

PART ONE

Setting the Scenes

Situating Sasso

Mapping Effeminate Subjectivities and Homoerotic Desire in Postcolonial Ghana

I have always, I think, opposed the stereotypic definitions of “masculine” and “feminine,” not only because I thought it was a lot of merchandising nonsense, but rather because I always found the either/or implicit in those definitions antithetical to what I was all about—and what revolution for self is all about—the whole person. And I am beginning to see, especially lately, that the usual notions of sexual differentiation in roles is an obstacle to political consciousness, that the way those terms are generally defined and acted upon in this part of the world is a hindrance to full development.

—TONI CADE BAMBARA, ON *THE ISSUE OF ROLES* (1970, 123–124)

When I first arrived in Accra to do my fieldwork in 2011, little did I know that there were clusters of self-identified effeminate men, collectively known as *sasso*, in the city and surrounding suburbs. I had heard rumors that there were bars and hang-outs that catered to gays, like Chester’s in Osu and Terry’s in Adabraka.¹ Although it was widely known that these spots existed, that they were associated with homosexuals kept many from visiting these bars lest they be identified as homosexual. Those who patronized these spaces did so at night.

I first encountered the term *sasso* during the early stages of my ethnographic fieldwork in 2011, when I was invited by Gina, a public health official working at the National AIDS Control Program (NACP), to meet with a group of six men in their mid-twenties to early thirties. The men initially introduced themselves to me as men who have sex with men (MSM) because of their active participation in HIV/AIDS outreach in Ghana. Admittedly, MSM was a public health label popularized by NGOs that undertook projects to minimize the transmission of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Ghana. At the time, I was unfamiliar with the term *sasso*. It was during my ethnography that I discovered that the term described self-identified effeminate men and persons, who, irrespective of their gender, engaged in homosexual sex.

Following this discovery, I pondered whether LGBT+ human rights organizations working in Ghana knew of the existence of *sasso* and if the term featured in their public health programs for sexual minorities alongside MSM. I came to understand that the existence of *sasso* was paradoxically a peculiarly Ghanaian articulation of sexual subjectivity laced with neoliberal, neocolonial, and postcolonial influences. The complex interweave of the local, the transnational, and the global was made palpable during my encounter with Iddrissu. In his late twenties at the time of our conversation, here is how Iddrissu described his initial encounter with the *sasso* community:

I was invited to this party at Terry's by a friend. At the party there were many people, men, old and young, and women, also old and young, in attendance. Most of the people in the party acted in a certain way, you know? The men I saw there, some of them were very effeminate. They were cross-dressed, while others danced very suggestively with each other without restraint. These are things that people of the same sex no longer do in public. Before, it was OK for men to dance with men and women to dance with women with nobody saying that they are gay. These days if you go to a wedding, funeral, or outdoor [christening ceremony], you can't even do that because you will be accused of being gay. But when I went to that party at Terry's and I saw the way people were acting, it was interesting to me. I suddenly felt comfortable and proceeded to ask my friend why he invited me. And he promptly said he did because he knew I was *sasso*; that I liked men like him. In response, I asked what "*sasso*" meant. To which he said it refers to a man who likes to have sex with men, a man who acts effeminately, and women who like to have sex with women or also act masculinely. I said to him but I don't act effeminately and he said but I know you like men by the way you eye men like me who act effeminately and pay attention to us. I didn't know how to respond to his observation, Kwame; because I know that it was true, that I was sexually attracted to men and that maybe I was gay. Never did I know what *sasso* entailed until I went to the party, which was attended by people some of whom identified as gay, lesbian, while many others quite comfortably self-identified as *sasso*. It was a surprising event, to say the least. I say that I am "*sasso*" to those who are aware of the term. Sometimes, too, I use "gay" only when I believe the person with whom I am interacting will not be familiar with the term [*sasso*]. However, I am very, very cautious who I tell I am gay. One never knows in this country.

Iddrissu's initiation into the *sasso* community threw him into overlapping and multiple worlds that decentered rigid Eurocentric framings of gender and sexuality in non-Euro-American contexts while paradoxically reinforcing these categories. Furthermore, his account magnified how the increased visibility of LGBT+ human rights, concomitant with a hyperattentiveness to gay subjects, eroded those homosocial practices so prevalent in the public sphere. Iddrissu's narrative reminded me of an experience I had during college. A group of students hurled homophobic epithets at my cousin and me simply because we had our arms around each other's shoulders. At the time, I did not fathom why that measure of affection between men had to be reduced to sexual attraction, nor did I comprehend how two men publicly displaying emotional intimacy constituted an act of sexual indiscretion.

The narrative shared by Iddrissu and my encounter in college capture the contests between local terms (*sasso*) and global categories (LGBT+). In general, sex and gender, as African feminists have observed, shift in meaning when they appear in African contexts. The Nigerian sociologist Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, in her critical assessment of the category “woman” among the Yorùbá people of Nigeria, notes that “the woman question is a Western-derived issue—a legacy of the age-old somatocentricity in Western thought. It is an imported problem, and it is not indigenous to the Yorùbá. If it has become relevant in Yorùbá studies, the history of that process needs to be told” (1997, ix). Oyèwùmí’s position on the controversy surrounding the place of women among the Yoruba is illuminating not only because it invites a deeper engagement with the category of woman in this West African culture but also because it pays attention to the historical processes that introduced the “the woman question.”

Like Oyèwùmí, I approach LGBT+ categories in the Ghanaian context by asking how *sasso*, in their engagements and practices, might complicate what it means to be LGBT+ in neoliberal Ghana. In this chapter I diagram how “*sasso*” (Ga) (or “*saso*” [Akan]), a category encapsulating self-identified effeminate men, men and women who engage in homoerotic sex, and men who act effeminately (but are not self-identified effeminate men) and women who act masculinely, challenges received ideas and notions that capture Ghana as a heterosexual nation.² I elaborate on how the term confronts and confounds normative and hegemonic Western framings of gender and sexuality by illuminating how these categories get challenged when trafficked from one cultural context to another (Amadiume 1987a; Oyèwùmí 1997; Wekker 2006; Gaudio 2009; Banks 2011).

As the Black feminist Toni Cade Bambara (1970), in her essay “On the Issue of Roles,” suggests, the implicit assumption that gender categories are reducible to the male/female binary is not merely inadequate but “antithetical” to the construction of persons. In other words, the masculine/feminine dichotomy, central to Western ideologies, stultifies other ways of embodying gender and sexual difference by generating false equivalences that leave in their wake “the madness of “masculinity” and “femininity” (1970, 125). Elsewhere in the essay, Bambara questions the need to use the West as a point from which to evaluate our identities by elaborating on how “we make many false starts because we have been programmed to depend on white models or white interpretations of non-white models, so we don’t even ask the correct questions, much less begin to move in a correct direction. Perhaps we need to face the terrifying and overwhelming possibility that there are no models, that we shall have to create from scratch” (1970, 133).

What will it mean to turn away from “white models or white interpretations of non-white models”? Embedded in a milieu where vernacular articulations of sexual and gendered subjectivities like *sasso* intertwine with nonvernacular articulations like LGBT+, I argue that collectively, *sasso* embody a constellation of identities and practices that reveal the scrambled nature of postcolonial subject formation.

