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**From Archipelago to Atlas: Narrating the
Postcolonial Queer Bodies in the Queer Writings
of the Philippines and Morocco**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the coming-of-age narratives in Realuyo's *The Umbrella Country* (1999) and Taïa's *Salvation Army* (2009). Focusing on the forms of queer identity formation of Gringo and Abdella, the study aims to further reevaluate the insufficiency of Western queer narratives that centralize the act of "coming out" as a moment of liberation and precursor to an authentic life. Through the approach of postcolonial queer frameworks, it is found that coming out as a standard practice fails to capture the nuances of postcolonial belonging in the queer consciousness of the protagonists. Gringo and Abdellah transgress silence to reclaim the spaces and time that accommodate their expression of queerness. In the former, Gringo shares his silence with his effeminate brother Pipo to escape the oppressive control of normative authority. They do so by coexisting in the clandestine games of "Miss Unibers" and reclamation of shame where they also reconcile the conflicting worldviews of their parents—his mother's inward looking-attachment to the Philippines, his father's outward-looking aspiration toward the US and their grandmother's past affiliation with Spanish occupation and colonialism. Meanwhile, the latter configures his queerness through the unspoken incestuous attraction to his older brother, which transgresses the confines of his Moroccan roots. As Abdellah leaves for Geneva, the physical dislocation and alienation from familiar spaces mobilize a deeper exploration of his sexuality. His disillusionment with this new reality however helps him to navigate his remembrance of shame and activate his agency in his identity formation. By foregrounding the significance of spatial and temporal transgression in the two texts, this study stresses the importance of seeing queerness as an ever-evolving expression of sexuality. Its declaration is not situated in a one-time act of coming out but in the continuous reclamation and recovery of alternative spaces and temporality as a means of sexual agency.

Keywords: queer, postcolonialism, coming-of-age, coming out

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INTRODUCTION

Narrating the intersection of queerness and postcolonial identities often brings us to unknown territories where familiar narratives and frameworks may no longer apply. This thesis explores such intersections through two complex and rich coming-of-age narratives: *The Umbrella Country* by Bino Realuyo (1999) and *Salvation Army* by Abdellah Taïa (2009). While distinct in their cultural and geographical backgrounds, both texts provide different nuances and insights into the lives of individuals whose queerness is marked by the vortex of their postcolonial realities.

In *The Umbrella Country*, the narrative delves deep into the life of Gringo, a young boy whose formative years in the Philippines mirror the turbulence of the Martial Law era in the country. Through Gringo's eyes, his burgeoning desire and queer identity closely interact with the socio-cultural and political pressures of his environment. This interaction allows the narrative to be ornamented with symbolic spaces and departure from normative temporalities that escape the scrutiny of their family and society. Meanwhile, *Salvation Army* looks into the semi-autobiographical account of Abdellah's coming-of-age in Morocco and his proceeding migration to Geneva, Switzerland. His narrative begins with a rootedness of patriarchy and traditional values in Morocco. Abdellah's journey to his queer consciousness is an attempt to reexamine and set a rupture to this conception.

Through the narrative of silence, they endeavor to make sense of their sexuality while simultaneously trying to situate their queer belonging to the spaces of nation, family and violence that they inhabit. Here, silence does not lend them the privilege of coming out and the process of reinforcing their sexuality is done through the creation of a reality where queerness is understood before it is spoken (Realuyo 1999; Taïa 2009). For this reason, coming out is negated and its absence only stresses a new standpoint voicing the limitation and irrelevance coming out brings about in perceiving the postcolonial belongings of the protagonists' coming-of-age narratives.

In this regard, it is crucial to see how the rejection of coming out can be situated in the two texts. Tennant (2020) critiques the Western trope of "coming out," as having failed to capture the diverse sexual expressions found outside colonial metropolises. In the

narrative of Gringo and Abdellah, silence becomes a powerful mode of expression. Their use of silence and discreet spaces reformulates their engagement with a different mode of queerness that exploits the alternative creation of personalized spaces and times. This personalization in turn accommodates the coexistence of their overlapping belonging to different parts of their identities.

Therefore, the research's objective is to employ an alternative starting point for identity negotiations that could coordinate points of intersections, especially as far as the queers and the postcolonial are concerned. Ruo's concept of queer temporality specifically addresses this issue by arguing that time operates differently in postcolonial contexts (2000). In particular, the temporal gaps between the discourses of the colonial era's anti-homosexual discourses and contemporary queer activism reveal a persistent tension within postcolonial states such as Uganda and India. As these nations seek to decolonize the residues of colonialism with postcolonial frameworks, they often revert to colonial legacies when it involves their treatment of queer identities. This condition shows temporal distress among postcolonial subjects and the states, leading to an impending failure of decoloniality where the shifts of power in the postcolonial states "enable formerly colonized states to become colonial in their own right" (9).

This temporal ambivalence not only tackles a discussion of identity exclusion, it also tries to redefine how postcolonial queer subjects understand the notion of "home" and belonging. Quintanilla (2020) theorizes that the process of un-belonging is actively reproduced among postcolonial queer subjects who undertake displacements. These displacements challenge national boundaries by allowing queer subjects to find belonging in the very act of navigating these spaces. Rather than romanticizing the idea of unrestricted movement, this perspective acknowledges the complexities and struggles that come with negotiating identities across multiple cultural and national contexts.

By locating the protagonists' juxtaposition of identities in a larger postcolonial context, this research strives to provide a thorough analysis to navigate each layer of narratives where queerness intersects with nation, family and the normative expectations embedded in the socio-cultural reality of the protagonists. The state of being temporally out of time and spatially out of space in these two books will become the ground through which this research stands and operates. In addition, this queer temporality is going to help the

analysis to evaluate the queer impetus and consciousness that are not based upon the process of coming out as the research accentuates the notion that one is rather being than becoming a queer. Consequently, the study fills the gap in the current scholarship of queer literature by providing a new perspective on postcolonial queer narratives that diverge from Western frameworks.

On account of what has been previously elaborated, the subsequent chapters of this research will explore the complexity of postcolonial queer representation in *The Umbrella Country* and *Salvation Army: A Novel* based on these two problem statements: 1) how is queerness narrated in the two writings; and 2) how does queer representation in the two works reject the heteronormative and homonormative aspects of coming out?

Drawing on the stated problem formulations, this research will divide the discussions into three subsequent parts. Chapter I will focus on a critical review of theoretical frameworks and relevant literature to supply the research with the structure for the analysis. Theories from literary and queer studies, postcolonialism and migration will be synthesized to situate the scholarly texts. In addition, a historical and sociological context surrounding the setting of the stories will also be observed to situate the queer perspectives from both the Philippines and Morocco. Chapter II will examine the analysis of the study which discusses the application of theoretical frameworks mentioned in the previous chapters to the textual analysis of *The Umbrella Country* and *Salvation Army*. Finally, Chapter III will conclude the analysis of the whole research.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

The organization of this chapter is divided into three sub-chapters: the first sub-chapter will delineate relevant scholarly works surrounding the studies on queerness in the Philippines, Martial Law and Realuyo's *The Umbrella Country*; the second sub-chapter will provide existing works of literature on queerness in Morocco, studies on Abdellah Taïa and *Salvation Army*; and the last sub-chapter will outline the theoretical review of Romanow's *The Postcolonial Body in Queer Space and Time* (2006) and Halberstam's *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005) as the lenses through which this research analyzes the two literary works. These divisions stem from the need to acknowledge the challenge of finding points of intersection between the different queer experiences in the Philippines and Morocco; this research undertakes this challenge by providing spaces designated to review the respective sections in their own regards so that the elaboration of theoretical frameworks of Romanow and Halberstam can bridge the gaps between the textual sources.

A. Review of Related Studies on Queerness and Martial Law in the Philippines

To read Realuyo's *The Umbrella Country* means to position the book in its larger postcolonial framework of the Philippines' Martial law and how this regime interfaces with the notion of queerness. Diaz's article on *Queer Love and Urban Intimacies in Martial Law Manila* focalizes the regime's oppressive response to queerness by expanding the nuances of what the term "queer" actually entails (2012). To begin with, his analysis of queerness does not strictly encompass the sexual spectrum and experiences among Filipinos while it still is a major part of the definition. First, queerness deals with how politically and economically marginalized people interact with the city. Then, it also involves the people's affect and attachment to metropolitan waste that the regime tried to conceal from the West (2). Here, Diaz underlines the fact that queerness embraces the abject and transgresses what is normally acceptable. Using Bernal's masterpiece "Manila by Night" (1980), Diaz shows the tug-of-war representation between the censored,

cleansed version of Manila that the regime wanted the West to see and the blatant raw texture of Manila, laden with its “vices”, that Bernal aims to capture. This double life of Manila is not without a cause. Politically, the regime’s attempt to “purge” the undesirable nook and cranny of the city was a direct result of the “demand by international institutions like the World Bank for the metropolis to ‘modernize,’ and the Marcos regime’s own push to showcase it as a ‘central destination in Asia’” (5). The appeal to developmentalism here is the keyword to understand the regime’s approach and possibly justification to censor the abject. Moreover, the same sentiment is also directed to Diaz’s use of Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters* (1990) in the analysis where he sees that the marginal corners of Manila are understood by both Bernal and Hagedorn as spaces “where queer pleasure” acts as “sites for locating critique (14).

In the two aforementioned cultural artifacts Diaz analyzes, they represent queer love as a potent and ever-existing presence in the city of Manila. Yet, the potency of a true, queer love is seen as an illusion in the face and remnants of American imperialism and capitalism, class disparities and politics of silencing. By precisely situating the queer love representation in “Manila by Night” with the creed of Catholicism in the country, Diaz recognizes the failing potency of queer love in the movie as a reasonably understandable situation. The moral unacceptability of queerness and its forms of love is an idea that needs to be erased and consequently removed. However, what makes the film a site for queer consciousness is the fact that the *bakla* character Sharon (re: a feminine man, cross-dressers, or men who identify as women) is present to remind the audience that forms of queer love are “constituted and reconstituted in the film for all the city’s inhabitants” (Diaz 2012, 11). The closely interlinked relationships between Manila’s forgotten urban spaces and queer reclamation for these spaces resist and inform the regime about what “their very existence could possibly offer” in opposition to the “sanitized” version of Manila the Marcos government is dwelling upon.

The oppositional orientation of seeing Manila as a metropolitan city is a focal point in Diaz’s analysis as Manila becomes a contested hub for the representation of love. For the queer and marginalized subjects, they afford love by loving the abject and the sordid: “love for the impoverished [parts of the] city”, “love for being high on drugs” and “love for just having fun with each other amidst squalor”. Meanwhile, Marcos and his government translate their love of Manila and the Philippines through “infrastructural

development (such as the building of multiple structures within the city aimed to better the lives of the Filipino poor)”, which in the process of doing so sanitizes places that do not serve the same aim. Specifically for Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda, Diaz notes their political longevity in the Philippines as a result of their “over-abundant love—for each other as a couple” as well as their love for the country (Diaz 2012, 3). What can be said about this opposition is the fact that the positionalities of love between the subjects in the margin and the people in power transcend the personal border. This is probably one of the very few intersectional points where postcoloniality can mediate the two groups. The personal is inevitably political in the face of colonial residues and the rebuilding of the remnants that colonialism had left. Diaz does not explicitly address this postcolonial issue much in the study, but it is always a necessity to refer back to the role of colonialism in discussing queerness and Martial Law in the Philippines.

Diaz’s study on queer arts and their respective characters who transcend personal borders into the political will instigate a provoking question as to what is left to the individuals when one’s sense of individuality consequently fades into the communal postcolonial consciousness?

In regards to Diaz’s study, Ponce in *The Diasporic Poetics of Queer Martial Law Literature* (2012) has provided a supplement to the issue of locating one’s sexuality in a larger framework of a nation. He argues, “queer diasporic Filipino literature does not pursue a politics of national inclusion—precisely because the “nation” is always ambiguous ... that the nation is an inadequate analytical framework for reading diasporic Filipino ‘gay writing’” (157). The stark difference between Ponce’s study and that of Diaz’s lies in the level of opacity they emphasize toward the Philippines as a nation and referential framework. In the former, the sexual experience and coming into being are not confined by the nation; the nation lies not at the center of sexual consciousness, but at the periphery. This underlines the idea that non-heteronormative forms of sexuality organically create their third space that the nation cannot infiltrate. In contrast, the latter conflates the queer subjects with the nation where they amalgamate to represent an alternating system of meanings, hence the nation/the city as the locus of sexuality becomes the center in which the subjects gravitate into. This problem of queer positionality in the two studies is pivotal to highlight as both address the diasporic Filipino

gay arts/writing in which the idea of home and belonging among the diaspora is yet to be settled.

Benedicto's study on the locality of homosexual identity formation between the diasporic gay Filipinos in the United States of America and the local gay Filipinos offers an in-depth analysis of how the geographical dislocation between the two has created anxious dynamics between Filipino queer locality and globality, and thus belonging (2008). The first point to consider in Benedicto's analysis is how fragile the concept of belonging is for both the local and diasporic gay Filipinos. Especially for the former, the interplay between the traditional and modern gay scenes is a complex matter to tackle. The concept of *bakla* as "a sexual tradition that conflates homosexuality, transvestism or effeminacy, and lower-class status" in the Philippines is in tension with the growing presence of "gay globality" that places *bakla* as the abject that needs to be relocated elsewhere to make ways for the globalized Manila's gay scene (318). The rejection of *bakla* is not without a cause because the diasporic gay Filipinos want to have a clear departure from a concept that has stigmatized and excluded them in their own culture first and foremost. Yet, *bakla* as a traditional form of queerness has to remain in their cultural memory to serve as a contrast and a necessity for a liberated self-definition that they believe queer globality can offer. However, in the process of favoring one over the other, the diasporic gay Filipinos experience exclusion in their new home countries and this leads to an existential crisis for their aspired global gay identity because, in their struggle to distance themselves with the notion of *bakla*, the idea lingers as an inseparable part of their diasporic queer experience (323).

In narrativizing the disjunctions between the diasporic and local gay Filipinos, Benedicto writes a quite provocative remark on the politics of distance. He argues that the geographical distance between the global gay sites in the American cities and Manila has allowed the residents of the latter to adopt global gay identity more fully than their diasporic counterparts. This occurs because the gay subjects in Manila do not possess the shared experience of displacement and exclusion that Filipino gay migrants undergo in their new home countries. The absence of discrimination is crucial here because for the Filipino gay migrants, America and the idealized references to the country are challenged and "undone". The polished image of a global gay identity that the American gay scenes flaunt and advertise proves to be merely a "global gay simulacrum"—a superficial image

that hides the actuality and reality of the harsh gay scenes (2008, 323). This, without a doubt, explains why the appeal of global gay identity is more strongly rooted in Manila and the Philippines as the absence of performing *kabklaan* means the ability to easily adopt the concept of global gayness onto the various cities in the country through “the production of [their] *own* gay clubs, gay publications, gay bodies” similar to the ones already mapped out in the US.

The establishment of Manila’s global gay culture also comes to be observed through the issue of class where the majority of upper-middle-class gay Filipinos permeate, dominate and dictate the culture. Benedicto highlights examples of web networking among gays such as the “Guys4Men” in which the users restrict their connection and networking through overtly stated boundaries such as English proficiency, which is considered a status marker in the Philippines, and the demand for hypermasculine idealization that directly disregards the feminine and lower-class association of *bakla* with its cross-dressing culture and embrace of femininity (2008, 328). What is striking about Benedicto’s finding concerning classism within the gay culture is the similar class issue that is also present in Diaz’s study between the low-class marginal queer individuals and the Marcos government. In the two studies, the subjects on the upper hand of the economy have erected their point of reference to the West, catering to the new ideals of what-should-be and what-should-never-be according to the ones already mapped out in the Western metropolis such as the USA. This oppositionality eventually leads to the appeal of modernity that tries to erase locality by resorting to the modes of global urbanism practiced in the West.

