The Convergence of Queer and West African Temporalities in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*

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Abstract
Bernardine Evaristo's novel *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) explores the life stories of twelve characters, many of whom are Black, female, and/or queer. West African culture is represented not only through some of the characters' identities, but also through paratextual symbolism of Adinkra signs accompanying the protagonists' names. The Akan concept of Sankofa, or 'going back in time to learn for the future,' resonates through the characters' construction of identity rooted in memories and continuous hope for the future. Queer temporality provides a fruitful framework for interpreting non-normative and resistant performances of time. Looking forward while feeling backward (Love) and striving towards a utopian future (Muñoz) are key to a queer performance of time in this analysis. This paper argues that queer temporality must be thought in conjunction with West African temporal circularity when scrutinising representations of time and temporality in *Girl, Woman, Other*. An analysis of the two subchapters on Amma, a middle-aged lesbian playwright, and Megan/Morgan, a non-binary content creator and activist, illuminates how queer and (West) African temporalities are narrated, performed, and experienced. Both subchapters exemplify a constant state of becoming, sharing a common thread of queer and West African temporality expressed through non-linearity and circularity. The acts of circling back, reclaiming the past, and desiring a utopian queer future thus become performances of queer and West African temporalities.

Keywords: time, temporality, queer temporality, West African temporality, chrononormativity, LGBTQ+ literature

Introduction

Bernardine Evaristo's critically acclaimed novel *Girl, Woman, Other* was published in 2019 and won the Booker Prize the same year. Evaristo shared the prestigious award with Canadian writer Margaret Atwood (*The Testaments*) and is the first Black woman to win the prize ("Bernardine Evaristo"). Through interwoven story lines, *Girl, Woman, Other* portrays the lives of various characters across multiple generations. The protagonists are primarily women and one non-binary person, most are Black and part of the African and/or Caribbean diaspora in Britain. Discussions of identity, race, class, gender, sexuality, relationships, and love, among many other themes, are embedded in a polyphonic narrative. The book consists of five chapters and an epilogue. Four of the chapters are further divided into three subchapters, each named after one of the twelve protagonists. Although the different stories span centuries, they all appear structured around the fictional play *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, directed by the novel's first protagonist, Amma. The characters are sometimes indirectly interrelated and appear in and disappear from one another's stories and lives. The moment during which several protagonists physically share time and space is in the fifth chapter titled "The After-Party," set after the premiere of the play. The different narrative positions, the changing focus on a number of characters, and the overall structure of the book reveal the interconnectedness of a multitude of queer and/or Black diasporic identities and perspectives (with)in time.

Most of the Anglophone scholarly discussions of *Girl, Woman, Other* focus on feminist and Black intersectional representations and readings (see f. ex. Courtois; Geisler; Haring; Husain; Sarıkaya-Şen; Strauss). Only a few scholars consider queer temporality in more detail. Carolina Sánchez-Palencia, for instance, states in her article on the novel that

> As [the characters'] black womanhood is addressed not only dialogically but also intersectionally in their various ages, classes, faiths, occupations, education and sexual orientation, they become and unbecome while journeying along a temporal dimension that deviates from the linear, and chrononormative modes. (3)

Distinct aspects of queer subjectivities demonstrated by various Black characters, such as Amma, Bummi, and Morgan, illustrate the necessity for an intersectional approach. With regard to the identities of queer characters of colour, postcolonial and queer theory must be brought together in the attempt to dismantle the strict binaries and renegotiate rigid categories of sexuality and gender that have been transmitted to other cultural contexts by the West. In this article, I therefore focus on the

narrative and cultural time and temporality of two of the omnipresent queer characters in *Girl, Woman, Other*: Amma and Megan/Morgan. Exclusively drawing on traditional narratology is insufficient in order to interpret Black, postcolonial and transcultural queer temporality in the novel. The specific cultural contexts relevant to the narrative must be acknowledged. I thus aim to combine aspects of queer temporality with West African understandings of time within the context of postcoloniality and transculturality. Merging these approaches allows for the nuances and complexities of queerness to emerge beyond a Western and white discourse.

The need to decolonise dominant assumptions about the gender binary and heteronormative sexuality has become increasingly apparent in recent years. Not only are both gender and (so-called biological) sex socially, politically, and culturally constructed, thinking of them as clearly distinguishable categories continuously reproduces patriarchal and colonial/racist power structures (see f. ex. Butler; Barker and Iantaffi). Numerous scholars have highlighted the binary understanding of gender as a colonial construct that ignores the diversity and fluidity of gender identities across cultures.[1] Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, among others, argues that "the conceptual category of gender is in origin, constitution, and expression bound to Western culture" (xiii). Similarly, the idea of sexuality as a rigid identity category developed in Europe and the Western world in close relation to racist thought in defining distinct human species (see f. ex. McCann and Monaghan). It is essential to acknowledge that Indigenous societies often recognise(d) and embrace(d) more than two genders as well as a spectrum of sexual identities, thus challenging Western notions of hetero- and cisnormativity, and associated gender roles and norms.[2]

Similar to gender and sexual identities, understandings and institutionalisation of time and temporality have been established almost globally according to white, Western standards. In line with other queer scholarship, I argue that queer temporality in particular offers

[1] Prominent work on intersecting African studies and queer/gender studies has been published by Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí in *African Gender Studies: A Reader* (2005), Sylvia Tamale in *African Sexualities: A Reader* (2011), and Chantal Zabus in *Out in Africa: Same-Sex Desire in Sub-Saharan Literatures and Cultures* (2013) among others.

[2] Within this area of study, it is important to recognise the difficulty and sensitivity of terminology and translation of conceptual definitions. Although I will be working with references to queer, lesbian, trans, and/or non-binary and genderfluid identities, often neither vocabulary nor concepts are easily transferable to African Indigenous understandings of sexuality and gender. I make use of the term queer to capture its inherent fluidity and permeability.

simultaneous critique, hope, and alternatives regarding dominant hetero- and cisnormative temporal structures. Time and associated temporal norms and values are, similar to gender, performed according to (socio)cultural understandings and contexts. Elizabeth Freeman argues that "time is actively constructed by the powerful such that any number of other, more obviously political aspects of life, seem natural: it is a tool for the naturalization of power relations" ("The Queer Temporalities" 93). In Western cultures, time itself is often assumed to be a natural given, and the past-present-future understanding of the so-called 'arrow of time' has been established on a global scale through colonialism. However, this perception of time has been discussed by historians, physicists, philosophers, and scholars of many other fields as constructed and its naturalisation ignores many Indigenous interpretations of time (see f. ex. Rao; Reichardt; Sprute). As Valerie Rohy so aptly points out, it is important to consider whether "nature determine[s] the order that narrative then follows, or [whether] narrative invent[s] the temporality we then take as natural" (175). Time must hence be considered as constructed and contextualised as such within postcolonial, cultural, and literary studies. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen suggest that "Western discourses of sexual and racial otherness most explicitly meet at the juncture of developmental time" (McCallum and Tuhkanen 7). The need for an interdisciplinary, intersectional, and decolonial approach to time in order to establish alternative concepts of time and temporality, specifically with regards to postcolonial and queer literature, thus becomes apparent.

