# *Conclusion: A Fabric that Never Goes Out of Fashion*

To begin this final chapter, I wish to return, momentarily, to Suakrom's football community and to the vignette about Edna, Aisha, and Naa that appeared in the Introduction. Edna, to recap, was looking to break up with her girlfriend Naa, who was also her footballing "team mother." Sensing a change in Edna's feelings, Naa decided she would try to "test" Edna by asking her friend Aisha to propose to her. The outcome of this proposal, so the logic went, would reveal to Naa whether Edna had lost interest in their relationship. The test backfired when Aisha and Edna fell in love.

The footballers' "love triangles" would not, perhaps, seem out of place in a TV soap opera. Yet the schemes, squabbles, and sensualities that animate Suakrom's football team are, I think, more than youthful melodramas. Practices of "giving" and "testing" love and each other are materially and emotionally significant. They reveal something about the social fabric of same-sex networks, the secrecies, and the forms of "connectedness" through which they are constituted. By exchanging gifts and mediating girlfriends, women are limiting and keeping in check each other's twosome amorous bonds. At the same time, however, the emotional and material complications connect the women involved by creating new meanings and consolidating such contingent same-sex bonding networks. The social and cultural significance of these shared practices is easily overlooked when we confront racist notions of a "loveless Africa" and, relatedly, seek to rehabilitate romantic love in this context by asserting the universality of couple love in ways that privilege the dyadic dimensions of (hetero)romance and togetherness. Indeed, it is one of the central contentions of this ethnography that the shifting networks of same-sex friends and lovers, these webs of siblings and "personal kindreds," constitute a specific mode of sociality and of collectivizing love under precarious postcolonial conditions.

The language of kinship and friendship was vital to the parlance of my respondents. In many ways, friendship, secret *mpena twee*



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(lovership) and kinship formed a continuum in describing or idealizing different aspects of passion and intimacy and the different stages of relating and relatedness through which a couple may pass. Mother-child/baby or senior-junior sibling terminologies that call on or instantiated certain hierarchies are used alongside terms such as "my dear" or "my friend" or "girlfriend." I often heard the term "friendship" or "woman friendship" used when a woman referred to an intimate same-sex bond, which accords with Ghanaian notions of passion and lovership beyond the desire for marriage. In Ghana, as elsewhere, "friend" can be a vague and highly ambiguous term because it leaves open whether the relation involves an erotic component. What became apparent through my research, however, is that kinship terminology is only seemingly more clear-cut, since a long-term lover could become a (metaphorical) sibling, and vice versa a cousin, hence a (genealogical) sibling, could become a lover. Indeed, the language of relatedness usefully lends itself to the representation of a variety of significant intimacies, including sexual ones. On the one hand, the assumed closeness and harmony between genealogical sisters or between mothers and daughters works to disguise sexual bonds or even to cover up abusive relational dynamics. At the same time, the use of kin terms also amounts to a way of professing the heat of passionate love or a deeply felt, affectionate connection to a person with whom one has shared many things, including hardships and the joys and power of the erotic.

Precisely because friendship is imagined as more negotiable than kinship in terms of hierarchy, the hierarchies friendships do (re)constitute are not opposed to but are framed by kinship terms. In the life stories of my same-sex desiring respondents, notions of family and friendship were deeply intertwined and held many shifting and contradictory meanings. Mostly, however, family and sibling practices were associated with sharing daily lives over extended periods of time and with relating and weaving joint networks of support, without necessarily living in the same household. This is consistent with historical patterns of duo-local residence among conjugal couples in southern Ghana. Stories in which a (genealogical) family member denounced their sister's female lovers were as frequent as stories in which mothers supported their daughters' same-sex intimacies or men who tacitly accepted their wife's "best friend." Especially if the female friend in question seemed to be caring and financially providing, grandmothers

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and mothers called them up and asked them for forgiveness on behalf of their daughter or appealed to their financial responsibility as "senior sisters." This sort of maternal support of a daughter's involvement with a wealthier woman speaks of the integrity of female bonding across generation, lineage, and class configurations, and its integrity with Ghana's historical social fabric.