SASSO AND SASOFO: CONSTELLATIONS
OF EFFEMINATE MASCULINITIES IN GHANA

To be specific, I use *sasso* to describe the assemblage of men bonded by effeminate identification, and homoerotic intimacy and desire. Since the majority of my interlocutors resided in or converged in Jamestown, which is predominantly Ga-speaking, *sasso* is ethnolinguistically of Ga extraction. In that regard, these effeminate men are not very different from *sasofo*, the community of effeminate men studied by the anthropologist William Banks (2013). Perhaps a minor difference is that the *sasso* I interacted with during my fieldwork mostly interfaced or were familiar with LGBT+ human rights NGOs like BURJ, among other organizations that engaged in public health programs addressing the health needs of sexual minorities. In his anthropological study of this community, Banks observes that “*saso* is an in-group term used to refer to members of this community and their subculture. Members are referred to as *Sasofo* (in Twi, lit. ‘Saso people’). Many of my interlocutors trace the origin of the term ‘Saso,’ to the expression ‘Mi Saso,’ which they translate as ‘my mate’ or ‘my colleague’” (2013, 265).

Building on Banks, I insist that *sasofo* and *sasso* share overlapping lifeways, the only distinguishing marker being that the former is found in an area dominated by the Akan whereas the latter is found in a predominantly Ga area like Jamestown, my ethnographic site. Hence, geographic location and ethnicity are key but not mutually exclusive sites for the construction of difference among *sasso*. For example, the *sasofo* studied by Banks mostly reside in the Central Region of Ghana, and *sasso* can be mostly found in Accra and other parts of Ghana. Though not entirely exclusive, *sasofo* operate in worlds in which traditional African spirituality remains a defining marker of their identity.

In sum, *sasso* describes a sexual subjectivity that both interweaves and interplays with being Ghanaian and global, vernacular and transnational, Christian and un-Christian, and rural and urban. The men whose stories and excerpts inform this book also bear some resemblance to the ‘*yan daudu* among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria, whose lives have been richly documented by the anthropologist Rudolph Gaudio; yet *sasso* are also quite distinct from them (2009). Gaudio notes that he “found tantalizing references to ‘*yan daudu* in relation to ‘prostitution’ [*karuwanci*] and *Bori*, the Hausa cult of spirit-possession whose practitioners are widely condemned by orthodox Muslims as ‘pagan’ [*arna*] or ‘heathen’ [*kafir*]. In most of these texts the term ‘*yan daudu* was translated as ‘homosexuals,’ ‘transvestites,’ ‘pimps,’ none of which turned out to be truly accurate, though they all convey a partial sense of ‘*yan daudu*’s activities and social identities” (2009, 17).

If the *sasofo* studied by Banks are enmeshed in spiritual practices, the lives of ‘*yan daudu* are similarly entangled with the Islamic religious virtues of being, becoming, and belonging, while being influenced and shaped by shifts wrought by colonial domination and trans-Saharan connections. *Sasso* subjectivities overlap with but are also distinct from ‘*yan daudu*. For instance, *sasso* and ‘*yan daudu* are

perceived as men who act like women. Unlike the ‘yan daudu, however, most of the sasso I interacted with had their experiences shaped by Christianity. Yet it can be adduced that sasso and ‘yan daudu are both shaped by the ongoing histories of colonialism, neoliberalism, global human rights interventions, and more. In effect, sasso, like most postcolonial subjects, are scrambled by a violent past, the effects of which continue to be visible in their relations to institutions such as the church, marriage, family, political economy and the law, and human rights NGOs. Sasso are constituted and distinguished by class, grades of effeminacy, ethnicity, educational level, and their degree of involvement with transnational NGOs and related Eurocentric identities. To be clear, their self-making strategies also challenge our understanding of “normal,” drawing from—and complicating—established values and practices of their communities.

TRACING TOPOGRAPHIES OF QUEER INTIMACIES
AND DESIRES: JAMESTOWN AND THE COMPLEX
OF SASSO SUBJECTIVITIES

Jamestown is one of the oldest suburbs in Accra, Ghana’s capital city. Located on the coast near the central business district, it is predominated by the Ga-Adangbe ethnolinguistic group, or in simpler terms, the Ga ethnic group (Kropp-Dakubu 1997; Odotei 1996; Fayorsey 1992).³ Economically, fishing, the dominant profession in Jamestown, has been generally male dominated. The suburb also hosts the large open market, Salaga Market. Jamestown’s close proximity to Accra’s central business district means that most of its residents are either fully or partially involved in the informal or formal economic sectors of the region.

Ongoing diversification of Ghana’s urban economy, evidenced by changes in the service, information technology, and financial sectors, to give but a partial list, is shaping fishing as the lynchpin of Jamestown’s economy. That Ghana is embedded in a global economy also implies that residents in this community participate in and contribute to global economic circuits in various degrees. Despite the reverberations of a neoliberal economy that restructured Ghana’s largely informal economy through projects orchestrated by the World Bank and IMF, and later, the European Union and China, fishing continues to be a key part of Jamestown’s economy. The fisheries industry animating the suburb connects it to other coastal towns in the Greater Accra Region, the Central Region to the west, and the Volta Region to the east. The sasso who participated in this ethnography had a variety of connections to fishermen, ranging from intimate, to familial, to commercial.

Besides fishing, the community has a rich culture of pugilism. World-class boxers and title holders like Azumah Nelson, Ike “Bazooka” Quartey, and “Bukom Banku,” among others, all have connections to Jamestown. Markers of slavery and colonialism such as the Usher and James Forts, historically slaveholding posts, are scattered through the suburb. Insignia of a past whose effects continue into the

present, Jamestown remains a transhistorical and transnational space animated by people whose identities are nervously linked to and constitutive of the making of the Black Atlantic world. Not too long ago, these slaveholding forts functioned as medium security prisons. The historical and enduring presence of these carceral complexes reminds us of Jamestown's deep connections to the present prison industrial complex, and the extent to which the transatlantic slave trade incised the veins of Africa through invidious and violent systems of human capture, displacement, and dislocation (Smallwood 2007; Mustakeem 2016; Pierre 2013; Rodney 1972).

The commencement of this ethnography in 2011 was sparked by an observation made in passing by the Ghanaian sociologist Akosua Darkwah to me that “when two Ga women say they are going to a funeral or a wedding on a weekend, it is an alibi or a coverup for an opportunity to engage in homoerotic intimacy.” It did not come as a surprise to me when the sasso I encountered at the National AIDS Control Program (NACP) office shared that they were from Jamestown. These sasso have been involved in projects that centered on access to health care for key populations, which included men who had sex with men (MSM) in Jamestown in different capacities. Most served as peer educators for local and international health and human rights organizations.

Local NGOs like the Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights, Ghana (CEPHERG), founded in 1998, and the Ghana-West Africa Program to Combat AIDS and STI (WAPCAS), established in 1996, are examples of early organizations that had LGBT+ issues on their radar. These organizations worked in concert with international NGOs like Family Health International, now known as FHI 360, to support outreach projects on access to health care among key populations, specifically men who have sex with men (MSM), female sex workers (FSWs), persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs), and the survivors of gender-based violence. These various projects mainstreamed terms such as MSM and FSW in public health discourses, and the sasso I encountered at the National HIV/AIDS Secretariat in Accra in 2011 participated in some capacity on the various projects undertaken by these organizations.