In his other study “Desiring Sameness: Globalization, Agency, and the Filipino Gay Imaginary” (2008), Benedicto furthers this appeal to global gay modernity among upper and middle-class gay Filipinos through his problematization of identity interpellation. He argues that the idea of familiarity found in the “existence of cultural common denominators” in which the Filipino gay upper classes can identify with “the gay White male stereotypes” cannot be a deciding reason as to why they resort to gay globality. He mentions:

If familiarity is what enables successful interpellation, then how do we explain how individuals whose lived experiences are marked by different material and spatial relations or even contradictory experiences of multiple imperialism come to internalize a particular representation of the self? In my view, this puzzle can be addressed by arguing that the operational principle in interpellation is not “sensibility” or how “recognizable” a particular subject is, but rather “desire” and how “pleasurable” it would be to occupy a particular subject position. (283)

The image of a liberated and adventurous Western gay is the exact image that upper-class gay Filipinos objectively aim to experience and emulate through the reproduction of Western styles of gay clubs and cultural products. Through this masturbation of pleasure and desire, they can see themselves as liberated individuals and not as a societal misfit. Their dissociation from the *bakla* conception further implicates their desirability to emulate the freedom ride of life the gays experience in their global, Western gay metropolises. Yet, in understanding the Filipino’s identification with the West’s gay globality, Benedicto warns to not fall short of interpreting this act of identification solely as “an attempt to escape tradition in favor of modernity” (2008, 287). Western subjectivities regarding the linearity of “historical development” from the traditional to the modern ways of life also play their parts in the Filipinos’ identification process of disregarding the *bakla* identity. The choice of terms that surround gayness/queerness in the Philippines is not strictly a process of transitioning from the traditional to the modern, but more a process of “the productive power of labels to create subject-positions and place individuals in those subject positions.” Thus, *bakla*, as an ideation that conflates feminine homosexuality, the state of woman entrapment in a male body and lower-class status into a single concept, is situated at a distance among the upper-class gay Filipinos for them to experience the modern pleasure that the West depicts. Particularly speaking, Benedicto places a greater emphasis on the “Dreams of America” that bedecks the Filipino imagination, “so much so that any individual who is able to claim Western-ness [and American-ness] is almost immediately granted a position of privilege” (288).

In the process of identification, the “stereotypification” of the liberated life of the gays in the West begins. As has been stated before, the distance between gay metropolises and Manila has allowed the residents of the city to adopt gay globality more fully than their diasporic counterparts. This, nonetheless, also marks a prominent drawback of restricting

their depth of perception into the urban West gay scenes and lives. There is also a selective process of viewing that sees the “foreign” as the better one without their realizing that what they have chosen to see is their “projection of desires”. Here, the Filipinos as the postcolonial queer subjects admire and fantasize about the West gay men as the ideals they need to achieve to experience the pleasure of privilege. Benedicto marks:

Identification with the stereotype generates both an admiration for and desire to replicate his traits and the places in which he is thought to reside, producing what I understand to be double-sided practices of approximation: The gay White male body becomes both an object to be emulated and a target of sexual pursuit; similarly, the gay space becomes a model for the transformation of the local and at the same time a travel destination. (289)

What is important to foreground in Benedicto’s comments concerning the stereotype identification with the Western gay is the fact that the Filipinos are consequently trying to displace themselves both physically and spatially to cater to their desires. The West is both now objectified and the objective in which they perform queerness. Additionally, while objectively trying to emulate same-ness with the West by mimicking what it has initially done, the Filipinos can only do it through the act of approximation “... for the desire for sameness cannot lead to actual sameness,” (290). Instead of writing a carbon copy of the West’s gay narrative, the Filipinos will eventually write their own narrative, different from the initial idea of “sameness” that has instigated them. Totality here cannot be achieved considering the “intellectual squeezing conditioned by connotations in [the] local language, colonial history, individual positionality in power relations, and the close articulation of American and Filipino culture.”

It is evident that there is a pervasive attraction and repulsion between the mediation of Filipino and American culture within the queer identification process in the Philippines and its diaspora. Queerness, through this paradigm, becomes a referential point where its definition has departed from sexuality into national and political consciousness, postcolonial belonging and the subject’s situatedness. Rather than proving a degree of erasure to the sexual affiliation of defining Filipino queerness, the discussion only establishes a form of queer identity that revokes the compartmentalization of sex from the co-existing components that give way for the sexed individuals to inhabit a relational

space where they can continually engage and disengage themselves. This discourse is certainly more overt in Realuyo's *The Umbrella Country* where the brothers' association with their queerness interposes itself with the differing temporal and spatial sources of identities that only lead them to create a third space to accommodate these factions.

In *The Politics of the Visible* (2004), Ty promotes the sense of in-betweenness by putting forward "the notion of borders/boarders as a way of looking at the liminal existence of Filipinos in the diaspora" (169). Through her analysis of Realuyo's *The Umbrella Country*, she argues that the making of Filipino diasporic identity has long severed itself from the classic immigrant narratives where the tropes between "the home country and America, the Old World and the New World, or the positions of exile and return" mark the course of immigrant voices and representation. Realuyo's book offers a new strand of complexities that introduce the pre-existing identity struggles to the conditions of "sexuality, gender, economic status, region of origin, age and religion" (170). This new reality has amplified the level of homelessness the diaspora inhabits. Interestingly, Realuyo navigates these rivulets of new identities by using the Philippines as the locus where identity interfaces originate. In this regard, Realuyo's sentiment toward the placelessness of the Filipino diaspora in the United States is what Campomanes emphasizes as the procedures among the Filipino-American authors to perceive the "intimate connection between Filipino nation building and the problematics of Filipino American community formation (1992, 54). In doing so, these authors opt to resort to the Philippines as the "ancestral focus" with which they attempt to understand their belonging in the United States. Campomanes writes:

The orientation toward the Philippines prevents prevailing notions of Asian American literature from reducing Filipino writing in the United States to just another variant of the immigrant epic, even if this in itself must be seen as an ever-present and partial possibility as time passes and Philippine-American relations change. (55)

The reversal is an active response to the recurring effacement of Filipino subjectivities in American history despite the latter's colonial subjugation in the Philippines. To bridge this erasure, the return to the Philippines is seen as redemptive; an act of remembering and reexamining the country's consciousness before, during and after the point of American colonialism. In other words, these authors want to situate their removal by

charting the roots of their identities in the larger genealogy of history that has constructed their placelessness in the first place.

Campomanes' view on returning to the Philippines as a textual source of literary creation among Filipino American authors, to a large degree, sets the stage for Ty's arguments on further looking upon the specter of colonial legacy in Realuyo's fiction. As Ty complicates the narrative discussion with issues of gender, sexuality and economy, she positions her analysis in the alternating fashion of seeing *The Umbrella Country* both as an individualized story and a national allegory. This, in her conception, provides an opportunity to read the novel "much more than a simple *Bildung*," a mere coming-of-age narrative. Specifically, she configures her analysis through the psychoanalytic application that regards the characters in Realuyo's book to be in the suspended stage where they fail to distinguish the boundary of the self and the other as characterized in Lacanian's psychoanalysis. This, as a result, induces a perpetual dependence of a child to their mother as they have yet to be able to recognize and create their own image (2004, 171). What this entails beyond Realuyo's text is its metaphor for the larger national consciousness and history. Ty states:

The demarcation between the self and the other, between the developing country, the Philippines, and its father and protector, the United States is never clear. Viewed through the lens of psychoanalysis the novel is much more than a simple *Bildung*; it also depicts the arrested growth of the Filipinos, and the difficulty in separating the Filipino subject from the colonizing American. (171)

In another instance, Ty also configures the occurrence of domestic violence and abusive relationships between the parental figures in the book, Estrella and Groovie, as the representation of the male aggressor and female victim that emulates the American colonization against the Philippines. Ty's tendency to direct her analysis toward the book's attempt to metaphorize the Philippines' national allegory runs the risk of reducing and obliterating the significant particularities that cannot be translated into forms of national belonging. Moreover, she seems to self-negate her established premise of leaving the conventional tropes of "the home country and America" only to arrive at the same place. Her emphasis on "sexuality, gender, economic status, region of origin, age and religion," only paves the way for her to reinstate that indeed they exist for the means of

national allegory. Yet, Ty's analysis simultaneously provokes us to reevaluate where one's selfhood is located in the postcolonial frameworks and analysis; is there even a space to begin with for the individuals whose narrative distinguishes itself from the nation, and if that unnamed space exists, through what means can these subjects reconcile their belonging.

May (2008) in *Extravagant Postcolonialism: Ethics and Individualism in Anglophonic, Anglocentric Postcolonial Fiction; or, "What Was (This) Postcolonialism* ventures to put into perspective the aforementioned questions regarding the locality of individuals in the postcolonial struggle. Here, he analyzes Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Gordimer's *The Conservationist*, Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* for their four protagonists—the Magistrate, Mehring, Mirza and Obi Okonkwo—and their pronounced individualism in the books. Despite the protagonists' respective colonial/postcolonial contexts, they show a degree of autonomy that differentiates their mode of being from the collectivist underlying of their society. Coetzee's the Magistrate confronts isolation and his authority through the ethical choices and responsibility established in the book's colonial setting; Gordimer's Mehring traverses personal interests and their consequent impacts on his societal obligations and community dynamics; Rushdie's Mirza grapples with the marked tensions between his individual identity and the torrent of collective cultural narratives that flows against his individuation; and Achebe's Obi Okonkwo struggles to find the equilibrium of his personal ambitions that defy social expectations in postcolonial Nigeria.

May's study of these four books and their protagonists challenges the pervading notion that individualism and postcolonialism are entirely conflicting and antithetical. He, on the contrary, argues that postcolonial literature often presents individuals who deviate from the social forces in order to transcend the determined social identities readily ascribed to them. Their assertion of their individuality allows them to engage in imaginative and visionary performances that uncover different understandings and forms of otherness. They, according to May, are what is called the postcolonial extravagant. He writes:

... that postcolonialism, in the significant form of postcolonial fiction at any rate, has its individuals, even its individualists, its eccentrics, those rare, odd birds in parrot masks, those curious and not entirely admirable characters who in moments of profound frustration or disappointment take off the masks [...] and distinguish—individualize—themselves. And how they individualize themselves is no less important than the bare fact that they do so: by quite willfully, constructing images or narratives, or undergoing epiphanies, that as Salman Rushdie might put it, bring newness into the world. Often enough that newness emerges in the form of a new and far richer apprehension of difference or otherness. Postcolonial fiction, as I will argue, features imaginative, aesthetic, or even visionary performances of an unexpectedly, uniquely generous nature. These characters are at their best, ethically speaking, when at their strangest, when they embrace strangeness and try to answer (to) it. (899-900)

His view gives prominence to the admittance that individualism as a “particular mode of difference” has been largely overlooked. Its lack of acknowledgment in the praxis of postcolonialism only corrodes the objective of postcolonial approaches that first attempt to continually seek different modes of representation. He mentions, “The ethical dimension of postcolonial literature has been underestimated to the extent that we have sought to explore these ‘torsions’ and write allegories pitting power against difference ...” (900). However, this underestimation must not be understood as a discontinuous state between postcolonialism and the individual autonomy of postcolonial literary protagonists. He underscores:

Yet, as I began by claiming, scarcely do these postcolonial fictions engage in a wholesale abolition of the individual. Indeed, they trash the individual no more than they do justice itself. Having been shielded from blame and indictment, the individual is not finally ruled out of bounds, not when it comes time to abandon the economic and to exercise imagination and generosity, not when it is time to move past blame and towards something like praise. Paradoxically enough, then, postcolonial justice tends to grasp with one hand what it would abjure with the other. Particular individuals, clearly, are rescued from economic justice, the suggestion being that guilt attaches to nobody in particular; but particular individuals, individuals in all their particularity, are also singled out for seemingly unearned praise. (904)

Postcolonial fictions require what May underscores as “particular persons” as they necessitate “the practice of postcolonial justice” (903). This form of justice carries with itself “the economic and punitive practice of assigning individual blame,” as it assumes

that “the individual exercises choice, possesses volition, that he or she is more or less autonomous.” It is indeed interesting to see how May almost conflates postcolonial individual subjects with justice and punishment. The bigger-than-world protagonists he perceives somehow are becoming too uncontainable for the fabric of postcolonial narratives. This exact point is where May’s analysis finds its pitfalls: his mode of individual agency is founded upon the premise of extravagance; how the characters’ individuality only directs them to ambiguous and tragic outcomes; it is as if their autonomy as individuals has become a plot device for the larger postcolonial narrative. May consciously underlines this issue by showing the modality of ending each character he examines undertakes:

Certainly these characters come across as personally interested; their egotism and egocentrism, their occasional solipsism, [are] unmistakable. Here is the obverse of the coin of individualism: Gordimer’s individualist, Mehring maintains a virtual ring around his identity from which he tries to exclude all disturbing people and ideas, thereby freeing himself from connection and concern. As we saw above, Rushdie’s individualist, Mirza, suffers the opposite condition, the megalomaniac’s dream of responsibility of the entire world. Achebe’s Obi, also an individualist, could not be lonelier in metropolitan Lagos, and he ends up in a prison of his own. And then there is Coetzee’s individualist, the friendless Magistrate, whose spaces of linguistically enforced solitude rival those of Coetzee’s earlier character ... (907)

Despite the unique perspective on the ethical dilemmas that these individualist characters bring to their societies’ postcolonial narratives, their individualism is eventually perceived to be fruitless. That having their idiosyncrasy recognized, but still insufficient in narrating their version of postcolonial identification signifies the need to invest in a postcolonial sensitivity that accommodates nuances of neglected personal narratives, which do not fit the normative moldings of existence. This is pointedly relevant and pressing toward new voices in contemporary postcolonial literature where the post- in postcolonialism no longer only incorporates the typical postcolonial struggles of collective identity and resistance. As expatiated in Realuyo’s *The Umbrella Country* and Taïa’s *Salvation Army*, their personal narratives against the ebbs and flow of postcolonial Philippines and Morocco will only be reduced into a chronicle of failure if they are read in the same fashion as May’s reading of Coetzee, Gordimer, Rushdie and Achebe. Precisely,

Realuyo's and Taïa's are entangled with the protagonists' queerness that pushes existing procedures of postcolonial approaches to rethink where the narrative of postcolonial queer individuals resides within the broader decolonial movements.

While it is simple to indict postcolonialism for its questionable fall into the allure of normative criticism, the relationship between postcolonial and queer studies is multifold. Spurlin (2001) rightly advances the problem by positing the reluctance of the two criticisms to look beyond the constraints of their situations. He denotes:

In its analyses of marginalization and subaltern experience, its emphasis on national identities and borders, and its attention to race, gender, and class, postcolonial studies have seriously neglected the ways in which heterosexism and homophobia have also shaped the world of hegemonic power. A parallel problem is that queer studies, most highly developed in the U.S., have shown little interest in cross-cultural variations of the expression and representation of same-sex desire; homosexualities in non-Western societies are, at best, imagined or invented through the imperialist gaze of Euroamerican queer identity politics, appropriated through the economies of the West, or, at worst, altogether ignored. (185)

While Spurlin's studies focalize the condition between postcolonialism and queer studies in South Africa, his insights provide an immediate reevaluation of the similar tense conditions of postcolonial queer studies in many post-colonized countries. First, he sustains the need for an intersectional critique between the two to challenge the homogenization of identities and the imposition of Eurocentric frameworks on non-Western contexts that simultaneously affect postcolonial and queer individuals. This argument has its foundation in the findings of different queer practices that are absent from the Western experiences. Such practice is found in the "mummy-baby" relationships among women in Lesotho where the affectionate and often erotic bonds between women are usually initiated during adolescence. Through this practice, one woman takes the role of a provider—the mummy—who nurtures and looks after another woman who takes her part as the dependent or the baby. Spurlin underlines this practice to create a degree of autonomy between Lesotho's women that has been enabled by the absence of Lesotho's adult males who "migrate to nearby South Africa to work for long periods of time" (193). However, the women's resistance to having been labeled as lesbian, as Spurlin shows, implies the inadequacy of Western queer descriptions of their experiences and the critical

requirement to reconfigure the base on which postcolonial queer theories have erected themselves onto:

Because rural women in southern Africa may engage in same-sex relationships without necessarily self-identifying, indeed often resisting being named, as “lesbian,” it is important for queer studies to ask how these erotic exchanges between women help rearticulate and redefine lesbian, gender, and African identity, which need not necessarily include the positioning of oneself as “queer,” but may nonetheless subvert (whether consciously or not) normative regimes of compulsory heterosexuality. (194)

Spurlin’s particular take on the “unnamed subversion” is critical to quote as it echoes the consequent conflation of *bakla* as gay and other queer practices in the Philippines that do not inhabit the same language as Western queer practices. Jacobo (2022, 162) perfectly captures these distinguished queer affects through the intersectional studies of queer performances and formations in the country where it is shown that, “... being a woman or a man [in regard to the traditional practice of queer performances] was a matter of occupation,” and not constricted solely to the immediate reference of sexuality. In addition, Jacobo’s account also becomes more daunting to understand as the occupations possessed by the respective individuals involve religious practices:

The *babaylan* (in some accounts *baylan*, *katalonan*, *daetan*, *anitera*) was associated with *babayi*, but because gender was seen in terms of social function and a role that is not necessarily fixed on birth sex, male-assigned but female-presenting people were allowed to perform priestess duties and were considered women as they conducted themselves as such... One remarkable feature of this feminine status is that gender-crossing is signified and indeed occurs with the donning of women’s clothes. The transvestic act accorded one with the kind of life associated with and expected of a woman. This does not necessarily cohere with contemporary cross-dressing, we must note, where identity may not change with the expression. (162)

Interestingly, Jacobo places this queer practice of *binabayi* as a transfeminine narrative that exposes “a gender that has always been there, but this genealogy of transfeminine knowledge [at the same time] tells us she is also now upon us” (171). Jacobo’s approach to the transfeminine narrative emphasizes a mode of subjectivity that resists strict

temporalization; its relevance does not depend only on the past associations and its perceived “unsuitability” to the contemporary gender practice in the Philippines.

