fairytale genre. These are the only significant traces of the connection that can be made between this story and the classical fairytale form.

After the prolepsis the narration of “Shoga” continues with our character defying the law and standing up for his rights. Waryaa’s attitude stands over the constraints that will make his homosexuality an issue of concern for his grandmother, who is now his guardian, his tutor, since Waryaa’s parents were killed in a police raid. Nevertheless, he deals openly with his queerness in the same way as does Boniface the houseboy. The affair between Waryaa and Boniface is narrated in explicit sexual scenes in which their sexual roles are well defined. The scenes explored in “Shoga” are beyond any type of fairytale like story. Osman writes about loss and desire using mirror-like characters of different ages, experiences and backgrounds. Both Boniface and Waryaa quickly develop an intimate bond. They smoke weed and have sex several times, passages in which Waryaa seems to be already sexually experienced; through their interaction Boniface becomes a slightly younger mirror image of Waryaa. What both Waryaa

and Boniface long for is a certain level of sexual freedom and this while there is also a need of sharing their experiences as refugees in Nairobi. The passages in which they enjoy their sexuality are infused with details of conversations dealing with their refugee condition which helps them to talk about their status and to dream and hope of a better future.

The character of Boniface has been analysed by Neelika Jayawardane and Ainehi Edoro's (2015) article in parallel with Chimamanda Adichie's story "Apollo" (2015) published in *The New Yorker*, where a similar character and relationship develops. In "Apollo" the houseboy by the name of Raphael takes care of Okenwa, a young teenager from a well-established bourgeois family. He was not the first houseboy to care for him, but his imprint has left quite a memory in Okenwa. The relationship between both characters in "Apollo" develops in a similar way as that of Waryaa and Boniface in "Shoga".

Jayawardane and Edoro published their article in the online web *Africa is a Country*, where they review the influence of the figure of the houseboy in literature. They first introduce their interest in the houseboy character appearing in both stories by stating how the production of literature has changed in recent years claiming that "[w]e've seen a sea change in attitudes towards homosexuality by writers, in part as a response to virulent anti-homosexual legislation in key locations" (Jayawardane and Edoro 2015). They also argue that "the work of writers such as Chimamanda Adichie and Binyavanga Wainaina have been very open about their personal views on homosexuality and have gone on to challenge and change how homosexuality and same-sex desire is represented in fiction". In terms of the comparison between "Shoga" and "Apollo" and the reasons why the authors resort to the houseboy character, Jayawardane and Edoro say that from a literary advancement in the treatment of queer African representations in literature they focus on Adichie's and Osman's stories

because of the subtlety and emotional complexity with which they handle same-sex desire, but also, and more importantly, because of their attempt to enact same-sex desire in the household — a space that has "traditionally" (we want to emphasize those scare quotes) been the location of heterosexual desire. Even more interesting is the fact that the figure of the male domestic labourer is employed by both writers to reconstitute the African household as a space where same-sex love can be imagined and even acted upon. In both stories, the labouring body of the "help," the "houseboy," or the "garden-boy" serves as the instrument through which the male protagonist awakens to his desire for another man. The houseboy is the embodiment of an intimate stranger: he comes from outside to inhabit and share the intimate life of the household. And in so doing, he clears out a space where the male child can discover and experiment with desire. (Jayawardane and Edoro 2015)

What the authors are describing is what takes place in Osman's story. Waryaa is attracted to Boniface the minute he enters the scene and he is not timid about articulating his desire by how he describes Boniface's physical traits such as "his pectorals would be slick with sweat" and "I noticed a beauty spot under his right eye. I touched it. His skin was soft [...] His abdomen was cut like slabs of chocolate" (Osman 2013, 35-37). Waryaa speaks with a slight underlying eroticism as it happens in some passages related to the character of Raphael in Adichie's story (Adichie 2015, 9-10). Osman's "Shoga" and Adichie's "Apollo" produce a similar outcome of erotic stimulation in both youngsters. The description of those sexual passages shows how both authors pave the way for their protagonists to be with another man who has aroused their sexual impulses. Waryaa and Okenwa are attracted in similar ways to Boniface and Raphael respectively but will not arrive at the same experiences; at least they will not be described with the explicitness we find in "Shoga". The erotic deployment of Adichie's is subtle and concealed, it stays on a refined level, however, not for that is it less appealing or successful in producing a reaction in the reader. "Apollo" is suffused with erotism. "Shoga" with explicit sexual descriptions.

Osman transgresses the boundaries of the fairytale genre, offering very simple plots and actions, by explicitly describing with many details the sexual encounter between Waryaa and Boniface. He goes beyond the suggestiveness of Adichie's passages not only for the explicitness of the sex but also by revealing conversations that Waryaa and Boniface have after their sexual encounters. They are to some extent portrayed as a formal couple who share their concerns and fears associated with their parallel refugee status. This produces a closeness and a certain complicity that has no replica in "Apollo". Boniface is questioned by Waryaa in bed about his dreams, to which he tells him that he would like to leave Kenya and go: "Somewhere exotic like England" (Osman 2013, 39). Boniface reveals his academic background as an engineer which grants him a certain professional success if he were to reach his dreamed destination. In turn, Boniface asks Waryaa what he is longing for and he replies: "I want to be loved" (39). The simplicity of Waryaa's statement is moving and at the same time revealing within the context of such hardships.

Waryaa's grandmother's suspicions about his relationship with Boniface will put an end to the affair. Waryaa arrives one day after school and finds Boniface gone. He confronts his grandmother about her decision; she waves his queerness against him, which he proudly defends. Waryaa's confidence in his sexual orientation does not seem to be bent by the

traditions and intentions of his family, and the quarrel with his grandmother will put an end to their relationship. Waryaa graduates from school and leaves the country to study in England. Throughout his years in England he continues to reach out to his grandmother with no success until he finds out about her death. Waryaa reflects about home and mourns his grandmother's death while he is in bed with his lover Ignacio

I imagined Ayeeyo in her grave in Nairobi. I imagined my mother and father. I imagined our modest home in Nairobi: the baobab and jacaranda trees in the backyard, the quiet veranda at the front. My whole life zigged zagged in my head. When I came, I cried. Ignacio asked me why.

I didn't tell him about my loss. Instead, I said, 'Insha Allah, everything will work out'. He looked at me quizzically. But I kept repeating this statement louder and louder until it created an incantatory effect. I repeated this statement until it became something I could hold onto, something I could believe in; until it shifted from mantra to fact. (Osman 2013, 42-43)

In Waryaa's reflection Osman gathers several aspects that link with the difficulties of living in the diaspora at the same time that he is presenting the resilience that, in this case, the resilience faced by a queer individual that is coming to terms with his life abroad. Having to endure a life of loneliness and lack of relations with family members is a stage that many queer individuals end up facing as a result of their same-sex orientation. In this case it is a forced situation that has taken our character away from his homeland. Waryaa is far from home now and his memories of having to come to terms with the death of his grandmother develop into an idealized memory of his adopted motherland of Nairobi. He recalls, most significantly, the veranda and the back yard, spaces where all his romantic and sexual encounters with Boniface took place. By now he seems to have forgotten about Nairobi not being a Queer-Nation-like place, that it was there that the tragic and violent death of his parents took place. Resilience is one of the features that diasporic individuals develop in order to be able to continue with their lives abroad, especially in the context of war displacement.

"Shoga and "Fairytale for Lost Children" have male characters: a youngster in the former and a child in the latter. They share themes connected with their coming to terms with their sexuality, the difficulties of the family's situation as refugees, and a tragic ending. The next stories "Tell The Sun Not To Shine", "Your Silence Will Not Protect You" and "My Roots are Your Roots" portray young homosexuals who narrate their stories from South London. As we have seen previously, Osman resorts to unnamed characters, a characteristic of narratives often associated with the aim to represent a universal persona. By denying the character a name

the author seems to imply that it can represent any individual, young or adult, who faces the same circumstances. This strategy is used in the three stories that I will analyse hereafter.

In “Tell The Sun Not To Shine” Osman depicts a young Somali arriving for the first time at a mosque in the London Southern area of Peckham. He is spotted there as a first comer by someone who helps him with the basics rituals to be performed before entering the building. This unnamed young man enters the area of prayer and follows the rituals as expected at the end of prayers he realises that the voice of the Imam confirms his unsettled feeling during the sermon. He recognizes the voice of Libaan, now an Imam, whom he met as a young man in his adopted land of Nairobi. The first pages of this story are filled with the memories arising from this encounter. “I remembered the first time we’d met. He had come from Somalia to spend the summer with us in Nairobi. I was fourteen, he was eighteen” (Osman 2013, 8). The images that our character recalls mingle with the actual vision of this Imam. His voice, during prayers, seems to arise some erotic feelings “[h]is voice swooped and dived like a kite around the Arabic syllables” (8). Some of the memories evoke the first years of their refugee status, a recurrent theme in most of Osman’s stories. The narrator says that back then on one of the occasions that they spoke “I told him about my school in Nairobi and how everyone there called me a refugee”, and that Libaan, acting as a protector, told him, “I’ll come to your school and beat them up” (8). Libaan is also portrayed as someone, like the houseboy in “Shoga”, who awakens or confirms in him a sexual desire for another man “I remembered him towering over me. His skin was dark like Oreos” (8). The scene goes on into more explicit erotic memories when Libaan and the narrator, then a boy, are together in a room. Libaan is sleeping and the narrator tells us “I remembered the first time I saw him naked. [...] I wanted to touch him but was terrified” (8). He does end up touching Libaan who simply dismisses the touch. The narrator is worried about his parents finding out so Libaan comforts him and tells him to forget about it all. That same night we are told that “[i]nstead of going to bed that night Libaan lowered himself to my mattress and slid his hand under my blanket” (8). The scene narrates a first encounter told by an adult narrator remembering his first sexual experience as a boy who feels attracted to an older youngster but is insecure about how he feels. Despite this, the encounters continue as does Libaan’s reassurance to the narrator with his “[n]othing happened” claim after each one. At the same time the narrator tells us that “[h]e was trying to dodge a life of complications. But at night he would place his hands, lips and tongue inside my world of complications. We would

catch strokes until it was time for morning prayers. And then we would go about our day wonderings if the previous night even happened” (Osman 2013, 10). There is a contrast between their behaviour at night and then during the day. The narrator’s seemingly passivity has shifted into a more active role in the sexual encounters that seem to have followed during Libaan’s stay; however, neither seem to want to acknowledge any emotional attachment until the moment of departure. Once Libaan is heading back to Somalia there is a tender moment in which both show a deeper attachment

We lay together on my dirty mattress. I pressed his palm on my lips. He kissed my collarbone [...] As the time for morning prayer came he whispered in my ear, ‘Tell the sun not to shine’. I whispered, ‘I will if you promise to stay’. He boarded a plane to Somalia the next day. (10)

It is at this moment that the real impact of the relationship becomes clear. The protagonist and narrator has developed an attachment to Libaan to the extent that at this moment of realisation, after prayer at the Mosque in Peckham, he is still dealing with the pain of the loss he suffered after his departure. The narrator, seeing the Imam after prayer greeting people and acting so normal, reflects on how he feels by repeating in his head how he wanted to tell him things related with his life after his departure. How he suffered and missed him. He had been in other relationships but seemed to be always picturing Libaan’s face whenever he was having sex with someone (10). He even gets to the point of saying that as a consequence of his relationship he dared to speak to his parents and they “disowned me when I came out to them. I wanted to vomit all these words out” (Osman 2013, 10-11).