Jasbir Puar claims that "[q]ueer times require even queerer modalities of thought, analysis, creativity, and expression" (121). How then are different conceptualisations of time and temporality (re)negotiated when examining them through a queer postcolonial lens? Which previously overlooked aspects of the text can a queer and postcolonial reading of socio-cultural conceptualisations of time and temporality reveal? In the following literary analysis of two selected subchapters of *Girl, Woman, Other*, I make use of the arrow of time as a measuring element based on a constructed past-present-future linearity and complement this limited notion with the subjective experience of time on a spectrum of temporality and the performance of associated values and norms. The storylines in the novel create an anachronic narrative in which the characters are met, lost, and encountered again, marked by a constant becoming. Their lives remain, have already been, or will be interwoven with one another. This element of carefully constructed temporal chaos continuously underscores queer fluidity and West African temporal circularity.

Queer Temporality

In hetero- and cisnormative societies, queer pasts and histories are negated and queer futures endangered. Jack Halberstam argues for "queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices" (1). Queer existence, time, and temporality thus appear to be inextricably interlinked. The term 'queer temporality' today concatenates complex and diverse concepts of countering a normalised and universalised, heteronormative understanding of a "clock-based […] social mainstream" (McCallum and Tuhkanen 1), while defying the expectations of a societal focus on reproduction:

> '[Q]ueer' refers to nonnormative logistics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time. 'Queer time' is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance. (Halberstam 6)

Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan highlight that "heteronormative life narratives are marked by a particular set of celebrated milestones, which include birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, marriage, reproduction, parenthood, […] retirement and death" (215). Aiming for, reaching, and celebrating these goals based on hetero- and cisnormative cultural values highlight the societal focus on "institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (Halberstam 1). These temporal norms in conjunction with heteronormative life schedules and societal expectations are what Elizabeth Freeman calls "chrononormativity": "a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts [based on] forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege" (*Time Binds* 3). A coming-out process over a period of time, having to do it over and over again, transitioning, or experiencing a first kiss at a later age than heterosexual peers are all aspects of queer temporal experiences that defy heterosexual standards. Queer temporality provides theories for understanding, experiencing, and eventually resisting the norms and associated values of (Western) 'straight' linear time, while focusing on personal and collective temporalities. This conceptual framework further challenges linear notions of time and questions cis- and heteronormative, as well as colonial narratives of progress, development, and life stages, thus allowing for a more complex understanding of time that embraces diversity, fluidity, and intersectionality. Queer life, thus, can be interpreted as a (in-/voluntary and/or sub-/conscious) non-normative performance of time. Queer temporality provides space for the potential of temporal unconventionality on numerous levels. Keeping critiques of temporal hegemonies in mind, I turn to three particular approaches to queer temporality that defy

prescriptive values and systems: the concept of queer utopianism, coined by José Esteban Muñoz, Heather Love's 'feeling backward', and Elizabeth Freeman's erotohistoriography.

Muñoz argues that in order to overcome what he calls 'straight time', the focus must be on a queer future. He stresses that "[q]ueerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz 1). Muñoz argues for the necessity of creating a queer future, a queer utopia fuelled by desire and hope. Desire, in turn, poses a drive for a queer future: "[D]esire is always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise" (26). According to him, "[q]ueer futurity […] is all about desire, desire for both larger semiabstractions such as a better world or freedom but also, more immediately, better relations within the social that include better sex and more pleasure" (30). A queer future can therefore only be achieved through longing.

Heather Love's concept of 'feeling backward' refers to (re)turning to painful histories and corresponding emotions. She argues that "the losses of the past motivate us and give meaning to our current experience, we are bound to memorialize them" while simultaneously being "bound to overcome the past, to escape its legacy" (Love 1). According to Love, "[b]ackward feelings serve as an index to the ruined state of the social world; they indicate continuities between the bad gay past and the present; and they show up the inadequacy of queer narratives of progress" (27). These backward feelings, such as sadness, shame, or loneliness, must be acknowledged in order to accurately describe collective and queer experiences. Love suggests making use of these emotions as a means of queer resistance against heteronormative historical linearity (1-7). Her affective orientation towards the past describes the notion of "looking forward" while "feeling backward" (27): "[E]arlier forms of feeling, imagination, and community may offer crucial resources in the present" (30). This dual temporal orientation—looking forward to change and the future while feeling a connection to a marginalised past—highlights the intricate emotional and historical layers that characterise the queer experience and queer temporality. Here, the subjective experience of personal and collective temporality appears circular rather than linear.[3]

[3] Another arguably circular approach is Carla Freccero's 'queer spectrality', outlined for example in her book *Queer/Early/Modern* (2006) and in "Queer Times," an article published in *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*, edited by Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (2011). By queering Derrida's concept of hauntology, Freccero "sought to forge a kind of ethics of haunting that would motivate queer historiographic endeavour

Both approaches represent the need for a queer outlook towards a future that is, although uncertain, defined by becoming and moments of opportunities and by emphasising the existence and importance of individual and collective possibilities. While queerness solely in the past or present is not possible, "queerness is not yet here but it approaches like a crashing wave of potentiality" (Muñoz 185). A queer future – and thus a queer past or present – is always uncertain, fluctuating, and in the process of becoming. The notion of 'becoming' towards a future and its non-linearity, fluidity, and relationality are thus characteristic for queer future-affirming temporality.

In her seminal work *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Elizabeth Freeman coins the term 'erotohistoriography' and argues that bodily experiences and affects of the past can be and are felt in the present. Erotohistoriography, she notes,

> uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter. Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones. (95)

The past thus inherently becomes part of the present as it is felt in the body by the person encountering a historical text or object. In a roundtable discussion, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities," Carolyn Dinshaw, referencing the influence of queer and postcolonial scholars, suggests the formation of "communities across time" through queer touches that "collaps[e] time through affective contact between marginalized people now and then" (Dinshaw et al. 178). Both Freeman and Dinshaw assert that texts, artefacts, and bodily sensations created and/or experienced by others in the past can be felt in the present, a phenomenon which generates (erotic and/or sexual) queer solidarity and community. Therefore, although arguing for different perspectives on past, present, and future, what unites most queer scholars "is the approach to the past and the present as categories that are far from either separate or stable" (Horvat 9). The past, present, and future are clearly neither distinct nor unrelated, and always entangled and fluid in queer culture, experiences, and literature.

through the project of queering temporality. This haunting would be reciprocal in that it would entail a willingness both to be haunted and to become ghostly, and insofar as the reciprocal penetrability entailed would also be sensuous—a commingling of times as affective and erotic experience—it would also be queer" ("Queer Times" 21). Although a fitting perspective, an in-depth analysis of queer spectrality in *Girl, Woman, Other* must remain a suggestion for further research.