B. Review of Related Studies on Queerness, Abdellah Taïa and Morocco

Some studies in Taïa's semi-autobiographical work *Salvation Army* and Taïa himself as an author have centralized their discussion with the theoretical framework of queer affects as the point of reference through which Taïa and his works are analyzed. In these studies, the foregrounding of affective turn is meant to avoid and most possibly escape the East-and-West dichotomy of sexual epistemology. This appeal to affect is indeed required in reading *Salvation Army* because while the budding sexual desire of the protagonist is overtly pronounced throughout the course, the way it is communicated is conveyed through silence(s) and inner monologues. Here, verbal communication escapes symbolization and queerness can only be understood through the feelings it entails. Georgis in *A Muffled Scream: Queer Affects in Abdellah Taïa's Salvation Army* explains that the turn of queer affect in the work through its cinematic adaptation "is not experienced as articulable knowledge, but a felt knowledge of danger or loss" (2015, 58). Abdellah, both as the author and the protagonist, lacks the wealth of language that enables him to represent his queerness in his sexual coming-of-age narrative. Feelings, accordingly, are the means through which silence can be interpreted and reinstated. Now, what this affective turn does in return is the revocation of the mode of seeing that places Abdellah as a victim of a sexually repressive and patriarchal culture in Morocco. The mode, on the contrary, gets expanded and enlarged as a purview to accommodate an alternative to seeing Abdellah as a subject. Georgis further mentions that "[queer affects] are a return to the site of abjection and to the incest ties," and there is a degree of lived carnality in the affects that get relinquished "... in exchange for socially acceptable ones" (60). Through this realization of carnality, "the young Abdellah tests the limits and possibilities under oppressive difficult conditions under which he lived, and arrives not to a settled identity, but a subjectivity at peace with itself even as it is unfinished project" (59). Thus, Abdellah locates his subjectivity in the oscillating mid-spectrum of acceptability where he seems to resist concretization of his sexual identity and belonging to a place. He, therefore, simultaneously becomes the victim as much as he is the instigator of his sexual adventures.

Schroth's *Queerness, Shame and the Family in Abdellah Taïa's Epistolary Writing* - (2021) also echoes similar application of queer affects in the study where it argues that

shame as an affective experience in Taïa's epistolary works is experienced in disjunction. This disjunction creates a reversal of the definition and meaning of shame as it reclaims, rearticulates and rewrites the queer experiences the subjects undertake in the work. Shame, moreover, carries the productive power to reshape and reclaim negative experiences. In his "queer Arab shame" argumentation, Schroth underlines the dynamics of relationality in shameful experiences where shame operates from the individual to the communal and vice versa. First, he commences with the long-standing socio-cultural presence of *hchouma* that objects to non-conformity as it is believed to endanger social cohesion. While it is more commonly associated with women, Schroth sees that the concept "assures cohesion because an individual's reputation, honor, and dignity are associated with the reputation of their family." What this implies is its broader attempt to subjugate and "pacify" any non-conformists and it does not stop at women. Accordingly, queer as a notion and subject is also involved in the application of this socio-cultural concept (128).

In the four letters he has investigated in the work, shame navigates different ends while it serves as the same means in each letter. In the first letter "L'homosexualité expliquée a ma mere," the shame reconstructs the relationship between a son and a mother through the act of acknowledging and communicating one's homosexuality that is deemed to be shameful for the family. Shame provides the possibility of filial reparation and the hopeful force of bridging the individual to the communal. In the second letter "Le Chaouche," shame gravitates in the domain of the family where shame is believed to recalibrate "familial ties" and "reshape collective memory". In "Celui", the third letter of his study, Schroth shows shame as the tool to reconfigure a son's perception of his dead mother whom he thinks to have been manipulative toward him and his father. In the act of shaming his mother for her deeds, he "demonstrates how lost he is without her guidance (2021, 143). In the final letter, shame revolves around the trauma of sexual abuse of a queer youth "at the hands of Moroccan and European men". The choice of the subject named Lahbib to write this letter of shame to Ahmed is critical in pivoting the nature of shame in the coming-of-age experience among the queer youth. Schroth foregrounds this by noting that "while the expression and revelation and shame does not, unfortunately, save Lahbib, it might very well liberate Ahmed" (143). Lahbib's choice to narrate the shame of his sexual abuse shows a redirection of one's physical unworthiness of having

been raped into the responsibility of the men who victimize and exploit the young people. Finally, Schroth reads shame as a “constant experience of life” among queer Arabs and it is only normal to continually negotiate shame with all its means and forms.

The two previous studies have denoted the appeal toward the affective turn of queerness in reinterpreting queer experiences and narratives beyond normative symbols and understanding. There seems to be an apparent transformative force in play in destabilizing forms and resorting to the felt emotions. However, the nature of reading queer experiences through an affective turn can be found to be problematic as well. Bouamer in his study *He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not: Cruel Optimism in Abdellah Taïa’s L’armee du Salut* problematizes the imposition of affect in reading the work as an entrapment toward false optimism, or in his term “cruel optimism”. The concept of cruel optimism, coined and developed by the theorist Lauren Berlant, refers to the idea that unachievable, harmful ideals such as the promise of enduring love and a good life in *Salvation Army* can create an equally false attachment among people. On top of this, the promises and ideals proposed are also in line with the heteronormative structure of the West in which “family, success, and love” are deeply ingrained (2021, 114).

Bouamer’s focus on rejecting optimism as the perceived affect of *Salvation Army* is based on the tendency among critics to place an overly heavy emphasis on the romantic moments in the work, both in the written form and its cinematic adaptation, as an optimistic potentiality where Abdellah is sexually and personally liberated from an intolerant sexual environment of Morocco. Bouamer regards this view to be reductive, normative and counterproductive to “Taïa’s efforts in making his original coming-of-age less hopeful, less cruelly optimistic.” It has to be noted, however, that being less hopeful is not to be interpreted as a state of hopelessness. On the contrary, the appeal to the less hopeful outlook in the coming-of-age narrative of *Salvation Army* is an attempt to “reflect on the constant transitional state of queer subjects against heteronormative expectations of ‘happiness’ nurtured by cruel optimism” (2021, 124). This optimism is cruel because it misleads Abdellah as a queer subject to believe that his attachment to the Western liberal form of sexuality and way of seeing would help to set him “free”. In other words, his attachments to dreams, ideals and promises only sustain his unhappiness. This is certainly the case at the end of both the book and the film where Abdellah is left stranded in Geneva while still being hunted by the specter of his past relationship with a Swiss professor,

Jean. The ensuing feeling of being unworthy of happiness in the final scene should be the point of departure where Abdellah finally embraces the non-heteronormative forms of happiness. His identity as a queer Arabic person enables him to understand and experience happiness on his own terms and conditions. Accordingly, queer optimism lies not in what is possible, but rather in what is not possible.

Meanwhile, Le Blond's studies accentuate the creation of the Franco-Moroccan queer identity that is facilitated by the book's stress on movements. Movements here are not necessarily restricted to spatiality as Le Blond qualifies movements to include geographical, narrative and temporal aspects in Abdellah's coming-of-age. These three points focus on underlining the nature of sexual fluidity and the multiple gender expressions that the characters exhibit in the book, which revokes a monolithic view of gender and sexuality (2021). In Le Blond's argumentation of the geographical, he reads Abdellah's geographical movement as a process of spatial investment where one creates and maintains attachment: "Taïa puts great emphasis on the places where he finds himself, and this emphasis translates into a fondness for [the] locale. Whether it be the family house in Hay Salam or the beach where he and Jean first walk together, there is a feeling of longing that transpires," and he argues that this longing is juxtaposed with "... the different places from his home country mentioned in the novel" (67). In this case, affect takes the form of a longing and movement mediates this affect to transpire.

Regarding the narrative motion, Le Blond finds that it can be understood through the book's three narrative divisions: the first part deals with the focalization of the parental figures in Abdellah's life, his mother M'Barka and his father Mohamed; the second is committed to Abdellah's relationship with his older brother, Abdelkebir; and the last involves Abdellah's experiences in Morocco and Switzerland. Le Blond approaches these narrative divisions first with the different use of pronouns in each part: *she* for the first, *he* for the second and *I* for the third. This consequent transition of pronoun displays how the movement of narrative focus in a character, in a particular space and time, influences other characters in a different space and time. Le Blond argues that "there is a constant shift between the *I*, representing Abdellah's thought and perspective, and the *she* and *he* representing the assumed perspectives of his mother and older brother" (67-68). What this shift of narrative offers, it seems, is the blurring of boundaries in Abdellah's point of reference for his identities and perspectives. There is an apparent attempt to reject identity

fixation and Abdellah's coming-of-age can only be narrated through instability. Far from its common negative association, this instability nurtures fluidity and a sense of queerness that is complex, ever-changing and continually negotiated.

The last form of movement, temporality, closely refers to the temporal oscillation throughout the course of the book where past and present are designated to situate a shared narrative space. Le Blond writes how time in each part of the book is structured differently and in a non-linear manner. The first part sets the temporal dimension into Abdellah's childhood and family life in Hay Salam. He, nonetheless, extends this past temporal reference further into a more distant past to the time when his parents got married. This extension provides a means of justification regarding the family issues he is unfolding in the first part. In the second part of the book, time is ordered more chronologically, following closely Abdelkébir's life and his influence in the family. This part ends with the sub-part of travel recounting where Abdelkébir brings his younger brother Abdellah and Mohamed to Tangiers. According to Le Blond, the book's last part is a precise example of how temporality vacillates. Two forms of temporalities are present here regarding place: the present episodes in Geneva, Switzerland and the past episodes in Morocco. The former concerns "the beginning of Abdellah's graduate studies in Geneva ... from Abdellah's arrival at the Geneva airport to his first days spent in the city," while the latter "correspond[s] to the years when Abdellah was an undergraduate student and met Jean, who gradually became his lover" (2021, 69-79). While time here unavoidably creates fragmentation, it only clarifies Abdellah's motives for his migration to Geneva which is driven by his fascination with the West and romantic remnants with Jean.

As demonstrated how spaces and temporal reconfiguration of Abdellah's queerness in *Salvation Army*, it becomes necessary to map out how they also depict a journey of queer discovery that performs itself through a series of disidentification, which Maroun (2021) presents as Abdellah's newly established queer masculinity. The formulation of queer masculinity against the heteronormative version of it is particularly intriguing as Maroun addresses the need for dismantling patriarchal figures as the means to destabilize and disidentify queer masculinity from the "Moroccan man." The figures accounted for this are the father, the king and the brother. They represent the forms of resistance that go from the bounds of private domains and into the public as Maroun stresses:

Patriarchy is a vital social structure in the understanding of queer masculinity in Taïa's works because the author needs to render its social power impotent in order for queer iterations of Moroccan masculinity to be legitimized. It is important to recall that Taïa disassembles the power of the father through various phases: subverting his leadership, the patriarchal structure of the family, and of society. Queer narratives, like Taïa's, are aptly positioned to break down the 'compulsory sexuality' that is 'inseparable from national identity' ... (92)

The point of role subversion is noteworthy because of its specific association with the dismissal of Mohamed as the father figure of Abdellah's family in *Salvation Army*. From the beginning of the book, Abdelkébir as the first-born son in the family takes the dominant role of a father figure for Abdellah and the rest of the family. Their mother, M'Barka, also sets the stage for Abdelkébir's prominence in the family as shown in the family's provision for his private room in the family house. The family's point of reference has shifted from Mohamed to Abdelkébir is a clear sign of an emasculated fatherhood. This first instance of role subversion provides the backdrop of Abdellah's consequent deviation from heteronormative fixtures. However, the absence of fatherhood that is inhabited by the presence of Abdelkébir as the eldest in the family does not automatically render him the absolute reversal of patriarchal figures in the family. Instead, Abdellah's displaced veneration of fatherhood that Abdelkébir embodies should be carefully approached as a multi-layered procedure of Abdellah's reclamation of his queer consciousness:

There is nothing queer about his brother; he is symbolic of a heteronormative ideology that permeates Moroccan culture—something Abdellah appears to long for in some sort of false ceremonial attempt at discovering a masculinity by consuming it ... His brother's ejaculate is symbolic of fatherhood so to consume it can be viewed as an attempt at becoming a man. However, its consumption would be through an incestuously homoerotic act, far from heteronormative and thus queer. I argue thus that since the brother remain in this literary world, Taïa has to deny his performance of masculinity, one cemented in heterosexuality, ... thereby illegitimizing his power in the eyes of the protagonist. Abdelkébir remains a benchmark against which heteronormativity is posited and frames masculinity for Abdellah, one that he ultimately expunges from the novel as the former marries off and abandons the family. (95)

In mediating Abdellah's growing queer consciousness, he perceives that it cannot be done through the heteronormative construction of Moroccan sexuality and masculinity. The fact that he mediates his queer desire through his brother Abdelkébir as the symbol of "displaced" fatherhood only reinforces Abdellah's growing dissociation with conventions. This dissociation is required as part of his coming-of-age narrative whose progression "foregrounds the need for him to reject these norms, undermine said norms' authority . . .," and it is pointedly done through the space of his family (95). It is why upon knowing his queerness holds no space in his society, Abdellah resorts to the transitional zones which Maroun denotes as the liminal spaces. Abdellah's queerness and his "performances of [queer] masculinity find their true expression on the border, in a place that isn't inhabited but instead, traversed," reinstating the fluidity of expression that has been a significant marker in Taïa's fiction.

Despite Maroun's nuanced description of the borderlessness of Abdellah's queer experience in *Salvation Army*, one needs to review Maroun's tendency to simplify queer identity formation as a binary process where queer characters either conform or resist the expectations of the heteronormative society they are in, which in this case in Morocco. Fluidity within the book's paradigm does not begin only with the liminal experiences of Abdellah, but even during the process through which he has to oscillate back and forth regarding his existential positioning against his family and society. Specifically for this instance, Abdellah's shifting positions cannot be simplistically categorized as either resistance or conformity. Their dynamics and state of ambivalence are what fuel Abdellah's coming-of-age narrative. Additionally, Maroun misses the chance to examine Abdellah's queer in-betweenness that lies outside the concrete spaces of the private and the public. The gist of Abdellah's queer consciousness is mentally constructed and verbalized. Here, liminality cannot manifest itself through tangible places, but through the exploration of affects. The emotional and the psychological should have been incorporated as the foci of liminality through which the expression of shame and repression is reclaimed. In other words, the non-places are as central to the reading of *Salvation Army* as the liminal third spaces Maroun includes.

The appeal toward affect and non-places in the analysis of *Salvation Army* is for a fact most potent in the pervasive melancholy atmosphere of Abdellah's coming-of-age from his boyhood into adulthood. As much of his desire is mentally communicated, much of

his physicality is also the product of lost and untranslatable wants and longings; and this conception is inhabited throughout the course of the book. Semerene (2014, para. 1) advocates this degree of melancholy in the film adaptation of the book which distinguishes *Salvation Army* as a coming-of-age narrative from the rest of the *Bildung* corpus:

Gay coming-of-age stories in cinema often lean toward linear odes to the resilience of white men who, if it weren't for their sexual proclivities, wouldn't ever have had to deal with lack of privilege. *Salvation Army*, the directorial debut of acclaimed Moroccan writer Abdellah Taïa, and based on his own autobiographical novel, refuses the usual attempts at heroic reparation and redemption associated with the genre. It approaches the subject with the strange and unbearable melancholy that queer boyhood actually involves. It's quite a thud of a film, which embraces, with grace and precision, the nastiness of growing up with desire stuck in one's throat like a muffled scream.