My findings on the gendered materiality of same-sex intimacies suggest new directions for African studies of love and sexuality that have documented how questions of materiality configure a variety of heterosexual "transactional sex" and "provider love" (Hunter 2010). This book's analysis reveals what happens when the question of who ought to pay within a relationship cannot be answered by deferral to sexual difference. My focus on female provider love underscores the material provisionality of everyday same-sex intimacy. By focusing on sugar motherhood and considering it indeed as a sort of motherhood, I have extended the notion of provider love beyond the opposite-sex framework. The bitter sweetness of the "sugar" provided by these "mothers" often lies in the fact that the romantic and sexual aspects of their intimacies need to be disguised much more carefully than those between "sugar daddies" and their "girls." While the girl of a sugar mummy cannot afford either commodified or public expressions of romantic love, she may consider herself to be in a reciprocal relationship through the language of kinship and mutual care. The younger woman's claim to reciprocity often thrives on idealized notions of marital, sisterly, or mother-daughter affection and togetherness.

Another claim made especially among same-sex lovers of the same age-group is the claim of becoming siblings through a process of sharing. Two different modes of sharing emerged from this analysis: most women conjured the everyday intimacy of "doing everything together," while others emphasized the "sharing of blood" and "the body." Throughout the southern Ghanaian context, blood is a powerful metaphor in construing descent. In the matrilineal Akan context, blood designates the connection between siblings and relatives descending from the same womb that posit women as the carriers of blood. Among those of my respondents who stressed the difference between non-sexual and sexual same-sex bonds and the significance of sexual practice, blood was used as a metaphor for deep passion and the capacity of connecting the inside(s) of different female bodies. Blood was also considered a liminal substance (for instance, in practices of

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blood friendship) that invites overly intense same-sex connections. A second mode of sharing is embedded in women's frequent expression of "doing everything together." The phrase points to a range of everyday sensualities, shared food, and work practices and to the mutual support given in overcoming material shortages, health problems, daily struggles, and personal crises. In this parlance, siblinghood emerged as a metaphor for intimacies that unfold over a long stretch of time and that went through sexual and non-sexual periods or had ceased to thrive on erotic passion and sexual desire altogether.

My respondents' expressions of love and desire were informed and shaped by Ghanaian norms of indirection and verbal discretion. These speech norms facilitate the blurring of kinship and friendship, and destabilize the primacy of sexual acts or sexual identities associated with same-sex love. Notwithstanding, the togetherness of women "doing everything together" does include sexual practices that are highly relevant and form part of an intimate same-sex discourse. This togetherness and the cultural discourse it produces, however, is curtailed by the broader precariousness and the provisional nature of love relationships under circumstances of chronic poverty. In the context of same-sex passion in particular, stable, long-term couple love is something of a "luxury," given that it requires material and spatial certainties that are unaffordable to young West Africans (cf. Masquelier 2009). Access to private space is critical to those (same-sex) couples who need to disguise their erotic intimacy. While privacy is most accessible to those who are "wealthy, male, and married" (Gaudio 2009, 115), subaltern friendship networks rely on and open up collective modes of sharing "private" spaces.

Given the role of spatial constraints in shaping non-normative erotic intimacies, space plays a significant role. With the increased media attention on homosocial bonding spaces such as girls' boarding schools or female football clubs – but also the gradual disappearance of women's gatherings at a queen-mother's house – same-sex socializing spaces are less readily available than they used to be. This is only partially balanced by the popularity of Christian women's groups and ministries, through which a number of my respondents met a female lover. Initiating erotic same-sex intimacies in religious spaces is premised on women's ability to overhear and not to identify with the evil portrayals of lesbianism or *supi*. This significance of homosocial spaces and sensualities is potentially obscured in studies of love that focus on

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heterosexual relations and that orient around twosome, middle-class understandings of conjugality in Africa. As my focus on friendship revealed, networks of female friends and metaphorical sisters are doing much of the affective work of love, which in North Atlantic societies is expected to be accomplished by individual couples and nuclear families. These friendships may include sexual intimacies without claiming either clear-cut sexual identity or formal kinship status, nevertheless forming contingent families and a culture of same-sex intimacy – a culture missing from the anthropology of friendship (Bell and Coleman 1999; Desai and Killick 2010).