Sankofa and Circularity: Time and Temporality in West African Cultures

When negotiating and analysing time it is essential to consider cultural influences. *Girl, Woman, Other*'s narrative subjects are mainly Black British women/people, all of different backgrounds. As a transcultural narrative, the novel considers experiences from various perspectives: Amma is British-Ghanaian, Bummi is from Nigeria, and her daughter Carole struggles continuously to combine her British and Nigerian identities, while Grace has Ethiopian roots. As Sánchez-Palencia claims, the novel

> is a criss-cross of narratives conceived as the intertwined stories of these twelve women [sic] whose voices interact dialogically and whose experiences move from past to present and project into the future, between England, Scotland, Ethiopia, Nigeria and the Caribbean, thus contesting the linear narratives of patriarchal and imperial discourse. (3)

Remaining entirely within the framework of global Northern perspectives and epistemologies when analysing postcolonial and/or transcultural literary works reproduces the exclusion of time concepts of other cultures. Robert Levine underscores that "the numbers on the clock capture only one glimpse of the human experience of time, and a most Westernly ethnocentric glimpse at that" (185). Implementing a linear, mechanical understanding of time has been a crucial tool of colonial power and through colonialism, white, Western, and Christian measurements of time have been established almost globally (Rao; Reichardt; Sprute). Thus, any analysis of (queer) temporality must be complemented by the recognition of alternative experiences of time and temporality and extended to experiences and traditions of non-Western cultures, in this case particularly African temporal systems and understandings.[4] Temporal categories and conceptualisations of time must always be thought in relation to hegemonic and normative power structures and culturally and politically contextualised.

In precolonial West Africa, time was often interlinked with natural or weather phenomena, farming techniques, rituals, markets, or the moon (Bohannan 253-254; Reichardt 470; Urama 235-237). Time as an idea did

[4] This is not to say that all Western time and temporal narratives are always chronological and homogenous, neither in contemporary cultures and literatures nor throughout history. I believe that another binary of Western vs. 'other' – here specifically West African – temporality is untrue and even harmful. However, as argued above and in the following and as has been shown by many postcolonial and/or queer scholars (see f. ex. Halberstam; Keeling; Sprute), time and temporality must be acknowledged and thought together with and within their cultural and historical contexts and in all their complex and diverse nuances.

not, and sometimes still does not, exist by itself. It is always enmeshed in "human actions and natural phenomena, such as myth, ritual, the seasons, war, economic activities," etc. (Okwu 20). Calendars, too, were based on such phenomena (Mbiti 19-21). These structures illustrate an understanding of time that is focused on natural events and occurrences, such as the moon cycles, as well as cultural and social components, like market days, and thus produced an often spiritual and ancestral, cyclical understanding of the passage of time. Moreover, "[a]n important corollary to the African concept of time is the notion of life and death merely as two different stages of a cyclical process – existence" (Okwu 20). This is further underlined by the belief in ancestral spirituality and circularity in many African cultures. Ancestors are believed to watch over their descendants, members of a community to join the ancestors after death, if they behaved particularly positively during their lifetime, and ancestors to sometimes reincarnate as a newborn child of a family (Dovlo 2). Essential in African cosmology, as well as for the "perception of disease, healing, and unity of life is the notion that the past, present, and future are a continuum and merge into each other in cosmic harmony. Therefore, time to the African is cyclical rather than linear" (Okwu 20). Everyday occurrences such as illness and health as well as life and death are thus perceived as cyclical rather than as located on a linear arrow of time. John S. Mbiti stresses that "[t]he linear concept of time in western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking" (17).

In *Girl, Woman, Other*, each subchapter is accompanied by an Adinkra symbol next to the character's name in the chapter's heading. The different symbols underscore the respective character's personality traits and/or the chapter's plot. For some, the symbols describe attributes, such as strength, bravery, and power for Amma (Evaristo 1), or adaptability, cleverness, and perhaps fluidity for Bummi (150). Morgan[5], however, is ascribed a symbol for transformation in life (307; "West African Wisdom: Adinkra Symbols & Meanings"). Adinkra is an Akan language that consists of symbols which portray concepts, proverbs, or aphorisms. It is used today mainly in the Côte d'Ivoire and in Ghana. Although not all characters in the novel are of Ghanaian or indeed West African descent, as the author herself utilised symbols from an Akan language, I argue for a reading of the text attuned to the Akan concept of Sankofa, one of the most prominent interpretations of time originating in present-day Ghana. It roughly translates to English as 'to go back and get/take it' and suggests the notion

[5] When referring to this character in general, I use Morgan as this is the name they choose when realising they are non-binary. Only when talking about this character specifically in a context before their newly assumed identity, and in quotations, will I be using Megan.

of being able to 'look back' or 'go back' in time to learn from one's mistakes and apply the lessons to the present and future (see f. ex. Jones and Leitner 201). Sankofa is symbolised in Adinkra either by a backward-looking bird picking up an egg (or nut) from its own back, or by an ornate heart, and represents the cultural connotation of non-linear time. Both symbols respectively portray past-present-future relations in a circular manner. Drawing on future-based queer temporality again, the idea of Sankofa can be linked to Muñoz' conceptualisation of hope as a "backward glance that enacts a future vision" (4) as well as Love's theory of 'feeling backward.' A coalition of the notion of Sankofa and queer temporality is thus suggested as a fruitful approach in order to enable a queer and decolonial reading practice.

The Experience and Performance of Time on a Spectrum of Temporality

The so-called 'arrow of time' is the commonly agreed-upon Western time structuring measurement. It is generally interpreted as a linear arrow, pointing from past to future and connecting both with the present (Muller 96-99; Rovelli 19). I argue that the concept of time and with it the 'arrow of time' as Western understandings of linear time are culturally, socially, and politically constructed (see f. ex. Fabian; Keeling; Rovelli) and must be considered as such in literary analyses. Yet markers of time and its measurement can still be fruitful tools when used within an analytical context. In the following, I will build on the metaphor of this arrow, thereby creating a basis for the analysis of time and a temporal order in an attempt to deconstruct and complement it with a spectrum of queer temporality.

