STRATEGIES OF CONTESTING HETERONORMATIVE SEXUALITY CONSTRUCTS BY QUEER MEN: A STUDY OF *STORIES OF OUR LIVES* AND *THEY CALLED ME QUEER*

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April 2025

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DEDICATION

My husband Kirui, children Neema, Kalya and Nuru. You inspired me that it is never too late to chase your academic passion and dreams.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the strategies of contesting heteronormative sexuality constructs by gays as depicted in The Nest Collective's *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* by Kim Windvogel and Kelly-Eve Koopman. These two narratives entail confessions of personal life experiences of people who self-identify as gays in Kenya and South Africa. The objectives of this study were: to examine how gay men construct their identities in response to dominant heteronormative discourses in the selected texts, to evaluate how satire serves as a tool of contestation in the selected texts and to analyze how narrative perspectives function as devices for understanding the gay experience in the selected texts. The research questions that guided this study were: In which ways do gays construct their identities amidst the dominant heteronormative sexuality discourses in the selected texts? How is satire deployed as contestation tool in the texts? To what extent are narrative perspectives a device for navigating gay experience? This study employed the Queer theory which counters maltreatment and prejudice against a sexual minority and advocates for 'consciousness-raising' and 'coming out' hence declaration of gay identity publicly. The study adopted qualitative research methodology and the corresponding interpretive approach by critically analyzing the selected texts and other academic literature in supporting the discussion and interpretations. These two texts were purposively sampled to comparatively study them as representation of two contexts in Africa, yet comparable. This study found that queer men in Kenya and South Africa deploy satire and the first person narrative voice as contestation tool in heteronormative societies as they grapple with queer realities and advance queer agency. It contributes to the African queer theory studies and to the existing body of knowledge in queer Literature.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Lesbian: A homosexual woman or girl

Gay: The term points to being exclusively sexually attracted to people of a person's own gender, specifically of a man.

Bisexual: One romantically or sexually attracted to both men or women, or to more than one sex or gender

Transgender: A person whose gender expression or identity does not correspond to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth.

Queer: Disparagingly used to refer to persons who are perceived as unusual for not being cisgender and defying the tenets of heterosexism thus having same-sex desires or relationships.

Homophobic: irrational fear, being unaccommodating and derision of same-sex love.

Heteronormative: suggesting or presuming that
only heterosexual relationships are normal, right and that men and women
have gendered roles.

Heterosexual: sexually or romantically attracted exclusively to people of the other sex.

Cisgender: denoting or relating to a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex registered for them at birth; not transgender.

Agency: The capacity to exert power or influence and the ability to influence your own thoughts.

LGBTQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning

Sex identity/Sex orientation: A description of the sex of a person, or people one is attracted to in a sexual or romantic way.

Gender identity: It is a person's sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere, along the gender spectrum. It is an internal sense of oneself as male, female or other.

ACRONYMS

ACT UP	-	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
GAA	-	Gay Activists Alliance
GLM	-	The Gay Liberation Movement
LGBTQIA+	-	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, or Asexual
SGM	-	Sexual Gender Minority

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

While majority in the West have embraced queer persons, and many governments legalized gayism and its practice (Magni & Reynolds, 2023), in Africa it has continued to be contested. Consequently, gays in Africa have to fight for their space and recognition in a hetero dominant society that is homophobic to the orientation (Ombagi, 2019, Daudu, 2021). The Nest Collective's[1] *Stories of Our Lives* represents various experiences of Kenyan gays, their struggle for visibility and attempts to contest heteronormative sexuality constructs that prevail in the Kenyan society. Similarly, Kim Windvogel and Kelly-Eve Koopman's *They Called Me Queer* depict the lived realities of South African gays and their strategies of contesting heteronormative sexuality. *Stories of Our Lives* is an archive of Kenyan queer narratives that was first published in 2015, with a second edition of 2020 which has been updated with new narratives collected in 2018. These narratives were collected for the 'Stories of Our Lives' research project (2013-2018). The names and characteristics of individuals and places in this book have been changed and /or redacted for the sake of anonymity. In 2013, the Nest Collective travelled across Kenya, recording over 250 personal accounts of people identifying as queer. Similarly, Ken Mwachiro's *Invisible* (2014), entails many tales from the Kenyan Queer Community. While the issue of sexual preference is contentious in Kenya, the queer community continues to strive to make itself manifest (Otu et.al, 2021). Kenyan queer activists outspokenly battle against discrimination and campaign for the respect of the dignity of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals and intersex individuals (LGBTQI) (Gitari, 2020). As a journalist and queer activist, Mwachiro collected and compiled stories from the queer community covering true accounts of young, old, urban and rural Kenyans who take pride in their sexual orientation and preference despite the many struggles they have encountered in relation to their gender

[1] The Nest Collective is a Kenyan artist collective famous for the collection of the queer narratives, *Stories of Our Lives*. Additionally, they are best known for their work in film and television, including the film 'Stories of Our Lives' and the web series 'Tuko Macho' and are also involved in fashion, visual arts and music projects. Nest Collective members are: Jim Chuchu, George Gachara, Njoki Ngumi, Dr. Akati Khasiani, Njeri Gitungo, Kendi Kamwambia, Sunny Dolat, Noel Kasyoka, Mars, Olivia Ambani, Hope Bii and Wakiuru Njuguna. In 2017 the collective published the book *Not African Enough*, an anthology of essays and photography about African fashion and released the virtual reality film project *Let This Be a Warning*.

identity (Eils, 2021). *Invisible* recounts tales of being among the LGBTQIA+ in Northern, Western and Coastal parts of Kenya and the queer persons finding their identity. *Stories of Our Lives* presents a selection from the resulting archive in an attempt to explore the consciousness, ambition, and expression of many queer Kenyans in their daily interactions with family, friends, schools, workplace, religion and ideas of the future and in diverse social contexts in Kenya. Through these stories, the self-representing queer Kenyan grants the reader permission to explore private and intimate worlds – where the vagaries of queer publicness, silence, intimacy, militancy and love happen (Nest Collective 2018). In September 2014, short films were produced based on these narratives and were received warmly by audiences in film festivals in places such as Toronto, London, Rio de Janeiro and Berlin but were ironically banned from private or public screening anywhere in Kenya, where the Kenyan Film and Classification Board deemed them as 'promoting homosexuality' in Kenya (Nest Collective 2018; Ndanyi, 2021). The film won the Berlinale Teddy Jury Prize in 2015 at Berlin International Film Festival and has since screened in more than 80 countries around the world with numerous awards but it is yet to screen in its home country.

They Called Me Queer, transcribed by Windvogel and Koopman, contains 32 personal accounts, poems and dialogues of people identifying as queer. In this text, the term queer derogatorily refers to people who defy heterosexuality and identify with other gender identities (Windvogel and Koopman, 2019). The South African law permits same sex behaviour and freedom to associate with any gender identity. Same-sex marriage has been legal in South Africa since the Civil Union Act, 2006 came into force on 30th November 2006. However, the South African homosexuals still feel marginalized as they continue to grapple with heteropatriarchy usually accompanied by the slogan that homosexuality is un-African (Jaji, 2017; Windvogel and Koopman, 2019). *They Called Me Queer* is a collection written by Africans who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual. Despite South Africa's tolerance towards the LGBTQIA+ community, segregation by sexual identities still heavily impacts every part of their daily lives (Windvogel and Koopman, 2019). Inclusivity is by theory as gays claim persecution by majority in the entire society. The queer people of colour experience extreme trauma (Marnell & Oliveira, 2021).

Queer Literature aids queer community members in asserting their identities and contesting heteronormative sexual constructs today. According to Van Klinken (2019), embracing the concept of "arts of resistance," his *Kenyan, Christian, Queer* presents four case studies of grassroots LGBT activism through artistic and creative expressions. This is inclusive of the literary and cultural work of Binyavanga Wainaina, George Barasa's (gay gospel musician) music video, "Same Love", the *Stories of Our Lives* anthology project, and the LGBT-affirming Cosmopolitan Affirming Church. Through these case studies, Van Klinken demonstrates how Kenyan traditions, black African identities, and Christian beliefs and practices are being geared towards promoting queer Kenyan Christian imaginations.

Additionally, in most African countries, LGBTQIA+ identities are still considered a taboo by many and people tend to shun and shy away from literary texts with queer themes. Indeed, the back book cover of *Stories of Our Lives* reveals that this book should not exist because the people in the book are said not to exist and that 'the act of publishing this book in an environment that is hostile contained within its pages is a radical endeavor'. Consequently, unlike in South Africa's Kim Windvogel and Kelly-Eve Koopman's *They Called Me Queer*, where the identities of the narrators are not hidden, the narrators in Kenya's The Nest Collective's *Stories of Our Lives* are anonymous, due to stigma in society and strict legal restrictions that have criminalized homosexuality. Despite elements of sexual liberalization in South Africa, there is still silence among the queer and this avoidance is more explicit in Kenya as evident in *Stories of our Lives*.

Research by Ray and Parkhill (2021) reveal heteronormative ideology as a cultural force that maintains the status of heterosexual men as the dominant group members' within a social hierarchy based on sexual orientation. According to them, defiance of heteronormative sexuality by gay men and their same sex behaviour motivate disgust and

hostile attitudes in heterosexist creating interpersonal and intergroup boundaries. Disgust is elicited in reaction to gayism, specifically, gays' sexual behavior.

Vilakazi and Mkhize (2020) claim that in the African context, queer individuals are perceived to occupy deviant gender identities and sexual orientations that do not conform to 'normalised' gender identities. While South Africa is one of the few African countries that have a constitution that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of 'sexual orientation', the majority of other African countries have homophobic legislation. Mauritania, Northern Nigeria, Sudan and Somalia have the death penalty for crimes related to homosexuality; and in Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Tanzania, Kenya, Southern Nigeria, Malawi and Zambia the penalty may be life imprisonment. In Uganda, the Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2023 has been said to criminalize homosexuality, and is contested at the highest court in the land. Indeed, literature shows that anti-homosexuality laws and policies, including criminalization of homosexuality in most African countries and elsewhere, were visible and emphasized as part of colonial legacies (Vilakazi & Mkhize, 2020). Thus the coloniality of power exposes various basis of discrimination, including but not limited to racial, political, and sexual, among others. Recent anti-LGBTQIA+ proposed laws in Uganda have been termed as violation of human rights by United Nations experts. Generally, postcolonial queer analysis through the LGBTQIA+ based themes and literary stylistic devices also exposes the misuse of heteronormative power to subjugate, subordinate and oppress non-heterosexual practices in social relations and within social structures, which is perpetuated by male hegemonic and patriarchal colonial practices. According to de Saugy (2022), there is politicization of anti-gay discourses by heads of state to gain political mileage.

Babajanova (2022) asserts that style in literature is the literary element that describes the ways that the author uses words or manipulates language. It entails the author's word

choice, sentence structure, figurative language, and sentence arrangement all of which work together to establish mood, images, and meaning in the text. Figurative language consists of: satire, irony, narrative perspectives, humour, similes, metaphors, flashback, foreshadowing, and story within story, symbolism, allegory, allusion, metonymy, synecdoche, dialogue, sarcasm, contrast, juxtaposition, paradox, oxymoron, rhetorical questions and many more. According to Kosimov (2022), figurative language devices enable writers to effectively channel complexities or feelings that they want to express in speech. Figurative language is a vehicle for convincing the audience, the notions of a narrator, capture their attention and solidify a psychological connection with them. This study limited itself to the way satire and narrative perspectives are deployed because the selected texts conspicuously adopt satire and narrative voice to contest heteronormative sexuality constructs and navigate the gay experience.

Mwangi (2010) argues that novelists in contemporary Africa employ self-reflexive techniques to highlight the dynamic circumstances in societies, examine traditionally taboo issues such as homosexuality and preserve themselves in the face of restriction. This highlights the centrality of first person narration and the aesthetic value of life writing in addressing queer thematic concerns. Additionally, Ombagi (2019), in his reading of *Stories of Our Lives* (2015), acknowledges that queer persons narrate their lives to create meanings, individual opinions and sexual preferences against a contradictory background in Kenya. Most research on gays engages their wellness in terms of sociological studies and mental health sciences by the queer community activists and empathetic scholars, and not much focus on literary criticism. Through analysing queer literature themes, the study contributes in addressing stylistic strategies employed by gays from the perspective of literary criticism looking into the aspect of styles such as satire and narrative perspectives, while enriching the policy debate on gays pitting conservatives and liberals in society.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Contemporary African gay writers use literary style to contest heteronormativity and normative expectations of gays by the society. Gayism has continued to be a contentious

issue globally and has been legalized in the West. The gays expect to share the same privileges in society like the heterosexuals and the cisgender. However, in the African continent homosexuality is scorned by many. The Kenyan society tends to be heterosexist and homophobic hence gays are treated as lesser and unimportant beings. They are victimized and perceived as unacceptable societal misfits. Similarly, in South Africa, where same sex marriages have been legalized, homosexuals still encounter persecution and are marginalized. The deprecation of these persons in the societies that prejudice them not only demeans them but makes them feel alienated.

This study sought to evaluate how, through strategies and evocation of literariness in The Nest Collectives' *Stories of Our Lives* (Kenya) and *They Called Me Queer* (South Africa) by Kim Windvogel and Kelly-Eve Koopman, the gays deploy satire to contest for their spaces and challenge heteronormativity and use especially first-person narrative perspective to navigate the gay experience in these societies. Further, the study critically appreciated how the gays push back their marginalization through constructing their identities amidst the dominant heteronormative sexuality constructs and discourses. Thus, the study focused on critical examination of how gays, through the aesthetic of life writing, employ satire and narrative perspectives to foreground their varied experiences in heteronormative contexts, navigate prejudice, and contest dominant patriarchal heterosexual constructs. Further, the study assessed how stylistic devices enable queer men to reconstruct and to re-negotiate their identities in the society. In this way, the study explored broader scholarship on the queer African studies theory and African queer literature.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study investigated strategies of contesting heteronormative sexuality constructs by queer men with a focus on *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*. The specific objectives were:

1. Examine how gay men construct their identities in response to dominant heteronormative discourses in the selected texts.

2. Evaluate how satire serves as a tool of contestation in the selected texts.

3. Analyze how narrative perspectives function as devices for understanding the gay experience in the selected texts.

1.4 Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. In which ways do gays construct their identities amidst the dominant heteronormative sexuality constructs and discourses depicted in the selected texts?

2. How is satire deployed as contestation tool in the texts?

3. To what extent are narrative perspectives a device for navigating gay experience in selected texts?

1.5 Justification of the Study

The reluctance by many African scholars to venture into studies on persons marginalized based on their sexual preferences and orientation still exists (Olondo, 2019), and this study helps to contribute towards filling this gap, by centralizing voices of their marginalized. While there are a number of African scholars who write and theorize on queerness, there remains a lot of ground to be covered on several aspects of queerness. By focusing on *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*, this study discussed how contemporary members of the queer community in the queer field contest their marginalization and advance their agency through style.

Recent queer studies also demonstrate the othering of queer persons in Rwanda(Stojanovski, Igonya, Gutabarwa, Otukpa, Mutuku, & Ushie, 2024); with many in Ghana, Namibia, Kenya, and Uganda having to endure discrimination and stigma that adversely affects their pychosocial well-being(Mogotsi, Otchere, Botchway, Muthoni, Gariseb & Ramalepe(2024), demonstrating the need interrogate other aspects of queer

realities, including how they push back against their marginality — which is partly the focus of this study.

As sexual diversities manifest in settings like present day Kenya and South Africa, the two selected literary texts that reflect the lived experiences of gays in the queer community reveals how queer men employ style and literariness as a strategy to contest heteronormative sexuality constructs, specifically satire and narrative perspectives. Queer narrations in *Stories of our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* stand out not only because they are personal life stories but also because not many literary scholars have made attempts to venture into them in both Kenya and South Africa. The navigation by queer persons in the texts is significant because being lived experiences of queer men, mirrors daily struggles of many real people not able to come out and share their daily struggles as gays.

These attempts by gays in the queer community, who through confessional mode of writing share their life narratives, are viewed as a significant contribution not only to the genre of life writing but also in literary studies in general. The two texts were purposively chosen for comparative studies in both Kenya and South Africa as a representation of a relatively conservative setting (Kenya) and a comparatively liberal setting (South Africa) but which both continue to contest the gay spaces in dynamic contexts.

Through life writing as seen in the personal narrations and satire in the texts, the study demonstrates that basic premises of hetero normativity in contemporary African culture is untenable, and continues to be challenged covertly and overtly in different spaces. This study not only amplifies the voices of the marginalized queer community, but could help inform policy decisions on gays in heteronormative settings.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The Nest Collective's *Stories of Our Lives* (2020) and Kim Windvogel and Kelly-Eve Koopman's *They Called Me Queer* (2019) raises pertinent questions of daily lived experiences of gay communities in Kenya and South Africa. At the policy level, these gay experiences help enrich the debate on the pros and cons of either criminalizing or decriminalizing gay practices.

This study based on the two texts with experiences from Kenya and South Africa also helps enrich the debate on gays as a political question. While the West promotes freedoms of individuals including minority communities like gays, the African society remain conservative and prefer a hard stance on gay practices. It therefore helps inform policy issues on gays and other related topics, and the question of whether legal sanctions are robust in regulating social behaviours of individuals. The study is therefore significant in unpacking behavioural divergence of individuals on matters sexuality, and the response of state and non-state actors as regulators and actors in the social space. It helps appreciate the controversial topic of sexual orientation, and this is intertwined with other societal issues like religion, politics, culture, law and ethics.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The scope of this research was two contemporary African literary collections by mostly African narrators who self-identify as gays. While the two collections of queer narratives comprises of confessions by lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and gays, this comparative study narrowed down to narratives by gays only to explore the agential capacity of homosexuals depicted through literariness. While there are several Literatures on the queer subject, the researcher purposively selected these texts not only because they are contemporary, but also *Stories of our Lives* has won many awards. The collections have many stories therefore rich and widely depicting struggles, contestations and navigating mechanisms of African gay men in a hostile environment. The selected

texts address the present day issues of African gay men in a different way that is yet to garner much attention from the existing literary scholarship.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

The queer theory helped to critically discuss and guide this study. The queer theories also known as the gay and lesbian theories emerged from the revolutionary movements of the 1960s similar to the feminist and Black criticism theories and not from scholars (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, 2005). Additionally, queer theory developed as gay and lesbian studies, which in turn was the academic wing of the gay rights movement (Nayar, 2010). The genesis of the Gay Liberation Movement (GLM) can be traced to the Stonewall Riot in New York in 1969 where the police raided a renowned meeting joint for gays. This brought about activism by Homosexual Rights groups throughout the United States and Europe. The GLM, Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) advocated for legal, medical, social freedom and rights for gays and lesbians.

It is worth noting that queer theory is relatively recent (1990s and after). The turn to 'queer' served particular purposes. 'Queering' is the process of reversing heterosexuality as a norm. 'Queer' now refers to not only gay/lesbian issues but also includes other practices, identities and communities, all of which have been marginalized in history. Such include bisexuality, sado-masochism, the transgendered and the transsexual (Seidman, 2020). Indeed, transgendering, transvestitism, drag and camp, and other sexual identities present the multiple natures of identities that cannot be reduced to one category (Seidman, 2020). Nayar (2010) asserts that queer theory drew upon the experiences of these movements while adding philosophical and critical insights into the nature of the body, the geography of sexuality and the question of sexual identity.

It is with this understanding that this study reviewed some of the ideas of key theorists whose work informed the study, thereby clarifying the queer theoretical approach. The queer or gay and lesbian theories fruitfully challenge the conventional notions concerning

gender and sexual identity that are esteemed by majority in Kenya, South Africa and other African countries. This study considers ideas of some critical contributors of the queer theory such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Sigmund Freud and others. The study also draws from the thoughts of contributors of the African queer theorists such as Stella Nyanzi and Keguro Macharia in reading and interpretation of the selected texts which are narrations from life experiences, thereby contributing greatly to life writing.

Principles of the queer theory can be traced from the homosexual rights movement through the Gay Liberation Movement that had two main objectives: to counter maltreatment and prejudice against a sexual minority, and to inspire gay people themselves to be proud of their sexual orientation. The movement employed 'consciousness-raising' and 'coming out' – declaring their gay identity publicly. This was important to the gay communities as being unnoticeable propagated their maltreatment in societies. These two aims are relevant to this study and are perceivable in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*. The texts portray the persecution of some queer men in the Kenyan and South African contexts. While this is the case, it is also noticeable in the texts that to construct their identity, some rely on revealing their identity and self-pride regarding their queer identity in order to thrive among heterosexuals aligning to objective one of this study.

Marginalization of homosexuality is evident in African continent as represented in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* where some of the perceived homosexuality supportive texts are not only criminalized but also limited in circulation and at the margins of academic discourse due to the politics surrounding the issue of queerness in Kenya and South Africa. Foucault ideas on sexuality contributes significantly to the principles of queer theory. Foucault (1990), theorizes sexuality as located within structures and discourses of power by arguing that certain sexual orientations were thought as unnatural and immoral and those with such sexual preferences were to be placed under surveillance. The perception that gays and lesbians have been disparaged and the awareness of their demonization in history enabled critics to seek texts whose thematic concern were gayism and lesbianism and highlighted homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle for social and

political purposes. Foucault's ideas of sexuality in relation to power dynamics helped analyse the selected texts, through literariness how the heterosexist society, which is homophobic, subordinates and marginalizes gays in Kenya and South Africa.

Foucault studies also help us to understand the principle of exclusion of the queer theory within institutions in societies as applicable in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Call Me Queer*. He further argues that classification of a particular group of people makes the other as deviant opposite of the norm. Homosexuality treated as deviant was therefore treated as a counter to the standard or norm. It was caught in a relationship of power where a dominant heterosexual society labeled and punished deviance. He demonstrated how definitions of 'normal' sexuality, that is heterosexuality, emerged through a demonization of homosexual relations. The sexuality of children, criminals, lunatics and homosexuals came under scrutiny. Foucault detects four principle operations of power: The sexuality of children was subordinated to that of adults, who were to monitor any 'perversions' like masturbation, a list of 'perversions' began to be formulated. The homosexual was now a symbol of disorder, a 'medicalization' of sexuality was on as doctors and scientists sought to provide a pathological basis for perversions and a compartmentalization of sexualities began to be visible. Sex was restricted to certain ages, relationships, times, and spaces.

Though a feminist, Judith Butler's ideas greatly impact the queer theory. Butler in her *Gender Trouble* describes gender as 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame'. Butler (1990) asserts that there is no natural body and that gender identity depends on the performance of the subject. This clearly gives the impression that gender is about one's doing and acting and not what one is. Butler affirms her theory of performativity by arguing that it is performance of roles that constructs a 'feminine' woman or a 'masculine' man. Thus, for heterosexual persons that would like to be naturalistic, they must also act the gender they identify with in the society.

Freud's ideas also helped conceptualize queer theory in the analysis of the texts and help appreciate the context of *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Call Me Queer*. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, detailed psychological case-studies appeared to complicate and expand the range of sexualities. According to Kennedy (2014), Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a German lawyer, published twelve volumes on homosexuality between 1864 and 1879. The term homosexuality was first used by Karl Benkert in 1869 and Krafft-Ebing's *Pyschopathia Sexualis* in its 1903 edition (Oosterhuis, 2000). Such works were important to Freud in exploring the notion that heterosexuality was safely grounded in nature. In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud, 1905), for instance, he noted that it was not a self-evident fact that men should find a sexual interest in women, a fact that is common in the narratives *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Call Me Queer*. This tenet exercises great influence on the queer theory and the literary analysis of the selected texts. Freud had noted in an Outline of Psychoanalysis that sexual life was concerned primarily with obtaining pleasure from the body, often beyond the needs of reproduction. If this is the case, heterosexuality supports bourgeois ideologies to the extent that procreation mirrors production. Gay sex, in contrast, is desire deprived of this goal; it is the very negation of productive work. While Foucault and Freud may not be queer theorists per say, their conceptualization of sexuality helped queer theorists interrogate and challenge the binary view of sexuality.

Nayar's idea that sexuality outside the traditional gender binary norms was identified as perversion and illness (Nayar, 2010) aligns with Foucault's ideas on queer sexuality. This aspect of his works contribute to this queer theory principle which aided in the analysis of the selected texts. Queer men in Kenya and South Africa being perceived as perverted and sick is a prevalent reality in the selected texts.

Nayar (2010) asserts that literary critics when analyzing literary texts examine race, gender, class and nationality. In novels and short stories, they examine sexuality in the form of man and woman sexual relationships. Male writers who are known to have close ties with men such as Tennyson and Arthur Hallam are marginalized and their references and

biographical information ignored. Further, Nayar explains that in the past heterosexuality was the norm and homosexuality was the deviation/perversion that deserved medical treatment and imprisonment as was the case with Oscar Wilde's trial and indictment at the turn of the nineteenth century (Kaplan, 2004).

Nayar argues that the limitation of queer theory is that it is more useful in the discipline of cultural studies than in old-fashioned literary studies because its interests lie in the links between the politics of cultural representation and institutional-state constructions of sexuality. While this may suggest a weakness of the application of queer theory in this work that focuses on literariness, it lays the background from which style is deployed as a tool to challenge societal constructs in heteronormative settings like that of *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Call Me Queer*. Its interests are in the power relations, social evaluation and institutional biases that underlie representations of the heterosexual or homosexual. Outlining the agenda and potential of queer sexuality studies, Srivastava (2014) and Nayar (2010) explain that Suparna Bhaskaran argues that 'queer sexuality embodies stories of development and under-development, modernity and tradition, economic (re)production and nonmaterial degeneration'. Queer sexuality, she emphasizes, is linked to AIDS activism, caste, the law and imperialism. Thus, queer theory is about the cultural contexts of queer sexualities, which clearly play out in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Call Me Queer.*

Betts and Herb (2025) also argue that in its principles, the queer theory aims at representing the construction of queer identities and the struggle for space by members of queer community among heteronormative societies. This is clear in *Stories of our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* where gay men, deploy the literary styles of satire and narrative perspectives in reaffirming their sexual identity and pushing back the heteronormative sexuality constructs imbibed in the Kenyan and South African contexts as seen in the texts.

Further, the centrality of Queer-African Theory Studies cannot be overlooked. For instance, in East Africa, scholars that have done useful work on queer subject. Stella Nyanzi has made major contributions on the queer African theory. Nyanzi (2014) argues that queering Africa surpasses the ideas of major proponents and contributors of the queer theory such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. She posits that their assertions on the tenets of the queer theory strengthen Western hegemony over African Queer Studies. Further, she puts forward that the obvious supremacy of the white South African queers is colonizing because queer identities in Africa are not limited to Eurocentrism. Also queer Africa is larger than one nation and cannot be confined to South African lenses only. In her *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer perspectives on sexual and gender identities* she posits that queering 'Queer Africa' entails 'simultaneously reclaiming Africa in its bold diversities and reinserting queerness.' (P. 61). This principle of the African queer theory, endorsed by Nyanzi's ideas is evident in *Stories of our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* where the narrators are African and occupy African environs. The narrators in these autobiographical selected texts clearly reject Eurocentric beliefs on gayism, that it defines African queerness since it is claimed in the texts that Europeans passed queerness on Africans during colonization. Several narrators in the selected texts, while redefining their identity insist that there existed a queer community in Africa even before the coming of the Europeans.

Munro (2024) also asserts that the practice of same sex marriage was present in precolonial Africa which contravenes the often narrative that casts Africa from the lens of being queer phobic. He argues that many African communities allowed a variety of sexual expressions and gender identity.

In augmenting this, Macharia (2009), in his ideas on African queer theory argues that while African politicians and clergy insist that homosexuality is un-African and a perversion, homosexual acts existed and were held in esteem by various communities across the African continent. Further, he asserts that colonialism and not homosexuality introduced homophobia in Africa. Abbas and Ekine (2013) adopt the term 'queer' to underscore a notion that embraces gender and sexual diversity and seeks to reshape, recondition and

revolutionise Africa. However, these scholars acknowledge the limitations of queer in relation to African neo-colonial realities.

These principles of the queer theory helped in analyzing how through stylistic devices gay characters in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Call Me Queer* take pride and are conscious of their sexual preference and declare their gay identity publicly as a way of defying the normative sexual constructs and navigating the gay experience. Just like Gay Liberation Activists became instruments of liberalizing people's sexual attitudes in the 1960s and distinctly disputed the prejudicial attitudes towards gay people by the heterosexual society, *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Call Me Queer* depict how style, especially satire and narrative perspectives, is utilized to navigate and challenge heteronormative constructs. It is used as a tool of depicting the gays' agency against the prejudice by straight and the cisgender in the society depicted in the two selected texts for this study.

In conclusion, the queer theory examines the history of cultural portrayal of the gay or lesbian as deviant, sick or criminal, while emphasizing sexuality as an important categorization of critical analysis when dealing *with* cultural texts. Queer theory operates between literary analysis and activism because it depicts how cultural representations play a role in the suppression of homosexuals. This study, therefore, intend to explore this nexus in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Call Me Queer*, to demonstrate how through style, the gay community navigates their daily experiences while exercising agency.

1.9 Research Methodology

This study is a desktop research and stylistically evaluated two literary texts: Kim Windvogel and Kelly Eve Koopman's *They Called Me Queer* and The Nest Collective's *Stories of Our Lives*. This study employed qualitative research methodology and adopted the corresponding interpretive approach through textual analysis.

The study was also based on a comparative research analysis as a study tool. Schneider and Wagemann (2010) argue that comparative research analysis aims at gathering information that sheds light on relationships, patterns and links between variables for a researcher to report the findings. This research design explores the analysis and interpretation of data. As such, it is instrumental when collecting information on topical issues affecting society. It thus fits the current study which sought to comparatively investigate the strategies of contesting heteronormative sexuality constructs by queer men in Kenya and South Africa in the selected texts authored in the context of two African countries.

Further, close reading of the selected texts was appropriate study tool to gather the primary data on how literary techniques function to depict contestation and navigation of gay experiences by queer men. A reading of the selected texts through discourse analysis was thus necessary to realize the interpretation and critical analysis of this study's objective. This method of study comparatively interrogated selected texts to explore the African literary queer narratives compiled by Kim Windvogel and Kelly Eve Koopman's *They Called Me Queer* and The Nest Collective's *Stories of Our Lives*. This aided in appreciating the meanings assigned to gays in the selected texts.

Liamputtong (2019) characterizes qualitative inquiry as a broad approach that qualitative researchers adopt as a means to examine social circumstances and perceive social experiences. Liamputtong further asserts that this method is interpretative because qualitative researchers look for meanings that have been constructed by people thus making discoveries. It aims at providing researchers the opportunity to work with marginalized persons to address fairness in society.

Wellek and Warren (1956), foreground the significance of textual analysis by pointing out the distinction between the literary studies and the study of other academic disciplines. They argue that Literature is connotative and reflective. It aims at influencing the attitude, persuading and ultimately changing the reader through all kinds of literary techniques.

Thus, I analyzed the use of stylistics. These are satire, varieties of narrations employed by the gays to render their experiences. The data comprised the comparative textual analysis of the selected texts while examining the mentioned narrative techniques discernable throughout the texts. The study texts are primary written texts in present times by African queer writers and sympathizers that predominantly deal with issues within gayism sphere. Textual analysis was done, including robust secondary textual reading to offer a critical appreciation of the primary texts, and to interrogate the connotations of the language used explicitly and implicitly in the selected texts.

For secondary data, library research involving reading of secondary texts was undertaken. Through library research, a review of other secondary academic literature within the scope of the study such as scholarly journals, articles and research papers to support the arguments helped inform this study. Keywords in my research topic was searched on Google Scholar to systematically review literature touching on my topic. My reading method entails the stylistic approach to the selected texts, and employed close reading of the texts to identify the literary techniques, particularly satire and first person narrative perspective used by gay writers to fight for space among the heterosexist and the cisgender. Since a qualitative approach is used in this research, the findings of the analysis was described in chapters in a descriptive manner.

Ames and Lewin (2019) propound that purposive sampling may be explained as a technique used in qualitative research to select a specific group of individuals or units for analysis. *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* have won awards and critically reflect the contemporary gender relations in society. Because they are relatively recent, they are gradually attracting a lot of critical attention, debating queerness as an evolving and emerging societal attribute. Biggam (2018) explains the centrality of purposive sampling in representation, uniformity and establishment of particular establishment of particular comparisons to explain the differences between settings or individuals. Such comparison and contrast in the two selected texts helped critically discuss representation of the queer men in Kenya and South Africa.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to my research problem. It examines an array of written works that touch on gays as represented in literature. The review is done in line with this study's objectives: To examine how gay men construct their identities in response to dominant heteronormative discourses in the selected texts, to evaluate how satire serves as a tool of contestation in the selected texts and to analyze how narrative perspectives function as devices for understanding the gay experience in the selected texts.

According to Marr (2018), Jessica Grant's award winning novel, *Come, Thou Tortoise* (2009) plot revolves around the female protagonist Audrey. Through literary devices such as numerous flashbacks, the narrative represents Audrey's life situations, relationships and personal growth. Not only does Grant employ style to interrogate the tension between sexuality and biology within the family, but also through the narration of Audrey's personal struggles and her navigation through straight space Audrey captures the reader's attention on the deep rooted, heteronormative tendencies that have been central to the Canadian fiction. The style of flashback relays Audrey's struggles as a queer woman and how she copes in heterosexual spaces. This points to the fact that in queer themed Literature, literary devices are crucial for the LGBTQ community members to reaffirm their sexual and gender identity in heteronormative discourses. This aligns with this study's exploration of literary devices by gays in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* as a tool of reaffirming their queer identity.