Once again, it is mistaken to grasp the melancholy representation of the adaptation and the book as a wholly negative experience. Ambivalence is at play and thus melancholy exists beyond the binary framework of either positive or negative sentimentality. In the book, Abdellah's epiphany is realized through a set of failures and shameful recollections. Yet, an apparent indescribable affect also underlines the undertones of the potentiality of these seemingly obstructive and defeatist experiences. One of the instances which readily exhibits the gradation of Abdellah's affect is in his unreciprocated erotic desire, which for some is translated as erotic love. Semerene asserts that:

... [the] erotic love between brothers is not just mutual, but eventually consummated, and thus less interesting than torturing, but also teasing, unavailability and impenetrability of the older brother's emotional presence in *Salvation Army* ... Abdellah has to settle for worshipping his brother surreptitiously, through looking at and for him. It's an intransitive kind of looking bound to never find any satisfaction. (2014, para. 4)

Indeed, the failing reciprocation of his desire has led him to a sense of alienation which drives him to the point of muteness. This for Semerene indicates the cinematic adaptation of the book as a drama that "lies on the silence of a boy's wallowing in a desolation he has absolutely no resources to understand, or express," and that "the

deafening silence exacted onto queerness,” shows the mere account of a young queer’s survival narrative.

Given Abdellah’s survivability as a young queer individual, it is imperative to question if his need to survive also implies his need to be saved. Horton (2018) revokes this appeal for rescue among queer individuals who have chosen silence as a mode of living instead of deploying coming out as a strategy to make one’s queer individuality visible. He notices how “queers are compelled to be talking subjects, those who are ‘out and proud’,” and this has resulted in the paradigm where silence is interpreted as incompatible to mediate queerness and its desire. Horton points out how the queers’ engagement with silence should be viewed:

I consider acts of concealment—silence, the impossibility of speech, and even the failures surrounding coming out and being ‘heard’ by family—as generative for thinking about the queer potentialities and contradictions of normative, natal kinship agreements. This is not an attempt to romanticize silence or advance it as a ‘non-Western’ alternative to coming out. Rather, I am interested in thinking through the manifold desires that are revealed by not verbally disclosing one’s sexuality to family ... I argue that the daily negotiations that queers make to navigate identities reveal the multiple and contradictory desires and institutions that queers inhabit. (2018, 2)

Horton intuitively discerns the reasoning behind accentuating silence as the “dearth of non-English, regional terms to describe counter heteronormative desire,” to the naming of queer sexuality that cannot be easily reduced into the act of coming out (6). In this study where he criticizes the practice of coming out which has become absent among the queer individuals and spaces in Mumbai, he recognizes silence as “not only about concealment, strategy, or a refusal to come out, but also the difficulty of translating and articulating desire,” that has become present as a response to the growing dichotomy between queerness as a “fixed identity” and as a form of identification whose reference shifts from one context to another.

The centrality of Horton’s reluctance to use coming out as the language for queer visibility is grounded upon the relationality that each individual sustains toward their fabric of society. There is an inseparable individual responsibility that directly relates and attaches oneself to the public. It is especially true when Horton’s spatial reference talks about the positionality of Mumbai queers and Indians in the larger context where he

perceives that "... for many queers in India (and beyond), the question of visibility—and of coming out—is tied to the complexities of kinship relationships, to the nuances of social networks, and even to issues of class and social respectability" (2018, 9). One's individuality, put differently, is defined by communality. Yet, it is also inadequate to equate this perspective to a rejection of individuality. Instead, it connotes the individual agency to reconcile and negotiate their belonging to the spaces they inhabit, be it personal or communal. Horton postulates:

Close-knit communities and the near ubiquitous obligations for marriage and heterosexual reproduction create the foundations of economies of honor, shame, and respect that translate into a family's social standing. Individuals are constituted primarily through their relationships to the broader social structure, to kinship ... Such a framework not only makes kinship an indispensable mechanism for social organization, but also renders issues of family and social respectability central to how individuals constitute themselves. Among the Mumbai queers I have worked with, coming out risks not just compromising personal respect, but also subjecting their families to censure, gossip, and rumor. (9)

Silence among the Mumbai queers manifests itself in multiple forms that Horton conceptualizes as "impossible speech," "silence as care" and silence as the token of "the ambivalence of home." The verbal dissonance and absence of language to represent queerness have an immediate link with silence as care. In mediating queerness, Horton finds that "... instead of directly coming out, some queers direct their sexual dissidence toward marriage. From stating that they want to focus on their careers to outright refusing to marry, renouncing marriage has become a convenient and strategic way for queers ..." This, at the same time, also provides spaces for queer individuals to "work around gaps in language" that would be able to help them negotiate their queerness in the family.

Interestingly, in another interlocutor Horton studies in Mumbai, he observes how he manages to flexibly dive into the spectrum of his sexuality and the means to represent them inside and outside the enclave of his traditional Catholic family. Manish, the name of the subject, has managed to juggle between the performance of closetedness in the family and the openness to take part as "a core team member for an LGBTQ youth support group" and "[participate] in queer flashmobs" in public (9). His rendition of his queerness is pivotal as it might be pinned down as an inauthentic representation of queerness. Yet,

Horton revokes this paradigm by showcasing the practice of care that lies behind Manish's choice:

Coming out would leave Manish's family vulnerable to censure and social shame. However, not publicly disclosing his sexuality to his family and to his broader community is not an act of complete disempowerment, or something that prevents his flourishing. Instead, silence is something Manish claims is an act of care for his family and their social reputation. His insistence that he should not put his family in a negative situation evokes the social interconnections that individuals navigate in daily life as well as the push and pull between caring for others and living on one's own terms. (9)

Besides, Manish's practice also exposes a broad spectrum of possibilities for queer individuals to live their lives and define the many versions of queerness that they can explore. His is also a different and unique case as Horton notes that while non-normative forms of sexuality are commonly celebrated and inhabited in private spaces, Manish has reverted this conception by enabling his queer agency within the public spaces which can accommodate his queer expressions. This reversal of negotiation is what Horton identifies as a form of manipulation that "seeks to honor both Manish's sexual desires and his kinship desires." His appeal to social respectability, as a result, becomes a matter of "recognizing and negotiating the ways in which modes of gossip, rumor, and even violence intersect with an urge to care for others, particularly family" (10). In this regard, no master narrative dominates one over the other; sexuality, while juxtaposed with family and social responsibility, goes hand in hand and represents a spectrum of queer representation that only gets expanded at the time negotiation is required.

As the family becomes an indispensable space for queer individuals in Horton's study, home consequentially turns into a contested site. Its role has now become ambivalent since "the line between acts of care and violence become blurred" (2018, 11). Through another queer subject in the study, Rahul, Horton observes how intimate violence and care are in order to maintain cohesion and safety between family members. Rahul locates this concern through his acknowledgment that in the vulnerable familial setting he is in, violence is looming from the act of disclosure. The stress on violence is particularly foregrounded against "a pervasive idea within the households of many of [Horton's]

interlocutors: that a parent is to blame for homosexuality.” Who takes the blame for this is unsurprisingly expected in a heteronormative and patriarchal household: the mother:

And, as Rahul emphasizes, it is often the mother who is blamed for a gay child because her coddling turned her son ‘soft’. Here, concerns over domestic violence crash into the desires to live openly. Rahul’s concealment of his identity is not just about maintaining a certain level of respectability but also shielding his mother from violence. Families, ..., can turn hostile at any moment. Thus, silence may not just be a condition of possibility for individual flourishing but collective flourishing. Rahul acknowledges the interconnectedness between himself and his family, despite the violence that surrounds him. (11)

Invoking the same instance of Rahul, Horton discusses Soraiya as a lesbian woman who discovers silence and concealment as the way through which she accentuates her agency. Horton notes, “Soraya suggests that disclosure can mark one as a body upon which violence should be committed through rape or forced marriages. Where coming out could lead family to pressurizing and fixing marriages, nondisclosure may enable some delay,” which according to her can also afford her to “... avoid the pressure to marry” (12). This appeal toward the performance of queer silencing “... also creates opportunities for play, sexual expression, and pleasure,” as silence denotes an untouchable realm that parents and families cannot penetrate. The body and its desire to find independence through the transgression granted by silence. Soraiya’s search for pleasure, for Horton, “... not only seek to displace norms around what kinds of associations one may have, but also disrupt certain forms of bodily discipline,” that have been established in a heteronormative framework. Horton continues, “The fact that such transgressions of boundaries take place within submission to familial expectations is important because it demonstrates that even within relations of queer subordination there are pockets of contest, resistance, and play, even amidst impossibility, silence, and failure.”

The dimension of queer silence is not exclusive to Horton’s study of the queer individuals in Mumbai. Recent queer studies have grown to question the agency of queer expression that is heavily stressed on the act of voicing up and public verbalization as shown in the coming-out procedure. What this entails as a response is the perceived complicity of those who have opted for silence as a mode of living their queerness as silence is frequently conflated as the permissiveness of quieting nonnormative

expressions. This is where the critical juncture of queerness requires revisiting: the power of queer as a definition lies in its acceptance to accommodate what is queer literally and metaphorically and the fact that it has begun to assimilate other forms of queer communications is counterproductive to its genealogy as a space through which normality and conventions are destabilized. On top of that, the need to reevaluate silence not only as oppressive but also as a form of resistance becomes relevant to the analysis of queer people of color whose formative growth as individuals is informed and supplanted by silence. Far from being stripped of their agency because of their silence, Horton's study in Mumbai attests to the contrary.

Kastein in *Queering Silence: Beyond Binaries through Queer Readings of Texts on Silence* (2024) seeks to undo and reconfigure queer silence through the close examination of the multifaceted nature of silence that she contextualizes based on the different settings of queer experiences. The premise of Kastein's analysis is clearcut: opposing the binary between voice and silence among queer representations. What she purports then is also definite: silence is oppressive as it is a force of resistance and its communication depends on the intersectional points of identity that influence how queer subjects experience silence. Thus, queering silence means transforming its perceived oppressiveness as a space for dynamic changes and eventual hopes.

In her analysis, Kastein finds the primacy of altering silence through the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, John Cage, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich and Susan Sontag. Through these five authors, she establishes the process of queering the silence as a method to apply "queer criticality" to "challenge normative assumptions" through its practice. It is therefore not a procedure where queerness gets to be imposing (2024, 58). This perspective extends queerness from sexuality to praxis and mode of seeing. She proceeds, "Queering texts look to deconstruct assumptions that are often made within systems that privilege heteronormative and cisnormative identities over queer identities," and this reasoning drives the study to look into the association between the forgotten queer belonging of the authors and their works on silence (59). The overlooking of aspects of the authors' queer identities results in the loss of nuances and depths about silence and how it embodies queerness in the works. She claims:

The act of queering silence, in the context of queer theory, operationalizes the method of queering to critique existing societal norms around the concept of silence through the lens of gender and sexual identities that fall outside a cisnormative and/or heteronormative framework. Queer navigation on silence goes beyond binary categorization and explores in-between spaces that can defy categorization or push the boundaries of what society deems acceptable. (59)

The “in-between spaces” she mentions particularly moderate how silence is perceived by the authors: on the one hand point silence is complicit in perpetuating violence and oppression, yet on the other hand it is also a tool of survival and the only accessible form of resistance. The in-betweenness of silence as a result suggests that it can no longer be instigated in a form of dichotomy and binarization. The quality of silence should be understood as a liminal space that the authors inhabit in order to exist; its multifaceted nature then necessitates a starting point that departs from this premise.

In her study of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). Kastein underlines how Anzaldúa grapples with the theme of silence in her work with the convergence of her Chicana queer identity and the presence of U.S.-Mexico borders as the literal and metaphorical constriction of cultural crossroads. Her work deals with the responses of silence as an aftermath of colonial racism and sexism. There, she appeals to the Mexican queer of color consciousness of the meeting points of opposing qualities in sexualities as a framework to embrace multiplicities of difference. In mediating these qualities, she observes how silence operates. First, it undoubtedly allows the oppressive brutality of systemic forces to marginalize and invalidate non-normative and non-conforming identities. Silence here is a corporeal violence that is enacted continually through centuries of colonization. Yet, in the same manner, silence has also turned into “a tactic for survival amid ethnic and linguistic colonization that is wrapped up with gendered and sexual imperialism.” Silence, as Kastein puts it, develops into a transgressive force as it becomes the only place where colonizers cannot get into (2024, 62-63).

Meanwhile, Kastein’s observation of Cage’s *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (1961). vocalizes silence as presence and performative. She notices how as an experimental composer, Cages approaches silence quite radically through his famous 4’33” work which consists of four minutes of silent performance as the performers pause playing their

musical instruments. The absence of sounds and/or voices is as performative as it is phenomenological as he gives voice to silence by making it present and felt by the audience. What can be made out of this experimental piece is probably the idea that silence does not mean the total absence of sounds, but the lack of it. Silence precedes noises and it is always present. Interestingly, this space of silence is also the way in which Cage attempts to navigate his private queer relationship with Merce Cunningham, whom Kastein interprets as keeping silence as a resistance against homophobia. She states, “According to Cage, what is present, but not always heard, is understood clearly through silence, which serves a revelatory purpose” (63-64). For this reason, silence is a site full of meaning; it is a form of communication in itself, through and within silence Cage displays a form of queer resistance against normative social frameworks that enforce binaries.

Similar to Anzaldúa, Kastein’s findings regarding Lorde’s *Sister Outsider* (1984) echo the aspects of survivability in silence and how silence gets to be protective and perilous. Rooted in her Black lesbian mother identity, Lorde’s work strives to present the dynamics of silence as one faces systemic injustice as a queer person of color. The form in which these dynamics are represented is through tying her extensive commitment to survival and self-actualization. At one point, she takes into account the risk of speaking out against oppression and silence does its work as a protection. However, at another point, she concedes that silence is the instrument the oppressors instrumentalize to maintain injustice. As a result, the mode of silence she advocates is transforming silence into a language of representation and action. The points of contradictions, while at some point prone to slippage, are exactly what silence embraces. Protective silence becomes the precursor to the gate of freedom and liberation; and as a practice of resistance, the process of maintaining and breaking silence is a trajectory. Kastein proposes, “While it can be protective, silence does nothing to change the systems and can signify consent. Lorde wrote a call to action for others to leave behind protective silence and challenge systemic silences” (65-66).

Provoking the specificity of her work toward the enforcement of silence against the queer community, Rich in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (1979) explores how heteronormative structures of power curtail the agency among queer individuals. Akin to Lorde’s call to break protective silence, Rich also shares similar standpoints by

conceptualizing silence as a form of dishonesty: “Rich’s silence contained elements of protective silence Lorde referred to but also includes the ways in which there is deluding silence in which queer identity is vocalized in ways which are dishonest” (66). This, according to Kastein, is a result of Rich’s “having spent half of her life in denial about her sexuality,” and Rich views this denial as the avenue through which silence molds people into liars. The erasure that heteronormative silence imposes is thus essential to be reclaimed by queer subjects; while it objectively aims to make queer individuals conform to the system, the reclaimed queer silence becomes a reflective space to rethink the truth of the systems that have silenced them in the first place. This truth reflects queer desires and its political potential to dismantle oppression.

Sontag’s *The Aesthetics of Silence* (1969), the last piece of work Kastein examines, philosophizes silence in arts and criticism as being indescribable and resisting definition. Silence in Sontag’s case performs as a retreat and critique of the limitation of language as a means of representation. As an artist, silence creates a space for evading the impetus for a language to define experiences that in turn commodify arts and meanings. To put it differently, Kastein looks at this perspective from the way “queer silence ... benefits from defying categorization and resisting stasis” (67). This way, “language [can be] free from abuse, inauthenticity, and violence,” from the demand for labels and classifications. In the same fashion, Sontag’s silence reacts provocatively as a rebellion and counter-cultural force, as in Cage’s experimental work.

The multiple performances of silence that Kastein has espoused through the works of these five authors suggest the countless operations in which silence manifests in queer lives and experiences. Silence is far from being a monolith of understanding and mode of being; its potential for queerness can be repressive, protective, strategic or even generative as it particularly relies on the specific intersections of identities of the queer individuals. The different belonging of identities, therefore, also denotes the limits through which silence can be represented. Kastein concludes:

All in all, queer silences are adaptive presences, rather than absences. Queer silences are full of sound, voice, and gesture. Taking new forms, queer silences continually resist silencing while simultaneously expressing meaning through silence, pressing the edges of possibility. Moreover, queer silences challenge the notion of being merely between two binaries. And further, queer silence exists not just between binary categorizations

but beyond them ... In the same moment that someone is silenced, they may also exert agency in deciding to be silent as a form of resistance or survival. This interplay means that silence is ambiguous, and it can be read as also having what might be seen as traditional markers of voice. Queer silences embody not just queer trauma, but queer possibilities, queer failure, and queer joy. (70-71)

C. Review of Related Theories

Referring back to the theorization on temporality and spatiality briefly stated in the introduction, this part will provide a more extensive review of related theoretical frameworks that specifically address the postcolonial queer body as a site of resistance and point of departure from its normative regard. Romanow's *The Postcolonial Body in Queer Space and Time* (2006) and Halberstam's *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005) are the two major references on which the study's analysis will depend.

