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Queer Africa: literature as art of resistance[1] /

'Queer Africa': a literatura como arte de resistência

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ABSTRACT
The discussion about literature as a fictional space of resistance in contexts of oppression in life is rich. Relatedly, we find literary works by African authors that represent queer bodies in fictional spaces in which, in life, are marked by homophobia and/or the criminalization of homosexuality. This article therefore aims to thematically present Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction and Queer Africa 2: New Stories. To this end, we discussed the context of criminalization of homosexuality in the authors' birth countries and brought to the debate African and Africanist scholars who discuss how the theologization and politicization of the religious discourse, according to which queer people are sinful and deprived of the grace of God, and the discourse of the tradition, according to which homosexuality is a product of the West and, therefore, un-African, seek the permanence of the status quo in these

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countries. During the thematic analysis of the short stories and the analysis of "Pub 360" based on Bakhtin's theory of the novel, we realized that the short story writers brought to the fictional world the representation of the conflicts experienced by characters who discover or live their sexuality in the midst of homophobic or criminalizing contexts and the love and passion of couples who live and explore their sexuality in their daily lives; that is, it is the human and humanizing experiences of queer bodies represented in the short stories that make these collections an art of resistance not only for the representation they make, but for their very existence.
KEYWORDS: Queer African literatures; Literature of resistance; Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction; Queer Africa 2: New Stories

RESUMO
A discussão sobre a literatura como espaço ficcional de resistência em contextos de opressão na vida é bastante rica. Nessa esteira, encontram-se obras literárias de autores/as africanos/as que representam corpos queer em espaços ficcionais em que, na vida, são marcados pela homofobia e/ou criminalização da homossexualidade. Este artigo tem o objetivo, portanto, de apresentar, tematicamente, as coletâneas Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction e Queer Africa 2: New Stories. Para tal, discutimos o contexto de criminalização da homossexualidade nos países de nascimento dos/as autores/as dos contos e trouxemos para o debate pesquisadores/as africanos/as e africanistas que discutem como a teologização e a politização do discurso religioso, segundo o qual pessoas queer são pecaminosas e destituídas da graça de Deus, e do discurso da tradição, segundo o qual a homossexualidade é um produto do ocidente e, portanto, un-African, buscam a permanência do status quo nesses países. Durante a análise temática dos contos e da análise do conto "Pub 360" a partir da teoria do romance de Bakhtin, percebemos que os/as contistas trouxeram para o mundo ficcional a representação não só dos conflitos vividos por personagens que descobrem ou vivem a sua sexualidade em meio a contextos homofóbicos ou criminalizantes, mas também os amores e as paixões de casais que vivem e exploram a sua sexualidade no seu cotidiano; ou seja, são as experiências humanas e humanizadoras de corpos queer representados nos contos que tornam essas coletâneas arte de resistência não só pela representação que faz, mas pela sua própria existência.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Literaturas africanas queer; Literatura de resistência; Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction; Queer Africa 2: New Stories

1 Introduction

Much has been discussed about "the role art plays as a place to question the world" (NAKAGOME; LICARIÃO, 2018, p. 10)[2]. As a branch of art, we find literature, in which ethical and aesthetic composition provides critics such as Bosi (2002) with the opportunity to analyze the ethical theme of resistance in literary works. He carries out this analysis in his work titled *Literatura e resistência* [Literature and resistance] based on two narrative perspectives: resistance as a theme and resistance as a writing process. Regarding the former, the author delimits his discussion to the period between the 1930s and the 1050s, "when numerous intellectuals were engaged in the fight against fascism, Nazism and their related forms,

[2] Unless otherwise indicated, the translation of quotations from Portuguese into English is ours. In the original: "o papel da arte enquanto espaço de questionamento do mundo."

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Francoism and Salazarism" (BOSI, 2002, p. 125)[3]. According to the Brazilian critic, this period produced the core of what was called 'literature of resistance' within a culture of political resistance. Thus, there was an effort for the ethical and political resistance to "be translated into a resistance in the plane of narrative and stylistic options" (BOSI, 2002, p. 127)[4]. As Santini explains (2018), as a theme, resistance was circumscribed to a context of political militancy. As to the latter perspective, resistance writing, that is, the one that selects themes, situations, characters, as Bosi (2002, p. 130) points out, is the one that "results from an ethics a priori […] which has been set against the dominant style and mentality"[5]. Relatedly, Santini (2018, p. 55; our translation) explains that resistance as a writing process "is in consonance with an aesthetic project that unveils tensions and discontinuities in which the individual falls short of a social structure that is unable to support him"[6].