As readers, we have no information about the reasons for Libaan’s departure. We do not know whether he still likes men or if he is a closeted homosexual. We know that he is an Imam, a title he holds because, following the mainstream assumptions about Islam, he fulfils all the characteristics of such a status possibly including that of being heterosexual.<sup>14</sup> Osman seems to be playing here with oppositions. The narrator has come out to his family and has been disowned, the other has acquired a highly relevant status in society. The story reveals how some people, acting hypocritically, create personas in order to fit in society despite their innermost sexual desires.

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<sup>14</sup> Currently there are Muslim movements in Africa and in the USA in which the gay, lesbian and transgender community have also gay Imams. See for example (Cavendish de Moura 2016); (Khan 2013); (Anderson 2016) and (Kugle 2016).

Here Osman is presenting the case of men who hypocritically follow the patriarchal heteronormative model. By using Libaan's closeting we are directed to reflect on the cultural pressure many queer individuals experience that forces them to choose between social acceptance and personal identity. Our universal unnamed gay protagonist has chosen the path of revealing his queerness in contrast to Libaan's denial, which is confirmed when at the end of the story we are told that their eyes meet at the end of prayer when everybody is talking to each other "That's when he saw me. He tried to smile [...] a smile that said many things: 'Not here, not now'; 'I'm sorry'; 'I'm scared'" (11). Libaan's attitude shows that he is probably hiding his true self. The young man runs away from the scene and the story ends abruptly.

Osman constantly deals with how queer individuals seem afraid to come to terms with their sexuality as they fear rejection from family and friends, bringing back to the fore the question of religion and in this case Islam. Theoretical evidence of the misinterpretations that are commonly wielded in the name of Islam have been provided through this thesis. Muslim practitioners, as is the case of our young male character in "Tell The Sun Not To Shine", are no less afraid. In this light it is important to acknowledge the fact that these situations are slowly showing some development in several African countries. Ekine and Abbas point in this direction when they claim that besides the mainstream assumptions regarding interpretations of the Qur'an nowadays "Muslim community leaders from several African countries including, Sudan, South Africa, Kenya and Senegal have recently begun to deny official Islamic homophobia, leading to movements in Islam that now accept and consider homosexuality as normal and natural" (Ekine and Abbas 2013, 552). They also state that even "some of these movements have either regarded Qur'anic verses as obsolete in the context of modern society or dismissed prevailing interpretations of Qur'anic verses as incorrect and erroneous" (552). Moreover, they claim these changes have fostered that "[o]ne Islamic group in South Africa for instance has thus argued that the Qur'an is against homosexual lust, not homosexual love" (552). If we follow this line of thought, then Libaan's attitude regarding his sexuality is thus disavowed. Libaan's lack of confidence, and how this is revealed in the encounter he has with his past at the Mosque can be understood as that of someone afraid of not being accepted due to biased religious interpretations, and, even further for his inability to come to terms with his own sexuality. As the information provided by Ekine and Abbas shows, things are changing.

In "Tell The Sun Not To Shine" Libaan asks the young man to keep silent about their relationship. There is an apparent regret of not being able to acknowledge him by how the

narrator describes this. His reaction may be interpreted in such terms as it causes both of them to repress their feelings. This element is something that Osman explores further in “Your Silence Will Not Protect You”, the next story that I am going to analyse.

It is a common feature of novel writers to include autobiographical elements in their writings. In “Your Silence Will Not Protect You” there are several autobiographical elements which are worth commenting on since they are revealing and recurrent in Osman’s short story collection. One of them is that the protagonist is called “Diriye” like the author (114). We learn about this in a passage in which, after a call from his father, at the end of the story, Diriye’s father calls him by that name and comments on an interview he has given to some magazine saying that “this gay business that you mention is something I don’t understand” (Osman 2013, 114). Using his own name and the conflict that arises later with his family and specially with this father, connects to the experiences of the author. There is as well the relation with problems related to mental illness, psychotic episodes, the struggle with the family and their religious bias that are recurrent in the collection of stories. The question of race and ethnicity, as well as the issues of being gay and having to come out of the closet are also frequent in Osman’s stories, whether in the narratives developed by lesbian, gay or transitional characters. In Jonathan Duncan’s (2013) interview with Osman published in the cultural section of *Africa is a Country* he signals that in *Fairytales for Lost Children*

[e]ach character is progressively aged in each story, which generously bares differing perspectives and ideas in time [...] But despite this linearity there lies in the narratives and character portrayals, a coexistence of polarities. One of them subterranean tides, undertows of torment and pain, the other, a buoyancy of wonder, optimism and profound resistance. It is within this reverberating field that a tension moves, bringing the narration[s] to breathe, and nourishes the work. (Duncan 2013)

Osman develops his strategies in the construction of the narratives to foster the contrast with characters that fill the stories with hope (often from his Somalian motherland as in “Watering the Imagination”) and pairs them with those characters who struggle to come to terms with their sexual orientation, either by coming out to their families or having to choose between their true identities and their relatives. These polarities in the stories that Duncan identifies will also be present as the story develops.

There is a psychotic episode at the beginning of the story where the protagonist makes an emergency call for help. He is hearing voices, another recurrent feature in several of Osman's stories within his short story collection. After receiving proper medical attention at the hospital his father and brother are on their way to collect the young man, who is slowly feeling the effects of a sedative dispensed by the hospital staff. While he waits for his relatives, he reflects upon his past and present situation where we learn that he belongs to a large family of twelve siblings. He tells us that his father had shown more interest in his aptitudes than those of his siblings, and how his father's expectations became an element of great pressure "[m]y father didn't care what I did—whether I chose to become a fashion designer or a painter or a writer—he just wanted me to succeed, and the fact that I didn't frustrated him greatly. In a sense he viewed my mental illness as yet another failure from my part" (Osman 2013, 105).

The pressure exerted by his father is another ingredient that influences the mental condition of this character. As the medication wears out the mental distress reappears and the young man finds himself hallucinating again, as he says "[t]he line between my conscious thought and the part of my subconscious that harboured unlimited secret fears was being kicked over by false perception. Silence became my self-protection" (Osman 2013, 106). This young man's personal situation seems to be a complex mixture of complicated family relations and kept secrets that seriously affect the character's mental health.

As the story develops, the negative psychological impact on the young man of his family relations becomes more and more evident. The psychotic episode prompts other family members to appear in the story. The elder sister is introduced and with her help and support the young man recovers physically and emotionally to the point that he enrolls back at university to finish his studies. As time passes by and he feels more and more confident after regaining faith in life he dares to come out and tells his sister that he is gay "[s]he looked frightened for this revelation, but it seemed only because I had just uttered the unspeakable, because she gathered herself and reassured me that it would be fine" (108). Brother and sister spend the afternoon together. His sister reassures him further regarding his gayness and the family bond seems to hold up for that, she also tells him that his coming out "explains so much! And I feel weirdly closer to you as a result" (108). Feeling reassured, confident and supported he says "[r]elieved that I had shared this secret with her, I went home and slept peacefully for the first time in years" (108).

This passage of revealing intimacy and reassuring confidence within the context of coming out as gay to the family is a rare example of welcoming support to begin with, especially from a large family with a seemingly authoritative father who has placed a lot of stress upon this young man. After his sister's reaction and with renewed confidence and with a sense of relief he goes on with his life. We do not have to wait long to learn that, under this positive atmosphere, he has found a partner J.T, a novelist and playwright, and that he had never had a long-term relationship. However, it seems that this time as he had come out "here was a man who made me feel wanted and needed and the feeling was mutual" and he further says that "[l]ove has a strange way of clarifying things, bringing order to chaos and making one feel bolder and more self-assured. JT did that for me" (109). Not long after that he comes out to his younger sister too and she reacts in a similar positive way as the previous one. The young man is having good reactions one after another, but his luck will not last long. At this point in the story things start to fall apart. His elder sister, apparently in an outburst of jealousy and intolerance toward him, breaks the spell of the romance

[m]y older sister started to worry. She was fine with me being gay when I was celibate. [...] One day, she sat me down and said, 'What you are doing is against our culture. It's against our faith. You have to stop. I was taken aback and I told her so.

'I thought you didn't mind me being gay?'

'I mind because it's against our beliefs.'

What I correctly read into that was that my older sister was embarrassed and, despite her earlier promises of support, didn't want to associate herself with the shame of having a proudly gay brother. The Somali community is all about tradition and that sense of tradition comes with an air of secretiveness, suppression and Puritanism. I had no desire to live in secrecy anymore. I had experienced what it was like to lead an open, healthy, guilty-free life and I liked it. It felt natural and necessary. I wasn't ready to come out to my entire family yet but as it turned out I had no say in the matter: my sister sped up the process for me. (Osman 2013, 110)

This is a revealing passage in which the young protagonist confronts his family. To wield the cultural traditions of Somalia as a weapon against her brother does not seem to take hold. The young man finds confidence in his reassured identity and will not be discouraged by such statements. Kopano Ratele's (2011), in her essay "Male Sexualities and Masculinities" argues that "[m]en who come out as loving to have sex with other men stand at the margins of a society that supports men's domination of women. Indeed, gay men often find that they are expelled or marginalised from the social category called 'men'" (Ratele 2011, 413).

Moreover, the traditions and beliefs that the sister is using to justify the inappropriateness of her brother's sexual orientation have at their core biased interpretations of the Qur'an. We have already provided evidence of the changes that nowadays are being fostered in several African countries as they question and deny these kinds of arguments used against homosexuals. Nevertheless, it seems pertinent to note what Kugle (2016) also argues in this context when he claims that "[t]he body of traditional reports (hadith) which the Muslim community preserved offers us no incident in which the Prophet Muhammad punished anyone in his community for same-sex acts, either between two men or between two women" (Kugle 2016, 62). He further notes that

[t]he Qur'an speaks to the issue of homosexuality only obliquely —not directly—and therefore the issue of how one interprets the scripture (with which principles, through which tools, by what assumptions) is of utmost importance. There is no term in the Qur'an that specifically describes homosexual people or acts. [...] Many classical scholars interpret some terms to forbid homosexual acts, but there is ambiguity in their method of interpretation and room within the Islamic tradition for alternative interpretations (both in the classical past and in the contemporary present). (Kugle 2016, 72)

Kugle's point of view helps us clarify the extent to which the arguments the sister uses have no real grounds to be sustained. Nonetheless, this young man's older sister does spread the word of him being gay to the rest of the family. The following events to be described proceed as a continuous threat by family members to the point that at a certain moment one of the brothers encouraged by a vindictive sister threatens him "I know a lot of guys in London who would happily kill you". With JT's help our character finds the strength to go to the police station to press charges against his brother. The police officer asks him to reconsider it, and he responds "[h]omophobic abuse is a hate crime, regardless of whether it's a stranger on the street or a member of my family, I am going to report it and press charges" (112), something he did the following day. The protagonist understands that his voice must be heard "[m]y voice had to come through. No word could be wasted. I had to express myself clearly and eloquently and I did. [...] I realised that the only way to deal with bullies is to hit them where it hurts: the law" (112).