Temporality as the "internal (psychological, experiential) time which constitutes our consciousness of time" (Jaszczolt 31), although connected to what individuals are taught time is and how it functions, is nevertheless a deeply personal and sometimes communal experience. There is no such thing as 'one' temporality, it is always a multitude of perceptions and experiences, influenced by culture and identities. Temporality is thus the subjective, personal, and relational experience of and association with time and its passage, entangled in learned and cultural norms and values. McCann and Monaghan describe that "[p]hilosophers have used the term [temporality] to refer to the experience of duration, the perception of time passing and relations of past, present and future. Within humanities research, temporality is also used to refer to the social organization of time" (214). Temporality often relies on time's measurements, especially when highlighting the difference between a felt time span and the 'actual' measured time an event, memory or emotion might have taken. Time can

be experienced and thought backwards or forwards from a present point in time. In Western epistemology remembrance and planning of the future often remain within this language that tends to reproduce the dominant notion of time as linear. However, temporality is seldom linear; for some the spectrum might reach from past to present, but it does not then follow the unidirectionality of an arrow. The fluid spectrum of temporality can be either personal or, as exemplified by queer temporality, a collective experience, in particular for marginalised groups. Drawing on the term *spectrum* from gender, queer, and sexuality studies, I argue for the understanding of temporality as an internal, subjective, 'felt' time on a spectrum or a continuum in an attempt to intertwine the thought of linear time with temporal circularity without invoking or reproducing a binary between linear and circular time. The terminology of the spectrum of temporality disrupts and deconstructs binary categories such as 'then and now,' and enables enmeshment and simultaneity similarly to gender studies and feminist and queer theories. Temporality is understood here to refer to a personal and a collective interpretation and experience on and outside of the arrow of time.

Borrowing from queer and gender studies once more, I furthermore propose an understanding of the performance of time and temporality, as well as attached connotations, norms, and values as *doing time*. Judith Butler famously identifies gender as "a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (192). Transferring Butler's idea of performativity and the concept of doing gender by Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman to the experience and interpretation of time in cultural contexts (see f. ex. Levine), I argue that time and temporality are continuously reproduced by behaviours that align with societal expectations and norms. West and Zimmerman state that "doing gender is unavoidable" due to "the allocation of power and resources not only in the domestic, economic, and political domains but also in the broad arena of interpersonal relations" (145). This holds true for time as well: Doing time is unavoidable, human beings perform (in) time and often in compliance with or resisting and disrupting associated norms and values. As outlined above, many African societies created time through actual human and natural performances and events (Mbiti 19-21). Social performances of time are adjusted according to taught culture and its respective norms and values. Time thus becomes an interpretation, learned behaviour, and performance.

Queer Temporality in *Girl, Woman, Other*

When examining temporal aspects of Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, the title already indicates a queer narrative on multiple levels. Following Halberstam's claim that in a heteronormative society, a person's development over time is expected to occur along a reproduction-focused evolvement from child to youth to adult to parent (Halberstam 2; 6). The title explicitly breaks with this presumption. When reading the title as sequential, after the 'Girl' becomes a 'Woman', the possibilities appear endless. This, in fact, reflects Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's understanding of queerness as an "open mesh of possibilities" (8). The 'Other' after 'Girl' and 'Woman' is not defined. A chronological development might alternatively be countered by simultaneity: The novel describes and addresses multiple identities at once. It is about (and perhaps also for) a 'Girl', a 'Woman', and the 'Other'. The convention of a chrononormative development is disrupted and the 'Other' is continuously renegotiated. The 'Other,' either as a personal identity or as a categorisation of the not-self, shifts according to the protagonist's and focaliser's perspective. 'Girls', 'Women', and 'Others' are of course also the characters themselves.

The characters centralised in this article are Amma and Megan/Morgan. Amma is a middle-aged playwright and theatre director who ponders on her life and identity as a Black Ghanaian-British woman and lesbian, her relationships, her friendships, and the past years with her teenage daughter, Yazz, shortly before the opening night of her current play. Morgan is a young non-binary social media content creator, writer, and public speaker with a focus on gender representation who remembers their life up to the point in time at which they attend the play later that same evening. They recall their childhood and contemplate their identity as a non-binary person as well as their diasporic and transcultural identity. The characters' individual stories progress along a main temporal story line, the evening of the opening night of Amma's theatre play, *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* (f. ex. Evaristo 1, 334, 405). While remembrance of precolonial African history and tradition is portrayed by and in the play, both Amma's and Morgan's stories are dominated by memories that are also distinctly queer. As Castiglia and Reed contend:

> Although its assertion of pastness might seem to reinforce concepts of chronological time, memories perform their work by refusing the discrete borders of sequential 'moments' and by collapsing the past and the future into the present. Invoking a flawed present that relies on the past for reparation, memories resist the notion of time moving progressively to the step of constant betterment. The past, in memory, augments the present and proposes templates for the future. […] Memory's collapse of chronological, progressive time, therefore, is one of its most potent features. (14)

Queer features here are the memories in terms of 'feeling backward' according to Heather Love and bringing the often felt experiences to a fluid and undefined present and future. These memories disrupt not only the linearity of the narrative but also the process of forgetting that which is uncomfortable to a normative society and joyful to queer individuals and communities.[6] Memories, the act of remembrance and thus of 'un-forgetting' and of making visible marginalised pasts illustrate a decolonial and queer resistance.

In order to describe how the narrative slides 'back and forth' along the repeatedly interrupted arrow of time, I identify four temporal levels. I call the present-level TL1. The second level, TL2, refers to memories reaching back to various points in the characters' past. TL3 names the level of a memory-within-a-memory. The 'universal time level' (TL0) refers to events that are happening regularly or continuously and/or whose temporal level cannot be distinctly identified. The narrators and focalisers of the two subchapters analysed on the following pages make use of numerous temporal levels, thus constructing a non-linear narrative around queer temporality. Although various characters either identify as homosexual and/or queer, in this case study I focus on Amma's and Megan's/Morgan's subchapters. While Amma is very vocal about and comfortable with her long-established lesbian identity, Megan/Morgan discovers her/their non-binary, gender non-conforming, queer identity while the narrative unfolds.

Amma's Temporality of Hope and Memory

Amma's subchapter begins in the present, TL1, and takes place over a comparatively short period of time: "Amma / is walking along the promenade of the waterway that bisects her city, a few early morning barges cruise slowly by" (Evaristo 1). It is not clear how much time passes, as only a few moments occur in the present and most of the subchapter is narrated in memories and analepses, these events take place on other temporal levels than the TL1-present. While on her way to the theatre to prepare for her opening night, Amma remembers her beginnings in the theatre world (2-3). Her walking in the present, her active remembrance, and her actions in the past create the notion of time passing for the reader. As in many African belief systems, the existence of time is connected to (human) action.