Alice Walker, an American writer's novel *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998) was coldly received and quickly dismissed unlike her first five novels, particularly the Pulitzer Prize–winning *The Color Purple* (1982). *By the Light of My Father's Smile* reviews were

generally scornful and scholarship was rare hence, the novel never became part of a larger cultural or scholarly discourse (June 2021). This is ascribable to its queer based themes. Walker through literary language and style expresses the queer realities that queer couples grapple with in constructing their identity. Through imagery and vivid description she clearly makes readers affiliated to heterosexuality uneasy as the novel begins. She explores and describes both fulfilling and problematic relationships between heterosexual and queer couples. Walker's traditional themes may not capture the twenty first century readers where majority are homophobic. Albeit the novel is set in the mid-twentieth century, and largely in Mexico, the portrayals of love and sexuality in *By the Light of My Father's Smile* challenge the tenets of hetero normativity in contemporary American culture. One of Walker's consistent aims has been the subversion of hetero normativity. In the novel, Walker effectively manipulates language to scrutinize the damage that occurs when Americans persistently uphold the culturally embedded behaviors that oppress and marginalize specific groups of people especially from the queer community. Therefore, Walker persuades her readers towards new strategies to expose, question and overturn inculcated ideologies that maintain patriarchy and hetero normativity. This relates to this study because just as language is used in this case to push back against queer marginalization, this study uses the selected texts in portraying the use of style; satire and narrative perspectives, by literary writers as a tool to contest heteronormative discourses by gays as seen in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* in the Kenyan and South African contexts. As such, literary style plays a key role in redefining queer identity.

According to Huang (2011), the Taiwan prolific writer Pai Hsien-Yung novel *Niezi* or *The Sinful Son* (1983) which was translated into English as *The Crystal Boys* (1993), is widely acclaimed as the first modern Chinese novel on gay theme. It explores the intersection between queerness and state culture. The novel represents homosexual characters that are repressed in the Chinese society. The novel begins with a depiction of New Park, a gay hang out in Taipei capital of the republic of china in Taiwan. The first person narrator, a teenager reveals that it is only 'nights' and no 'days' for the gay kingdom and as soon as the sun comes out, they go into hiding. Pai's evocation of day and night imagery is

symbolic and creates the aesthetic value of language in Literature, as it implies atrocity and secrecy. Homosexual oppression is raised and addressed in Taiwan, the representation of male homosexuality in contemporary Taiwan through gay characters and evocation of symbolism in this novel is a strategy to challenge heteronormative sexual constructs. This is important as it affirms this study's assertions that language and style are strategies employed by queer men in the selected texts to oppose conventional sexual constructs to reaffirm their identity.

Andrews (2019), asserts that during apartheid in South Africa, queer identities were almost unheard of in South African Literature. However, after the fall of the institutionalized apartheid Literature began to explore the role of queer people in the history of South Africa and also appreciate that queer people are part of the South African society. Thus, eminent authors who explored queer themes emerged. Most of these writers and the stories they told were from a white outlook with the glaring absence of black queer voices especially in South African literary novels. Novelists such as K. Sello Duiker, Fred Khumalo, Zukiswa Wanner, and Chwayita Ngamlana, represent black, queer characters as narrative techniques in post-apartheid novels and how they defy cultural, racial, and sexuality ideologies as they grapple with their identities and with questions of belonging and visibility as seen in *They Called Me Queer.*

These authors, through fiction grant queer characters space to fight for their place and to voice the realities of queer South African lives and push back against systems that oppress queer people. However, even in post-apartheid, queer characters and themes are limited in South African Literature due to cultural factors and resistance as represented in the works of Wanner and Duiker. These literary works offer central counter narratives to the common homophobia through affirmation of the black, queer subject and their place in South Africa. Duiker, in his play *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* through the character Tshepo, a black homosexual protagonist defeats overwhelming societal and cultural barriers and finds a sense of freedom and optimism and accepts himself as a black queer man. Duiker, through

employing the style of symbolism represents how gay characters find spaces both internally and in their social environments, where they can express their desires and assert their queer identities, just as in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called me Queer*, queer men deploy literary style to rediscover their identity.

Similarly, Fred Khumalo's *Seven Steps to Heaven* (2007), set in Durban, South Africa revolves around two boys, Sizwe whose father is a staunch, anti-gay parish minister and Thulani, who have a deep connection and express the same-sex behaviour. Fred uses several stylistic devices such as irony and anaphorism in his novel to depict the struggles experienced by the black homosexuals among the straight people in the South African community. Published three years after Khumalo's novel, Zukiswa Wanner's *Men of the South* (2010), is a representation of urban black masculinities that disrupt patriarchal conceptions of fatherhoods and men's societal roles. Wanner has very successfully brought out the issues faced by gays in the modern African society, in a humorous, witty and hilarious style. Therefore, style brings out gay experience and navigation as seen in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called me Queer*.

Nahole (2023) and Hoad (2016) suggest that 'I am a homosexual, Mum' examines homosexuality as detailed by the late Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina. Though late, Wainaina remains a voice for the queer community and his legacy carries on in his writings, greatly impacts LGBTQ based Literature. Wainaina, in an interview revealed that it is a lost chapter of his memoir, *One Day I will Write About this Place* (2011). It is an imaginary story as he pictures himself revealing his sexual orientation to his late mother while she lies helplessly on her deathbed. He contests the heteronormative sexual constructs by coming out amidst the extremely homophobic Kenyan society. This highlights the secrecy and suspicion since he did not reveal his sexual preference to his mother before her death or his father. Through the first person narrative technique and rhetorical questions Wainaina represents the agential capacity of homosexuals when he opposes the view that homosexuality is un-African and suggests that it is homophobia that is rather un-African.

He blames religion as the origin of anti-gay sentiments and homophobia. This further represents literary style as a tool to contest heteronormative sexuality constructs by queer men and rebuild their identity. It is relevant to this study as it broadens scholarship in the gay sphere and deployment of style to defy heterosexism in the straight space as depicted in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called me Queer* through satire and narrative perspectives

2.2 Construction of Identities by Gays amidst Heteronormative Sexuality Constructs

Pollitt et al. (2021) research reveals the queer theory defines heteronormativity as the temerity and empowering of heterosexuality. The research claims that research on how young people make sense of and narrate heteronormativity in their own lives is necessary for purposes of informing theories of heteronormativity. Additionally, majority in the society uphold and approve heteronormative sexual relations and tend to refrain from same sex conduct as seen in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*. Indeed, Hellman (2019) observes that gays contest for space in the society due to the impact of heterosexism on both the public's imagination of the gays' sexuality and the likely effect of internalized heterosexism on gays.

Scandurra et al. (2021) asserts that heteronormativity relates to a hierarchical social structure, that confines heterosexuality and binary gender identity as normal and natural. Thus, expounding the borders of passable heterosexuality and gender identity in Italy. The research points up heteronormativity as a hierarchical and structured societal system oppressing Italian Sexual Gender Minority (SGM) individuals. Just like in Italy, Mwaniki et al (2022), argue that young gays in Nairobi do not reveal their sexual orientation for fear of stigmatization, a pointer that heteronormative constructs are dominant in both Kenya and Italy.

A Heteronormative ideology as a cultural force is reinforced even in religious states. Subsequently, Naeimi and Kjaran (2022) point out the functionality of educational institutions in relation to the gender and sexuality constructs in educational spaces and norms in learning institutions.

Heterosexism is also rife in educational spaces. While Wilkinson (2021) argues that queer-identifying peoples have more rights, opportunities, and recognition in educational policy than generations prior post war in Northern Ireland, only one in five Northern Irish schools have touched upon lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) topics. This reluctance is because of the firm heteronormative sexuality constructs, which are also discernable in narratives in *They Called Me Queer* and *Stories of Our Lives.* Furthermore*,* Regan, Valentine & Meyer (2021), suggest that heteronormativity expresses the credence that heterosexuality is and should be the preferred system of sexuality and should inform binary understanding of gender identity and expression. Queer theory seeks to disrupt dominant binaries that shape our understandings of gender and sexuality. Queer theory and heteronormativity facilitate interrogation and questioning of sex and gender systems in educational institutions and research to appreciate the experiences of LGBTQ youth.

In tourism, research by Usai, Cai & Wassler (2022), reveal that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) tourists are considered one of the most profitable and, at the same time, vulnerable and discriminated-against segments of the industry due to the heteronormative norm in the society. Structural heteronormativity is identified as a constraining factor and queer identities feel there is need to denaturalize heterosexuality in a tourism context by giving a voice to an often-overlooked and scarcely understood tourism segment.

Heterosexism is also dominant in the workspace. According to Adikaram and Liyanage (2021), Sri Lanka endorses hegemonic heterosexual masculinity hence gay male employees are harassed due to their sexual orientation. They encounter stigma as a result of failing to comply with the heteronormative hegemonic discourses of masculinity and heterosexuality through microassault, organizational exclusion, and sexual harassment.

The socially constructed and institutionalized systems of power also perpetuate the gay employees' harassment experiences. Corlett et al (2022) also asserts that there are manifestations of heteronormativity in the workplace where heteronormativity is reproduced in the configuration of space, organizational policies, and the monitoring of their accomplishment by leaders. Employees interact with others based on heterosexual presumptions and reward what is aligned with heteronormativity, and censor what is not. Finally, individuals acting of their own accord may perform their gender in ways that strengthen the presumption of heterosexuality and communicate heteronormativity alignment. This study adds to these findings by providing an in-depth understanding of how harassment is manifested in the Kenyan and South African workspace with its distinctive heteronormative norms and values as captured in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer.*

According to them, Islamic Republic of Iran is a religious state whose sexuality heavily relies on heteronormativity and gender normative principles. Learning institutions are therefore strongly heteronormative and queerness is viewed as illegitimate. The Iranian education system upholds the state's heteronormative ideology. The ideology dictates that students must be heterosexual and cisgender while sticking to Islamic values of strict gender binaries. Sexuality and gender diversity education is therefore not condoned. Heteronormative sexuality construct also notable and ingrained in religious spaces.

Nicole Kligerman (2007), in her article, 'Homosexuality in Islam: A Difficult Paradox', presents the contradictory physical existence of homosexuality. She examines the complicacies of gayism through delving into Islamic inclinations and Qur'an beliefs on gayism. She also explores the lasting legacies of the West on sexuality and the contemporary violation of the rights of Muslim gays. Nicole points out that the Qur'an straightforwardly castigates gayness as it refers to homosexuals as Lot's people or *qaum Lut*. This alludes to Prophet Lut in the Qur'an or Prophet Lot in the Bible who gave stern warnings against homosexuality in Sodom and Gomorrah. God annihilated all humans in

these cities through raining fire and brimstone. Lut in the Quran cautions men against having sexual desire towards their fellow men and calls it an atrocity. This is evident in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* as gays narrate their experiences in reconstructing their identities in the education space and religious spaces where they face rejection and persecution.

While SGM individuals continue to be marginalized, they remain defiant to heteronormative sexual constructs as manifested in Muparamoto (2021) who points out that queer identities are increasingly becoming noticeable, and that Zimbabwe has experienced mushrooming of queer marshaling and sexual identity politics, pointing to the agential ability of queer communities to push back. This defiance to heteronormativity by gays is presented in *Stories of our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*. This is despite late President Mugabe's pejorative and homophobic remarks that LGBTQI community in Harare was worse than dogs and pigs (Mugabe, 2017). In Kenya, Raila Odinga, the former Kenyan Prime Minister in November 2010 demanded for the arrest of all practitioners of homosexuality in Kenya (BBC, 2010). Additionally, former president Uhuru Kenyatta dismissed gay right as of no importance to Kenyans while attributing it to the societal and cultural norms of African/Kenyans who do not embrace homosexuality (Anampour, 2018). President Ruto, too, has termed homosexuality as unacceptable in Kenya (Ruto, 2023). Indeed, Moagi et.al (2021) asserts that aspects of gender identity and sexual preference continually jeopardize LGBTQI individuals in Africa as depicted in *They Called Me Queer* and *Stories of Our Lives.*

Jolly (2023) also asserts that international development work was heteronormative as it assumes heterosexual gender stereotyped household models and publicly views sexual gender minority as sickness rather than a prospective contributor to wellness. Over a decade later, LGBTIA+ and sexual pleasure have occupied space in development discourses and there is integration of sexual rights. However, queer identities seem to reinforce other intersecting axes of inequality. By joining Non-Governmental

Organisations and other social and civil rights groups, the gay community in *They called Me Queer* and *Stories of our Lives* contest heteronormative constructs.

A study by Andrikopoulos and Spronk (2023) discloses that the queer community construct their identities by striving to 'un-queer' what is perceived to be queer thus 'queering' the drawbacks that affect the queer individuals in Africa. Lewis and Hermann (2023) postulate that in Sydney, Australia, and Johannesburg, South Africa, Pride events are instrumental in recreating the identity of queer individuals. These events aid in affirming queer identities while providing acceptance, a sense of belonging, exposure and connection. While Pride events like this help recreate identity of queer persons in public spaces, there is need to interrogate how gays choose to recreate their gay identities in private spaces as demonstrated in this study.

Ofei and Oppong-Adjei (2021) also assert that contemporary works of African literature use narratives to create meaning of queer individuals' experiences within an African setting. The plots of these literary texts revolve around characters that manifest undisguised queer erotic social ties with other characters while addressing pertinent concerns of queer sexual identities. These individuals cannot help being the way they are hence affirming their identities in the African heteronormativity and queer discourses.

This is reflected in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* where Africans who self-identify as queer depict the queer world to re-invent their identity. Sahrani, Kuncara and Sudirman (2022) propose that texts and narratives in form of literary works enable gays to experience self-acceptance and affirmation of their identities and stop being closeted in a homophobic and heteronormative society. This study intends to augment this re-invention by interrogating how self-confessed gays in the selected texts navigate queer spaces.

Al Areqih (2022) propounds that literary works from Africa, in addressing sexuality topics brings to light the construction of the queer self-identity and how the societal norms shape that process. As such, this literary works envisage queer liberation from violence and constraints put by African cultures, norms and religion. Although some studies have argued that LGBTQ is from Western countries and is un-African, others like Casteleyn (2019) have argued that queerness was already in Africa and is not just a foreign culture. This study consolidates Cateleyn's views by propounding on the reality of African queer lives experiences.

Further, Al Areqih (2022) posits that major renowned African literary authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, among others are diverse in their fictitious writing particularly in form, narrative, technique and are able to high spot multiple themes that are perceived as abominable or insignificant in African communities. Through introducing queerness in authentic African Literature, the writers' objective is decolonizing African queer sexualities and deconstructing queer African identities. In like manner, the two anthologies of queer narratives: *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* relay African sexuality based on personal life experiences while expounding construction of gay identities by queer men and how this process is influenced by Kenyan and South African customs. This thesis helps draw comparison with several queer-themed fiction writings among African literary writers by exploring lived-realities of gay narrators in Kenya and South Africa.

Similarly, Courtois (2022) puts forward that in other parts of Africa such as Nigeria, present-time novelists write LGBTQ themed novels in English language to give voice and visibility to gays as sexual minorities hence recreating their identity in the heteronormative and homophobic Nigerian society. As a result of their gayness, the characters in this novels are portrayed as controversial leading to the surfacing and development of long silenced

narratives. Just as in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* where gay characters are foregrounded, queer identities reconstructed and interpreted as per the African perspective, Courtois further asserts that to aid reconstruction of queer identity, Nigerian novelists and writers play a key role in underscoring the marginalization and silencing of the 'abominable' gay characters through activism and foregrounding the characters. Thus, this disconnects them from gender colonialism and brings about liberation of Nigerian queer individuals. Therefore, the significance of literary works in queer identity construction cannot be ignored. Similarly, Priyadharshan (2022) conforms to this proposition and asserts that among other examples, the novel *The Death of Vivek Oji* by the Nigerian author Akwaeke Emezi's exposes the psychological turmoil experienced by queer individuals in Nigeria. For instance, the queer protagonist Vivek dies as a result of the prudish Igbo society that predominantly manifests heteronormative practices. Therefore, the narration of the novel paves way for resistance as it subverts heteronormativity upheld by the Nigerian state and society. This thesis discusses lived-realities of gay persons to further explore how gays challenge the dominant heteronormative discourses.

Macheso (2021) establishes that authors employ the present-day African queer fiction as an instrument to embody and rehumanise queer identities in Sub-Saharan African societies. Like other scholars, Macheso argues that queer subjectivities are often marginalized by heteropartriachal authorities that endeavor to crash queer agency. Unlike Macheso's, this study is based on true life experiences of queer men and how they affirm their queer identities in hostile African environments. This study demonstrates that queer life writing can be employed to advance queer agency and queer identity construction. Furthermore, in another research, Macheso (2021) establishes that the embedded heteronormative discourses in sub-Saharan Africa dictate what is permissible and what is not. Informed by their sexual identities, LGBTQ individuals are exposed hence perceived as insignificant. Further, he claims that queer characters in cultural and literary texts aid in advancing the agential capacity of LGBTQI community and fight against queer exclusion to assert their identity. This characters are meant to encourage social change and reform the permeated

scornful attitudes mainstream societies have towards sexual diversities among the queer individuals hence affirming their selfhood. Therefore, for the LGBTQI members, the struggle for queer emancipation is paramount for posterity of queerness in sub-Saharan Africa.

Gore (2022) argues that in state socialism queer oppression and contention are matters of concern. Further, Nguyen (2023) submits that realization of queer emancipation is through political and economic structure overhaul. Pollitt et.al. (2021) submit that in queer theory, heteronormativity is the prominence and the promoting of heterosexuality as a societal norm. While some African writers have attempted to unveil the experiences of African queer community, Akpan and Okon (2023) argue that there is a long established intentional silence and a conscious sidelining of gayness by other African writers and critics in African literature yet it is an aspect of African life. This study therefore comes in to fill this gap by enhancing queer visibility in Africa and facilitating their voicing of this marginalization and sidelining.

2.3 Satire as a Contestation Tool

According to Kahramanovna (2019), satire plays an important role in eradicating the social defects in society. The presence of satirical character and types in literary works is widely used to expose such flaws and imperfections, thus striving to eradicate its negative traits.

Murodova (2022), asserts that satire is one of the most effective and successful ways of getting a message out in the contemporary world. The author fully mocks vices with the intention of getting rid of such vices in the society. Humour, ridicule, exaggeration, hyperbole, irony, parody, burlesque, juxtaposition, comparison and analogy are frequently utilized in satirical works which could be poems, short stories, tales or novels.

Ibroximovich, Rahimjon, and Yusupovich (2022), claim that satire is an accusatory literary work depicting the negative phenomena of reality in a funny, ugly form. It is also mockery, reprimanding of societal human weaknesses.

According to Adetuyi, Ajibade and Patrick (2019), satire is a technique employed by writers to expose and criticize foolishness or societal ills involving an individual or a society. Apart from playing the role of an entertainer, the artist uses his artistic creation to instill truth into people's consciousness by using humour to ridicule the victim(s). Satire, in terms of literary arts, is a literary device. Literary devices are often referred to as figures of speech; therefore, satire should also be regarded as a figure of speech that writers include in their writing to enhance creativity. Religion is often linked to purity, morality, justice, truth, fairness and love. Religious leaders and the adherents of a certain religion are often criticized through religious satire especially when they fail to live up to the standards of their religion. Religion presumably meant to advocate for love and affection especially for the downtrodden and marginalized is satirized for demonizing gay men instead of embracing them as dictated by the tenets of religion.

Azeez, Sattar, and Al-Bahrani (2019), contend that what differentiates satire from other types of humor, like irony and parody is that irony sheds light on certain matters or figures presenting them in a ridiculous way without the intention of mending and parody are targeted to aesthetic customs and attitudes. Satire is defined as "the use of ridicule, irony, sarcasm to lampoon something or someone" (P.205) This definition implies that satire manipulates other types of humor like irony and sarcasm when scoffing things or people.

For Singh (2012), in satire, vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, and society itself, to improve humanity. Although satire is usually meant to be funny, its greater purpose is often constructive social criticism, using wit as a weapon and as a tool to draw attention to both particular and wider

issues in society. Satire is a technique employed by writers to expose and criticize foolishness and corruption of an individual or a society by using humor, irony, exaggeration or ridicule. Satire is a comical piece of writing which makes fun of an individual or a society to expose its stupidity and shortcomings. Writers expect that whosoever they criticize improve their character by overcoming their weaknesses. Satire and irony are interlinked. Irony is the difference between what is said or done and what is actually meant. According to Shavkatovna (2019), satire is a genre of literature in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, drawing reader's or the audience's attention to a particular or wider issues in society, with the intent of shaming individuals, institutions, governments, or society as a whole into improvement. Kemit and Hendar (2022), argue that satirical expressions may be used to criticize inhumane government policies and the cunning means the government employs to gains its power. Satire is against hypocrisy. For instance, the Kenyan constitution prohibits marriages involving homosexuals as article 45 (2) and specifies that "every adult has the right to marry a person of the opposite sex, based on the free consent of the parties" (The Constitution of Kenya, 2010). The applicability and complexity of Kenyan laws in regard to queerness is also exhibited in the case of Andrey Mbugua Ithibu Versus Kenya National Examination Council, where s/he sought to change her gender mark in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) certificate following his change of name from Andrew to Audrey as s/he navigated her/his gender identity disorder.

Additionally, Park-Ozee (2019) propound that satire is important in political and cultural commentary and that irony is a powerful technique in the making of satire. In the function of satire, Boler and Turpin (2008) assert that satirists suggest that irony is an element of satire and protagonists may significantly utilize satire to critique and unmask the weaknesses of the ruling class and speaking to them the unsaid truth. Moreover, satire foregrounds contradictory practices, dismisses and ridicules the opinions of intolerant persons while expressing the need for genuine debates. Further, Opitz (2007) submits that the term satire is derived from the Latin phrase 'Lanx Satura' and the term satire was commonly used to heavily criticize and heap scorn on degeneracy and disreputable

individuals in the society. Opitz also adds that satire later outstretched to works of art that are inclined to criticism. Satire is not self-standing but deeply connects with other elements such as irony to draw public attention towards certain matters. LeBoeuf (2007) argue that satire is pivotal for social commentary since historical time to date and is widespread more than ever. Satire in Literature is instrumental in sensitizing for social and political change while unmasking absurdity to display a particular human shortcoming or vice making satire involving and convincing in the modern society. McClennen et.al, (2014) put forward that satire is a perfect tool for social critique and it works by ridiculing hypocrisy to bring about progress and change.

2.4 Narrative Perspectives in Navigating Gay Experiences

Rifktovna and Ergashevna (2022), discusses the narrative perspectives as an important strategy of communication between the writer and the reader. According to Lanser (2021), the first person and third person narrative perspectives help in articulation of queer sexuality by narrators in narratives. Kord, and Sedighi (2022), argue that the narrative voice relies on the way the narrator tells a story, its process, and its result. The narrator is responsible for the modification and rules of the story. Thus the narrative voice is the narrator's voice that determines the point of view. In a first-person narrative, the character and the narrator merge. However, the narrator recounts the conception of the character's manner to reveal her/his perception through thought and feeling. This is relevant in this study and narrative voice is important as it helped examine gays as narrators and characters in *They Called Me Queer* and *Stories of Our Lives* where they recall and narrate their lived experiences. Narrative perspectives facilitate gay narrators in the telling of their own stories, from their own mouths as creators, writers, protagonists in spaces where the practice of homosexuality is unacceptable unlike the fictional and creative imaginations; thus, making the stories credible and original.

The argument by Flaminia &Rosalba (2022) is that the first-person narrative perspective is a tool for deconstructing stereotyped representations of gender-based violence by women and giving voice to the survivors of gender-based violence is inferred in queer community of selected texts to contest for their space in homophobic spaces.

He (2022) argues that renowned Chinese authors such as Chen Qian creatively employ the first-person narrative perspective in their literary texts. The choice and use of the first-person narrative perspective plays an important role in the texts ability to achieve its effect naturally and in expressing the author's thoughts from the use of first-person narrative perspective. Telling a story in the first-person is a subtle and influential method because of its particularity. It helps in expressing the real-life events of queer identities and the heteronormative perspective of the society. The use of the first-person narrative perspective plays an important role that cannot be ignored in the narrative effect of the selected texts.

According to Al-Alami (2019), a point of view in a narrative relates to the narrator's position in the narration of characters and events. Point of view is significant because it dictates the narrator's choice of the information to share with the readers and the depth to which the reader identifies with the protagonist. The first-person narrative voice is effective for a character-driven novel as it alludes to either the protagonist or an observer using the pronoun 'I' and is deployed to express a character's thoughts and feelings. Additionally, a study by Salem et.al. (2017) reveal that the first person narrative perspective entails narrating a story from the protagonist's outlook which greatly enhances the reader's propensity to assume this outlook.

Similarly, in narrating trauma and queer perspectives, Olondo and Musumba (2024) put forward that the narrator controls what to narrate in the first person narrative voice. Thus, in this point of view, information available to the readers is by this narrator only, hence it is subjective towards his or her ideologies. The readers therefore, must engage with the literary works and are free to interpret, create meaning and draw conclusions for

themselves. This is clearly applicable to the gay narrators in the selected texts because they are able to express their personal opinions about heterosexism and how to elude oppressive heteronormativity, especially in *Stories of Our Lives* where the narrators choose to hide their identity and places of residence for fear of victimization. Further, Olondo and Musumba (2024) assert that queer lives in the African continent often face minoritisation even in spheres where they are legally accepted such as in South Africa. Nevertheless, amidst contentious discourses that range from 'homosexuality is un-African' to 'Africa is homophobic' there exists a substantial creation of art that defines being a queer African. Therefore, drawing from these assertions, the first person narrative voice is an exemplary strategy for the queer narrators as they recount these 'abominable' practices and the different forms of penalties they are subjected to by the unfriendly heteronormative spaces that frown upon their existence, such as brutality, shaming and stigma as well as ways they grapple with homophobic environs.

Indeed, narrative voice is consequential for readers in exploring close textual reading, comparative analysis of texts and how characters interact with cultural norms and internalise them. As such, Esadia (2021) submits that the narrators' points of view and voices are powerful techniques deployed by writers to foreground the struggles encountered by characters, particularly of those attempting to find their own identity in their journey of self-realization and self-discovery. Esadia's analysis of selected texts by Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor highlights that in short stories, flashback and the omniscient narrative voice are pivotal in helping a narrator be cognizant of realities particularly when faced with marginalization in homophobic surroundings. The readers are also enabled to get a glimpse of the narrator's identity and that this identity is directly connected to the places and spaces he occupies. This insinuates that the setting where the narrators stay plays a major role in their understanding and formation of their interpersonal relationships just like the happenings they are involved in. Queer narrators in the selected anthologies as will be discussed in this section, have utilized the omniscient narrative voice and the first person narrative voice and retrospect as they narrate life experiences from childhood and how the various facets of society such as family, work, religious, political and educational

spaces contribute to the shaping of their queer identities. Moreover, the narrative voices aid in their expression of queer perception and the push back towards queer prejudice to thwart marginalization. Further, the readers are able to appreciate the queer identities of these African narrators. Therefore, it can be said that in the portrayal of literary characters and their identity creation, narration is significant. The perspective voice of the story amplify the readers' appreciation of the text by appealing to the senses of the reader and enhancing the readers' creativity because they help the reader become creative enough by envisaging various circumstances the narrators have to deal with. Esadia (2021) further submits that writers recall and express past events through storytelling while giving moral standpoints on the events. Thus, the readers are informed on how to go about and interpret these episodes. Narratives told from the first person's narrator perspective tend to be better understood because they develop through the narrator's eyes especially in the narration of selfhood tales. However, both the first person and the authorial narrations are instrumental in revealing the protagonist's mental characteristics and personal identity quest struggles.

This is in line with Ganzevoort (2011) who argues that narrative approaches enable marginalized persons to voice their personal life experiences and share their otherwise 'dangerous stories' in the lens of societal norms and traditions. This is pertinent to the selected anthologies of this study as sexually minoritised narrators express their life accounts with the help of narrative perspective voice. Further, to emphasise the significance of local narratives that call into question the hegemonic logic of an oppressive society, scholars having a critical outlook such as feminist and queer utilize narrative approaches. Ganzevoort further asserts that regarding the aspects of a narrative, structure is the first dimension; and it helps in the presentation of the story elements and plot chronologically. The narrative may also create its own time and may not present events chronologically but the episodes in the story are interconnected through foreshadowing and flashbacks. The second dimension is the narrative perspective and it represents the stance from which the writer chooses to construe his or her story. As such, narrative perspectives allow the readers to critique the effect of the narrator's position including his background, age and gender. This leads to the conclusion that the first person narration provides a

platform for the narrator to voice his or her respective interests, desires and needs using relevant tone as seen in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer.* In expressing their innermost desires and interests they also highlight queer coping strategies as they challenge heteronormativity. The role of the character is the last dimension in a narrative. This expresses how the writer assigns roles to him/herself and other characters in the story such as the main characters or victims to enhance the narrative structure and the narrator's identity.

Furthermore, Omuteche (2011) notes that in narration, narrative techniques such as flashback, foreshadowing, internal monologue, description among others, are pivotal in enhancing the plot development in a narrative. Additionally, in forms of narration and point of view, the narrative voice of the narrator lays out the narrative perspective in a story. The point from which a story is told is determined by the narrator of the story. The narrator can be a first person or third person. The first person narrator is usually involved in the action and happenings at any moment in the story. While describing the role of other characters in the story, this narrator must tell his or her own role in the narrative. However, if a narrator is not a character in the story and takes the position of a distant observer, he or she is referred to as the third person narrator. This type of narrator narrates what other characters do and may exhibit the all-knowing attribute. Some may portray or have limited knowledge about other characters hence recount only conversations eavesdropped on and often describe people, events or situations without giving their own reflections about them. Moreover, there is need for readers of a narrative to pay attention to the perspective of the narrator, his or her personality, comments and what they know or don't. The omniscient narrator, who is the third person narrator involves the reader by allowing readers to uncover and analyse the unfolding events. The first person narrator and protagonist impacts the readers fully by allowing them to share in his or her experiences and actualizations. Thus, the point of view from which a story is written is important in shaping how the readers experience the narratives.

Omuteche (2011) observes that various writers use points of view in a diversified way. For example, Grace Ogot in her short story The White Veil, deploys omniscient narration, empowering the narrator to describe the other characters' actions, thoughts and events to the readers as a distant observer. This is central in enhancing objectivity making readers interpret events and characters without biasness and formed opinions. On the other hand, Chika Unigwe in her short story, The Day Independence Came, deploys first person narration where the narrator is involved in the story and is revealing to the readers what happened to her. In this point of view, besides the narrator hardly understanding herself, the narrator's understanding of other characters such as her parents and events in the story is also limited. Thus, the reader has to be actively involved in interpretative reading as his or her creativity and wisdom is required for making inferences in the reading of such a story. This is in agreement with Wasike (2000), who in his analysis of Wahome Mutahi's *The Jail Bugs* proposes that the first narration point of view is a perfect narrative strategy because it allows the author ample space to relay to the audience a direct description of the happenings and the characters present in the narrative. He asserts that this would be a perfect narrative strategy for texts which are critical in nature. The reason is that the author represents honesty, intense emotions about their experiences, dense and detailed account of the systemic oppressive heteronormativity, and how they overcome and their struggle to achieve queer liberation like in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer.* Just as Wasike, Van Peer and Maat (2001) argue that in a narrative, narrative perspective voice determine how readers interpret the behaviour of narrators when reading a story and whether they will be sympathetic towards the narrator's plight.

Also, Omuteche (2021) in his analysis of Ngugi wa Thiong'o *Petals of Blood* explores the complex first person communal 'we' narrator. He observes that it is effectively deployed by fiction authors in enhancing plot development, thematic concerns and producing the general feeling or atmosphere that a literary text creates within a reader. Just as this narrative point is used by Ngugi to emphasise the significant transformations in Ilmorog town in *Petals of Blood*, it is arguable that comparatively, as represented in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*, queer persons utilize the first person narrative to

emphasize and contest for changes and liberation from queer marginalization and repression. The first person narrative voice is impressive to these queer narrators because it celebrates the resilience as a way to navigate queerness amidst unsettled past and present encounters with trauma, opposition and homophobia from the African heteronormative society, while being optimistic about a promising future for African queer lives. Omuteche further observes that the first person narrative voice communal 'we' is a language feature that strengthens intimacy and evokes compassion and empathy from the audience. The first person narrative voice makes vivid and enlivens the narrator's experiences to the audience such that the readers feel like they are present, side by side with the narrator. Thus, this creates another level of narration which facilitates the audience appreciation of coping mechanisms and struggles of queer persons in the selected texts. Worth noting is Berkes and Boswell (2019) who posit that queer African creative writing, also termed as 'contemporary queer turn' is a powerful tool for short story writers, autobiographers, memoirists and novelists to represent queer sexuality diversities and its appreciation in the African continent through literary styles. Through these narrative approaches and styles, the prolific nature of the literary imagination of these queer authors is substantiated. Berkes and Boswell further assert that in the contemporary queer writing, there has been the burgeoning of an abundance of queer life writing in the African countries.

