

PART TWO

Amphibious Subjects  
in Rival Geographies



## Amphibious Subjectivity

### *Queer Self-Making at the Intersection of Colliding Modernities in Neoliberal Ghana*

I note, for instance, that the work now circulating as queer African Studies in the United States is indifferent to many of the conceptual frames in African Studies.

—KEGURO MACHARIA, “ON BEING AREA-STUDIED” (2016, 185)

Sometimes, one must know when, where, and how to be gay.

—HILLARY (JULY 2011)

The Aidspan film *I Didn't Want to Bring Shame on My Family: Being Gay in Ghana* features a young Ghanaian man who self-identifies as gay, living with HIV in Jamestown. The documentary begins with a close-up of the interviewee moving his lips, announcing his name and his age. He says: “My name is Hillary Afful. I am twenty-nine years. I am gay. I am HIV positive. And I live in Accra, the capital of Ghana.” He gives away a smile that reveals two of his silver-plated incisors in this scene, telling a story that dismisses any assumption that men who have sex with men (MSM) in Ghana do so because of the money, since he had always enjoyed it. There is a voiceover animating the background, presenting the viewer with statistical figures of the increased rates of HIV infection among MSM.

The narrator discloses how external donors have helped to minimize transmission rates. “Ghana has made tremendous strides in tackling HIV by bringing its general prevalence rate down to 1.3 percent. A lot of this can be attributed to support from the Global Fund, which pays for around 90 percent of the antiretroviral drugs used in treatment.” In the sequence that follows, a medical professional presents her opinion, expressing how nobody in Ghana really wants to acknowledge that being gay is a global thing. She further adds that the stigma and taboo nature of homosexuality means that gays are not comfortable with utilizing health

facilities for their upkeep and protection against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. In view of this, they have to rely on self-medication.

In another scene from the clip, Hillary, the young man at the heart of the documentary, remarks: "When you have HIV, for instance, it's like a shame on your family and I didn't want to bring shame to my mother." Here he sobs. The documentary concludes with the following quote from Hillary: "There's more to be done than what we've been doing previously. Lack of knowledge my people perish. We need to do something to reduce the risk of infection among the gay community in Ghana. Now I believe there's hope for me, but at first, I lost hope."

Aidspan, the organization that released the video, is a transnational health and human rights NGO funded by the Global Fund, which is an international NGO headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. The video by Aidspan was filmed in Jamestown because Hillary lived there, and not because of the organization's awareness of the town's history of boys cross-dressing or the complex entanglements of homoeroticism and heteroeroticism. The video went viral both in Jamestown and across the country, resulting in verbal attacks on the *sasso* featured in the video beside Hillary. In turn, they demanded, reasonably, that the clip be removed immediately, although Aidspan did not comply. As an organization, Aidspan engages in continent-wide projects aimed at stopping the spread of HIV, opportunistic infections, and contagious diseases.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the organization addresses the obstacles to its mission to eradicate these conditions. The organization thus perceives homophobia to be a bottleneck hampering access to health care for MSM. However well intentioned, the approach adopted by Aidspan to address health care for these men, who identify as *sasso*, was paradoxically insensitive to the nettlesome social, cultural, sexual, historical, political, and economic environments in which they are embedded.

Several questions animate this chapter, namely: How are we to critically comprehend the responses incited by Aidspan's attempt to rescue Hillary and other *sasso* who participated in their health projects? How are we to understand their rationale for publicizing the video? What sociocultural frameworks must be considered when elucidating how *sasso* responded to a video that supposedly sought to bring them assistance and redress? How do *sasso* subjectivities and processes of self-fashioning amplify the complexities of self-making among queer subjects in a terrain animated by uncertainties triggered by the collusion between neoliberalism and neocolonialism?

In this chapter, I respond to the queer African theorist Keguro Macharia's felicitous "litany of complaint" in his critique of the emerging subfield called queer African studies. In "On Being Area-Studied," an excerpt of which appears in the first epigraph, Macharia expresses disappointment at queer African studies' failure to engage with existing conceptual frameworks afforded by African studies, and African scholars, to be specific. For Macharia, "it is difficult to imagine that African philosophers, including John Mbiti, Kwesi Wiredu, and Nkiru Nzegwu,

[and for the purposes of my argument here, I include Kwame Gyekye] have ever written anything that conceptualizes personhood, individuality, or community” (2016, 185).

In this chapter, I illuminate how Hillary’s remark in the second epigraph foregrounds how *sasso* carefully navigate the changing scenes of Ghana. Thus, I show how *sasso* craft sexual subjectivities that sit at the vexed intersections of what I describe as African Christian and queer liberal modernities. These competing modernities are the outcome of complex colonial, neocolonial, and neoliberal histories of exploitation that scramble *sasso* subjectivities, making amphibious subjectivity an insufficient heuristic on occasion.

#### INFLECTED SUBJECTIVITIES: SASSO AS AMPHIBIOUS, POSTCOLONIAL, AND QUEER SUBJECTS

I contemplate how *sasso* like Hillary position themselves within, against, and on the frontiers of postcolonial identifications and the queer liberal categories supplied by NGOs such as Aidspace, examples of which are MSM, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. *Sasso* lives consistently reveal that these categories are unsteady, shifting, possessing different assigned meanings. For example, Hillary’s self-identification as gay in the Aidspace documentary drew on queer liberal nomenclature, a term he rarely deployed in Jamestown. Being *sasso*, for Hillary, thus required a degree of tactical and strategic circumspection, and there, the ability to engage in pretentious conformity was apparent. In the following conversation, which transpired between us in the summer of 2012, Hillary reveals how he carefully navigated the muddled terrains of his subjectivities. Asked if his family knew about his sexual encounters with men, Hillary responded:

It’s really hard to tell. I don’t tell them that I do *sasso*. They only know that I am *sasso*. I respect them, and so when I am around them, I am very careful about what I say or what I do. I may be comfortable joking around with friends about my sexual encounters; however, I have to be sure that jokes about my sexual encounters with men are muted when I am around members of my family. It is very difficult to even tell my mother that I am a peer counselor for men who have sex with men at the NGO. She only knows that I work on HIV-related projects. As for my sister, I believe she is aware of my homosexual encounters because she has female friends who sleep with women and are also my good friends. However, I believe she understands. On the other hand, my mother is very humble and a respectable member of my family and the community, and I don’t want to break her heart. Kwame, many *sasso* are in the same shoes as me. Most of us don’t talk about our lives with men. For those who have done it, the consequences have been grave. We’d rather live our lives under the carpet rather than live openly as gay men. You know, all of this is out of respect. Because, once you say you are gay in this community, it reflects not so well on your entire family and community. People will talk and say stuff about your family. And most of us want to avoid the consequences that our homosexuality can bring. So, one better plays in secret.

Hillary's response points us to the many selves—at once contradictory and coherent—he embodied. Neither Aidspace workers, nor the nation that criminalizes and polices homosexuality, could fathom such complexity. In this account, Hillary articulates a self that is deeply embedded in his family, and in that context, he meticulously avoids exhibiting any traits or actions that would draw his family's attention to his engagement in homoeroticism or even his health-care outreach for MSM. In these hidden textures and transcripts, he engages in a self-fashioning process analogous to Gyekye's amphibious identification.

Although his family partially relied on him for financial support, derived from his participation in NGO activities directed at sexual minorities, Hillary, as well as those aware of his employment, kept such associations shrouded in secrecy. Significantly, Hillary's family members engaged in similar forms of secrecy, hiding their perceptions about his homoeroticism. While his public secret was "known" to them, to employ Taussig's (1999, 5) assertion, it was not "publicly articulated"; rather, it formed part of a social protocol observed by both Hillary and his family to avoid potential tensions within his nuclear family.