My examination of age, gender, and notions of reciprocity, rather than egalitarianism, proved to be a productive entry point into the relational dynamics between female lovers in Ghana. In the discursive practices of my respondents, age and gender emerged as deeply intertwined social categories. A term such as "sugar mother," as well as the Akan Twi term *ɔbaa barima*, only applies to mature women who have achieved a certain level of socio-economic status and thus a certain social age. On these grounds, I am highly critical of the speculation that gender-stratification outweighs age-stratification within same-sex relationships on the African continent (Greenberg 1988; Murray 2000). Certainly, in contemporary queer ethnographies gender does indeed figure as a primary route to explore the complex role divisions among female same-sex lovers. This, however, pertains not only to Africa and its diasporas (Wekker 2006; Matebeni 2012), but even more so to ethnographies on *toms* and *dees* in Thailand (Sinnott 2004; Wilson 2004) or *tombois* and *girlfriends* in Indonesia (Wieringa 2005; Blackwood 2010), which have been likened to North Atlantic butch-femme constellations. These studies found gender to be the most significant category to think through paired differences. It seems that with the increasing commodification of sexualized body ideals and the global popularity of the nuclear family, a specifically gendered understanding of binary roles is being promoted as the primary model for same-sex love. The importance of gender within same-sex relations is certainly reflective of the normalization of companionate marriage as the necessary outcome of "modern" romantic love. At the same time, following Strathern (1988), research categories and analytical tools are inevitably linked to the epistemological cultures and subcultures by which researchers are rooted. The attention given to gender as structuring same-sex intimacies in various locations, however,

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may thus speak to the disposition of queer scholars socialized in metropolitan subcultures in which gender has been the main category of difference admitted, conceptualized, and cultivated within otherwise allegedly egalitarian lesbian (and gay) relationships.

Butch-femme theorists have teased out the power and complexity of gender within lesbian relationships (Kennedy and Davis 1993; Martin 1994; Cvetkovich 2003). Not least, they elaborate on the limited capacity of the binary gender framework to account for the negotiations around active and passive, giving and receiving, feminine and masculine within same-sex couples. My research revealed that looking at these dynamic positions through the lens of seniority and relatedness is yet another way to undermine the dichotomies between femininity and masculinity. It further contributes to a deeply relational understanding of intimate power and its aesthetics. Rather than assuming that sexual role divisions are primarily informed by a gendered self-relation, the focus on seniority as a relational category tied to knowledge adds an additional dimension to how our selves shift as we age and move through different relational situations, not only in West Africa. Despite or precisely because a person's sexual self-expression is valued, sustained, and conditioned by situational concepts of what it means to be butch or femme or queer, our (gendered) selfhood may undergo considerable shifts throughout a lifetime. Inasmuch as we depend on others for knowledge about ourselves (Strathern 1988, 132), erotic self-understandings are always relational. They shift depending on who we are with and under what socio-economic and (sub)cultural conditions, and in which way a partner is socially older or younger, and more or less knowing than ourselves.

One term that reflects the significance of knowledge and seniority within same-sex relational configurations is *supi*. In the secondary school context the term, which has traveled along the coasts of Anglophone West Africa, is framed by the idea that there needs to be a more knowledgeable girl who leads her junior into "feeling," interpreting, and acting upon feelings of attraction. She effectively teaches her that love ought to be a give and take. At the same time, the expectation that gifts are to be reciprocated and handed on, means that the senior's knowing position is undermined once the junior starts initiating her own relationships and exchanges. First, I pondered the resulting love triangles in terms of their manipulative character and the boundaries they set to the togetherness of a (potential) couple.

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Increasingly, however, I realized that the negotiations over love and livelihoods tie in with women's notions of gift exchange and the imperative to share in order to get by. By passing on both material and immaterial gifts, including the gift of knowing same-sex passion and surviving heartbreaks, new bonds and contingent families took shape while constantly being tested and reconfigured. Intrusive practices and attempts to monitor the desires and intimacies of friends, lovers, and siblings also speak to the agency of women who have little to claim as their own otherwise. Especially within young women's informal networks and collectivities a certain freedom in being allowed, or even expected, to lie and make up stories (cf. Burch 2013, 64), extended their scope of performing and inventing a personal "life." Faced with the exigencies of everyday survival, some claims to being a "hustler" and a trickster can be vital to asserting one's power and retaining a level of inner "freedom" amidst the precarious and marginalizing conditions of unequally distributed global capital.