Subsequently, these queer life writing anthologies such as *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* show the importance of forging local and global queer alliances as well as aid in provision of publishing platforms to members of the LGBTQ community who are often subservient in heteronormative societies. Additionally, these makes the African queer community visible and vocal hence strengthening their agency and challenging the notion that queerness is un-African. These African queer mostly non-fictional stories not only represent a socially marginalized group but also examine the meaning of being queer in Africa today. African queer life writers express their life experiences, their everyday plight in their quest for acceptance in their heterosexual families and communities and their constant battle with homophobia and hostility. This is aimed at foregrounding the reimagining of queer African sexuality. Forms of narration are based on the idea of a

common literary language, or a universal pattern of codes that operates within the text of a work. This puts under investigation literary pieces of language and yields an understanding of the components has in its very texture. Such pieces of language include flashbacks and irony.

CHAPTER THREE: GAY IDENTITIES CONSTRUCTS AS SUBVERSION OF DOMINANT HETERONORMATIVE SEXUALITY DISCOURSES

3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the construction of identities by gays amidst heteronormative sexuality constructs. It interrogates the challenges of becoming queer and the re-conceptualization of queer self-hood by queer men through literary techniques such as satire and narrative perspective. This enables the exploration of the subversion of the heteronormative sexuality discourses to become queer in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer.* The chapter employs the queer theory to further underpin, ground and deepen analysis. While analysing queer identity construction, this study also relied on the various themes present in the selected texts such as finding identity, societal intolerance, self-love and acceptance, challenges in family and queer relations which serve as a tool of validation and understanding for queer individuals.

3.2. Challenges of Becoming Queer

Becoming queer denotes individuals embracing sexual diversities or any sexual identity that is not considered straight or cisgender by the society. Van den Berg (2016) discloses that liberal gays claim that declaring and revealing their sexual identity frees them from the constraints of heteronormativity. Also, Motschenbacher (2020) reveals that in the nineteenth century, there has been sexual identity variations among individuals and communities which has shaken the foundation of gender binaries. Suen et.al. (2020) argue that in relation to gayness, an individual's sexual identity is determined by the sexual attraction between persons of the same gender. In the context of this study, it is about human males being attracted to each other. It is also about these men being drawn romantically, sexually and emotionally to each other. On the other hand, gender identity in relation to gayness is not about sexual attractions but who a person is, in this case, gender queer.

Consequently, this has been challenged by the heteronormative dominant discourses in many African societies and by majority globally. Accepting and becoming queer shows attempts and effort by queer men to weaken societal heteronormativity. An anonymous narrator in "Identity", part three of *Stories of Our Lives* is intransigent about queerness and heterosexism. He feels gratified about his gay identity and confesses that he would still bolster up his queer identity even upon his resurgence in another life. He also envisions himself getting married to a man in future in the Kenyan heteronormative discourses. This implies that when queer men possess unbending beliefs and inflexible ideas about their identities, it enables them to construct their queer identity in predominantly heteronormative settings. The narrator says, 'I would love to get married to a man one day. Even if I was to come back in another life, I would still want TO BE GAY' (P. 223). Similarly, another anonymous narrator in "Society and the Future" of the same anthology also reinforces his identity by refusing to be hypocritical and living a double life. He expresses,

> I want a gay family; I want to marry a man. I usually tell myself that if I have to marry a lady, I'll have to struggle to stop being gay. Living a double LIFE IS EXPENSIVE (P. 245).

Despite the antagonism, the negative attitudes and feelings towards the sexual identity of the narrators, they embrace their identity hence becoming queer amidst dominant heterosexism. De la Mata, Cala and Sala (2022) assert that Judith Butler's Performativity theory tenets buttress the queer theory. Further, these principles of performativity theory by Butler that gender identity is not natural but is learned and performed are actualized by queer persons to construct their identities in dominant heteronormative discourses. There is however an ongoing debate and gender identity remains a contested debate as both social and biological construct. Further, on Judith Butler performativity and sexualities, Ginano (2021) puts forward that one is not born, but chooses to become a man or a woman and gender can be described as an individual's constructed identity whether masculine or feminine from sociocultural aspects of their lives. Butler (2020) asserts that the feminist

theory has often been inclined to finding fault with the ordinary explanations of sex thus, questioning sexuality that presume biological sex, male or female determines gender, masculinity and femininity. The feminist theory describes gender identity as attained through a performance that is compelled by social restrictions and taboos and the body is instrumental in enabling the performance of such social and cultural roles. Similarly, research by Mikkola (2008) reveals that feminism is believed to be a movement that works towards putting an end to the oppression of women. In this context, the term 'man' or 'woman' viewed as a sex term means that biological and features of anatomy such as sex organs determines what it means to be a human male or female. However, Mikkola further asserts that feminists understand 'man' or 'woman' differently: as a gender term that is determined by sociocultural factors and not as a sex term. As a result, this has elicited interest and contention in the feminist theory because feminists differentiate sex from gender while other standard language users seem to use gender and sex interchangeably. Feminists claim that gender is determined by social and cultural aspects while sex is determined biologically. Drawing from this, it can be said that generally most people assume that sex and gender are similar terms; that men are human males and women are human females. Feminists dispute this as they advance that the two terms differ in meaning. The feminist philosophy argue that while sex defines human males and females in relation to biological features such as genitalia, hormones and chromosomes, gender defines men and women depending on social factors such as identity and social roles. To some extent, in making this distinction, the feminist ideology motivates queer men to challenge heteronormativity by countering the standard definition of sex and gender. The queer theory and the feminist theory are related because they address the normalized 'othering' and marginalization of queer identities and women that tend to occur in the society. Just as feminist theory focuses on women voices and experiences for liberation from heteropatriarchy, so does the queer theory advance the agency and liberation of queer men from hetero dominance and heteropatriarchy. Queer men are successful in their utilizing of the feminist approach because it helps strengthen their agency. This concept, in supporting the belief that one is not born a woman but can become a woman by performance, empowers their performance of these societally dictated female roles hence constructing their queer identity. However, there is some aspect of failure as it tends to be daunting for

queer men because these female social gender roles are restrictive and are regarded as taboos when performed by men, especially in the African context. Therefore, they still experience marginalization in societies that are predominantly heterosexist. Winer (2024) puts forward that many societies regard queer men as gender deviants because they appear more feminine than masculine. Gays tend to mirror and perform femininity. It is argued that they are effeminate because they represent the societal perception of feminine attitude and behaviour. Salvati et.al, (2021) asserts that in most gay romantic relationships or in a marriage between two men, one partner may exhibit masculine characteristics while the other one may be more feminine. While one man may seem feminine and his partner manly, they are both gay. Queer men are debunking the notion that in a same-sex couples one is the 'man' and the other is the 'woman' which comes from the assumptions of straight couples in relation to what happens in heterosexual relationships. While their appearance may differ, it is in the bedroom where they agree on who takes the dominant or submissive role. Additionally, in some instances the gay couples may flip these roles.

For this reason, a 'man' is not necessarily male and a 'woman' is not necessarily female. This argument suggests that one is not a man as a result of being born so but because he acts like a man according to the expectations of the societal and cultural norms on how to be a man and vice versa. Judith Butler in her *Gender Trouble* describes gender as 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame'. Butler (1990) asserts that there is no natural body and that gender identity depends on the performance of the subject. This clearly gives the impression that gender is about one's doing and acting and not what one is. Butler affirms her theory of performativity by arguing that it is performance of roles that constructs a 'feminine' woman or a 'masculine' man. Thus, for heterosexual persons that would like to be naturalistic, they must also act the gender they identify with in the society. Judith concept of performativity is therefore relevant to the modern society queer community in constructing their self-identity among the African and global heterosexuality. This idea not only strengthens queer acceptance but also challenges the long established traditional notions about sex and gender in the contemporary society. Ginano (2021) also suggests that this has raised the platform for queer individuals and activists to struggle against harassment and discrimination towards the sexual minorities and universal global organizations such as the United Nations to recognize the rights of

gender minorities as well as the acceptance of same-sex marriages in some countries: hence, fortifying their identity.

This is why, in *They Called Me Queer,* Jamil F. Khan actualizes resistance towards queer marginalization in South Africa to re-conceptualize his queer identity. He encounters challenges while finding his identity because of the disparagement he encounters from his homophobic setting. In his story titled "Breaking down the Walls: Colonial Legacies, Home and Heteronormativity", he narrates that as a queer man who loves playing the female gender roles in gay love affairs, his gratified discord with heteronormativity and his identifying as a gay pleasantly is inspired by queer exclusion experiences he encounters in the South African hetero dominant surroundings since childhood to date. He remarks, 'growing up, this was mostly what I was surrounded by: heterosexual, married couples with children. This living arrangement was hailed as the ultimate symbol of RESPECTABLE LIVING.' (P. 127). In his story, he insinuates that while growing up in the South African community, gender and sex meant the same thing and those who conformed to the established societal gender roles were highly regarded. As a gay, he narrates that he loved performing gender roles that were considered feminine such as cleaning and cooking to define his identity. This was seen as abominable by his family and the people in his community because he was born a man. For instance, he voices, 'He (my brother) would always describe my sexuality to be female-like. I presented a threat to the notion of stable masculinity yet I felt I was the perfect candidate to practice patriarchal domination.' (P.131). It can be inferred that Khan forms his identity by promoting queer acceptance and sees himself as an agent of subverting patriarchy which tends to be promoted by heteronormative discourses.

Comparably, in "Identity" part three of *Stories of Our Lives* a queer man narrates encountering and enduring opposition because of non-adherence to the notions of heteronormativity to develop his identity. At peace with his gayness, he disregards normativity and the constituted societal gender roles fortified by heteronormativity in

Kenya. He constructs his queer identity by refuting the assigned masculine and feminine traits and stereotypes in the Kenyan society. He says;

> That expectation that people are supposed to look a certain way; like if you're a man, you're supposed to walk in a certain way, talk in a certain way, dress and do your hair in a certain way, I find it problematic. I DON'T LIKE CONFORMING. (P. 221)

His construction of queer identity is based on the idea that a person's behaviour and mannerisms is what determines their gender and not the sex assigned at birth. This conforms to Amodu's (2023) assessment of black lesbian solidarity which reveals that defining and acknowledging gender roles through performance leads to acceptance of gender identity hence construction of queer identity in heteronormative societies. Correspondingly, in *They Called Me Queer,* Lwando Scott, a renowned queer scholar maintains that queer identity construction in South Africa is greatly complicated by non-gender conformity and gender identity. In his narrative: "Harnessing the Power of Queerness*"*, Scott laments that gender performativity roles always disadvantage South African LGBTQ individuals and their identities. This is because these roles dictate masculine and feminine societal roles so queer men are demeaned and victimized for failing to live by those expectations. He narrates, "When you are an effeminate boy, it is other people who fast impose a gay sexual identity on you before you have actually discovered it for YOURSELF" (P. 16). He discloses that he has been effeminate during his childhood and as a young adult, he dresses and loves doing chores associated with females. He endures a lot of abusive remarks and shaming for appearing 'womanish' as a man yet, he refuses to subscribe to the traditional masculine roles and mannerisms. This gives him the opportunity to construct his queer selfhood in the South African hetero dominant setting in his struggle for prominence.

This elicits the need to analyse the intersectionality between the identity constructions by queer men and hegemonic hetero dominance in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called me Queer*. Regan and Meyer (2021) posit that although the queer theory with Foucault and

Butler as forerunners seeks to impede traditional gender binary concepts that are dominant in the society, heteronormativity circulates the notion that heterosexuality alone should inform the understanding of gender identity and expression. Medley (2021) argues that heteronormativity promotes hegemonic masculinity notions which negatively impacts queer men. To reconstruct their identity, most turn to psychological therapy that affirms their gayism for self-improvement and healing trauma. Additionally, Van der Schyff (2022) argues that heteronormativity points to heterosexuality as the only tolerable presentation of sexuality construct while subduing homonormativity structures and beliefs in the society and queer men have to disregard the predominant heteronormativity for formation of their identities and for visibility. To illustrate this, an anonymous narrator in "Memories", part one of *Stories of Our Lives* who claims to be a Kenyan International Human Rights scholar, discloses that he engages his lecturer, a prominent law professor in a conversation on homosexual rights. He narrates being perturbed by what he calls the professor's illogical perception about queer identities including his sentiments that queer individuals cannot beget offspring. He differs with the professor who is ironically a law expert but is downtrodding gays and their rights hence demeaning their identity. As a gay and a scholar, he affirms his identity by rejecting the professor's heteronormative ideologies that he promotes while delivering lectures in his class. He expresses, 'I found his arguments very silly, because there are a lot of heterosexual couples who cannot or do not or choose not to procreate, yet they have RIGHTS' (P.10). This means that queer men refuse to bow to heteronormative sexuality constructs by being indignant. They also reject vulnerability and violation of sexual rights by refusing to explain their sexuality to heteronormative conforming persons in the community. A different narrator in "Coming Out", part five of *Stories of Our Lives* says;

> Gay people have to explain themselves so much that we forget it shouldn't be our responsibility to go around explaining our sexuality to every Tom, Dick and Harry who feels that they deserve an explanation. If you want to understand what being homosexual is, go read a book or Google it, or figure it out ON YOUR OWN' (P. 301)

Thus, explaining themselves to people makes them feel lesser to the heterosexuals and resisting this is a way of constructing their gender identity.

De la Mata, Cala and Sala (2022) argue that individuals experiencing minoritisation or feeling threatened by exclusion such as the LGBTQI community fall back on identity reconstruction and therapy as a means of survival. After self-recognition they deconstruct and resist the ideology of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality and begin to internalize queerness as a legitimate sexual option and as a way of constructing personal identity. In "Identity", part three of *Stories of Our Lives* one narrator accents the role of gay individuals in subverting the heteronormativity in the Kenyan society. He points out that it is the non-conformists in a particular structure and not those within a system that easily become agents of change to the system. Therefore, this insinuates that it is the Kenyan LGBTQ community and not heterosexuals that will play a major role in fighting against heteropatriarchy and queer exclusion to give rise to validation of the identities of sexual minorities amidst hetero dominance. He says;

> Alliance people don't start banks. River Road guys start banks. It is people who are not in that system who start new things. So for me, River Road is queer. It is where things exist within a bigger SPECTRUM OF POSSIBILITY. (P. 214).

This indirectly suggests that it is the Kenyan queer men that will struggle against queer antipathy by advancing their agency, their perceptibility and their queer self-actualization. Further, Boyer and Lorenz (2020) explains that heteronormativity endorses heteroromanticism while dismissing other sexual possibilities. Indeed, this makes some gays question their sexual orientation and their identity. Thus, they push back and work towards subverting heteronormativity and in the process construct and explore their queer identity. For instance, in "Coming Out", part five of *Stories of Our Lives* an anonymous narrator openly portrays indignation towards heterosexism and heteropatriarchy as he plainly declares his gayness and intentions to tie the knot with a man. He mentions, "I want to marry a man. A lot of queer people are against marriage perhaps because of how heterosexist and PATRIARCHAL IT IS" (P. 290).

Sigmund Freud, the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis ideas support the queer theory. As already stated in this study, in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud, 1905), for instance, he noted that it was not an obvious fact that men should find a sexual interest in women, a fact that is common in the narratives *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Call Me Queer*. Freud (1940) had noted in *An Outline of Psycho-analysis* that sexual life was concerned primarily with obtaining pleasure from the body, often beyond the needs of reproduction.

According to a different narrator in "Society and the Future", part four of the same anthology, Kenyan queer identities stand up to heteronormativity whenever queer discrimination arises in conversations to forge identity. This narrator discloses his ability to engage forwardly in conversations on queerness to defend his queer identity. He expresses, "There are people who shut-up when anti-gay conversations happen around them, so that no one will know you are gay. When I hear such conversations around me, I DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT" (P. 243) Furthermore, Robinson and Schmitz (2021) propound that to affirm their queer identity and reconceptualise selfhood, resilience among the LGBTQ youth enables them to push back against the marginalization of sexual minorities propagated by the heteronormative dominant discourses. This is in conformity with an anonymous narrator in "Identity" in *Stories of Our Lives* who admits to spiritedly battling against hegemonic heteronormativity to reconstruct his self-identity. He confesses to negating his queer self although he finally rises above the struggle and is now appreciative of his homoerotic identity. He attests the initial fear of coming out to being bullied in school because of being gender non-conforming in the Kenyan educational space which is extremely homophobic. He is also apprehensive of his identity because of his religious background. Nevertheless, he celebrates himself for his ability to accept his sexual orientation and recreating his queer identity despite the abhorrence he faces in a heteronormative setting. He says;

> Claiming the label queer has taken some time, it has been a very arduous and painful process, because I have lived with some kind of denial for pretty much most of my life, and it's a good thing that I am young and out now. For a substantial amount of time, I was in denial. I was deeply religious, and I was trying to relate with God. I think when I was in high school, I was teased a lot. I was GENDER NON-CONFORMING (P. 225)

Comparably, Maake, Rugunanan and Smuts (2023) posit that while the South African law upholds and recognizes sexual minorities, the issue of diverse sexualities is still highly disputable as many South Africans believe that sexual identity can only be appreciated through heteronormative terms. This puts the South African queer men on the periphery because they have to fight for space as they reimagine their queer identity. Thus, to fit in the dominant heteronormative discourses and spaces in the country, gays must advocate for their gender identities. The authors further reveal that heteronormativity is dominant particularly in rural areas where gays are perceived negatively, humiliated and encounter attacks such as name calling. For instance, they are often termed as "Stabane", a disparaging Isi-Zulu word for gays. In *They called Me Queer*, Lwando Scott a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Western Cape makes major contributions on queer identities. To begin with, Scott's doctoral thesis is on same sex marriage in South Africa and is titled: *The more you stretch them, the more they grow: Same sex marriage and the wrestle with heteronormativity.* This means that when suppression of the queer community continues to be enhanced in the society, this community strives to thrive through identity construction. In his narrative: "Harnessing the Power of Queerness", Scott while disclosing his childhood and personal life experiences accentuates the process of redefining his queer identity and his battle with heteronormativity in South Africa. He narrates his passion and romantic desires for other boys and his failed attempts in concealing these desires. Heteronormativity in South Africa makes Scott feel threatened and exposed because heterosexuals are armed with pejorative statements aimed at gays. At first, he is afraid of being discovered though it is plain that he is queerly. He says, "The irony of me always trying to avoid detection was that it was almost impossible to hide as everything I was always pointed TO MY OTHERNESS" (P. 16).

Likewise, Jamil F. Khan, another narrator in *They Called Me Queer,* highlights the power of repressive heteronormativity in shaping queer identity construction. Khan is a South African renowned gay author and critical diversity scholar. In his narrative "Breaking down the Walls: Colonial Legacies, Home and Heteronormativity", Khan recounts that people around him, especially his family exercised heteronormativity power through disciplining his gay sexuality and enhancing normalizing discourses whether intentionally or unknowingly.

He narrates being conscious of the authoritativeness of hetero dominance especially through his sister-in-law who keeps asking him when he would get a girlfriend. This makes him feel guilty of transgressing the heteronormative standards which he knew he was not going to conform to because he begins a journey to redefine his identity. "The normative assumptions made by the 'when' in her statement implied the inevitability of heterosexuality which I knew WOULD EVADE ME." (P.128).Simply put, he is constantly anxious that his queer identity would attract people's attention and he would be disgraced because he does not want to conform to the societal gender norms. He says, "The power exercised over me as someone in need of mercy kept me constantly subordinate. I was in a constant state of apology because my very being was transgressive. Like in the pursuit of happiness through material things, the pursuit of normativity proved to be a futile project. I NEVER ACHIEVED IT." (P.131). He discloses that he affirms his identity by resisting the heteronormative discourses. Further, he finds himself still grappling with the inevitability of heteronormativity in the South African society even after moving into his own apartment. He narrates that he realizes that he can never get away from the permeated heteronormativity because he encounters all the policing power structures his family subjects him to, yet he thought he had left them behind having endured their torture. He painfully learns that these heteronormative systems have an insidious nature with far-reaching arms when they replicate even in his new found home. Heterosexual gender roles affect his first queer love relationship as he is forced to taking the traditionally female gender role of a nurturer despite being the breadwinner. This elucidates gender issue in relation to queering.

Khan discloses, “A constant balancing act involving my own need to assert my power as a breadwinner and his fragile male pride ensued. Implicated in the heterosexual matrix once again, I experienced emotions of frustration, duty, confusion, overwhelming AND EVENTUALLY INDIFFERENCE.” (P.132). Khan strongly disputes this pattern of domestic labor that requires division of labour prescribed by traditional gender roles in an attempt to reconceptualise his identity. He puts an end to their relationship as his queer partner seems to be yearning to recreate a familiar structure of the heteronormativity he grew up with. Khan gets into a second queer relationship where the same trend manifests. Khan voices his frustration as he feels that he lives under the shadow of heteronormative structures and established gender roles which is a threat to his queer identity. His gay partner tells him, “If you did not know how to cook, we would not have a relationship. I am a MAN AFTER ALL” (P. 133). Khan asserts that his partner straightforwardly privileging his masculinity as salient over Khan’s and dictating he must be a good cook for their relationship to thrive takes heteronormativity to a new level of absurdity which clearly upsets him. However, disgraced, he narrates to have passed the cooking test and this experience later leads him to develop an aversion to domestic chores and female gendered roles. He is unfulfilled by this and rejects heteronormativity, ends the relationship and prefers to be alone in the meantime to reconstruct his queerness. He says;

> I stopped living a life that had been scripted for me by regulating my preferences and desires. I had my entire life wrapped up and handed to me with instructions to follow. I rejected all the subjectivities imposed on me in pursuit OF SOMETHING UNFAMILIAR (P.133)

Finally, he discusses that besides many other afflictions that queer South Africans experience, heteronormativity is deeply entrenched in the country and it enforces outlawing homosexual desire and withholds protection for queer innocence, bringing about dissatisfaction in the lives of queer men. Its resistance aids the process of queer identity formation. Khan queer experience implies that the ingrained heteronormative notion may affect queer relationships although it seems that most queer men do not aspire to emulate heteronormative masculinity.

While it appears from some narratives in queer marriages or gay love affairs that both partners are masculine, some have ‘masculine’ men and ‘feminine’ men due to societal adherence to conventional masculinity.

Khan ends his relationships because he finds his masculinity threatened by his partners who force him to conform to the female gender roles dictated by the prescriptive heteronormativity. This also suggests that the queer men’s self-affirmation of their personal values enables the gay feminine men to rise above the biasness expressed towards them by their partners. Further, internalized homophobia appears to negatively impact queer men who are more feminine.

Heteronormativity strengthens the championing of queer identities. A comparable scenario is represented in Maquba’s narrative “String of Advice” in *They Called me Queer* which conveys the impression that queer individuals in South Africa renegotiate their gender identities by renouncing the conventional gender expressions assigned by their parents at birth and gaining new identities to resist heteronormativity system that dictates queer individuals must hide their true selves. “Our identities are locked in documents with names we abandoned behind our parents’ backs. We silently wish upon their death in exchange for freedom. Enlightenment is a risk where knowledge has no PLACE TO BURY” (P. 62).This narrative reveals that for queer persons, heteronormativity enforces confining rules and tension. Therefore, they secretly become queer to construct queer identity in a heteronormative family setting to avoid sexual silencing and rejection after outing. This coincides with a research by Reczek and Bosley-Smith (2021) who assert that to construct identity, LGBTQ identifying persons relate with their anti-queer heterosexual parents by avoiding conflict with them. This suggests that it is done to appear to be keeping ties with them and evade the pain of being rejected by their own families. Further, Bedera, Nordmeyer and Holland (2023) put forward that disclosure of identity by queer lives in a heterosexual family setting is more harmful than helpful. Parents’ reactions to queer

children confessions in some cases may be extremely humiliating hence leading to stonewalling mechanism by the queer survivors.

Heteronormativity has long been reputed as normativity in many African countries. Therefore, it marginalizes sexual minorities, sidelines the experiences of queer individuals and overlooks works done by members of the queer community. This has continued to trigger and inspire queer men to take another look at their sexual identity. In another instance, an anonymous narrator in "Identity" in *Stories of Our Lives* resolves to reconceptualise his queerness amidst heteronormativity by studying and attaining more knowledge about his sexuality. He unveils that as he studies about sexual diversities, he makes discoveries that inculcated conceptions about gender diversities and the solidity of heterosexuality are quite misleading. Gradually, he cultivates radical queer politics that orient him to identify himself as queer to date. He also discloses that accepting his sexuality was amazing and relieving because he finally reclaims his personal identity. He says, "I made a decision to accept my 'gayness' so I read a lot about my sexual orientation and discovered new insights…Now I didn't feel this overwhelming sense of guilt and fear, that there are repercussions for WHO I WAS" (P. 226). It is therefore true to say that as queer men aspire to gain awareness and get acquainted about their gayness, they acquire revolutionary views and reclaim their sexual identity.

While the study relies on the tenets of queer theory for analysis of the texts, the autobiographical theory insights may assist to add depth to the understanding of these queer experiences. The German historian and psychologist Wilhelm Dilthey is believed to be the founder of the theory of autobiography. Smith and Watson (2001) propose that the autobiography, which is a true account of personal life experiences written by that person permits the writer to interact with the audience because the audience explores and reflects about the writer's life account. Besides being the author, the story revolves around the writer as the narrator because he or she is also the main character and is often involved in and affected by most decisions and conflicts that come up in the story.

Additionally, Pascal (2015) asserts that life writing aims at helping people to attain a deep, intuitive understanding of themselves in relation to their experience, explore the journey of self-discovery and express change of attitude. Therefore, because *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* express personal life experiences of queer men, the autobiographical theory insights help in appreciating how queer men achieve self-discovery in the process of narration and the challenges of identity the narrators experience and how storytelling enables the narrators to accept their true identity. However, Gehrmann (2022) submits that in Africa life writing has often been imposed as a problem due to the presumed lack of selfhood and individuality in African societies.

In Lwando Scott's narrative "Harnessing the Power of Queerness" in *They Called me Queer*, there is a high manifestation of intolerance for gender non-conforming individuals and marginalization of queer persons while endorsing heteronormativity. This spurs resistance by queer men against hetero dominance to reclaim queer selfhood in South Africa. He expresses, "The rigidity of normative gender ideals in South African society meant that no one escaped unscathed, including those, or maybe particularly, those who are themselves ESCAPING PROSECUTION" (P. 18) As a result, gays strive to deconstruct this normativity while validating queernormativity for sexual identity formation. Morantes-Africano (2023) asserts that the deeply rooted marginalization of sexual minorities and their identities is catapulted by heteronormative discourses and will continue to be so if not addressed. He further argues that self-awareness and identity relates to not only confidence in self but also the lauding of an individual's ability to struggle against societal systems of oppression. People's negative attitude on sexual minoritisation is expressed when gays come out hence it invigorates queer persons to affirm their identity and attain self-worth. This conforms to Malinowitz (1993) who submits that the queer theory is instrumental in debunking the concept of traditional gender binarism while propagating queer liberation. Thus, this empowers queer individuals to counter-attack heterosexuals and their anti-gay remarks as well as the public shaming by homophobic groups as seen in *Stories of our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*.

Additionally, Colebrook (2009) argues that the queer theory explores and provokes reflections about what the notion of queerness is all about. This not only strengthens queer self-recognition and rejection of normativity but also the affirmation of queer ego-formation. Further, King, McIntyre and Parker (2020) submit that as genderqueer identities continue to be increasingly visible in the modern society the transgender individuals convey their journey of embracing positive self-perception through personal narration of life experience.

By the same token, a majority of members of the LGBTQ community opine that not contending with sexual discrimination signals that such matters are abominable and should be stonewalled. For this reason, one narrator in "Identity" in *Stories of Our Lives* resolves to holds fast to his opinions and beliefs about his queerness and spiritedly rises up against homophobic remarks. He refuses to be silenced by the Kenyan heteronormative society and is unreserved in contending with the heterosexist scornful attitude hence rebuilding his queer identity. He says, "I stick to my guns and the fact that I will respond whenever someone says something which is widely homophobic was my power. I think that was a defining moment IN MY LIFE" (P. 228). Correspondingly, in *They Called Me Queer*, Lyle Lackay, a queer South African copy writer and essayist also relies on self-affirmation to navigate his gay experience. In his narrative "Eating Fried Chicken While Poking My Penis: A contemplation of Gender" reveals that he thrives on queer self-pride. He narrates that he does not mind the long languid stares and the unyielding looks he receives and the 'after you' he gets for being mistaken for a woman rather he finds it funny and enjoys it because he loves his queer identity. Although he experiences queer harassment in South Africa, his home, he expresses feeling flattered that some people in Philippines where he visits refer to him as beautiful man and while appreciating those who positively acknowledge his queerness he wonders what is wrong with the rest of the world especially the African continent that disparages queer persons. He says, "I look myself in the mirror, I love that I am a gay boy, my personal style is androgynous. I enjoy my masculine legs and the stature and strength my broad shoulders lend."(P.12). He adds;

> My friend Alix asked if I might be gender fluid. Her request came via an email, which included an urban dictionary definition of the term. I had never heard this term before, but it sounded right. It felt good. I have always liked the word "fluid". It denotes an openness-a feeling of flexibility. A freedom to move. A freedom to be. (P.14).

Indeed, for Lackay to appreciate gender fluidity denotes understands the notion of sexual diversities and that sexuality is not natural. This evidences that he has a positive self-perception about his gayness and self-acceptance which enables him to get through heteronormativity in South Africa.

In addition, Idowu (2023) propounds that in Africa, there is a noticeable disapproval, resistance and denial of queer existence by the political and religious spaces in the continent fueling the disparagement of queer identities. To reconstruct their identities, queer individuals in places of worship fight for space especially in Africa where heteronormativity conceptions hold sway. Gays redefine scriptures in holy books and work towards eliminating negative thoughts about their sexual identity for identity formation. For instance, in "Religion and Spirituality" which is part eight of *Stories of Our Lives* an unidentified narrator who is a Christian uses the Holy Bible to resist negativity surrounding gay identity. Although his friends and fellow students in a medical school find him extremely weird and blasphemous, the narrator insists being proud of his queerness claiming that Jesus was queer. The narrator says that while Jesus was not queer sexually, he was outside the boundaries that usually surrounds a man of his age. He argues that Christ was a very strange and odd man because at thirty he was not married yet "He was uprooting married men from their homes to walk around the country with Him, leading rallies, sitting with sinners such as prostitutes." (P.353) Thus, he reasons that Jesus would understand him for being queer and approve his queerness enabling him to construct identity. The narrator also says, "Christians are strange, they are queer for following a queer man, and not recognizing that queerness." (P.354).

Another narrator in "Religion and Spirituality" which is part eight of *Stories of Our Lives* contests for his queer identity by affirming himself religiously. He narrates that he is in a religious college studying theology and he has always had aspirations to be a preacher.

In his study of the Bible, he quotes verses that talk about the unconditional love of God for all humanity arguing that queer men are inclusive of this humanity. He says that God is different from religion when he expresses, "I know God loves me, I know he loves me the way I am. Don't let anyone tell you as a gay person that God doesn't love you. It's religion that has something against homosexuality, not God." (P.345)

Just as in the African continent, Ting et.al. (2023) postulate that heteronormativity is dominant in other parts of the world and particularly in Malaysia where the queer community members fearfully express the vulnerability of their queer identities. They tend to feel threatened and their perception of the heterosexuals is "us" verses "them". Correspondingly, Ning and Guo (2022) argue that queer persons in China grapple with myriad challenges including barring of same-sex marriages as a result of the hetero dominance in the Chinese society. Moreover, research by Hooman (2022) reveals that like in Africa, to Iranian queer activists, the social media is a powerful tool to forge alliances, champion public sensitization on LGBTQI community, defy subjugation, stereotypes and contend the heteronormative discourse. While this is so, the queer persons still lack freedom to express themselves and demand equality publicly. Social media's accessibility and efficiency gives voice to gay activists, empowering them to be change agents in questioning gender constructions and sexual relations established by the religious space in Iran. Thus, many queer men in Kenya and South Africa have by all means pursued unity in continuously expressing their quest to renegotiate their queer identities and subvert queer exclusion.

Likewise, ideas propagated by queer scholars and other scholars in the queer field also strengthen queer identity construction. As represented in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*, research by Parise (2021) reveals that educational spaces buttress heteronormative ideologies over non-binary gender identities. For instruction, teachers rely heavily on text books as the curricular resource whose content is geared towards advocacy of heteronormativity. To renegotiate their identity, queer persons use queer scholars' ideologies to deconstruct thematic concerns in these textbooks that uphold heteronormative power structures. This is meant to advance societal comprehension of the intersectionality between gender complexity and curriculum especially among researchers, educationists and publishers. A research by Fielding (2020) reveals the centrality of queer theorists and scholars in foregrounding ways of moderating and pushing back against heteronormative constructs by gays to mitigate queer upsetting and promote queer identity construction. Their contributions are significant since they augment queer identities knowledge and advance appreciation of sexuality and queer literature.

For example, Lwando Scott in "Harnessing the Power of Queerness" attributes the process of reconstructing his queer identity in the South African heteronormativity to the efforts of queer scholars and theorists. He narrates in *They Called Me Queer*, that he particularly relies on the ideas of Michel Foucault on discipline and queerness. Michel Foucault was a prominent French philosopher, writer and literary critic. He was popular for authoring *The History of Sexuality*. In his study of sexuality, his goal was to illustrate how power dynamics relate with the knowledge of sex and modern sexuality. Scott voices that the Foucauldian ideas on discipline shape his perception about his queer self-identity. He highlights Foucault's arguments that societal discipline comes in many forms hence people modify themselves to fit in and to be seen as normal. This is why at first, he attempts to conceal his gay identity to avoid trouble with the society where many hold to heteronormativity. He says, "in my attempts to avoid detection, I was being disciplined by South African society because the threat of mocking, of name-calling, and physical violence was enough to make me try and conform TO AVOID DETECTION" (P. 18).