It has been 20 years since Bosi published *Literatura e resistência* [Literature and resistance] (2002). His thought, however, has been developed either through a dialogue with other authors who also discuss resistance or through analyses of other literary genres that were not the focus of his studies. One example found in the essay collection titled *Literatura e resistência* [Literature and resistance] (DALCASTAGNÉ; LICARIÃO; NAKAGOME, 2018) is Fernandes's essay (2018), which approaches the theme of this article. He discusses the representation of minorities in literature – more specifically, transvestite characters in Brazilian narratives of the 20th century. According to the author, "it seems to be a consensus that the abjection of certain non-hegemonic groups has been represented in literature as a means to register the pain, injustice, and inequality of marginalized subjectivities" (FERNANDES, 2018, p. 87)[7].

Amongst the marginalized subjectivities, we find gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual African bodies – the scope of our research – who have been represented in African literature and,

[3] In the original: "quando numerosos intelectuais se engajaram no combate ao fascismo, ao nazismo e às suas formas aparentadas, o franquismo e o salazarismo."
[4] In the original: "traduzir-se em uma resistência no plano das opções narrativas e estilísticas."
[5] In the original: "decorre de um a priori ético [...] que já se pôs em tensão com o estilo e a mentalidade dominantes."
[6] In the original: "permanece em consonância com um projeto estético de revelação de tensões e descontinuidades em que o indivíduo se posta aquém de uma estrutura social incapaz de o abrigar."
[7] In the original: "parece ser um consenso que a abjeção de determinados grupos não hegemônicos tenha sido configurada nas literaturas como um modo de registrar as dores, as injustiças e as desigualdades das subjetividades à margem."

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more specifically, African literature in English, produced in countries that were colonized by the British crown. It is within this context that we find the corpus of this study, namely, *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction*, a collection of short stories edited by Karen Martin and Makhosazana Xaba and published in 2013, and *Queer Africa 2: New Stories*, the sequential short-story collection, also edited by Karen Martin and Makhosazana Xaba, published in 2017.

According to Macheso (2021), the short stories from these collections are a queer[8] activism of resistance in heteronormative societies in Africa whose "heteropatriarchal authorities strive to disable queer agency by dehumanising queer subjects" (MACHESO, 2021, p. 8). Macheso states that African fiction writers use their works to rehumanize queer subjects in heteronormative societies that disable these bodies by deliberately subjugating and erasing them. Due to this "incapacitating" condition, Macheso uses a term well known in disability studies to argue that queer African literature becomes a "prosthesis" in disabling contexts due to the "punitive laws, culture, and religion that work together to incapacitate queer agents" (MACHESO, 2021, p. 11). It is important to point out that, for Macheso, narratives become a "prosthesis" not because they represent queer characters, but because the fictional narrative becomes a destabilizing discourse in the midst of the hegemonic discourses of cisgender[9] heteronormativity. Although Macheso discusses the writing of the short stories, he does not refer to the process of writing as resistance (BOSI, 2020), but he points to the vulnerable position in which the short-story writers find themselves when living in countries, such as Nigeria, where it is prohibited to advocate for queer rights in any form; according to Macheso (2021), even the identification of the short-story writer with the main character may result in adverse consequences, putting his/her life at risk.

We believe that the concept of disability and the understanding of literature as a "prosthesis" do not do justice to the queer activism in several African countries because they seem to portray African queer subjects as passive and inactive in an oppressive environment. In

[8] We use the term 'queer' in this article as an "umbrella term for a variety of dissident or nonnormative categories of sexual and gender identification, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender" (van KLINKEN, 2019, p. 7).
[9] "Someone who is born with a biology (sex) and identifies with it and also identifies with the expected gender for their sex (woman-feminine or man-masculine) is called a CISGENDER person (From the Latin, Cis = on the same side)" (FURLANI, 2019, p. 173). In the original: "Alguém que nasce com uma biologia (sexo) e se identifica com ela e, ainda, identifica-se também, com o gênero esperado para o seu sexo (mulher-feminina ou homem-masculino) é denominada uma pessoa CISGÊNERO (Do latim, Cis = do mesmo lado)."

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this vein, van Klinken (2019) refrains from discussing the queer issue in Africa as a disabling condition; to the contrary, as he investigates the context of queer subjects in Kenya, he recognizes that, even in the face of legislations that criminalize homosexuality in Africa based on anti-sodomite colonial laws, which have not been revoked, or anti-gay laws created in African countries, such as Nigeria and Gambia, the emphasis on homophobia obscures the growing social mobilization and political activism of groups from the lgbti (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people)[10] community in different parts of the continent.

Moreover, van Klinken (2019) discusses the role that religion (Christianity and Islam – although the focus of his book is on Christianity) plays in promoting homophobia and the influence of its discourse, which characterizes queer people as sinful and deprived of the grace of God. He presents four case studies in which Kenyan queer people use their own religion as a critical and creative means to engage in activism against homophobia. It is in this sense that he thinks art as art of resistance and artivism. Asante Jr. (2008, p. 170) defines the artivist as the person who "uses her artistic talents to fight and struggle against injustice and oppression […]. The artivist merges commitment to freedom and justice with the pen, the lens, the brush, the voice, the body, and the imagination."