In starting the discussion of what the term "postcolonial body" might entail, Romanow states her dissatisfaction with the general scholarly perception of "postcolonialism" and the "body", which often defines the two based on their exteriority and visibility. To specify, she notes that there is "a conflation of notions of colonization, globalization, racism, and economic inequality" in the understanding of postcolonialism. At the same time the "body" is seen solely as the "issues of gender, race, and physical transformation" (2006, 2). This degree of visibility, according to Romanow, is reductive as they overlook the unseen potentiality of "the mind, 'soul,' and the mechanical structures of the organs themselves." Indeed, Romanow's appeal to the unseen indirectly brings her discussion to the affective turn that has provided a praxis and tool of analysis without being reliant on symbols and ideas. For this reason, Romanow critiques the traditional view of postcolonial studies that has constrained itself to the colonized nations' historical, geographical and political contexts. The problematization of this traditionalist view lies in the fixation on static colonial narratives of oppression and resistance that has reduced postcolonial identities as a mere product of their colonial history. While these colonial narratives are foundational in navigating postcolonial identities, they are insufficient to address and situate the ongoing identity formation in the aftermath of colonialism, where the context of diaspora, globalization and the contemporary world are taken into account.

Here, temporal reference is the keyword to understand Romanow's approach to reestablishing postcolonial definition. It is clear that her arguments aim to limit a past-centric approach in the traditional definition of postcolonialism where postcolonial

communities are viewed as and perpetually shaped by their reaction to colonial legacies and their residues. This indeed curtails the sense of agency among the post-colonized individuals as agents who are not only recycling their colonial past but also creating new complex identities in the present. In this sense, limitation is not to be equated with a total repudiation of the past, but more toward the destabilizing of it. The means through which the process of destabilization can be initiated is through the inhabitation of queerness in postcolonial identity formation.

Romanow attempts to situate postcolonialism as/in a queer space where “nonnormative geography and temporality” constructs and deconstructs “the history of colonization, the process of Othering, and the pressures and reality of the diaspora, and the emerging global community” (3-4). In this regard, Romanow no longer places queerness in the discourse of gender and sexuality. On the contrary, queerness is seen as a mode of living where people depart from a normative mode of life. She argues:

Perhaps, indeed, the ‘postcolonial’ is not best defined by the history of the nation from which the individual emerges, but, instead, by the non-normative modes of living which are produced and enacted by that individual as a response to normative temporalizations and spatializations of the cultures they inform. (4)

This inclusion of queer paradigms in postcolonialism is an organic response from the post-colonized individuals who locate their postcolonial existence in the experience of movement, displacement and cultural exchange enabled by their diaspora. For Romanow, the appeal to global movements among the postcolonial diasporic communities marks the shift of postcolonial genesis from “a predetermined, historically fixed locus to a wider metropolitan arena.” Quoting Spivak on planetarity, Romanow adapts the former’s conceptualization of postcolonial relocation and disjunction. There is a disruption at play and the definition of postcolonialism must respond to this by putting forward the planetary consciousness which rises above the boundaries of nation-states and global capitalism. By locating the diaspora outside of these boundaries, they no longer reside and belong to the logics dominated by capitalism and imperialism. Thus, it is unavoidable to acknowledge the new reality where multiple identity formations overlap from their local and global interface (5). In this regard to the new reality, queerness with its liquidity drives the postcolonial subjects to retrieve their sense of agency and act upon it.

As Romanow broadens and expands the conception of queerness to be merged with contemporary postcolonial concerns, one must critically be conscious of the number of caveats that her theorization entails. Primarily, there is an overt risk of diluting the specificities of struggles and oppressions of queer individuals with that of postcolonial subjects. Beyond the concept of double colonization, many postcolonial queer people stand in the outer margin of the society as a pariah in an already oppressed society. As a result, the broadening of queerness as a space could overlook the overarching question of where postcolonial queer people can locate themselves in their respective postcolonial societies beyond an abstraction. In addition to this, Romanow also emphasizes the discussion of contemporary postcolonialism as the point of movement with the diaspora as the crux of her focus. Her employment on the global dimension of identity formation in the movements of postcolonial subjects might neglect the realities of those who are still within the borders of their postcolonial nations, completely disengaged with the opportunities to mobilize and take part in the larger diasporic migration to the metropole(s). Yet again, her abstraction and theorization of queer non-normativity as a new approach to postcolonial consciousness has laid a valuable groundwork to re-examine conventions in postcolonialism. The attempt to queering the postcolonial beyond the former's association with sexuality is at the same time a struggle to mediate private/public domains of the two into a negotiated space.

Romanow's lack of specificities in her theory is understandable to an extent where she aims to answer the question of *what*: what is a postcolonial body; what is queering the postcolonial; what queer conceptualization outside of its sexual association means in understanding postcolonialism; and what queer non-normativity offers in the contemporary movement of postcolonial identity formation. Halberstam, on the other hand, frames her discussion on queer temporality and spatiality in *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005) by detailing the blueprint of how queer individuals concretely assemble and disassemble their state of beings/living against heteronormative conventions. At first, Halberstam marks the aspects of compressed temporality and "impending mortality" that the AIDS epidemic had caused among the gay communities. One's ability to stretch their temporal conception to the future is threatened by the specter of AIDS and this has initiated the beginning of a temporal reconstruction of living a life "... unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance,

and child-rearing” and through “logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death (2005, 2).

The aforementioned revocation of temporal linearity is a response to the upheld logic among the middle class that conflates temporality as reproductivity. Queer time, as Halberstam argues, recovers alternatives to living that have been normalized based on longevity by the Western cultures:

And so, in Western cultures, we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create longevity as the most desirable future, applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstances), and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity. Within the life cycle of the Western human subject, long periods of stability are considered to be desirable, and people who live in rapid bursts (drug addicts, for example) are characterized as immature and even dangerous. (2005, 4-5)

Under this paradigm of temporality, life is duly timed and scheduled based on a large degree of productivity. The “biological clock” of women, giving birth, growth of children and inheritance binds the family to “the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of both familial and national stability” (5). In response to this paradigmatic temporality, Halberstam resorts to postmodernism to situate queer temporality and space as a counter-practice to living. First, queer as a term is adjusted from its essentialist definition in the domain of sexuality to the reference of “non-normative logics and organization of community, sexual identity, embodiment and activity in space and time” (6). In this instance, queerness recaptures and reclaims the crisis of form and meaning in postmodernism as an opportunity; a potential to temporally and spatially depart from the “frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance.” This reliance on volatility sets apart queerness as a mode of living from the bourgeois’ dependence on stability. Nevertheless, it must be understood that the appeal toward volatility and crisis is the appeal to unlock different routes to understanding the sense of self; it is largely about the potentiality to utilize means that are discarded or even not thought about before.

Then again, one might critique Halberstam’s postmodern approach as a potential limitation on how it can apply to diverse experiences of queer subjects across different

sociocultural and economic contexts. While Halberstam's postmodern framework provides a nuanced measure to dismantle the Western bourgeois' norm regarding temporality, it does not translate to automatic applicability to non-Western queer realities where the notion of filial piety, family connections and cultures are deeply intertwined with their queer identities. In such contexts, postmodernism's celebration of fragmentation and instability can be at odds with the lived realities of queer subjects who are undertaking different modes of struggles and oppressions at home.

Halberstam further puts queer mode of living into practice by demonstrating how subcultural lives among the queer communities act as markers of cultures that defy heteronormative conceptions of "family time and family life." In this practice, the notion of "stretched-out adolescence" is introduced to question "the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood." The way subcultural lives advocate this notion is by "delaying the onset of reproductive adulthood" (2005, 153). This argument is partly a critical response to the growing trend among middle-class gay and lesbian couples who are raising their children in "conventional family settings." The emphasis on class here is crucial as it echoes Spivak's accounts of the class dynamics between diasporic and local postcolonial subjects, which are more prevalent in contemporary postcolonialism. As can be seen here, social class is also implicated in queering time and space, revealing how class differences deeply influence queer identities and resistance as well. Therefore, when Romanow and Halberstam unequivocally state that queerness as a mode of living no longer carries its essentialist association with sexuality, they mean to offer an alternative where marginality is reimagined as a site of potential transformation, rather than a dead-end.

The three modes of subcultural queer activity which Halberstam stresses are punks and riot dyke bands, drag kings and queer slam poetry. What queer insists on its incorporation into these modes of subculture is the relational reconditioning between subculture in general and queer cultural production. To specify, Halberstam comments:

Queer subcultures are related to old-school subcultures like punk, but they also carve out new territory for a consideration of the overlap of gender, generation, class, race, community, and sexuality in relation to minority cultural production. (2005, 154)

The quoted remark above shows that queer subculture performs itself through the “transient, extrafamilial, and oppositional modes of affiliation,” where the very source of its existence can only be found through multidirectional and multidimensionality. This approach employed by the queer subculture is clearly in opposition to the “natural forms of congregations” where its existential premise is based on permanency linked to family and kinship.

In looking at these queer subcultural modes, two implications have to be considered: the first deals with their problematic incorporation into mainstream culture and the second is the conflation of subculture and youth culture. About the former, Halberstam notes, “The subculture might appear on television eventually as an illustration of the strange and perverse, or else it will be summarily robbed of its salient features and the subcultural form—drag, for example, will be lifted without subcultural producers, drag queens of kings” (2005, 157). This view indeed presents a power imbalance where the dominant mainstream culture holds the upper hand to dictate the degree of acceptability in presenting the subcultures. It also decides the degree of erasure that suits the mainstream audience, which further vanishes the agency of subculture artists. However, this is where the dilemma begins: “Subcultural artists often seek out mainstream attention for their performances and production in hopes of gaining financial assistance for future endeavors” (158). In this dynamic of power relations, subculture activists are in danger of mainstream capitalism, yet subculture’s inception into mainstream culture also informs people of its prevalence and influence in mainstream culture. What arises from this cultural crossover is the question of whether these subcultural practices are truly sustainable without having to stand under the shade of mainstream capitalism and cultural praxis.

Meanwhile, when it comes to the subculture and youth culture conflation, Halberstam’s critics address the ageist issues in youth culture. While both raise the appeal to resistance and antidisestablishmentarianism, queer subculture is not tied to a particular stage of life as is youth culture. Queer subculture is a means through which people continuously engage with cultural practices throughout their lives and not just about a phase concerning youth rebellion where one goes against their vertical relationship issue with authority such as parents (2005, 160). Moreover, this conflation also runs the risk of overlooking and marginalizing older queer individuals who sustain their subcultural

paradigm and spirit up until their old age. This last point on older queer subjects is where Halberstam's conception of "stretched-out adolescence" materializes itself. For many old queers, "The separation between youth and adulthood simply does not hold, and queer adolescence can extend far beyond one's twenties" since they do not subscribe to the temporality of "family life and reproduction" (174). Moreover, the overemphasis on youth in subcultures, even in queer youth, is problematic concerning the old queer individuals who "did not have the benefit of LGBT activism, queer activism, and so on," that have emancipated young queer individuals to some extent.

CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. Narrativizing Queerness in *The Umbrella Country* and *Salvation Army*

Narrated through the first-person point of view, the two texts perambulate the coming-of-age accounts of Gringo (Gregorio) and Abdellah with a degree of closeness that proclaims the protagonists' ownership of their narratives. This ownership does not exclusively hold a chart of sexual consciousness of their queer identity. Through and more than their queerness, they attempt to solve an enigmatic maze they call family, belonging and violence. In attempting to do so, the two texts employ quite different approaches to telling and showing their share of narratives in regard to spatiality and temporality. The first part of the analysis will attempt to situate queerness through spatiality and temporality in Realuyo's *The Umbrella Country* and is continued with Taïa's *Salvation Army*.

To begin with, Gringo in *The Umbrella Country* explores his coming-of-age through small, claustrophobic spaces that do not lend him "a room of his own" to grow and disentangle his issues. Poverty, exacerbated by the Martial Law in the Philippines, has also amplified the impression of spatial suffocation that the characters undergo in the text. Yet, with such little space to move, Gringo offers a reconceptualization of how the little spaces function under his reality:

Our house, where everything happened, a house of wooden shingles connected to our neighbors', ours in the middle of three, with aluminum gutters wrapped around the rim of the roof, ..., our house holding on to the others like a close-knit family ... Other houses were connected to each other as well, all of them, some of them very old, some new. Only color and age of the doors set them apart. (Realuyo 1999, 5)

In Gringo's housing area, houses with their proper divisions are almost nonexistent and this creates a spatial merger where the connected houses become one big house with compartments reserved for some families. This apparent spatial enlargement is also shown in Gringo's depiction of the family bedroom where he says, "Our room was too small for four people and rows of cabinets but it expanded in the dark. The partitions of

cabinets simply vanished with the walls” (22). This remark is one to be underlined as it lets us regard a different form of negotiation that Gringo embraces concerning his life despite being an 11-year-old kid at this course of the book. First, he is aware of the lack of space for him as an individual with a growing consciousness of sexuality. His same-sex attraction holds no space in a society that still views it as a deviation and sin. He, as a result, acknowledges his homosexual desire through isolation while being spatially anxious about the spaces that keep on growing on his terms as part of society. Nevertheless, his isolation is shared with his brother Pipo who is more expressively flamboyant and feminine. They both navigate their spatial crises in silence alongside their parents Daddy Groovie and Estrella, and their godmother Ninang Rola.

In situating the parental figures in the brothers’ constellation of spaces, different forms of spatial references have to be understood. Daddy Groovie with his brusque masculinity regards the Philippines and its Martial Law regime as a source of his emasculation. The loss of his job as a construction worker has made him lose his belief in the country. What this does in return is his overarching attempt to relocate to the USA throughout the book. These two points, unemployment and relocation, will be the source of frustration that drives violence and abuse in the family. Meanwhile, Estrella as the brothers’ mother never once associates herself with the States. The locus of her existence is the Philippines and only through the Philippines can she find her place. She shares this rootedness with Ninang Rola who happens to be her aunt. Nonetheless, Ninang Rola comes from a different temporal reality and history. Her identity is formulated in and during the Spanish colonization; her way of being is then informed through norms and values the Spanish colonists leave in the Philippines:

Suddenly, both she and Daddy Groovie were not in the space where we were. Daddy Groovie: I know he was somewhere else, in the States, working at his new job, the job he had been proudly talking about for years while he condemned his inability to maintain a construction job, blaming it on Martial Law, on the president, and on curfew because nobody could work at night anymore. And Mommy: she wasn’t in the States, I knew that. She never spoke of a country other than our own. (Realuyo 1999, 20)

The boys, Gringo and Pipo, are trapped in this spatial and temporal vortex—the past, present and future are becoming a contested ground. The brothers, with their individual

space of sexual coming-of-age, are temporally out of time and spatially out of place, adapting Rao's remarks (2020). This dislocation of spatial references among the parental figures introduces the second form of crisis among the brothers where their collision only translates to a series of abuses in the family.

The first instance of abuse can be found at the beginning of the novel when Gringo stays awake late and witnesses a growing suspicion Daddy Groovie imposes on Estrella:

“So what are you going to do when I’m in the States, huh?” Daddy whispered. He sounded angry, although anger always came side by side a knotted face and pointed stares. It was too dark to see what was on his face. His voice got deeper. “Find another husband, huh? Huh? Huh? The way you always wanted. Just waiting for me to leave, huh?”

I saw Daddy Groovie lift something from the floor, what looked like a piece of wood and move it toward Mommy, grabbing her neck tightly with his left hand. “Why don’t you just use this, huh? How ‘bout this for your new husband?” (Realuyo 1999, 24)

Gringo witnesses a form of physical and verbal abuse that will become normalized starting from this point of the book. Indirectly, he also becomes a victim of what he sees regardless of the immediacy of the abuse on him. In these interstices of violence, the presence of Ninang Rola provides a degree of mediation on how Gringo interprets and locates the family's violence. He denotes, “Ninang Rola said that we all carried crosses on our backs, the crosses getting bigger as we grow old. Life is a trip to Calvary, and there are no easy ways to get there, she told me, over and over again ...” (27). It is clear that there is an implied justification for the violence he experiences in the family, but when violence has morphed itself into a form of communication in someone's life, there is an unavoidable distortion at play in understanding what violence necessitates.