[6] For further important scholarly work on queer memories and queer remembrance, see for example Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed's *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past* (2012) or Anamarija Horvat's *Screening Queer Memory: LGBTQ Pasts in Contemporary Film and Television* (2021).

Amma's memories are seamlessly integrated in the same paragraph as her existence in the present. Her chapter is a prime example of queer futuristic anticipation that derives from memories. The story as such is set in the present towards the upcoming opening night of Amma's play but constructed by mainly back-reaching memories that establish Amma's character as well as her relationships, wishes, and desires. These retrospective thoughts underline Muñoz' notion of an ecstatic present while aiming for a positive future. Paying attention to the past in order to create a present and a future outlook also illuminates the West African concept of Sankofa which is embedded in Amma's Ghanaian heritage. The reader learns about Amma's past through analepses instead of a chronological narrative. The past, however, is however never 'distant' but always immediately integrated into the present narration. The anachronistic narrative here disrupts the clear-cut distinction of past, present, future, while making visible the past's influence not only on the personal present, but also on political and cultural realities, hegemonies, and ongoing consequences of past trauma and joy.

Throughout the subchapter, Amma actively thinks about the passage of time. Not only is the main story (TL1) repeatedly interrupted by the memories on the other time levels, which also take up more of the subchapter than the actual story on TL1, the memories and analepses are also anachronical. While time passes on TL1 only in one direction along the arrow of time towards the future, temporality is constructed on a spectrum, sliding continuously and often without a distinct indicator between memory levels and the present. Amma's identity and extraordinary life are constructed by her future-oriented memories dominated by hope. Shortly before the opening of her new play that is yet to take place, she remembers her early years in theatre (TL2), waiting for her life to change and for her career to finally be successful: "[H]er life stretched emptily ahead with only online television dramas to look forward to" (2). Although the future did not seem quite enticing back then, this rather negative perspective is applied only at the beginning of the subchapter. This retrospective negativity aligns with Love's theory of 'feeling backward' and embracing pain and sorrow (Love 4). Amma repeatedly remembers hardships from a point in time shortly before her biggest success yet (Evaristo 6-7, 14-17). Amma's experience of temporality relates to both the idea of Sankofa, of going back to memories and lessons learned from past incidents, and of feeling backward while looking forward.

Her queerness is initially revealed when Amma thinks on TL1 about how she used to dress (TL2) and how her style has changed. She

remembers wearing an “ever-present badge of two interlocked female symbols” (3). This hint mirrors the historical aspect of hidden queer images that only reveal their message to knowing community members. Although the symbol is fairly well-known today, the recognition and knowledge about its meaning might not be self-explanatory to people who have never consciously encountered it. For oblivious readers the description is followed by “talk about wearing your heart on your sleeve, girl” (3), drawing attention to the symbols and their meaning. Although Amma’s lesbianism is still not made explicit yet and requires prior knowledge, it is neither kept secret by Amma nor the third-person narrator. The unequivocal exposure of Amma’s sexual identity is accompanied by a changed narrative perspective. When Amma tells her best friend Dominique on TL2 about her parents, upbringing, and their relationship, the perspective shifts and Amma addresses Dominique directly. The same narrative device is used when Amma raises the topic of her sexuality: “he doesn’t know I’m a dyke, are you kidding?” (12). Similar to the badge and the symbol, here terminological knowledge is presupposed. Although the statement is embedded in queerphobia and denial on the part of Amma’s parents, the normalcy and representation of queer existence and identity appear casual, perhaps even comforting to some (queer) readers as well as Dominique, a fellow lesbian, and other community members.

In the present on TL1, Amma ponders her current polyamorous relationships, before remembering past adventures with Dominique again (22-23). Her non-monogamy is inherently temporal and queer. The multiple mentions of queer sex and Amma’s sex life declare her sexual identity as unmistakably sapphic (20-22). Sánchez-Palencia suggests that the “characterization of Amma’s lesbian temporality might be read as an invocation of Freeman’s erotohistoriography inasmuch as the account of her different sexual experiences serves to break apart time into lesbian moments” (4). The past is retold by recalling sensual, erotic and/or sexual experiences that take place on TL2 in the present on TL1. These events influence Amma’s present: She “has had sexual relations with many different partners in varied contexts, some of whom help her repair and alleviate previously inflicted bodily damage, while some others help her learn more about herself” (Sánchez-Palencia 4). Moreover, polyamory portrays an important aspect of queer temporality. The innate synchronicity of polyamorous or non-monogamous relationships underlines the relationality of time as well as the illusion of straight time’s linearity. Having multiple partners, having sex with multiple partners—either consecutively or at once—and those partners having other partners as well breaks up binary expectations of a heteronormative monogamous relationship according to chrononormative values.

After Amma enters the theatre building in the present on TL1, the temporal level shifts, unveiling the content of the play (Evaristo 24-25). Stories and historical retellings about West African women warriors in the 18th and 19th centuries are portrayed on stage, seemingly centred around "the last Amazon […] Nawi" and her life story (24). The Adinkra symbol at the beginning of Amma's chapter, 'Okodee Mmowere', signifies strength, power, and bravery ("West African Wisdom: Adinkra Symbols & Meanings"), attributes displayed by Amma herself throughout her subchapter, but also by these warriors and the actors on stage. Amma moreover assumes that at least some of the female warriors must have been queer and therefore includes sapphic relationships into her play (Evaristo 24). She thus makes visible representations of queer sexualities and relationships indigenous to many African precolonial societies (see f. ex. Oyěwùmí; Tamale; Zabus). The play is erotohistoriography in itself through the bodily representations of queer history and personal queer pasts. The corporal displays of strength on stage mirroring the warriors' historical ones, longing for representation, the excitement felt by the author, actors, and audience to be able to contribute to that, and the writing process itself are all affective bodily actions. Women loving women are then explicitly represented by bodies portraying queer pasts on stage.[7]

Meanwhile, Amma's narrative is thus further positioned towards the future. When entering the theatre building in the present, she expects that "over a thousand people will fill the seats this very evening" (Evaristo 23). The reader later encounters several of these people before and after the play in and near the theatre (see f. ex. 41, 339, 417). Significantly, Amma's life story is constructed around the people she meets throughout her life. The queerness of finding, focusing on, and even prioritising a chosen family instead of a biological nuclear one sets the tone for the rest of the novel. Different stages of her life are recalled and constructed around her friends, both in present and past tense. The remembrance of life according to phases within chosen families in the queer community illuminates Amma's non-compliance with chrononormative time. The arrow of time as a Western, white structuring measurement hence fails to contain Amma's memories and connected emotions on a narrative level; her thoughts and remarks jump back and forth between persons, times, occasions, spaces, and relationships, often without definite temporal markers. Temporality for Amma is particularly relational, circular, and fluid.