Based on this context of resistance, this article aims to discuss how two collections of queer short stories become art of resistance. We thus seek to show the context of the birth countries of the short story writers in relation to homosexuality as well as the discourses that foment homophobia in these countries. Examples of these discourses are the discourse of tradition, according to which homosexuality is un-African, that is, a product of Western colonization; the discourse of religion, which preaches that homosexuality is unnatural (contrary to nature) and sinful; and the legal discourse, which is often under the strong influence of the discourse of tradition and religion, to criminalize homosexuality based either on anti-sodomite laws from the British colonization that were maintained after independence or on laws created in their own countries that usually underwent changes to harsher forms of criminalization as is the case of Nigeria's Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, signed in 2014.

[10] We will use the acronym as used by the author. However, in Brazil the acronym currently used is LGBTQIAPN+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transvestite, intersex, asexual, pansexual, and non-binary people). It seeks to embrace a great number of gender and sexuality variations, recognizing that the plus (+) signal refers to the existence of other possible variations.

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After discussing this context, we intend to carry out an exploratory analysis of the corpus of this study, showing the themes represented in the short stories and the way they dialogue with the discourses that politicize and theologize homophobia. In addition, we present a brief analysis of H. W. Mukami's short story titled "Pub 360" based on Bakhtin's theory of the novel. Finally, we make a few remarks about the discussion we propose in this article.

2 Criminalization of homosexuality in Africa and the discourses of tradition and religion

According to the *Map of Countries that Criminalise LGBT People*, produced by Human Dignity Trust (2022), an international organization that uses laws to advocate for queer people, there are 32 countries in Africa that criminalize homosexuality in varying degrees. This number includes two insular countries, namely, Comoros and Mauritius. The 2021 ILGA World's (International Lesbian and Gay Association) report titled *Our identities under arrest* differentiates the countries that have a specific law that criminalizes homosexuality (whether it is the colonial law or a post-independence law, as is the case of Nigeria) from those in which there are no anti-homosexuality laws, but people are arrested or prosecuted for their gender expression or same-sex sexual relations. This type of criminalization is called *de facto*.

According to ILGA's report, there are 28 countries in which the criminalization of homosexuality is *de jure* and eight in which it is *de facto*. The difference in the numbers is a result of the methodology used by Human Dignity Trust and ILGA World. A good example is Egypt, which uses the law against prostitution to criminalize homosexuality with three years of imprisonment. To Human Dignity Trust (2022), Egypt is on the list of countries that criminalize homosexuality whereas for ILGA World (2021), the criminalization of homosexuality in the country is not *de jure*, but *de facto*. This difference points to the need to investigate the context of each country, but it would go beyond the scope of this article, as we need to narrow down the data about African countries in their relation to the short stories from *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction* and *Queer Africa 2: New Stories*.

Therefore, we focus on the birth countries of the short story writers, namely, South Africa, Botswana, Nigeria, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. At the time of the

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publication of the short-story collections, only South Africa did not criminalize homosexuality. In fact, Gloppen and Rakner (2020, p, 196) state that "South African law is among the most protective of LGBT rights in the world" as it is part of the country's constitution, according to which "The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth" (CONSTITUTION, 1996, p. 6).

Another country that currently does not criminalize homosexuality is Botswana. The decriminalization occurred in 2019, after the anthologies were published. Before 2019, the law in force was the Penal Code of 1964. Under Section 164 [Unnatural Offenses] any person who had "carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature" (BOTSWANA, 1964, p. 66) was sentenced to a period of imprisonment of seven years or less. On June 11, 2019, according to NBC News (2021), the High Court determined that the law was unconstitutional. The government tried to overturn the decision, but on November 29, 2021, the Court of Appeal upheld the High Court's ruling that decriminalized homosexuality in the country.

The other countries (Nigeria, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) still criminalize homosexuality. In Nigeria the law in force is the 2014 Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, with a maximum sentence of imprisonment for 14 years. It is worth emphasizing that in the north of Nigeria the punishment can be stoning to death under the Sharia law[11]. Two countries criminalize homosexuality with imprisonment of up to 14 years: Kenya, under the 1930 Penal Code, and Zambia, under the 1033 Penal Code. Life imprisonment is the possible maximum sentence in two countries: Sierra Leone, under the *1861* Offences Against the Person Act, and Uganda, under the 1950 Penal Code. Only Zimbabwe has a "lighter" law, as its maximum sentence is imprisonment for one year, under the 2004 Criminal Law Act.

Based on the dates of the laws that are in force, we understand that four of those countries still use colonial laws related to "unnatural offences" and "sodomy." We give special

[11] "Sharia is the legal system of Islam. It is a set of norms derived from the Quran's guidance, Prophet Mohammed's speeches and conduct, and jurisprudence from the fatwas - legal pronouncements of Islamic scholars" (BBC NEWS BRASIL, 2021). In the original: "A Sharia é o sistema jurídico do Islã. É um conjunto de normas derivado de orientações do Corão, falas e condutas do profeta Maomé e jurisprudência das fatwas - pronunciamentos legais de estudiosos do Islã."