Though, specifically in Accra, many women referred to an adult female lover as their *supi*, either playfully or in responding to my questions, I decided not to coin *supi* as an overarching designation for female same-sex desires in Ghana. Instead of privileging one singular term, I was more interested in the many ways in which women interpret their practices and articulate their passions in verbal and non-verbal ways. What renders *supi* a compelling term is the fact that it is used in similar ways as the term *motsoalle* in Lesotho (Kendall 1999), or the Hausa term *kawa* in northern Nigeria (Gaudio 2009) that can refer to a female friend *or* lover. Such terms and especially *supi,* with its popularity on Ghana's coast, suggest a link to of the "black queer Atlantic" (Tinsley 2008, 192) in their reminiscence of expressions like *mi mati* in Afro-Surinamese Creole (Wekker 2006) or *my girl* in African-American English (Tinsley 2010) that span sexual and non-sexual expressions of female intimacies. Certainly, the vagueness implied in terms like friend, girlfriend, or the German *Freundin* is also deployed in a variety of rural and urban settings and situations where people are not "out" or reject the urge to label and single out a same-sex bond as distinctly (homo)sexual. What may be specific about the black queer Atlantic, as conjured in Tinsley's experimental writings, is the legacy of a multitude of maritime contacts between the continents. This maritime contact zone – fraught with violence and exploitation, but also with solitude, desire, and resistance – lingers on

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an ocean that obscures all origins (2008, 192). The grammar of queer intimacies forged on seas and oceans remains watery and in flux, undermining all fixities.

In various spaces and locations female same-sex lovers are described without explicitly invoking sexual connection. Indeed, "lesbian" seems to be the exception in its explicitness. As such it has gained transnational currency and is put to use within very different grammars. When my respondents in Ghana did refer to themselves as lesbian, they verbalized sexuality not as an identity but as praxis. Janet Aidoo's verb construction "doing *supi*" for instance implies erotic "enjoyment," without marking the sexual as foundational to her identity. Rather, an awareness of the power of the erotic, both within relationships and as an internal resource that emerges from "the joy which we know ourselves to be capable of" (Lorde 2007, 57) and the active pursual of such joy, seemed to be vital to her selfhood. Such a notion of actively doing and re-doing same-sex intimacies through daily action has the flexibility to include and absorb more static terms like lesbian/ism without losing its own culture as a practice. The term "knowing women" seeks to account for the articulate ways in which many women in Ghana, and perhaps across the black Atlantic, appeal to same-sex passion and intimacy as a knowledge that is acquired through practice and invigorated by passing it on.

This book began by discussing how working-class women in southern Ghana tend to dismiss the "noise" produced through the antagonism of pro- and anti-gay voices and how they object to the project of naming themselves in sexual terms. Their tacit resistance against an internationally driven activist project ties in with a more general reluctance to commit to prescribed identities. Many of my respondents not only pursued same-sex and opposite-sex intimacies in different locations, they also went by different personal names and nicknames, both African and Euro-American ones; they had several mobile phone numbers (without necessarily owning their own phone); they juggled different formal and informal jobs; and they consulted both western medicine and African traditional healers. While inhabiting different spaces that were governed by conflicting knowledge traditions, the idea of adhering to one single identity did not occur to the women I encountered; fixity in word and action seemed to be undesirable or unaffordable, and at odds with their critical agency. These multiplicities reflect the constant material uncertainties that shape their life praxis.

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But it is also more than that. As Achille Mbembe points out, the postcolonial subject is *per se* bound to navigate the different public spaces that constitute the postcolony. Each public space goes by its own norms and institutional practices and has a logic that is “liable to be entangled with other logics when operating in certain contexts; hence, the postcolonial subject has to learn to bargain in this conceptual marketplace.” This requires “a talent for play” and a “marked ability to manage not just a single identity, but several – flexible enough to negotiate as and when necessary” (2001, 104). This multiplicity seems to hold particularly true for “knowing women” who proudly assert themselves as “hustlers” and describe how they juggle a variety of intertwined affective and material needs and desires. For these same-sex loving women in particular, the necessity of improvising and operating on different registers and the capacity to negotiate multiple positions and identifications is vital to carving out personal spaces and fostering wayward intimacies and cosmopolitan desires under precarious postcolonial conditions.

A young self-identified lesbian in Accra once conveyed the following to me over a bottle of Coca Cola: “at first it was just civilized, but now you have it all over the world.” We were sitting at a street joint during an annual Ga street festival in Accra, in the midst of an exuberant young crowd of people, making up their own “styles” and fashions. While suffused with dreams of travel and transnational connection, her statement pertained to her circle of friends and to the flamboyant young Ghanaians passing by whom she read as queer. It was too loud to launch into a discussion of the “civilized” world and its ongoing quest to construct itself as the sole hub of sexual modernity. Does her rightful claim to be part of this “civilized” gay and lesbian modernity include the queer, as in unruly, practices and desires of those “feeling backward” rather than gay (Love 2007)? And what is the loss inscribed in modernity’s seamless absorption of intimate erotic friendships that do not speak their names, while walking the backstreets of queer globalization?