In order to fully understand Hillary's subjectivity, his lifeworld and choices, it is important to consider not just the complicated role of human rights organizations in postcolonial Ghana, but also how these organizations scrambled his subjectivity. How, then, does Hillary as sexual dissident manage these selves, especially when the body suddenly confronts the vagaries triggered by epidemiological uncertainties wrought by HIV? In what ways does the HIV-positive self, which, like the queer self, is cloaked in silence, complicate the politics of making queer bodies visible?

#### THE UN/RESPECTABLE POLITICS OF SILENCE: WHEN HIV/AIDS SCRAMBLES SCRAMBLED SUBJECTIVITIES

Here, I set the stage with Hillary's scrambled past to expound on how his subjectivity/ies shine/s light on how he was grounded in and defined by his family and the community in the suburb of Jamestown and its environs and the contradictions such situations generated in his NGO work. The Aidspace video presents us with a different Hillary. This Hillary is positioned as a person living with HIV in a milieu where bodies living with HIV face severe ostracism from a world that pathologizes the disease. The slice of the subjectivity Hillary offers here altogether obscures how Jamestowners and Hillary's family and friends, *sasso*, and actors from local NGOs such as BURJ supported him during seroconversion. In light of this, I reckon how life for Hillary, and for *sasso* more generally, constitutes a composite experience that generates multiple, unpredictable responses, including vacillations between hope and despair.

Residing in a state governed by homophobic reason, to paraphrase Amar Wahab (2012), Hillary at times, and surprisingly, asserted his Christian and queer



FIGURE 3. Gracing a Muslim wedding with Hillary at the Aviation Social Center in August 2012. Photo by author.

selves in an unbothered and confident manner. At events organized by the church and in other venues such as weddings, outdoorings, and funerals, he was regarded as an important figure in the sasso community and beyond.

As an ethnographer, I acknowledge that my experience with Hillary, constitutive of my own ethnographic journey and navigation of being queer in this uncertain, often dangerous, milieu, presents but a slice of his life. Perhaps, like Aidspan, I am complicit in articulating a self that may not adequately give Hillary his due. I am of the view, nevertheless, that one of the struggles emanating from the business of ethnography might be that the stories we tell are distinctively informed by perspective and mood, and perhaps the reasoning that we contribute something “distinct” to the field.

Residing as Hillary did in a sociocultural and medical landscape where people living with HIV (PLHIV) faced considerable difficulties in accessing health care, his articulation of an amphibious self was perhaps intended to mask his ailing condition. Surrounded by family and friends, Hillary’s self-fashioning enabled him to keep his head above the proverbial water. Jamestown’s uneasy relationship with PLHIV, economic desperation, and the homophobia engendered by neoliberalism’s unhallowed wedlock with neocolonialism occasionally interfered with his sense of being (Alexander 2005; McFadden 2011). Since survival was of the essence, at least for Hillary, he invented and imagined otherworldly narratives of his life that provided an explanation (if only to himself) of his condition, the source of which lay beyond scientific reason and medical explanations. Hillary drew, for instance, on narratives of misfortune and witchcraft. By reducing the symptoms of his condition to supernatural causes, he positioned himself as the victim of another world where unseen forces could be blamed for occurrences that were believed to have unknown causes (Farmer 2006; Epprecht 2008; Ashforth 2000).

*Racialized Epidemiologies: Being Black/African and Gay  
in the Age of HIV/AIDS*

The Aidspan video froze Hillary’s amphibious, scrambled, and messy subjectivities, rendering it homogenous and simultaneously queer, yet victimized and plagued by HIV. Here, I move beyond narratives of queer victimology and gay men as vectors of HIV. These Pavlovian discourses, which often reinforce racialized tropes of African homophobia and sexual intolerance toward sexual and gendered

minorities, also neglect the historical and persistent configuration of the Black body as a vehicle of HIV/AIDS. In other words, the association of HIV/AIDS primarily with gay men and the Black/African body constitutes an epidemiological project to construct the Black body as a stand-in for and vector of epidemiological failures. A discursive regime tethered to histories that produced scientific, religious, medical, cultural, and moral enquiries that vitiated Black corporeality, the epidemiological composition of the Black body in the age of AIDS indubitably suffers from these “controlling images” preceding the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Gill 2018; Collins 1991, 69; Cohen 1999).

The distinction between the Western gay AIDS narrative and the African AIDS narrative, for instance, both ruptures and blankets the connection between gay and African AIDS. Let us for a moment consider how Haiti was touted in Western media as the origin of the “brand” of AIDS that afflicted gay men in the eighties to lend evidence to how the Black/African body is consistently racially marked as the source of HIV/AIDS (Cohen 1999; Farmer 2006; Brodwin 1996). Thus, while Aidsman attempted to highlight Hillary’s disenfranchisement and tragedies in a video that sought to rescue him from the claws of homophobia, the portrayal also racialized the gay Ghanaian subject by neglecting the discursive regimes in which that subject was both embedded and constituted. In light of this, if we return to the origins of HIV/AIDS as ultimately a spectral scene of racialization for both the African and gay subject, then Hillary’s subjectivity is also “messily” racialized by the Aidsman video, although such language or vocabulary is foreclosed by the video. The controlling image born out of the intersection of being Black, gay, and a carrier of HIV nourishes contemporary public health attempts at eradicating HIV.<sup>2</sup> Precisely intended to rescue perishing subjects like Hillary, these campaigns obscure the hidden fact that these bodies already perish under legacies that continue to exact racial terror on Black bodies.

### *Complicit Silence: HIV Stigma and the Politics of Avoidance*

In the summer of 2012, Hillary was clearly battling chronic illness. At the time, I was reluctant to conclude that he had contracted HIV. Having visited the hospital on several occasions, he consistently said that it was malaria plaguing him and so not to worry. Whenever I paid him a visit in the one-bedroom apartment he shared with his “girlfriend,” I found scores of antimalarial drugs, ranging from artesunate amodiaquine to vitamins to concoctions such as blood tonics. These pills were intended to help rejuvenate him and enhance the quality of his blood. The drugs were strewn on the table next to the couch that also doubled as his bed. The state of his health was disquieting, requiring that he remain in bed for long periods of time.

In spite of his condition, Hillary offered to let me conduct an interview, expressing that he enjoyed my company and the funny anecdotes we shared. As my key respondent, Hillary undoubtedly reveled in the attention I gave him, and I was drawn to his aptitude for storytelling punctuated by moments of head-bobbing.



When I arrived in his apartment that afternoon, the humid atmosphere of Jamestown was infused with the smell of smoked fish. To overcome the heat, Hillary burrowed in a long couch with deep-blue cushion covers in the living room, basking in the breeze generated by a noisy standing fan nearby. He entertained himself with episodes of RuPaul's *Drag Race*, which he viewed on an old Samsung color television that sat on a TV stand. After a few dozen episodes, he switched to regular cable. Serendipitously, the midday news on Metro TV, one of the TV channels in Ghana, was on. Making breaking news that afternoon was the death of the president, John Evans Atta Mills. The news filled Hillary with a mixture of sadness and relief. The president had been noted for taking a stance against homosexuality, condemning Western governments for attempting to impose bad values on Ghanaian culture.<sup>4</sup>

An ardent member of the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP), Hillary saw the loss of the president as an opportunity for his party to be victorious in the next election against the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC), the deceased president's party. Despite his condition and acute pain, he was enthralled by the state of events unfolding in and around the country in the wake of the president's death, prancing about his room following a long and hearty phone conversation with a friend. While our interaction that afternoon centered on the death of the president, he went on to inform me that, had it not been for the wonderful attention from his mother and sister, he would have been completely immobilized. He was also thankful to his friends (sasso), roommate, and some young children in the compound who occasionally attended to him. Before my return to the US that summer, I paid him one last visit. I said this to him in Ga language upon arriving: "Auntie Le [big woman],<sup>5</sup> how are you feeling today? You know I leave in a few days, right?"