He also opines that the ideas of other queer scholars hallmarks his own perception about his sexual identity enabling him to reaffirm his queer identity. He says, “my ideas about queerness have been heavily shaped by the queer scholars who critic the normative ideas around GENDER AND SEXUALITY” (P. 21). Furthermore, he adds;

> Clearly, reading queer writers played a large role in shaping the way I see myself, my gender and my sexuality. They were instrumental in how I began to see the power of my queerness and how in many ways it was that power that MANY PEOPLE FEARED (P. 22)

He also underscores in his narrative that in constructing his queer identity, he is influenced by the notions of Michael Warner who argues that the preference for queer represents a rebutting of minoritising and an approval of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal. Indeed, one of the leading scholars in the study of sex and sexuality is Michael Warner who makes significant contributions that are key in the understanding of the queer theory.

In his article *Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet,* Warner (1991), argues that heteronormativity implies the existence of sexual default and thus it should be scrutinized by queer politics. He is significantly supported by other scholars such as Adrienne Rich, Gayle Rubin and Monique Wittig who had earlier popularized the concept of heteronormativity in social and feminist lesbian theory (Dasgupta, Donica & Weiss, 2023). Heteronormativity advances the normalization of heterosexuality in contemporary cultures which is fortified through the belief that both sex and gender are intrinsic. Further, the societal norms strengthen specific performances of gender roles intended to secure sexual reproduction hence reinforcing the hegemonic patriarchal power structures. Warner posits that the society tends to prejudice and discipline individuals who fail to conform to these gender roles that sustain the hegemonic gender binary concept. As a result, normativity is easily recognizable in many social spheres and family structures through stigmatization and exclusion of queer persons. Warner’s perception of heteronormativity succeeds in formulating a helpful tool in queer theory to explain and expose hegemonic notions of

sexual politics. Thus the politics of heteronormativity and discrimination against fuels the reliance on queer scholarship and queer theorists' ideas to construct the identity of queer lives. Likewise, Khan, in *They called me queer* details his reliance on ideas of different scholars in the shaping of his queer identity. In "Breaking down the Walls: Colonial Legacies, Home and Heteronormativity" Khan alleges utilizing diverse notions on constructs of gender by different scholars in queer life writing to describe and redefine his queer identity and his queer experiences in a heteronormative world. He says, "I engage with the work of various theorists on the constructs of gender, sexuality, family, effect and power" (P. 126). For this reason, concepts by queer scholars are important in shaping and redefining sexual diversities.

3.3. Re-conceptualising Queer Self-hood

Queerness in sexuality refers to having a sexual identity that does not conform to the established societal sexuality notions particularly, heterosexuality. Spronk and Nyeck (2021) argue that because heteronormativity is well-grounded in the African continent, it plays a central role in influencing and shaping how queer lives in Africa perceive themselves and their selfhood or identity. Re-conceptualising selfhood means redefining and having a new idea about one's uniqueness thus reclaiming individual identity. While exploring the term reconceptualisation, Pinar (1978) asserts that societal traditions birth reconceptualisation. Reconceptualization may also be perceived as challenging a norm that is conspicuously established presently such as heteronormativity. Therefore, the homophobic environment in Africa contributes to the internalizing of homophobia by queer lives to oppose it. This implies that for LGBTQ persons in Africa, accepting and identifying as queer creates awareness while surging revolution against queer prejudice.

Further, Glick (2003) submits that since its emergence, the queer theory provides background knowledge on reconceptualising queer sexualities, bodies and desires. Taylor (2016) propounds that queer theorists are instrumental in constructing the lesbian and gay

culture and politics and revealing queer discontentment towards the straight discourses which questions the gender identity and sexual orientation notions globally.

The African queer anthologies *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* represent queer men in pursuit of reconceptualising their gay identity. This means that they work towards redefining their queer identity because in Africa, sexual diversity is perceived as taboo and is often viewed as a controversial topic provoking resistance in most African social spheres. Since they are conditioned to believe that they are abominable, in reconceptualising queer selfhood, they must find ways of rethinking their identity and developing a positive outlook about their queerness while challenging heterosexism and cisnormativity in the continent. Bikowski (2021) puts forward that in Literature, queer identities can be reclaimed by having gay character story lines written by gays. Bikowski also advances that this would propel the positive reimagining of gay selfhood because such texts, written by queer men and queer writers who sympathise with the LGBTQ community represent the gay personages' struggle against the apparent gay marginalization fueled by heteronormativity in these texts. Therefore, literary texts with queer thematic concerns play a key role in redefining and navigation of queer realities and identities in the contemporary society by facilitating the construction of new and positive thoughts about their identity compared to the previous negative ideas. As such, the relaying of the experiences of the non-heterosexual characters creates the platform for reconstruction of queer identities.

Just as Nest Collectives' *Stories of our Lives* depicts the experiences of Kenyan queer men, in exploring queer self-actualization, Windvogel and Koopman's *They Called Me Queer* relays the experiences of black queer identities in the South African context. This is noticeable in Lwando Scott's narrative: "Harnessing the Power of Queerness*"*. In *They Called Me Queer*, Scott, a gay post-doctoral fellow in Western Cape narrates that akin to other black South Africans, the history of apartheid and its residue makes him struggle with his identity. Further, he reveals that his racial identity is made even more complicated by the complex ways it intersects with his sexual and gender identities. He states that, "There is a die-hard narrative in South Africa, and other parts of the African continent, that

homosexuality is UN-AFRICAN". (P. 24). Scott asserts that the narrative that gayism is un-African posits that homoerotic behaviors were passed over to and acquired by Africans from European settlers during their invasion of Africa.

However, to reaffirm his African queer selfhood, he proposes that prior to the arrival of colonizers in Africa, there was existence of same sex behaviors in different African communities with different meanings that negates the notion of 'gay' as understood in the Euro-American imagination. This Western imagination advances the notion that the White people introduced queerness in Africa during their attempt to conquer Africa; and queerness can only be better understood in the lens of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler ideas. However, frontier and pioneer queer African scholars such as Abbas, Ekine, Keguro Macharia, Stella Nyanzi, among others, are known to differ with this Euro-American imagination. As highlighted, they express that the queer African studies and theory are significant in understanding queer African lives and experiences. Scott in "Harnessing the Power of Queerness" in *They Called Me Queer* expresses that queer South Africans endure strict regulations, intolerance and homophobia from the impact of imperialistic Europeans in the country. Further, he observes that the assertions that the majority maintain, that it was the Europeans who brought homosexuality in Africa, contravenes an array of historical evidence available. Alimi (2015) asserts that while many African presidents have publicly claimed that same sex behaviours are un-African, the true culture of Africa acknowledges diversity, including sexual diversity and endorses acceptance, with homosexuality being familiar among Africans and their culture. Alimi observes that the Yoruba and Hausa old-fashioned terms "adofuro" and "yan daudu" respectively refers to gays. These terms are as old as the as the Yoruba and the Hausa cultures. According to Alimi, King Mwanga II of the Buganda Kingdom, who ruled from 1884-1897, never concealed his gay identity and did not encounter any hostility from his subjects, until the introduction of Christianity and queer hate by the Whites. King Mwanga, as a Monarch, had publicly declared his queer identity and it is recorded that he was not the only one but there were other Ugandan queer men in this times. As a Nigerian queer man, Alimi vehemently disagrees with politicization of queerness and encourages appreciation of African history, the true African culture that values people's differences and uniqueness. This promotes impartiality and recognizes

everyone despite their sexuality. According to Munyavi (2023) in the Angolan history in 1600s, Queen Nzingha Mbande was a butch queen and openly a queer woman.

This is because in her ruling, she not only declared herself as king but customarily adorned herself in full men's wear. She was also famous for having numerous young male concubines who dressed as females and were her wives.

This correlates with Scott's ideas that queerness existed in Africa long before colonialism. Relatedly, Casteleyn (2019) argues that indeed, Africa had queer individuals even before its interaction with the West which actively promotes it: thus, constructing queer African identity. Casteleyn further propounds that to comprehend queer African practices and identity construction there is need to move beyond the comprehension of sexuality and gender based on the Eurocentric notions. Additionally, to facilitate gay identity constructs, Kenyan tenacious queer activists are strengthening the visibility of queer African narratives while Africanising queer studies and queering African studies. Scott's ideas on queerness in his narrative are thereby in line with the principles of the queer theory and the Queer-African studies advanced by the East African queer scholars highlighted in this study.

Scott, who proudly self identifies as a queer man in *They Called Me Queer*, lauds his ability to embrace his sexual identity despite the internal wars he encounters within himself. It is through rising above these internal conflicts about his gender identity that he is able to construct his queer identity in the South African heteronormativity. This implies that African queer men are faced with conflict within their minds concerning their queerness in the African context that is predominantly heterosexual. Thus, self-pride and embracing their gayness is a way of constructing their identity in these contexts. He says:

> I am inspired because although I struggled coming into my own through shame and self-doubt, I can't imagine my life without my queerness. It is feeling, doing, living with and through queerness that I feel in touch with my humanity in that I am striving to live the best life POSSIBLE (P. 20)

This is in line with Cerezo et.al. (2020) who assert that an individual's identity formation is shaped by regular repression encountered in important social contexts as well as the incessant pressure to abide by the formulated gender norms.

Multani (2023) reveals that Gays tend to detach themselves from families or communities that forbid the expression of their gender identity and disregard their sexual orientation. Sexual gender minorities tend to form their own social spheres that affirm their identity. Thus, their identity formation process in heteronormative dominant discourses is entrenched in self-definition and acts of resistance against marginalization to attain freedom of expression. Additionally, persons put on the periphery such as sexual minorities, by seemingly oppressive structures such as heteronormativity, advance new ways of reshaping their selfhood such as developing resilience to attain liberation. Multani further asserts that on the dynamics of identity construction, there is pushback by queer men against normalised discrimination in an effort to redefine self, and their home surrounding and voice determine the reconstruction of their identities.

One un-named narrator in the story "Identity", part three of *Stories of Our Lives* while conforming to his authentic sense of self, discloses that he delights in his queer identity and freely allows its manifestation in self despite his family's expectations. He narrates that his parents and uncles specifically pressure him to marry a girl from his Kalenjin community, yet, he fantasizes about tying a knot with a man. Without reservation, he chooses to stick to his gay identity rather than conforming to the dictates of heteronormativity that undermine his queerness. He also professes that he will not trade his individuality for anything, not even the wish of his family. As such, he defies heterosexism to affirm his queer identity. He says:

> I would instead imagine being with a perfect guy, having a perfect life. I didn't resist it. It was easy on my mind - this is just what I am. My whole body and spirit just flowed with it. One day, I think I was just sleeping, I just decided to make this my personal thing to define my sexual lifestyle. Forget my uncles AND EVERYBODY ELSE (P. 218)

To correspond to this, Eribon and Lucey (2001) argue that Michel Foucault, a major proponent of the queer theory says that the hetero dominant culture institutionalizes heteronormativity pushing queer persons in a society to construct a counter or a reverse gender norm to reaffirm their identities. Foucault (1990) theorizes sexuality as located within structures and discourses of power by arguing that certain sexual orientations were thought as unnatural and immoral. These sexual preferences entailed any form of queerness and that queer persons needed to be scrutinized.

Thus, a reading of *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* evidences this scrutiny of the LGBTQ community by many in the Kenyan and South African societies which tend to be hostile towards the queer communities. The reading of these selected texts not only discloses plainly that queer men are in opposition to this but also infers that queer men with a strong sense of self-worth and high regard towards their sexual orientation attain identity reconstruction in the hetero dominant African setting. For instance, Lyle Lackay, in his narrative "Eating Fried Chicken While Poking My Penis: A Contemplation of Gender" in *They Called Me Queer,* discloses that gender binary conforming persons exhibit aversion towards queer men attributed to negative stereotypes. While he challenges this as a South African gay copywriter and essayist, he refuses to be controlled by this hostile attitude, the perception that he is sick, and instead regards himself highly. He condemns the strange looks that he sometimes encounters in the streets that reveal hostility and scornful attitude towards queer men. He says, "and I have come to learn, a look is not just a look-often it is intrusive, annoying at times, and at moments can even instill a sense of fear." (P. 13)

He decries violation by conformists of traditional sexuality norms as he narrates an unsuccessful assault by a straight man who follows him all the way home in the dark, but he shouts at the man who then sheepishly retreats. In another incident, a skater humiliates him by calling him a "faggot" which is a derogative term for queer men. In his defense, he retaliates by giving his attacker the impression of harming him thus scaring the skater away. He says:

> A skateboarder bro approached and dropped the "faggot" bomb. I once again puffed my chest, deepened my voice and cocked my head to the side. I wouldn't have actually hit the bro. I merely wanted him to know that I could - threatening behaviour 101. (P.14)

Lackay, self-identifies as a queer man and is happy about his queer identity. He says that to reconstruct his identity, he realizes that he would become a better person if he ignores LGBTQ hostility and focus on more important issues. As a millennial, he recalls growing up in environs where sexuality was categorized into gender binarism which he opines was silly as sexuality is complex and dynamic. While he expresses that he felt confused, left out, emotionally distressed and physically secluded from his peers, he also appreciates the emergence of sexual diversities as it enabled him to find his identity when he says, "But those were different times and we made do with what we had." (P.14)

Likewise, Craig Lucas' narrative "Open Letter" in *They Called Me Queer* unveils the presence of homophobic elements in the South African context. Lucas is famous a gay songwriter and singer from Cape Town. In his story, he reprimands the hostility he experiences as a gay and the marginalization of queer persons in the country. Further, this hostility negatively impacts the self-esteem of queer men because it made him forget that he was talented, kind and loved. However, after he hits rock bottom, he concludes that living in fear and self-hate because of homophobia is living a lie. To construct his identity, he convinces himself that now more than ever he has so much to live for and he wants to live.

Just as the rain can only fall from the sky after heavy clouds, he says that his life has been cloudy for too long and he wants the rain to come and wash away heavy sadness caused by being put on the periphery. To redefine his identity, he says that deep in his soul he is joyful about being queer despite the fact that he anticipates losing a couple of friends, music fans and strained familial relationships as a result of queer identity disclosure. One of his famous composition is "Hearts Exposed", and he says that he no longer wants to live in the irony of singing the song about "exposing heart"' yet hiding his. He is also ready to live with societal rejection of queer and love himself. He expresses,

> I welcome whatever is coming my way with an open heart and an open mind, until then I have some making up to do with the people who stuck by my side even when I was at my worst and some amazing songs to write. (P. 44)

This opposition to the LGBTQ community also exists in Kenya as seen in "Society and the Future" which is part four of *Stories of Our Lives*. One unidentified narrator recounts that there are challenges that come with being queer such as suspicion and being perceived as an outcast. He castigates persons who conform to heteronormativity for their demeaning utterances. He says that people taunt him for being gay yet he is highly educated and he finds it difficult to acquire rental residence because of victimization. He says, "Sometimes when you want to rent a house, people tell the landlord. "You! You want to rent your house to a fag! Your house will get burnt down!" (P.263). Thus, the land proprietors and land managers develop cold feet when it comes to leasing him a house. More troubles arise when he orders any kind of rides including scooter rides. One time he recounts being publicly humiliated when some people laughed at a scooter rider who had offered him transport. They tell him, "Driver don't carry that one! Your motorbike will crush into the water when you get to the bridge!" (P. 263). Whenever he wants to give opinions when having conversations with his peers, they shut him off and dismiss him. At a discussion about sexuality, he tries to give his viewpoint and they tell him, "what can you tell us, you sleep with your fellow men" (P. 263) and he challenges their attitude by telling them that, "If I am sleeping with men, that's my business." (P. 263).

His challenging of normative assumptions of sexuality is a way of constructing his queer identity. It can be inferred from these narratives that queer men, whether individually or collectively use their identities to challenge the repressive sexual norms.

In the same way, a different narrator in "Identity" part three of *Stories of Our Lives* narrates his struggle with identity crisis because of his homophobic environment. He experiences this from a tender age, in his family setting because while in primary school, his father beats him severely and orders him to stop acting feminine because of the narrator's love for cooking and plaiting a doll's hair. He also remembers being bullied in high school by his peers, teaching staff, non-teaching staff and the entire school administration who thought he was too feminine. He says, 'my friends want me to act in a certain way, the way society prefers men to act. So, that is how I decided to remain who I am. (P.190).His friends are forcing him to act masculine and are getting very agitated because he cannot act like a man as they would wish. He decides to be himself, to stay in his queer personhood to construct his identity.

Milton and MacDonald (1984) argue that constructing gay identity requires having a positive gay self-image which brings about personal acceptance. Connolly (1979) further propose that the Jürgen Habermas theory of ego development enhances understanding of gay identity construction which usually involves three stages; an interpretation of same-sex desires based on self-interest, to absorbing the normative and traditional assumptions about homoeroticism, to critically evaluating societal norms and managing the positive gay identity achieved. For instance, a narrator in "Society and the Future", part four of *Stories of Our Lives* has high self-regard about his gayness and as he internalizes the Kenyan traditional gender binary norms he questions the authority of heteronormativity tenets as the base for regulating sexuality in the Kenyan community. He says:

> What is wrong with people? I suppose they find safety in this standardization. There is security in these norms, but they shouldn't expect that everyone seeks the same security. You might find security in your norms, but I don't find security in your norms. I find security in my freedoms. The things that make me happy are not the same things that MAKE YOU HAPPY (P. 242)

As a queer man, he repels conforming to normativity and censures those who do so. Rather, he finds self-worth in his gay identity. To corroborate this, Ning and Guo (2022) posit that queer men in China reconstruct themselves in these heteronormative structures through building a positive image of their gayness while striving for civilized gay marriages hence generating their personalized identities. Furthermore, Hall (2022) argues that as a queer man and scholar, to construct his identity in heteronormativity, he had to get the hang of perceiving himself and his queer identity positively. He voices that this involved unlearning the negative perception of his queer identity deeply engraved in his mind and rejection triggered by the South African heteronormativity. Seeing some resilient and happy queer men whose state of joy was not determined by societal acceptance or rejection aided his ongoing process of self-rediscovery and self-acceptance.

Manning and Adams (2021) posit that the queer theory and its concepts can be used to call into question gender binarism while advocating for the acceptance of queer diversities while chipping away the dominant heteronormativity. As a result, the embracing of queer varieties in the African society enhances queer men self-affirmation which enables their identity formation.

Likewise, another anonymous narrator in "Society and the Future", part four in *Stories of Our Lives* narrates that in the past, he grappled with self-invalidation and always felt like a castaway in the Kenyan society which is largely heteronormative. He testifies that primarily he feels subverted by heteronormativity hence afraid of honoring his identity.

He further explains that while he trusts that gay rights movements would intervene his situation, he judges himself through the mirror of heteronormative societal expectations hence he always ends up demeaning himself. He later becomes cognizant of the fact that he would never be happy if he does not put himself first and be proud of his identity. He expresses,

> Now I know that I am more than what the movement or the society expects. I am more than both. This is me. There will always be gay people and there will always be homophobic people. I don't have to exist in that binary of right and wrong. I just want to be happy. I have the right TO BE HAPPY (P. 241)

Thus, through unlearning the negative conceptions about his sexual orientation, the narrator gradually acquires self-admiration and self-appreciation as a way to construct his queer identity.

In support of this, Pindi (2020) reveals that the queer theory just like African feminism envisions the liberation and tolerance of the African sexual minorities within and beyond Africa. Therefore, it is clear that for queer men, the principles of the queer theory are a powerful tool for empowerment and inculcating a positive opinion about their sexual preference and acquiring high self-esteem hence constructing identity in hetero dominant discourses. Worthen (2023) reveals that the meaning of the term 'queer' has evolved from describing something strange to derogatorily referring to those perceived as LGBT among heterosexist societies. Nevertheless, in the modern society, the LGBT community has reformed the term 'queer' to represent dissension and defiance towards the predominant heteronormative discourses and to reclaim their queer identity. While some gays and lesbians may still feel stigmatized while being referred to as queer some members of LGBTQ community in the contemporary world have a positive outlook towards being called queer as they view the term 'queer' as an empowering identity. An unidentified narrator in "Identity" part three of *Stories of Our Lives* reveals that he recreates his queer self-hood by declaring his gay status openly, repeatedly and gratifyingly whenever he is with his Kenyan heterosexual allies. Additionally, he discloses his embracing of and his high regard for the term 'queer'. He voices;

> I am gay, a homosexual; QUEER. I like the word 'queer' a lot these days. I never used to like it, but I like it now. As I have been out more and more to myself and my friends, I am less bothered. It's NOT AN ISSUE. (P. 212-213).

Unlike previously when he is embarrassed by his sexual preference and being called queer, the narrator is apparently undisturbed by his queerness. Therefore, this self-approval enables him to reconstruct his identity amidst the Kenyan homophobic atmosphere.

Wilson (2020) asserts that the queer theory raises the platform for the manifestation of various sexual identities and through queer activism empowers those who are labelled as 'queer'. Thus, being labeled 'queer' is a way that some queer men reaffirm their identities as the term has been coined by the queer community to challenge heteronormativity in the present times. On the other hand, Van den Berg (2016) observes that the fight for the reconstruction and liberation of queer identity is a product of the gay community's contemplativeness and consciousness about their belonging to the 'stigmatized collective'. Such is evident in *Stories of Our Lives* where another anonymous narrator in "Identity" expresses in his narrative that he derives satisfaction in his gayness and that he is unabashed hence reaffirming his queer identity in the Kenyan setting. He says, 'I have no shame saying I am gay, I AM HOMOSEXUAL' (P. 213). His self-respecting attitude is what recreates his identity in the heterosexist Kenyan setting.

Edmondson (2020) puts forward that Binyavanga Wainaina's public declaration of his gay identity in "I Am a Homosexual, Mum" (2014), was a bombshell to many in Kenya and Africa. He called it his 'lost' chapter of his memoir *One Day I Will Write about this Place.* Through this chapter he shifts his closeted identity to coming out in the Kenyan heteronormative setting which paves way for other queer men to affirm their queer identity, thus, 'queering' Kenya. This also advances the queer African studies. An anonymous narrator in "Coming Out" which is part five of *Stories of Our Lives* confirms this as he says, 'I like the way Binyavanga Wainaina came out.

I think his coming out has done a lot for THE GAY COMMUNITY.' (P. 285). This concurs with Ting et.al. (2023) who propounds that gays recreate themselves and their sexual identity through identity disclosure and questioning the cultural, religious beliefs and legal customs that are deeply rooted and used to dismiss members of the queer community. To reinforce this assertion, Pecoraro (2020) also discloses that albeit the trouble that comes with public declaration of queer identity in heteronormative spaces, disclosure strengthens queer identity. In *Stories of Our Lives*, while the above said narrator is happy about emulating Binyavanga Wainaina in fearlessly making plain his gay status to reaffirm and romanticize his queer identity, he feels sorry for some of his counterparts that are closeted, uncomfortable, and ashamed of their gay identity. This fear, he suggests, limits the affirmation of queer identity. This anonymous narrator in "Coming Out" has managed to construct his identity through outing his queerness in the Kenyan society that is heteronormative. He says,

> I am a homosexual man. I like to say that I am a homosexual, because it's a word that people feel others shouldn't say. The scariest thing is when you say it among homosexuals, and they react like that. That is the most tragic thing; that homosexuals are the most SCARED OF IT THEMSELVES. (P.207)

In support of this, Schofield et.al. (2022) assert that disclosure of one's gayness whether suggestively or plainly is a way of re-inventing queer identity. Valiantly associating and self-identifying as a sexual minority openly signals a significant and intentional process of identity construction for queer individuals in a heterosexual society. Craig Lucas, a renowned South African gay musician and also 'The Voice South Africa' Season 2 winner in his narrative *Open Letter* in *They Called Me Queer*, shares his internal conflict with his queer identity. By virtue of being gay amidst South African heteronormativity, he insinuates feeling oppressed, bitter and bound for concealing identity. Once he publicly discloses his queer identity, he alleges that he gets his power back hence reaffirming his queer identity. Prior to this, he struggles with suicidal thoughts and drug addiction. He says, 'On 15th January 2016, I shared my story with my friends and family. I was free. I found love for myself again, and LOVE FOUND ME.' (P.43). His outing brings liberation in his inner self, enabling him to be proud of his gayness hence finding his identity.

Similarly, making reference to Jamil F. Khan's narrative: *Breaking down the Walls: Colonial Legacies, Home and Heteronormativity* in *They Called me Queer,* he discloses that he experiences queer emancipation and identity reconstruction when he confesses his identity to come to truth. He challenges traditional gender constructs dictated to him by his parents and the society and tells them that it is not about them but they should always remember 'it is his truth to bear' (P. 129)

Moreover, Binternagel (2018) in his analysis of the queer theory and what it advances concerning a person's sexual identity construction postulates that the revealing of one's LGBTQ identity is a process of constructing the African queer identity against the rigid norms and binaries created by heteropatriarchy. Further, Jones (2021) posits that in these modern times, the queer discourse continues to increase its influence in current research in language and queer identities. This being so, queer persons in marriage and parenting re-affirm their identity by coming out in the society and revealing their identity, so as to redefine their identity as evidenced in these queer anthologies.

3.4 Conclusion

Through the themes raised in the text and the lens of the queer theory which counters maltreatment and prejudice against a sexual minority and advocates for 'consciousness-raising' and 'coming out', the analysis of this chapter, has displayed the strategies of contesting heteronormative sexuality constructs by queer men as depicted in *Stories of Our Lives* and They *Called Me Queer*.

By 'consciousness-raising' and 'coming out', they reclaim their queer identities amidst the dominant heteronormative sexuality constructs and discourses depicted in the selected texts. While the queer community in Kenya and South Africa continue to face persecution from a heteronormative society, the texts demonstrates that the queer community exercise their agential capacity and in some instances have been successful in pushing back against heteronormativity that has relegated them to the periphery of society.

This chapter contributes to the appreciation that queer men both in Kenya and South Africa are still experiencing persecution on account of their sexual identity.

While this is the case, these persecution is more in Kenya compared to South Africa. Queer men in South Africa are succeeding in construction of identity although they are still contending with dominant heteronormativity despite decriminalization of queer sexual orientation. With LGBTQ still criminalized in Kenya, queer men are also succeeding in constructing their identity by countering heteronormativity and homophobia. South African black queer men have been struggling with coming to terms with their queer identity due to their racial identity and the residue of apartheid unlike in Kenya where they struggle due to legal restrictions and homophobia. However, the queer men in both countries have worked towards queering Africa and redefining queer African identity and rejecting the slogan that queerness in un-African.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONTESTING THE MARGINS: SATIRIZING THE CENTRE IN *STORIES OF OUR LIVES* AND *THEY CALLED ME QUEER*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how satire has been deployed as a contestation tool by queer men in The Nest Collective's *Stories of Our Lives* and in Windvogel and Koopman's *They Called Me Queer*. As a literary style, satire has been powerfully utilized by gays in the selected texts to bastardize political actors and the criminal justice systems, religious persons and family units for hypocritically relegating gays to the margins, while they condone other social ills in society. Queer men have been pushed to the periphery of the society whereby other members of the society frown at their existence irrespective of their station and situation in life. In the narratives from selected texts, queer men contest this relegation to the margins by ridiculing and exposing the frail side of the idealistic pillars of the society such as justice, religious and family systems. This has been done effectively, through satire as a literary style. Contestation entails disapproval or protest against specific matters that are of concern to people in the society; for example, sexual minoritisation by queer persons in this context. Satire is instrumental in objecting queer relegation by queer men. The satirical literary style has been efficiently utilized by gays in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* to castigate the glaring hypocrisy and the making of allowances for social vices while painting gayism as the core problem. Young (2018) asserts that while satire is a literary form that exposes absurdity, shames human follies to ridicule, it connects with irony to juxtapose the real and the ideal. Further, writers through language creativity use satire as a tool to attack wrongdoers and unite all kinds of people in the society. Satire is corrective and aims at bringing positive change and hope despite its critical nature. Satire and irony are interwoven because Simpson (2003) argues that, "It is the concept of irony more than any other device which tends to be regarded as the central mechanism in the production of satire" (P.52). Thus, for queer men, satire is important in political and cultural commentary and irony is a powerful technique in the making of this satire. It is also significantly utilized to critique and unmask the weaknesses of the ruling class and speaking to them the unsaid truth.

In the selected archives of queer narratives, satire comes in handy in foregrounding contradictory practices, dismissing and ridiculing the opinions of intolerance towards queer persons. Satire is also used by queer men in expressing the need for genuine debates about queer oppression and on whether queerness is what is ailing the African society in light of other social ills. Satire is not self-standing but deeply connects with other elements such as irony to draw public attention towards certain matters and in Literature. Additionally, it channels the sensitizing for social and political change by the LGBTQ community, while unmasking absurdity and vices displayed by heterosexuals and cisgender. It can therefore be argued that satire is convincing and a perfect tool for social critique because it works by ridiculing hypocrisy to bring about progress and change. This study will explore the use of satire by gays to lampoon shortcomings in political, religious and family heterosexual spaces. It can be argued that self-narrations play a key role in relaying the style of satire. In satirical narratives, the narrators are able to clearly display the frailties of various facets of the society. The self-narrations in stories of our lives and they called me queer expose these weaknesses in their attempt to justify same sex behaviour to campaign for acceptance and normalization of queerness, in heteronormative discourses that may tend to be homophobic making them feel disparaged.

4.2 Weaponising Satire to castigate marginalization of queer men in political and criminal justice systems

Wasike (2000) on the uses of satire in fiction in his analysis of Wahome Mutahi's *Three Days on the Cross* and *The Jail Bugs* asserts that satire as an artistic tool, for fiction writers, is powerful in highlighting social issues. Although satire seems to be heavily employed in *The Jail Bugs* more than in *Three Days on the Cross,* Mutahi still manages to effectively utilize the satirical literary style successfully in the two texts. Wasike foregrounds how Mutahi deploys satire in the texts to bring to light politics, police brutality and religious hypocrisy. The characters become the writer's voice in making social criticism while he ridicules offenders at the same time. Therefore, satire as a literary style influences the

interpretation and understanding of subject matter in texts. Further, using simple language, human weaknesses are brought out and lampooned.

Wasike (2000) posits that "the nature of Satire is that it exploits the discrepancy between appearance and reality to expose hypocrisy and pretense and thereby lambast those who do not practice what they preach". (P.9) This mismatch is what he calls ridiculous. This argument is relevant in the analysis of *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer.* This is because queer men in their narrations use satire to unmask the mismatch between appearance and reality in political, religious and familial heteronormative contexts in Kenya and South Africa. Thus, for these queer men, satire comes in handy through techniques such as sarcasm, humour and irony for criticism. Wahome's *Three Days on the Cross* reveals that while satire does not use black humour, it easily makes fun of issues such as religion that love to impose serious demands on humankind. Further, insincerity and pretense are provocative topics in satire and they tend to attract the attention of satire especially when related to religiosity. Clergymen, particularly those who feign holiness become targets of satire as seen in the hypocritical, perverted and religious-looking priest Father Kerekou who is a notorious liar who betrays his priesthood by his appetite and lust for women. Wasike also asserts that in African Literature, politics and police brutality are also trendy topics of satire as it reprimands societal ills. Police brutality as seen in *Three Days on the Cross* is depressing to its victims because it involves psychological and physical assault, unfair arrests, false accusations which births rage against the tormentors. Besides lambasting all these, the writer, through satirical irony castigates the institutionalized corruption.

Ogweno (1999) asserts that satire in Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, *Song of Ocol, Song of Prisoner* and *Song of Malaya* is foregrounded through in criticizing human folly. In the study, satire is majorly used in matters concerned with religion, politics and foreign culture. Ogweno further asserts that using satire, Okot focuses on people whose shortcomings hinder the attainment of standards set by the society in these literary works. For instance, Wahome Mutahi, Okot use satire to castigate the clergy for failing to live according to the

tenets of their religion. Okot conveys the impression that irony accomplishes satire to aid in criticizing both Catholic and protestant leaders for their sexual sins, pretense, pride, corruption, arrogance and incompetence while using religion as their gauge.

Okot also does not spare political leaders but castigates their avarice, ignorance, callousness and their dullness. These assertions are also mirrored in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* as queer narrators criticize political leaders for their discriminative nature and religious leaders for hypocrisy.

Satire is seen in *Stories of Our Lives,* where one narrator castigates Kenyan politicians and government officials for being selfishly scheming and opportunistic in their hostility towards the Kenyan queer community. At the same time, they politicize LGBTQ. They are spurious because they appear bothered by gayism and suddenly show concern about it, particularly during the election period. During the campaign period, they make remarks meant to politicize queerness. The narrator, in "Society and Future", part four of *Stories of Our Lives*, opines that most Kenyan citizens in his county interpret this as political hypocrisy and intentionally disregard such rhetoric. These politicians do this for their convenience to avoid losing votes during elections hence gaining political mileage. The narrator therefore employs satire to lambaste the insincerity displayed by these politicians. He says;

> Our Governor said openly that queer people have no place in his county. He hasn't done anything legislative, he just makes statements. I think it might have been for political reasons because it was said during an election period. People did not respond positively to it. We feared they would, BUT THEY IGNORED IT. (P. 243)

It is arguable that irony, sarcasm and satire is used by this queer narrator to expose and ridicule the victimization of African queer men by political leaders. The political attacks are crafty techniques to deceive and distract the masses from major challenges affecting African countries such as inflation, corruptness, and underdevelopment. Satire is therefore deployed by queer men in the political space to ridicule political leaders for their inadequate

leadership skills. Schmitz et.al (2023) propound that the queer theory and politics reveal that the LGBTQ persons have always been the focus in contentious political debates and divisive politicization throughout history. While it is meant to heighten social exclusion of queer persons it also informs and facilitates commentary on faulty government leadership. Schmitz et.al, (2023) further asserts that the queer theory empowers LGBTQ persons to collectively resist divisive politicization and any rhetoric that is individualistic and harmful to their mental wellbeing.