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attention to Nigeria and Zimbabwe, which created their own post-independence laws, which are included in what Ambani (2017) calls the second wave of criminalization: new laws are created to either broaden the scope of the colonial laws or make them more specific in order to include, for example, lesbians, who are not "contemplated" in the anti-sodomite laws. Nigeria's Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act (NIGERIA, 2013) prohibits any civil union between same-sex people and punishes it with imprisonment of up to 14 years. It is worth mentioning that civil union is understood as any affective relationship between two independent adults – whether it is a stable relationship or not. In addition, it is also prohibited to register, operate or participate in queer clubs, societies or organizations as well as to demonstrate affection in public – the punishment in these cases is imprisonment for up to ten years.

Uganda also deserves our special attention. The law in force is the colonial law of 1950 (Section 145 - Unnatural Offenses), which sentences any "carnal relation against the order of nature" to a maximum of life imprisonment. However, in 2013, the Parliament passed the Anti-Homossexuality Act. According to The Guardian (2014), this law, signed by President Yoweri Museveni in February of 2014, "calls for homosexuals to be jailed for life, outlaws the promotion of homosexuality and obliges Ugandans to denounce gay people to the authorities." BBC News (2014) explains that the Constitutional Court annulled it because it was passed without the requisite quorum. The Parliament, then, makes another attempt to approve a new law in 2019 – the Sexual Offenses Bill. Humans Right Watch (2021) argues that, although the bill offers "provisions designed to prevent and punish sexual violence," it also further criminalizes "sexual act between persons of the same gender" with imprisonment of up to 10 years. The bill was returned to the Parliament by President Yoweri Museveni in august of 2021. He stated that it covered offenses already included in the Penal Code.

Still focusing on Uganda, we cannot dismiss the fact that the creation of these laws was supported by several Parliament members and by conservative religious leaders who used the nationalist discourse of tradition and the religious discourse to claim that homosexuality is sinful and contrary to the teachings of their sacred books. Valois (2016) brings the example of Pastor Martin Ssempa, the founder of the Makerere Community Church – which later was called One Love. For Valois (2016, p. 45), Ssempa was an enthusiastic supporter of the 2013 Anti-Homossexuality Act, and his sermons were "politically charged, globally oriented, and highly

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nationalistic." In Ssampa's (2010) own words, the law was necessary due to a few factors: "international groups which are coercing homosexuality down our throats […]; lack of protection for the boy child from homosexual rape; […] lack of legislation against promotion and conspiracies to promote homosexuality." Valois (2010, p. 45) explains that in One Love homosexuality is seen as the result of the cultural and economic hegemony of the West and is, therefore, part of "an international liberal agenda to degrade 'traditional' morality in exchange for hedonism as human rights."

As we see in this example, the legal criminalization of homosexuality is corroborated by the nationalist discourse of tradition – homosexuality is un-African as it is a product of the West against 'traditional' morality – and the conservative religion that conceives of homosexuality as a 'learned behavior' that stems from the West. Therefore, these discourses influence each other to promote the criminalization of homosexuality and to justify homophobia in their countries. It is the ongoing politization and the theologizing of homophobia. Msibi (2011), Ambani (2017), Mutua (2011), Epprecht (2013), among others, argue against the discourse of tradition and religion by presenting several ethnographic studies to showcase that same-sex relationships occurred in different ethnic groups, for different reasons, in the pre-colonial period.

In this vein, Ambani (2017) explains that, although heterosexual relations were valued, leading to marriage and procreation, same-sex relationships followed a policy of silence and discretion (NAMWASE; JJUUKO; NYARANGO, 2017) – or as Mutua (2011) and Epprecht (2013) put it, a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Furthermore, according to Ambani, not many African languages had specific vocabulary words to refer to people who had sex with people of the same sex. Thus, he makes it clear that homosexuality existed in pre-colonial Uganda and that "same-sex relations are documented to have existed in many other African societies including the Siwah, El Garah, Basotho, Venda, Meru, Phalaborwa, Nuer, Bantu, Lovendi, Langi and Teso" (AMBANI, 2017, p. 24). Msibi (2011) also explains that, although it is not possible to ascertain that homosexual relations were publicly approved, evidence helps to dismantle the political and religious discourses that pre-colonial Africa was "sodomite-free." He thus presents some ethnographic studies that confirm the presence of same–sex relations among indigenous peoples of Nigeria, Uganda, Malawi, and Senegal.