Inasmuch as the “backward” stories here – of “stealing” and “exchanging” lovers, or of the senseless joys and “spiritual” dangers of losing your mind by giving yourself fully to love – resist the positivist narrative of a liberated gay modernity, they speak to queer-feminist and postcolonial affect theories that reconsidered the gay “promise of happiness” (Ahmed 2010). By reclaiming negativities and re-centering

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uneasy and abject feelings – shame, obsession, or loss, but also the intense pleasures that inhabit the shadows of queer existence – they offer a point of coalition between those marked as Other through the cracks of gay globalization and "inferior by means of the allegation to backwardness" (Love 2007, 6). Bearing with the inconceivability of feeling "queer" as opposed to "gay," queer of color and postcolonial theorists further advocate the forging of provisional alliances and "affective communities" (Gandhi 2006) that are based not on a shared history or identity, but on different and multiple experiences of not fitting in (Anzaldúa 1981). Located at the periphery of the "civilized" with its normative categories of (sexual) difference, intersectional coalitions may have the capacity to undermine their own absorption into a universalizing narrative of a gay, capitalist modernity.

The question of cross-cultural coalition-building has been critical to queer activists on the African continent. They are faced with a conundrum: On the one hand, they are confronted with local and nationalist discourses that condemn LGBTI groups, subcultures, and activism as a foreign import. On the other hand, they are compelled to interrupt the "single story of 'African homophobia'" emanating from generic narratives about African nationalist leaders and homophobic policies. While this story often serves the homonormative, self-congratulatory rhetorics of North Atlantic nation-states, it is also summoned by African LGBTI activists in need of donor moneys. As Okech and Sika argue, the exigencies of donor funding and "'the watchdog' role of international LGBT networks" (2019, 21) have contributed to generic portrayals of African homophobia among activists in Africa. Increasingly, however, these transnational dynamics are resisted by African-based organizations such as the Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL). In 2012 CAL rejected the creation of a special United Nations mandate that was geared toward granting specific rights to LGBTI Africans.

> CAL's main concern was that various African governments that cosigned the resolution for the special rapporteur tended to perceive this commitment as a something separate from their obligations to the social and economic, but also sexual, reproductive and political rights of all people. If human rights defined in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity are thus isolated it makes it easier for states to regress back towards affirmations that queer activists and feminists are un-African alien bodies, otherwise why would they need 'special' institutions and rights? (Sika and Okech 2019, 26)

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Queer and feminist African activists have been hesitant toward the imposition of policies that separate sexuality from other human rights, such as the right to mobility. Thus, Tamale critically compared the political economy of homophobia in African contexts to the rising tides of xenophobia in Europe and draws out parallels between the ways in which queer Africans are scapegoated and barred from cultural citizenship at home and the exclusion and inhumane treatment African migrants face in the global North (2013, 227). In Europe, these racialized exclusions happen in a setting where testifying to one's acceptance of gay culture has become a yardstick of a person's progressiveness that makes them fit for European citizenship (Mesquita and Purtschert 2016).

Both, North Atlantic representations of African queers in need of salvation and of African homophobes that should be educated and/or deported pose a challenge to queer postcolonial activism and scholarship. Inadvertently, a certain paternalism that racializes and others African bodies and intimacies is resurfacing in the field of Queer African studies. Keguro Macharia scrutinizes the well-meaning "western" desires to explore African queers or safe them from African homophobes (2018). As Macharia warns in the renowned *Journal for Lesbian and Gay Studies GLQ*, "queer African voices and experiences will be absorbed as 'data' or 'evidence' not as modes of theory or challenges to the conceptual assumptions that drive queer studies" (2018, 185). As in every field, research on queer Africa is not immune to the mistakes previous generations made when descending upon Africa. While refusing to be "area-studied," Macharia celebrates the "African genius of waywardness" that "accumulates odd stories, little moments, folksy wisdom and seemingly disconnected anecdotes." Rather than following the aesthetics of theory it is marked by a "stubborn refusal to come to the point" (Macharia 2018, 188). This stubborn refusal is nowhere more poignant than in my respondents' passive resistance to labeling themselves, in their creation of new terms, and their creativity in confronting hostilities and adverse living conditions.