This episode triggers a reflection where the protagonist realises he will be forever rejected by his family after pressing charges against his brother "I grew up in a very close-knit family where everything was shared, and I was now an outcast in a very real sense" (112). This

situation leads him to “a state of depression and isolation” (113) as the loss of family and the traditions that are deeply embedded in his personality are not an easy adjustment to make since they have a profound impact in this man’s life. He admits that “I had always thought of family as a fixed, all powerful entity. I was raised in a culture where family was the most important thing. But as a gay man I had to learn that nothing in life is fixed, especially families” (113). In a very short period of time the protagonist and narrator has to face serious changes regarding his identity construction. Now the situation has shifted, yet he is gaining strength and conviction despite acknowledging the hardships of a future without his family. In fact, he reflects and says that it is “[i]nteresting, ever since I distanced myself from my family the voices I used to hear in my head have stopped. I am no longer paranoid” and later he also admits that “[i]t is also painful and telling that the voices I heard in my head when I was unwell were always shouting homophobic slurs at me. Those voices didn’t belong to strange nebulous creatures. Those voices belonged to my family” (Osman 2013, 113).

Osman again resorts to issues of mental instability expressed through the hearing of voices, also present in two of the stories about lesbian identities in the collection, which is used to show the influence of family members and the ostracism the characters seem to endure when having to face them. Coming out of the closet is a painful process that many queer individuals still endure nowadays, with an unforeseeable outcome even when one thinks that the family is accepting, as we have seen in “Your Silence Will Not Protect You”. It is evident that with this character Osman presents us with a very difficult rite of passage, albeit not an uncommon one. Keeping one’s sexual identity in the closet is a painful way of existence. This closeting is problematic since it does not imply that sexual encounters will not happen, it is just a closeting towards social standards. The protagonist of the story puts an end to this duality by deciding not to go back into the closet and instead become an open queer individual who enjoys his sexuality. To a certain degree, Osman here exposes the need for the normalisation of same-sex orientation in cultural contexts that are traditionally seen as restrictive and rigid. As Duncan (2013) pointed out, the narrator’s experiences that he finally overcomes through identity resistance, all the struggles he is faced with. He develops a resilience that we can also observe in the next story.

“My Roots Are Your Roots” is the last story representing the coming of age of queer African gay characters in Osman’s *Fairytales for Lost Children* and the last one in the collection. A

short one-and-a-half-page that mirrors the length of “Watering The Imagination”, the opening story in the book. In this final story there are two male characters sharing a moment of intimacy during which they confess how they have come to terms with their sexuality, while also transmitting a sense of belonging that emerges from their acceptance and has evolved into their own family unit. Osman’s choice to place this story at the end of the book brings a kind of happy ending to the collection, in line with the classical fairy tale tradition with which he seems to make a wink to the reader. The narrator is not the African protagonist, but another character. Another similarity with the first story, where the narrator is the mother. This story has two characters, Korfa, a young Somalian that is braiding the hair of his Jamaican boyfriend and unnamed narrator. They are both diasporic individuals who live in the area of Peckham, in South London. The opening lines recall the first ones in “Shoga”, the story of Waryaa who is having his hair done by his grandmother and wants to have his hair braided. However, in this case the image is reinforced with elements that give the scene a romantic touch

Korfa likes braiding marigolds in my dreadlocks because he says that they remind him of home. He carries home in the way he walks: an elegant, loos strut. He wears home in his skin in the form of attar, a delicious perfume that makes me dream of Somali coastlines, places where children play football amidst colonial ruins, and young men like Korfa flee in darkness on boats to Yemen and Kenya, determined never to look back.

I am his only family in this country, and he braids marigold memories in my hair to share something of himself that is more intimate than an expressive bouquet of flowers. (Osman 2013, 155)

The narrative appeals to our senses through the names of flowers, smells, and visions of places and people with this strategy he brings forward the element of home and how it is a relevant and recurrent theme in the minds of diasporic subjects. The author is also mirroring several motifs that appear at the beginning of the book in “Watering The Imagination”. He draws a connection with his motherland, from where the character in the former is speaking to us, linking it with the story of Korfa and his boyfriend where he tells us how home is created from their diasporic location in London. The mixture of elements that gather in this passage offer a portrait of how diasporic individuals constantly develop a romanticised connection with their motherlands. They develop a sense of belonging to their new adopted lands by often resorting to a sense of longing for home in the creation and reproduction of memories that arise as romantic idealised images of their countries.

What the author of *Fairytales for Lost Children* is doing here is, to some extent, to reproduce a beautiful beginning following some traditional fairy tale genre model. Osman, with the use of images, landscapes, names of flowers, places, the heat of the summer and the smell of incense, appeals to our senses and portrays a picture of companionship and romantic love. Right after that he shifts into a passage of explicit sex: with it the author challenges the formal content of fairytales. The full sense and meaning of the title is revealed to have an even deeper connotation when one of them says this sentence to the other “[m]y roots are your roots” (Osman 2013, 156). It is a play on words that the author uses to emphasize the true importance of the sense of belonging. Being rooted in a place, to its culture, to its people, to its traditions is part of the necessary process that any individual who is physically displaced must face in order to create a sense of belonging. In this case, Osman is creating it through the relationship that these two characters develop in a foreign country that is now their home. This is evident when we learn as queer individuals these characters have to deal with yet another issue, their sexual orientation within the context of dislocation. Korfa’s lover talks about this in the last page of the story

[n]either of our families knows that we’re two men who love each other. When we are together there is a sense of solace, a lack of fear. [...] We make love and we forget. We forget that he comes from a country wrecked by war. He forgets that his family are still back home and in desperate need of money. He forgets the thrust and flow of daily life and we assume our own groove. I forget that my family would kill me if they found out. I forget that by loving Korfa my life is in danger. (Osman 2013, 156)

The Jamaican narrator is describing how, by forgetting, they can come to terms with their own identities and with their new realities. They are also reassured and feeling strong having created a new place of belonging. They build their sense of belonging and their safety by leaving the past behind. Or at least they are in the process of doing so while they are fortifying their binding by creating a new life. The secrecy of their sexual orientation, the images of war, the cultural rejection and danger that their queerness entails are surmounted by creating a new home and forgetting. They create their own family.

The image of the garden also appears in this story when the narrator refers to their little apartment as “our secret garden” (156), a motif which enhances their intimacy. Osman resorts to the image of the garden, as he has done previously, creating a haven of peace in this case.

The intimacy is enhanced by the use of this element that also connects to the themes used in the fairytale genre. Korfa's Jamaican lover tells us that "[t]he magic of the secret garden is that it exists in our imagination" and that "[t]here are no limits, no borderlines" (156). This emphasises the acceptance and freedom regained by these two lovers after coming to terms with their sexuality. The feature of the garden is utilised by Osman to include a traditional closing for the story, and for the book since it is the last in the collection, as we are told that for the lovers "[t]he secret garden leads to the marigolds of Mogadishu and the magnolias of Kingston and when the heat turns us sticky and sweet unwilling to be claimed by defeat we own the night. We own our bodies. We own our lives" (Osman 2013, 156).

The ending of this story brings a sense of solace and recaptures several themes that are recurrent in Osman's stories. The secret garden connects Korfa to his motherland, also the country of origin of the author of *Fairytales for Lost Children*. Somalia is linked through the feature of the garden to Great Britain with the intention to support the need to come to terms with the actual home they are creating. The heat of the summer has the capacity to build a sticky unpleasantness that is conquered by owning the night, a night when lovers are sharing memories while braiding flowers in their hair, through the perfume that they wear, through acceptance of their origins. Ending the story by showing two characters owing their bodies and lives creates a reassuring and positive image of young gay men who have endured the hardships of coming to terms with their queer sexuality against all odds. The last representation of queer African gay characters that Osman introduces in this story is a perfect closing for a book that deals with many of the difficulties that relate to the various stages in the development of one's sexual identity. There are other characters that will complete the portrait of queer representations provided by Osman in his short story compilation which I will analyse in the following section. Before I do that I will discuss "If I were a Dance", the last story in which gay characters appear, in order to provide a full and coherent analysis of Osman's book.

"If I were a Dance" is the story, of Anas and Narciso, two male African ex-lovers who manage to reach a compromise to stage a choreography. Placed in the middle of the book, the story unfolds during the time they rehearse, and later perform in a theatre, a piece of dance they had created together. This story is different from the others in the collection because it does not focus on the construction of a queer identity, the discovery of sexuality or the stage of coming out. The story explores a common situation for ex-lovers in the context of trying to achieve a

mutual project that had been part of their lives and could be interpreted as a way of showing that the difficulties of finding love and the conflicts that may arise in queer couples do not differ those in heterosexual couples. Osman produces a story that focuses on feelings within relationships and avoids other themes present in the collection of stories such as those related with coming out, religion or cultural traditions and family reactions to queer identities. It seems that the point Osman wants to make relates to the idea that queer relationships also bring conflicts and problems, fundamentally highlighting the fact that human interaction is always complex, for heterosexuals and for gays, for queer individuals. To some extent it could be argued that with this story Osman puts the stress on humanity as a central characteristic in relation with finding a relationship and dealing with the complexity of the emotions that arise in this context.

There are, however, a few elements that can be linked to the fairytale genre, and Osman seems to creatively insert them during the rehearsals held by the protagonist, their rifts while working on the dance piece, and amidst the movement of the bodies at the dance studio or on the stage. The first element that can be linked with the fairytale genre connects with the story of *Aladdin* when Anas, the narrator of the story, tells us about Narciso his ex-boyfriend and says that he would prefer calling him Narcissus and butts him in a bottle.. He says about him that “[i]f his ego were bottled a drop would poison a scorpion”. The name of the ex-boyfriend seems also relevant as it recalls the mythical figure so well-known for his egocentrism. In a single sentence Osman is making a connection with the aforementioned tale and at the same time deconstructs it by commenting on the personality of Narciso.

Another element connecting with the fairytale genre is the title of the choreography, which was called “The Fairies”. Osman is pointing straightforwardly to the fairytale genre in this story. In this case, it could be argued that he is using elements of the genre in a fragmented way, as we will see with the inclusion of other elements that appear in other passages. It seems that there is no other purpose than to highlight some of those features; brushing the story with details that seem unimportant helps his deconstructive strategy. Right after the title of the choreography, Osman resorts to another element by using repeatedly the number three.