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Thus, Msibi (2011), Ambani (2017), Mutua (2011), Epprecht (2013), as well as van Klinken and Chitando (2016) bluntly declare that Western colonization did not introduce homosexuality in Africa, but homophobia, which was confirmed by colonial laws whose article on "carnal" relations against the "order of nature" is "ironically [..] defended as protecting African values, while in fact it reflects the Victorian values of a nineteenth-century colonial Christianity" (van KLINKEN; CHITANDO, 2016, p. 3). Ambani (2017) adds that the British colonization introduced not only intolerance, but also systems of surveillance and regulation whose barometer was the colonizer's own value standards based on which indigenous African laws, customs and institutions were evaluated.

The understanding of the context of the criminalization of homosexuality and/or the oppressive homophobia against bodies that do not follow the cisgender heteronormative "pattern" in these countries allows a better investigation of the role queer literature plays as an art of resistance, or artivism, the theme of this article. In the next section we present this and analyze the collection of short stories in order to understand their ethical-aesthetic value in the world of art and in the world of life.

3 *Queer Africa* and *Queer Africa 2*: I resist because 'I am'

As we pointed out in the introduction of this article, *Queer Africa* and *Queer Africa 2* are two anthologies of short stories (and three excepts of novellas or novels), written by writers from different parts of Africa who may or may not live in their home countries. In the second section we indicated they were born in South Africa, Botswana, Nigeria, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction* (2013) has 18 texts, two of which are excerpts of a novel and a novella. As we aim to work with the same literary genre, we analyzed only the short stories: Nigeria (1 short story), Zimbabwe (2 short stories), Zambia (1 short story), South Africa (8 short stories), Uganda (3 short stories), and Botswana (1 short story). Following the same criterion, we excluded from our corpus of analysis an excerpt of a novella from *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* (2017), totaling 25 short stories: South Africa (9 short stories), Kenya (7 short stories), Nigeria (6 short stories), Uganda (2 short stories) and Sierra Leone (1

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short story). In relation to the home countries of the writers, seventeen are from South Africa; seven from Nigeria; seven from Kenya; five from Zimbabwe; one from Botswana; one from Sierra Leone, and one from Zambia.

As we can see, seventeen short story writers are from South Africa, a country where homosexuality is not criminalized. The other twenty-four writers are from countries that criminalized homosexuality when the anthologies were published. It is important to point out that we are using the data provided by the editors of the anthologies. This does not mean that they still live in their home countries as is the case of Ametesiro Dore, the author of the short story titled "The day he came." Dore is a Nigerian author who now lives in Italy as a resident writer of ICORN (*International Cities of Refuge Network*), an international organization that offers "shelter to writers and artists at risk, advancing freedom of expression, defending democratic values and promoting international solidarity" (ICORN, 2022). Another example is Ola Osaze, who wrote "Pyrrhic Victory." Osaze is a Nigerian transgender man who lives in the United States. It is worth mentioning that Dore and Osaze are found on social media or on the Internet; however, some of the authors' names are simplified, as is the case of Kenyan author Idza L., who wrote "Nine pieces of desire." This simplified "version" of their names makes it difficult to find further information about these authors, and maybe this is the reason behind it. Another possibility is that the author's name (a real or a pen name) is somewhat common, as is the case of Sierra Leonean author Victor Lewis, who wrote "My Dad forgot my name?" As Macheso (2021) explains, the fact that an author from a country where homosexuality is criminalized publishes a short story may place him/her at risk, which may be the reason behind the simplification of their names or the use of pen names.

As we thematically analyzed[12] the forty-one short stories from both anthologies in relation to the representation of homosexual characters or relationships, we found seventeen short stories that represent gay characters or relationships, and twenty-two that represent lesbian characters or relationships. No short stories represent the life or conflicts of bisexual or transgender people. In fact, there is one short story in which the representation of the main character's words and

[12] Due to the length of the article and our main goal, which is to make the anthologies *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction* e *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* known to the readers, we present a brief summary of the themes of some short stories, chosen for their representation of the selected themes. A brief analysis of the short story "Pub 360," based on Bakhtin's theory of the novel, is carried out at the end of this section.

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actions could lead us to consider him bisexual: “Pelican driver” by Nigerian author Davina Owombre. However, nowhere in the short story is this stated by the character or the third person narrator. There are other short stories that portray a double life of male characters who are married to their wives but have sexual encounters or relationships with men secretly, as in “My dad forgot my name” by Sierra Leonean author Victor Lewis, or those who represent either a loving relationship between men – hidden from their wives – in an Islamic society, as in “Maimuna doesn’t know” by Kenyan author Jean-Louis Wilfred, or the revelation of the love of a man for another one after his wife’s death, as in “The Stone” by South African author Matshepo Thafeng.