Going back to the brothers' space of their own, the discussion reignites Halberstam's account of how queerness as a mode of living reclaims crisis as a potential (2005). Violence, which is argued to have arisen from spatial crises, has never withered the brothers' agency to navigate their identities. The second chapter of the book “Miss Unibers” shows an instance of a shared space between the brothers where they build a community to accommodate their differences. Gringo inhabits this space through the localized beauty contest competition of Miss Universe as their “game of the season,”

which is different from “the other boys [who] gambled with marbles, play cards, and rubber bands to know who would be ruling our street next ...” (Realuyo 1999, 30-31). Held at English-speaking Titay’s verandah, the brothers and other kids are protected from the outside world and the taunting that it brings from other children. Moreover, it is also one of the very few spaces where the kids can be free from the presence of an adult. The emphasis of personalized space in this case is not directed toward the verandah where the game is held; more than this the space belongs to the game “Miss Unibers” itself. The verandah with its surrounding plants as a fortress will always remain in the same place, but the game, to some extent, is a portable box that the kids use to store their agency. This is a critical aspect in the brothers’ coming-of-age narrative as they inhabit their agencies through forms and the most accessible form they can afford is this game where they emulate beauty contests through their DIY approaches.

Notwithstanding, once this agency of space is displaced to the brothers’ home, a notable degree of complications transpires. Daddy Groovie as an emasculated father figure imposes a brutalist form of masculinity on his children. This imposition is at odds with Pipo’s overt femininity and flamboyance. His existence alongside his “Miss Unibers” box is the specter of *bakla* in Filipino society. While it indeed carries a homosexual association, *bakla* also brings with itself an implication of lower-class status and the state of womanhood that is trapped in a man’s body. The state of *bakla* is experienced beyond the state of poverty that the family is in. They become the pariah and a scapegoat for the society’s frustration. Their marginality is a spectrum that no one should bother to get into. In this regard, *bakla* is perceived as an abjection and discomfort that unsettles society’s performative normativity. In the book, *bakla* as an abjection is personified in the character Boy Manicure, an owner of a beauty parlor who embodies the concept of *bakla* through his observable femininity throughout the book. He becomes the point of reference that children need to refrain from becoming and Pipo’s association with him drives Daddy Groovie to resort to violence:

The long *yantok* was slicing the air. I could feel it land on Pipo’s skin. This was always the way with Daddy Groovie. There was the need to hurt Pipo, whip him with his long, smooth, rounded bamboo stick that he had kept for us before we were even born. A dialogue with his first-born son, he called it. I could hear him cursing. *Putangina ka. Lalaki ka ba o ano? Huh? Huh? Are you a man? Who do you think you are, Boy Manicure?* (Realuyo 1999, 45)

This scene where Daddy Groovie parallels Pipo and Boy Manicure is crucial for some reasons. First, the embodiment of *bakla* in the character Boy Manicure is not fully met. While he indeed embraces his femininity, he is far from being considered a lower-class status. To specify, he owns his own beauty parlor amidst the poverty enveloping the street. Furthermore, he has clients coming from other places to his beauty parlor for his service. In other words, Boy Manicure cannot be identified as the low-income *bakla* which Tan (2001) terms as *parlorista*. Tan notes this term includes not only men who work in beauty parlors but also those working as fiesta entertainment providers, domestic helpers, market vendors and sexual service for young and older married men (120-121). Therefore, *bakla* as a haunting specter is insufficient to locate Daddy Groovie's violence to Pipo.

Ildefonso's study on the genealogy of homophobia in the Philippines offers a pivotal insight that opens doors for understanding regarding violence in *The Umbrella Country*. The study points out the beginning of the AIDS epidemic in the country starting in the 1980s as a result of the "behavior originated from middle-class [Filipino] gay men who picked up western notions from their experiences abroad" (2022, 223). This behavior relates to the sexual partnership among gay men who started to seek other gay men. Before the popularization of the term "gay" through *Taglish* (Tagalog-English) in the Philippines in the '70s, Tan (2001) writes that *bakla* and *lalake* (real men) classify the spectrum of male sexuality in the country. Thus, "a proper *bakla* would never have sex with another *bakla* for that would have been tantamount to lesbianism. A *bakla* was a "girl," and "girls" go for "real men" (121). However, Western gay culture changed the nuances of *bakla* through its conflation with being gay, and the Filipino gay elites were complicit in adopting this Western conflation to *bakla*. Starting from this point onwards, HIV began to stigmatize gay men and being gay was as well conflated with having transmitted HIV.

This genealogy and its situatedness appear in the book's following chapter "Hallowed Be Thy Name" when Gringo's narrative oscillates from his homosexual desire and fascination to the character SWAT and Daddy Groovie's verbal abuse to Pipo:

You will never change, will you? Just like Boy Manicure, aren't you? Just like your Lolo Pino, embarrassment to our family, you know what happened to him? You want to know? He didn't live long enough to see you, to know that his blood would appear again, *impaktong lolo mo!* He died, eyes open, embarrassed, paying for everything he did on his deathbed, he probably paid everybody to attend his funeral, too, *baklang patay*, my father's poor brother, dead like that? Huh? So you want to grow old like that? Huh? Look around you, see who people make fun of around here? (Realuyo 1999, 57)

This is an agonizing scene between a father and a son where a remembrance of homosexuality is driven by the death of a relative. While the cause of the death is not clarified in the book, homosexuality's trajectory is narrated in the account of an early death. It becomes a premise with a finalized conclusion reserved for those who "trespass" the boundary of "normality." In addition, homosexuality is treated as a disease as it once was in the history of the Philippines. If an early death caused by the disease of homosexuality is not petrifying already, the second torment in the afterlife colors the homosexual subjects:

... boys who think they're girls, they burn them in hell every day a dozen, like your Lolo Pino, God-bless-his-soul. Someday Boy Manicure will be burned in hell, too, his life is hell now, you want that? Huh, huh? (Realuyo 1999, 58)

This being the case, it becomes clear that the locus of violence is situated by regarding homosexuality as a disease, an abject that one has to deter to escape from an excruciating early death. The brothers' father's negative remembrance of the death of his uncle only fuels his justification to eradicate the specter of *bakla* and homosexuality in the family through abuse.

The abuse inflicted upon Pipo has resulted in his animosity toward Gringo; his frustration as shown in the climax of the book in "A Company of Rats" materializes itself: "You never hit Gringo. You never hit him," he persisted" (Realuyo 1999, 157). This is the part where Daddy Groovie told the family that he could not pass his visa interview at the US embassy because they told him that he was sick. Daddy Groovie goes berserk in this scene and it leads to the departure of Ninang Rola who has always taken the role of the family's mediator. Her leaving the family is critical because she is the one who brings

the family into one in the first place. Her confession to Gringo in the chapter “Godmother of Words” reveals the bleak past of the brothers’ parents where they were not supposed to get married to each other. Ninang Rola was the matchmaker between Estrella and the infatuated Daddy Groovie, and this would later lead to a pre-marital rape that the latter did toward Estrella. Ninang Rola with her Christian belief insisted on keeping Estrella’s baby and sent Daddy Groovie off to the north to be responsible and marry Estrella. On realizing that Daddy Groovie had married someone from a poor background, they deserted him and stopped considering him as a family member. Everyone forsook him except for Dolores, his relative living in the US, who since then becomes the reason why he had been adamant about leaving for the States (112-134). Ninang Rola, as a consequence, has always been the glue that attaches the family; her departure then means the loss of attachment for the already fragile family.

In the following chapter after “A Company of Rats,” the narrative seems to subside. Gringo’s world has turned still and lifeless with silence as the means of communication in the family. Estrella and Pipo have been further desensitized to the violence that Gringo consequently becomes the bigger-than-life character who is a spokesperson for the family’s trauma. So much is said in silence and so much is done in stillness. This, nonetheless, is a harbinger of a darker turn of the book. Pipo’s reaction to his father’s relentless abuse has disoriented him; not only is his sexuality diminished, but it is also invalidated. His ongoing loss of equilibrium guides him to Boy Manicure’s place where he is molested and raped. Gringo witnesses this harrowing scene and notes how “[Pipo’s] behind was bleeding, blood slowly dripping down his thighs. I slowly moved behind him, to cover him. Although the street was empty, I didn’t want anyone to see the blood on his shorts” (Realuyo 1999, 183). This episode of Pipo’s is the precursor of Daddy Groovie’s departure to the United States. Despite the constant abuse, Daddy Groovie’s absence leaves an influential mark on Pipo’s life afterward. Gringo’s narration of Pipo only shows a greater degree of disorientation that Pipo undergoes. Gringo closely narrates how Pipo tries to emulate Daddy Groovie’s presence in the family:

Daddy Groovie's T-shirts hung on Pipo like a burlap sack, empty of rice. His favorite one—gray with a peeling State-side flag and thread curling out of the seams. He wore that every day. Every time he put it on, he brought it closer to his face, inhaling perhaps Daddy Groovie's scent. While he sat in front of the dresser, he would look at himself in the mirror and comb his hair endlessly until it was flat. When he walked away, he carried himself with some kind of heaviness, his shoulders hunched. Bowed his head wherever he went. Covered his face with his hair. Long, for his age. (206)

Furthermore, Gringo also notices how Pipo has stopped playing outside and seeing his close friend, Sergio Putita and chooses to remain at home, waiting for something unknown. Eventually, Pipo's silence leads him to the part of the book where during the street's curfew, Boy Spit and Gringo notice Pipo engaging in some kind of experimental orgy with some other kids in an abandoned space. Gringo, left shocked by the scene, remarks, "I couldn't help but wonder how he managed to get there, and why after everything that had happened to him, he would do this" (234).

The book does not reveal the motifs behind Pipo's choice, but Ninang Rola's conversation with Gringo, while she discloses the family's past, might give us a hint: "This is what I always tell you about shame, Gringo. Shame. Verguenza. It is within us, in our blood, it stays there for as long as we are here" (128). Each member of Gringo's family holds their shame and they inhabit shame as a space. Pipo's disorientation with the succeeding poignant episodes in his life should be understood as an attempt to reclaim this shame. This is especially true after the brutal murder of Boy Manicure whose hands get chopped off by someone unknown toward the end of the book (238-250). There is an unspoken reconciliation between the brothers and this occurs once the police inspection finds Gringo's underwear in Boy Manicure's house. Upon discovering this, Estrella becomes furious and retrieves *yantok* to hit Gringo. Nevertheless, Pipo begins to shout at his mother and angrily takes the *yantok* off Estrella's hand and breaks it into small pieces: "You never helped me. You never loved me ..." (261). Here, Pipo's outburst speaks more than words; while Gringo has never entered Boy Manicure's house, he tells Estrella that he once was at his house. This is the part where Gringo also reclaims his shame for not telling anyone the truth about what has happened to both of them. As what Gringo says, "At first it was hard to accept what I had done, the cost of my lie, people constantly

looking at me, talking, but whenever I saw Pipo smiling, laughing, being his old self again, I thought maybe it was all worth it. I didn't have to sit Mommy down and tell her it wasn't me" (279-280). As Ninang Rola says, they each have carried their crosses to the Calvary and there are no easier ways for them to carry the crosses than having accepted the bruises, pain and trauma.

The narrative concludes when Estrella tells the brothers about a house Daddy Grovie has managed to rent in Woodside, the USA. Upon preparing to leave for a new country, Ninang Rola returns to the family and helps them sell everything the house contains; a symbolic closure of the family history in the street by not leaving anything behind as family artifacts. Gringo also does his part of the closure with Boy Spit by giving him calendars and umbrellas for his shanty. Then, they proceed to hug and kiss for the first time; Fernando is the real name of Boy Spit and as his face is slightly lit by the window, Gringo admits that "It was a very beautiful name, just like him under the dim flicker of the fluorescent light, his face slightly lit by the window where I had watched him all these years, the most beautiful thing I had ever seen" (Realuyo 1999, 283-284).

Gringo's narrative ends at the airport, an interstitial space representing the transition between what is and what is going to be. Ninang Rola accompanies the brothers and finally tells the brothers that their mother will not be joining them in the USA. She poignantly remarks, "Your mother belongs here. This is her only place in the world" (Realuyo 1999, 297). In other words, she has an unfinished shame she has to reclaim in the Philippines and it is time for the brothers to start anew and look at their shame as an old friend in the new country. Resolutely, Gringo finishes his part, "I held my brother more tightly. I had never held him like this before. I didn't want anyone to touch him again or harm him. Inside, I would carry the weight of what I knew, everything I knew about him, no matter how heavy it was" (298).

Gringo's queer coming-of-age narrative, with its confinement within the suffocating spaces of home and family in the Philippines, allows him to navigate spaces that are enlarged through spaces and silence(s). The multidirectional spatiality and temporality that his parental figures impose have induced a crisis that he recaptures as a potential for him to belong to each of them, while at the same time belonging to a completely different space. This space materializes as the reclaiming of shame and living above its remnants,

which performs itself as a means to reconciliation with his brother. In parallel to this, the analysis has come to Abdellah in *Salvation Army*. Divided only into three chapters, Abdellah's coming-of-age narrative charts his life records which begins with the family, his adulation and his incestuous desire for his brother Abdelkébir and lastly his deeper exploration of sexuality and migration.

Abdellah's opening words in his story evoke Gringo's share of space in the family where small spaces of the house become the locus they gravitate into. However, instead of a house containing five family members, Abdellah's holds eleven members: the parents Mohamed and M'Barka, three sons Abdelkébir, Abdellah and Mustapha, and the six daughters. Abdellah further shows how the family does the room division:

For a long time, Hay Salam our house in Salé, was nothing more than a ground-floor dwelling with three rooms, one for my father, one for my older brother Abdelkébir, and the last one for us, the rest of the family: my six sisters, Mustapha, my mother and I. In that room, there were no beds, just three benches that served as our living room couch during the day. (Taïa 2009, 13)

The house with the limitation of space it possesses stages an early introduction of carnality and its consequence in the family. Abdellah recounts how the children know everything that happens inside the house and this primarily includes his parents' lovemaking activities and the fights that follow suit. Abdellah, to a large extent, is influenced by this realization once he comes to recognize the sexual quality that pervades the family. In describing the loss of privacy in his parents' lovemaking nights, Abdellah embraces the role of an aesthete; sex turns into art and Abdellah eloquently portrays his imaginings of his parents' sexual act. For him, "Sex was clearly the preferred language through which the image of the couple they formed could be expressed. Even after bringing nine children into the world, their desire for one another remained intact, mysteriously and joyously intact". Then he says, "At first I wouldn't see anything, everything would be black, but eventually I'd be there beside them, ... I'd be ready to lend a helping hand, aroused, happy and panting along with them (Taïa 2009, 16).

Now, the narrating language that Abdellah employs to describe his parents' lovemaking inhabits a different temporal and spatial narrative in comparison with Gringo in *The Umbrella Country*. Gringo's coming-of-age is written through the language of a growing

kid, temporally located in his childhood and transpires alongside his growth. Therefore, much of his desire, feeling and queerness is embodied in an unspecified description; he employs a description of language to his sexuality that is only accessible to an inexperienced 11-year-old. For example, in a scene where Gringo witnesses Pipo in a circle of experimental orgy, he says, “The sensation I felt was unfamiliar and I wanted to feel it more; while Boy Spit is holding his hands, what Gringo can say is “I felt warmth inside me, something that I knew was coming from his having constantly held me. I wanted to keep it in there though there was another feeling I couldn’t understand (Realuyo 1999, 233-234). In this case, Gringo’s use of language is imprecise as he lacks the experience that allows him to be descriptive of his experience. He, as a result, is linguistically reluctant and uncertain.

Nonetheless, Abdellah as a narrator in *Salvation Army* locates his narrative space differently. Abdellah with his flexible use of language and rich description of carnality seems to be dislocated from the actuality of the occurrence. Abdellah, somehow, becomes a narrator who is compiling and recalling his compartments of memories. In doing so, he revisits the three divisions of his past and reclaims his narrative space with his acquired mastery of language. There is no uncertainty in his description and this only magnifies a practice of temporality that is dynamic and fluid. However, this argument on Abdellah's temporal dislocation as a narrator will be contested in the second chapter of the book where he writes a 7-day diary of his vacation with Abdelkébir and Mustapha.