Waywardness is also embedded in newly created words and phrases that take on a life of their own in the circles around "knowing women" like Okaile in Accra. This way with words, which includes the twisting and bending of words appropriated from or inspired by the global LGBT lexicon, is not unique to working-class women in Ghana. Slips and mispronunciations have been deployed by queer activists and writers throughout the continent. At a conference in Nairobi in

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March 2014, Binyavanga Wainaina, for instance, spoke about how he first came across the acronym LGBT. In doing so, he continually pronounced LGBT as "ligibit"(Matebeni and Msibi 2015, 1). For some queers in the audience this conscious slip momentarily opened up a new language that was detached from the rights-discourse, as Zethu Matebeni and Thabo Msibi observed: His vocabulary offered "a different way of naming oneself" and of making "identity categorization pronounceable" and impossibilities possible (2015, 1).

The peripheral role of African women within queer and academic discourses compelled me to search for women's own language. What I found was a rich repertoire of metaphors and indirect and poetic ways of invoking love and friendship, self, and society. In conclusion, I would like to use yet another metaphor, one which was imparted to me by a "knowing woman" in Suakrom, Ma'Abena Oppong. Though Ma'Abena is not a regular churchgoer, she identifies as a Christian. When we first met, she was looking for a suitable church congregation and followed the "preachings" of popular charismatic men on the radio. However, she did not buy into the devilishness attributed to "lesbianism" by many pastors in the aftermath of the imagined "homoconference." It is simply the pastor's job to preach, she argued. Interviewing Ma'Abena together with Josephine, I asked her how she has the strength to believe that it is a "normal" thing to kiss a woman, as she says. Ma'Abena replied by telling us the story of how she consulted a pastor about the legitimacy of female same-sex passion. The analogy the pastor made, speaks to the Ghanaian fabrics displayed on the title page of this book:

> *When they started talking about it on the FM [radio], I went to ask a certain pastor*. [...] *And I asked, 'Oh Pastor' – the church is Roman, near our place, the* man *is a* young guy *[and I asked] "so this thing, is it in the Bible?" And he said it was in, but it was something which happened in Sodom and Gomolia or something, something.* [J.A. Gomorrah.] *Exactly,* long time. *So for him, he* felt *that whatever happens, when it's time is past, it comes back again. So that's how the world is. And he said* – even, first*, our mothers, in the past, they wore something like "kimplin" clothing. That passed away. Later they wore something called "shada" that also came and went. So (.) it's one of those things of the world that goes and comes* [...] *So it all* depends *upon your heart.*[1]

In Ma'Abena's rendering of the young pastor's voice, same-sex intimacies are considered a historical practice, fashionable since biblical

[1] Interview with Ma'Abena Oppong at Suakrom, April 25, 2008.

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times. He compared it to an old Ghanaian fabric and a dress pattern that keeps returning in different shapes and with different names. Ultimately, these patterns are classics and will never disappear. Ma'Abena denied the pastor's nosy questions as to whether she herself was "doing it." Instead she seemed to find solace in the image of the fabric and the certainty that her heart alone is in charge of deciding how the fabric becomes her. Without knowing what exactly inspires Ma'Abena to think against homophobia, the heart appears to be the seat of her personal strength and certainty.

While the intimate discourse and practices of "hustling" women who love women in Ghana are not nearly as silent as they might seem to be, the question remains whether they can make themselves heard and under what conditions. Spivak controversially argued that although the subaltern woman does have agency on her own terms, she is not in the position to publicly articulate herself (1988). Since subalternity is undermined in the very moment it is articulated and taken up as such, the subaltern experience is by definition never fully accessible. Rather than providing political solutions or theoretical formulas for the emancipation of subaltern women and thereby usurping or assimilating their experience, Spivak insists on maintaining it as an "inaccessible blankness" and thereby pointing at the limits of western knowledge (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2015, 199). Conversely, approaching the subaltern experiences of "knowing women" in Ghana, requires not only the freeing of "our imaginations" (Wainaina 2014) in and about Africa, but the decolonization of the disciplines and epistemologies that systematically prevent certain forms of knowledge along the established lines of power. If decolonization starts with the process of "un-learning our privilege as our loss" (Spivak 1990, 9), we must constantly grapple with the inherent limitations of our privileged positions.

Privilege is not unlearnt by mystifying "knowing women" or appropriating their intimate knowledge. This implies critical reflection of our own institutional being and resistance to the internal dynamics of disciplined, academic knowledge production. While there is no ready-made formula to decolonize the established categories of knowledge and their inherent power relations, the project of transforming the knowledge we (dis)identify with and reducing the privileged distance to those whom we seek to study and know, requires creative, counter-intuitive, and unprecedented methodologies and practices – their results must remain radically open-ended.

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