Not all the short stories represent this type of double life; on the contrary, most authors seek to represent different facets of the lives of people who are discovering their sexuality or the conflicts they have due to external or internal forces as well as the problems and the joys of same-sex relationships. Some short stories represent the discovery of sexuality and the doubts it creates, as in “Pampers” by Nigerain author Olakunle Ologunro, in which the main character makes a new friend from school who helps him discover his sexuality. Kenyan author L. Isza’s “Nine pieces of desire,” on the other hand, narrates the discovery of sexuality made by others. In the story, the friendship of two female adolescents is interrupted by the main character’s family, who bans her from talking to her friend. The story “Jambula tree” by Ugandan author Monica Arac de Nyeko unfolds in this vein. The narrator-protagonist tells, in the form of a diary, that she and her school friend were found naked under a Jambula tree and that, as a consequence, her friend was sent to study in London. Another separation of lovers is found in Kenyan author Bishara Mohamed’s “Is it love that has you?” A third-person narrator narrates the relationship between two female adolescents; as it is discovered, one receives an Iman to exorcize her and is sent to Saudi Arabia to live with her aunt and the other ends up married with children.

The unrealized love between two female adolescents is also represented in “Sethunya likes girls better” by Botswanan author Wame Molefhe. Its third-person narrator tells, through a flashback, the story of a married woman who remembers the great love she had/has for her school friend. The discovery of two young men’s homosexuality can also occur through tragedy, as in “Poisened grief” by Zimbabwean author Emil Rorke. A third-person narrator narrates the tragic death from toxic smoke inhalation of two young men who were lying embracing and naked in a barn that burned down and the town priest’s first refusal do conduct their funeral.

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The legal criminalization of homosexuality is represented in two short stories. The first one is titled “Perilous love” by Ugandan author Shinta Ayebazibwe. Its third-person narrator narrates the encounter of two young women who develop an interest in each other but remember that their relationship may result in a prison sentence of up to fourteen years. The second is “Stowaways” by Kenyan author Alexander K. Opicho. A third-person narrator narrates the encounter of the protagonist, a new college student, with her roommate and their sexual/love experiences; however, one says that they must be careful not to be discovered and arrested.

The representation of the conflict that stems from religious beliefs is found in several short stories. Some are external conflicts, as religion hinders queer characters from having love relationships. However, one short story represents the internal conflict of a character in relation to his Protestant beliefs. This is “The day he came” by Nigerian author Amatesiro Dore. In the short story, the narrator-character (there are three types of narrators in the story: first, second and third) narrates his internal conflict in relation to his homosexuality due to his beliefs in sin and the return of Christ. His internal homophobia against an effeminate character is also portrayed.

Other short stories represent queer issues in their intersectionality with other social markers of difference, such as race and obesity. One example is “Impepho,” by South African author Roger Diamond. A first-person narrator narrates his inter-racial relationship (he is white and his partner is black) and remembers, as he lights incense, both the time when they climbed Table Mountain and the night when his partner went out to drink with friends and never returned. The other example is South African author Barbara Adair’s “Philip.” A third-person narrator is interrupted by the thought of the protagonist, who goes to a club for the affluent with his father and shows that because he is overweight he is hindered from being picked up on by other men; in other words, even being in a racially integrated club that is not gay friendly, the narrator feels ostracized because he is gay and overweight.

Other short stories represent how family and society reject queer people who are comfortable with their sexuality. “This tomorrow was Christmas,” by Ugandan author Juliet Kushaba, is one of them. The protagonist tells of her visit to her family for Christmas and the fact that she would bring her partner. Although her mother and siblings expect the arrival of her boyfriend, the one who arrives is her wife. This causes commotion in the family, especially when they learn that the protagonist and her wife have been married for two years. Another example is

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"Aqua Speaks" by South African author Jayne Bauling. A third-person narrator tells the story of the protagonist, who is lesbian and works as a forester in a male-dominated and sexist environment. Aqua is the name the protagonists gives herself to express her sexuality freely and the name she wants the other employees to call her.

However, not every short story from the anthologies represents a world of conflict, rejection and pain lived by queer characters just because they are queer. Some just represent the daily lives of queer couples or couples who break up for reasons not related to their sexuality. One example is "The voice is the first to go" by Kenyan author Alexis Teyie. The narrator-protagonist narrates the reunion she and her wife have with friends in her house. She goes to the supermarket to buy ice cream for the kids, and the cashier asks if she was talking to her sister on the phone. She answers she was talking to her wife. Another example is South African To Molefe's "Lower Main." A first-person narrator narrates the conversation she had with a friend who had broken up with her girlfriend. The latter went through a moment of apathy and one day, after spending a night out, is changed, which makes her friend imagine that her partner had betrayed her with another woman. Still related to betrayal, we find "Warm," a short story written by South African author Emma Paulet. The protagonist-narrator narrates her relationship with her partner and the desire they have not only to hold hands as they walk down the streets, but also to let her partner's father, who is in the Air Force, know about their love. The protagonist goes to live in another country to do a graduate program and ends up having sex with her roommate, but is constantly thinking about her partner.