Temporal dislocation permeates throughout the book. The temporal reference between scenes is oftentimes non-linear and there is meta-information or signs that serve as a warning. As Abdellah previously says, what ensues after lovemaking between the parents is fights. Toward the end of the first chapter, this transpires and it shows itself through screams and shouts of M’Barka regarding her husband’s accusation of her infidelity. Up until the cry for help, Abdellah reads a new paragraph elaborating on the genealogy of his parents’ grapple with fights. There, he explains how there is a long-sustained jealousy that Mohamed harbors with M’Barka’s cousin Saleh who he finds to spend an intimate time together one day when he and M’Barka have just got married. In their early marriage, Mohamed would look for work in other villages and thus was not always at home. The day when M’Barka spent her time with her cousin Saleh was the day when Mohamed came home earlier:

Unfortunately for him, Saleh, my mother's cousin, was there, right in his own home. Even worse: He had also brought a basket crammed full of provisions. Mohamed had never been able to stand Saleh, that he found vulgar and spiteful. M'Barka and Saleh were sitting next to one another. Their knees were touching. They were drinking mint tea. They were laughing. They were almost playing make-believe, the way little kids play house. M'Barka slightly inched away from her cousin when Mohamed made his entrance. (Taïa 2009, 18-19)

This scene marks the feeling of betrayal Mohamed lodges for M'Barka. Moreover, it also points out "the end of a certain idea of love and the start of an unbridled, violent sexuality without decency" (20).

With the root of the issue exposed, Abdellah reverts the time to the actual post-sex fight scene between the parents. The nine children of Mohamed and M'Barka outnumber the former during their fight and this gives the kids an advantage in rescuing their mother: "Without even thinking about it, we would all start banging on the door, crying, begging Mohamed to spare her this time, just this once. We pounded. We yelled too. And we always ended up breaking down the door, the door that had weakened over time ..." (Taïa 2009, 23) and there comes the rescue where Abdelkébir begins to save her and brings her back to her room with his other siblings processing behind him. This fluid temporal alternation between the past and the present, while being temporally dislocated as a narrator, foregrounds a degree of declaration where Abdellah's coming-of-age narrative exists out of time and thus has to be read as so.

The second chapter of *Salvation Army* illustrates the mapping of Abdellah's desire as an early adolescent where he spatially transforms his lack of space in the family house in chapter one into his incestuous desire for Abdelkébir, his older brother. In this following chapter, Abdellah begins his narration with the birth of Abdelkébir, setting the stage to focalize the former's symbolic foundation that gives way to his excessive attraction to his brother. As the first-born son in the family, Abdelkébir marks the onset of blessed family life, "a good sign, synonymous with good fortune, wealth, happiness" (Taïa 2009, 27). It automatically places him a degree of importance in the family, which then clarifies the reason for his having a room of his own in the previous chapter.

Later in the narration, Abdellah relates how Abdelkébir gets to experience a rare privilege and the privilege takes the form of being breastfed by Fatéma who occurs to be their uncle's wife. This largely occurs because their mother, M'Barka, no longer has milk in her breast to feed Abdelkébir. Interestingly, Fatéma's connection to Abdelkébir is not exclusive to theirs; Abdellah is also bestowed with the same privilege by having Fatéma care for him and breastfeed him. For that reason, Fatéma locates a shared space of displaced motherhood for both Abdellah and Abdelkébir: "These things remind me of her tender gaze upon me and this special link that makes us one, her, Abdelkébir and myself ... I called Fatéma Mama. Abdelkébir too" (Taïa 2009, 31). By putting a short history of his brother as precedence of his sexual attraction to his brother, Abdellah seems to formulate a form of justification; there is a locus of his desire and it is charted in the shared growth space they endow in Fatéma. However, as the brothers grow into an adolescent and an adult, there is an extent of severance that they undertake with Fatéma. Through the eyes of a teenager who shows a longing for care, protection and a role model, he displaces Fatéma with Abdelkébir to accommodate his space for these longing(s). This exemplifies a negotiation at play and he gets consequently diluted with the interfaces of his needs. Therefore, while sexuality is overt and blatantly narrated, incestuous desire is just a spectrum of unspoken needs that Abdellah tries to conceptualize by himself. Reducing Abdellah's desire solely as sexual means to consciously cast aside other equally crucial forms of needs.

In the later progression of the book, the narrative moves from the constraint of home to a summer vacation in Tangiers. The city takes a prominent role in formulating and reformulating Abdellah's identity formation for some reasons: first, the city reformulates the view and mode of heteronormative masculinity and sexuality that Abdellah holds before his travel; second, the city's proximity to Spain foreshadows Abdellah's migration to Europe and sets the stage for him to become a diaspora. These roles are made possible through Tangier's history which is bedecked with the city's status as a city of exception. There, life was dictated by the interest of the market which was greatly a result of "Tangier's establishment as an international zone by Western interests from 1923 to 1956." This establishment attracted "suspected activities ranging from international monetary speculation and a black market in drugs to underage prostitution," which in turn

“nurtured a reputation for sexual permissiveness” (Boone 1995, 99). Accordingly, Tangier is a space of indulgence and Abdellah is growing to be conscious of this.

Summer 1987 brings the three brothers to Tangier. This summer vacation lasts for eleven days in which each day is closely narrated through the form of a diary. Abdellah is turning into an observer in these eight days with Abdelkébir as the object of his observation. The latter is an artwork that Abdellah believes can only be fully appreciated through his eyes. His appreciation grows exponentially from respect and reverence to bodily attraction. This change purports an abrupt reversal of masculinity and sexuality that Abdellah undergoes. Before the first day begins, Abdellah acknowledges his normative social and cultural upbringing:

It’s hard for me to admit it but I was like every young Moroccan guy: I kept an eye on my sisters, considered it my mission. I was the guardian of their honor. I acted like a man, the kind of man people hoped I would become. Fortunately, that didn’t last long. I gave up the idea of becoming that sort of man rather quickly after our trip with Abdelkébir. (Taïa 2009, 38)

Part of what makes this abrupt change possible is the temporal timelessness of Tangier as a city that disillusion young Abdellah: “Tangiers belongs to another lifetime, one set in the fairly recent past but one in which I played no part” (44). It is a city that can only be perceived through affect for it is an interlude; a city in recess and pauses. For him, “People in Tangiers seem lost ... they don’t even seem Moroccan. Besides, most of them speak Spanish pretty well. We could actually see Spain from this kind of lookout point on Victor Hugo Avenue” (47). Contrary to the enlargement of claustrophobic spaces in Gringo’s *The Umbrella Country*, Abdellah’s opportunity to experience actual places outside his three-room house only minimizes his space to process his narrative. Consecutively, he gets belittled by the broad, unknown spaces. Yet, his disillusionment is reasonably and repetitively caused by his obsession with his brother Abdelkébir. Tangier as a city should have accommodated his obsession to be unveiled without announcing it to Abdelkébir. However, his obsession is left unreciprocated and leads to his further frustration.

The fourth and fifth days of the vacation are Abdellah’s most important turning point in the book. For the first time in his narrative, Abdellah undergoes his initial sexual encounter with an older man named Salim. Before Abdellah meets with Salim, he notices

Abdelk bir’s absence in the hotel room from a letter he leaves to the brother. There, he mentions having to return to Tetouan to buy something and the brothers can use the 100 dirhams he leaves for the day. Abdellah’s response turns mentally reactive; he does not like the freedom he gets from not having Abdelk bir in his proximity and this haunts him greatly. Even so, the subsequent scene monumentally revokes what he believes regarding his freedom. During relaxing and sunbathing at the beach, Salim comes to offer his assistance in applying sunscreen to Abdellah. Afterward, Salim invites Abdellah to go somewhere where they can be alone and go to a movie theater. Abdellah accepts this invitation and this ends his diary on the fourth day. In his next diary entry, he articulates the details of what occurs between him and Salim at the movie theater. He commences the entry: “I feel sick, sick, sick. I am a traitor. I have betrayed Abdelk bir. At the movies, with Salim” (Taia 2009, 56). Now, “betray” is such a strong word to highlight the degree of relationship between the brothers that is almost parasocial. The one-sidedness of his obsession has led him to dictate, expect and define the terms of his brotherhood according to his own conditions. Besides, his next entry explicates how this betrayal takes another form:

And the worst is that, I loved it, loved having this [40-year-old] man who smelled good wrap me in his strong arms and talk French in my ear while he tried to get at my penis, my ass. And I let him. And it didn’t hurt. Oh, I loved it. Yes. Oh God. (56)

This is further exacerbated by his realization upon seeing Abdelk bir’s hickey:

When he stood up, I noticed this hickey, this big red hickey where his tee-shirt usually covers his neck. There it was, the undeniable proof. He had done the unforgivable. Him too. I knew it ... I thought so ... And I was right. He had betrayed me too. When all this started, I was a little nuts. Now, I’m completely crazy. (56-57)

Later on the final day of the vacation when they return to their home on the train, Abdelk bir confirms Abdellah’s suspicion and goes to tell him that he is going to marry a girl named Salma (62). He struggles to accept this revelation and inside his mind turbulence of emotions leading to hatred, confusion and distress is brewing. Despite that, this severance between Abdelk bir and Abdellah is needed as a plot device. Just as the severance from Fat ma creates room for their bond as brothers to deepen, Abdellah’s

detachment from his obsession with Abdelkébir is also crucial in enabling him to inhabit a new space during his migratory journey to Geneva, Switzerland. More to this, it also lets Abdellah repossess his agency to navigate his sexuality and the making of his queer identity in the last chapter of the book.

In the third chapter of the book, there is a major temporal leap that the narrative employs: Abdellah has just arrived in Geneva, Switzerland to spend a year to finish his postgraduate degree in 18th-century French literature (Taïa 2009, 74). He is left alone in this new country when Charles, a friend of his, has chosen to not respond to his call. This chapter takes half of what the book comprises and the narratives it represents alternate between Abdellah's time in Geneva and Abdellah's past romantic accounts with Jean, a Swiss professor of French literature he meets in Rabat. Time here is consciously challenged as Abdellah undertakes his third severance which transpires to be his physical disconnection with his motherland, Morocco. A diaspora in the metropole, Abdellah embodies what Romanow (2006) conceptualizes as a postcolonial body within a queer time and place. The inhabitation of queerness in Abdellah's postcolonial consciousness commences with his temporal narrativity that challenges linearity. This overlapping of the future and past temporality is a reaction to the destabilization that Abdellah enacts to accommodate his now liminality; as a postcolonial queer diaspora, he recognizes the in-betweenness of his space where time resets itself and freezes.

In his past recollection of his relationship with Jean, the foundation on which it is built is based on the Orient/Occident exchanges that take form almost in the professor/student paradigm. To specify, Morocco has become an exotic fascination for his orientalist thirst; the country and its people are a living research laboratory for his intellectualism and Abdellah is actively becoming a participant of Jean's orientalist fancy. Nevertheless, the same framework is also used by Abdellah; his love of the French language and literature draws him to Jean in the same manner. Blatantly, Abdellah explains his fascination for Jean:

I was delighted to have a man of my own, someone who was interested in me, someone who got me out of my working-class world, at least for a while, a cultured man, a Western man, in some ways the man of my dreams.

I shamelessly expressed my desire to become an intellectual, to be able to see the world more and more like an intellectual does, like he does. (Taïa 2009, 90)

Abdellah's confession indicates his attraction to Jean through his escapist means and this sustains the idea of reverse exoticization. All the same, the Western allure comes to a halt when Abdellah finally gets a chance to leave Morocco for the first time in his life in Switzerland. Being in contact with the Western soil gives him an electric shock that shambles his whole perception. Charles, Jean's friend who later becomes Abdellah's, notices how the age gap between the two is alarming and this materializes itself in one night. At a restaurant, a Swiss man comes up to him and gives him his card, telling him he pays very well too; in this new land, the same reality converges: he is seen as nothing but a male prostitute (114). This event is indeed not new in Abdellah's memory—it recalls his time with Jean in Morocco when two cops accuse him of being a male escort for Jean and proceed to verbally abuse him: "Make sure he pays you a lot ... and wash your ass good when he's done, dirty faggot" (92). In both of these places, Abdellah realizes that "Over there, just like back home, everything was for sale" (115). Yet again, this particular part of his narrative propels him to reconfigure his regard to the West as a postcolonial and queer subject:

I figured out two other important things during this trip to Europe. First of all, I realized to what degree my fascination with Western culture was based on reality. And then, once I lived there a day in and day out, I got to see just how different the West really was, nothing at all like the place I read about in books or saw in the movies for so many years. I came from another world and nothing let me forget that. (Taïa 2009, 113)

Now that the couple's objective is met, there is no longer a foundation that might rebuild the debris. The couple's separation, driven by abstract fancies and sexual intricacies, is only a logical outcome of the relationship.

Interestingly, the second time Abdellah comes to Switzerland for his studies, he accepts this commodified view of his postcolonial body. One day after window shopping around downtown Geneva, Abdellah is cruised by a guy in his forties who is telling him to stop walking. Then, the middle-aged guy asks Abdellah to follow him and Abdellah, being physically attracted to him, follows him through. Upon stopping at public toilets, he

comes across a place that he deems as a space of “intense poetic sexuality” that Geneva does not have:

These men expressed their desire without becoming violent, touched the penis in a very gentle, courteous way. Inside this dirty, underground location, they played out a sexuality that was both clandestine and public. They smiled at one another like babies. They didn’t talk. Instead they let their lucky bodies do the talking for them. They would masturbate with their right hand while touching their partners buttocks with the left. These men were not paired up. They all made love together, standing up. (Taïa 2009, 122)

The man who invites Abdellah to this space begins to give him a fellatio and money. His discernment of what has happened to him afterward is important to look at:

I was happy, thanks to a moments pleasure, relieved. When you come right down to it, he didn’t take me for a prostitute. He liked me, wanted to get a taste of me, that’s all, that’s all this was about. Nothing but a mutual exchange of pleasure. (123)

His contemplation of sexual adventurism and prostitution has undergone a total shift. It marks what Halberstam (2005) underscores as the revocation of heteronormative pathology of stability. Abdellah exploits what destabilizes him in the first place—his perception of prostitution—and retrieves it as the means to recover his agency.

This scene added to his time spent at the Salvation Army exhibits Abdellah’s choice to transgress the boundary of normativity. Salvation Army as an association to accommodate those who are deemed untouchables by society is the place where Abdellah gets to embody the abject and instill an affective reformulation of his experiences. His narrative is not one concerning absolute optimism and the enduring human faith to stay true to it. Beyond and above this regard, Abdellah’s *Salvation Army* is one relating to potentiality; the potential to render wasted spaces as valuable and functional; the potential to scrape the deepest of human folly to undo one’s investment of value; and most importantly, the potential to show that alternatives exist in the tiny crevices of life and they are waiting to be reclaimed.

B. Absence of Coming Out as Heteronormative and Homonormative Rejection

It is first necessary to locate the history of coming out as a queer practice and how it morphs into the community as an imperative to visibility and recognizability to understand its inability to represent queerness in the reading of *The Umbrella Country* and *Salvation Army*. To begin with, Saguy in *Come Out, Come Out, Whoever You Are* (2020) chronicles the historical timeline of coming out beginning in the late 19th century and early 20th century. These periods saw the rise of gay men who “came out” by entering into gay societies. The specific “gay worlds” that rendered gay men visible thrived during this time in many American metropolises. While this gay subculture was private, Saguy notes, “... although their codes and rituals were different from today’s, many Americans who loved and had sex with members of the same sex embrace a positive identity, rejected the idea that they were perverted aberrations, and skirted around oppressive legislation” (10). In the following period in the 1930s, a backlash was brewing against the growing visibility of the “gay world,” yet “with the help of industrialization, urbanization, and World War II,” this degree of visibility only continued to show its prominence up until the 1940s and 1950s. Specifically within the World War II period, the political atmosphere had sustained “a generation of American men and women to spend time in single-sex environments on the front or in factories far from their towns and families ...,” and this allowed both men and women to navigate the potential of “their same-sex desires,” (10). They continued to explore their newly found sexuality in the post-war time when they “moved to cities ... [and] joined local gay subcultures.”

Nevertheless, on the eve of the Cold War, the visibility of the gay world was at a perilous junction. The haunt of communism had become a specter that linked non-normative forms of being as part of the Red Scare in the United States. Saguy remarks, “... political anxieties linked to social change in the context of demobilization and anti-communist fervor during the Cold War made gay people targets of heightened repression.” This pervasive communist attack in the country sought to attack not only communism and queer individuals but also other progressive movements such as feminism which also witnessed a relatively thriving development before the Cold War. What this entailed in the process was the condition of the gay world that had become secretive. Yet, the danger of being publicly and visibly gay did not hinder the tenacity of

gay individuals to form a movement. Saguy emphasizes the steady and clandestine creations of homophile movements such as the Mattachine Society: “Indeed, many used pseudonyms so that no one who knew them outside of the organization would suspect their activism on behalf of such a stigmatized group. This tradition of secrecy was faithfully observed for the following two decades” (11).