Between 2011 and 2014, I undertook several visits to the community—the longest visit occurring between May 2013 and August 2014—hoping to understand the complex of homoerotic desire and intimacy in Jamestown as well as the roles NGOs played in sasso life. My ethnographic research entailed engaging in participant observation, collecting life stories, and serving as the resident consultant of the NGO Bring Us Rights and Justice (BURJ), which offered free human rights services to sasso and other sexual, gender, ethnic, disabled, and class minorities. Incidentally, this was also a period during which news about homosexuality in Ghana dominated the news media. Clergy and members of the civil society alike were vocal about what they perceived to be Ghana's diminishing moral standards.⁴

It can be assumed that this moral and political coverage partly explains the antihomosexual violence that rocked Jamestown following rumors that sasso had

organized a homosexual wedding in the community for a lesbian couple. Before this incident, Jamestown, for most sasso, was a space where they could express their femininity and engage in clandestine sexual encounters with men without fearing sanctions from the community. The wide acceptance of effeminate masculinity together with the invisible presence of homoerotic practices is arguably linked to the nature of social organization among the Ga people on the coast.

Understanding Jamestown's Profuse Homoerotic Networks

Anthropological studies of the Ga, the indigenous ethnic group in Jamestown, shed some light on the vibrant homoerotic economy in the suburb. The copresence of homoeroticism and heteroeroticism among the Ga people can be linked to the duolocational pattern of postmarital residence characteristic of the Ga. Here, the bride and groom reside in separate residences (Field 1940; Fayorsey 1992; Odotei 1996). Margaret Field, in her ethnography entitled *Social Organization of the Ga People*, asserts that "Ga men do not live with their wives. They live with their 'brothers' in groups of from three to ten, and their sons join them as soon as they are too big for the women's compounds" (1940, 3). The Ghanaian social anthropologist Clare Kor-kor Fayorsey, like Fields, observes that "due to the separation of spouses in Central Accra female matrikin reside together, whilst their husbands live elsewhere. The co-residence of urban Ga women enables them to engage in joint economic ventures" (1992, 20). I draw on Fields and Fayorsey to argue that this pattern of after-marriage interactions not only influenced economic connections but also shaped political and gender relations, thus creating an environment for the copresence of heteroerotic and homoerotic intimacies. Economically, if husbands embarked on fishing expeditions, wives remained in their natal homes awaiting their husband's catch. The fish caught during these expeditions were either smoked and sold in the market or sold fresh on the market by the women. These economic contexts served as social and political domains for women to define and assert their agency.

The absence of husbands enabled married women to bond with other married and single women in the community in spaces like the market and at ritual gatherings like weddings, naming ceremonies (outdoorings) and funerals. Despite their heteronormative qualities, these rituals, some of which are elaborated in chapter 4, were paradoxically sites at which homoerotic connections were established between men and men and women and women. These complex homosocial bonds notwithstanding, there was also the ritual involving cross-dressed boys who accompanied fishermen on their fishing expeditions.⁵

Although the act of cross-dressing has received scant historical and ethnographic study, it draws attention to the fluidity of gender categories in Jamestown, justifying the profuse network of sasso, some of whom cross-dress on occasion. The coincidence of a culture of male cross-dressers in a town animated by male-dominated professions like fishing and pugilism paradoxically both troubles and reinforces heteronormativity.

The current vernaculars and worldviews that shape the *sasso* with whom I interacted—both in Jamestown and other parts of Accra—are therefore the byproducts of a complex environment, the history of which is irreducible to traditional vocabularies of human sexuality and the transnational lexicon on gender and queer identities which mostly use the Western world as a starting point. If, as Toni Cade Bambara (1970) suggests, to begin with the West as point of departure is to assume a “false start,” then what would it mean to make a nonwhite location as the point of departure?

SASSO VERNACULARS AND WORLDVIEWS

Who are *sasso*? What are their locations in the community of Jamestown, Accra, and Ghana? How should they be positioned in ongoing debates between the nation-state and LGBT+ human rights formations? While these questions do not have simple answers, the rather obscure etymology of *sasso* bespeaks this difficulty.⁶ In the Ga language, *sasso* means “coequal” or “to occupy the same status.” A similar term, “*seso*,” which translates into English as “coequal,” exists among the Akan, Ghana’s largest ethnolinguistic group. Among the Akan, *seso* is expressed to distinguish the status of a person within a hierarchy defined by age, gender, class, ethnicity, and urban or rural location.⁷ When used to denote gender difference, the term is used to emphasize masculinity as the domain of men, deemphasizing femininity as a result. The following anecdote, shared by my mother, is a good example:

Growing up in the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies, it was often presumed that education was not for girls. But for some girls, especially those born into Christian and educated families, the opportunity to access primary and secondary education was quite easy. Those who made it into the university were very few nevertheless. As for me, I was asked by my elder brother to go and learn to sew. He thought that, as a girl, my destiny was to become a seamstress or a stay-at-home wife, who helped with the upkeep of the household and the family. School was no place for a girl, he often said. I was, however, obstinate. You know that I don’t leave anything to chance. I chose instead to go to school. With the support of my mother, that is your grandmother, I went to school, and I excelled very well. Because I refused to pursue what your uncle had suggested he called me “*obaa akokonini*” (female rooster). He thought that my refusal implied that I had challenged him. By calling me a female rooster, he was intent on putting me in my place. He wanted to prove to me that I was not his coequal [*seso*].

Thus, some men primarily deploy *seso* to fortify their masculinity, as my uncle does. Referring to my mother as a female rooster, he reminds her that she is acting unconventionally by refusing to comply with his commands. The configuration of coequality also actively operates in the domain of class-making. In the latter dimension, the affluent use it to brace their class location to prevent its potential breach by those at the lower rungs of the class ladder. For example, people in

positions of power are, without hesitation, served by their guards, drivers, and laborers, sometimes called houseboys, who are not their coequals.

Below, I turn to the use of *sasso* among the Ga, arguing that while it is similar to *seso*, it has a polymorphous meaning. Therefore, the following question is key: why do self-identified effeminate men utilize *sasso* as their terminology for their community and various groups? I provide no definite answer in this book, especially when we consider that *sasso* imbue several meanings to the term. However, I share the following speculations. First, *sasso* is a term distinguishable from *Kwadwo Besia*, a term used derogatorily to describe effeminate men. Second, *sasso* could possibly describe same-sex relationships as sex among “equals”—whereby such equality is presumed to be based on the same gender of those engaging in a sexual act.⁸

INTRODUCING KWADWO BESIA

To understand Kwadwo Besia, I briefly chart the naming system among the Akan, who, according to the Ghanaian linguist Kofi Agyekum, have names that “are very unique because each person has an automatic birthday first name that points to the day of the week that s/he was born” (2006, 212). For example, my first name, Kwame, references the fact that I was born on Saturday. In a similar fashion, Kwadwo, sometimes spelled Kojo, the first name in Kwadwo Besia, is the name among the Akan that refers to males born on Monday. Among the Ewe, an ethnic group in the southeastern part of Ghana, the variant of Kwadwo/Kojo is Kodzo. In general, the naming system among the Akan and other ethnolinguistic groups in Ghana tends to incline toward dual gender configurations. Thus, if Kwadwo is the name assigned to the male born on Monday, then “Adwoa” is his female counterpart.