Alona Liabenow’s end of degree dissertation *The Significance of the Numbers Three, Four, and Seven in Fairy Tales, Folklore, and Mythology* (2014) points to several aspects of the influence of number three in the fairytale that seems relevant to include here. For example, Liabenow points to the three drops of blood that are “spilled in the snow in *Snow White* and the

wishes made by the queen who wishes for a child “as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window frame”” (Liabenow 2014, 6). Number three is found in many other stories, claims Liabenow, such as in *The Three Bears* and *Beauty and the Beast*, where Beauty is the youngest of three daughters and on top of that she has three brothers (Liabenow 2014, 3). Liabenow also argues that “tasks in fairytales often come in sets of three or must be completed within three days” (3-4). In addition, Anas, the name given to our character and the narrator, uses this number at the beginning of the story “I lived with this man for three years; I could handle him for three more nights” (Osman 2014, 48). The number three is also an element often related with the gifts or wishes offered by fairies or godmothers in stories. This feature in this story, in turn, is enhanced by the fact that the choreography they created together is also divided into three sections, each with a different title, the middle of which, “If I Were a Dance”, gives this story its title. Osman continues to use the number three motive in the next pages, where Anas describes the planning of the performance “[w]e broke the segments down into three acts, which would be performed individually over three nights” (Osman 2014, 49). The effect of this repetition seems to bring forward a connection with the number of tasks found in traditional fairytales mentioned above.

Osman is using effectively features of fairytale motives and structure of the genre. However, in line with Osman’s deconstructive purpose the story will not have a happy ending, and the spell of the tale will be broken, by turning the character of Narciso into a selfish alcoholic man who cannot keep his word. Anas and Narciso quarrel during the last performance while on stage. Anas leaves the theatre and puts a tragic end to the show as well as to the story. With this ending Osman breaks with the classical format and with the spell that is often to be found in fairytales, a device that can be interpreted as another way to deconstruct the genre. The reversal of the ending in “If I Were a Dance” mirrors other tragic endings in the collection such as that of “Fairytales for Lost Children” and that of Yassin in confusion in “The Other (Wo)man”, a story that will be analysed in the following section.

### **3.4. Transgender and transitional identities: “Pavilion” and “The Other (Wo)man”**

In this section, I will analyse how Osman portrays transitional and transgender queer African characters in *Fairytales for Lost Children*. The author devotes two stories to these complex and

interesting processes of queer identity construction. These stories are “The Other (Wo)man”, where Yassin, the main character, experiments with his process of transitional identity construction, and “Pavilion”, in which we find Cat, a transgender nurse. To the already identified difficulties for lesbian, children and gay characters when going through the processes of coming to terms with their sexual orientation, here, Osman introduces several new conflicts that need to be faced by transgender and transitional queer individuals as they construct their new sexual identities. In “Pavilion” Osman chooses a mature transgender character already integrated and accepted by his community who narrates his story while struggling with bullies at work, while in “The Other (Wo)man”, the author writes about a character coming to terms with an aspect of his sexuality that had not yet been explored, that of becoming (an)other (Wo)man. I shall start by analysing the story of Yassin.

Before I begin the analysis of the stories, a few words are needed to understand the additional complexity found in the world of transgender and transitional individuals. Through my analysis I will rely mostly on the works of two authors, Sylvia Tamale in her compilation entitled *African Sexualities* (2011), and Ekine and Abbas’s (2013) *Queer African Reader*. In some instances, I will also refer to a guide provided by the GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) web in which the proper terminology needed is accessible. First and foremost, the term used to define those who do conform to their assigned gender attributes is Cisgender. According to Liesl Theron in her article “Does the label fit?” (2013) “[d]efining cisgender is to attribute the term to people who are conforming or agree with the gender assigned to them by society, matching their gender identity with their sex at birth. The term cisgender is mostly known and used in the transgender community” (Theron 2013, 316). Theron also states her opinion regarding the specific situation of transgender individuals arguing that

[t]ransgender, transsexual and gender non-conforming people face oppression in the most tangible way, being on the peripheries of our gendered society. Living in an invariable struggle to validate their existence, and many times being rejected by their loved ones, transgender people constantly face marginalisation. Some feminists critique transsexual people where on the one hand female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals are portrayed as seeking to escape oppression and gain (male) privileges, and on the other where male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals are never fully accepted into womanhood-as their appropriation of femininity is only an act. These notions stem from the approach that a gendered experience or identity can only be allocated to a given sex (Butler 2004: 9). Butler goes on to say that this kind of feminist thinking is ignorant of the risks, discrimination and humiliation trans people endure in their day-to-day lives, from public harassment, lack of access to

services and opportunities, to loss of employment and more severe forms of discrimination such as violence and hate crimes. (Theron 2013, 316)

Clearly the world of transgender and transitional characters is not devoid of complexity, struggle and rejection. This complexity is directly tied to their journey towards gender construction. Articulating such an elaborate transgression of gender identities according to the established norm in patriarchal societies is not an easy task. Often the rejection is evidenced by how this process of gender construction is seen and understood from a heteronormative perspective. Enduring these processes is an additional struggle in the path towards identity construction for transgender and transitional individuals. With this in mind, we need to understand that often transsexual and transgender are terms that might be used as synonyms. In Audrey Mbugua's article "Gender Dynamics: a Transsexual Overview" the author provides a clear definition of transsexualism which is

also known as gender identity disorder, gender dysphoria [and] represents a desire to live and be accepted as a member of another sex/gender, usually accompanied by a sense of anguish and torment around one's anatomical sex—because of the way this connotes a gender—and sometimes accompanied by a wish to have hormonal treatment and surgery to make one's body as congruent as possible with the preferred sex. (Mbugua 2011, 238)

The author expands his description adding that "the goal of the therapeutic intervention is to help the individual achieve maximum psychological and physical well-being" (238). Transsexual or transgender individuals may not necessarily undergo a fully therapeutic intervention or even search hormonal treatment, but that does not alter their perception of gender identity. As to the terms "transsexual" and "transgender" the GLAAD's Media Reference Guide to terminology provides some direction regarding their proper use. In the case of transsexual versus transgender, the latter is preferred. According to GLAAD transgender is

[a]n umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms - including *transgender*. The term *transgender* refers to people whose gender identity (the sense of gender that every person feels inside) or gender expression is different from the sex that was assigned to them at birth. At some point in their lives, transgender people decide they must live their lives as the gender they have always known themselves to be, and often transition to living as that gender. (GLAAD 2010)

Additionally, it has to be noted that, according to GLAAD, nowadays the term transsexual is considered “an older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Still preferred by some people who have permanently changed - or seek to change - their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries” (GLAAD 2010). However, to further the scope and to foster the need to differentiate between them, the authors also say that “unlike *transgender*, *transsexual* is not an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word *transgender*” (GLAAD 2010). As for transitional individuals in the context of discussing transgender issues one has to bear in mind that

[t]ransition can include some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one's family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person. (GLAAD 2010)

We can see the complexity and sensitivity of the scenarios experienced by individuals who do not conform to their biological attributes. Bearing in mind this complexity it will be a necessary element to understand the difficulties and struggles, as well as the flexibility implied in the process of sexuality construction for transitional and transgender individuals. In the stories that I will be analysing from an intersectional perspective, building one's identity is presented through the issues of race, gender, sexuality, which intersect in both stories to illustrate the elaborate paths that transgender and/or transitional individuals must follow to come to terms with their gender identity. We shall see how this occurs while analysing “The Other (Wo)man”, the penultimate story in Osman's collection.

“The Other (Wo)man” is the story of Yassin, a young feminine Somali gay male who has moved to London ahead of his family, which remained in Nairobi, Kenya. The story develops in the southern area of Peckham, London, where Yassin, with the help of Jude, a married man he meets while surfing on a very popular gay dating site called Gaydar, will be confronted with an aspect of his personality that he had not dared to experience until that moment, which is why I consider him a transitional character. Yassin goes beyond the perception of his own femininity by trying women's lingerie brought to him by his lover. Yassin will playfully engage in a sort

of private performance when he starts trying on women clothing and, with those first moments of experiencing with this other (wo)man he is discovering within himself he will finally dare to go out to the world dressed up as a woman.

Osman uses several layers of sexual orientation and gender identity construction in this story. Playing with the words of the title Osman draws our attention to those layers, thus connecting with the transitional aspect that the character will develop as the story unfolds. This use of wording, the underlying power of words, can also be linked to Butler's performativity theory. How words convey meaning within the context of analysing the heterogenous world of queer individuals is a fitting approach to understand the flexibility that sexual identity construction may require. It also reinforces the importance, from a Saussurean perspective, between words and meaning (sign and signifier). Here we are dealing with an elaborate world in which there are several elements, especially in the portrait that Yassin provides, intersected in his process of transitioning to this other (wo)man he will progressively discover within himself.

There are also several other themes in this story, besides that of the location, that connect to other stories in Osman's collection. One is the question of freedom. The story begins with a quote from Sartre that says "[f]reedom is what you do with what's been done to you" (Osman 2013, 119). Freedom is a recurrent element in Osman's collection and is used to mark the achievements faced by his characters while standing for their sexual or gender identities. The sense of isolation that Yassin experiences as a result of being in a foreign country without his family corresponds with the processes that diasporic subjects endure as they come to terms with their new surroundings, culture and location. It is one of the steps, a process, towards gaining freedom for diasporic individuals, highlighted here by the fact of being also a transitional character who is dealing with this stage of identity construction.

Additionally, the isolation that Yassin senses is increased by how he perceives a rejection of his femininity by the mainstream gay behaviour and requirements, of which he becomes aware while reading profiles and chats from Gaydar. The story explores Yassin's experiences as he searches for a partner. This search, at some stage, triggers the awakening of several conflicts in Yassin with respect to mainstream gay aesthetics, which in turn create doubts as to the openness he had expected from that community.

When Yassin first registers on Gaydar we learn that he is confronted with stereotyped attitudes, aesthetic standards, behaviours and so forth, that the author uses to enhance the

various aspects that one may have to face within the gay community. With this, it seems that Osman is revealing some of the stereotypes that exist in the mainstream gay scene and that are often a source of frustration for other gays individuals. Here I am referring to a certain iconicity of the gay male which is often presented of by having a well-defined and muscular body, following the fashion of the moment and showing many other characteristics that encapsulate a trend of what being gay may be at the moment. In fact, these conflicts triggered by a sort of American standardisation of an image of being gay has aroused not few discussions within the gay and lesbian community and it is one of the reasons that fostered the debates and followingly the rise of queer theory. For Yassin these unexpected attitudes he finds while surfing the net, will be shocking as he had idealised a freedom that emanates from the implicit idea that in Western societies being gay, being queer, is equivalent to being accepted regardless of your personality or your uniqueness as a queer individual, such as for example that of being feminine.

This is how Yassin tells us about his experience registering on the popular gay dating site: “[t]he first thing that struck [him] on joining Gaydar was the number of men who claimed to be in search of meaningful relationships but were more than happy to settle for meaningless sex” (Osman 2013, 119). Yassin’s surprise about the attitudes of people reflects assumptions about the laxity of sexual relations in the gay scene. It is one of the many stereotypes that gays have to endure because of their visibility and is often decontextualized. However, this is not the only surprise Yassin experiences. As he starts navigating the gay site in search for a partner he also finds out that “[m]ember’s profiles would mention their fondness for opera or ballet but would then undermine the effect by adding details of their ideal lovers’ anatomical requirements: ‘XVWE a +’, for instance, which Yassin eventually decoded as, ‘Extra Very Well-Endowed a Plus’ (119). Apart from the explicitness of some profiles Yassin also realises that

[t]he site ran a competition to determine the sex appeal of its members called ‘Sex Factor’. The winners were typically men who exhibited considerable muscle-mass and had the words ‘straight-acting’ as part of their profiles. Feminine-acting men, Yassin soon noticed, were considered losers. Manliness was the thing most worth embodying, even if that manliness was a front, hence the term ‘straight-acting’. (119)

Osman is resorting to a series of stereotypes which emanate from the gay scene and gathers most of them at the beginning of the story. This is a strategy used to, on the one hand

criticise these attitudes, which may be real but as I said most time decontextualized, and on the other hand place the character of this story in a context in which he will, apparently, not have any chances of finding a partner. This will foster the sense of isolation, rejection and additional difficulties that the character will be dealing with. Osman exposes Yassin at the very beginning of the story to a set of obstacles that will have to be overcome in order to gain his freedom. In addition, Osman also uses this situation to show the emphasis on “straight-*acting*”—with the special use of italics that the author employs on the ‘acting’ part of the compound word— and points to the question of performativity and the relevance of the use of language.