Kwame, I can't believe you are leaving so soon. Time flies! So, you are going to be leaving me alone, for a long year. Don't forget about me. Anyway, by God's grace, I am feeling much better today. I don't know why this malaria won't leave me alone, because it comes and goes. Now, I cannot even go out to work, and, as you know, I need the money I accrue from work to survive. When you are sick, too, you don't want to go to your boyfriends, because sometimes, they give you some money after giving them what they truly desire, sex!

While I was bothered by Hillary's ill health, there was very little I could do. Sometimes the thought of him having contracted HIV/AIDS crossed my mind, but I was also troubled by that conviction, given his continued resilience and zest even in his weakened state. In retrospect, I could see that Hillary's allusion to chronic malaria as the affliction that made him chronically weak masked the etiology of his condition and the associated costs of his ailment.

Since the income derived from his part-time work as a peer educator at West Africa Program to Combat AIDS and STI (WAPCAS) was inadequate, Hillary was unable to defray the costs of his medical bills and rent. Furthermore, he had

been out of work for months. Support, in the form of money, came mostly from friends and family. It is worth noting that Hillary never considered himself a sex worker. For him, it was customary to receive money from boyfriends with whom he had intermittent sex. Upon my return to the States, I periodically called to inquire about the state of his health and learned that his sporadic fevers continued, although they were not as severe as before. I advised him to seek the services of health professionals as quickly as possible to avoid any further decline in his health. To ensure that he received regular medical treatment, I also provided him money on occasion when I was in the field.

I mention these encounters with Hillary because I knew from having observed his relentless fevers that he was showing signs of HIV. The *sasso* who were close to him also knew he had become infected. Who was I to reveal that he was seropositive? Maybe it was his profound involvement in the *sasso* community, especially in relation to such issues as improving access to health care for key populations, which prevented us from discussing his symptoms. My assumption is that those *sasso* who shared my awareness were silent out of respect. As a community, they understood that telling Hillary that he had contracted HIV could worsen his condition. Our hesitation, therefore, reflected an expression of our amphibious subjectivity, one that was driven by our empathetic considerations for him and the community of *sasso* that we were all a part of. At Hillary's memorial, Mawuli, a close friend of his, had this to say:

You know, it is very hard to tell someone to go in for an HIV test, especially when you are aware that they know that they should do it. In Hillary's case, it was even more complex because none of us had the strength in us, not even Kissi, the one who always managed to stand up to him or dare him. Telling someone that you suspect they have HIV is nearly impossible, and such was the case for us. Hillary had a strong personality. In fact, he was like our mother, protecting us from the people who brutalized us. So, who were we to even gesture at any suspicion? And more so, nobody wants to be told to go for an HIV test especially when they themselves are familiar enough to know what is right from wrong, and to recognize that regular testing was necessary always. I, for one, and some of the "aunties," thought that he was probably on medication. Hillary, until he was diagnosed, never bothered to go in for a test. But, I believe that if we were silent, then we were so out of both respect and fear.

As a leading peer educator in the *sasso* community, Hillary had ample awareness of all matters related to sexual health and safer sexual practices. He was also the key person that public health NGOs reached out to when they needed peer educators. Assuming that Hillary's involvement in these activities perhaps provided him with the knowledge about his condition, I was reluctant to bring up the possibility of his seropositivity. Other *sasso* shared the same concerns, and the excerpt from Mawuli echoes this. Hillary's stature in the community inadvertently required that his seropositivity be kept in the realm of silence.<sup>6</sup>

*Inventing Causation*

In late April 2014, I arrived at the BURJ office to news that Hillary's condition was worsening. Kobby, a sasso and an employee at BURJ, related the story to me. Hillary first introduced me to Kobby in 2011, right after my first meeting with them at the National AIDS Control Program office. The two had known each other a long time and were taken for siblings on several occasions. Shortly after my arrival that morning, Kobby dragged me onto the balcony of the one-story office building to break the news that Hillary was engaging the service of a traditional herbalist who had ostensibly identified the cause of his infirmity. The herbalist's services had been sought to help cure Hillary.<sup>7</sup> Demanding very high fees for his service, the herbalist claimed that he could definitely cure Hillary. Added to the large sum of money were demands for a goat, along with other ritual objects supposed to enhance the efficacy of the ritual cure.

Hillary's confidence in the man's claim to cure him of spiritual attacks was not surprising. Living with a disease the cause of which was supposedly unknown, it was productive to assume that juju (black magic) could cure him. On one of my visits, Hillary mentioned that he believed an unknown person might be causing him undue spiritual harm, disclosing, in addition, that he had awfully long and sweaty nights.

As the religious studies scholar Adam Ashforth observes in relation to post-apartheid South Africa: "When suspicions of witchcraft are in play in a community, problems of illness and death can transform matters of public health into questions of public power, questions relating to the identification and punishment of persons deemed responsible for bringing misfortune to the community, that is: witches" (2000, 1). In a similar vein, Hillary's engagement with the healer was informed by his belief that someone intended to harm him. Further, his reliance on the herbalist in this moment foregrounded a self that believed that the ritual had curative powers. Here, he suspended his Christian beliefs in his quest for a cure from a medicine man who would otherwise be considered as demonic and primitive in the African Christian imaginary.

Hillary's determination to engage the services of the herbalist was born out of his disappointment with medical results that diagnosed his condition as malaria. Did he have malaria? Was he telling a story to cover up the possibility of having contracted HIV? In my interactions with him, he never mentioned that he had HIV. I only believed what he said, which was that he probably had "chronic" malaria or was the victim of spiritual forces. Hillary's experience with the herbalist was short-lived. My suspicion that the native doctor might be a dupe was confirmed when Hillary's sister discovered that the herbalist connived with a neighbor to dupe him. With the herbalist out of the picture, Hillary looked elsewhere in search of an answer to his sickness. In his desperate quest, he sought the services of a Christian spiritual preacher-cum-healer in an isolated suburb on the

outskirts of Accra. The healer, a woman in her sixties, was believed to heal people miraculously. Hillary claimed that he first heard about the miracle-maker on the radio. Listening to an advert that celebrated her powers to make the crippled walk again, to raise the dead, and to heal those beleaguered by incurable diseases such as HIV, he saw her as the final solution to his chronic condition. Furthermore, he was delighted that she was a Christian healer who performed rituals that also drew on non-Christian, animistic practices. Hillary, who attended church every Sunday with his sister, describes its service:

This spiritual church is unlike any spiritual church that I have seen in Ghana. There's a lot of discipline. Members have to be at service on time, to avoid missing miracle hours. During miracle hours, the angels of God descend. At this time the doors to the church have to be shut. That way, the miracles will be more effective. I think the other goal is that we don't want other spirits inhabiting this space. It is not good for the miracles and us. We need the healing, so we have to be disciplined, which is why I leave very early to make it on time for miracle service. I am hopeful that whatever chronic disease is making me feel weak will end with this woman. They say she can even cure HIV/AIDS. I have seen people who have attested to the woman's credibility. Every time I go there, there's someone giving a testimony about how much better they feel. I am already feeling better after having been there twice.