Boukes and Hameleers (2020) postulate that satire plays a major role in political criticism as it helps in openly mocking traditional norms of political behaviour such as populist reasoning by political leaders as seen in this narrative. Therefore, political satire spotlights loopholes in political spaces such as selfishly promoting such reasoning during election period to emerge victorious. Satire also castigates and ridicules such behaviour in an attempt to correct these persons and reform the society. Gloppen and Rakner (2020) postulate that queerness has progressively become a matter of political contestation and conflict in the African continent as highlighted by the narrator above. Their research reveals that Robert Mugabe's reproach of the Zimbabwean gay community in 1993 marked the genesis of politicized homophobia in Africa and spread across other African countries. Gloppen and Rakner (2020) also assert that politicization is where a social behaviour is made of great significance politically and the basis of mobilization by societal and political actors. That social behaviour becomes a topic of heated public argument and conflict, in this case, the same-sex behaviours. As stated, African queer individuals become victims of political attacks linked to political homophobia by incumbent political leaders to avert the attention of citizens from thorny issues of economic crisis, corruption and poor development strategies which castigates their incompetence in leadership. This strategy is used politically during election period and the case of the named governor in the referred narrative seems not to be isolated because other Kenyan national leaders are also known to make sweeping anti-gay statements that could be perceived as attempts to please the electorate. Mr. Obama's words that "bad things happen when governments get into the habit of treating people differently", during his visit in Kenya were meant to publicly

satirize Mr. Kenyatta and other Kenyan political leaders on their support of queer marginalization because of what they represent (Citizen TV, 2015).

Similarly, the Kenyan President, William Ruto, Kenyan opposition leader Raila Odinga as well as other religious and political leaders have joined forces in declaring homoeroticism unacceptable in Kenya with other leaders such as Aden Duale saying that the gravity of homosexuality is comparable to terrorism (Ngirachu, 2020). This adversarial attitude towards homosexuality by African leaders cuts across the African continent. On the other hand, the South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa has been accused of lip-service and not being genuine in his support of the LGBTQ community in the country. After a queer bloodbath incident in the country that led to the killing of queer individuals in 2023, and many other crimes against them, Ramaphosa has pledged support and condemned hate crimes against LGBTQ which has been perceived as empty rhetoric by many South Africans (ACTION SA, 2023). This stance taken by African leaders on LGBTQ community provokes satire. Correspondingly, Thomas (2017) observes that the queer theory is nearly absent from the public law and the systems of governance, power and politics at the local, state, national, and international levels. In his research which is informed by the queer theory, he proposes that there should be consideration and plans to pursue all available avenues to have the queer theory legalized to reshape sexual constructivism because majority of political and legal systems view sexualities as innate and fixed instead of variable. This is perceptible especially in the African continent.

"Memories", part one of *Stories of our Lives,* also presents an anonymous narrator who deploys satire to condemn brutality and sexual victimization experienced by queer men in the hands of the police and fellow inmates. Satire has been utilized by the narrator in his story to ridicule the unfairness in criminal justice systems manifested by, discriminative arrests, engaging in homophobic sexual violation and neglecting the safety of queer persons. Satire here shows the frailty of many African criminal justice systems. Firstly, this narrator recounts deep hurt and betrayal having been disowned and driven out of his home by his family because of being gay. Since he has no one to turn to, he ends up in the streets

where he is frequently accosted. He narrates experiencing a harsh life and police harassment, countless times because of being queer. He also encounters a series of arrests and incarcerations.

He alleges that while in police detention, the supposedly "straight" male prison wardens and his fellow male prisoners also assault him physically and sexually. Their misdeeds are enabled by the law enforcement officers in charge of the cell where he is locked up. Besides satire being evident in male convicts seeing queerness as unnatural yet they secretly subjecting the narrator to unwanted sexual advances, it also used by the narrator to ridicule justice systems represented by prison police for disparaging queer lives. This is because satire merges irony and sarcasm to expose human follies and pretense. He adds that they verbally abuse him by referring to him as "shoga", a derogatory Swahili term for homosexuals in Kenya yet they make suggestive sexual advances and want to have him without his consent.

He lambastes them as he unmasks them. He finds it ridiculous that the police exhibit outright biasness and deliberately refuse to protect gays. The narrator in this narrative, uses satire to call out the discrimination and misuse of power by the police in perpetrating violence towards queer men on account of their sexual preference. He says, "The streets were very hard; hunger, cops and thieves. You can see my neck is full OF KNIFE MARKS" (P. 92). Kirsch (2020) insinuates that within these contexts, the queer theory is indeed relevant, having been born by queer social group resistance to oppression and quest for queer dignity in various societal spaces. He argues that Michael Foucault through queer theory calls for equality and that it emerged from a radical belief of queer self-actualization, coupled with struggle against queer discriminative behavior and abuse. This relates to the above narrator's situation who exposes the difficulties that queer men goes through in the vulnerable Kenyan prison cells, while opposing the biasness and disparagement he experiences in the hands of the prison police and his fellow inmates.

Fox (2023) discloses that while satire calls out misuse of power and authority, it also reaffirms eroded societal principles while demanding for justice. Satire in this case criticizes police biasness and misuse of power when handling marginalized sexual minorities, pretense and the inhumane nature depicted by their fellow inmates through sexual violations strengthened by the justice and political systems in Kenya. It aims at restoring social moral principles that have been eroded such as equality and humanity. Fox (2023) further asserts that satire is also meant to stir self-reflection in citizens which promotes good relations, peaceful co-existence of all, rationality and good use of power.

Satire is also deployed as a tool to show the weaknesses of the justice sector in *They Called Me Queer*. Gays in South Africa have been relegated to an outer edge and their existence is frowned upon by most people in all societal spheres. The narrators in this anthology struggle to surmount this marginalization by unveiling through satire that the justice system is faulty. It is satirical that the social justice system that advocates for liberation of queer persons seems to buttress queer marginalization.

Kim Windvogel highlights in the foreword that the narratives in *They Called Me Queer* revolve around extreme trauma and marginalization of gays, and the entire LGBTQ community by the South African political and justice system among other facets of society. These narratives portray that gays encounter disproportionate rates of violent attacks and are often more likely, unable to access resources. The South African queer men in the narratives effectively use satire to lampoon political actors, law enforcement societies and court systems for brushing them off and claiming to endorse and legitimize their identity at the same time. Also, justice for crimes against LGBTQ persons is not always dispensed as queer persons would wish. Shittu (2021) argues that satire enables writers to make social and political commentary while subjecting to mockery shortcomings in the social legal systems, wrong and unfair government policies. Through its compelling role, satire arouses social consciousness in the society. Satire in *They Called Me Queer* presents the frailty of the political and legal system because even with a seemingly ideal constitution, queer

persons still express dissatisfaction towards the judicial system in safeguarding them from heterosexual dominance. It is this heterosexual hegemony, reinforced by politicians and the government that pushes South African queer persons to the margins of society. Kim voices;

> In South Africa, same sex conduct and freedom to any gender identity and expression has been encrypted into our utopian constitution. However, fourteen years later, we continue to fight against the beast of heteropatriarchy (P.3.)

These assertions portray that the country's legal policies are not all-encompassing, resulting in exposure to maltreatment in most stations for the LGBTQ community. Satire reprimands the attacks and victimization experienced by the gay community in political, religious spaces and family settings as Kim voices that;

> Our policies strive to be inclusive, but what is inclusivity in theory when our very identities are still persecuted by strangers on the street, family members, police officers, teachers, medical staff, pastors, politicians, and by the greater society? (P. 3)

This disclosure reveals that there is a mismatch in what is seen from the face value and the reality. Policies in the country are said to be bias-free towards gays yet in actual fact the politicians, law enforcers in justice systems and majority of persons in other social spheres tend to discriminate the queer community. Their vulnerability is criticized by queer men through satire. Meyer, Dale and Willis (2022) assert that the tenets of the queer theory focuses on matters of queer persons and buttresses the challenging of the normalization of discriminatory behavior towards queer persons. They further put forward that the queer theory has an established history of working towards establishing the facilitation of social change in relation to queer acceptance and acknowledges that LGBTQ group still faces discrimination as expressed by Kim Windvogel above.

In "Memories", *Stories of Our Lives*, a different unidentified narrator employs satire to condemn atrocities committed towards queer men by law enforcers. He interestingly

juxtaposes Kenya and other places in the world, with regard to queer life experiences. He voices that there are queer men in Dubai and Bangkok, Thailand where he visits and spends some time. He also submits that although homoeroticism is practiced in Dubai, one must be careful since there is the risk of being detained in the same manner as in Kenya.

He says, "I learned that Africans are fetish for them. But you have to be careful not to be caught, because the police also go undercover to catch HOMOSEXUALS" (P.100) As this narrator expresses his love for travelling, he evidently satirizes the callousness displayed by many police officers towards the LGBTQ community in the various places that he visits abroad as well as in Kenya. He observes and uses satire to expose and ridicule police negligence, dismissal and failure to protect queer individuals. His experiences relayed in a series of flashbacks, humour, and imagery, imply that in Kenya, and in these environs that he visits there exists queer discrimination and harassment meted by law enforcers. For instance, in his visit to Italy, he significantly uses satire to ridicule the Italian police force for dehumanizing him and his gay partner. He decries that the Italian security officers make fun of their racial and sexual identity instead of guarding them from harm as foreigners. They shame and accuse the narrator and his partner of being in Italy for prostitution because they are black and gay. Other than satire lampooning the police officers for their misdeeds, this illustrates the plight of the queer people of colour in the modern society. He says;

> The next morning we were taken to court. The charges were that we had assaulted the police and destroyed state property by denting police cars, by breaking their windows. Two policemen had pressed charges against us. They came to court in plaster casts! We couldn't believe the lengths they HAD GONE TO! (P. 102)

Clearly, this narrator deploys satire as a tool to ridicule the unprofessionalism depicted by the South African criminal justice system exemplified by these police officers. He expresses that they are arrested, beaten and kept in custody for questioning about crimes they did not commit. Absurdly, on account of being queer, the police forcefully take their personal belongings and valuables instead of safeguarding them. They commit crime instead of maintaining law and order. He claims that they are sternly warned that in the Italian system, when there is drama, it would be unreasonable to argue with the police

because nobody ever contests what the police say. This is even worsened by their sexual orientation. They are supposed to just accept the charges. The narrator comically narrates their release by a judge who sees how small he and his gay partner looked, comparing to the size of the men alleging the beating and the damage the narrator and his friend were supposed to have done and it was not adding up to this judge.

While the judge releases them, he does nothing then they are rearrested and physically assaulted by eight policemen who even humiliate them by stepping on them with their boots. This happens right outside the courts under the watch of this judge. Satire therefore is used by the narrator to expose and criticizes the frailty of the justice systems in this country as seen through the discriminative police cruelty dispensed on gays and the shrugging off of the narrator and his friend by the judge when they are harassed and retaken into custody. Satire is displayed through ironic effect, that this animosity is displayed in Italy where one would expect that the society is more tolerant to LGBTQ community than in Africa. Tivenga (2022) observes that satire provides comic relief to individuals who are victims of violent repression such as the queer individuals as instanced, in ridiculing the police force's, politicians' and the entire justice system's inability to do as expected. Further, satire also becomes a powerful tool that empowers these victims and people in the society to understand police brutality, uncover police vices and condemn police excesses. Narrations in the selected texts agrees with arguments by Nadal (2020) who argues that the criminal justice neither protects nor serves LGBTQ persons. He observes that LGBTQ persons are more likely to be incarcerated on trumped up charges and the law that is supposed to protect them often discriminates or work against them.

Noluvuyo Zaza in the story, Stigma, *Shame and sex work* in *They Called Me Queer,* explains that life is miserable for many queer persons in South Africa. The narrative illustrates the use of satire by queer persons in mocking and making plain the government's and the law enforcers' dismissal of the law's authority, by directly and indirectly advancing queer exclusion in political spaces. Noluvuyo says;

> The South African government should dispense more information to communities about being part of the Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, being queer and here, so that we can remove the stigma and the brutal violence that still follows around wherever we go, so that the police will listen to us when we say we have faced violence at the hands of the community. (P. 172)

The story continues to emphasize that while the same-sex behaviour is legitimized in the country, and hate crimes against queer persons are prohibited by the law, queerness is continuously met with disapproval. They have to deal with targeted violation used against them and their identities, supported by the security officers and politicians. The narrator's observations are that the law enforcement system is quite fragile, because the police often openly dismiss cases of queer assault. This exposes gays to more relegation by the cisgender and heterosexuals. This story also through satire highlights queer injustice in courts and alignment of political and justice systems towards violation of the rights of gays. This enhances situations such as the denial of queer men to access essential services and persecution of their family members subjecting them to emotional pain. The government and judicial systems are castigated by queer persons for queer insecurities, because they constantly face the fear of being unnecessarily arrested. Satire is thus used by gays to emphasise and expose the shortcomings of the political and justice systems.

The shortcomings of the South African criminal justice continue to be satirized in Carl Collison's, story "Of Names and 'The Blood That Falls' " in *They Called Me Queer.* Collison, a South African queer writer and activist, narrates a true life account of his queer friend, Daniel Ivan Thomas, famously known as Daantjie. One night, as he returns home from a friend's wedding, he is accosted and brutally assaulted sexually by a heterosexual man, who derogatorily refers to him as "Moffie" (homosexual). Helpless and with disability, he pleads with his attacker to spare him but he violently assaults him physically and sexually, leaving him for the dead. A Good Samaritan takes him to hospital and after treatment he discovers that he has to live on diapers because of "the blood that falls" from

behind. As Daantjie relieves the horrors of the incident, he expresses that he harbours painful memories. Daantjie says;

> My sense of humanity is gone. My dignity is gone, and here he is still walking the streets, the criminal. Yet, I am disabled. I have to go to the hospital permanently now (P.59)

As a disabled queer man living with cerebral palsy, he expresses that it breaks his soul that he does not receive justice for the crime committed against him because he s queer, even after reporting his case to various law enforcement agencies. He spots his abuser in the streets walking freely. Satire in this instance becomes a powerful tool in the hands of queer satirists, in ridiculing the weaknesses of the South African justice system. The system strengthens hate crimes against gays and impunity by allowing such criminals to go scot free. According to Daantjie, many queer men are being killed and no justice is served when it comes to gays. He says;

> As jy mooi kyk, is dit ons mense wat uitgeroei word, gemoor word, verkrag word, geslat word, doodgemaak word-especially hier by ons in die Witzenberg area. (If you look closely. You will see that it is our people that are being exterminated murdered raped, beaten, and killed. Especially here. In the Witzenburg area) (P. 60)

Daantjie counts himself lucky to have survived the ordeal as it could have been worse. He recounts the horrors of killings of his queer friends particularly in the rural Western Cape region. He says, “There are others in that particular rural Western Cape region who have died such as Phoebe Titus, David Olyn and Brendon Hufke” (P.60) Daantjie is surprised that the legal system seems unbothered about offences towards gays and no one follows up about the killers of his queer friends. Satire is therefore used to expose the failings, and castigate negligence and partisanship in law enforcement agencies as they turn a blind eye to offences against gays. Satire underscores the gaps in the justice system. He narrates the nasty ordeals that befall South African queer men in the watch of law enforcers. They are knife raped, tortured and dragged to death. They are lynched despite pleading for mercy from ruthless heterosexual lynch gangs who laugh and enjoy torturing them. This agree with Nadal (2020) who has observed that in fact the law meant to protect all end up

punishing and discrimination against gays hence does not serve them. This prejudice could also be associated with historical trauma and the established legacies that continues the marginalization at present.

In "Coming Out", part six of *Stories of Our Lives,* another narrator employs satire in criticizing the Kenyan law, attesting that it outlaws homosexuality but seem tolerant towards other crimes.

He says;

> I know that what is ailing this society is deep and wide, but it is informed by a law that states that two men are not allowed to express love. This law excuses the violence that we see, the killings that we see. The firings, the dismissals, the prejudice, the eviction from rental houses, the exclusion from family. That injures people's dignity, and people are not able to realise their dreams because they feel LESS THAN HUMAN. (P. 247)

He employs satire to ridicule and bring to light gaps in political and justice systems in matters concerning queer men. He conveys the impression that the tolerance of these illegalities is strengthened by law enforcers who exonerate major offenders and criminals who commit crimes to humanity allowing them to go scot free. Further, he emphasizes that queer identity in Kenya is often presumed to be a major threat to humanity while other crimes such as brutality and assassinations tend to be overlooked hence making the Kenyan queer community vulnerable.

Concurring with this, Adekunle (2023) postulates that satire as a literary device lampoons police abuse of authority and excessive use of force that results in killings, assault, extortion and unlawful arrests. The high-handedness expressed by the police towards gays is noticeable in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer.* It is therefore fair to state that besides provoking reflections to law makers; satire also creates ethical consciousness among court systems and political spaces. In this anthology, the narrators make the law enforcers contemplate on whether it is right to show leniency on other culprits and use

excessive force on queer men who may not pose a threat to civilians compared to actual law breakers. Since satire is corrective, it may suggest effective ways of advancing amiable relationships between queer men and the police, politicians and both heterosexual and queer civilians.

Horvat (2022) submits that satire is used to unveil and lampoon actual cases of police brutality and negligence buttressed by political actors, governments and justice systems. In "Society and Future", part four of *Stories of Our Lives*, satire is deployed by a queer man to castigate police excesses and disregard towards LGBTQ violation. This narrator feels abandoned and victimized, and he lambasts security guards for failing to shield him and his gay friends from deliberate public verbal and physical harassments by the masses. Reality dawns on him that this is happening to them because they are queer men. He narrates that during the mayhem, the law enforcement officers are partisan. They overlook the offense committed towards the narrator and his friends, disregarding their duty in enhancing their right of protection. They are ridiculed for what is viewed as incompetence and moral decadence; upholding the harassment towards the narrator and his friends. He observes:

> Two of my friends got mad and called them out on their ignorance and told them we had just as much right to be there as they did. The watchmen were just watching, and not doing a thing. I was really shocked and TRAUMATIZED BY THAT (P. 259-260)

This narrator is melancholic and uses satire in decrying his plight and the misery of living in Kenya as a queer man despite being a bona fide citizen of the country. He tells that his life is imperiled as a result of his sexual orientation because queerness is considered criminal in Kenya. In his narrative, he augments the sentiments of a previously referred to anonymous narrator who insinuates that state actors encourage the Kenyan law enforcers to excuse other depravities while harshly persecuting members of the Kenyan LGBTQ community. Indeed, it is satirical that Kenyans seem forbearing towards other heinous crimes and see gayism as menacing and an act that warrants death. The narrator asserts;

> I am in a country where being who I am and expressing my love is considered criminal. The fact that a majority of the population would possibly want to stone me if they had an opportunity makes me sad, but it's a sadness that I have to bear with everyone else that is in the same situation I AM IN (P. 266)

This suggests that the narrator on behalf of other queer persons deploy satire to castigate the disregard towards queer persons and criminalizing of homosexuality in political paces and judicial systems, without giving due attention to other forms of lawlessness. The controlling of citizens' culture of sex is upsetting and detrimental to the queer men. It heightens the disciplining of queer bodies, strengthening queer marginalization which the gay narrators use satire to speak against in the society. The LGBTQ communities in these African countries have experienced first-hand discrimination and cruelty in the hands of their law enforcers backed up by their state administrations. Foucault (1995) augments this as he notes that homosexuals are portrayed by regimes as criminal and deviant because some bodies are perceived as normal while others abnormal. Thus judicial systems feel that queer behavior and any person practicing homosexuality deserves to be punished.

Coming back to Kenya, the degeneracy in the justice systems enforced by weak political systems continues to be ridiculed through satire. An unnamed narrator in "Sex Work", part seven of *Stories of Our Lives* alleges that one time he is arrested and detained by law officers. However, on second thoughts, the police officers release him on condition that he should return to the station and give a share of the money earned in gay sex work to them. This exposes the unethical behaviour of these law enforcers. The fact that they demand money, take bribes, and from people they perceive as criminals and abominable is pretentious and is satirized by the narrator. They tell him, "We know what you do so we are letting you go because we know you'll make some money tonight and later you'll come and share it WITH US." (P. 335)

This conforms to Msimanga, Ncube and Mkwananzi (2021), who assert that uses of satire include exposing the failure and incompetence of political leaders and criminal justice systems, in dealing with multiple challenges pulling down a country. Satire has a watchdog role that is meant to keep the government in check while satirizing and questioning the failings of the government, politicians and public officials. Thus, satire is a perfect tool that exposes mistakes made by political actors, court systems, and governments. It is deployed by these queer individuals to express discontent with the state and non-state actors using irony and mockery to demand fair practices and inclusivity. Since queerness is unwelcome in Africa and other places as illustrated in the narratives, satire is utilized by queer men to condemn law enforcers, who advance queer criminalization, resulting in normalizing discriminatory practices against sexual minority groups. These queer narrators have also expressed that this has been disadvantageous to gays as they have been placed in the periphery where they are denied access to resources. Kodah (2017) in his critical reading of Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* asserts that satire is effectively and deliberately used by narrators to discredit political corruptness and social vices, mental attitudes, societal norms, such that important lessons can be drawn from texts by people in a society.

In *A Man of the People*, Chinua Achebe as a satirist stirs critical minds to struggle for the redemption of the African continent from the jaws of discriminative politics and lawless political actors such as Chief M.A. Nanga and his counterparts who engage in dirty intricacies. Satire advocates for societal change, for equality and integrity and rejection of all kinds of political and immoral behaviours. Achebe's satire in fiction writing condemns foolishness and attacks weaknesses displayed by social, public and government actors through aggression and abuse. It is arguable that this concept is also applied by the queer narrators in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*, to fight for the redemption of the African queer lives from discriminative politics and practices. Politicians, law enforcers and the entire criminal justice system in Kenya and South Africa seem to play a role in normalizing queer discrimination.

What is cited by the narrators conforms to a research by Cesar (2023) who submits that with regard to the queer theory, the Foucauldian principle of bio power or power over life explains that a majority of state administrations govern through discriminatory practices towards homosexuals and sex workers to discipline their bodies. Further on this principle, Foucault elucidates that in their intervention of sexuality, governments opine that sex meets two forms of bio power. The first form is the disregard towards queer persons and sex workers by governments in their interest towards disciplining their bodies and the second is their efforts in criminalizing homosexuality and prostitution, thus, strengthening marginalization of queer persons and sexual workers in all societal spheres. Drawing on this, governments have openly continued to exhibit great interest in controlling their citizens' culture of sex while powerfully utilizing the criminal justice systems in the spearheading and the attaining of sexuality norms control. Therefore, this has been detrimental to sexual minorities with the Kenyan and South African queer community not left out as demonstrated in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*. The LGBTQ communities in these African countries have experienced first-hand discrimination and cruelty in the hands of their law enforcers backed up by their state administrations. Foucault's ideas of bio power are thus central in exposing the role of criminal justice systems in reprimanding and suppressing homosexuality and prostitution. The systems through consolidating power establish queer criminalization resulting in normalizing discriminatory practices against sexual minority groups.

This has been disadvantageous to queer persons as they have been placed on the periphery where they are denied access to healthcare and other resources. Queer individuals feel that interrogating this would help develop fair practices and inclusivity because they are mostly ignored if they raise concern about being attacked by the public and the system. Cesar (2023) further puts forward that this is also present among the Western society. While it is considered that sexuality in Western civilization is personal, the purportedly private matter is now dictated by the nation-state. Not only the state but also other western communities plainly champion the strict regulation of bodies that do not conform to heteronormativity as the hegemonic sex culture.

4.3 Deployment of Satire to castigate marginalization of queer men in religious spaces and persons

Satire is artistically interwoven in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* to censure weaknesses and follies in the African religious spheres by queer men. Adetuyi and Patrick (2019) in their analysis of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* submit that Okot's major concern is religion, and the unexpected hypocrisy displayed by religious leaders. While insisting on the uses of religious doctrinal rules as a yardstick to daily living and societal interactions, they have failed terribly in keeping to these standards. Thus, Okot as a satirist weaponises satire, particularly in criticizing clerics for their glaring moral decadence and living a lie. Satire also criticizes human follies and vices while evoking humour. Further, focusing on the principles of Christianity, Okot's comical critique of the clerics would possibly raise feelings of disgust rather than constructive change associated with satire making Okot's satire unique.

Satire, as an artistic form has also been conspicuously deployed in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called me Queer* to censure weaknesses and follies in the religious sphere. The queer theory concepts are pivotal in the religious spaces. Daniels (2016) propounds that John Boswell's thoughts were revolutionary in the development of the queer theory in religious studies having been a renowned historian of religion. This implies that the growth of queer studies is deeply connected to the field of religion. Boswell in his book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980) advances that the church had not denounced queer persons until the twelfth century. Therefore, the award winning book became revolutionary in the queer spaces and studies.

In view of persons in religious contexts and communities, the queer theory spells out emphasis of queer persons embracing conceptualization of fixed identity. This is the belief that one is born queer rather than acquiring queer identity.

In queer studies, this notion is utilized in queering religious discourses by opposing religious condemnation of gayism as a behaviour that self-identified queer persons can simply choose not to engage in. Daniels (2016) further argues that as expressed in queer theology, many scholars inspired by Foucault's thoughts, use the queer theory to queer religion. Queering religion entails re-conceptualizing religious communities as well as challenging normal doctrinal and scriptural interpretations.

Satire has been deployed to make fun of religious persons for their legalistic demands to live according to the tenets of religion while they are not able to fulfil these requirements. Many religious persons in Africa tend to be homophobic. One anonymous narrator in "Memories", part one of *Stories of Our Lives,* narrates that after graduating top of his class in law school, he rejects job offers from big law firms for a Christian law firm because he expects good treatment from the Christian faith community. However, he quits his job because the working space becomes unfriendly. He says;

> I got job offers from big law firms and turned them down for a Christian law firm, because I wanted 'the fellowship of brethren'. They found out I was queer and the work environment became very hostile. I had to quit, there was NO LOVE THERE. (P.2)

Satire is relayed here and is effectively used to criticize religious hypocrisy in religious spaces as persons who preach love and acceptance for all, fail to live by this yardstick. It is ironical that after the narrator declines work opportunities from renowned law firms, his anticipation of love and acceptance as a gay in the Christian law firm is shattered and he relinquishes his job out of frustration and stigma. In his narrative, he quotes the phrase 'the fellowship of brethren' to ridicule the Kenyan Christian community's weaknesses by exposing their pretense for failing to practice the unconditional love they preach. Although their religious convictions prohibit homoerotic relationships, they also advocate tolerance towards those who are perceived as social misfits and not spurning them in order to reach out to them.

Almujalli (2023) postulates that satire is indeed a powerful literary technique for social criticism and that through deployment of irony, satire capacitates authors to uncover and critique imperfections in religious institutions, individuals and all societal shortcomings. Through highlighting these follies, satire seeks to provoke reflections, spur change while questioning deeply rooted norms in religious spaces. Almujalli further asserts that satirical narratives, like some in *Stories of our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*, expose and mock hypocrisy represented by religious persons and religious practices in a society. Drawing from this argument, queer men in the text use satire to enhance public consciousness towards religious flaws such as pretense in religious spheres, as seen in different narratives of the selected texts. The narrator is forced to resign and leave his working station because of the hostility he encounters from his workmates in the faith community and his sexual orientation yet, he hoped to be loved and embraced.

Wanelisa Xaba's narrative "Dangerous Deities" in *They Called Me Queer* also demonstrates the use of satire by queer persons to ridicule religious hypocrisy. The narrator feels that part of the South African faith community has surely failed to practice and live by the dictates of religion. These religious people express aversion towards queer persons and send a powerful message that God despises gays. They feel that this should not be the case as it deeply wounds their identity. Wanelisa voices;

> I just can't handle the rejection. How do you live when you are made to feel that God has rejected you, the God who is also your image? I live with disappointment (P. 168)

The narrative reveals that queer persons believe in the notions of godliness; to stretch, love and accommodate what is perceived as queer, and persons viewed as social misfits, just as God. Xaba deploys satire to criticize church people's effort in breaking and bringing down queer men, and ridicules religious persons for misrepresenting God and appearing to be antigod in the society. This exposes the flaws of persons in religious spaces in failing to live by the yardsticks of religion.

In what could pass as a remedy to this, Gill (2020) argues that individual consciousness should take preeminence over religious organization's dogma and doctrine and that arrangements should be made by the religious organizations to accommodate LGBTQ persons in religious spaces. While this may sound accommodative and tolerant, it is easier said than done.

The satirical literary style bastardizes religious individuals, in the subsequent narrative for their self-righteous nature yet they are deceptive. A different unidentified narrator in "Memories", *Stories of our Lives* attests that in his religious Muslim community the Sheikhs, including some pastors and politicians do not practice what they preach but are pretentious. The narrator deploys satire to unveil and ridicule the rot in these systems that are characterized by heightened hypocrisy and dark dirty secrets. Even politicians, some who practice homosexuality in secret, fear to call for tolerance of homosexuals for fear of backlash from the electorate. The narrator says;

> Yet they are the same ones – those Sheikhs – at night, and in the dark, they call you and flirt with you. During the day, when you meet – he passes you like he doesn't know you and – if he's with his friends-he points you out and says, *ile ni shoga, ishikeni!* (That is a fag, catch it!). These religious leaders are neither conforming to their professed convictions nor are they what they appear to be, judging from face value. (P.6)

He also adds;

> These sheikhs, these pastors, all of them, this big people in government. They don't want people to know. So they attack those of us who present openly. At night, they're gay – but I don't know why they find the idea of accepting THEMSELVES SO HARD

It can be argued that the narrator uses satire to display and ridicule the terrible failings of these clerics and politicians. They are characterized by double living as they contravene queerness while at the same time practice it in secrecy.

This compares with Wasike (2000), who asserts that "the nature of satire is such that it exploits the discrepancy between appearance and reality to expose hypocrisy and pretense and thereby lambaste those who do not practice what they preach" (P.9) Indeed, appearance can be deceptive because it is what majority perceive or generalize as truth but reality is what actually exists about some political and religious leaders as seen in the narrative. Religious hypocrisy in religious spaces continues to be laid bare and ridiculed in "Memories", *Stories of our Lives* where a different unnamed narrator, who identifies as a gay sex worker confesses to blackmailing a pastor who he had met through referrals and had a sexual relationship with. The pastor secretly gives him money for payment while discouraging him from ever making public their affair to maintain his good reputation as a churchman. For a man of cloth to condemn gayness then practice it behind closed doors is insincerity. The narrator discloses;

> He was very discreet, this guy. He was very careful to make sure no one in his neighbourhood knew what was going on between us. He needed to be respected by his church congregation. Whenever I'd go to his house, he would ask me to dress formally in a nice shirt and pants so as not TO RAISE EYEBROWS (P. 145)

According to the narrator, the pastor has terribly failed and is prone to secret sins. It is arguable that the style of satire has a unique nature of revealing truths in religious spaces. This is because it unveils the hypocrisy of religious leaders in passing judgement upon others yet they are not faultless as demonstrated in the narrative above. The narrator portrays religious leaders as being hypocritical and their flaws are laid bare because in this narrative, they gospelize that homosexuality is sin, yet they fail to walk the talk. Indeed, the narrator further derides some religious leaders as seen in the story saying;

> I have no religion. I find the church a waste of time. Many of my clients are "godly" men who are supposed to show others the way. Some even preach against homosexuality, then, COME TO ME. (P. 146)

Religious spaces in Kenya are infiltrated by religious hypocrisy and the narrator uses satire to criticize this while opining that religion does not make sense as long as there is pretention among religious persons in religious spaces.

To advance satire in this section, a research by Khoir (2020) reveals that while Islamic religion does not condone queerness, it professes to embrace and nurture all humans. As such, majority believe that religion upholds graciousness and goodwill, inclusive of Islam, which inculcates in its followers love for all manner of persons in the universe. Nevertheless, some members of the Muslim queer community feel crestfallen because of the contemptuous attitude they get to deal with from their counterparts who are often prejudicial in reality and not tolerant as taught by the religion. Gay narrators use satire to ridicule these persons in this religious spaces for keeping the external part of the commandments and not the true religious values of love and compassion. In "Memories", *Stories of our Lives*, an anonymous narrator who is of the Muslim background is frustrated that he is seen as a curse by this society. Firstly, this adversely affects his occupation as a cook. He is repulsed by the fact that cooking for his Muslim community is difficult because they refuse to eat food prepared by him. He utilizes satire to mock the clergy for insisting that homosexuality is the main problem in the society while ignoring and excusing other ills such as corruption, land grabbing, child sex abuse and infighting. He says, "When I cook-especially if it's for Muslims-they say, 'oh, that person is an abomination, we can't and will not EAT HIS FOOD!" (P. 177).This narrator exploits satire to express that his Muslim brothers have failed terribly in maintaining the lifestyle required by religion, to love all manner of persons in the universe, inclusive of queer men. This appears to be the trend in the most religious spaces.