[7] Although the pre- and postcolonial contents of the play, particularly in connection to its temporality and queer and postcolonial memory, would certainly be an interesting subject, more detailed examinations must remain a suggestion for further research. For a more in-depth analysis of the play within the novel see Courtois.

Remaining on TL2 for a while, Amma recalls interactions with another close friend, Sylvester (30-34). On TL3, she remembers within her memory the deaths of her parents (34-36), before recollecting the birth of her daughter and then Yazz' development over the years on TL2 (36-39). In direct opposition to the heteronormative nuclear family lies Amma's performance of her reproductive timeline. She explicitly and defiantly breaks with the heteronormative assumption of a nuclear family by having a child with her gay friend and raising that child in a communal manner. "By not trying to fit into hegemonic or even homonormative standards like gay marriage, Amma takes control of her own narrative, her own chronology" (Sánchez-Palencia 4). This resistance to chrononormative expectations becomes particularly obvious during the paragraphs about Yazz. When thinking about Yazz, the tense switches to the present on multiple occasions. Although "Yazz / recently described" Amma's style and choice of clothes as unflattering, the third-person narrator then continues to describe the situation in a universal present in which Yazz "pleads with her" or "knows full well that Amma will always be anything but normal" (3). Amma regularly places memories of her daughter in the present, rather than remembering the events in past-tense. This narration thereby breaks with the linear timeline of chrononormativity. Yet, when recalling her daughter's upbringing, this is the only time Amma's memories appear to progress consecutively: From when "Yazz / was born nineteen years ago" (36) to Yazz' behaviour as a child (37) to her teenage years (38).

The last paragraph takes place on an unknown temporal level (TL0). The language implies the present—"the house breathes differently when Yazz isn't there" (40)—yet as previously established, Amma is currently not in the house but at the theatre. Seemingly in the present, Amma realises that she misses Yazz, who recently moved out. Amma "hopes she comes home after university / most of them do these days, don't they? / they can't afford otherwise" (40). Evaristo here creates an alternating sense of negativity by criticising the capitalist and neoliberal housing crisis for younger generations, and hope as well as longing when ending the subchapter with: "Yazz can stay forever / really" (40). The juxtaposition of "forever," the final full stop at the end of the character's subchapter, and Yazz being the focaliser of the ensuing subchapter in the book further emphasises the simultaneity of queer identity in the present, and subsequent queer futures. This melts the West African notion of circularity with an immediate and queer future created by both action and longing. The subchapter ends on a universal, blurry temporal note. This generates a simultaneity of past, present, and future by combining Amma's experiences from the past with her emotions, wishes, and desire felt in the present but directed towards the future. Amma's temporality is based on a

queer feeling backward and a Sankofa-like remembrance, both with utopian ideas for continuing forward to the play and to a future with Yazz. A queer future is thus very clearly on the horizon. Concluding the chapter, future-oriented hope and bittersweet nostalgia are combined to an omnipresent temporality on an unknown time level.

Megan/Morgan's Circular Temporality of Becoming

Morgan's subchapter begins on TL3, it is thus a memory-within-a-memory. The memories retold in the beginning still refer to Morgan as Megan and the narrator uses the pronouns "she" and "her" (307). It can be concluded that the memories from 'her' childhood and youth are recalled from a past point in time, because the character is already known as Morgan on TL1. The ensuing memories are difficult to locate on the arrow of time and a specific time level. Memories embedded in critical analysis of hetero- and cisnormativity on TL2 (307-308) are followed by recollections of the constraining expectations of Morgan's parents to adhere to conservative gender roles during childhood on TL3. On this third time level, Morgan remembers being forced to wear dresses, play with Barbies, and to present as 'feminine' (307-310), although this demeanour "felt wrong, even at a young age" (308). The taught norms of hetero- and cisnormativity and behaviour according to ascribed gender roles dominated Morgan's life from the very beginning and by reconstructing these memories, Morgan is able to view them through a critical lens.

The structure of Morgan's chapter points most obviously to a reading of queer temporality. The reader accompanies Morgan on their learning curve, and witnesses their first exposure to queer identities, and their reflections on their own queerness. From a young age, they want to change certain gendered circumstances, but their attempts always meet resistance from their parents and friends and Morgan is punished for their refusal to adhere to gender stereotypes (309). Their negative emotions towards traditional 'femininity' become even more apparent when they get older. The exact age is not specified, but at some point, between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, Morgan's discomfort regarding their physical appearance begins to grow. The passage of time, and with it Morgan's bodily changes, are seen as problematic and uncomfortable, so much so that Morgan's body "began to repulse her" and only after shaving their long hair off, "she felt free, weightless, herself" (312). Freeman's concept of erotohistoriography might partly be applied here, as well. From a later point in time, Morgan remembers bodily sensations, the frustrating aspects as well as the joyous ones. They are annoyed and pained by having to adhere to Western gender norms that are not necessarily part of their ancestral cultures and feel relieved after being able to change the appearance of

their body. According to chrononormativity, during this adolescent time physical changes can certainly be confusing but are generally meant to be welcomed. For Morgan, however, the future seems forlorn and pointless. As a consequence of internal discomfort, gender dysphoria, and external reactions, Morgan leaves school and begins to work at McDonald's, where they feel "McStuck / McForever" (313), implying that for Morgan there seems to be almost no future[8] at all, while simultaneously the present and its circumstances seem to be infinite and unchangeable.

Morgan begins to seek refuge in drugs, spending their "evenings hanging about on the Quayside with the men and women who accepted her as she was / an outsider, just like them" (Evaristo 313). Morgan begins "sleeping with the men who could provide [drugs] for her" and "with the women who took a liking to her / discovered she preferred them" (314). It is implied that these are regular occurrences, underlining the blurriness of time both when under the influence of drugs on a "higher, happier plane" (314), and when feeling lost and desperate. The incisive moment in which Morgan decides to quit drugs is underlined by the almost lyrical phrasing of the outcome of Morgan's withdrawal: "she woke up / born / again" (315). Time feels cyclical, a metaphorical birth repeats the initial one. Moreover, the metaphor of birth is underlined by the nine months Morgan is lost in drug use, cannot see and subsequently denies a future, but begins to experiment with their queer sexuality. It then takes nine days for them to become sober and consequently be "born / again." Evaristo here evokes the belief in the possibility of re-birth, an important part of African cosmology (see f. ex. Dovlo), while the temporal length of nine months and nine days hints at a birth metaphor that is queered by Morgan's gender and sexual identity but also their refusal to adhere to chrononormative reproductive expectations. Morgan does not birth another human; they are themselves cyclically born again. This is their first conscious decision towards a hopeful future.