Hillary self-styles in a manner that diverts attention from what I believed was the actual cause of his condition—seropositive status. While mentioning HIV/AIDS in this conversation, he did not directly claim that he had contracted the disease. Yet, it appears that his belief that the healer could cure persons living with HIV drove him there. By resorting to stories that reduced his condition to supernatural causes, he averted our suspicions of his seropositivity. These were, therefore, significant discursive acts enacted by Hillary. By drawing on a dominant discursive regime that often reduced an illness with an unknown cause to the supernatural, he concealed his condition, thereby averting ostracism. Hence, Hillary's public secret, his seropositivity, was safely kept. This deflection, I argue, relies on his performance of a self that he desired to mask. He lived amphibiously. Confused as I was by his terminal illness, I could not rule out the possibility that he was either under spiritual attack or was living with HIV. The fact that Kobby and other sasso believed that Hillary was experiencing spiritual afflictions did not help resolve my vacillation either.

Against this context, when Hillary admitted in the video that he was HIV positive, that revelation was truly directed at an NGO existing to meet the needs of persons living with HIV. Would Hillary have been able to tell Aidspace about his quest for a spiritual cure? Moreover, would he have been able to tell Aidspace that he was under spiritual attack? I claim that Hillary stood to benefit from Aidspace as someone afflicted with HIV at the time of the interview. Thus, Hillary's self-presentation in the video at once revealed how he struggled to navigate both African Christian and queer liberal identities. However, the clip elides how sasso



FIGURE 4. A still from the Aidspan video in which Hillary narrates his ordeal with HIV/AIDS. Source: Aidspan.

navigate both African Christianity and queer liberalism, reducing these sites of identification as polar opposites that constrict each other.

*The African Christian Subject as “Victim” of Queer Liberal Modernity*

I return to the Aidspan video to consider just how it circumscribes Hillary’s self and the world around him. In so doing, I clarify how the video reinforces homophobia as one of the leading causes of HIV/AIDS among gay men in Ghana, thereby overwriting those complexities that work to produce their vulnerability in this neoliberal context. Hillary’s narrative in the documentary stages a distinction I hope to make here, and to disrupt at the same time: African Christian subject as the product of African Christian modernity versus the queer subject as the product of queer liberal modernity. The former is rooted in the matrix of Christianity, colonialism, and commerce (see Pierre 2013, 5), and the latter is shaped by ongoing neoliberal and neocolonial ferment (Ferguson 2006; Agathangelou 2013).

The still in figure 4 is from the Aidspan video, which opens with the camera zooming in on Hillary’s lips. He tells the viewer his name, his age, and his status as a person living with HIV. This is followed by a scene of the fishing harbor in Jamestown, dotted by canoes, with men fishing. Hillary immediately appears in another sequence on the beach, walking by some of the canoes with fishing men in the background. Wearing a light green T-shirt with violet stripes, he walks alone. The clip quickly returns to the scene in his living room, where the interview began.

Before disclosing his seropositivity in the video, Hillary proceeds with an anecdote about a friend who went to the hospital to get blood work done only to be confronted with questions and biblical counsel. Explaining why he did not seek health care at the onset of his illness, he mentioned a diseased friend who had to constantly contend with the unwelcoming looks and services of nurses at the hospital. Intended to capture the ignorance of health workers, who probably mostly identified as Christian, and who are pathologized in the narrative for their anti-homosexual responses, the story teems with the kind of sentimentality that might incite a cause to rescue Hillary and gay men. Since health-care providers often castigated sasso at the hospitals, leading to interactions that ultimately discouraged them from accessing needed health services, Hillary expresses angst at the maltreatment of a friend of at the hands of the nurses. He asserts the following: “It was a common practice of the nurses expressed toward sasso whenever they went

to the hospital to seek health care, even if it had nothing to do with receiving HIV/AIDS-related services.”

Notwithstanding his own ailing condition in both contexts, Hillary demanded improved access to health care for MSM, for persons living with HIV (PLHIV), and for female sex workers (FSW), suggesting that such measures would help minimize fears among MSM. By drawing on biblical tropes, health workers not only elide the understanding that Christianity itself is a complicated echo of colonial and missionary projects, as Janice Boddy (2007) has suggested, but also heighten homonegativity. The insidious spread of what might be read as religious violence toward *sasso* is perhaps justified by the following assumptions held by health-care providers. Reliant on particular logics of Christianity, nurses who attended to *sasso* read their castigations as acts of redemption from the excesses of Western influences, of which homosexuality was often regarded as the most abominable. By quoting passages from the Bible to MSM, health workers pathologized *sasso* because they engaged in sexual practices that were “naturally” un-Ghanaian. However, in the process, they sought validation and legitimacy in the redemption of *sasso* from what they considered as the ills of queer liberal modernity and demonic Western practices.

Condemning *sasso* as sinners by referring to them as not part of the nation-state’s official sexual identity—heterosexuality, that is—the health workers drew on Christian rhetoric to confine the likes of Hillary to zones beyond Christian modernity. In the latter formation, *sasso* are regarded as subjects contaminated by Western culture, in other words, decadent citizens. For instance, Ofori, a peer educator who worked closely with hospitals that provided services to MSM, conveyed his embarrassing ordeal with a doctor. “I was once scolded for being uncivilized and referred to as an animal by a medical doctor,” he said. Painfully recounting his experience, he shared how the doctor unapologetically declared that “fire and brimstone would rain on me like it did to the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, that story from the Bible. I am Christian, too, and it’s not like I am not struggling already with being *sasso*. Some of us try to do good stuff, too. In fact, for the most part we are often even better Christians than those who ring bells about how holy and perfect they are. I think it is frustrating when they say such things to us.”

Not long before Ofori disclosed this story to me, the then moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Right Reverend Professor Emmanuel Martey, boldly and unapologetically referred to homosexuals as even worse than animals during the vetting of Nana Oye Lithur, a human rights advocate who promoted LGBT+ human rights, and the then director of the Human Rights Advocacy Center (HRAC), an organization for which Hillary was once a volunteer. The medical doctor’s reliance on the Bible may entrench the notion that Christian modernity situates sub-Saharan Africa outside queer liberal modernity; however, Ofori’s revelation says otherwise, given his struggle to overcome the unhealthy confrontations between both modernities. His experience exemplifies the tensions emanating from being both *sasso* and Christian.

Such health workers discouraged sasso from accessing health care. Hillary, for example, disclosed his reluctance to visit the hospital in a timely fashion as the result of the hostile environment engendered by health-care workers. Receiving news that he was HIV positive at a hospital where health workers heaped scorn on those with the disease made his discovery of his seropositivity even more traumatic than it might have been. In our interactions, Hillary recalled how MSM did not patronize health-care services for fear of being castigated by health workers who allowed their Christian worldviews to interfere with their duty to offer health care to sasso. Hillary's involvement in major HIV/AIDS prevention projects allowed him access to knowledge that other sasso did not have, and his revelations in the video position him as a queer liberal modern. In this schema, Christianity is rendered as the negative copy of queer liberal modernity, where modernity is indiscriminately pathologized.

*The Queer Liberal Subject as a "Victim"*  
*of African Christian Modernity*

When Dennis Altman, the pioneering Australian gay academic and activist, argued that "both affluence and political liberalism are required for a commercial gay world to appear" (1997, 421), he quite literally forgot the extent to which these processes occurred within particular configurations of racialized power and orchestrations of colonial capitalist modernity. Thus, we might ask, what was at stake for Altman when he made this claim? Did a nation's acceptance of "gay" identity signify the new fad that described one's modernity? For Altman, neoliberal modernity represented the enabling environment out of which the queer liberal body arose. However, his articulation of capitalism with gay identity conceals what the historian John D'Emilio (1983) described ten years earlier as capitalism's seductive relationship with gay politics. Arguing that the rise of gay identity was conceived out of the fraught bond that gay politics shared with capitalism, D'Emilio exposed the exploitative conditions that gave rise to gay identity, and how that very claim to identity perpetrated exploitative and oppressive structures. Altman's uncritical assertion that political affluence and liberalism were the stepping stones toward queer liberalism, then, displaces how the controlling discourses, images, practices, and regimes that made gay identity visible further disenfranchised and marginalized other bodies—specifically queers of color such as sasso.