This narrator also woefully recalls being kicked out by his religious family immediately they begin to notice that he is different, and that is the point when he decides to fully commit to his gender expression. Unfortunately, he receives news of his father's passing. He knows what inheritance he is entitled to, because his father owned land and property. He also describes how he goes to the Chief Kadhi to report his family for kicking him out yet he only wants to claim his share from his father's property. When they see him, all they keep saying is, "This is not our brother," and he also retaliates by telling them, "You are not my brothers either". (P. 178)

It is satirical that his brothers, who also have a strong religious background, disown him because of his queer identity. Against their religious convictions, they subject the narrator to emotional pain and loneliness by turning their backs on him, and looking at him as the black sheep of the family instead of embracing him. He narrates;

> But my brothers and I don't talk to each other. Would you believe me, if I told you that we haven't spoken to one another in the last fourteen years, yet we live in the same house? My brother is actually an *Imam*, but I have never gone TO HIS MOSQUE (P. 179)

In this quote, the style of satire is used by the narrator to show and scorn religious hypocrisy in Muslim religious spaces. He satirizes his brothers' false show because they have to pretend that they fully accept him because of religion and reputation, lampooning the pretense expressed by pious people, in religious spheres. He further details that if someone visits their home, they would not be able to tell that there exists any conflict, because his family is good at performing togetherness. He recounts that during Muslim religious festivals such as Ramadhan and Eid; they break the fast and celebrate together. But the second the visitors leave, his family goes back to their usual silent treatment. Satire lays bare their strained relationship as the narrator claims that his elder brother is actually an *Imam*, but the narrator has never been to his Mosque.

This conforms to Tsavmbu (2021) who asserts that the main component of satire is irony and that satire is noticeable in literary texts as it highlights religious conflicts and intolerance. In this situation, satire lampoons both Christian and Muslim characters who fail to embrace all kinds of people in the community as endorsed by the sensibilities of religion, just as seen in the case of the narrator above. Likewise, Adele Adam's story, "Love Thy Neighbor" in *They Called Me Queer* reveals LGBTQ rejection by the faith community in South Africa. Like his Kenyan counterpart, the previous narrator, using satire to show the frailty of religious systems. Adam says;

> I endure a lot of emotional and physical abuse because of my gay identity from Christians. I am a Christian. I am who I am, and no one can tell me that being a Christian means that I cannot be queer, or that I cannot make decisions for my life. (P. 138)

While Adam above asserts his commitment to his Christian belief, the physical and emotional abuse he undergoes demonstrates the internal and external conflict that may arise when one's faith clash with his or her sexual orientation. This consolidates arguments by Deguara (2020) when interrogating the challenges and contradictions of being Catholic while being gay. The Catholic faith, she argues, presents an irreconcilable paradox to those whose sexual orientation do not conform to the Catholic faith and teachings which are strictly heterosexual.

This religious intolerance in the religious field leads to hatred of queer persons and is condemned through the style of satire. It births negative self-thoughts among gays. As a result, they grapple with self-shame shaming while placing themselves outside the society. Adam narrates enduring great psychological and physical abuse in the hands of religious persons instead of godly affection because of being gay.

Satire can also be pointed out in "Childhood and First Times", part two of *Stories of Our Lives* to ridicule religious hypocrisy. The narrator exposes and mocks the deception in religious persons, who secretly practice same-sex behaviour to avoid soiling their reputation. A faceless narrator narrates that as he grapples to find his identity, he gets sexually attracted to one of his male clients in his work station. He works as a shoe shiner on the streets. He is forced to confess to him how he feels as his client is uncomfortable at his gazing. Although the client is homophobic, he sympathizes with the narrator and promises to help him overcome queerness by linking him up with a friend who is an apostle and a café owner for deliverance prayers. When he visits the apostle at his café, he is greatly disturbed because he turns out to be gay.

He is very disappointed as his friend who had introduced him had claimed that the supposed exorcist was a man of God and had the solution to his struggles. Surprisingly, after their sexual encounter, the said apostle indecently keeps pursuing the narrator in an attempt to establish a love affair but he would have none of that. He sits at his stall waiting for the narrator who turns to dodging. On realizing he is being avoided he introduces the narrator to a religious musician who also turns out to be gay. The narrator says;

> For me it was a very difficult time, because I was looking up to God for deliverance. A man of God would have helped me out but it was my first time and he was a man of God. It really broke my heart… He finally realised I was not interested in him, so he introduced me to another religious person-APPARENTLY A MUSICIAN. (P. 202)

Satire is used as an exemplary tool by this narrator to reveal and lampoon the religiosity among a percentage of African religious persons, in religious spaces for preaching water and taking wine. While the religious dogma promotes love for all manner of persons, it does not condone the practice of homosexuality by its members.

In advancing the use of satire, a different nameless narrator in "Memories", *Stories of Our Lives* narrates that as a gay sex worker, he finds it strange that majority of his clients are married Kenyan men who are Muslims and Christians. The narrator says;

> My clients are mostly Kenyan men; Muslims and Christians. I usually meet them in the club. Sometimes they pay you upfront, and sometimes you can ask for 2000 shillings and they complain, "*Elfu mbili nikulipe wewe? Siwezi, afadhali niende kwa bibi yangu*!" (2000 for you? No way, I'D RATHER GO TO MY WIFE!) (P. 25)

Satire is employed by the narrator to reprimand the pretentious trait of these "godly" married men who secretly engage in sexual relations with a gay.

The narrator holds up to shame the "godly" men because they not only practice gayism covertly but also participate in sex work with gays threatening them not to breath a word about it. In his encounter with them, he also discloses that they claim his sex work charges are so high. He finds it absurd that they demand he lowers his charges or they would simply go to their wives. This notion is shared by Wright (2022) who through satire bashes religious hypocrisy as moral, ethical and religious authoritarianism. Satire is also used by the narrator to call out and condemn their religious and double sexual lives as they do not practice Islamic and Christian religious convictions about sexuality, and claim to be heterosexual yet, they are secretly homosexual. They also regard queer men with great contempt and selfishly sexually objectify them.

Satire is also highlighted in "Society and the Future", in *Stories of Our Lives* by an unidentified queer man, who finds religious individuals laughable because of their holier than thou attitude. He states that they fail to see their own shortcomings and are obsessive about judging "others". They are fixated in the othering of gays and single-mothers as expressed by the narrator;

> But when the sun rises, everyone goes back to pretending that they are respectable, and everyone goes back to judging "others"; the gays, the single-mothers, the perverts. But there is no "other" when it comes TO SEX (P. 254)

He further satirizes Kenyans for professing that their country is a Christian state. He finds it preposterous that gays are always labeled as being promiscuous by the straight and cisgender. According to him they are no better but are worse off because they engage in illicit affairs with other people's spouses and strangers, while drunk, in cars. In similar fashion, their children practice teenage sex in schools and with house helps. Satire is also evident in this narrative as the narrator wonders why many heterosexual men comfortably engage in sexual relations with him yet they view the practice as an abomination. This narrator attests to the validity of Betts (2021) assertion that satire deploys irony, mockery and sarcasm while analyzing topical issues.

In this narrative, gender binary conforming persons are ridiculed for their self-righteousness and hypocrisy. They openly apportion blame to queer men, yet, they are no better.

In "Society and the Future" in *Stories of Our Lives*, satire is utilized by an unidentified gay narrator in his story to condemn the strong hate expressed towards him and the entire queer community by religious leaders. Religion propagates peace and therefore religious leaders should nurture peaceful and harmonious co-existence among all people in communities. On the contrary, the narrator vividly recounts being accosted with other queer persons in his estate. This assault was planned by heterosexual persons and spearheaded by religious leaders. He says;

> The people from the community led by religious leaders made a plan to get rid of gay people. They knew where we lived, in what clubs we frequented. Unluckily, I was caught. That was the worst. I was beaten so badly. They stole my phone and identity card. It had ALL BEEN PLANNED (P. 270)

Religious leaders are satirized for being perpetrators of violence instead of being ambassadors of peace. The society anticipates religious leaders to be mediators in the event where any form of violence occurs and be forefront in promoting peace and communal living.

Satire is also noticeable in "Memories", in *Stories of Our Lives* where another anonymous narrator is shocked by his male pastor making sexual advances at him after an overnight service. He flashbacks how his pastor offers to allow him to spend the night at his house since it was late and unsafe for him to go back to his place after the overnight service that ended at 3am. He is grateful for his pastor's kind gesture and happily accompanies him to his house. However, he becomes dumbstruck with confusion when his pastor begins to touch him inappropriately and finds this strange.

He expresses, “About an hour later, I started feeling his hands all over me, and I thought, “This is weird.” I didn’t expect that of him because he was a pastor and I understood HIM TO BE STRAIGHT” (P. 124)

Further, the narrator comically details how he wonders whether the pastor could be dreaming or imagines he was his girlfriend but to his amazement, the pastor persists with his creepiness even after the narrator questions him in bewilderment. He seems unbothered and unashamed and responds that it is normal for that to happen. This satirizes some clerics in that they publicly criticize and condemn gays in their sermons while they practice it behind closed doors. They rank the same sex behaviour as the worst sin, yet they practice it. Religion promotes extending love to all human race regardless of their colour, class and gender. Most religions also often promote affection, respect, tolerance, pardon and empathy for all. Relatedly, another anonymous narrator in “Religion and Spirituality”, part eight of *Stories of Our Lives* opines that the community perceives queer individuals as despicable hence ungracious to them. The narrator says,

> The conclusions from the religious community about gay people are not positive, and it affected me. It was a battle I had to fight. But I realised it’s only God who can judge ME, NOT PEOPLE” (P. 346)

He uses satire as a tool to vent his disappointment in the hypocritical religious community in Kenya for failing to live by the religious standards and norms that they preach.

Another unidentified narrator in the same part of *Stories of Our Lives* continues to ridicule religious leaders through satire for preaching the prosperity gospel which he calls a humanitarian disaster. He laughs at deceptive clerics who make their followers believe that they can physically assault their wives on Monday and feel forgiven by Saturday night because they gave their pastor money to build a house in the suburbs.

As he satirizes religious fanaticism, he laments that it is pretentious of them to condemn queerness and accentuate it as the origin of challenges in the country while failing to notice their own shortcomings. He says;

> It's not something that I can cope with and it's ridiculous they are able to be so hypocritical. They are no better. I have never entertained religious fanaticism. Their whole religion is on fire and they have literally just created POCKETS OF HELL HERE (P. 348)

To support this, the use of satire by this narrator, Effiong (2024) proposes that satire aims at censuring pretense and to hurt hypocritical persons with bruising irony in an attempt to bring change in the society. Further, Harris (1990) posits that satire is used to respectfully correct religious hypocrites and persuade them to change their character. Good satire is constructive and does not aim at damaging its victims rather it paints the vice as abominable and hence it should be effaced from the society or from its victim.

Religious hypocrisy is also expressed in the same part of *Stories of Our Lives* by another unidentified narrator that alleges being a committed Christian and a frequent church goer. He voices being burdened by guilt and feeling like the "worst sinner" as a queer man. He prays, fasts and even confesses this to his pastor who prays with him to be delivered from homosexuality. He is stunned when he learns through his friends that there are pastors who are gay like him but pretend to be straight contrary to his expectations. This foregrounds satire because the Christian religion disapproves its followers from becoming queer and being pretentious. He says, "I met another lady who told me that their pastor sleeps around with small boys. Another group of friends showed me a pastor who has his own church and HE IS GAY" (P. 356) On learning this, the narrator is not only devastated but also convinced in his heart that they are more pretenders in the church than outside it. He reprimands the dishonesty and pretention in religious spaces through satire. Though he labels himself a pretender, every time he goes to church he is surprised by the pretense in church as an institution. This is in agreement with Richter (2021) who asserts that satire plays a crucial role in challenging non-adherence to religious routineness and norms.

Also, satire criticizes issues such as downright criticism of laws that repress atheists and their perceived allies such as the queer identities. Satire can also be seen as a form of contention with hegemonic political and religious notions. Besides unmasking and criticizing many other societal ills, it is arguable that satire through irony exposes intolerance and conflicts caused by religion in literary writing.

The analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* by Tsavmbu (2021) reveals the connectivity of irony and satire. Adichie's uses the ironic effect of satire as a main vehicle to satirically expose religiosity in the character Eugene Achiko. Achiko's religiosity sham in *Purple Hibiscus* is portrayed in his extreme zeal and piety, yet he is also a serial wife beater and treats his family cruelly. He appears nice to other people in the society yet impatient and unforgiving to his family. He is satirized for hypocrisy because he does not practice what he preaches. The queer narrators also condemn the same religious hypocrisy in the anthologies because the faith people are zealous, yet they do not live by what they preach. Consequently, since Literature originates from society, satire intends to inspire reflections in people's conscience for purposes of change from a literary perspective. This implies people stopping religious hypocrisy and backing up their faith with actions. Satire is therefore a perfect tool for social, political and religious control by condemning vices, and is intentional about effecting positive changes in the society.

4.4 Use of Satire to castigate marginalization of queer men in family spaces and society

Queer men in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* deploy satire to criticize their family members who refuse to coexist with them because of their queer identity. For gays, dealing with criticism from family members can be very challenging. In relation to this, Demina (2021) puts forward that the nature of satire in a family setting explores parents' reaction towards their children who seem defiant. Most parents react by rejecting, threatening and perceiving these children as objects of derision.

This brings in satire as a tool to castigate such parental behaviour and attitude. The satirical effect is produced by family members failing to embrace the one who seem delinquent instead of protecting them. Demina further asserts that satire can be directly or indirectly used to mock or to protest against human vices among blood relations. Also, good satire elicits desired ironic effect. The role of healthy and supportive family relations for everyone in societies cannot be overlooked. Queer men in heterosexual family settings want to be supported, loved and accepted unconditionally like other family members for their complete wellness. A research by Wilkinson (1974) submits that a stable family setting is necessary for the entire wellness of all family members. Further, he argues that persons from disintegrated and unsupportive families live unfulfilled lives and tend to exhibit antisocial behaviours that are subject to legal action. Strong family relations are therefore important for queer men to live rewarding lives and achieve contentment. Normally, the family unit connotes a sense of belonging to its members and represents a safe haven. It is in family that individuals expect to be loved and embraced regardless of their weaknesses.

It is anticipated that total acceptance for a person deemed an outcast and a social misfit can only be found in the family setting. Additionally, Magpantay et.al. (2014) also assert that many young male adults from broken families, queer youth inclusive, experience high levels of anxiety and depression as well as juvenile delinquency. They also tend to fall back on negative strategies such as smoking and alcohol abuse to navigate this antisocial attitude. Thus, there is need to analyse queer persons' life experiences in relation to the family set-up. According to Pollitt et.al. (2021), the queer theory appreciates heteronormativity as the dominance and the validation of heterosexuality. Pollitt further propounds that in young LGBTQ persons' lives, the perception of the traditional gender binary and sexuality constructions are intertwined with their family settings. Also, for young queer persons who consider and regard biological parenthood over other family settings, their sexuality and sexual attraction is informed by their gender expressions.

Satire is deployed by gays to ridicule the conduct of family members that contradicts the ideal family norms which should be cohesive. It is arguable that for these queer narrators satire is pivotal in criticizing unhealthy and unsupportive family relations in the society. Queer individuals experience violations accompanied by corrosive utterances from their parents and siblings. Although South Africa may seem more unconventional in matters of sexuality, people are still conservative hence they tend to be hostile and reject queer family members as represented in *They Called me Queer.* Alluding again to Scott's "Harnessing the Power of Queerness", he recalls tolerating corrosive and demeaning utterances from family members. He says;

> My aunt asked my mother if she wasn't scared of "Satanism". This was a code for homosexuality. This is just one of the many times that I would endure wounding statements coming from people throughout MY YOUNG YEARS. (P. 16)

Here, satire is artistically deployed by Scott to reprimand his family's situation and the social belief system through storytelling. He ridicules their reluctance to embrace him as he is, yet, they are his blood relatives. In his narrative, Scott discloses that initially, he struggles with negative self-image because of queer exclusion in South Africa. He reveals that this is worsened by the unacceptance from his family members. They are ashamed of him. He expresses that shame is complex and like a disease it spreads even to relatives of queer persons. Members from both his nuclear and extended family are embarrassed to be associated with him as much as they may not show it out rightly. "Although it was never said, there were some family members who displayed feelings of shame towards me because of MY FEMME BEHAVIOUR" (P.18). Satire deployed by Scott to mock rejection by his family, also extends to the African family spaces.

Referring back to Jamil F. Khan, in *They Called Me Queer,* he sounds satirical in deriding the stigma dispensed to queer persons by their family members. He observes that his story; "Breaking down the Walls: Colonial Legacies, Home and Heteronormativity", is a reminder for many queer youths in South Africa and other African countries that a sense of belonging may not be found in their homes.

He says, “Home is not a place that is easily found, if it is found at all, behind the walls of “normal”. (P. 126) He remembers his mother, brother and sister in law all promoting normalizing discourses. He says that their rhetoric was always blended with “degrees of objection, ranging from disapproval to disgust” (P. 128). He explains that one afternoon, while watching an episode of Oprah with his mother, she comments on the subject of parents dealing with their gay children in response to the show’s encouragement of acceptance by family. Her response to this is, “This is fine as long as they are not my children” (P.128). It is during this moment that Khan realizes that despite how close he and his mother are, she would be his first opponent if he were to choose an authentic life of fully expressing his sexuality. Indeed, she proves him right when he eventually declares his gay identity by being cold towards him and expressing aversion towards him and his identity. He also recounts that when he was twelve, his brother once referred to queer people with the exclamation *“sies”* which implies disgust among the Afrikaans. He becomes very nervous as he realizes he is a phobogenic object to his brother without his knowledge. When he comes out, shame surfaces and his brother still finds it hard to accept him. Khan’s brother and his wife use gender to police Khan’s body. They deconstruct his sexuality to be female like and make him feel like a space invader. The purpose of their actions is to make him feel inferior in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Khan notes;

> He would always comment on how having me around was like having two wives-clearly a mark of transgression in a monogamous, heterosexual utopia. The transgression was my tolerated presence: a male body marked with feminine gestures and attributes. (P. 131)

Satire enables Khan to display and reprimand the unexpected queer rejection in family spaces. In recounting his frustration caused by his family’s behaviour towards him, he criticizes the African family settings for perceiving their queer children and siblings as objects of scorn. He is seen as the black sheep in his family and he has to live with loneliness and sense of detachment from his family.

Another typical example of satire in family spaces is Chase Rhys in the story "Blue Tea and the Beast" in *They Called Me Queer* narrates that he grew up as queer and his father hated him with passion. He always asked his mother to put make up on his face for him to look beautiful and fantabulous as she does. His father scornfully refers to him as "Moffie" which is an offensive term used to refer to queer men among the Afrikaans. Rhys queerness is met with sorrow and revulsion by his father and he extends this loathing to Rhys's mother. His mother loves him unconditionally and is serially physically assaulted by her husband who feels that she is encouraging Rhys's queerness. One day he attacks them both and Rhys locks himself in the bathroom to escape his father's wrath. His mother is beaten to a pulp by his father while blaming her for Rhys' gayness. Sadly, chooses to commit suicide by jumping from the rooftop than to accept and live with the reality of having a gay son. Satire is utilized by Rhys to target this damaging attitude of family members through the technique of irony. Uden (2020) puts forward that satire may be used to ridicule negligence of family roles by family members and criticize ineffectiveness in dispensing family duties whether physical or psychological. This include disregard of parental responsibility by parents towards their children, posing dangers to their lives. Gay narrators express dissatisfaction in the bad treatment dispensed by their parents and some have had to face difficulties, pain and dangerous encounters which would have been avoided had family members and parents been more understanding and compassionate.

Fägersten, Wictorin and Nordenstam (2021) propose that satire can be used to criticize the negative representation of the nuclear family unit in a narrative. Satire not only ridicules the unit but also enlightens the audience on the negative repercussions that are an aftermath of characters in a family undermining the image of the ideal nuclear family, in stories. For instance, the narratives from selected texts suggest that most queer individuals are estranged from their families and are dealing with the hurt of being rejected by their nuclear families with low chances of being accepted. They can only be fully included on condition that they abandon queer life or be excluded from the family domain.

Stories of Our Lives highlights the satirizing of the family institution in several narratives. A typical case is about an unnamed narrator in part one "Memories", who is expelled from high school for being involved in a same sex relationship. His parents facilitate his admission in another high school but, he narrates that his mother is always upset because she finds him 'weird'. He is particularly inclined to doing chores that are considered feminine like cooking and cleaning, and then even enrolls in a beauty school after high school. One time, out of anger, his mother kicks him out of their house when she catches him with his gay partner. This exposes him to life's perils and his hope in healthy interactions with family members is shattered. Things get worse and his father disowns him. He tells him, "You are not my son. You got those habits FROM YOUR MOTHER." (P. 69)

As a queer man, the narrator utilizes satire to condemn such loopholes in family relations and the parenting of queer children. The narrator is satirical of the fact that his mother is discriminative and does not love him like his siblings. Additionally, he feels that he cannot bank on his family's support. Therefore, parental responsibility becomes an object of satire for the narrator because his parents fail to exhibit care and guardianship towards him. It could be reasoned that while queer persons may differ with their family members in their views about sexual identity, they expect total acceptance and not to be deemed as misfits and objects of shame in the family setting. The narrator recounts that unfortunately, his mother kicks him out and since he has no place to go and nothing to do, a friend advises him to become a gay sex worker in Nairobi and Mombasa. In desperation, he agrees to it and grievously ends up suffering intense physical, verbal and sexual abuse. He uses satire as a device to criticize his family's rejection and unfeeling attitude towards him. He also asserts that it is because of their forsaking him that he ends up experiencing tribulations which could have been avoided. His relationship with his father is also strained because his father incessantly assaults him physically and verbally for being gay.

Satire is also deployed by the subsequent anonymous narrator in the same part of the anthology to admonish the family unit for their insincerity and perpetration of queer marginalization. He lampoons his family members for making him feel lesser, while he endures a condescending attitude from them as a queer man. Moreover, he ridicules their hypocrisy and finds it laughable that his family is ashamed and uncomfortable about his gay identity yet they cannot confront him about it. This is because they are financially unstable while he happens to be the breadwinner; and the most learned in his family. One time when watching exposes of gays in Mombasa on TV, his sister indirectly voices to him that homosexuality is an abomination and she would never allow her children to become such. However, like other family members, she fears he would sanction his financial assistance yet they rely on him for daily providence. This is why they cannot tell him out rightly or disown him. This ridicules their selfish character because they tolerate him for his money. Trott (2020) while admitting that it is difficult to accept queer persons in family spaces asserts that it is obligatory for families to accommodate difficult and honest discussions on being queer and provide safe space for family members that may be affected.

Another anonymous narrator in "Memories" part one of *Stories of Our Lives* further lampoons his family in disclosing being extremely assaulted by his father because of being gay. He details that when the beating becomes extreme, he runs away from home and becomes a sexual worker at fourteen years. He lacks the anticipated sense of attachment and protection from his family. He says;

> I left home because I couldn't take the beatings anymore. The streets were very hard; hunger, cops and thieves. You can see my neck is full of knife marks. It was very hard. I didn't have anyone to look OUT FOR ME (P. 92)

Through satire, the narrator castigates rejection by his own blood, and it is this desertion by his family that perpetuates avoidable misery in his life. Unconcerned about his life, his family severs links with him because of his gayness. In fact, they travel to Europe leaving him all alone without caring whether he lives or dies. While sometimes family acceptance

of queer children is intricate, as a continuous process rather than a one-shot event, the narrator uses satire to call out their rejection. He also uses satire to speak against queer rejection in the family spaces and vent his disappointment.

Ghosh (2020) explores young queer people's acceptance by their parents in conventional heteronormative families. The study reveals that parental appreciation and approval of young person's queer sexual identity is not guaranteed but may be gradual depending on whether the appropriate resources for navigating their children's queer identity are available to them. These resources include psychotherapy, sympathetic allies and members of the extended family, and networking with other parents of LGBTQ children. Miller and Eisenberg (2020) put forward that family affirmation is pivotal for the protection of queer youth identities in all contexts especially the heteronormative ones that subvert the LGBTQ identities. This advocates for family acceptance of gays as it is beneficial to them. Although it seems to antagonize religious doctrines and conventional norms, it strengthens their mental and physical wellbeing.

Another unidentified narrator in "Society and the Future", *Stories of Our Lives* laments that he does not have a strong attachment with his family as he would wish because they have totally refused to embrace his queer identity. He says;

> It's a shame that I don't have a stronger bond with my biological family. I don't feel like they understand me. I don't feel as understood by my own biological family as I do BY MY FRIENDS (P. 266)

He utilizes satire to criticize his family's sense of detachment and neglect towards him. The warm bond with his friends is his only hope because they accept him for who he is. Satire is therefore deployed by queer men in the texts to make a mockery of the callous nature and disinterest displayed in the family settings. Families of queer individuals display hostility towards them, yet they yearn for their love and acceptance.

In “Coming Out”, part five of *Stories of Our Lives*, an unidentified narrator ridicules his family for their insensitivity and ignorance about his gay identity. He is disheartened and wonders that if his very own people can treat him as a lesser person, how would the rest of the world treat him? He attributes his fighting spirit to marginalization by his family members. Dejectedly, he states that he anticipates and would endure rejection from everyone else but not his nuclear family. He uses satire to lament the fact that he learns self-hate from his home. He does not learn this from outsiders as he would anticipate. He says, “Gay people are underdogs, you have to aim much higher to get what the rest are getting. I WAS TAUGHT THAT AT HOME” (P. 279) This affirms that queer men are using satire as an instrument of censure, to ridicule the betrayal and the distress they are subjected to by their families on account of their gay identity. One might also argue that queer family support reduces the likelihood and occurrence of stigmatizing experiences associated with violations of traditional sexuality norms. While breaking family ties may seem liberating and comforting to queer persons, it on the contrary leads to deep sadness to both family members and the estranged queer member (Eribon, 2004). Consequently, severing family ties is too difficult and intense, and many cannot come to terms with the reality of lost family dreams and bonds.

In “Coming Out” of *Stories of Our Lives* another anonymous narrator speaks against the repeated emotional abuse he gets from his biological sister. He recounts that she would derogatorily call him “kookie” (a gay character in a popular TV soap opera) to refer to his mannerisms. She berates him, telling him to go away and find people who are like him and live in a location far away since queer men or “kookie” type of characteristics are not accepted or wanted in the society. His sister demands that he “finds a separate place to live,” or “find a girlfriend and it was always so urgent” (P. 282). Also, as a result of prejudicial attitude against LGBTQ people in Kenya, some queer men experience complete alienation by their families or considered dead. For instance, one anonymous narrator in the same part says, “When I came out to my mother she told me I was A DEVIL WORSHIPPER” (P. 285). The subsequent narrator also came out to his parents and they were extremely devastated by his gay status. He says;

> So I walked in and told my parents. It was hell. So many tears, so much drama. My mother's face crumpled when I told her. Like I was dead or something. My father held his head in his hands and moaned like HE WAS IN PAIN (P. 286)

This narrator satirizes and mournfully contends with his parents' reaction especially when he watches a YouTube clip in which some two white boys from America came out to their father and recorded the whole conversation. He is brought to tears when their father said, "Nothing changes. I still love you, and I'm still PROUD OF YOU" (P.288) He wishes that his father had said the same things. He castigates majority of African parents, who he says like his parents, are ashamed of the queer identity of their children. He vents his disappointment on how cowardly they are, about asking him to hide, be silent about his queerness and get married nonetheless. He highlights that his father frequently calls to ask him if he has made any decisions about "changing his lifestyle" (P.289) so that he is accepted back home. He adds;

> I no longer feel connected to them. My family is now a group of people who I have known for a long time, but I am not connected to. My friends are my family now. When I am in trouble, I scroll past my parents' names on my phone and call my friends instead. Free of the burden of being their good son… I died, and was reborn as a new person. They died to me, too, AND IT'S FINE (P.290)

It is unfortunate that the narrator seems to have accepted that his gayness has brought division between him and his family. The queer narrators above underscore satire as an exemplary tool to ridicule the conduct of family members in family spaces, as presented in the narratives to be contradicting the ideal cohesive family norms. Majority recount experiencing violations accompanied by corrosive utterances from their parents and siblings. The satirical narratives provoke readers to have critical reflections of the nuclear family ideals in their family settings.

Another anonymous narrator's mother sounds disgusted by his queerness and even threatens to kill him. She says, "I thought about coming to your bed and stabbing you, but

I imagined I'm the one who's going to have to bury you. You're THE DEVIL HIMSELF" (P. 291). The family unit continues to be satirized through another anonymous narrator in "Coming Out", who feels deeply hurt by his family that abandons him for his gayness and yet he yearns to be accepted by them. His family holds a meeting to corner him because of his sexual preference. The narrator details of tension between him and his family members during the meeting as he tells them that if anyone feels his being gay is a hindrance to their relationship, he/she is free not to visit him. He then tells them that if anyone keeps in touch with him it would mean that the person has no problem with his gayism. He says, "and for a whole year, no one came to see me" (P. 302). The narrator through satire is critical of family spaces that have queer family members and ridicules his family members' refusal to visit him because he is queer, and using his identity as an excuse for hindering their peaceful co-existence.

In the selected texts, satire has also been utilized by gays in showing decadency among heterosexuals in brutalizing queer men. In "Identity", *Stories of Our Lives*, the narrator begins by revealing clearly that heteropatriarchy and heterosexist ideologies are long established in Kenya. He then castigates the brutality exhibited by straight Kenyan men who profess conformity to the supremacy of these ideologies. The narrator is one time accosted and beaten senseless by heterosexual men because of his gay identity. He is also threatened, verbally abused and left at the verge of death by his attackers. This barbaric behaviour and cruelty displayed by these straight men is horrifying according to the narrator. Besides the incessant blows he receives resulting in numbing pain, he also feels insulted and demeaned. He says;

> The worst thing is that there were all these parked cars around us and no one came out to help. These guys were kicking and kicking me. They were calling me "*shoga"* (fag) and one of them said that they were going to shove a pipe UP MY ASS (P.28-29)

By family failing to defend or support him even while under such attacks demonstrates failure of family as social support system.

This lampoons the heterosexual society that shames and advocates hatred for others on the basis of their gender identity for reasons that it differs from their own. This cruelty hampers peaceful coexistence and harmonious living in the society, as it propels conflicts and divisions by minoritisation of certain classes of people. The hegemonic masculinity is pronounced in Kenya. This ideology promotes queer discrimination and unfavourable conditions in families towards gays and women in general. Coming back to Carl Collison's narrative, "The 'Yes' Ice Cream" in *They Called Me* Queer, he narrates how gays in South Africa are referred to as *moffie-naaier* – a derogatory term for a homosexual among the Afrikaans and are always victims of this brutal attacks. In his queer activism, he collects personal life stories of South African queer men who have been brutalized by straight men to criticize their cruelty. Collison asserts that queer men rape and sexual abuse incidents are recurrent in the country. Just like in his story, "Of Names and 'The Blood That Falls'", "The 'Yes' Ice Cream" is about a crippled queer man who discloses in this story to Collison, the horrors being gang raped by straight men. He gives Collison an ice-cream as a sign of trust and opens up to him. He also allows Collison to write and publish about his dark story. He reveals that he is suspicious of his neighbourhood. He also cannot share queer life experiences and his sexual assault experiences with his family members because he does not trust them. Feelings that he has bottled up for years come flooding out to Collison and not to his family members satirizes the family unit. 'Gang raped not once but twice they made it known how much they hated him, him THE- *MOFFIE-NAAIER.'* (P.56)

Thus, through satire, the queer men in this narrative hopes the public gets an opportunity to reflect on the mistakes and shortcomings and not repeat them in future. This especially applies to the family unit which ideally should be the first line of defense for queer men, but which in practice lead in further marginalizing them.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how satire is deployed as a resistance tool by queer men to thwart heteronormativity with the help of the queer theory. This creates awareness about the artistic strategies used by gays in contesting heteronormative sexuality constructs and how through the deployment of these styles queer men in Kenya and South Africa grapple with daily queer realities. It has displayed how queer men in various spaces resist queer discrimination by exposing the ills meted against them by the heterosexuals who mostly domineer the modern society.

As a literary style, satire has been powerfully utilized by gays in the selected texts to bastardize political actors and the criminal justice systems that discriminate and disparage queer men while being complicit in other social ills in society such as corruption and bad governance. It condemns the politicization of queer identity for political mileage. In the religious spaces, it satirizes religion that preaches love and acceptance of all, while hypocritically othering queer identities as demon-possessed and requiring exorcism. Finally, family spaces are also projected as unsafe as unexpected, because of the excommunication or discrimination of queer members. Although satire seems to be heavily employed in *Stories of Our Lives* more than in *They Called Me Queer,* the narrators have been immensely successful in effectively utilizing the satirical literary style in the two anthologies.

To satirize various actors in society, gay men through their narrations in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer,* illustrate ironical circumstances through which the hypocrisy of heterosexuals who derogate gays is exposed. Using satire, weaknesses of a mainly heteronormative society is critiqued, so as to strengthen the gay community that is under attack and help consolidate the gay identity.