Performativity is a highly complex and interesting term—as explained in the theoretical section—as it relates to gender construction from a queer theory perspective. It could be argued that this acting, or performing in a manly manner, implies a series of gestures and attitudes which conform to a stereotyped masculine attitude. Butler’s (2007) performativity theory is applicable here in full since it is through this Derridean iterability (repetition) that the identity of the subject can be enabled or disabled i.e.: it can be constructed or questioned. Feminists claim that this attitude of “straight-acting” by gays perpetuates the patriarchal stance sustained by the homosexual/heterosexual binary that feminism seeks to deconstruct (Jagose 2001). In the same way the seemingly straight acting attitude of the lesbian dyke or tomboy was criticised by lesbian liberation movements arguing that those behaviours perpetuated the patriarchal binary men/women they sought to dismantle.

The rise during the 70s and 80s of the gay and lesbian liberation movements projected a certain image associated to a kind of behaviour and aesthetics. This image of the gay prototype has resulted in the production of an icon for the gay community and has raised several debates about the kind of identification that other gays around the world have been subjected to. All those who do not follow or comply with those aesthetic norms are subjected to rejection (effeminate gay among others) by those same liberation movements even though all these individuals are fighting for the same, civil and political rights (Butler, 2007; Jagose 2001; Sedgwick 2008). Queer theory sought to end with those debates by creating, or better said by restaging the use of the term queer, in order to enhance the possibility of designing with it an umbrella concept that could include all possible sexual and gender identities.

What Yassin is facing, while searching on the gay site and learning about the stereotypes he does not conform to, is precisely that kind of rejection that for him “was dispiriting. Yassin was a slightly feminine young man who, no less than others, desired the ideal male as presented

in underwear ads: a man so sculpted as to seem super-real” (Osman 2013, 119). Osman uses this masculine attitude with a two-fold intention since it will undermine Yassin’s confidence and expectation of finding someone to have a relationship with, yet at the same time the person he will find will be a very masculine man. It is also a way to show to what extent the influence of the gay icon is embedded in queer individuals despite its subjectivity. Even though Yassin is aware of his femininity he is at the same time influenced by the gay mainstream aesthetics, he desires an idealised version of the gay male, he “worshipped musculature, and for someone shy like himself Gaydar was the best place to find it” (119).

In his self-identification as a feminine gay man who likes muscular males Yassin reveals the harsh reality he will be fighting as he builds his sexual identity. Yassin creates a picture-less profile for dating at the Gaydar site, also omitting certain personal details revealing his lack of security, his fear of rejection, as well as being partly closeted when he admits that he does not upload a picture of himself since “[a] myriad of reasons against doing so filled his head, both generic (someone crazy recognising him from it and attacking him on the street) and specific to him, a Somali Muslim not so long arrived in London” (Osman 2013, 120).

Osman is making a point about the expectations of freedom that many queer individuals think they will gain by leaving their countries where their queerness is persecuted by law, culture and tradition. The author plays with the contrast of wanting that freedom at the same time that it is a dangerous situation to be confronted with. Yassin finds himself in a very strenuous situation where he has to deal with the need to come out and explore his sexuality while at the same time expose himself to the world in doing so. Osman, in an article published in the “The Blog” section of the *HuffPost*, says that “[a]s a young gay African, I have been conditioned from an early age to consider my sexuality a dangerous deviation from my true heritage as a Somali by close kin and friends” (Osman 2014). This explains the fears he transmits through Yassin’s character about coming out and probably being recognized by other Somali refugees living in London. Osman, in the article, adds that for him while dealing with his sexuality and culture his

coming of age in London, [...] was another whiplash of cultural confusion that one had to recover from again and again: that [of] accepting your sexual identity [which] doesn’t necessarily mean that the wider LGBT community, with its own preconceived notions of what constitutes a “valid” queer identity, will embrace you any more welcomingly than your own prejudiced kinsfolk do. (Osman 2014)

Osman is pointing to several conflicts that the mainstream gay scene produces by acting as a filter of personalities and identities which need to pass a certain parameter of sexual and aesthetic conditioning. This is something that had affected Yassin at his arrival at London. However, life goes on despite difficulties and that is why he resorts to the online dating site where he thought things would be different. Despite his early disappointment the step that he takes to register on the site is an initial attempt to overcome his fears. After a while and not having received any messages Yassin is about to close his account on Gaydar when he receives a message from a possible suitor. The message is from a man called Jude who works as a pilot for the Army. Osman is playing again with certain aesthetic stereotypes very well connected with the manly expression and icons used in several gay scenes which relate to the use of heterosexual standards of men and dress codes. Jude tells Yassin that he loves playing music and reading African literature specially some favourite Nigerian authors. Yassin feels as if someone had “pushed all his buttons” (Osman 2013, 121) but was not sure how to act. He looks at some of the pictures attached to the message and finds himself dreaming of being in the arms of that man. Yassin and Jude exchange information over a telephone conversation in which he discovers that the army pilot is married. This is a total contradiction for Yassin, a married man is cruising on gay dating sites and that seems to be alright. Here Osman introduces a scenario that needs additional comment as it directly addresses some of the conflicts created by patriarchal heteronormativity.

According to Jagose (2001), in the wake of the AIDS epidemic, especially in the USA, surveys were carried out to provide some data which could explain why heterosexual couples were also affected by the pandemic. Those surveys revealed that “many heterosexual men, even married and with children, had regular sexual encounters with other men yet did not consider themselves gay or homosexual” (Jagose 2001, 7-8). That a man can love another man is no surprise, there is no real conflict with that as it has been documented for centuries and has been attested in many literary works. Foucault’s achievements in documenting the problematics of same sex relations in Greek and Greco-Roman societies, brought to light the demystification of this taboo. The contradiction here resides in the external perception of the wrongful positioning of heteronormativity regarding same sex desire portrayed by Yassin’s surprise when finding out about Jude’s married status. Having a heterosexual man admitting that he can have sex with other men but not considering himself homosexual for that matter seems coherent and to some

extent stimulating, from a queer point of view, since it helps us sustain the lack of boundaries and the flexibility of sexual identity construction.

Nevertheless, Yassin is considering meeting Jude for he feels very attracted to him and also because he has been straightforward about his marital status. However, Yassin's best friend Savannah does not agree with him meeting Jude. Savannah is someone that according to Yassin "prided herself on being an expert in analysing people, Freud reincarnated as a barb-hurling black lesbian" (126). For her Jude is a married man who "wants to maintain his relationship with his wife, come home to a good meal, spend quality time with his kids, [and] he also wants to use you as a receptacle for the sexual fantasies his wife can't fulfil. This fucker wants to have his cake and not only eat it but *gorge* on it" (Osman 2013, 126).

Osman is working here with three types of sexual identities by gathering an effeminate gay a lesbian and a straight man, a reflection of the fluidity of sexual identity. Placing the three characters in a story is a strategic move towards queering the narration of sexual identity construction. These characters help us to deconstruct the rigidity of binaries that constraint the construction of sexual identity by questioning them. In addition, it helps reinforce the argument that queer theory inhabits an in-between space, a flexible location to be occupied by all those who do not comply with heteronormative rules and rigid sexual identities. Osman opens a space of articulation that confronts the mainstream assumptions and evidences those made by heterosexual conventions.

After the discussion with Savannah, Yassin has some time to think and reflect upon his situation. He recalls the mental portrait of the life he thought would be able to have in London as a queer liberated individual, with no restraints and being able to live his identity freely. However, in the current situation Yassin feels deceived and lonely. The possibilities of dating online seemed at first the best option for him; however, it turns out that the experience is making fell out of place. He even sees the loneliness of others on the Gaydar site, which makes him feel overwhelmed by the lack of humanity and the amount of people that seem desperate to do anything for sex or supposedly for love. Yet Jude's message, despite his married status, is a lifeline to Yassin, who reflects upon his own loneliness and that of the

thousands of men on sites like Gaydar, [who] huddled miserably over their computers, desperate to connect, and realised that London's scale only deepened the isolation he felt; magnified it and made it unbearable. That was how come an affair with a married man twice his age could seem like a golden opportunity. (Osman 2013, 127)

Here Yassin is confronted again with his possible new life, his isolation, his queerness, his femininity and a certain loss of hope. In this respect Osman points to the obstacles that many individuals have to face today in an interconnected world, criticizes the lack of humanity of big metropolis, and the struggles of meeting others through social media. Despite all that, Yassin is encouraged by the prospect of finally meeting someone after the hardships he has endured first as a refugee in Kenya and now as an immigrant in London. Hence, he meets Jude and they start having sexual encounters. Osman, in one of his articles, points at the need to hold on to moments like this when he says that otherwise

what to do? There are only two options when one is barricaded in by banal yet dangerous stereotypes: Either shed some of the complex layers that have made you who you are or cling to those complexities and appreciate the value of the long game, the fact that there is power and strength in multiplicity, the fact that there is power and strength in a beautifully unwieldy heritage. (Osman 2014)

The second time they meet Jude brings some lingerie for Yassin to wear. Yassin feels insulted and he breaks up with him. However, the lingerie arouses some curiosity and a few days later he tries some of the items and starts to play with them. While he tries them on he admits that “they felt wonderful against his skin”, and they felt “unexpectedly natural”; moreover, he tells us that “he felt free in those stockings, freer than he had felt in a long time. He now understood why some men dressed this way: it allowed them to become for a short private while the heavenly creatures in their heads, the beautiful girls who had the world in their palms” (Osman 2013, 139). He feels somehow empowered in his femininity after those moments of playfulness and encouraged to meet Jude again. They meet and Jude is thrilled to find Yassin dressed in that clothing. The scene that follows breaks the narrative because Jude asks Yassin to play the active part of the sexual encounter. Yassin seems to have doubts at first, but in a playful way he consents. Later he dispatches Jude and his lingerie away. After that Yassin goes beyond those first steps triggered by this encounter which leads him to further explore his femininity by experimenting and playing with the lingerie. He goes out shopping, in a context of reaffirming his new transitioning experiment, and buys women’s clothes; he is exploring those boundaries in a joyful way and he says so when at home where he feels secure that

[h]e tried to get into the butterfly jeans and discovered that they weren't built for a man's crotch. So he tucked his penis and balls in between his legs and taped them in place with masking tape. He had seen that procedure performed in *Paris is Burning*, the cult Eighties film about New York's drag ball culture. Even though he had always loved the film's depiction of drag as gender performance, he had never imagined that it would one day inspire him in his exploration of his own gender role. To wear the jeans was a painful process that went beyond physical discomfort, as if he was neutering himself by camouflaging his manhood in that masochistic way. He felt empowered by the makeup and the tight clothes, as if these social constructions were markers of authentic womanhood. (Osman 2013, 144-145)

By dressing up using women's clothes Yassin is experimenting with several layers of identity construction. He feels this transitioning while he transforms his appearance into this other (wo)man. *Paris is Burning* is one of the queer cult films of the 80s; quoting it seems to be a strategy used by Osman with which he can address several aspects that are also analysed in the film/documentary; such as the processes of identity and gender construction, the relevance of the houses' competitions, and the brotherhood spirit of the gatherings. It is also a film used by Butler in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), with which she analyses New York's drag ball culture to discuss the process of gender and sexual identity construction. Butler looks at the elements (clothing, gestures, attitudes etc.) deployed by the participants in those balls which may constitute part of the individual's means of identification with his/her gender as a construction resulting from a repetition that gradually builds his/her identity (Butler 2007). This construction is produced progressively, as shown in the gatherings that are documented in the film, and in a variety of forms and performances in competitions that confront the different houses that participate in the events. An approach to the construction of gender is exemplified in the film throughout these performances and used to deconstruct the rigidity of heteronormativity and traditional gender assumptions.