For D'Emilio, the development of capitalism and its free labor system saw great swathes of people migrate into urban centers to look for employment. Thus, the enterprise of free labor significantly shaped predominantly existing heterosexual structures. This shift, among others, created an environment in which gay men and women came to interpellate themselves, drawing on capitalist modernity's ideologies. Altman's assessment, appearing more than a decade after D'Emilio's penetrative observation, however, elides the complexity of the history of political liberalism and the affluence required to nourish gay liberalism, particularly in postcolonial settings, where such relationships are even more complicated. It is



in this historically fraught context that the Aidspace video functions, emphasizing how being tolerant of minorities is an integral feature of queer liberalism (Eng 2010). Hillary's expression of dissatisfaction at health workers in the documentary partly celebrates the position that queer tolerance is indicative of modernity whereas African Christian logics are cast backward.

Thus, African Christianity is perceived to be perpetually at odds with a more progressive Christianity that animates the West, where there are now a growing number of churches that consider themselves the citadels and sanctuaries of queer freedom by virtue of their endorsement of gay marriage and tolerance of queers. Once again, the complicated and problematic racialized histories that constituted Christianity in Africa, and their fraught relationship to colonialism and capitalism, are ultimately obscured by such constructions.

In the regime of queer liberal modernity, health workers' intolerance toward MSM is perceived as the corollary of their ignorance. Ambrose, a clerical worker, recounted his disappointing experience with a nurse to me. Apparently, he had contracted a sexually transmitted infection (STI) and was in dire need of antibiotics. Experiencing excruciating pain, he confidentially told the nurse that he suspected his condition was the result of having anal sex with some men in his neighborhood. Following that disclosure, the nurse drew other nurses' attention to him, revealing Ambrose's homoerotic engagements, a disclosure that was supposed to be kept a secret. Ambrose added that the nurse described his interest in homoerotic intimacy as a "demonic practice." For these health-care providers, Ambrose's infection was simply a supernatural penal sentence from God. Herein resided a paradox. While Ambrose required urgent medical attention, the health workers contrarily shared the view that he needed spiritual intervention.

Angrily recollecting this story, he wished he had had a bolder response to the nurses who embarrassed him without reason. For Ambrose, the health workers were "not only illiterate and petty, they were also pretty unqualified to be in such positions." "What makes me mad," he maintains, "is that my taxpayer's money feeds these ignorant workers." Ambrose's story is one of many accounts that sasso shared regarding their negative experiences with nurses. It is important to note that not all nurses in this context maltreat sasso. A nurse in the Aidspace clip, for instance, dismissed some of her coworkers for their negative attitudes toward sasso. "Every client that comes to a health worker must be treated with the respect and the individuality that the client needs," she said. "As a health worker, no matter your religious background, you should never impose your religious values on the client." This nurse's appearance in the video automatically designates her as a "good nurse." Perceived to be free from the trappings of African Christianity, she poses as a figure of reason, who, by sharing progressive views on the issue of homosexuality, gets configured as "modern" in the queer liberal sense of the term. Thus, ironically, sasso, as amphibiously modern subjects, critique health-care workers, whereas health-care workers generally look upon them as locked in vile sexual practices that require their redemption.



Another scene in the documentary features a medical doctor who reinforces the narrative of ignorance among Ghanaians. She launches an appeal for funds, hoping that such financial donations will help ease the woeful conditions incapacitating health-care delivery for key populations, including *sasso*.<sup>8</sup> Directed at global donors such as the Global Fund, Aidspan's primary donor, the request for financial assistance is intended to help minimize persisting ignorance around HIV and male homosexuality, as well as curb the spread of HIV/AIDS. By stressing that resources from the Global Fund will help quicken the pace of knowledge required to mitigate homonegativity and the spread of HIV, she shows how LGBT+ liberalization has yet to arrive in Ghana. The medical doctor's narrative, unlike the medical doctor who blatantly scolded Ofori with Christian religious epithets, reinforces Altman's view that political liberalism and affluence constitute the dispensation in which gay identity can appear (1997). Here, American dollars and European euros have to be pumped into HIV/AIDS programs and auxiliary projects from donors like the Global Fund to facilitate the enabling environment required for queer liberalism.

The documentary further imagines the ignorance and intolerance of health-care workers as the offshoot of Christianity without paying attention to the historically constituted contexts in which they reside. Here, Christianity of the African variety is interpreted as stifling its followers' ability to rationally and epistemologically embrace sexual minorities, who are perceived as decadent citizens in the epistemic and moral universe of Ghana.<sup>9</sup> There are two competing epistemologies here. The first is tied to African Christianity, which is perceived as backward. And the second is tied to queer liberalism, which is couched as progressive and civilized. Once again, the colonial-cum-racist binary is reasserted, masking the persistent interpenetration of these ideologies.

For *sasso* like Hillary, who work in HIV prevention and LGBT+ human rights organizations, the uncanny ties between these two frameworks shape those uneasy conditions that make amphibious subjectivity palpable. In particular, the collisions and collusions create the possibility and impossibility for amphibious queer self-making. Hence among *sasso*, LGBT+ is both an approximation *of* and *for* modernity in the context of queer humanitarianism. However, they, too, consider themselves to be "Christian moderns," to recycle Webb Keane's term (2007). For Keane, in postcolonial contexts that forced the embrace of Christianity, Christian practices continue to actively function as a key site of modernity-making and human emancipation. Extending Keane's argument here, it appears that health workers who evidently drew on Christian rhetoric to convert *sasso* at the health centers operated from an ideological standpoint similar to the one that nourished missionaries during the civilizing encounter (Keane 2007; Pierre 2013; Miescher 2005).

These health workers perhaps sought to disencumber *sasso*, that is, emancipate them from what they perceived as sexual contamination. The convoluted intersections of queer liberal and Christian modernities present questions about

when, where, and how *sasso* emerge as new privileged subjects amid transnational neoliberal LGBT+ human rights organizing. On the one hand, like many Ghanaians, *sasso* endure the uncertain reverberations of neoliberalism, given their location in postcolonial contexts with fraught pasts. On the other hand, these pasts, animated by combined forces of Christianity, coloniality, and capitalism, shape and reshape their locations as vulnerable subjects. How, then, are the intersections between vulnerability and privilege in *sasso* lives to be comprehended? To what extent do the uneasy alliances, which are tendencies of neoliberal modernity in the postcolonial milieu, decrease *sasso* ability to comprehend the shifts in their lives? How do *sasso* deal with these transitions and tensions in a nation that continues to be racialized under rancid neoliberal regimes?

*Interstitial Subjects: Sasso at the Intersections of African Christian  
and Queer Liberal Modernities*

While on the surface, it appears that there are two competing frameworks of modernity, I intimate here that both African Christianity's and queer liberalism's articulations of modernity are Janus-faced constructs that spawn Janus-faced problems. I aver that "African" Christianity, as discussed previously, is purportedly sutured to "Western" Christianity, the latter being an iteration of Christianity that is at once deeply colonial, and now postcolonial and palimpsestic, because of its domestication and vernacular dynamism. Queer liberal modernity, on the other hand, is perceived to be in tandem with secular neoliberal democracy. Thus, in the secular framework of human rights that supposedly pervades queer humanitarian reason, Christianity betokens backwardness. And, in what might be conceived to be the bulwark of the homophobic state of reason, African Christianity, as it were, gay identity is primal and sub-animal, as echoed by the moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Together, these articulations of modernity are at once epistemological and ontological, intermingling in a postcolonial landscape grappling with the pressures conceived by the unholy matrimony between neoliberalism and neocolonialism.