Etymologically, Kwadwo can be interpreted as “calm” or “peaceful” (Agyekum 2006, 215). The prefix (Kwa) is a hanging syllable, and the suffix (dwo) means “cool,” “calm,” “passive,” and “patient.” *Besia* is the Akan—specifically Fante, a dialect—term for “female.” I speculate that Kwadwo is assigned the suffix *besia* because it means “calmness,” “patience,” “tenderness,” and “passivity,” as opposed to “haughtiness,” “impatience,” and “aggression,” which are considered masculine traits in this milieu (Agyekum 2006, 214).

Growing up in Ghana in the late eighties and early nineties, I was socialized to interpret Kwadwo Besia as a derogatory category and was often referred to by that label because of my effeminate mannerisms. I was taunted for being girlish because I did not exude aggressively male traits. Name-called incessantly by friends, family members, and strangers, I was always reminded to act according to existing gender ideologies. Just as my mother was called a female rooster by my uncle, Kwadwo Besia was hurled at me to compel me to conform to customary gender expectations set for boys. It shoehorned my gender identity into the pigeonhole

of masculinity despite the contentious conditions that animated becoming a man in Ghana, a convoluted process documented by the historian Stephan Miescher (2005). In *Making Men in Ghana*, Miescher provides rich historical details on how missionary Christian and colonial educational ideologies on gender and sexuality conflicted with indigenous notions of masculinity. The irreconcilable nature of these tensions scrambled the masculinities and femininities of colonized subjects in the colonial situation.

Kwadwo Besia has increasingly surfaced as a deprecating term. In Ghana's intensifying homophobic landscape, the term has become synonymous with homosexual. Despite the invidious transposition of homosexuality onto Kwadwo Besia, *sasso* occasionally deploy the label among themselves, oftentimes offensively and jocularly on certain occasions. If *sasso* is now a popular term, it is not because it avoids the freights Kwadwo Besia carries but because it allows effeminacy some room for flexibility in a context that disciplines nonheteronormative bodies. Little surprise, therefore, that the term *sasso* interweaves alternating parts of speech; in particular, noun, verb, and adjective. In this book, however, I focus mainly on self-identified effeminate men.

BLURRING PARTS OF SPEECH: SASSO SUBJECTIVITIES AS MULTIPlicitous INSTANTIATIONS OF DESIRING SELVES

The historically evolving distinctions and definitions in terms used to refer to homosexual men highlight the fact that *sasso* is not simply a neat placeholder. In other words, its etymology is a matter of debate. The search for etymology sometimes leads to the essentialization of origins in the same way that the quest for sources serves to fictitiously portray the "original" as authentic, untouched, and unproblematic. Retreating from reducing *sasso* to its etymology, I unpack how *sasso* blurs the multiple parts of speech that define it, alternating as it moves through time and space. The assemblage of meanings that converge in *sasso* constitutes the amphibious ground for the performance and embodiment of the "multiplicitous self."

In her highly influential anthropological study of female same-sex intimacy among Afro-Surinamese women, the anthropologist Gloria Wekker captures the multiplicitous self as "a self that is multilayered, complex, integrating various instantiations of 'I'" (2006, 12). The phenomenon of "mati work," which describes "an old institution . . . in which women have sexual relations with men and with women, either simultaneously or consecutively" (2006, 2), is central to the ethnography. For Wekker, the relationships that formed within this institution did not easily align with Eurocentric conceptions of homoeroticism and homosexuality; rather, they undermined hegemonic conceptions of gender and sexuality. Indeed, they were reminiscent of "the West African-based cultural archive of

sexual subjectivity as slaves belabored it under specific demographic and colonial political circumstances in the former Dutch colony, Suriname” (2006, 2). I find Wekker’s meditation insightful for two reasons. First, it presents an entirely different sexual and gender framework for dissecting intimacy and desire. Second, her reading refuses to capitulate to Western models of gender and sexuality. The institution of mati work is an example that shines light on the limitations of Euro-American-centric labels that circulate hegemonically in both scholarly and nonscholarly worlds.

Aware of the many meanings of *sasso* in this project, I focus, in particular, on effeminacy as one of *sasso*’s key distinguishing markers. It is not my intention to reduce *sasso* to effeminacy, rather I am interested in highlighting the contestations and complexities encoded by the term. Just as Wekker observes that mati work among Afro-Surinamese women is not limited to the sexual acts between women, so I argue that *sasso* is reducible to neither effeminacy nor engagement in homosexual acts. The elasticity of *sasso* signals its “amphibiousness,” defying any attempts at homogenization. From its etymological meaning as “coequal” to its various iterations as a noun, verb, and adjective, *sasso* constitutes a constellation of sexual and gendered practices and relationships. And as an assemblage, it does not easily map onto Western articulations of gender and sexuality that circulate in heteronationalist state and homonationalist LGBT+ human rights discourses. The irreducibility of *sasso* is evidenced by how its usage is contingent on whether it is employed as a noun or a verb or an adjective by members within or outside the *sasso* community.

BEING AND DOING SASSO AND WHAT MAKES
ONE SASSO: NOUN, VERBAL, AND ADJECTIVAL
DIMENSIONS OF SASSO SELF-MAKING

It became apparent during my fieldwork that effeminacy does not necessarily make one *sasso* and that *sasso* was a capacious term. Terry, forty-five at the time of our interview and one of the oldest *sasso* to participate in this ethnography, aptly captures the byzantine nature of effeminacy and *sasso* identification:

There are some men who display effeminate mannerisms and have no idea what *sasso* means. We, in the *sasso* community, that is, those self-identified effeminate men who call ourselves “*sasso*,” will call those effeminate men “*sasso*,” but they may never have heard of the term and, even if they have, will choose not to use it. This is an important distinction to remember, Kwame. Not all effeminate men are *sasso*, especially if they choose not to identify themselves in that manner. *Sasso* (self-identified effeminate men) may call those men “*sasso*,” but that by no means implies that they want to be called “*sasso*” until they comfortably choose to identify with the community and become part of us. Effeminacy is still an important marker for us though. It allows us to know our “sisters,” even if they are not yet in the collective. If these

men are associated with professions like food vending, interior design, tailoring and dressmaking, the list is long, we also know they are *sasso* because in Ghana most of these professions are mostly female oriented.

Sasso does not merely reference effeminacy, as Terry's insightful description evokes. In this narrative, he evinces how the assertion of agency is paramount to how one embraces or rejects *sasso* identity. Against this backdrop, while *sasso* are likely to address an effeminate man as "*sasso*" because he supposedly exhibits feminine tendencies, the person in question may not willingly self-identify as such.

What does it mean to "do" *sasso* in a world in which the possibilities of queer intimacy and kinship are imagined as impossible? What communities and connections are born out of this "doing"? These questions have been tackled by several performance studies theorists, especially those invested in Black queer performance and the performance of queer people and women of color in marginalized settings (Butler 1990; Muñoz 1999; Bailey 2013). As I asked in the introduction, in what ways do *sasso* embody a gender and sexual subjectivity that troubles Western conceptions of gender and sexuality? How do they already trouble gender and sexuality in a manner that already troubles the gender trouble about which Judith Butler (1990) writes?

Scholars of Black queer performance have long plotted how nonheteronormative Black subjects, precisely because of their racial, gender, and heterosexual non-normativities, make worlds within frames that attempt to circumscribe their being (Johnson 2005; Bailey 2013; McCune 2014; Madison 2005). Touching on what performance engenders, especially in ballroom culture, Marlon Bailey suggests that "performance makes it possible to revise, negotiate, and reconstitute gender and sexual categories and norms" (2013, 18). Bailey's intimation demonstrates that nonheteronormative subjects straddle structures that shape them and, in the process, shape those structures in contentious and sometimes incoherent ways. Hence, if sociocultural and political-racial structures are positioned to socialize subjects into preexisting categories of identity, then, by that very logic, subjects uneasily shape the institutions that make subjects out of them.