CHAPTER FIVE: NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVES IN NAVIGATING GAY EXPERIENCES

5.1 Introduction

Michel Foucault's popular statement that "queer visibility is a trap" (1979, p.253) seems to be the reality in most African countries. Even African countries that have never criminalized gayism or those that prohibit discrimination against gays have not been left out in side lining queer persons. Indeed, it is a plight for queer individuals in Kenya, South Africa and the entire African continent because they tend to be disenfranchised in most social contexts as a result of the hetero dominance adopted through societal customs. This discrimination has left the queer subjects with no option but to find ways of getting through the complexity of living among cisgender heterosexuals in contexts that are predominantly heteronormative. These queer subjects are thus compelled to design strategies to negotiate through the net of homophobia as demonstrated by narrators in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*. One of these strategies that forms the focus of this chapter is the narrative perspective. The narrative perspective is a stylistic device that has been key in the navigation of LGBTQ subjects' marginality. Mavrody et.al. (2021) assert that voice is mostly used to describe narrators and narration, particularly by deploying literary techniques of writing a character's personal thoughts in the third-person narrative voice or the first person narrative voice. Voice also relates to the point of view of major and other narrators or characters in a literary text. Voice is determined by the choice of words used by the narrator or the protagonist inclusive of the tone, and is a form of self-assertiveness of a narrator that is present in the communication role of literary texts. Omuteche (2015) also observes that the audience's understanding of what a writer includes in their narrative, essay or poem which ranges from characterization to plot, setting and resolution, enhances audience appreciation of the representation of varieties of narrative voices in the literary texts.

He argues that the first person narrators and the authorial narrators, for instance, reflect that the language we speak, which is determined by our backgrounds shapes our thoughts about

reality. The narrator is the voice of the story. The authorial narrator differs from the first person narrator. Individuality is the salient feature of first-person narrator while the third-person narrator is not a character in the story (Jumpertz & Tary, 2020). While the former may be subjective and an internal perspective of the narrator, the latter is an external perspective of the narrator hence, could be more objective. As such, it can be argued that these narrators may use their language to describe the deep-seated societal norms and beliefs of communities in which these texts are set. The first person narrative perspective has been effectively utilized by gay narrators in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* in displaying queer marginalization strengthened by the long established hetero dominance notion in the homophobic Kenya and South Africa. It is also used by the queer men in these queer anthologies to demonstrate their ideological strategies of navigating the gay experience. In contesting the heteronormative sexuality constructs they deploy the first person narrative perspective to attack the hostility expressed by those, who as per the lens of these queer narrators, blindly accept the accustomed racial and sexual marginalization of LGBTQ communities in the two African countries and the entire continent. The first person narrative perspective dominates the two anthologies making it possible for gays to assert their individuality from a personal perspective. This perspective is important as it allows the narrators to speak from personal and intimate point of views. Therefore, with the help of the first person narrative perspective, this section interrogates queer African experiences and unpacks gays' coping mechanisms in navigating heteronormative spaces. In *They Called me Queer* and *Stories of Our Lives*, narratives are narrated from the first person narrative perspective, which strengthens the realism of the narrative plot since the narrative voice addresses the readers directly giving it more credence. Although the narratives are personal confessions and self-narrations of queer men in Kenya and South Africa, this study is written from the perspective of scholarly writing and not from the perspective of a queer writer. This points to the interiority and exteriority of writing and how a writer or a narrator feels. Smith and Watson (2010) argue that in life narratives and life writing texts such as *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called me Queer,* individuals deploy the art of writing their life stories as a tool of advancing their agency. Narrators negotiate cultural restrictions and other strictures by telling their life stories. The narrators in the selected texts are queer and narrating their stories enables them to fight for space in

heteronormativity and achieve self-discovery. These narratives are also intended for a particular audience and are intentional. The narrators address specific readers. The readers are able to tell the intent of the narrator and how the narrators expect the readers to react. For instance in the selected texts, the narrators paint a clear picture of their struggles with heterosexist environs and expect the readers to be empathetic, understanding and accommodating to them amidst their deep seated beliefs in heteronormativity. Self-narrations also enhance originality and authenticity. The narrators have an immediate and firsthand knowledge of that experience. It can be argued that life writing in such queer narratives enables the narrators to assert themselves through the 'I' in the first person narrative perspective. Discussed in this section are duality, religious affirmation and self-affirmation.

5.2 Narrative Perspectives and Duality

While not entirely a new concept, Butler (2020) is credited for her concept of performativity in gender and sex. This brought about the idea of multifariousness of sex, an idea that sex is a spectrum and not binary. While not directly concerned with duality, performativity opens one up to the question of sex orientation as a question of socialization and not biology. In this section, I interrogate how through narrative perspectives gay men challenge the binary nature of heteronormativity, while seeking to project sexual identity as socially constructed and subject to individual uniqueness and preference.

It is certainly true that the narrative perspective is not just an element in storytelling but it plays a key role in shaping the entire narrative experience. Therefore, the centrality of the first person narrative perspective in communicating meaning to an audience or readers cannot go unnoticed. It is pivotal as seen in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*, because it enlivens the narrator's or the protagonist's experiences hence appealing to the emotions of the audience, while drawing them to the mood in these queer narratives. This narrative perspective also enhances the reader's understanding of the subject matter, in this case, the queer thematic concerns.

For instance, it has played a major role in enabling these gay narrators question the basic tenets of heteronormativity and narrate queer experiences in the African context. The narrators have emphasized the various ways in which they deal with heteronormativity in relation to their berated queer identity. While some have deployed the first person narrative perspective to affirm themselves, others have utilized it to relieve concerns, fears and their resigned nature towards the undermining of African queer identities hence bringing into play duality to survive.

The term duality in the queer context denotes the attribute of exhibiting two different or opposite lives. This is manifested more in the Kenyan setting than in comparatively liberal South Africa as seen in the selected texts. Duality in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* is demonstrated where queer men fake heterosexual coupling, concealment of queer identity, denying queer identity and falsifying family relations to live together as gay couples. They have sexual affairs and marriages with heterosexual females in the open and with queer men secretly. Additionally, those narrators that have not actualized this, have confessed pondering over or giving thought to entering into heterosexual marriages to evade suspicion of being gay and questioning by family, friends and the entire heterosexist communities. Unlike the bisexual, these gay narrators profess to be straight and conceal their romantic or sexual attraction to queer men while they are actively involved in gayism secretly for fear of being pushed around by heterosexuals. Thus, in order to mask their queerness, they pretend to be romantically attracted to women.

Fornieles (2023) asserts that the first person narrative perspective can be used to create queer spaces and bring about alternative gender narratives in pieces of writing. Further, literary works apply different narrative perspectives and the first person narrative perspective may be deployed to unsettle established conventional gender formulations and advocate for unconventional sexuality and gender diversities. This is well represented in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* because the personal narrations by these queer men feature LGBTQ themes and narrators that oppose hetero dominance as they

attempt to redefine the cultural workings of sexuality and gender. Fornieles (2023) accentuates that the first person narrative perspective is not just a voice and nothing more, but in the queer field, it can be instrumental in upsetting embedded traditional gender binary norms and in vocalising the establishment of queer identities.

While centering on duality, it is important to stress that in the homophobic African setting where queerness is frowned upon, great courage is required for gays to disclose their identity and share their experiences.

As a result of fear of victimization, queer persons in Kenya's *Stories of Our Lives* recount their tales anonymously. Similarly, in South Africa's, *They Called Me Queer* where names and towns of residence of the narrators are unhidden, gays still encounter discrimination. In the selected anthologies, the first person narrative perspective effectively point duality as one way of queer men surviving in these heteronormative societal contexts.

Onanuga (2022) argues that in African societies, homophobic standpoints persistently resist the outing of gays whether forced or deliberate as represented in some African fictional narratives. Queer visibility is absent in Africa and members of minoritised sexual communities employ such measures in order to cope with queer exclusion. The first person narrative perspective is deployed by the narrators in the selected texts to relay that to survive homophobia and heteronormativity, gays become deceivers and imposters. As such, with duality suggesting queer two-facedness, gays dodge homophobic restrictions by dating both opposite and similar genders and establishing feigned relationships; all this meant to dupe heterosexuals about their identity. This duality is revealed by the narrators' self-confession in the first person narration.

To begin with, in "Memories", which is part one of *Stories of Our Lives,* an anonymous narrator represents duality through hiding his queer identity and entering into a fake straight

romantic affair. He utilizes the first person narrative perspective to openly admit how together with his gay partner and a lesbian couple, they fake romance to cover up queerness. His date, a lesbian and their partners, who are also in his predicament agree to this arrangement to circumvent stigma, suspicion, stress and avoid detection by straight and cisgender persons. Unfortunately, for him, his family and the community become suspicious of him making him prone to emotional imbalance and serious mental breakdown. He battles intense feelings of being a pariah and besides fabricating a heterosexual relationship, he turns to drug abuse as he lacks moral support which he narrates almost ruins his life. He self-confesses that;

> We used to go places, all the four of us. I would sit with my lesbian girlfriend in front, and my boyfriend would sit with her girlfriend at the back. But some people got really observant. She IS A TOMBOY. (P.14).

The first person narrative perspective alludes to the narrator or protagonist using the pronoun 'I' or 'we'. Salem et.al. (2017) reveal that the first person narrative perspective entails narrating a story from the protagonist's outlook. Thus, it can be said that the pronoun 'I' and 'we' points to the narrator as a main character, who is directly affected by the events in the story. These pronouns help the narrator in self-confession, personally relay to the readers his and his friends' survival tactics of deliberately disguising heterosexual coupling to escape the stigma that comes with being queer in the Kenyan homophobic setting portraying their scheming character. 'I' and 'We' also helps in creating intimacy between the audience and the narrator because the reader is able to identify with the narrator's thoughts as it seems like he is addressing the readers directly.

In describing the aspect of duality, Olondo (2019) asserts that just as thespians use masks in a performance to masquerade, so do gays mask their gayness to hoodwink heterosexuals and shield themselves from suspicion and victimization from the 'standard' world. Moreover, in the queer context, this masking not only involves the make-believe heterosexual relationships by gays, but also lying about one's sexual identity and concealing it. Comparably, In "Memories", part one of *Stories of Our Lives,* another

faceless narrator utilizes the first person narrative perspective to disclose to the readers that his survival tactics in the queer prejudiced African society, reflected through Kenya are concealing his gay identity and marrying a lesbian. The lesbian should be in agreement with his idea of pretending to be in a heterosexual marriage. In the narrative, the narrator emphasizes that till date, his personal decision to be closeted has been helpful in navigating the stigma associated with gayism. He recounts that his family has never found out about his queer identity and in school, he acts masculine when interacting with gender binary conforming persons, lest they start judging him. Although he finds this quite challenging, he believes that he has no alternative for the sake of peace and his family.

Further, he narrates that his deeply heteronormative parents would literally die of stroke if they were to discover that he is gay and so disclosure will never be an option to him. The first person narrative perspective enables him to further disclose his secret about his plan to marry a lesbian to help him conceal his identity and negotiate queerness. While he seriously considers this, he also reveals his ploy to later divorce his lesbian lover and expresses his fears about the new marriage laws in Kenya, and how tough divorce is regarding the division of property. He says;

> If I found a lesbian who wanted a child, it might be easier. Then we would be able to keep our boundaries, so I can date men and she can date women. I would introduce her to my family and we could even walk down an isle AND GET MARRIED (P.123)

The first person narrative perspective indicated by 'I', refers to this narrator as the protagonist. It is effective because in deploying this perspective, he succeeds in expressing the obstacles he encounters for being queer, his feelings and his deliberate deceptiveness advanced by queer stigma in this homophobic society. It also enables him to draw the attention of the interested reader as he highlights queer thematic concerns. Olondo and Musumba (2024) put forward that the narrator controls what to narrate in the first person narrative perspective. Thus, the information available to the readers is by this narrator only, hence it is subjective towards his or her ideologies. As such, this is clearly applicable in the narrative above because this perspective empowers the anonymous narrator, as the

central figure in the narrative to express how he plans to elude oppressive heteronormativity by marrying a lesbian and having a child. It also enables him to be subjective in indirectly giving his personal opinions; that heteronormativity is repressive.

Further, duality continues to be unveiled by these queer men who feign brushing aside their gay identity while swinging both ways to cope with the struggles of being gay in the African subversive environment. In another instance in "Memories", of *Stories of Our Lives* a different anonymous narrator deploys the first person narrative perspective to divulge how African queer men are turning to pretence and fabrication of sexual identity so as to escape queer persecution and finger pointing reinforced by the deeply rooted societal heteronormativity in Africa. He narrates "I think it's the denial. Society does not expect you to be like that. Many of us try to be bisexual because you are expected to have girlfriends – peer pressure AND ALL THAT" (P. 69).

Al Areqih (2022) asserts that African sociocultural and religious moral principles disapprove queerness hence play a central role in constructing a queer person's identity and influencing their choices of navigating hetero dominant contexts. To give credence to this, in "Identity", part three of *Stories of Our Lives* a different unidentified narrator deploys first person narrative perspective to disclose that he is madly in love with another man but the situation in Kenya is not conducive for gay marriages. He displays duality by marrying a straight woman to hide his queer identity and navigate in heteronormative religious spaces and family setting. He narrates his struggles and fears of his gay identity being exposed. Besides, having been raised in a heterosexual family setting, he reveals that he dearly loves his grandmother who nurtured him and prays she never gets to know about his secret as she would die of shock on finding out that he is gay. Nevertheless, he feels that living a double life is a nerve-racking ordeal yet it is the only option he has left. He says "It is stressful living a double life. People think highly of me. I sit in church, in the youth COMMITTEE". (P.220).

"I" refers to the first person narrative perspective he uses in his narrative to make readers appreciate his dilemma of disclosure or hurting his family, in justifying his double life as a way of surviving in the homophobic environs. He also explains that this will be his life unless the stringent laws against gayism in Kenya are loosened. The societal and religious value-orientation in Kenya shapes his introspection about his queer identity, so, the behavior he exhibits is simply protective camouflage. This narrative perspective is also meant to make his readers comprehend how as a queer man he interacts with the Kenyan cultural norms, how he internalises them as they shape his attitude towards his sexuality.

In the same part of the anthology, another anonymous queer narrator similarly represents his dual nature. Through first person narrative perspective, he confesses to secretly practising homosexuality but, for fear of being noticed and disparaged, he would have to marry a heterosexual woman as a way of protecting himself and coping in the hetero dominant discourses in the African context. He expresses "I AM GAY, but I would like to get married. Of course, to a woman! I will marry at some point because I am in this Africa so I MUST MARRY" (P. 221).

It is arguable that the first person narrative perspective "I" is an exemplary tool for this narrator to stress the presence of queer intolerance and contention over gay rights in Africa resulting in camouflage by queer men. He plans to get into a heterosexual marriage to conceal his real emotions and his gay identity. The effectiveness of this narrative perspective is also to reveal the narrator's thoughts on homophobia and how African politics of conventional sexuality and discrimination against queer persons make him consider living a double life. In similar fashion, an unnamed narrator in "Identity", part three of *Stories of Our Lives* also deploys first person narrative perspective to narrate queer double living. He reveals that, concealing gay identity and masquerading as straight or bisexual is a technique employed by a majority of queer identities to escape victimization by the heterosexuals. While referring to queer men, he says;

> Many of them are single. Or they are deep in the closet. Or they are getting married so that people don't know, to save face in society. Or SAYING THEY'RE BISEXUAL. (P.231)

It is clear that just like the first person narrative perspective, this omniscient narrator connects with the audience by allowing the reader to uncover, analyse unfolding events and comprehend how queer men negotiate their identities in heteroromantic contexts. Authorial narration depicts this narrator as an eyewitness, who perceives that duality is meant to preserve the reputation of queer men among heterosexuals.

This is in agreement with Omuteche (2011) who observes that in the third person narrative perspective (omniscient), the narrator takes the position of a distant observer and may exhibit the all-knowing attribute. Further, deploying omniscient narration empowers the narrator to describe the other characters' actions, thoughts and events to the readers. This is central in enhancing objectivity making readers interpret events and characters without biases and formed opinions; drawing their sympathy.

Comparably, dualism is evident in "Society and the Future", part four of *Stories of Our Lives* where another anonymous narrator utilizes first person narrative perspective to say he gets apprehensive whenever his parents raise eyebrows on his queerness. To get through this, he becomes deceptive, as he contemplates on forming a heterosexist family while remaining queer. Masking his queerness is a gimmick to delude his parents into believing that he is not gay and gain their trust. He says, 'Maybe I'll have one kid, so that I can leave a specimen of myself, and so that my mom and dad CAN KEEP QUIET.' (P.251). Furthermore, in the same part of the anthology, the two-faced nature of gays continues to be unveiled through two other anonymous narrators whose fall back plan is to trick their families to avoid the humiliation that is dispensed by straight persons to gays. The first narrator expresses in his story that being a queer man in Kenya is not a joy-ride. He reveals that his parents give him no rest and they have refused to stomach the fact that he is homoerotic. They vent that he is such a disappointment as their only son and their only hope to continue his family's line of descent. Since they disapprove of the narrator's queer

identity and are interested in having grandchildren in a heterosexual family setting, they keep persuading him to mask his sexual identity to escape LGBTQ shaming. They even propose to him a 'brilliant idea' that to pass as a heterosexual, he needs to find a girl to marry to hide his identity. This would ensure he does not experience stigma that comes with being gay in his environs. He says, "They tell me, 'Even though you are like that, try and have a cover plan. You can find a nice girl and marry her. COVER YOUR TRACKS'" (P.262)

In like manner, the other anonymous narrator suggests that holding on the aspect of duality paves a way for the harmonious co-existence of gays and heterosexuals. Through the first person narrative perspective, he confesses that many queer men, himself included, are deceiving hetero dominant communities by living with their gay lovers in the guise of relatives for safety. Therefore, the narrator and his lover are mendacious as they claim to be members of extended family to navigate the constraints of homophobia in Kenya. He expresses;

> I live with my boyfriend but nobody knows. We live as cousins. We are both not originally from here (this town), so they can't tell that we're actually not cousins. We have been together for TWO YEARS NOW (P. 271)

Indeed, all that ~~is~~ instanced in the above narratives is in line with Hunt et.al. (2020) who argue that queer men who identify with long-established heteronormative masculinity in their surroundings tend to act straight due to internalized homophobia. Jahn (2021) observes that in a personal narrative, besides the narrators narrating their personal accounts, they use the pronouns 'I' and "We", signifying direct lived experiences and direct communication towards the reading audience. The first narrator uses this narrative perspective to decry that his own parents have denigrated him for being queer and see him as a source of shame. It also enables him as the queer protagonist to directly address his readers which may create a strong sense of empathy to some readers.

Similarly, the first-person narrative voice is also uniquely suitable for the second narrator presenting his queer realities. “I” significantly impacts how he reveals information to the audience, that the anti-gay behaviour and attitude in Africa forces him and his partner to lie as a way to gain power to survive. His personal narration straightforwardly and deeply enlightens the readers about LGBTQ inevitabilities while suggesting that perhaps other queer men are doing these to navigate the African gay experience.

Nahole (2023) in her study explores the portrayal of queer characters in African literary works and asserts that queerness elicit repulsion in Africa. Although some people are non-judgmental, their positive reaction is overpowered by negativity. Further, Nahole proposes that those queer persons that come out of the closet are devastated because they encounter disgrace. Despite the many techniques to circumvent homophobic Africa, queer subjects face social challenges and therefore live a burdened pretentious life to fit in heteronormative African societies. This strategic adjustment is relevant even in the South African setting. Queer men apply duality to survive in homophobic societies. The story of Craig Lucas, a renowned musician in South Africa demonstrates his struggle with heteronormativity. Being queer, he narrates concealing his queer identity to thrive in his music career. In his narrative “Open Letter” in *They Called Me Queer* he discloses his participation in a music talent programme as a prominent artist, but just when he is close to winning the music award, his victory is threatened by his sexual identity. He expresses;

> Then came The Voice South Africa. People started telling me to keep the fact that I was in a relationship with a man a secret. ‘The audience is conservative,’ they said, ‘no and no one will vote for you (P.43)

To gain votes from the South African audience, he conceals his gay identity as advised and to his amazement he wins The Season Two Voice South Africa Award. He further adds, “So I did, and I won. ‘I am glad I listened to them,’ I thought” (P. 43). Even though Lucas eventually rises above duality at the end of his narrative, it is important to note that he struggles with a split sexual personality for a long time as it becomes his survival tactic in South African heteronormativity. The first person narrative perspective gives Lucas a

platform to voice his Music career growth ambitions and highlight his sexual duplicity to the readers. He narrates that he is gay, yet he acts as if he is not, as a queer coping strategy. In concealing his gayness, he garners many votes and becomes the season two winner in a popular South African singing competition. Ganzevoort (2011) argues that scholars having a critical outlook such as queer scholars, emphasise the significance of local narratives that call into question the hegemonic logic of an oppressive society.

Moreover, first person narrative perspective enables marginalized persons to voice their personal life experiences and share their otherwise "dangerous stories" in the lens of societal norms and traditions. This is pertinent to the selected anthologies of this study as sexually minoritised narrators express their life accounts with the help of first person narrative perspective. Similarly, Lwando Scott lingered in sexual identity dualism before finding his true identity. Scott in his story "Harnessing the Power of Queerness" in *They Called Me Queer* utilizes first person narrative perspective to openly admit duality as his coping mechanism. As a post-doctoral fellow in Cape Town, he protects himself by hiding his queer identity. He asserts that violence, taunting and disparagement of gays is a real menace in South Africa. He actualizes the ideas of Erving Goffman, that conceptualizes stigma (queerness in his case), as a force that drives its victims to go to great lengths to hide it so that they are not prosecuted for having the said stigma. He says;

> When I think of the way I would walk around wanting to be invisible at times to avoid detection, I behaved like someone who had a stigmatized identity, and this caused ME GREAT SHAME. (P. 17)

Further, he adds; "I knew the isolation was part of survival because hell was other people, and so, being by myself meant that I wouldn't be VICTIMIZED". (P. 20)

The 'I' in Scott's narrative insinuates that he personally opines that the discovery of an individual's sexual identity is characterized by complexity especially when one is attracted to people of the same sex. Scott proposes that concealing identity is propelled by the

paralyzing scare that comes with a man realizing his attraction is to other men as well as being frowned upon as a queer man.

Comparably, Jamil F. Khan's "Breaking down the Walls: Colonial Legacies, Home and Heteronormativity" in *They called me Queer,* reveal that he opts for duality for quite some time in his life by concealing his queer identity to survive while waiting for the right time to come out.

Khan reflects experiencing emotions of despair and fear for his obvious inability to achieve heterosexuality. He says, "Subtly, I began to co-opt myself into being less homosexual because the risk of not attaining the ultimate standard of respectability proved more dangerous than CHOOSING SOMETHING ELSE" (P.127). Using first person narrative perspective, Khan narrates that being queer in a world that shows him the opposite made him to feel anxious and ashamed. He feels the constant threat of wrath for transgressing heteronormative boundaries was all around hence he struggles to conceal his gayness. He adds;

> I remember constantly going back and forth between admitting and denying my sexuality to myself in an attempt to convince myself that I still had a chance of living my discordant sexuality undetected if I just PERFORMED IT PROPERLY. (P.128)

In the first person voice, he narrates that confession seemed too dangerous and he could imagine only three possible outcomes: to live in perpetual unhappiness married to a woman, to declare himself asexual (based on a narrow understanding of sex and sexuality at the time), or to commit suicide.

It is evident in these two queer anthologies that the narratological episodes and themes such as becoming aware of one's queer identity are well presented in a first-person narrative because the queer men involved are present as characters and are self-conscious while

telling the story and relieving their experiences. Thus, the concerned LGBTQ persons involved in these narratives strengthen the theme of developing queer self-recognition for African queer individuals. In narrating their own queer lived experiences to their audience, they also retell it to themselves hence it brings about self-reflection and has a therapeutic function to these queer narrators.

5.3 Narrative Perspectives and Religious Affirmation

Religious spaces have often been associated with marginalization and bastardization of gays, considering that most religions do not condone homosexuals. While there are instances where religious spaces can be safe for opening up and expressing oneself more forcefully as gay (Van Doorn, 20125), this remains an exception than the norm. Using the work of Michel Foucault to theorise the contours of gay Christians, Beazer (2013) has also documented that gays attend church for faith, fellowship and identity reasons, despite the hostility they may face in such spaces. Religious spaces like churches and mosques may therefore serve as spaces for affirmation by gays, despite the feeling of guilt and judgement such spaces may pass on gays.

Stories of Our Lives and *They Called Me Queer* highlight that queer persons deploy first person narrative perspective to quote phrases and texts from holy books such as the Bible and Quran and many others that help them overcome negative thoughts and self-doubt about their queer identity. Gay narrators in these texts deploy the first person narrative perspective to express queer religious affirmation as a way of queer persons coping amidst African hetero dominant discourses. A study by Schollars et.al. (2021) discloses that most queer persons disclose having been brought up in conservative Christian settings where their emerging queerness was condemned. Nevertheless, they confess to finding new fellowships and places of faith in later teenage or adult years. Therefore, to overcome insecurities and survive the weight of societal injustice and marginalization unleashed to them, queer persons attribute the Christian God or Allah, for Muslims as loving and

gracious to all, not only to persons practicing traditional gender binary notions but also to the LGBTQ community. It is therefore correct to say that for some queer men religious communities are therapeutic and dispense inner healing and moral support for gays to enable them cope with the gay experience. Firstly, in "Memories", part one of *Stories of Our Lives,* an unnamed narrator deploys the first person narrative perspective to enlighten readers that validating oneself through religious concepts helps in navigating the gay experience. It is here that they offer each other moral support and he also financially supports his needy Adventist gay partner whose family wants nothing to do with him. He notes that their survival among heterosexuals and their growth in faith can be attested to their sexuality. He narrates;

> I wouldn't have met the wonderful people I have met because of being gay. I think it's an opportunity I was given to get to meet these people, and would I have it if He (God) was so against it?... I think He loves us just AS WE ARE. (P.78)

The first person narrative perspective in the pronoun "I" is significant in amplifying the narrator's attainment of positive thoughts on queerness, through the religious coping strategy in this narration. "I" in this story also underscores the narrator's cherishing of the Adventist queer social group in strengthening hope. This narrative perspective is also a vehicle for the narrator to voice his rejection towards the notion preached to them about their abhorrence by God and cling to the unconditional love and the grace of God for all humanity, including all LGBTQ persons. The first person narrative perspective in this narrative is also meant to advocate for queer religious affirmation as a tool to subvert the heteronormative supremacy and challenge Christians who are anti-gay or against LGBTQ affirming churches. This conforms to notion expounded by Hinman and Lacefield (2020) that gays raised as Adventists, queer coteries are instrumental in not only integrating their sexuality and spirituality but also, constructing personal identity hence navigating the gay experience. Further, they put forward that queer men brought up in strict religious backgrounds from an early age, such as the Adventists, are prone to having permanent scars due to the puritan doctrine inculcated by their clergy. As such, early indoctrination can have an impact on the emotions and sexuality of the sexually minoritised hence counselling and staying connected with queer circles is significant for coping and for moral support. It

is contradictory that the clergy/religious group that indoctrinated one while young is expected to counsel and offer social support to the same victims of their indoctrination.

In "Memories*",* part one of *Stories of Our Lives,* an anonymous narrator narrates his reliance on religious affirmation to cope with the gay experience.

The second person narrative perspective allows him to share with the reading audience about his hope in God and how he finds solace and healing in religion as a gay sex worker, when his family sever their relationship with him because of his queer identity. He says, "He (God) doesn't care if you are Muslim, Hindu or Christian. Even if you are gay or a sex worker, you just know God is looking at you and PROVIDING FOR YOU". (P. 95).

The above narrator uses the second person narrative perspective, through the pronoun "you" to encourage the reader as a potential victim of queer exclusion, or address the reader as a perpetrator of queer marginalization. In this situation, this narrative perspective also makes the reader part of the story just like the first person narrative perspective. This gay narrator deploys this narrative perspective as a technique to hoping to make such readers become cognizant of their prejudicial attitude and change because according to the narrator, God does not discriminate against any person. He also encourages queer persons to be happy about their queer identity and not to recoil. Chen and Bunescu (2021) argue that the second person narrative enables the narrator or the protagonist to explore the reader's thoughts using the second pronoun "you". While not common like the other two perspectives, it is significant in bringing the reader on board as a character involved in the story just like the first person narrative perspective.

Likewise, the unnamed narrator in the subsequent story opts to be fearless in declaring his gayness through both religious and self-affirmation to get on and live among heterosexuals. In his story, he employs the first person narrative perspective, while confidently professing

Christianity and his practising of homosexuality despite the antagonistic attitude of his family and faith community towards his stand. He expresses;

> My colleagues know. My pastor knows because I am part of the praise and worship team, and I spread the gospel in different schools. I am a homosexual and I am very PROUD OF MYSELF. (P. 160).

As he uses this narrative perspective, the pronoun "I" reveals that the narrator is religious and queer at the same time. He describes in the first person narration of his active participation in evangelical activities thus weakening religion boundaries and disrupting normativity as a means to create space for queer appreciation. It can be said that the narrator's use of "I" to narrate his vibrant involvement in church activities despite his pastor's awareness promotes the upsetting of the notion of a 'true' religion that challenges queerness. This is in agreement with Liesch (2023) who asserts that gays and those who conform to homonormativity, feel that they deserve access to religion. Thus, they champion for inclusion in matters of faith, while claiming they have rights to access and belong to faith communities just like the heterosexuals to navigate the gay experience. For this reason, queering religion has been linked with the endorsement of sexual diversities as well as desires and identities that have been discredited for long within the study of religion.

According to Lanser (2021), the harmony between the feminist and the queer understanding of voice, may be used to explore how the first person narrative perspective may take queer form or be 'queered' in narratives. Further, the research discloses that the first person narrative perspective may express queer sexuality directly or indirectly as seen in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called me Queer.* It also promotes appreciation of this narrative perspective with regard to gender and sexuality and in relation to queer and feminist thought. It is therefore correct to say that the first person narrative perspective aids the narrators in this anthologies in giving insight about their state of mind and emotions to the readers while emphasizing on their reliance on faith to navigate their gay experience.

In *They Called Me Queer,* Lester Walbrugh's story "Tyron's Prayer" is a testament of how queer persons rely on religious affirmation to navigate queer experiences. Walbrugh is a South African short story writer who majors in queer writing. His narrative is unique in *They Called Me Queer* because it employs the third person narrative perspective. In this authorial narrative perspective, Walbrugh is not an actor but an observer and a guide.

However, just like the first person narrative voice, it creates a vantage point for the audience to understand the story and see through the thoughts of characters as well as providing platform for the writer's flexibility in developing the plot of the story. His story strengthens religious affirmation of queer identities as a way of coping in homophobic African settings. The story revolves around a religious mother and her two sons Tyron and Hilton. She is apprehensive and frantic with worry about her two sons; Hilton is a drug addict and Tyron is a queer man. His mother turns to her faith whenever she is feeling hopeless about her sons' situation and in the story she asks Tyron to join her in prayer for God to deliver him from queerness and help his brother who has not returned home due to drug addiction. As a queer man, Tyron feels sorry for his mother yet he must set himself free from her and assure her that he can make his own decisions even about his sexual identity. Her perception of Tyron's queerness is that it is an illness and during the prayer session she tells him, "May the Lord reach into your soul and grab the illness there that has been eating you, my son." (P.32). His mother sees him as a lost son, however, Tyron uses the same religion to assure himself and affirms his queerness. He says, "My lord, He will protect me, He will love me." (P.32). It brings about ambiguity towards religion as relate to the space occupied by LGBTQ subjects. The omniscient narrative voice is important as it enables Walbrugh to unveil, unbiasedly, the conflict between the queer world and the heteronormative world through exposing Tyron's thoughts verses his mother's on this subject. Also, in South Africa's homophobic surroundings, like Tyron, queer men are made to realize that they can rely on religious affirmation as a way to get through such environs, by Walbrugh and readers are allowed to critique this and make judgements.

Another unidentified narrator in "Religion and Spirituality", part eight of *Stories of Our Lives* identifies as a committed queer Muslim. He relates to the readers how he copes in the Kenyan society which he perceives as deeply religious and heteronormative. Evoking the first person narrative perspective literary style, the narrator sheds on hope for the queer men through citing LGBTQ social networks and religious affirmation as a consolation and a means to navigate queerness amidst hetero dominance.

He opines that members of the queer community should affirm themselves and believe that both the Christian God and Allah (Muslim) loves them as they are and they do not judge or condemn them as their religious counterparts do. However, he discloses dealing with doubt and internal struggles as he narrates battling disillusionment due to his awareness of the fact that Islam strictly condemns his queer identity. For this reason, his hopelessness leads to his contemplating suicide by taking poison due to shame for his gay identity and the heavy burden of guilt triggered by his doctrinal notions. He says, 'I don't want to go to hell. If my being the way I am provokes Allah, then let me END MY LIFE.' (P. 342). Fortunately for him, he gets to link up with a Muslim rainbow social group where he maintains to have found the answers he has been searching for concerning questions about his sexual identity in relation to matters of faith. He makes a deliberate choice to affirm himself as God's workmanship and affirm his queerness. He says;

> Luckily, I came across and joined a group here that is called Young Queer Muslims where we sit together and have all our questions regarding religion and being queer answered. I thought I was cursed, but I discovered that I am not. God created you. Embrace yourself. God does not make mistakes, so who are you to QUESTION YOUR BEING?' (P. 342).

With the emerging global acceptance of the LGBTQ sexual identity, Islam continues to face a great dilemma as such convictions go against Islam teachings. This personal narration implies that queer Muslims who are strongly attached to their Islamic faith experience distinct setbacks as they get to deal with hostile heteronormative environments and the gravity of homosexuality as a sin in Islam. Consequently, this leads to difficulty in acceptance of their identity which negatively affects their emotional wellness. However,

pronoun “I” used by the narrator shows the significance of the first person narrative perspective, in persuading the audience that religion and religious queer groups are crucial for LGBTQ persons in surviving queer condemnation. It can therefore be argued that the first person narrative voice is an exemplary strategy for the queer narrators in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer* as they recount these ‘abominable’ practices and the different forms of penalties they are subjected to by the unfriendly heteronormative spaces that frown upon their existence, such as brutality, shaming and stigma as well as how they grapple with homophobic environs through religion.