I argue, therefore, that the moderator's sentiments to the media be closely examined as the corollary of the uneasy transitions within a nation and a transnational world undergoing unprecedented transformation. As a Christian modern, the moderator, like the nurses *sasso* confronted at the hospital, can be figured as benefiting from the historical privileges Christianity promised its converts. In that regard, he, in the heteronormative order of things, emerges as a privileged subject. In the present context, however, the privileges accorded Christian modernity collide with neoliberal articulations of modernity, which, by "salvaging" sexual minorities simultaneously embed them in transnational queer liberal circuits. These uneasy transitions, especially in Africa in general, and Ghana, in particular, are evidenced by the pursuit of postindependent development agendas, which sought to accelerate liberal modernity.

The intensification of neoliberal economic practices in the eighties, for example, bespeaks the shifting terrains of sexual citizenship, wherein Ghana was officially enrolled in a global political economy through programs of structural adjustment and economic recovery. These programs significantly shaped the contours and directions both of African Christianity and those visions of democratization held by postcolonial African leaders. For these fledgling nations, aspirations for democracy, as Claude Ake (1996), the late Nigerian political scientist, reminds us, presented contested spaces for building the nation in a context reeling from the debris of a past of colonial exploitation. The continuing marginalization of postindependent nation-states in the global political economy is rooted in this history of unequal power relations founded by colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and racial apartheid (Rodney 1972).

The current anxieties around transnational LGBT+ human rights activism cannot, therefore, be detached from the conditions created by neocolonial liberal modernity. For example, sasso are embedded in LGBT+ human rights projects that attract vast amounts of funds that seek to reduce homophobia. These projects, supported by “queer dollars,” however, elide other conjunctures that intersect to trigger antihomosexual violence. The execution of these projects masks and reproduces violent class inequalities and the harsh regulation of Ghana’s economy by neoliberal institutions based in Euro-America such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the European Union. Thus, sasso, supposedly the beneficiaries of these funds, emerge as vulnerable subjects and targets. It is clear, then, that the optimistic practices by transnational LGBT+ NGOs to rescue sasso, coterminous with the hardships suffered by the Ghanaian masses, intensify homonegativity (Berlant 2011).

To be clear, the remains of colonial Christianity and its concomitant neocolonial political economy can be seen in the vibrant surge in African Christianity, which currently vies for legitimacy by competing with queer liberal projects and attempts by the African nation-states to assert sovereignty and self-determination. The tensions from the competition to redeem sasso as both postcolonial bodies independent of queer liberal projects and as queer bodies to be liberated from the predations of the homophobic nation-state epitomize the nervous conditions that constitute neoliberal Ghana.

### *Subjectivity Remixed: Sasso at the Nexus of Nervous Modernities*

The documentary further envisions queer liberal modernity as more respectable and proper, characterizing Christian modernity as both improper and inhumane to sexual minorities. For instance, the medical doctor in search of funding opportunities highlights Christianity as one of the major obstacles preventing queer liberation, depicting Christianity as a barrier to health-care access for key populations such as MSM. Elevating queer liberal modernity over Christianity in this paradigm of modernity effectively displaces the “coeval” existence of these

modernities (Fabian 1983). Therefore, the depiction of Hillary's experience as synecdochic of the experiences of gay men in the video reinforces the image of a homophobic Ghana in need of a cure from LGBT+ human rights missionaries. In this imagery, too, health workers are featured as utterly intolerant toward sexual minorities because of their Christian evangelizing of MSM. Steven, a *sasso* who works as a peer counselor, once described to me his experience with a nurse:

One day, I went to see the doctor because I contracted a sexually transmitted infection (STI). I had been to that hospital before and did not like the way the nurses treated me. Initially, I did not want to go to the same hospital, but my options for going to clinic are limited where I reside. Once I arrived, I could hear the nursing attendants giggling and whispering to each other. I knew they were talking about me. Based on the way I was dressed, in my skinny jeans and tight velvet shirt, there is no way these ignorant people were not talking about me. When it was my turn, one of them boldly asked: "So, when are you guys going to stop doing these things?" I responded by asking what she meant by that. And she said, "The kind of thing that you do that brings you here for us to inspect your anus. You guys are going to go hell. Do you read the Bible at all, young man?" I kept silent because of how embarrassed I was. There were other patients around, and these illiterates had the nerve to publicly disclose my private affair. Sometimes they don't respect privacy, these Ghanaian nurses. They need to be educated on the importance of confidentiality.

Like Ambrose, Steven conveys the challenges MSM confront. In retrospect, he regrets not being able to lambast the nurses for embarrassing and making him feel guilty. However, his ability to narrate his experience to me places him in a position that authorizes him to interpellate health workers as ignorant, insensitive, and naive. This can also be read as an act of compensation engendered by his queer liberal subject position, which gives him a framework to have thought about demanding that he be treated justly. The charges he brings against the nurses are informed by how the latter allowed their religious backgrounds to narrow their understanding and attitudes toward MSM. Moreover, Steven perceived them as both witless and "un-Christian": "If they claim to be Christian then they should love their neighbors as they love themselves and not kill them instead."

Toward the end of the Aidspan clip, too, Hillary quotes a verse from the Bible to justify how ignorance breeds death. He says: "For the lack of knowledge, my people perish." In its original form, this verse, found in Hosea 4:6, states, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children."<sup>10</sup> That he cites the quotation in the clip reveals how his Christian subjectivity coincides with his queer liberal self. This entanglement reflects the workings of his multiplicitous self and the coeval existence of selves that are supposedly figured as perpetually in conflict in larger religious and liberal discourses.

The quotation also paradoxically foregrounds the extent to which particular ideologies related to missionization, such as those that emphasize the significance

of Victorian sexuality, trigger health workers' hesitation at offering MSM medical services, leading, sometimes, to their death to HIV/AIDS. At the same time, the denunciation of health workers' homonegative attitudes by Hillary, Ambrose, Ofori, and Steven signals their participation in projects that attempt to expose the vulnerabilities that sexual minorities in Ghana face, such as their lack of empowerment and the absence of reliable and efficient health services. In that regard, they embrace the brand of queer liberalism that animates Aidsplan's politics. Thus, their commitments do not imply a foreclosure of their identities, as both African Christian and queer liberal modernities make us believe.

Hillary's open identification as gay and the revelation of his seropositivity in the video makes him appear "progressive" compared to most *sasso*. Within this framework of tolerance, the latter are no different from the health workers, given their repudiation of the clip. Hillary, then, emerges as a modern subject in the queer liberal sense of the word. However, such a reading, judging from the negative responses to the video, disarticulates and threatens the subject locations of the *sasso* who demanded that the video be removed from circulation. Their displeasure with the video emanates from it diminishing their amphibious subjectivity by fixing them as gay. Thus, while *sasso* articulate amphibious subjectivity in the face of the increased visibility of same-sex politics and concomitant homophobia, Aidsplan evades the precarious contexts of their subject positions, as well as their decision to have their public secret out and circulating in the public domain.

I have demonstrated that in Jamestown, Hillary refrained from employing *gay* as a term of identification by embracing *sasso* instead. In sexual health projects such as the ones facilitated by Family Health International (FHI) in Ghana, he deployed *MSM* to capture his identity. However, in BURJ-related projects that aimed to empower sexual minorities, he self-identified as gay. Hillary's embodiment of these myriad identifications crystallized in the following conversation that I had with him regarding to whom he reveals his work and sexual proclivities:

I am *sasso* because that is the term the people in Jamestown understand. Gay is sometimes too negative. Once you say you are gay people immediately think you get fucked in the ass. Yes, I am a believer of gay liberation in Ghana; however, in Jamestown I feel that when I say I am *sasso*, I do everybody and myself great good. Just think about this. How many people in the community do you think will understand the term "gay"? It is very recent, and I didn't know it existed until recently. I say it only when I am around human rights groups and people who I believe have some level of education and tolerance for effeminate men. Also, when I did the SHARP project for Family Health International, we used the term "MSM," because the organization did not want the Ministry of Health thinking that it was imposing gay identity on Ghanaian homosexuals. Sometimes, one must know when, where, and how to be gay. My mother knows I am *sasso*. If she knows I am gay at all, she wouldn't tell me in my face that she knows I sleep with men. And my church members love me and prefer I do not say these things around them. They, too, know very well that I sleep with men, but they know that it is not their business to castigate me for doing what I do.