In other words, to do *sasso*, to be *sasso*, and to become *sasso* are part of a constellation of strategies, both implicit and explicit, intentional and unintentional, employed by *sasso* to traverse a terrain assailed and made precarious by the tensions between the heteronormative nation-state and homonormative LGBT+ human rights organizations. Thus, to "do" *sasso* is irreducible to the performance of effeminacy and intertwines uneasily with the act of engaging in homosexual sex.⁹ For example, Ayikwei, a *sasso* who works as a hairdresser in Jamestown, when asked what *sasso* meant quickly retorted: "To put it simply, all *sasso* are not the same. We have different styles and we express them differently. Sometimes these styles result from who we associate with, whether or not we go to church, if one attended a private or public school, and many more." Ayikwei's definition of what *sasso* entails casts light on how problematic the homogenization of *sasso*

by the nation-state and LGBT+ human rights organizations can be. He notes, too, that sasso are not a uniform constituency.

This lack of uniformity is evidenced by how sasso create and navigate worlds differently by drawing on the distinct yet overlapping resources at their disposal. These world-making processes are contingent on factors including but not limited to class, ethnicity, and proximity to whiteness. “All sasso are not the same” can also reference how the sexual position one takes in the moment of the homosexual sex—whether the sasso is a top or bottom or either—shapes their construction of sasso identity. It also captures the degree to which religious affiliation impacts how one embodies and performs effeminacy. This means that identifying as Muslim, Christian, atheist, or traditional African can influence how a sasso molds or distinguishes themselves from other sasso. I have shown above how the community of sasoso studied by William Banks in Ghana’s Central Region are distinguishable from the sasso in this book because spiritual practices are significant to the constitution of their subjectivity.

Another interpretation of sasso is offered by Desmond, a food vendor in Jamestown, who agrees with Ayikwei’s interpretation that sasso are not all the same and that factors and forces abound to explain why sasso are a variegated constituency. Desmond goes a step further to describe sasso as a man who “sashays around, swinging [his] waist in a twirling fashion, throwing [his] wrists about effortlessly without fear of sanctions, and possessing the gait of a model. I will call such a person a sister, or, better still, auntie. Sasso are like that. Sometimes, too, when we exaggerate, it is like you see in RuPaul. Some of us like that show.”

This encapsulation not only rehearses assumptions about gay men in Western mainstream popular culture and sexological discourses, but also condenses the markers of a sasso, limiting it to one’s bodily techniques and performance in everyday life. Indeed, this description evokes what I describe as the “auntie trope,” which appeared to be widespread among the sasso I interacted with during my ethnographic study. The reference “auntie,” which is another characterization of sasso, is a placeholder that, to a certain degree, mixes gay identity in the West with vernacular articulations of effeminacy. Hence, it is possible that “auntie,” too, is a category that not only captures “effeminate man” but also draws on the widely used familial “auntie” to describe elderly women in many Ghanaian contexts. These contextual meanings are neglected by both LGBT+ NGOs and the nation-state in their various projects on sexual citizenship. Desmond’s insightful attribution also undercuts hegemonic understandings of queerness such as those espoused by the NGOs and the heteronational state by weaving practices of gender enacted in RuPaul’s *Drag Race*, an American reality show that has an internet presence, with vernacular understandings of gender nonnormative men.

It may appear that effeminacy is a significant reference point among sasso; however, on occasion, an overly effeminate presentation of the self by a sasso will invite rebuke from sasso who prefer to cloak their effeminacy. Consider, for instance, the

following anecdote by Richard, a sasso who was regarded by other sasso as too effeminate and derided as gay, a label with which he did not openly identify.

As for me, I cannot control my effeminate mannerisms. Whenever I am walking in town, clearly the way I walk betrays my effeminacy. I did not used to be called names before. Now people jeer at me, calling me “gay, bati man, homosexual.” Some call me “Kwadwo Besia,” and some sasso do it too, although to laugh at me. Despite the name-calling I know that I am not in control of how God created me. I always tell them that I was born that way so they have to deal with me being in their midst or walking on their street. Sometimes too I remark that their jeers and mockery will not change my looks. I have had friends over the years too, some of whom have praised me for how bold I am. For instance, the women at the market where I go to do grocery always shower me with gifts. Some say that I am beautiful, and that they wished that I were their daughter.

Richard illuminates the adjectival distinction of sasso, while also revealing the degree to which effeminacy is now rendered as analogous to homosexuality or gay identity. This iteration of sasso can potentially also describe a kind of gender nonconformity, of being “wrongly gendered,” which presumes engaging in homosexual practice, a correlation that has recently entered the public sphere with the increased visibility of LGBT+ politics in Ghana. That he’s referred to as “bati man” instantiates the trafficking of the derogatory Jamaican term for a homosexual, *battyman*, into the Ghanaian context through dance hall music, which is very popular in Ghana. Moreover, it is difficult to determine whether the gendered nature of this acceptance is a kind of polite derision or mere mockery. What I know, however, is that the appreciation shown Richard by the market women is sometimes protective, one that is intended to guard him from unwanted stares and attacks. Drawing on biblical Christianity, he validates his nonnormative gendered self in a context in which being effeminate is viewed as antithetical to masculinity, and, in particular, Christian masculinity. Adriaan Van Klinken’s (2019) *Kenyan, Christian, Queer* captures how Christianity, read as inimical to queer subject formation in postcolonial Kenya, was recycled as a site of radical queer possibility and freedom. Richard’s anecdote reinforces Van Klinken’s observation by showing how Christianity is central to their subject formation and queer self-fashioning.

Richard provoked unpredictable responses, even in sasso circles. He says: “I don’t know what is going to happen to me anytime I go out there. I leave my life in the hands of God. At least, I know that my family loves me and that they will come to my aid should anything devastating happen to me.” For example, Kobby, a human rights officer at BURJ, once reproached Richard for being “too auntie” in a public space. He instructed him to learn to manage his effeminacy, which he perceived as hypervisible. To be clear, Kobby is known among sasso to suppress his effeminacy to avoid homonegative responses from his family, strangers, and sasso themselves. Kobby’s discomfort with overly feminine sasso is apparent:

I am OK if they do it in spaces that will not incite trouble. Things are changing in Ghana. As you know, sasso are viewed as gays these days. As for me, I always say that people like Richard have to be careful because if anything happens, they are those most likely to be attacked. He can display his effeminacy when he is with us, or at Terry's, which, as you know, is a safe spot for all of us. But when you walk on the streets of Accra, and in a place like Nima, you have to be watchful and careful about how you present yourself.

It can be inferred from Kobby's account that being overly effeminate was acceptable, though in remarkably complex ways, until the transposition of gay identity onto sasso. It appears that Kobby's unabashed objection is employed to caution sasso like Richard to be watchful of the heightened homonegativity, yet it also reinforces homophobia. In other words, there is an exercise of "social discipline," to use Goffman's (1959, 57) terminology, among sasso circles, in the same way sasso face disciplinary forces outside their circles. "Through social discipline," Goffman asserts, "a mask of manner can be held in place from within" (1959, 57). Hence, Kobby's assertion, by being disciplinary, preserves particular ideas about proper masculine behavior that sasso are required to adopt when moving between and within most public spheres. Besides spaces such as Terry's, a joint owned by an older sasso called Terry, and Clubhouse, a bar frequented by sasso, many places in and around Accra were not too safe for sasso like Richard. Richard and Kobby thus had varying degrees of amphibious self-styling.