Several other short stories could be presented in this brief thematic analysis. As stated before, those that have been selected are representative of the themes listed, which justifies their choice. However, we would like to end this section with a brief analysis of "Pub 360," a short story written by Kenyan author H. W. Mukami, based on some concepts of Bakhtin's theory of the novel. In the story, the protagonist-narrator, who is also the pub owner, sees two women, Chi and Ashu, in her establishment. Chi and Ashu met in the bar and, as they "locked their arms and held each other" (MUKAMI, 2017, p. 240), the barman reprimands them with the following words:

> Whatever it is you pair of *black whores* are thinking of doing in my bar, you better think twice. You can go and perform your free *pornography* to other

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> clubs but not here, you are starting to make my other customers uncomfortable. You are watching too many *foreign videos*, you shameless copycats. *This is Africa*; so clear your bills and get your *dirty demonic selves* out of here (MUKAMI, 2017, p. 240; our emphasis).

Bakhtin (1981, p. 333) states that "[a] particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance." In this sense, when Mukami selects the languages that make up her aesthetic work, she does not select them from a dictionary, but from life. As such, these languages, filled with social and historical values, produce meaning outside the purely linguistic content and, as ideologemes, participate in the clashes around the object. Bakhtin (1981, p. 331) clarifies that the fictional prose "deals with discourse that is still warm from that struggle and hostility, as yet unresolved and still fraught with hostile intentions and accents; prose art finds discourse in this state and subjects it to the dynamic-unit of its own style."

We can see that Mukami puts an utterance of rejection of lesbian bodies in the mouth of the barman called Johnny. Thus, she makes him refract two discourses we have discussed in this article, namely, the discourse of tradition and the discourse of religion, based on the axiological position given to him, that is, the position of a homophobe.

In regard to the discourse of tradition, based on which homosexuality would be un-African, we see that, after calling Chi and Ashu "black whores," he connects them to something foreign, stating that they watched too many "foreign videos" and that they were in Africa: "This is Africa." The African male character's reminder that the two African female characters were in Africa is the means by which the author "gives form" to the discourse of tradition (homosexuality is Western) within the "framing" context of the short story. She uses a homophobic character who utters a discourse that is transmitted as authoritarian (BAKHTIN, 2015), corroborated, thus, by politicians and religious leaders in the world of life.

Moreover, in the materiality of the utterance we find the word "demonic," uttered when the barman demands that the two women leave the pub. Therefore, the author adds, to John's speech, the expression "dirty demonic selves," which is penetrated by conservative religious values that connect homosexuality with sin and, therefore, with dirt. Furthermore, the author establishes a close link with Neopentecostal Protestantism by choosing the word "demonic." Van Klinken (2016), who discusses the role of Pentecostal and Neopentecostal churches in Kenya,

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states that demons are a very important doctrinal category in these churches as life is understood based on a spiritual battle between good and evil, angels and demons, God and Satan. In this sense, for van Klinken, many problems related to finance, mental and physical health, among others, are "framed" in this battle in which demons have to be expelled so that prosperity and health can be guaranteed. In this context, homosexuality is seen not only as sinful but also as demonic, which makes queer people a target for healing or exorcism. Even people who fight for queer rights are considered "agents of the devil participating in a satanic conspiracy to impose homosexuality on Africa" (van KLINKEN, 2016, p. 74).

The representation of this hostility enters the short story through words, utterances, language. The hybridization of the barman's language is deliberately orchestrated by the author who mixes, for example, within the limits of the utterance "so clear your bills and get your dirty demonic selves out of here," two languages, viz., the language of the barman and the language of Neopentecostal religion, as well as "two different linguistic consciousness, separated […] by social differentiation […]" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 358). Thus, when the author creates the individual consciousness of the barman, she makes him assimilate the authoritarian discourse of religion, which enters the verbal consciousness as a "compact and indivisible mass" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 343), leading him to accept it in its entirety or to reject, also in its entirety, any discourse that opposes it. In the plot, this makes him expel the lesbian characters from the bar.

How does this short story become an example of literature of resistance (BOSI, 2002)? In the plot, which, for Bakhtin (1981, p. 365), "serves to represent speaking persons and their ideological worlds," the protagonist-narrator fires the barman and asks an employee to bring Chi and Ashu back to the pub. After disclosing that she was a lesbian too, she decides that Pub 360 belonged to them that night: "the world in Pub 360 belonged to us that whole night" (MUKAMI, 2017, p. p. 243). The author's idea to transform the pub into a "safe haven" for non-heteronormative relationships, even within a conservative heteronormative world that sees them as promiscuous and un-African, is a metaphor of what the anthologies *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction* and *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* represent: a safe haven of resistance against the legal discourse (laws that criminalize homosexuality), the religious discourse (religious leaders who state that queer people are sinful, deprived of the grace of God, and even demonic), and the discourse of tradition (politicians and religious leaders who state that homosexuality is a

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Western import and, therefore, un-African). “Pub 360,” thus, as the title indicates, is a 360 degree turn: from oppression to resistance.