Yassin's experimenting, first with lingerie and later with other clothes, foster a sense of identity which also boosts his personality. He is beginning to find confidence in himself again and uses it to go out to the world dressed as a woman for the first time. He admits that "[h]e felt empowered by the makeup and the tight clothes, as if these social constructions were markers of authentic womanhood" (Osman 2013, 145). Those elements he is trying on are linked with the process of performing and the construction of one's identity as exposed by Butler's theory. In addition, they are creating a sense of belonging to this new transition towards his gender identification. This is what he is ready to do at last, while he gets dressed he says that he was

“willing to erase his male persona and squeeze into the butterfly jeans and tight blouse to complete his transformation into a (wo)man”. Yassin’s transition does not stop there, he “didn’t just want to become a (wo)man, he wanted to become a Muslim (wo)man, or at least his playful idea of a Muslim (wo)man” (145). It was ironic, Yassin tells us

that for all his wanting to break free of social strictures he should choose to wear a garment that embodied the very essence of fitting into the mould. He felt that since he was a Muslim he would retain the most conspicuous marker for women of his faith but use it for his own subversive ends. (144-145)

The intersection of elements that affect, and help, Yassin’s sexual identity construction is relevant to his self-identification in this transitioning stage he is experiencing. Those elements are representative of his culture and of his identity. Here Yassin is replicating the very essence of what queer theory proposes, to question the limits of gender roles and to play in a subversive manner with those boundaries. For Yassin “the idea of even questioning one’s own gender-role was considered un-Islamic, and here he was, not only questioning it but challenging it in the most dangerous way” (144-145). Yassin’s friend Savannah, who is lesbian woman, is shocked and surprised but at the same time supports her friend’s transformation. Without knowledge of the procedures and as a first timer performing his new role as a woman the new he/she goes with his friend to a lesbian bar. Yassin feels more welcomed playing the role of a woman, than going to gay bars as a man. Furthermore, Yassin is even complimented by the bouncer of the bar they are going to, enhancing the sense of achievement of Yassin’s new identity construction. “I bagged myself a Muslim gyal!” Utters the door bouncer at the bar, and “Yassin wanted to speak but he was too astonished by the man’s reaction. He had never been paid this much attention dressed as a man. Why was he suddenly so lusted over as a woman? Was he that unattractive as a man?” (Osman 2013, 148).

In the space of a single evening Yassin has become a “performance artist whose female persona had outstripped his male identity in terms of allure. In the masculinity obsessed world of gay dating, his effeminacy was considered unappealing, but when he embraced that effeminacy and became a (wo)man, masculine straight men paid attention” (148). Yassin thus gains mental assurance and feels as if “it was a fairytale alternate universe. But like most fairytales, this one had a sting in its tail. If he spoke, the spell would be broken” (148). Yassin knows that as soon as he speaks his real biological identity will be revealed and is alert at the prospect of being found out. Osman is working here with the fairytale feature of breaking the

spell in the context of Yassin's coming out as a new transgender individual, and so the author continues his deconstructive path by re-writing a well-known feature of fairytales. Utilising this feature in this context places us in an alert mode to what may still be revealed that evening at the bar.

Once inside the lesbian bar, Yassin cannot avoid comparing this feeling of being welcomed as a new (wo)man to his experience in the gay clubs he had been to, where "most of the men stood around cruising each other or were drugged out of their minds, the sleazy vibe was offset by gleaming décor" (Osman 2013, 148). Here by contrast he says that "[d]espite Medusa's<sup>15</sup> sagging chairs, murky brown wallpaper and general air of dinginess the women were either engaged in what seemed like relaxed conversation by the bar, or they were dancing" (148). Osman's use of the stereotyped gay scene is confronted with that of the lesbian. There is a sort of feeling of belonging to the latter more than to the former that relies on the assumed role of the new (wo)man created by Yassin, who is feeling currently accepted and included in the group.

Yassin describes this female bonding as an "occasion, perhaps, where they could leave their circumscribed lives behind and surround themselves with like-minded people who wanted to dance, kiss, fuck and celebrate each other. Yassin was unexpectedly moved by all these women who had gathered in sisterhood and the general air of camaraderie between them" (Osman 2013, 149). There is a group of boys (or teenagers as described) in the bar who are seemingly cruising with a group of lesbians in the club, a situation that calls the attention of Yassin. He is approached by one of the boys who starts talking to him/her. As soon as Yassin opens his mouth and replies things change. He had forgotten about his voice

'You're a fucking bloke?' Said the young man, his face twisting in instant disgust.

'I don't know what you're chatting about,' scoffed Yassin. 'You're a straight guy fishing for chicks in a dyke bar. If that ain't lame, then I don't know what the fuck is.'

'You asshole,' said the guy in his prepubescent voice before lifting his T-shirt to flash a firmly bandaged chest that showed the faintest outline of flattened breasts. 'I am a fucking dyke!.' (Osman 2013, 150-151)

As Yassin had previously thought and had also been warned by his good friend Savannah, the moment he spoke the spell of being a woman disappeared. The spell is broken and we are

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<sup>15</sup> Medusa is the name of the pub.

led to the final scene of the story. He leaves the club, and once outside he rips off his clothes and starts thinking about his experience. Yassin's first performative interaction as a (wo)man to be, who is confronted by a woman in the process of transition to a man, is indeed a complex one. This is a very powerful scene where Osman mirrors the deconstructive approach of queer theory regarding sexual identity construction as a complex web of intersectional elements that take place during its production. The encounter described in the story reveals the difficulty of finding some minimum space in-between binaries, as well as overcoming what patriarchal heteronormativity classifies as depraved and deviant behaviour.

The contribution of Sedgwick's arguments to the understanding of sexual identity construction as complex apply to the experience of Yassin and his friend at the bar. It is worth reminding that Sedgwick points at the complexity of sexual identity construction by including a triad of elements: biological, chromosomal and cultural which for her have a clear influence to be considered in this process. We also have the issue here of the construction of one's identity by performing it, and that, to certain extent, directly addresses Yassin's failure in the above scene. If we take another glimpse at the definition and complexity of the performativity theory proposed by Butler which constructs by deconstructing gender assumptions, we can understand that Yassin's deception is nothing more than a temporary finding of his own way, which needs to be secured in its own repetition of acts and gestures to finally construct his new identity as a woman.

What Butler proposes is that this act, in this case the act of Yassin becoming a woman, needs to be perpetuated in a repetitive manner to finally and permanently become what this performance is producing, a woman. It is not in the production of a singular performing act that one will become whatever this act implies, not for Yassin, not for anyone who is building his/her new gender identity. One needs to, one has to, according to Butler's performativity theory, repeat this act in a manner, amount, conviction and in a constrained environment which will entail, somehow, the subject's agency. This agency is completed by the constitution of the identity one builds in connection with its gender association which, in the case of transitional individuals is, as we are learning by Yassin's progress, a complex one. Yassin will become that (wo)man in the process of continuing with his re-production of gestures and attitudes. A performativity process that will culminate in the creation of a new subject with which he fully identifies, and that is seen as such from the outside as well. Yassin realises this after the scene at the bar:

[w]hat had he hoped to gain from this? He had tried to go with the flow, going along with every strange situation that came his way. Every experience of the body, of its power and limitations. Such experiments created a desire for something more fulfilling. It was a hunger born of rootlessness but he couldn't see that. He couldn't see that true liberation was a strictly DIY process, frightening in both its intensity and limitless scope. There seemed to be no boundaries between his male and female sides and this frightened him. Where to go next? How to embrace such complexity? (Osman 2013, 151-152).

Even though there are doubts in his speech, Yassin is fully aware that what he feels inside is both odd and starting to feel also natural. When he states that there seemed to be no “boundaries between his male and female sides” he reflects on the in-betweenness notion that queer theory proposes. The questions that arise in Yassin's mind seem coherent for a first timer in the process of creating a new identity, yet also suggest that his process is felt as something that needs to be “embraced” despite its “complexity”. Yassin realises that “[h]is interior landscape was in transition” (152), a transition that needs reinforcement and repetition, as Butler would argue. Yassin knows that “[t]his night had been a dystopian fairytale but now the spell was broken and he had awoken” still “[h]e licked his wounds and started walking home” (151-152). In this case, the author is making yet another turn of deconstruction of the fairytale tradition by making the male protagonist of the story play the female role, the princess. In addition, he makes it a dystopian narrative in which the character of Yassin has to deal with an even more complex process of identity construction.

This home Yassin is going back to is the place where he can feel a sense of belonging, where he will be able to work on the process of constructing his/her identity. This physical space called home is the haven where he will come to terms with his conflicts and where he will be able to build his strength to face the world. It is the place, this home, where strategies are devised, hopes are built, and memories are stocked. It is a place, this home, where all aspects and features of the diasporic individual melt. It is a home where he mixes all the ingredients and cooks his new identity. He will be clothing and dressing as the other (wo)man, continuing with his construction of an identity that seems to have failed in his first attempt, but needs to be reminded as well of the sense of belonging he felt and how clothes felt so natural and fitting to his already accepted femininity.

At the end of the story Yassin has come to terms with his sexuality and has been deceived by a gay culture he thought was going to be more tolerant about his sexual orientation.

Yassin's expectations are frustrated when he realises that, within the gay scene, there are other biases that must be overcome if you do not fit into the idealised muscular straight-acting sexual archetype. The shift, the transition that Yassin experiences is that of a transgender individual's first stages of identity creation. The construction of one's identity, we have argued, is a complex process where there are several layers taking part. In Yassin's case, this other (wo)man he is discovering experiences the first struggles of living as such in a world of possibilities despite the conflicts and possible rejection he will face. No transitional progress can be expected to be devoid of some conflict to be found in the path towards its construction. Holding onto its meaningful principles, in the case of Yassin or for that matter any transitional or queer individual, will probably be the only secure anchor to hold onto, which is precisely what the next story that I will analyse presents.