Sasso as Homoerotic Act

If doing (verb) and being (noun) sasso are uneasily entwined, then what does it mean to engage in homosexual sex if the person involved does not share effeminate characteristics? Doing sasso exceeds effeminacy to include the act of engaging in homosexual sex itself. Thus, noneffeminate men per their engagement in homosexual sex are likely to be described as sasso if they have a sexual preference for men (effeminate or noneffeminate). This also applies to women, as the anthropologist Serena Dankwa (2009, 2021) observes in her ethnography on female same-sex intimacies in Ghana. Here, whether the men or women who engage in homoerotic sex displayed characteristics that were considered to belong to the opposite gender has no bearing on their place in the universe of sasso. What is stressed is the expression of same-sex desire. In other words, the act of same sex can mark one as sasso regardless of gender presentation, making the amphibious dimensions of sasso more palpable especially as it crosses sexuality and gender in rather convoluted ways.

To be clear, emphasis is placed on the act of sexual engagement and with whom. Thus, there are self-identified effeminate men who have clandestine sexual engagements with noneffeminate men, who, in Western sexual nomenclature, may be heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual. This mode of classification also makes it

plausible for women to be sasso. In that respect, a woman or man does not have to act masculinely or femininely to engage in homoeroticism.

For those men who appeared masculine, sharing homoerotic experiences did not require embracing gay identity. A litany of studies in sub-Saharan Africa have shown how sexual bonding between masculine and effeminate men, while transgressive, paradoxically reiterates heterosexual modalities (Lorway 2015; Epprecht 2008; 2004; Reid 2013; Gaudio 2009). Such accounts also reveal how masculine-looking men form an integral part of the homoerotic worlds. Indeed, sasso (self-identified effeminate men) have a predilection for “straight-acting men.”¹⁰ The more manly a noneffeminate man, the more likely they will be approached by a self-identified effeminate man. The following story disclosed by Hillary, a sasso who was actively involved in the LGBT+ human rights movement, reinforces this position.

I have always liked this guy who lives in my compound, he is a gentleman with a good job. His body looks good, he takes good care of himself, and most importantly, he is younger than me. We have been eyeing each other, but I don't know if he is aware I do sasso or that I am sasso. I know he reads my effeminacy, and that, one day, it will draw his attention. He is on my radar. I know I will have him one day although I think he is shy because he fears that we may be caught when we have sex. I don't think about the consequences that will result when we are caught. He is a real man, and that's all I want now. Don't think I am selfish, I just have needs, and I believe he does too.

Hillary's expressions “I do sasso” and “I am sasso” collapse sasso as a noun and a verb. While the young man described above is not sasso—a self-identified effeminate man—Hillary wonders whether he might be interested in a homoerotic encounter with him. Moreover, his noneffeminate disposition, epitomized by “gentleman,” made him a person of sexual interest for Hillary.

OUR MANLY MEN: *GENTORS* AND *LOGS* IN THE SASSO UNIVERSE

I distinguished between two kinds of noneffeminate men within the sasso universe: “gentor” (pronounced *jentor*) and “log.” Deriving from *gentleman*, *gentor* presupposes a particular view of masculinity that is refined, educated, and preened. Log, unlike gentor, belongs in the lower stratum of the working class, doing menial jobs or being partially employed. Very often, they have no access to a fixed income. Yet, they, too, like the gentors, are quite prominent in sasso worlds. In sasso vernacular, log is euphemistically the placeholder for the “working-class phallus.” Together, these men do not self-identify as effeminate, yet their desire for homoerotic intimacy with sasso situates them in sasso worlds. Considered “straight-acting,” they exhibit virile traits that distinguish them from the traits of

effeminacy that denominate sasso subjectivity. Evidently, sasso-embodied plays of “ladylikeness”—which occur through a complicated effeminate matrix, sometimes subject to social discipline—present them as the counterparts of gentor and logs in this nonheteronormative situation. That gentors and logs form an integral part of the sasso universe reinforces William Banks’s assertion that “Ghanaian men who only have sex with women do not locate their sexual identity in some sort of in-born psychological disposition. Instead, by emphasizing that they follow the culturally constructed tradition of Ghanaian heteronormativity, and by avoiding self-referential terms such as ‘straight’ or ‘heterosexual,’ these men frame their sexual preference as a ‘natural’ outcome of proper social ideals and cultural fulfillment” (2011, 277).

Western sexological discourse on homosexuality and heterosexuality is frayed by gentors and logs, who, like sasso (self-identified effeminate men), reconstitute gender and sexuality in a manner they deem fit. In a context currently contending with the “global cultural wars” resulting from the clash between LGBT+ human rights organizations and African governments (Kaoma 2009), these gender and sexual reconfigurations are significant. Logs and gentors, like the sasso animating this study, need to be situated in this nettlesome context. Despite their engagement in homoerotic intimacy and being part of the sasso universe, these men refuse LGBT+ identification. Although they *do* sasso, such engagement does not, per their worldview, make them homosexual or gay.¹¹ In other words, the blurring of the lines between gender and sexuality, of the barriers between homoeroticism and heteroeroticism, conducted by gentors and logs offers a different origin from which to begin to decenter analyses of gender and sexuality.

Gentors: Gentlemen and Homoeroticism

Gentor is derived from the word *gentle* and designates men of a certain caliber and social status. Gentors are likely to be in heteromonogamous relationships, residing in upscale, middle-class, and low-middle-brow residential neighborhoods in the capital and surrounding suburbs. Some gentors, most of whom are bachelors with university degrees, are young and likely to court women their age or younger. Gentors enter the worlds of sasso (self-identified effeminate men) through furtive channels, which implies that they are rarely seen with sasso in public spaces. Gentors and sasso occasionally have long-term relationships. Emmanuel, a tailor in Accra, recounts his relationship with a gentor:

These men [by which he means gentors] do not come into Jamestown, you know? We meet them at weddings or funerals. There we give each other looks, and when I like them I just go to them and make a move. However, I am not always very direct like I do with the logs, who I have to pay to have sex with anyway. For the gentor, because they are wealthy, they want to be treated with respect. So, when we meet for the first time and they like me, we exchange numbers and then the relationship begins. Sometimes we do it in the car, and then a hotel, and may be eventually in their house.

My boyfriend was a very rich man who had traveled to Europe and America. He was married, but his wife continued to be based in Europe, while he often traveled to Ghana to do his usual business. He was introduced to me by a friend at a wedding, and, in fact, revealed his feelings about me to my friend. Although my friend liked him, it appeared that he liked me more. I moved in with him after a few dates, and we really had such a great time together. He called me his “wife.” And I called him my “husband.” It was a great relationship.

As Emmanuel’s story suggests, the relationships that occur between sasso and gentors parallel relationships between heteronormative couples, as some sasso use heteronormative terms such as *husband* and *wife* to refer to the relationships that obtain between them and their lovers. Sasso relationships with gentors highlight the power differential determined by the gentor’s class and their sexual position as the dominant partner.