We glean an amphibious subjectivity from this excerpt. Openly identifying as gay when he deemed convenient, he nervously subscribed to “the gay international” (Massad 2007) and Altman’s notion of the “global gay” (Altman 1997). For Hillary, *gay* indexes a modern sexual lexicon perceived as the byproduct of Western LGBT+ humanitarian projects and media influences on Ghana. These shifts and movements from one self to the other are not always easy for sasso. Reflecting on the discomfort emerging from these transitions, he declares: “I remember getting caught for making sexual advances toward a guy at the bar by my cousin. I was quite embarrassed by that, but quickly diffused it by making a joke out of it.”

In this situation, his public secret, that is, his homoeroticism, came out in the open, yet he had to quickly cloak it. The contradiction that inheres in Hillary’s narrative, therefore, reflects the uneasy entanglements of both Christian and queer liberal modernities, and his locations in them.

*Blending and Bleeding Subjectivities: When LGBT+ Freedom  
Breeds Homonegativity*

The queer of color critic Chandan Reddy (2011) and critical and queer literary studies scholars like Jodi Melamed (2011) and Lauren Berlant (2011) have amplified the fractious relationship between liberalism and the production of violence. For Reddy, queer liberalism, circulating under the banner of queer liberal politics, produced a brand of freedom that concurrently produced violence, which reinforced a “whitewashed” queer normativity that disenfranchised queers of color. Melamed perspicaciously argues that liberal projects ultimately represented and destroyed the lives of the victims on whose behalf they spoke. Lauren Berlant (2011) uses “cruel optimism” to capture the insidious character of liberal projects that claim to produce freedom. I contend here that, in a similar vein, projects such as the ones pursued by Aidspan, despite their optimistic intentions, “blend and bleed” sasso constituencies in differing degrees.

The sense in which I use “blend and bleed” is different from how Bryant Keith Alexander deploys it in his fascinating elucidation of performing queerness together with Black masculinities in pedagogical settings (2006, 4). While Alexander uses “blend and bleed” to capture diversity, I use it here to uncover how queer liberal projects’ inclination to blend in turn homogenizes rather than attends to the historically specific circumstances of subject formation and those structures of power to which both their pasts and presents are sutured. It is such homogenizing that bleeds, my metaphor for vulnerability and violence, the populations that are often represented as their target. I argue that Hillary and other sasso are on the receiving end of such invidious projects. To echo Melamed, the representation of sasso as vulnerable queer subjects who live lives that are at the mercy of the homophobic nation-state paradoxically heightens their visibility and precarity.

By blending and bleeding, therefore, queer liberal projects sidestep how amphibious self-making occurs among the target population for whom they

pursue such freedom and liberatory projects. For instance, I have argued that some *sasso* continue to practice Christianity, deriving succor from it in times when Ghana is hit by harsh neoliberal reforms such as conditions imposed on the nation's spending by the World Bank, the IMF, and the European Union. In the midst of these economic shifts, Hillary and Ofori, for example, drew attention to their appreciation for Christianity, often invoking a popular Ghanaian moniker that "it shall be well in Jesus' name." These *sasso* identified as Christian, but they also fiercely indicted health workers who imposed their Christian beliefs on MSM. The complexity of their relation to Christianity is constitutive of the violence faced by minority subjects. In the case of *sasso*, the ability to choose when, where, and how to be queer in order to overcome the violence exacted by African Christian and queer liberal modernities shaped and was shaped by their amphibious subject positions. In their moments of need, they often went to church, fasted, and prayed, and, if need be, raged at neighbors who drew on the repertoire of Christianity to shame and ostracize them.

An active member of the Anglican Church in Jamestown, Hillary often spoke about how much he loved his church and his role in his congregation. In the summer of 2012, when I visited him in Jamestown one humid evening, he recounted his passion for his church.

I really love my church. I make it a point to attend choir rehearsals every Wednesday and Saturday. I enjoy wearing the colorful robes with kente stripes, and also performing on Sundays and other special occasions are activities I love. Almost everyone who goes to my church knows how I appreciate being in the choir. For example, I am known for my reliability, and, as a result, I have gained a lot respect in the church. Whatever I do outside of the church stays there. I am aware some of the members in the choir know that I am *sasso*; however, they still like me for who I am. Although I have been confronted by some of the church elders in the past, most have been less critical of me over the years. Sometimes I tell myself that the Anglican Church here in Jamestown is truly a rewarding space to be *sasso*, especially as most of the mothers here have sons who are like me and do *sasso*.

In this account, Hillary shines a light on his active involvement in church activities. In this conversation, he does not openly self-describe as gay; instead, he deploys the term *sasso* to shroud his homoerotic inclinations in the context of the church. Although some members of his church were aware of his homoerotic encounters, they did not engage in open conversations. Sexual and erotic languages were often enmeshed in a latticework of figurative and proverbial vocabulary, especially when they were understood to be nonheteronormative (Epprecht 2008; Ashforth 2000).

Hillary's ability to harmonize his passions for church and for LGBT+ activism—presumably incongruent—in a seemingly seamless fashion reflects his capacity for self-styling. Drawing on the amphibious resources at his disposal, such as the convoluted meaning of *sasso* as a verb, noun, and an adjective, as well as his knack of disidentifying with heteronormative practices, he both curtails and mini-



mizes homonegative responses likely to be thrown at his queer subject position. Such disidentificatory (Muñoz 1999) acts are enforced through competent phallic practices such as fatherhood, pretentious conformity, and marriage, all of which make one appear heteronormative.

Constricting the extent to which Hillary amphibiously self-fashioned, the documentary represents the tolerance of LGBT+ human rights as a mark of modernity undermined by Christian modernity. Thus, it ignores how these modernities overlap, albeit fractiously, in Hillary's life. Hillary's friends were aware of his HIV status. And their knowledge of his status was silenced in their quest to avoid marking him. His Christian stature and sasso awareness of his intense religiosity heightened their desire not to remove the curtain that covered his seropositivity. Residing in a context where being seropositive is represented as the result of one's amorous sexual practices, sasso, as a community, effectively acted to save Hillary's image. Foster, for instance, recounts that "Hillary would have done the same for anybody else. We sasso know how our culture is. Sometimes, we are better off keeping it among ourselves. Of course, there will be that gossip, but we always look out for each other if need be." Foster's narrative highlights Gyekye's (1987) emphasis on the value of the community for the individual and vice versa. It is indeed a compelling example.

Hillary ultimately authored himself in a manner suited to negotiating the multiple conditions he traversed, some of which were stifling, while others were liberating. For Aidspace, his subject position clarified the predicaments of gay men in Ghana, such as their travails with HIV. How are we to grapple with amphibious becoming as a contested practice that allows for, and at times complicates and implicates, queer self-making in postcolonial Ghana? And how can an appreciation of the milieus in which these multiple selves are enacted allow us to fathom, in a complicated fashion, how sasso mediate international NGOs such as Aidspace, local human rights NGOs such as BURJ, spiritual healers, medicine men, and even the ethnographer (myself)?