"Pavilion" is one of the first stories published by Osman in the media. It appeared in *Prospect Magazine* in 2011. "Pavilion" is the story of Cat, also known as Mrs Granger, a transgender nurse working at a hospital where she takes care of mentally disordered patients. At work Cat has found her place and her identity as a transgender does not seem to have created any conflicts. In the process of describing her every day routines at the hospital Cat tells us about a fight she had with Riley, the head nurse's boyfriend, which ended up involving the hospital board. Cat is a character that Osman creates to address a successful process of gender identification in a transgender individual. It is the only representation of queer African transgender identities in the collection of stories. By introducing this story, Osman seems to complete the umbrella of queer representations he offers in the collection.

Told through a first-person narrative voice, "Pavilion" is a very straightforward story where several aspects of the life of this transgender nurse are revealed. One of the first things that Cat tells us about in this story is related to the use of names. She tells us about it right at the beginning of the opening passage after describing how she and other nurses work with patients at the hospital, how they manage them, and how they cope with stress. Cat says that besides her work "what I really love are the fake names we nurses came up with to mess with the patients' heads. I chose Cat Power<sup>16</sup> even though I am a hard-boiled, six-foot Somali tranny"

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<sup>16</sup> Cat Power is an American pop singer.

(Osman 2013, 59). It is a relevant aspect, this play on words, that links to the creation, performance and construction of identities, which in this case is presented in a playful way.

“Pavilion” is actually named after a fictitious poisonous injection that Cat creates and threatens to use against Riley, Zipporah’s boyfriend, at the hospital, in the fight that takes place during one of her shifts. Cat confronts Riley in order to set the boundaries that she will demand to be respected regarding her transgender identity. Zipporah and Cat do not get along very well as the latter tells us because “[s]he disliked the idea of a man wearing stockings to work. She disliked my weave, acrylic nails and ‘ostentatious spirit’” (60). Riley’s attitude towards Cat is clearly homophobic. Cat tells us that he had a “history of violence. He enjoyed ‘dancing with Snow White’, which much muddled his head” (60). He is in hospital after having injured his mother with a knife during an episode of drug abuse. Osman is using the name of a well-known fairytale character as a euphemism for cocaine. At the hospital Riley provokes Cat by asking her if she wants to have sex with him, to what she replies audaciously that she “don’t fuck devil-spam” (61). Riley feels provoked and starts bullying her, calling her names like “fucking fag”, and keeps verbally abusing her to the point of doing so in a sexual manner. Cat endures this while at the same time planning her “retaliation”, which comes during a night shift when Riley does not want to take his pills as he says from ‘a skeet queer’. After that Cat threatens to inject him with a poison she calls “Pavilion”, while holding a syringe filled with water. The threat issued by Cat results in the involvement of the hospital board. It is here that the name Mrs Granger (the official name of Cat) appears as Dr Feldman, the chief-of-staff, Zipporah, Riley and his mother have gathered to accuse Cat of threatening Riley with a poisonous syringe. Riley’s mother accuses her of being a “homicidal trans-fanny” who wants to put her son away for ever. However, Riley’s story starts to unravel when he names the poison that Cat was going to use, Pavilion, which does not exist as it was created by Cat just to tease Riley. In her defence Cat accuses them of using “transphobic slurs and murder accusations” (63) towards her and standing up for her rights she tells them that she will file a complaint with the authorities for their “transphobia” and because “you have repeatedly victimised me. Why, because I wear tights and a bit of slap? You compromised my physical and emotional safety by encouraging an environment of naked hostility towards me” (Osman 2013, 64). The story ends up shortly afterwards and we learn that Cat and Riley met months later on the street, that Riley seems to be more himself not high on drugs, with a cleaner and healthier appearance. They exchange some pleasantries and that is the end of the story.

It is my opinion that with “The other (wo)man” and “Pavilion” the representations of transitional and transgender characters in Osman’s collection of stories is complete and offers an overall view of the flexibility of gender construction from a queer theory standpoint. Adding transitional and transgender portraits to the umbrella of characters we have seen in this section seems only pertinent to the scope of individualities that can be found within this context. Yassin and Cat’s stories expands the discussion of the underlying complexity of gender identity. As noted at the beginning of this section, the struggles for transgender individuals are extremely difficult in Africa, however not less interesting to address and explore. Yassin’s first attempts towards a transitional gender identity construction are mirrored against the confirmed transgender individuality of Cat. One supports the other in their articulation of gender construction, and they, at the same time, offer us another view of the world.

Clarke (2013) claims that “Africa is marginalised in Western queer theory, which means that queer Africans are not being represented in the leading literature or theoretical frameworks dealing with sexuality” (Clarke 2013, 176). It could then be argued that Osman’s *Fairytales for Lost Children*, together with other stories and writers already mentioned in this thesis, are changing this deficiency at least in the literary world. Representing queer African voices is paramount, says Clarke, for Africa to find its voice in the queer theory field and literary spheres.

## 4. Conclusions

In this MA thesis I have analysed the stories included in Osman's collection *Fairytales for Lost Children*. I have focused on several aspects that the author addresses in his stories, which in most cases have an autobiographical connection with his past, present and the concerns with the future. These aspects relate with being African, Muslim and queer, and with coming out to one's family and the difficulties that this act entails, which are, in sum, the issues and themes that characterise the struggles narrated by Osman's chorus of voices in *Fairytales for Lost Children*.

After a brief introduction, I provided chapter 2 the theoretical framework I used in my literary analysis. I have resorted mainly to queer theory as the academic field of enquiry that proposes and articulates a fluid view of sexual identity construction. The theoretical background focuses on the possibilities of questioning gender roles as well as the rigidity imposed with them by patriarchal heteronormativity. Queer theory has provided the basis not only to question gender inequality but also, and probably more importantly, to support the flexibility of inbetweenness regarding sexual orientation and gender identification as a fluid process implying several levels of identity construction. Queer theory also provides the grounds to address the in-betweenness that is articulated amid the essentialist (one is born) vs the constructivist (one is made) debates of sexual identity construction. Queer theory, even with the questions that this academic field of investigation rises in African academics, scholars and writers, offers the potentiality to utilise its tools with the aim of deconstructing the heterosexual/homosexual binary.

In chapter 3 I focused on the analysis of the texts. In *Fairytales for Lost Children* Diriye Osman offers a wide representation of queer African identities. Osman gives voice to lesbians, children, gay men, transitional and transgender individuals who narrate their stories of queerness. Using the literary genre of the fairytale genre, he deconstructs its traditional formal and thematic features of form and content. Osman utilises the storytelling frame and adapts it to his own needs, thus, offering a platform to question what fairytales have been doing, indoctrinating children about gender roles making them think a heterosexual relationship is the only possible relationship that exists.

In these stories, the characters narrate their experiences which deal with issues regarding cultural, religious, and social biases nourished throughout centuries of patriarchal

heteronormativity. By addressing these issues Diriye Osman can be considered as the first African author to devote a whole collection of stories to the representation of queer African individuals that speak about coming out of the closet or refusing to abide by patriarchal views of sexual orientation. They do so either from their motherlands on the African continent, from their adopted refugee lands in Africa or their diasporic location, in this case London.

The range of themes that are tackled in the collection of stories cover, to a certain extent, the author's own personal experiences in the processes of coming out of the closet as a gay man to his family and friends. These conflicts are also explored in lesbian, transitional and transgender characters who endure similar processes of finding their place and voice while protecting and standing for their gender and sexual identities. Family members seem, in some of the stories such as "Watering the Imagination", to support the queerness of their siblings. Notwithstanding, their attitudes shift in most of the cases as in "Earthling", "Ndambi", "Your Silence Will Not Protect You" and to some extent "Shoga", to a position contrary to their first assertions. In most of the stories, the familiar bonds are broken as a consequence of these biases resulting in the isolation and sense of loss that permeates the character's narrations. Osman refers to this relevant aspect—the reaction of families—that affects the lives of the characters, often in a dramatic way, probably in order to emphasize their endurance before difficulties. In "Your Silence Will Not Protect You", "The Other (Wo)man", "My Roots are Your Roots" "Ndambi", "Earthling" and "Shoga" we are also faced with the isolation and the loss of family bonds which contrasts with a strong sense of gaining freedom that transcends from the resilience that the characters end developing.

I have also been able to analyse Osman's collection from a postmodern perspective in order to discuss the deconstructive tools that the author uses to question patriarchal heteronormativity by resorting to the fairytale genre. First by utilising the title to call our attention to this matter, and then, by how, in the collection of stories, he uses several literary techniques which sustain our view of his book as a postmodern literary work. Osman resorts to prolepsis and frame narratives, intertextuality and happy endings as well as providing a sequencing of the stories creating a certain cyclicity similar to the traditional fairytale structure. Postmodernism offers writers a range of possibilities to tackle this deconstructive approach from a literary perspective. Writing about the representation of queer African identities using the fairytale genre is a bold attempt, inventive and transgressive as the task demands. It demands so since, despite the main assumptions, one has to acknowledge that

fairytale are the bases used for the socialisation of children into gender roles. And it is the very grounds of that indoctrination, which affect the minds of children from a very early age, that needs to be subverted in order to provide a haven for all queer identities. There is a clear need to break once and for all with the rigidity of the heteronormative model to regain freedom of choice. And that is precisely what Osman does in *Fairytales for Lost Children*.

In my analysis I have explored how in the collection of stories Osman also argues against the cultural and religious misinterpretations of the Qur'an when dealing with the issues of homosexuality or same sex relationships. In this respect I have resorted to academic publications to rebate the misuse of this line of questioning. Muslims and Islamic scholars, believers, and queer individuals around the world are slowly dismantling the use of the Qur'an as the main source of authority against their identities. They do so by means of a close analysis of its interpretations contesting most of the mainstream assumptions linked with the scriptures and the hadiths that are so frequently quoted to sustain the rejection of sexualities other than the heterosexual. These findings have helped me to sustain the lack of direct mentioning or condemning of any kind of homosexual identity. Therefore, the main arguments that are used against queer individuals, on the grounds of cultural or religious Islamic traditions have been properly debated and refuted.

The rigidity of the patriarchal model is revealing in how families use it in their reasoning to support their rejection of other sexual orientations, as seen specially in the cases of "Earthling", "Ndambi", "Shoga" and "Your Silence Will Not Protect You", which differ from the traditional heterosexual model. The dichotomy between the heterosexual/homosexual construction is exposed in those arguments but it stands on grounds that are nowadays outdated. Nevertheless, we can interpret that the purpose of the author when referring to those issues is to expose their unstable foundations from a twenty-first-century academic approach.