On Logs: The Hustlers/“Kubolor Boys”

Logs are men who belong in the working poor or are unemployed.¹² The Jamestown community, like several Ghanaian low-income suburbs, has been hard hit by unemployment and economic debacles. The emergence of logs on the scene of sasso thus provokes the question whether they indulge sasso for sex because of the uncertain and precarious states in which they live or because they genuinely have feelings for sasso. Moreover, it is unclear whether sasso, most of whom are self-employed, take advantage of the desperate situations that logs face to have sexual and sometimes long-term intimate connections with them. While these questions arose in my conversations with some sasso, there seemed to be an agreement among both logs and sasso that they truly enjoyed each other beyond the realm of sexual intimacy. Logs are likely to be hustlers, who in local parlance are also known as “kubolor boys,” and who engage in a range of activities including pugilism and fishing, among other menial and semi-skilled jobs. Evidently, sasso engagement with men with a preference for homoerotic intimacy generates a peculiar “political economy of homoeroticism” (Lorway 2015; Livermon 2012; Gaudio 2009; Epprecht 2004). This economy circulates in a radius defined by the class orientation of sasso and the class status of their homoerotic partners. As Kissi, an exuberant sasso and shop owner, once reminded me:

Kwame, we make the gentors have sex with us just for their money. I am not saying we are sex workers, but it is something like give and take, or I give you my tit and you give me your tat [laughs]. It is not like you have to ask for the money. They know that they have to give you something for the road, for the day, to survive, you know? And, we, too, when we do it with the logs, we have to give them something. They, too, have to live. Because in a way when we are with the gentors we are like them [logs], because we need the money and when they [logs] are with us [sasso] we become like the gentors. The only difference is that the logs like the gentors penetrate us, although occasionally some will demand that we penetrate them. There was this

time when this well-built young man I had a sexual encounter with demanded that I too penetrate him. It was not something I was expecting since I thought that he was only into penetrating. These guys are interesting, you know? So, when I sleep with a log, for example, I have to give him something [money] for the road, for the day, in order for them to survive. It is hand go, hand come, you know.

The transactional dimension of homoeroticism that Kissi speaks of here might be interpreted to mean that sasso engage in sex work.¹³ We should not reduce this transaction aspect to sex work, though, since in this erotic world, sasso, gentors, and logs acknowledge that homoerotic sex is only available under conditions governed by codes of secrecy and security. And with the growing tide of economic insecurity, pseudohomophobia, and the transformation of the public secrecy of homoeroticism into public knowledge, some tactics and strategies have to be enacted to deal with both homoerotic and economic scarcities. Logs are also likely to have girlfriends, while retaining clandestine or sometimes open relationships with sasso in Jamestown.

POLITICAL AND AFFECTIVE ECONOMIES OF HOMOEROTICISM AND PHALLIC CAPITAL

As a suburb where homoerotic desire is both overtly and covertly expressed, Jamestown is a site that enables creative ways of acquiring homoerotic sex; the exchange of gifts is but one example. Gentors, for instance, provide gifts and money to sasso in order to get sex from them. Sasso, too, offer gifts to logs in hopes of receiving sexual satisfaction from them. Shadrach recounts his back-to-back sexual experience with a log and gentor to illustrate his statement that sasso “get paid to get fucked and we pay others to fuck us”:

I remember having sex with both my gentor and log consecutively on one occasion. I enjoyed such serial encounters. It made me feel good. You know? My log needed money, and had come to me for financial supplication. But, I did not have any money at all. He demanded sex in exchange for something small, you know [he pauses and looks me in the face]. I so badly wanted to have sex with him because he has a big “something” between his legs, and could also gyrate his waist very well whenever we had intercourse. In fact, he knew how to make love to me more than many of the other men I had encountered. Because I cared for him, you know like I loved him, I called my rich boyfriend [gentor] and asked if I could have a brief meeting with him. He knew that whenever I called him, I was interested in having sex with him, and I often gave him my best skills [laughs loudly]. He, too, loved me very much, especially as I gave him the much-needed satisfaction. He didn’t hesitate to have me over.

He drove over to Jamestown to pick me up [and bring me] to his house. I had already notified my log before my departure that I was going out and that I would be back home later that evening to make him some sumptuous dinner and also have some money ready for him. You see, you don’t only give money to these people for

sex; sometimes you have to go an extra mile to cook for them too. As they say, a way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Because my food is delicious, whenever these men come they get stuck to me. So, I knew that if I invited him over for dinner, he would have no reason to reject my invitation. Sometimes, all one required was to make food for the logs in exchange for sex. Because when you give them money, either they will give it to their girlfriends or buy drugs.

My log had a girlfriend in the community, who somewhat knew about our relationship. But she didn't care because I was giving her boyfriend money that he invariably used to sustain her upkeep, and several people knew that. Here, it was like everybody did what I was doing, so nobody had to say anything, and if they did, it had to be done secretly. Now let me return to the food issue for these guys. In my opinion, a sasso is always better off cooking for them. So, to be able to meet my log's needs that particular evening, I went off with my gentor, spent the afternoon with him, and gave him what he wanted. He, in turn, gave me some money for groceries. And, when I got home early that evening, I made a tantalizing meal for my log, after which we bathed together and did our little something, something.

Shadrach's anecdote evokes a complex of homoeroticism that both coexists and conflicts with heteroerotic expressions. For instance, it is apparent that his log has a girlfriend. His allusion that it doesn't bother the heterosexual couple complicates the presumed watertight compartments separating heteroerotic and homoerotic bonds. The dynamism of this pattern is indeed crucial for understanding how nonheteronormative sexual subjectivities are expressed here, and their links to particular political economies of intimacy and desire in neoliberal and neocolonial times (Valentine 2007; Decena 2011; Gill 2018; Allen 2011).

Carefully skirting heteronormativity either intentionally or unintentionally, I argue that sasso transform restrictions into potential sites for subversive erotic self-making and play. As a result of their connections to gentors and their entrepreneurial prowess, sasso experience class mobility in low-income Jamestown. This affords them the resources to have intimate homoerotic experiences with logs. The following anecdote by KK explores this further:

As for me, I like logs more than the gentors. Logs are simply my preference. Because I have a stable job and money, I would rather go and get them and just do whatever I want with them. Remember, they want the money because they are frustrated. There are the coconut sellers, shoeshine boys, truck pushers, driver's mates, and car mechanics. I honestly like them rough like that because they know how to do it very rough. All I have to do is to just ensure that they clean themselves very well before any sexual action takes place. To do this, I provide them with a place to bathe, give them clean towels to clean their bodies, and then the action begins. They always appreciate when you value them as human beings too, you know?

When you see them on the street for the first time, you may think that they are very dirty and untouchable. But, give them an opportunity by making them bathe with hot water and, in addition, get them clean and you will see a crystal difference in their appearance. Some of these men are princes underneath the terrible conditions

that Ghana creates for them. I know that it is fate that has made them what they are. As for me, I see it as my God-given duty to make them bathe thoroughly and then proceed to have intercourse. I have actually had some of the best sex with these guys. After the sex, I give them money and I ask them to leave. Whenever I want to see them again, a phone call is just a stretch of an arm away. Having sex with these guys comes easy for me, and because of their “wretchedness” [he shrieks], people hardly look at them. As for me, I think that being with them sexually is like eating a juicy chicken and then wiping your lips with a tissue afterward [he smirks at me]. Nobody will ever notice that you have eaten a juicy chicken, if and only if you wipe your lips well. Never leave a trace behind else they will find out.