When Morgan is forced to move out of their parents' house on their eighteenth birthday, the memories are told quickly and successively, still in the blur of TL2 and TL3 (316-317). During the next months, they flee to a place that is arguably beyond space and time, the internet, where they first encounter Bibi (317-318). Morgan "discovered the trans world, engaged in conversations with people on the trans spectrum" and begins chatting with Bibi (318). This instance portrays queer temporality in terms

[8] For more in-depth arguments for the 'no future' approach to queer temporality, see Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*.

of education in several aspects. As Nguyen Tan Hoang puts forward in "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion":

> [a]mong many paths that delineate 'queer time,' two of the most generative for me include (1) retracing a young person's secretive and circuitous routes to queer culture (through music, art, literature, popular culture) and (2) revisiting the various scenes of queer pedagogy (not only in the classroom and library but also in the park, street, bar, basement, kitchen, chat room, bedroom). (Dinshaw et al.183)

Although certainly subconsciously aware of their queerness already at a young age, Morgan discovers that they like to sleep with women as a teenager and learns about queer culture later in conversation with Bibi and other people on the internet. Their education does not occur according to a hetero- and cis-normative timeline in school, but only when they seek out the information they want and need. The written conversations between Morgan and Bibi are retold over an unknown period of time, but in depth, and occupy more narrative time than the individual events of Morgan's childhood and youth (Evaristo 318-324).

Morgan and Bibi's "historic first meeting in Caffè Nero on a Saturday afternoon in Newcastle station" (324) might already shift the temporal level from TL3 to TL2. Numerous conversations, mostly with regard to various gender and sexuality related topics have already taken place between the two (323). This meeting leads to their first kiss and marks the beginning of Morgan's physical relationship with Bibi (326). On a hike, the two of them discuss Morgan's gender identity and expression and alternative ways of referral and pronouns (328). Jacob Roberts Lau posits that "[t]rans-temporal moments are often affective events of somatic dislocation and point to hopeful moments in which current and past displacements could be rewritten" (Lau 8). While on this hike, Morgan finds themselves in a different and new space, somewhere they appear not to have been before. Moreover, they are accompanied by their new lover, friend, confidant, and potential partner, who provides a 'safe space' for the conversation on gender, sexuality, and identity. During this walk, Morgan decides on their pronouns, a trans-temporal moment that influences Morgan's life, relationship, and overall narrative.

Importantly, Morgan and Bibi explicitly talk about queer utopia. During their walk, Morgan wonders "how she could put her gender-free identity into practice when they were living in a gender-binary world" (Evaristo 326). When Morgan suggests that "maybe that was the point, a completely gender-free world, or was that a naïve utopian dream?", Bibi argues that "dreaming wasn't naïve but essential for survival, dreaming was the equivalent of hoping on a large scale" (327). Their hopefulness and desire for a more inclusive future is in line with Muñoz's concept of queer utopia.

Immediately after witnessing their conversation, the reader is transported to the present on TL1. The third-person narrator states that “Morgan (no longer Megan) / has self-identified as gender-free for six years now” (328). Contrary to Amma’s, Morgan’s subchapter hence includes a temporally defined change between past and present, introduced by this explicit announcement. The transition of name and pronouns illuminates the differentiation between past and present in Morgan’s narrative. Simultaneously, the indistinguishable narration of TL2 and TL3 is kept open to interpretation and as such, mirrors the fluidity of queerness, of diasporic identities, of social media and online communities, and of temporality.

Arguably, Morgan’s subchapter then seems almost split into a ‘before’ and ‘after’ their decision to change their pronouns during the hike with Bibi. Due to the character’s explicit trans (temporal) experiences and non-binary identity, but also given the (queer) fluidity of memories and narrative time levels, Morgan’s chapter eludes a clear-cut split into a pre- and post-transition order. Even though they were assigned female at birth and forced to adhere to stereotypical gender norms as a child, Morgan has been non-binary their whole life, as shown by their chapter’s temporal entanglements. Lau advocates for a “reading and understanding [of] trans of color narratives [that] suspend[s] the expectation of a linear trajectory ‘crossing over’ from one gender and/or sex to another” (26). A certain transnormativity might be reflected in Evaristo’s writing, as there are glaring differences between the part of the chapter set before and the one after the hike. The first part is told on two past time levels and the character is referred to as ‘Megan’ and ‘she/her’ (Evaristo 307-328). The second part consists of TL1 and TL2, but the memories of TL2 only include references to ‘Morgan’ and ‘they/them’ pronouns (328-340). Nevertheless, I argue that Morgan’s queer gender fluidity is mirrored in the (queer) temporal fluidity of the narrative. Their ‘feeling backward’ is narrated on different levels of the past, underlining the difference in memory and in gender performance. Morgan hopes for and strives towards a better future and adjusts their identity and behaviour accordingly. Their temporality is felt and narrated in two temporal segments. Their ascribed identity feels distinctively wrong in the past, and Morgan thus often feels backward with grief, anger, and perhaps bitterness. Nevertheless, they do recall the past unhappy times in detail in order to learn and to and establish a joyful future, which is constructed throughout the first parts of then ‘Megan’s’ subchapter as not-yet-here. The notion of becoming is distinctly queer in Megan’s/Morgan’s narration.

Morgan's name and pronouns on TL1 and the universal time level are now adapted. By then, TL1 has progressed to a point in time after the play (329). The following narrative alternates between the present on TL1 and analepses to various incidents leading to and results of Morgan's career as an influencer on Twitter (329-330, 332-340). By means of their outspoken activism online, Morgan contributes to creating an archive of queer presence and memory, documenting "those […] dreams of belonging to 'History'" and making possible "the feeling a latter-day queer subject might have reading the archive of those dreams" (Nealon in Dinshaw et al. 179). Morgan leaves traces of queerness on their accounts and platform(s) on the internet for other (queer) people to find, perhaps even generations later.

On a universal time level (TL0), Morgan and Bibi enjoy their relationship with one another (Evaristo 331, 333) and regularly visit GG, Morgan's great-grandmother. After remembering conversations with GG about her ancestry and GG's decision to leave Morgan her farm after she dies (331-332), the narrative keeps jumping back and forth between the recent past (TL2) and the present (TL1). On both time levels, Morgan encounters Yazz. In an anachronic and once again cyclical manner, Morgan first discovers her in the present at the National Theatre, before recalling their first meeting with Yazz when they gave a presentation at Yazz' university in the previous year (334-338). This time, Morgan makes possible queer education (see Hoang in Dinshaw et al. 183) outside a normative educational context. Although their talk takes place at a university, as an influencer and activist they are not a lecturer in the usual sense. Their presence and presentation add to a more diverse representation of queer possibilities for the younger audience. The interaction between Morgan and Yazz is taken up again on TL1 when Yazz invites Morgan to stay and talk to her friends after the play (Evaristo 339-340). The subchapter ends with Yazz telling Morgan she hopes that there is alcohol left at the party as the attending people "don't know when to stop" (340). The last sentence uttered underlines once again a universal temporal level, as well as the open ending and endless possibilities for Morgan's future.