As we have discussed so far, in the anthologies we find stories that represent the conflicts faced by characters who discover their sexuality or who are in homophobic societies; or internal conflicts related to the discourse of religion and to anti-homosexuality laws in their countries, that is, the places the authors chose for their fictional representation. However, the fictional stories also represent love, companionship, betrayal, resilience, and resistance. Bodies attract to each other, love each other and/or get separated. Sexual experiences are represented in the context of affection, intimacy, passion. All these human experiences rehumanize these queer bodies – often dehumanized by laws and religion that are supposed to protect them – and allow the voices that echo in the fictional fabric to find social significance (BAKHITN, 1981), to be updated and resignified by readers, whether they are queer or not, in their own experiences in the world of life and their contexts of reception. In this sense, *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction* and *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* become places of resistance not only because they represent queer themes and characters, but because they disrupt the hegemonic discourse of heteronormativity. Thus, they resist due to their own existence (MACHESO, 2021).

Final remarks

This article aimed to discuss the role queer African literature in English plays as art of resistance. We thus presented some studies by authors, such as Bosi (2002), who discuss resistance in narratives from two different perspectives: resistance as a theme and resistance writing. More specifically in Africa, we presented Macheso’s (2021) thinking in relation to the short stories that comprise *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction* and *Queer Africa 2: New Stories*, showing that, according to him, these stories become a “prosthesis” in a “disabling” context that tries to dehumanize queer bodies. We acknowledge that the author’s position points to the reality lived by people who are silenced and devoid of their basic human rights, but we believe that the idea of “disablement” might obscure the activism of these bodies who seek to make their voices heard. We then brought van Klinken’s (2019) discussion to the fore as he brings to light the social

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and political activism of the lgbti community in different African countries and, more specifically, in Kenya. With regard to art, he discusses how it can become art of resistance and their creators, artivists.

To have the proper understanding on how art resists, we offered an overview of the criminalization of homosexuality in African countries. To narrow down the data, we focused on the eight home countries of the short story writers and learned that, at the time the anthologies were published, only South Africa had legally decriminalized homosexuality. In addition, although briefly, we also discussed how the discourse of religion, according to which queer people are sinful and devoid of the grace of God, and the discourse of tradition, according to which homosexuality is an import from the West and consequently un-African, influence one another and use the legal discourse to maintain the *status quo*.

We then briefly analyzed the themes of some short stories and, based on some Bakhtinian concepts, examined the discourse of a character of H. W. Mukami's "Pub 360." We found out that the stories represent themes related to several areas of queer people's lives: conflicts with one's sexuality; the discovery of love/sexual relationships by others and the traumatic consequences to the lovers; or conflicts regarding religious tenets or legal prohibitions. However, they also represent love, passion, and betrayal; there are characters who love each other and live their daily lives, and couples who get separated; sexual relationships are paired with affection, intimacy, and discovery. In other words, human and humanizing experiences are orchestrated by the short story artivists who use ethical-aesthetic material so that the fictional lives are meaningful to the lives of the readers who resignify the stories based on their places of reception and their own experiences.

It is important to point out that we did not intend to bring the context of the criminalization of homosexuality and homophobia in African countries from an essentialist and stereotypical perspective. Homophobia exists in countries where homosexuality is not criminalized, such as the case of the United States and Brazil, and the criminalization of homosexuality is not limited to some African countries. Human Dignity Trust (2022) shows that seventy-one States in the world criminalize same-sax relations even when they are private and consensual. What is more, as Epprecht (2013) points out, several factors must be taken into account when one is discussing homophobia in Africa, for there are significant differences in how discrimination against and

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hatred towards queer people are expressed in the continent. The factors that contributed to abusive discourses, discrimination and violence against sexual minorities in Africa are multiple and historical: they are "fractures and fictions within traditional patriarchal cultures, colonial legacies, economic stress, popular anger at the West, the rise of new fundamentalist […], literalist and/or retribution-oriented expressions of faith, and calculated political opportunism" (EPPRECHT, 2013, p. 176).

However, in this context, some literary works represent the queer expression and the way "lgbt or queer subjects themselves negotiate the relationship between cultural and sexual identities and develop new forms of African queerness and queer africanness" (van KLINKEN, 2019, p. 10). It is, then, as an "art of resistance" or "resistance through art" that *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction* and *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* become a beacon to illuminate queerness in Africa and show, through fictional representation, that lives, through their natural relations (counter to the discourse of relations "against the order of nature") and affection (counter to the discourse that sees homosexuality as perversion and promiscuity), disrupt heteronormative patriarchal discourse and disclose the humanity of queer bodies who are often considered second-class citizens. In this sense, we agree with Macheso (2021) when he says that queer literary works do not resist just because they represent queer themes and characters: they resist through their own existence; they resist because they are!

CRediT

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