I conclude this chapter by returning to Macharia's litany of complaint, which expressed discontent at the presence of a desert in the emerging field of queer African studies, a desert that hankers for an oasis teeming with conceptual and ethnographic wetlands derived from African scholarship. In this chapter, I concur with Macharia's demand, illuminating how African philosophy, like the worldviews of sasso, is ignored in much of queer liberal scholarship and queer liberal politics of liberation. And, although a rereading of Gyekye's notion of "amphibious personhood" is significant, it too is insufficient in attempts at "queering Queer Africa," to quote Ugandan feminist Stella Nyanzi (2014). Yet Gyekye's intervention does provide a framework through which to understand that Hillary inhabits a lifeworld scrambled by ongoing collusions and collisions between neoliberalism and neocolonialism.

Thus, how might the strategies adopted by Hillary and other sasso both exemplify Gyekye's idea of amphibious identification and show its inadequacy? How is



Hillary's relationship with Aidsan, his family, friends, the ethnographer, and the cultural ecosystem a reflection of amphibious subjectivity? How are we to make sense of how his life *queers* African philosophy, anthropological conceptions of gender and sexuality, and queer African studies? In summation, how queer is Hillary, if he is at all? Aidsan evidently scrambles the scrambled milieus that shape sasso processes of queer self-making. Whichever way we seek to understand the scenario Hillary's multiple selves present us, it is important that we account for how he transcends as well as muddles tropes of suffering and victimhood.

Hillary's navigation of selves in environments rendered nervous by the cumulative impacts of a past of European colonial and Christian domination, and the accumulating impacts necessitated by present neocolonial and neoliberal articulations of modernity, make him complexly amphibious. Familiar with the self that exceeded homophobic environments during fieldwork, I understood that Hillary was a fierce advocate for sexual minorities and LGBT+ rights. He challenged anybody who disrespected sasso. That same person was also uninhibited about disclosing his sexual exploits to me. In fact, it is Hillary who first introduced me to the idea that "the sweetness of homoerotic sex is in its secrecy." Hence, if Hillary's presentation in the video emphasizes his painful ordeal with being HIV positive, then the documentary submerges his microsociological relationships with friends, family, and the multiplex nature of his ontology and instead foregrounds Hillary as a victim.

Hillary articulates different selves to different individuals and organizations at different times in order to create and re-create himself when and how he deems fit. Such performances may be configured as politically driven, informing claims to both heterosexual and homosexual citizenships in milieus that are clearly divided on the issue of queer citizenship. They also enable queer self-fashioning among sasso in postcolonial Ghana in ways constitutive of becoming and unbecoming, in other words, the performance of what Stuart Hall refers to as an "unfinished closure" (1987, 6). Aidsan's imperative to reduce Hillary to his gay identity is tantamount to cutting out huge chunks of his life. As Taussig reminds us, "If it is the cut that makes the energy in the system both visible and active, then we should be aware of cuts in language, strange accidents and contingencies" (1999, 5).

The documentary slices out important dimensions of Hillary's life, neglecting the complexity of his subjectivity; in doing so, it makes visible that which is known but cannot be accounted for by the video—the public secret. The documentary, then, stages a paradox. It "beatifies" Hillary, and, in so doing, pathologizes the sociopolitical and cultural milieu that supposedly disenfranchises sexual minorities from engaging in queer self-making. Hillary emerges as a "saint," whereas the sasso who vociferously demanded that the video be pulled down emerge as "ungrateful sexual minorities," backward and no different from the homophobes who subject them to antihomosexual oppression. Finally, that sasso sanction the video by requesting that it be removed from the virtual public sphere not only enforces a claim to queer citizenship but also highlights the extent to which

coevalness does not imply the absence of power based on race, class, gender, and one's location on the globe.

Sasso reactions to the Aidsspan video reveal how a well-intentioned project can have negative consequences by representing and destroying the bodies that are the targets of human rights rescue missions. The clip may possess the potential to unveil some of the issues faced by sexual minorities—which it undoubtedly does—but the demands made by sasso that the video be removed from YouTube and other internet platforms reveal that the film did compromise their complex selves. The Aidsspan exposure of sasso echoes Ashley Currier's point on the paradoxes of visibility and invisibility as they play out in LGBT+ human rights projects. For Currier, "Visibility and invisibility are not completely separable from one another analytically. Invoking public visibility also implicates those who are not visible and structures that generate visibility" (2012, 7). What work does visibility or invisibility do, and who stands to benefit or not benefit from structures that present opportunities and challenges to visibility?

Prince's unequivocal statement below, which is drawn from a phone conversation during the uproar triggered by the video, sums up my arguments in this chapter.

Kwame, I don't understand why these people don't really get us. As for me, I think it is important that they recognize that if we say we are gay, we say so because sometimes it is nearly the English equivalent of sasso, perhaps because gay people are effeminate and not necessarily because they have sex with men. Of course, if having sex with men can be part of your gay identity, and you are able to throw both your effeminateness and who you have sex with out in the public together that is fine, I wouldn't shame you. Over there [by which he means in the West], it is OK to do that. In Ghana things operate differently, although these things have changed because of, you know, that alleged conference thing which happened in Koforidua about nine years ago, when there was an allegation in the media that some international gay organization had plans to organize a conference. Before, we could be sasso [effeminate selves] in public and do sasso [engage in homoerotic sex] with our boyfriends in our bedrooms, alleyways, public bathrooms, football fields at night, and even the bushes. Nobody dared to challenge us. These days, things are different, because to be sasso means to be an effeminate man who has sex with men. It means to be gay, and that can make people look at you differently. By that I mean it fixes your reputation, you are no longer sasso but you are gay. That, in a way, was just what that documentary video did to the sasso who it associated with Hillary. As for Hillary, he is big mouthed, and it is like he knew he was going to die and leave us with these troubles. What I am therefore saying is that it would be wrong to tell me to go tell my mother, my father, my brother, and my sister that I am gay. I believe that they all know that already, because I used to be called Kwadwo Besia while growing up in my village. Just as I am OK with hearing other sasso say they are gay, I believe it is their decision to make regarding when is the appropriate moment to say so. When we go to outdoorings, for example, the people we encounter mostly know what we do in our private lives. But when they see us in a video like that, what do you think they

will say, especially when I did not want my face plastered on some video that I didn't know was going to be made public, especially to Ghanaians? The internet is a place where things are hard to disappear; these people should learn to respect us.

Prince's concern shines light on how the video commits violence against sasso. As I write this, the video is still accessible online, and, Aidspan, it appears, is not inclined to delete it. The video made sasso identities monolithic, flattening out the complex constitution of their subjectivity as self-identified effeminate men, leaving them gravely embittered because it emphasized their sexual proclivities. Prince's analysis of the video also clearly shows how it remains insensitive to the cultural parameters within which sasso operated as self-identified effeminate men. And as with Hillary, Prince's insightful observation is nothing short of a theoretical overture.

Extrapolating from Hillary's experiences, we can infer how and why sasso identify in a particular way at a given time, as they amphibiously navigate transnational LGBT+ human rights activism and its concomitant cruel optimism, often belied by homonegativity. Sasso response to the Aidspan video clip signaled their desire to remake themselves in an unprecedented situation in which homophobia and ostracism were anticipated. Moreover, the clip consolidated the stereotype that effeminacy was a denominator for gay identity, reinforcing the notion that gay men were more likely to be infected with or living with HIV, as could be surmised from Hillary's declaration. In Jamestown, assumptions about effeminacy are murkier and not clearly defined. The suburb is, therefore, a site of contradictions, where being an amphibious subject intermingles with African Christian, queer liberal, and epidemiological subjectivities, among others; this complexity was flattened out by a video bearing the title *I Didn't Want to Bring Shame on My Family: Being Gay in Ghana*.