Gender and time are performed by Morgan in relation to both Western and West African epistemology. Although Morgan refers to themselves as "gender-free" and "non-binary," as well as "pansexual" (336), terms originating in Western queer studies, the very concept of gender non-conforming identities or genders outside the binary is indigenous to many African cultures (see f. ex. Tamale 3). Morgan's rejection of the gender binary aligns with their African heritage on numerous levels. Not only is the

male-female binary and associated gender norms a Western invention (Oyěwùmí), portrayals of different non-binary or genderfluid and queer identities can also be found in other African literature, most notably perhaps in several of Akwaeke Emezi's works. In Emezi's novel *Freshwater*, the protagonist is a genderfluid *ogbanje* person. According to Igbo beliefs, ogbanje are reborn spirits that often 'haunt' the mothers and families and contribute to children's deaths at a young age (see f. ex. Chukwudera; Christie C. Achebe). In *Freshwater*, the spirits and the different persons the protagonist becomes, identify as different or no genders. Even in one of the most famous African literary works, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's daughter Ezinma, who often behaves like a boy, is believed to be an ogbanje child (see Achebe; Aji and Ellsworth). Morgan's gender-free and non-binary identity is thus far from isolated in African literary representation.

Morgan contemplates their diasporic identity as "part Ethiopian, part African-American, part Malawian, and part English", which they realise feels "weird when you [break] it down like that", so instead they prefer to think of themselves as "just a complete human being" (Evaristo 311). Similar to their refusal to subscribe to any gender binary, their discomfort with a distinct categorisation based on visible markers of nationality and ethnicity becomes apparent. The combination of being and performing outside of the Western gender binary but referring to identity categories in terms of what has been criticised to be Western terminology underlines Morgan's diasporic queer experience. As stated earlier, in current discourse 'queer' is reclaimed by many as an umbrella term for cosmopolitan LGBTQIA+ identities and realities. The Adinkra symbol of transformation[9] that introduces Megan's/Morgan's subchapter ties the temporal aspects of both queer and postcolonial/diasporic experiences together. Moreover, in African cosmology, "healing and unity of life" (Okwu 20) are embedded in a cyclical continuum, which is represented in Morgan's repeated 're-birth,' first after their drug addiction and then after their transition. Past, present, and future are fluidly intertwined in Morgan's trans identity and their overall narrative. Morgan continuously defies hetero- and cisnormative temporal values. Neither do they subscribe to chrononormative performances of straight time, nor to Western linearity. Morgan's transition and non-binary identity are in themselves performances of queer and West African temporality.

[9] 'Sesa Wo Suban' translates to 'change or transform my life/character' ("West African Wisdom: Adinkra Symbols & Meanings").

Towards a Conclusion: Intersections of West African and Queer Temporalities in *Girl, Woman, Other*

In *Girl, Woman, Other*, examinations of sexuality, gender, as well as time and temporality are brought together in queer postcolonial fluidity. The title indicates change as well as simultaneity of identity in a queer and diasporic context, the two characters scrutinised in this article evolve along those lines. Amma's subchapter is largely told in analepses; she remembers her life up until the day of her play's opening night. Her narrative is constructed around platonic, romantic, sexual, and familial relationships in the past and present. In her subchapter, the content of the play that is yet to be performed is pre-empted, leading to the inclusion of an analeptic future-perspective. In relation to time and temporality, it therefore adopts a queer approach to future-positivity and performs this on a discourse and content level. Megan/Morgan performs queer time directly through their transition from being perceived as and labelled a woman, assigned female at birth, to gender-free/non-binary. Chrononormativity is not only defied by their life events and decisions, but queer critique is also performed through the narration of Morgan's non-linear learning process and transition as well as the notion of constant becoming. Too often, queer "sexual past [is] relentlessly reconfigured as a site of infectious irresponsibility rather than valued for generating and maintaining the systems of cultural communication and care" (Castiglia and Reed 3). For Amma and Morgan, though, queer sexual pasts are both irresponsible, frustrating, and sad as well as joyous memories (see Evaristo 21-23; 314, 326). Both characters recall their own past erotic experiences. Amma even writes into existence the memory of others, that is, the warriors' sapphic relationships (re)presented in her play (24-25). Furthermore, both characters continuously establish and maintain queer 'systems of cultural communication and care' as their narratives are constructed around their relationship to themselves and their loved ones.

The characters' subjective temporality and the performance of time and its associated values on the spectrum of temporality highlight the necessity of including queer and West African temporalities in this literary analysis. "In a typically diasporic (queer) fashion, *Girl, Woman, Other* is designed as a fluid continuum rather than as a series of clear-cut subject positionings" (Sánchez-Palencia 11). By bringing into dialogue approaches from queer and (West) African cosmologies, it becomes clear that time and temporality are always constructed in relation to each other, to the (other) characters, and to cultural and societal norms and values, as well as embedded in power structures, and must be examined as such.

Kara Keeling argues that "[r]elation anchors us in the queerness that is autochthonous to time" (198). In *Girl, Woman, Other*, the polyphonic and kaleidoscopic narrative in its non-linearity and anachronicity points to queer temporality by highlighting the fluidity of sexuality, gender, time, and temporality. The two subchapters discussed here are centred around the notion of constant becoming. The anachronicity of each narrative underscores the non-linear spectrum of queer temporality based on which the characters experience their queerness and general life, while the overall structure of the novel points to West African circularity.[10] The lives of Amma and Morgan are embedded in a spectrum of queer and non-linear temporality. Both subchapters speak to the idea of 'going back in time to learn for the future', and thus, to Sankofa. Their identities are constructed through memories on the one hand, and their continuous desire and hope for a utopian queer future on the other. Micha Frazer Carroll claims that "*Girl, Woman, Other* is about struggle, but it is also about love, joy and imagination." Circling back and reclaiming the past as an act of queer and postcolonial defiance, while celebrating ecstatic moments of queer joy against all odds and desiring a utopian future within its uncertainty are all performances of queer time and temporality. Reading the novel through a queer and West African lens therefore becomes a decolonial practice.

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[10] Of course, there are many non-African or -postcolonial examples of anachronic narratives. A variety of Western and/or white authors make use of non-linear time to disrupt, subvert, rethink, or (re)claim non-normative or alternative temporalities. The intention of this article is not to argue for non-linearity and anachronicity to be an exclusive characteristic of African temporalities, but rather to advocate for the inclusion and acknowledgement of nuance and complexity in terms of cultural contexts and histories when analysing (narrative representations of) time and temporality.

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