In my thesis, I wanted to explore and sustain the claim that Osman tries to give visibility to other sexual orientation and gender identities in his book *Fairytales for Lost Children*. I wanted to explore and analyse his stories, and highlight their underlying political message. I focused on the struggles and difficulties of queer individuals, as well as on the resilience and sense of freedom that permeates from the character's narratives in Osman's collection. In a current context of continuous demonstrations and social and legal achievements for queer individuals, in a world that seems to shift steadily and with a renewed confidence to the acknowledgement of the rights for the LGBTQI+ movement, it seemed pertinent to analyse

Diriye Osman's *Fairytales for Lost Children*. This collection of short stories brings to the literary sphere a window to observe and listen to the lives of Somali queer individuals which narrate their stories of survival, of hope and freedom in the middle of, for most of them, the struggle of dealing with the world's bias regarding queer identities, family constraints for individuals coming out of the closet, and cultural and religious misinterpretations of homosexuality, among other conflicts.

There is a breath of air, possibility and courage in the representation of queer African voices in Osman's book. The message, as I said before, of this chorus of voices is one of resilience and dignity that stems from their endurance. Sharing this message through the narration of these stories can be interpreted as a kind of homage that Osman is paying to their lives. The world is a much better place when one understands the scope of its diversity. Our gender connects not only to our chromosomal identification or with our anatomy: it is part of our sense of belonging in the world and it is a distinctive feature of our individuality. It cannot be framed in a rigid structure of binaries male/female, man/woman, homosexual/heterosexual, gay/straight, and so forth, since, in many cases, when set free, one may find that its sense of belonging inhabits a flexible in-between place of articulation. Our gender identification is the reflection of several layers present in our identities. These layers may be influenced by biology, chromosomes, cultural traditions or personal identification with the world. This process of construction is not, and cannot be, the result of a general plan resulting from a biased and rigid standpoint. It is the result of a fluid process of identity construction which Diriye Osman masterfully addresses showing the creativity and underlying beauty of this process that flourishes and lives on against all. The representation of queer African individuals in *Fairytales for Lost Children* provides a great platform for unheard voices from the African continent that take their rightful place in the world. The author has transgressed the boundaries of heteronormativity using a fairytale frame by giving them a place in contemporary literature, paying homage to a queer world of possibility and inclusion.

## 5. Summary in Slovak

Cieľom tejto diplomovej práce bolo prebádať zobrazenie rôznych afrických homosexuálnych identít, ktoré sa objavujú v Osmanovej zbierke poviedok s názvom *Fairytales for Lost Children*. V Osmanovej knihe sa nachádza sedem poviedok, ktoré sú analyzované podľa špecifického poradia. Literárna analýza je štruktúrovaná na základe afrického homosexuálneho zobrazenia, ktoré tieto postavy stelesňujú. Z tohto dôvodu je práca usporiadaná podľa poradia, v ktorom sa postavy v knihe vyskytujú, počnúc lesbickými ženami, pokračujúc homosexuálne orientovanými deťmi a mládežou a končiac analýzou osôb v procese pohlavnej transformácie a tiež afrických transrodových jednotlivcov homosexuálnej orientácie.

Táto časť začína analýzou prvého príbehu knihy o matke a jej lesbickej dcére s názvom *Watering the Imagination*. Keďže jadro príbehu sa zaoberá lesbizmom, do analýzy sú zapracované ďalšie lesbické postavy, ktoré sa objavujú v príbehoch *Ndambi* a *Earthling*. Práca ďalej pokračuje časťou, ktorá sa zaoberá objavom homosexuálnej identity u detí v príbehu *Fairytales for Lost Children*. V tejto práci je ďalej skúmané vykreslenie homosexuálne orientovanej mládeže v príbehoch *Tell the Sun not to Shine, Your Silence Will Not Protect You, Shoga, My Roots are Your Roots* a *If I were a Dance*. Nakoniec sa moja práca zameriava na vzhľad postáv v procese pohlavnej transformácie v príbehu *The other (Wo)man* a transrod v príbehu *Pavilion*. Celkovo práca skúma zobrazenie afrických queer identít s cieľom analyzovať ich zastúpenie v Osmanovej knihe.

Cieľom tejto práce je zamerať sa na skúmanie relevantnosti hlavných čít každej africkej queer identity vo vzťahu k: 1) miestam ich vyjadrenia v: a) rodnej zemi (v tomto prípade to môže byť Somálsko, Osmanová krajina pôvodu, alebo Nigéria, krajina, v ktorej našiel útočisko), alebo b) diaspóre (aktuálne miesto pobytu autora, t.j. Londýn); 2) osobným obmedzeniam v súvislosti s konštrukciou sexuálnej identity a 3) tomu, ako títo jednotlivci čelia konfliktom, ktoré vznikajú pri priznaní ich náklonnosti k rovnakému pohlaviu svojim rodinám, priateľom a svetu, alebo ako sa pohybujú vo fázach procesu pohlavnej transformácie, ktoré znamenajú zmeny v postojoch, obliekaní odevu opačného pohlavia a konštrukcii identity.

V dôsledku toho, že postavy vystupujú ako queer, v niektorých z týchto príbehov čelia nepriateľským reakciám k ich homosexuálnej identite. Tieto reakcie často vychádzajú z konkrétnych náboženských, kultúrnych a spoločensky nadobudnutých presvedčení. Tieto kontexty boja a predsudkov otvárajú dvere debate o konštrukcii sexuálnej identity, ako aj o konflikte medzi prírodou a výchovou, ktorá koreluje s rozpravami esencializmu verzus konštruktivismu. Posledným je aspekt rozoberaný v teoretickej časti tejto práce, ktorý zdôvodňuje vhodnosť queer teórie.

V práci sú skúmané tie príbehy, v ktorých majú problémy s duševným zdravím vplyv na niektoré z postáv, ako napríklad počutie hlasov, čo odhaľuje mieru utrpenia, ktoré je spojené s kultúrne a

nábožensky konštruovanými stereotypmi, ktoré sa týkajú túžob osôb rovnakého pohlavia. Tento duševný stav sa zdá byť prekonaný vtedy, keď sú tieto postavy presvedčené a stoja pevne za svojou osobitou sexuálnou orientáciou. Ťažkosti, s ktorými sa tieto postavy musia vyrovnávať, sú výsledkom rigidity spôsobenej heteronormatívnosťou a predstavujú väčšinu ťažkostí, ktorým musia homosexuálni jednotlivci čeliť v určitých momentoch ich života, čo je v súčasnosti problémom vo väčšine afrických krajín.

Táto analýza bude skúmať, ako je proces konštrukcie sexuálnej identity (tak ako je prezentovaná v niektorých príbehoch) výsledkom kombinácie faktorov, ktoré sú v rozpore s používaním rigidných binarít, ktoré boli vytvorené na základe západného patriarchálneho a heteronormatívneho myslenia (Foucault 1990; Butler 2007; Sedgwick 2008).

Podľa Annamarie Jagose (2001) bola queer teória ako fráza vytvorená Teresou De Lauretis v roku 1991 (Jagose 2001, 127). De Lauretis predstavila svoju teóriu v kontexte, v ktorom boli homosexuálne a lesbické oslobodzovacie hnutia videné, ako neúspešné v schopnosti reprezentovať všetky možné sexuálne orientácie a rodové identity. Podľa nej bol cieľ článku s názvom *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*, ktorý bol upravený pre špeciálne vydanie časopisu *Differences* (Jagose 2001, 127), zameraný na špekulatívny predpoklad, že homosexualita už nie je jednoducho videná ako marginálna, pokiaľ ide o dominantnú a stabilnú formu sexuality (heterosexualita) oproti ktorej by bola definovaná buď ako opozícia, alebo homológia (De Lauretis, 1991: iii, citované v Jagose 2001, 127). Autorka svoju pozornosť zameriava na jadro heterosexuálneho modelu, ktorý je zavedený v spoločnosti po stáročia. Tvrdí, že je čas preskúmať, objasniť, zložiť, urovnať, alebo konfrontovať príslušné histórie, predpoklady a koncepčné rámce, ktoré charakterizovali sebareprezentáciu severoamerických lesbičiek a gejov bielej a inej pleti do týchto čias. Takto by sme mohli preformulovať a pretvoriť vzťahy našich sexualít, vytvoriť ďalší diskurzívny horizont, ďalší spôsob vnímania sexuality. (De Lauretis 1991)

Autorka jasne vysvetľuje potrebu prehodnotiť rozsah sexuálnej orientácie a rodovej identifikácie v kontexte, v ktorom vzrastali obavy z vhodnosti toho, čo homosexuálne a lesbické oslobodzujúce hnutia ponúkali. Zároveň spochybňuje zdanlivo rigiditu homosexuálnej/heterosexuálnej binarity. De Lauretis stanovuje základy queer teórie tým, že vidí sexuálnu identitu ako konštrukčný proces, ktorý musí byť pochopený mimo týchto štruktúr. Základy queer teórie vychádzajú z porozumenia, že je viac identít, ktoré obývajú priestor medzi binaritami. De Lauretis ďalej poznamenáva, že „nie je produktívne zastupovať lesbické a homosexuálne vzťahy buď ako iba transgresívne alebo deviantné voči správnej, prirodzenej sexualite..., alebo len ako ďalší voliteľný životný štýl” (127). Autorka poukazuje na diskusie medzi esencializmom a konštruktivismom. De Lauretis tiež tvrdí, že konceptualizácia „lesbičiek a gejov [...] vymedzuje teóriu sexuality”, a že chce, aby queer teória „fungovala ako kriticky rušivý pojem, ktorý je v protiklade pojmami lesbičky a gejovia”

(128). Pre narušenie binarity je potrebné spochybnit' jej funkčnosť, teda potrebu formulovať nový všeobsažný termín.

Keďže táto práca sa zaoberá africkými queer zobrazeniami, je potrebné sa vyjadriť ku kontextu Afriky vo vzťahu ku queer teórii. V tomto ohľade stojí za zmienku, že podľa Clarka „západ dostal sám seba do pozície autority vo vedomostiach týkajúcich sa homosexuálnej skúsenosti“ (Clarke 2013, 177) a z tohto dôvodu tvrdí, že „Afrika nemôže urobiť svoju vlastnú cestu bez apelu na vedomosti (a teda) silu západu“ (177). Okrem toho priznáva, že Afrika je marginalizovaná v západnej queer teórii, čo znamená, že Afričania s queer identitou nie sú reprezentovaní vo vedúcich literárnych a teoretických rámcoch do takej miery, že „africká sexualita je tlačaná za hranice do nejasnosti“ (176).

*Fairytales for Lost Children* môžu byť považované za prvú kompiláciu príbehov venovaných reprezentácii afrických queer identít, ktoré sú napísané africkým autorom. Existujú africkí autori a vedci, ktorí písali o homosexuálnych problémoch v Afrike a to z literárneho, alebo akademického hľadiska, ale kolekcia akou je Osmanova je jedinečným príkladom v literárnej sfére. Zdá sa, že ide o odvážny a kreatívny pokus ponúknuť čitateľovi publikáciu, ktorá zastrešuje homosexuálne názory. Byť spisovateľom a zamerať sa na tak komplexný amalgám identít sa zdá byť príkladom záujmu a potreby ponúknuť priestor na zaplnenie. Taktiež to poukazuje na význam príspevku tohto typu do literárneho sveta, pretože literatúra produkovaná africkými autormi v Afrike o vzťahoch rovnakého pohlavia, alebo konštrukcie queer identity je mizivá.

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