KK’s penetrative allusion reveals the complicated nature of both normative and effeminate masculinities. KK assumes the role of gantor in his relationship with the log, as a result of his middle-class location. The log takes on a passive class role because he is a hustler. If, socioeconomically, the log remains economically subservient, that position does not necessarily imply that they are coterminously sexually passive. As KK takes on the sexually passive role during his intimate homoerotic encounters with logs, his statement further reveals the degree to which sasso themselves play a role in the making and shaping of dominant or hegemonic masculinity. Logs may be heterosexual men, yet their low-income class status combined with the likelihood of unemployment diminishes their masculinity.

Additionally, KK suggests that cleaning the low-income logs makes them look like gantors. He asserts: “I make them into princes.” Occupying a class position higher than the class status of the logs he engages with, KK draws on his resources to become “friends” with logs. This role switch in class puts the log, who is a non-effeminate man, in a submissive position. KK, who is a self-identified effeminate man, takes on the dominant role. An amphibious process that troubles gender and sexual binaries and expectations ensues from KK’s interaction with logs. The “straight-acting” log not only transgresses the boundaries of heterosexuality by having homoerotic sex with KK, but also embarks on crossing the boundaries between two different classes, from their lower class to middle class—KK’s class, albeit temporarily. These behind-the-scenes microsociological connections are barely acknowledged by LGBT+ human rights NGOs.

NEOLIBERAL VORTICES: SASSO IN QUEER, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND PUBLIC HEALTH NGOS

The complex distinctions characteristic of the sasso universe have significant implications for the categorical imperatives of transnational LGBT+ rights NGOs. Sasso subjectivities, particularly in the site of my fieldwork, are necessarily influenced by the presence of international LGBT+ human rights NGOs whose interventions, which include LGBT+ empowerment programs and projects on access to health, overlook the fluid character of sasso self-making. Indeed, whether or not

sasso identify as gay is situational, depending on time, place, and with whom they are interacting. Sasso in Jamestown and surrounding suburbs embody selves that unsettle the presumed distinction between being heterosexual and homosexual, as well as the presumed distinction between Ghanaian and un-Ghanaian. Sometimes, too, in their practices, they appear to reinforce these distinctions. On some occasions, sasso participate in the tendency of NGO interventions to homogenize them as gay men in some contexts, while actively rejecting it in others. In other words, sasso “interface with different subcultural fields” (Muñoz 1999, 5) to navigate the precarious environments in which they live. The paradoxical relationships sasso have with NGOs ultimately illuminate how they deploy tactical strategies in a landscape defined by the collusions between neocolonial and neoliberal apparatuses.

Evidently, sasso complex historical and contemporary situations appear to summon transnational LGBT+ rights advocates to cultivate more careful attention to the unexpected ways in which their interventions interact with queer politics in the contexts in which they intervene. It must be noted, then, that sasso lives permit us to witness the ways in which neoliberal human rights projects paradoxically create value out of and for particular subjects under the guise of creating diversity and embracing multicultural worlds. As the literary scholar Jodi Melamed has argued, “Neoliberal multiculturalism has created new privileged subjects, racializing the beneficiaries of neoliberalism as worthy multicultural citizens and racializing the losers as unworthy and excludable on the basis of monoculturalism, deviance, inflexibility, criminality, and other historico-cultural deficiencies” (2011, xxi).

Like Melamed, I suggest that on the stage of neoliberal human rights politics, sasso are represented as bodies worth saving precisely because they are homosexual subjects existing in environments disemboweled by homophobia. Yet, at the same time, other postcolonial subjects like the working poor, of which sasso are a part, are deemed unworthy because of their homophobic tendencies, impoverishment, and supposed religious conservatism. LGBT+ human rights NGOs represent sasso as vulnerable, yet they simultaneously displace them by heightening homophobia. To be clear, sasso are likely to be members of the working poor, engaging in jobs that are erratic, much of the proceeds from which they use to supplement or fully support their families. These precarious positions are intensified by neoliberal and neocolonial regimes of exploitation.

Sasso networks in Jamestown include homoerotic encounters that operate through nuanced connections of secrecy and disavowal. Thus, in this context, the transnational imperative of being “out,” which mostly animates Euro-American LGBT+ politics, aggravates established strategies of queer self-making in ways that provoke the very homophobic violence the LGBT+ human rights NGOs are seeking to combat. It is not my intention to dismiss the leaps that have been made by LGBT+ NGOs like BURJ, one of the key NGOs addressing LGBT+ rights and

improved health access for sexual minorities such as sasso. These leaps include, most importantly, the increasing politicization of LGBT+ issues in Ghana and the emergence of organizations that distinctly address LGBT+ human rights as a human rights concern. The proliferation of these organizations exposes Ghana's supposedly unblemished heterosexuality as a heteronationalist fiction which circulates as a fact in anti-LGBT+ rhetoric. As the anthropologist Michael Taussig argues: "When the body, a nation's flag, money, or a public statue is defaced, a strange surplus of negative energy is likely to be aroused from within the defaced thing itself" (1999, 1). In this case, heterosexuality is the "nation's flag," celebrated as a sacred dimension of the Ghanaian nation-state. Amid the increased visibility of LGBT+ politics, effeminate men are increasingly being rebranded as gay because their presence "taints" the supposed purity of the Christian heteronationalist state. Not only are they the focus of LGBT+ organizations but also targets in campaigns to end HIV, which elide the constituency of men—gents and logs—who engage in sexual activities with sasso. These men distinguish themselves from sasso by rejecting effeminacy and publicly dismissing homosexuality, a technique of separation reminiscent of their rejection of gay identity. In fact, the secrecy that shrouds their homoerotic engagement echoes accounts discussed by C. Riley Snorton (2014) and Jeffrey McCune (2014), respectively, on the phenomenon of "down-low" in the United States. These scholars suggest how down-low remains a key site of racialization and a practice used to code Black men who discreetly engage in homoerotic encounters as vehicles for the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

Thus, for sasso and the men who clandestinely engage them for sex, contemporary public health engagements and LGBT+ human rights interventions must acknowledge these subjectivities as tethered to particular histories of racialization in both Africa and its myriad diasporas. Moreover, these marginal sexualized and racialized groups are convoluted by histories of displacement and dislocation (Pierre 2013; McFadden 2011; Kanneh 1998). Throughout this book, I insist that the relegation of these histories to the background does violence to these subjects, who undoubtedly continue to both confront and resist anxieties wrought by a violent past (Pierre 2013; Gill 2018).

Sasso subjectivities are reminiscent of the colonized subject described by the cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall, whose "identity is formed at the unstable point where the unspeakable stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of a history, a culture. And since he/she is positioned in relation to cultured narratives which have been profoundly expropriated the colonized subject is always somewhere else, doubly marginalized, displaced always other than where he or she is, or is able to speak from" (1987, 6).

The conditions in Jamestown, a low-income suburb that sits on periphery of the city, together with sasso, most of whom live in the margins, reflect the

displacements triggered by such unspeakable stories of history and culture in contemporary neoliberal rescue interventions. Within this framework, the nation-state, invested as it is in heterosexual citizenship, and LGBT+ human rights organizations, invested as they are in homosexual citizenship, both paradoxically displace sasso identities.