Further, Etengoff et.al. (2022) argue that Islamic queer men merge their religious and sexual identities by re-explicating anti-gay texts from the Quran and interpreting them as endorsing LGBTQ while perceiving their sexuality as divinely created by Allah. To emphasise this, in “Religion and Spirituality”, part four of *Stories of Our Lives* there are three unnamed narrators, who express through the first-person narrative perspective that they are content with being queer Muslims. This has been possible through affirming themselves religiously. One anonymous narrator professes, ‘I feel that there is no problem with the Islam religion and my sexuality. My boyfriend IS ALSO MUSLIM.’ (P.349).In the same part of the anthology, another unidentified narrator explains that to negotiate dominant heteronormativity, he joins a gay religious group. Here, queer people struggling with their faith meet on Sundays to converse while drawing inspiration about their sexual identities from the holy books. He says, ‘I see myself as a spiritual being when I love and kiss my boyfriend-there is no criminality. We read the Quran, we read the Torah, we read the Rastafari Bible and we read THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE.’ (P. 344). Indeed, “I” in the first narrative perspective becomes a vehicle for pronouncing religious affirmation by queer men as a way of navigating the gay experience in a heteronormative society. The anonymous narrator in the subsequent story, as a coping strategy, ~~he~~ shares his credence that God is for all. He dismisses people who attempt to dispute homosexuality to break through societal homoerotic curtailments. He says “I believe God is for all. I believe God is a caring God. He doesn’t choose only men THAT LOVE WOMEN”. (P. 345).

In the same part of the anthology, another unnamed narrator who identifies as a Christian discloses through the first person narrative perspective his ambition to be a cleric. To navigate queerness, he begins self-empowerment towards his goal by studying theology in higher learning institutions to be able to shepherd a church. He hopes to integrate queer identities in his congregation and attempts to reconstruct perspectives in sexuality in the society and religious space to help LGBTQ persons in grappling with heteronormativity. He says;

> I want an all-inclusive congregation; gay and straight. Most gay people I know don't want anything to do with religion because of the stigmatization and how the religious community judges them. So my prayer has always been to be the bridge, I always ask God to make me the one who reconciles the two because GOD LOVES EVERYONE. (P. 345)

From the narratives above, it can be argued that the pronoun "I", in this narrative perspective makes this navigation strategy to be better understood especially in such narration of selfhood tales. The first person narrative perspective has been crucial in revealing the personal thoughts of the narrators above to the readers and how religion relates with their quest for true identity.

Correspondingly, in *They Called Me Queer*, Haji Mohamed Dawjee in the narrative "Becoming: The Fourth Stage" through the first person narrative perspective reveals that just as cancer has four stages, so does both queer men and lesbians come to terms with their queer identity in Africa. Dawjee is a queer South African columnist and author. Although she is a queer woman, it is important to note that she discloses her empathy for queer men and their plight. Her story brings hope to Islamic queer men who feel dejected. While affirming herself through the Islamic faith, she professes that the African queer men should walk shoulder high and appreciate Allah's acceptance for their gayness. Having encountered serious stigmatization, from family and the society at large, Dawjee turns to

religion for affirmation though filled with guilt, shame and doubts of Allah's acceptance for LGBTQ persons. Dawjee reveals having been raised in a strict and highly conservative religious Muslim background and wonders whether Islam has answers to questions on queer identity, where they were taught that Allah abhors queer persons. Full of fear of Allah's harsh judgement, she hopes in Allah's mercy, and that He would be "sensible enough" not throw queer bodies in the pits of hell together with thieves, liars and paedophiles. He should reason that a person's sexual identity is not a sin. Dawjee expresses;

> I read and read and read and just like that. My dominant hemisphere found the words to produce answers. There is no sin of homosexuality in Islam. The only incarnation of being gay that exists in the text of the Koran is the story of Lut and his people and the sin is not sleeping with men. The sin is one of rape, pillaging and the unkind treatment of guests and strangers. I read until my eyes bled with information. I read until I disconnected who I was from what I was told. (P.9)

As already highlighted, queer Muslims read texts from the Quran while interpreting them from a different view point as encouraging queerness and perceiving their sexuality as divinely created by Allah. Dawjee further adds that, "Common sense told me that it was impossible for a religious people who existed since the time of Muhammad (the year 570) to not have any trace of a sexuality other than heteronormativity" (P.9)

Further, Dawjee narrates reading about two Islamic scholars, Shams and Rumi that were gay lovers. Shams was a spiritual teacher and Rumi was his spiritual student. Dawjee wonders about their queer relationship and the fact that there are stories of Shams disappearing with other men for years leaving Rumi to find new male companions like Salah and Hosam. This convinces her of Allah's love for queer men hence countering queerphobia. Thus, it can be said that Dawjee deploys the first person narrative voice to communicate religious affirmation and scripture memorization as ways of queer men surviving in hetero dominant discourses. Dawjee deploys the first person narrative

perspective as seen in pronouns “I” and “me” in her reading of Quran to oppose religious prejudice against queer men and encourage them to accept their queerness while reconciling their religion and gay identity. This conforms to Liesch (2023)’s view that affirms that in queering religion, theological queer readings are meant to disrupt conformity towards traditional gender binary by looking for gender variations and queer desire narratives within sacred texts.

As such, the queer theory challenges sociocultural norms on sexuality and gender, disrupting historically established sex norms and allowing LGBTQ persons to fight for space within religious contexts. Further, Esadia (2021) asserts that the first person narrative perspective helps queer narrators to voice their expression of queer perception and the push back towards queer prejudice to thwart marginalization. Dawjee brings out positive perception of gayism and religious affirmation as a pushback strategy; making the readers able to appreciate the queer identities of these African narrators. Such life experiences from childhood and how the various facets of society such as family, work, religious, political and educational spaces contribute to the shaping of their queer identities are expressed through narrative perspectives.

Indeed, Lundqvist (2020) asserts that the question of the interrelation between sexual orientation and religious beliefs tend to create tension. Therefore, with respect to sexuality and religion the ideas of queer theory help analyse what is viewed as normal while at the same time subverting the normative such as destabilising religious norms that undermine queerness in order to accommodate queer persons in the religious faith altogether.

5.4 Narrative Perspectives and Self-affirmation

Self-affirmation and “coming out” among LGBTQ is dependent on many factors. For instance, a study by Butler (2017) reveal that in USA rural and urban gays differed in terms of income, “outness” and self-reported LGBTQ identity, with rural respondents scoring lower in all the three indicators. Many factors determine whether gays will openly come

out and self-identify as gays, depending on whether they feel safe to do so and other reasons. Others like Siqueira and Medeiros (2022) have argued that Queer pleasure as stylization of self may help establish micro-transformation and tackling of discipline and normalization of bodies and processes of resistance. The reimagining of queer self as adequate and normal enables LGBTQ persons to confidently come out and affirm their identity as abnormal normal. In spite of this, gays continue to face resistance, and continuously left to navigate these queer spaces by affirming their queer identities.

Gay culture is diverse and often depends on the location of the queer persons. This study highlights that while coming out may evoke empathy and support from various facets in the society, often times this positivity is overpowered by negative and condescending attitudes. Efforts of queer visibility in the African continent are often met with biases and hostility. That is why, queer self-affirmation becomes pivotal in navigating gay experiences. In *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer*, the first person narrative perspective displays self-affirmation as a technique that is used greatly by queer men to cope in heteronormative environs. Self-affirmation entails gays ability to perceive their worth and value and embracing one's queer uniqueness. It is worth noting that this section, does not entail queer persons challenging negative and unhelpful thoughts about their identity from the lens of spirituality but their own mental resilience and strong will. Straight and cisgender persons in the African society often display a scornful attitude towards queer persons and they develop mental fortitude to pull through this. To maneuver gayness, one anonymous narrator in "Identity": the first part of *Stories of Our Lives* attributes developing a strong sense of self-love and building his inner strength to stand firm against accepted sexual norms and to walk away from humiliation perpetrated by heterosexuals. The narrator through the first person narrative perspective further reveals that self-acceptance breeds liberation for queer identities. Previously, he is greatly bothered by the spite displayed towards him by heterosexuals in the Kenyan society. They corrosively refer to him as a homosexual yet he realizes that no matter how hard he tries, he would never be able to relate with women sexually. Embracing positive self-perception gives him the mettle to withstand mockery and to be undisturbed by their negativity. He voices;

> I couldn't stand being called 'Shoga' years ago, and that's why I ran away. But I love men. Even if you put a woman here, I can't be interested in her. Since I accepted myself-that I love my fellow men- I respect myself, and even when people gossip about me, I DON'T CARE. (P. 168)

The use of "I" in this point of view by the gay protagonist in this narrative, is to give his personal view on his identity while using his voice to challenge normativity and uphold queerness having been harassed before. It can also be said that the narrator is using this perspective to strengthen the narrative of queer emancipation and acceptance. The narrator wants African queer men like himself to be empowered to oppose normativity and fight for queer acceptance by the society.

Brison (2023) asserts that first person narrative perspective is therapeutic and can function as a medium to voice experiences of victimization and the rising of the victim to self-affirmation. In her book *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*, she uses the first-person narrative perspective to relieve her harrowing and horrifying experience of being sexually assaulted, strangled and left for the dead. She also uses the same narrative perspective in her personal narrative to narrate healing and self-affirmation that accompanies her rising above hegemonic masculinity. Just as Brison uses the first person narrative perspective as therapy, queer men such as the narrator above, can be said to utilize the same perspective for self-affirmation after overcoming queer repression. This narrative perspective motivates him to narrate queer harassment, reprimanding his abusers that scornfully refer to him as "shoga", while affirming his true identity.

Correspondingly, in "Identity": part three of *Stories of our Lives* another anonymous narrator narrates that as he embraces positive self-image, he is liberated from the struggle of acceptance by heterosexuals. While employing the first person narrative perspective he draws attention to the importance of self-approval in navigating the gay experience. He

says; “Overtime, I have begun accepting being gay is part of who I am. I realise that I get frustrated when I try to force myself into the accepted heteronormative identity”. (P. 212)

Self-worth is significant in unshackling queer individuals from the jaws of heteronormativity as it brings about the sense of being good enough and worthy of belonging strengthening queer navigation. In the same part of this anthology, a different unnamed narrator attests to this as his way of navigating gayness in Kenya. He says;

> The moment when I felt at my most powerful as a queer person was when I decided that I was not a person who was afraid, and that actually I have a deep well of courage and resilience within me. (P. 228)

Self-affirmation for queer men is therefore paramount in grappling with deeply rooted heteronormativity. In the same way, it can be inferred that for queer men, the first person narrative perspective, in queer personal narratives is focal in relaying queer self-acceptance and surmounting self-doubt and insecurities propelled by heteronormativity. “I” in the narrative above imply that the first person narrative perspective is impressive to this queer narrator. The reason is that it is a perfect tool in celebrating their resilience as a way to navigate queerness amidst unsettled past and present encounters with trauma, opposition and homophobia from the African heteronormative society.

In “Identity”: part three of *Stories of Our Lives,* another anonymous narrator through first person narrative perspective expresses that self-affirmation is important for queer individuals to gain physical and emotional strength that is paramount in navigating the gay experience. The narrator feels that because of his queerness, it is a ‘me against the world thing’ (P. 233), hence, self-validation as a gay every now and then has helped him to safeguard his mental wellness when dealing with heterosexuals. He says, “I have to act as a bodyguard for every part of myself, my mind, my body, my heart and it works and that

HELPS ME SURVIVE." (P. 233). Likewise, in part four of the anthology, "Society and the Future*"* another unidentified narrator personally narrates that he withstands homophobia within the Kenyan setting inspirited by self-love and acceptance. He propounds that humanity needs to understand that a man expressing sexual affection to another man is not shameful love nor a taboo. He expresses;

> It is not shameful for men to hold hands. It is not shameful to be called a homosexual. I am a homosexual, and very proud of that and I AM A KENYAN. (P.248).

The first-person narrative perspective is significant in the narrations above because the use of the first-person pronoun "I" by the narrators is effective in emphasizing that the established societal norms and concerns about people's nature of sexual identities are not absolutely necessary. It can also be said that these narratives signify that the first person narration also equip the narrators to resist domineering philosophies such as homophobia as they personify their own queer experiences.

Further, in *They Called Me Queer,* Lwando Scott after closeting for a long time gets through the South African heteronormativity by affirming himself and his queer identity. In "Harnessing the Power of Queerness*"* Scott, in first person narrative perspective, narrates being hesitant to reveal his gay identity at first. However, progressively he develops self-approval and navigates his gay experience by loving himself and disentangling himself from those who trigger in him feelings of shame as well as those who are discomfited by his queerness. He says, "I would cope by extricating myself from those who induced shame in me and also those who are embarrassed BY MY SHAME". (P.18). It implies that he finds tranquility in his thoughts and his own company. He discloses that these South African gay intolerant environments make it difficult to embrace his queerness.

Heteronormativity shapes his thoughts instinctively that queerness is evil and punishable. For him to navigate this, he embraces positive self-image and withdraws from people who perceive him as a social misfit. He adds that;

> With regards to my queerness and how I was navigating South African society. I was a happy-go-lucky boy who loved beautiful things and my flamboyant personality ran up against the sanctions I would endure for being a HAPPY GIRLY BOY. (P.19)

Scott highlights that he is shocked by his previous ignorance about his sexuality because he realizes that his queer-come-flamboyant personality becomes instrumental in forming formidable alliances with people from different corners of the world and an asset in providing him with remarkable tools to question normativity in the South African society. Scott also discloses that he was also unaware that his stand on queerness would lead him to the sociology field, particularly diversity studies where he learns about differences and how diversity matters and affects people's positions in society. This came in handy in overcoming self-rejection and heterosexist prejudicial attitudes in South Africa. He expresses, "being queer enables me to imagine a different world where alternative genders and sexualities are not things to be policed, judged and demonized but are to be embraced, ENCOURAGED AND EXPLORED." (P.20). Scott, while focusing on queerness, in his storytelling uses the first person narrative perspective to suggest and communicate to the readers that; his reconsideration of unhappiness and negative self-perception triggered his queer liberation. Thus, from Scott's story, the first person narrative perspective is plainly restorative and an exemplary tool for queer liberation.

Moreover, Scott titling his personal story "Harnessing the Power of Queerness" signals his optimism that his narrative can be a demonstration of the power of queerness in the African Continent. He claims to deliberately rebelling against heteronormativity and its demands all his life. He says;

> I refused gender and sexual categories even as I struggled with feelings of shame; my queer spirit was defiant to the calls to be normal and delivered a FULFILLING QUEER LIFE. (P. 28)

Macheso (2022) postulates that queer literary writers from sub-Saharan Africa not only use their works to narrate and expose the susceptibilities they face up to in their specific societies but also how they attempt to shake off the restrictions of homophobia to affirm themselves. For instance, in his autobiography, *You Have to be Gay to Know God*, Siya Khumalo explores queer agency in South Africa's homophobic setting to challenge the support of homophobia by demolishing its imbibed hegemonic ideologies of power dynamics in the South African society. The African queer writers, by spearheading queer activism, depict new images of queer individuals that claim legal rights and prominence for their inviolable presence in Africa. This queer life stories imply that advocacy of queerness aid in surmounting the repudiations and constraining power of heteropatriarchy and for self-affirmation. For instance, Andiswa Mkosi's narrative: "They called me Stabane*"* in *They Called Me Queer,* represents the significance of advocacy of LGBTQ people in the society as a way to renegotiate queerness in the South African heteronormativity. "Stabane" is an obscene IsiZulu term referring to people of same-sex behaviour. Mavhandu-Mudzusi et.al. (2023) on the term argue that queer persons hate being called "Moffie" and "Stabane" because they are offensive and are taken to support LGBTQ community stigmatization and verbal abuse.

Using the first-person narrative voice, Mkosi being queer, laments that unfortunately in South Africa, for queer subjects, in many social spheres, interactions are hostile and difficult to navigate. On account of their queer identities, queer persons find themselves engaged in excessive quarrels and fights frequently break out between gays and heterosexuals. According to Mkosi, LGBTQ persons are constantly fighting for their identities, place and gender no matter where they find themselves hence there is need for queer activism to facilitate gay navigation. Mkosi's ideas are reinforced by Gulam Petersen in his narrative "Journey of a Lifetime" in *They Called Me Queer.* Petersen is a gay sex

worker who believes that the society needs sensitization about queerness for inclusivity of LGBTQ individuals. Self-affirmation makes him preach that queer lives matter. He expresses;

> Wake up people! Wake up government! The time is now-we need freedom from being treated like criminals. We need everyone's support because our lives matter. I matter. (P.122).

Utilizing the first person narrative voice communal "we" as a language feature increases rapport with readers and evokes empathy from the audience. The first person narrative voice makes vivid the narrator's call to end queer oppression to the audience such that the readers may have the feeling of being present, side by side with the narrator. Thus, this creates another level of narration which facilitates the audience appreciation of queer self-affirmation. Petersen, in his narrative, engages in LGBTQ activism by attempting to disrupt the South African cisheteronormativity and promotes queer visibility while subverting queer exclusion and stigmatization. Despite decriminalization of same sex behaviour in South Africa, Petersen insinuates that queer oppressive norms still exist in the country as he calls on their government and all South African citizens to put an end to violation of the rights of sexual minorities. His demand for queer inclusivity and cessation of queer suspicion not only portrays him as an agent of change, but also as a queer man who is proud of his identity.

Therefore, queer persons utilize the first person narrative perspective for self-affirmation while being optimistic about a promising future for African queer lives. This perspective give gays an opportunity to voice their experiences and coping strategies. Additionally, it enables them to tell how after personal reflections, they reconsider their queerness to build a positive self-image. They narrate queer united efforts to gain control from predominant heterosexism to liberate themselves.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed through the aesthetics of life writing and self-narrations, how queer men negotiate their queer identities and experiences in hetero dominant societal contexts using the first person narrative perspective as a tool in navigating the gay experience in The Nest Collective's *Stories of Our Lives* and They *Called Me Queer* by Kim Windvogel and Kelly-Eve Koopman. With the help of this narrative voice, they reveal several coping mechanisms and majorly duality, religious affirmation and self-affirmation.

While the queer community in Kenya and South Africa continue to be a target of stigmatization and criticism from a heteronormative society, the texts demonstrate that the queer community have effectively applied these coping mechanisms to survive in this heteronormative settings where they are perceived as social misfits. The navigation helps gay men accept their internal struggles while wading off attacks and marginalization by the heteronormative society.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Chapter Summary and Discussion

This chapter presents the summary of each chapter in this thesis that sought to interrogate how gay men contest heteronormative sexuality constructs in *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer.* These two books are narrations from queer writers, who through their daily lived experiences explain how they navigate their marginality in homophobic contexts in Kenya and South Africa.

Chapter one of the thesis explained the background of the study, and the general context of queer communities in Kenya and South Africa. It further set the research puzzle: that in African continent homosexuality is scorned by many, and still considered a taboo, even in contexts where homosexuality is legalized as is the case with South Africa. The study set and achieved three objectives: Interrogated how gays construct their identities amidst the dominant heteronormative sexuality constructs and discourses depicted in the selected texts; evaluated how satire is deployed as contestation tool in the texts; Critiqued how narrative perspectives are tools in navigating gay experiences. Among the study justification, it has revealed how gays and writers employ style and literariness as a strategy to contest heteronormative sexuality constructs, specifically satire and first person narrative perspective. This discourse is also useful to enhance and build on African queer theory and practice, and may be useful in enriching the policy debate on queerness in

African society contexts. While the two collections of queer narratives comprise of confessions by lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and gays, this comparative study narrowed down to narratives by gays and stories that explore the agential capacity of homosexuals depicted through literariness. The study was guided by the queer theory, also known as the gay and lesbian theories which emerged from the revolutionary movements of the 1960s similar to the feminist and Black criticism theories and not from scholars. For a nuanced analysis, queer theories from the west and other regions were interwoven with African queer theories, which helped interrogate queerness as African realities in the selected texts. The study was a desktop research, and sought to stylistically interrogate two literary texts: Kim Windvogel and Kelly Eve Koopman's *They Called Me Queer* and The Nest Collective's *Stories of Our Lives*.

Chapter two reviewed the literature relevant to the research problem. It examined an array of written works that touch on gays as represented in literature. The review is done systematically in line with the three study objectives: To interrogate how gays construct their identities amidst the dominant heteronormative sexuality constructs and discourses depicted in the selected texts, to evaluate how satire is deployed as contestation tool in the texts and to critique how first-person narrative perspective are tools navigating gay experience.

Chapter three brought out queer identities constructs as subversion of dominant heteronormative sexuality discourses. As highlighted, this has been achieved by gays' efforts towards constructing the queer selfhood and subversion of dominant heteronormativity. From the standpoint of the queer scholars and queer theory which advocates for sexual diversities and queer liberation; the study has laid bare the strategies of challenging heteronormative sexuality constructs by queer men as depicted in *Stories of Our Lives* and They *Called Me Queer*. By awakening queer consciousness and outing, queer men reconnect with their true identity as they struggle against the traditional gender binary norms represented in the selected queer anthologies. As the LGBTQ community

continue to be victimized in the Kenyan and South African hetero dominant contexts, *Stories of Our Lives* and They *Called Me Queer* demonstrates that the queer community exercise their agential capacity and in some instances have been successful in pushing back against heteronormativity that has relegated them to the periphery of society. This study is instrumental in understanding and presenting the persecution of queer men both in Kenya and South Africa.

It also distinguished between the two contexts, observing that queer stigmatization is more pronounced in Kenya compared to South Africa. Despite the legal acceptance of sexual diversities in South Africa, queer men still struggle against dominant heteronormative discourses but have emerged triumphant in finding their true queer selfhood amidst these discourses. In the case of Kenya, although the law prohibits any form of queer sexuality, gays are also succeeding in constructing their identity by opposing homophobia and heterosexism in various spaces highlighted in this study. While Kenyan queer men have not experienced racism and apartheid residue, South African queer men struggle with coming to terms with their queer identity due to their racial identity and the residue of apartheid; unlike in Kenya where the struggle is due to legal constraints and homophobia. However, the queer men in both countries have worked towards queering Africa and redefining queer African identity and rejecting the slogan that queerness in un-African.

Chapter four demonstrated how selected texts deploy satire as an exceptional tool for gays to challenge heteronormativity. Queer men narrate their fight for LGBTQ community visibility and grappling with daily queer realities. Through satire they have been able to upset conventional gender binary norms. They have exposed and contended with the politicization of queerness to cover other socioeconomic concerns, police brutality, negligence by law enforcers and unsupportive families for queer persons in the modern African society. While satire seem quite conspicuous in *Stories of Our Lives* more than in *They Called Me Queer,* the narrators have been immensely successful in effectively utilizing the satirical literary style in the two anthologies. Satire has been weaponized for disrupting established heteronormative norms to empower the gay community that is under

attack and help consolidate the gay identity. This study reveals that the contest for queer liberation is still ongoing in Africa. Queer relegation is present in Kenya and South Africa. The gay narrators are a voice representing the African gay community in making social and political correctness. In agreement with other queer and literary scholars on satire, their narratives reveal the existence of police brutality, queer injustice in criminal justice system, religious hypocrisy, disconfirming families, and queer politicization in Africa. Moreover, the African rainbow community suffers defamation from political homophobia.

Political leaders exonerate themselves of bad governance and its effects by deceiving gullible masses that sexual diversity is the major problem. African governments, criminal justice systems and law enforcement officers strengthen queer marginalization by criminalizing homosexuality (Kenya), intimidation and arrests, not protecting queer lives from physical, sexual assault, permitting violation of queer rights and securitization of gay persons. Some political actors are also deeply involved in gayism but in secrecy. Similarly, homophobia trickles down to religious spaces because queer men in Kenya and South Africa mostly encounter rejection among different faith communities. In *Stories of Our Lives* and *They Called Me Queer,* satire supremely exposes the presence of religious hypocrisy at its height. Many African religious leaders and persons have the holier-than-thou attitude because their lives do not reflect adherence to the tenets of religion. They condemn queerness by preaching against it, yet they also practice it behind closed doors. Similarly, their pharisaic trait make them advance hate for queer persons as the 'right way' to deal with them instead of loving all as per the dictates of religion. Satire has been used by this narrators to censure this pretense and hurt hypocritical persons with bruising irony for corrective purpose. The study also proves through the satirical literary style, that while some families support queer family members, a majority are unsupportive. It is plain that living in heterosexual family settings is challenging for LGBTQ persons. This is because heterosexual families victimize, discriminate, gaslight and even sever blood-ties with queer family members. Satire criticizes such behaviour and attitude from one's blood relations.

In Chapter five, the study has shown through analysis of the selected queer anthologies that indeed, first-person narrative perspective is significant in explaining navigation of gay experiences in heteronormative discourses. Narrative perspectives, especially in the first-person, relay that queer persons significantly depend on duality, religious affirmation and self-affirmation to cope with heteronormative discourses. While the queer community in Kenya and South Africa continue to be a target of stigmatization and criticism from a heteronormative society, the texts demonstrate through the first person narrative perspective that the queer community have effectively applied these coping mechanisms to survive in this heteronormative settings where they are perceived as social misfits.

The navigation helps gay men accept their internal struggles while wading off attacks and marginalization by the heteronormative society.

6.2 Conclusions

While gay men continue to contest their othering in a society where heteronormativity is well grounded and mostly unchallenged, this study demonstrates that queer persons continue to fight for their identity in private and public spaces. The study has demonstrated that while queer community is frowned upon in public spaces, it is sometimes celebrated in private by the most unlikely and unexpected. Through language style, satire, it exposes the human folly that masks in religion, culture and politics, by bastardizing queer community yet engaging in other vices and evils that could be worse and vile in nature than queerness. The texts depict the proverbial dual lifestyles of heteronormative as the proverbial “white-washed tombs”, appearing to be good on the outside yet rotten on the inside. It also demonstrates through the first person narrative perspective that while queer men camouflage their sexual identity as a technique to protect themselves from shaming and harassment in heteronormative discourses, others rely on self-acceptance and religious affirmation to sail through heteronormativity.

6.3 Recommendations and Further Research

This study augments the existing body of knowledge in Literature, queer literary studies and diversifies and builds on the growing field of African queer theory studies. It also helps

enrich the policy debate on gay rights and the debate pitting conservative and liberal views in society. While the West promotes freedoms of individuals including minority communities like gays, the African society remain conservative and prefer a hard stance on gay practices. It therefore helps inform policy issues on gays and other related topics, and the question of whether legal sanctions are robust in regulating social behaviours of individuals.

This study recommends further research through other stylistic and literary devices, on navigating queerness in other queer categories such as lesbians, bisexual and especially the transgender where such study seem to not have garnered great attention of the scholarly discourses. It also raises further questions for researchers beyond literary discourses to other disciplines, such as whether or not to legalize the queer community, and the implication of criminalizing queer activities on rights of queer persons.

6.4 Conclusion

Although Kenya, South Africa and the entire African continent still frown upon the existence of queer sexuality, they continue to struggle for queer visibility and acceptance. It is challenging for African queer men to live among cisgender heterosexuals because of intolerance and literary styles reveal queer contestation and coping strategies. Discourses of sexual equality have not taken hold in the two African countries. The deployment of literary style by queer men reveals that legalization of same sex behaviour has not been successful in Kenya. In South Africa where campaigns for legalization of gayism seem successful, queer men still decry marginalization and harassment based on their identity. There is increasing attention to the challenges faced by queer men in Africa. Literary styles in queer literary studies remain powerful tools for queer men to establish equality and acceptance of all sexuality forms in Africa.

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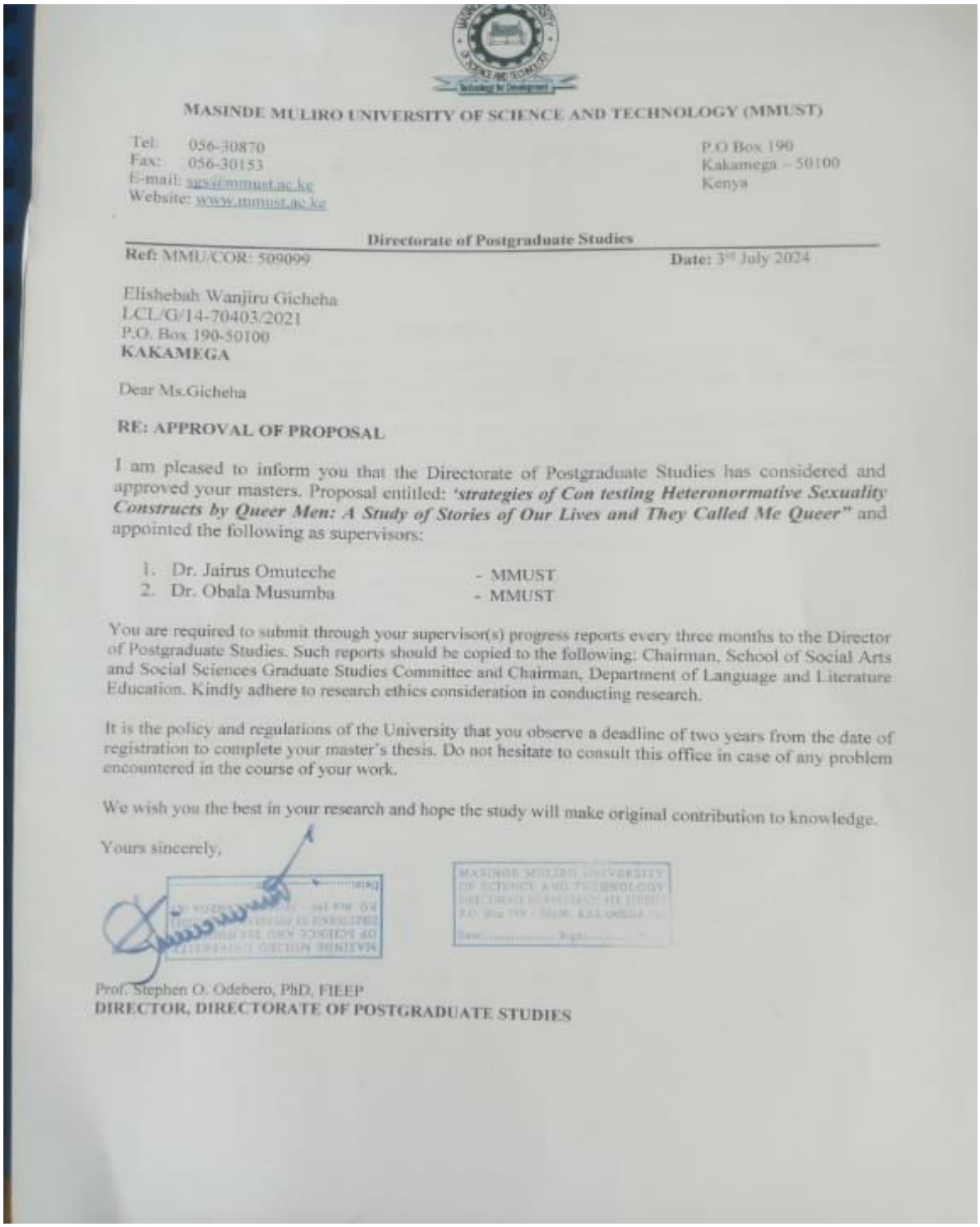
APPENDICES: Appendix 1: DPS Approval



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P.O Box 190
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Kenya

Directorate of Postgraduate Studies

Ref: MMU/COR: 509099 Date: 3rd July 2024

Elishebah Wanjiru Gicheha
LCL/G/14-70403/2021
P.O. Box 190-50100
KAKAMEGA

Dear Ms.Gicheha

RE: APPROVAL OF PROPOSAL

I am pleased to inform you that the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies has considered and approved your masters. Proposal entitled: ***'strategies of Con testing Heteronormative Sexuality Constructs by Queer Men: A Study of Stories of Our Lives and They Called Me Queer"*** and appointed the following as supervisors:

1. Dr. Jairus Omuteche - MMUST
2. Dr. Obala Musumba - MMUST

You are required to submit through your supervisor(s) progress reports every three months to the Director of Postgraduate Studies. Such reports should be copied to the following: Chairman, School of Social Arts and Social Sciences Graduate Studies Committee and Chairman, Department of Language and Literature Education. Kindly adhere to research ethics consideration in conducting research.

It is the policy and regulations of the University that you observe a deadline of two years from the date of registration to complete your master's thesis. Do not hesitate to consult this office in case of any problem encountered in the course of your work.

We wish you the best in your research and hope the study will make original contribution to knowledge.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Stephen O. Odebero, PhD, FIEEP
DIRECTOR, DIRECTORATE OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

Appendix II: Research Permit

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: **993326**

Date of Issue: **23/July/2024**

RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Ms.. Elishebah Wanjiru Gicheha of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Kakamega on the topic: STRATEGIES OF CONTESTING HETERONORMATIVE SEXUALITY CONSTRUCTS BY QUEER MEN: A STUDY OF STORIES OF OUR LIVES AND THEY CALLED ME QUEER for the period ending : 23/July/2025.

License No: **NACOSTI/P/24/38235**

993326

Applicant Identification Number

Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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