The Daughters of Bilitis in October 1955, as the first lesbian organization in the United States, was established by four lesbian couples as an independent organization that catered to their lesbian audience and readerships. The organization’s presence amidst the war instigated the expansion of homophile movements and the general awareness of “lesbian and gay people as a distinct, self-conscious, and embattled minority,” and it initiated the importance of coming out as part of the larger issue of the awareness. Saguy purports:

For this movement, coming out meant acknowledging one’s sexual orientation to oneself and to other gay people, *not* to the world at large. In fact, it was nearly universally taken for granted that this information was to be kept within the group. Such selective sharing relied on code phrases that could be used in mixed company to designate someone as homosexual ... Like *coming out*, the term *gay* was derived from women’s culture and specifically from the slang of female prostitutes, who used the term *gay* to refer to female prostitute before it came to refer to gay men. (11-12)

This conception, however, began to change in the 1960s, the time when the Civil Rights Movement and other social movements alike took place dynamically in the landscape of American politics. These social protests and demands against systemic injustice paved the way for the modeling of political social movements for the gay community. Here, being gay and the act of coming out had departed from private into public; the visibility of homosexuality also became one’s visibility as a political subject. Saguy mentions Franklin Kameny as one of the notable leaders in the gay rights movement who attempted to revoke the negativity surrounding the gay community. More importantly, he also sought to reject “the homophile movement’s traditional concern with medical theories of the causes of homosexuality and its possible cure” (12). This was indeed a crucial response at a time when homosexuality was still considered an illness. Utilizing the blueprint of African-American’s talk of reclaiming the beauty of being black, Kameny represented a slogan that affirmed, “Gay is Good,” recapturing the pride of being gay.

One of the most seminal and momentous points in the evolution of coming out was the Stonewall Riots of 1969, which would change the course and trajectory of gay rights activism in the country. The riots were not a one-time act where resistance took place. There were preceding forms of confrontations that transpired especially in the late 1960s when people rioted against the “state oppression around gay establishments, including those at the Black Cat Tavern in Los Angeles in 1967” (13). Yet, the Stonewall Riots in New York City happened to be the radical turning point “between the homophile movement and the more radical gay rights movement.” This transition not only galvanized the movement but also reinforced a clear link between personal identity and political activism.

As a member-only bar establishment for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, Stonewall Inn was often targeted in police raids where “tactics such as entrapment,” had become the means to attack these frequenters. Exactly on the 27th of July in 1969, the Inn’s patrons began to fight back against the raids. Saguy writes:

But patrons did not go passively, and observers outside joined the fight. The police, who had stormed the bar, barricaded themselves inside as the growing crowd on the street pelted them with bottles and stones, preventing them from escaping until reinforcements arrived. At that time, the police made a few arrests, and the crowd dispersed. When word of riots spread throughout the Village, many LGBT people joined the resistance, which continued off and on for several days. Gay people confronted the police and some were clubbed. (13-14)

This monumental resistance was celebrated in the year to come through the form of a “commemorative parade that took place in New York and other cities on the first anniversary of Stonewall and subsequent annual parades across the globe, known as Gay Pride” (14). Thus, Stonewall Riots had become the point of reference through which activists argued that the act of coming out by publicly revealing one’s sexual identity was the act of challenging societal norms and negative perceptions; it also set to build a collective force for political and social activism for the community.

By the 1970s, Saguy also observes how “coming out was set up in explicit relation to the metaphor of the closet—from skeletons in the closet—conveying the shame associated with hiding one’s homosexuality” (14). Furthermore, coming out of “the

closet” was also seen as an essential step toward liberation that did not only influence the individuals related to the act but also the broader awareness of the community regarding the presence of the gay community that had always existed beyond the Stonewall Riots. This demand for gay subjects to come out was largely inspired and propelled by Harvey Milk—an openly gay official—who made it a political imperative “that gay men and women come out to show Californians that they have friends, co-workers, and family members who are gay” (17). His rigorous public statement proved to be successful in revoking California’s Proposition 6 (The Briggs Initiative in 1978), which attempted to ban gay teachers from teaching and working in public schools.

The following decades in the ‘80s and ‘90s beheld the AIDS crisis, which had brought new urgency to the gay community and its activism. Added to this crisis were the conservative government and the Christian Right which made the gay community who was impacted by the AIDS epidemic get to be even more devastated. The animosity of the political climate at the time thus contributed to the creation of a closeted gay identity. As a response from the activists, they demanded gay individuals declare their homosexuality “as it is an assurance of safety and community” (18). This communal belonging was becoming a more prevalent mode of narrative in many of the anthologies published in the ‘80s. The premise of these narrations is that “the coming out narrative became a rite of passage, something to be shared with others, and the centerpiece of gay liberation movements.” Coming out, as a result, had become a political statement that was critical to battle the fear-mongering ignorance of the AIDS epidemic.

Two organizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s rose to prominence at the time surrounding the epidemic: ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power and Queer Nation). ACT UP used radical tactics to demand better treatment for people with AIDS and to challenge the stigma against the disease. It was also the organization that introduced the slogan, “SILENCE = DEATH”. The organization’s radical stance stemmed from its combined practice of advocacy, public awareness and resistance. Saguy states:

... it was a radical direct action advocacy group working to bring about legislation, medical research, and treatment and policies to help people with AIDS and bring an end to the disease. It disseminated posters and stickers ... and engaged in acts of civil disobedience and marches, for which many members were arrested. (18)

Still, the gains from ACT UP were impeded by the setbacks from the US Supreme Court ruling of *Bowers v. Hardwick* in 1986 which allowed American states to “continue to outlaw sodomy, even in private.” In March 1990, Queer Nation separated itself from ACT UP as an organization to reorient and expand its objective not solely on AIDS, but also on existing issues concerning the lesbian and gay community. Through them, the derogatory implication of the term “queer” in the United States was reclaimed, again in the same way the Black Power movement had reconfigured the term *black*. In addition, they also worked to debunk the widespread anti-gay conceptions “... such as the idea that homosexuality is a choice or contagious,” while at the same time, they were against “assimilationism” (19). The radical interface among organizations and communities led to the complete alterations of the concept of *the closet*, which now “referred to someone pursuing same-sex desire in private but maintaining a homophobic political stance in public,” for the sake of maintaining their social membership in the society. Saguy observes that the following tactic of outing “those who are in the closet (usually public figures such as politicians and celebrities,” was becoming acceptable. Anger driven by the mistreatment and death from AIDS was particularly noted as the condition that supported this controversial measure.

The crisscrossing of “out and proud” activism toward coming out as a political practice and way of being was not without critics. Saguy stresses the reluctance among “people of color and white women” to identify themselves with the need to publicly declare their sexuality as a precedent of their political agency. They were particularly hostile toward the appeal of coming out to privileging and prioritizing sexual identity over “race, class, gender or gender identities,” and “they resisted the notion that sexual behavior should dictate a person’s identity and political priorities, especially in a context dominated by white gay men” (24). The 1990s was the age of intersectionality and it was not questionable why the intersectional modes of self-identification had become the norm of the time. Another point they raised was about seeing coming out as embodying “the sense of permanency,” which failed to capture the nuances of the sexual spectrum and the fluidity it carried. In other words, coming out essentializes sexual identities that it initially attempted to destabilize. The fact that queerness had become homonormative especially fed their objection to the activism as it mainly privileged white, middle-class gay men, which did not reflect the layers of marginalization undergone by queer people of color.

In contextualizing the history of coming out as a practice in the works of Bino A. Realuyo and Abdellah Taïa, it has become clear that coming out cannot be a master narrative that informs the coming-of-age sensitivities of Gringo and Abdellah. Their queerness, which intersects with their postcolonial belonging, is situated not in the subjectivities of activism and public, but in the space of family. The radicality of their narratives begins with how silence is reclaimed as the form with which queer desire and longing are communicated. Silence precedes and ends the production of noises; far from being death, the protagonists reappropriate silence as a site of potentiality where they get to mediate family, violence, nation and queerness. Their appropriation of silence, in any case, challenges and disrupts the trajectory of normative timelines concerning queer identity formation, which is frequently temporalized from closet to disclosure, from repression to liberation. Gringo and Abdellah showcase a form of cyclical temporality that resist linearity and approaches life on their own terms. In this sense, the silence that permeates Gringo and Abdellah's queer coming-of-age narrative is not a void, but a dynamic space where the unspeakable is transformed into a form of resistance.

In both *The Umbrella Country* and *Salvation Army*, the absence of a traditional "coming out" narrative serves as a deliberate rejection of heteronormative and homonormative frameworks. This absence not only challenges the Western-centric conception of coming out as a rite of passage for queer individuals but also invites a holistic reformulation of the theoretical understanding of the coming-of-age narrative for postcolonial queer individuals. The previous analysis of this study has highlighted how the queer identity formation of the protagonists is not detachable from its cultural belonging and nuances of family, violence and home. In formulating their queerness, Gringo and Abdellah reclaim bits of transgressive spaces and temporalities that they resituate for their agency. As much of these spatialities and temporalities are enacted through silence, the locus of their struggle is located in their individuation. Queerness, therefore, relates one's self to their inhabited spaces and times. This mode of seeing is a whole different approach from the West's LGBTQ coming-out narrative, where the emphasis on queer liberation begins with a public declaration of their sexual identity. The issue of this trope lies in its assumption that coming out is necessary and desirable for living an authentic life. The traditional *bakla* in the Philippines does not publicly come out so that people recognize their existence and authenticity. They exist with the premise

of spatiality that has already recognized the multiple forms of sexuality and the spectrum it contains. On the other hand, coming out, both as a strategy and narrative, only perpetuates social conditioning that views queerness as an outlier because it positions queerness as something that must be acknowledged and validated by the broader society. This validation process inherently reinforces the notion that queer identities are deviations from the norm whose legitimacy depends on public acceptance.

In Gringo's case, the cultural and familial environment in *The Umbrella Country* does not provide the space for such a declaration. The oppressive atmosphere of Martial Law, coupled with the economic and social constraints of his family, creates an environment where silence becomes a mode of survival. Gringo's queerness throughout the book is intimately and silently entangled with his relationship with his brother Pipo. In the complexity of their brotherhood, they share silences and clandestine games of "Miss Unibers" as a space to navigate their queer identities. As coming out is alien to their context, their agency and authenticity are reclaimed through the quiet acts of resistance and the creation of private spaces where they individually validate and recognize their queerness.

Similarly, Abdellah's queerness in *Salvation Army* is personalized through silence and mental struggle rather than a public declaration of coming out. The genealogy of his queerness locates its source in his complex and unreciprocated feelings toward his brother Abdelkébir; the permeating social norms and Moroccan upbringing also hold their share in Abdellah's coming-of-age narrative. Employing a coming-out paradigm in understanding *Salvation Army* would reduce its nuances to a mere discussion of sexuality. Displacements in the book take form physically and symbolically. His migration to Geneva as a postgraduate student is a physical dislocation that allows him to explore his sexuality and indulge in it. Yet, the severance of Abdellah's relationships with Fatéma and Abdelkébir is a symbolic dissociation that disillusiones and disorients him. In this symbolic regard, Abdellah's frustration carries not only his sexuality but also the fragments of needs that are imbricating. His reliance on affects, accordingly, only demonstrates a form of queerness that is evolving and shifting, and it actively resists fixation and declaration of its formation.

The rejection of coming out as a trope in these queer coming-of-age narratives also functions as a critique of the heteronormative and homonormative constraints that dictate how queerness should be expressed. Heteronormativity prescribes a rigid framework for gender and sexual identities where heterosexuality is seen as the default and any deviation from this norm must be recognized and categorized. Homonormativity, on the other hand, imposes its own set of norms within the queer community that replicate the expectations set by the heteronormative system. This form of homonormativity can be seen in the impulse of queer communities to emphasize coming out as a marker of authenticity and acceptance. Its relationality to heteronormative terms and conditions causes the existence of queerness to always be situated under the shadow of heterosexuality. By making a default procedure of sexual coming-of-age for queer individuals, as depicted in the process of coming out, homonormativity will only limit various existing sexual expressions and the spectrum that it pertains to. If queerness stays true to its belief of sexuality as an experience contained in a spectrum, coming out as a procedure is consequently becoming irrelevant. The degree of changes in one's form of sexual expression should not be restricted to a one-time act; and especially for queer individuals, they do not owe people an explanation to publicize the terms of their sexuality. As Gringo and Abdellah have narrated in their coming-of-age narratives, being queer does not entail a process of becoming one—it rather has got something to do with inhabiting a space and identity that are already theirs. They embrace the potential of the transgressive and the abject and reformulate them to their own terms.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study emphasizes the complex interplay of postcoloniality and queerness within the coming-of-age narratives of Realuyo's *The Umbrella Country* and Taïa's *Salvation Army*. These narratives challenge the Western-centric standard practice of "coming out" as a necessary and defining moment in the lives of queer subjects. On the other hand, they provide a nuanced portrayal of the interfaces of queerness within the postcolonial boundary of the protagonists that are deeply rooted in cultural, familial, spatial and temporal contexts.

Gringo in *The Umbrella Country* conditions his queer identity through his intricately linked relationship with his brother Pipo. The repressive Martial Law environment in the Philippines, which has resulted in the family's temporal disjunction and violence, has made them resort to silence and private acts of resistance as the space to navigate their queerness. The absence of the "coming out" narrative is not only crucial but also foregrounds the irrelevance of its practice within the cultural and familial constraints of the brothers. Through the secret games of "Miss Unibers" and the reclamation of shame, the brothers restore these crucial sites to negotiate the place for their queerness and its belonging to home, family and violence.

Abdellah in *Salvation Army* comparably explores his queerness through a layer of displacements and unreciprocated feelings for his brother Abdelkébir that is made possible through silence. His narrative rejects the trope of coming out by stressing his internal struggles and the evolving nature of his queer identity formation. His unspoken incestuous desire for his brother reveals a narrative of disillusionment where his needs overlap with sexuality. Similar to Gringo's reclamation of shame, Abdellah also deconstructs the destabilizing remembrance of his discrimination and uses it to resituate his queerness in the new country. Through the reading of *Salvation Army*, Abdellah's coming-of-age narrates queerness as a constellation of experiences that is more than the essence of sexuality.

By featuring the absence and revocation of traditional coming-out narrative in the analysis of *The Umbrella Country* and *Salvation Army*, this research calls for a more

culturally nuanced approach to queer studies. The sensitivity to uncover the diverse modes of queer lives across different spatial and temporal landscapes is not only a requirement but also an obligation to begin with. It, more importantly, demands a constant, unremitting reevaluation of progressive means that might harm queer individuals in their practice.

This study's findings also invite a holistic reflection on the limitations of dominant queer theory as it diminishes and restraints the sensitivities and subjectivities of non-Western queer identities. The imposition of the "coming out" framework, while celebrated as the creed of liberation in the West, fails to capture the full and continually expanding spectrum of queer experiences across cultures where the identities of family, social expectation and obligation intersect in unique articulations. Postcolonial queerness, as probed in this research, testifies to the resilience, adaptability and creativity of individual queer of color to explore their identities without having to conform to the enforcement of Western's conception of public declaration and disclosure. With a specific emphasis on queer silence, the study also encourages researchers alike to navigate the agency of silence that is found beyond the limit of definition. Silence can be complicit, it can be resistant, it can be reflective, it can be death, it can be hopeful, but most importantly silence carries with itself a space full of possibilities.

By revisiting queerness through its temporal and spatial conjunction with postcolonialism, this research also contributes to expanding the scholarship of queer identity formations and their evolution in non-normative and violent contexts. The protagonists in the narratives studied refuse to be temporally situated in linear timelines of queer identity development. Their state of ambivalence requires a circular model of temporality that better represents the constant ongoing negotiation of time, space and personal agency. Thus, their identity is not cemented in a one-time act of coming out; it stands against the permanency and assimilation of both heteronormativity and homonormativity. Their positionality against silence, as a result, is not a void, but a strategically active response to the boundaries of the social, cultural and political milieu set against them.

All in all, this research foregrounds the need to perpetually reevaluate dominant/master narratives that consequentially attempt to erase different approaches to identification. As

this research suggests, it is not only within heteronormative frameworks that dominant narratives can be imposed against queer identities. Homonormative, as the study found, can be complicit in the effacement of multiple possible forms of representation. One does not get to be more queer than the other through adapting heteronormativity and homonormativity. Gringo in *The Umbrella Country* and Abdellah in *Salvation Army* are a testament to this; the absence of coming out and publicly identifying themselves as gay does not stop this research to conclude the books as a narrative lacking “queer qualities” many usually find in a coming-of-age narrative. Therefore, constant reassessment of our understanding is always needed to fully celebrate the plurality of diverse sexual expressions beyond the comfort of our conceptions.

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