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Queer Objects: Introduction

> Nowhere can a collective feeling become consciousness of itself without fixing upon a tangible object; but by that very fact, it participates in the very nature of that object . . .
>
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In February 2018, a member of the Kenyan Parliament posted on her Facebook page an image that startled her followers. It depicts a girl in her early teens standing in front of a small, traditional house of branches and clay in what looks like an arid savanna landscape. Shyly looking away from the camera, her face is barely visible. What stands out instead is her large bead necklace. Strings of red beads spiral up in concentric coils, covering her neck from her chest to her chin. From the front, the beads appear to form a flat-conic bundle resting heavily on her shoulders. Most Kenyans would recognize such necklaces as representative of ethnically Samburu women from the northern parts of their country. Young women wearing such necklaces feature widely in tourist ads and on the promotional materials of girl-empowerment organizations as representative of a traditional African culture. Samburu, however, associate such necklaces with women living in rural areas, who raise livestock or farm. Tokens of beauty and respectability, such necklaces display these women's attachment to local *lkereti*—a Maa (Samburu) language word that English-speaking Samburu translate as "culture" or "the normal way of doing things." To distinguish young stay-at-home rural women from "schoolgirls," Samburu call them "girls of the beads" (Maa [M]: *ntoyie ee saen*), their necklaces emblematic of a distinctly rural femininity.

When the MP visited villages to hold political rallies, she often photographed one or another "girl of the beads" whose schooling she had decided to sponsor. A Samburu herself and a well-known women's empowerment activist, she posted these pictures on her Facebook page to promote the education of rural girls and demonstrate her strong commitment to facilitating it. Her social media followers, mostly middle-class, educated, town-based Samburu, saw "girls of the beads" as legitimate beneficiaries of such humanitarian

gestures. They would respond to the MP's posts with messages of gratitude, addressing her respectfully as "our mama" or "mother of Samburu." The image the MP uploaded on that day was similar to the ones she had posted in the past. But the text that accompanied it was different. "Some time ago," she wrote, "this boy took to wearing beads like a girl and elders cannot do much about it." "It is important," she said, "that he be rescued and sent to school to become a real man."

The MP's followers responded to her revelation by posting dozens of comments that expressed shock, pity, or disgust. Many saw the "boy with beads" (M: *layeni oo saen*) as proof of a recent global spread of homosexuality much debated in the national media. Some asserted vehemently—in English—that "homosexuality is un-African." They borrowed this phrase from political and religious leaders across the continent who, throughout the past decade, have used it often to depict same-sex intimacies as a threat to their nations and cultures. This threat, leaders implied, was foreign, coming from outside. The MP's other followers commented in Maa and the national Swahili language, calling homosexuality a "disease" (M: *moyan*) or "curse" (Swahili [S]: *laana*). "Homosexuality is an ungodly act that does not exist in our culture," one follower said. "Samburu people have known no such thing." "The world," said another, "is slowly turning to Sodom and Gomorrah." "The child is innocent," yet others countered, emphasizing a possible lack of "parental guidance" and urging the MP to help.

Why did the MP's post prompt anti-homosexual rhetoric among social media users from the region? What did it mean for the MP and her followers to want to "rescue" the child? And how did a bead necklace—otherwise emblematic of culture, rural femininity, and Samburu ethnicity—become entangled in denoting homosexuality? The MP posted this image at a time when, in northern Kenya, Samburu *laiyok* or "boys" aged twelve to twenty prepared for initiation, through ritual circumcision, into a new age set (M: *laji*)—that is, a named generational cohort of men. Such initiations take place once every thirteen to fifteen years. In February 2018, elders across the region were planning to commence these ceremonies within a few months. This was a time when locals expected novices to prove their strength and courage and convince elders they were ready "to become men." The girl the MP photographed was of the same age as these novices, but, once outed as a "boy," she generated unsettling ambiguity. For someone who was supposed to prepare for male circumcision to wear a girls' necklace and act shyly and modestly as girls of the beads typically did caused "gender trouble" (Butler 1990). For educated Samburu active on social media, these acts subverted cultural expectations of masculine assertiveness long associated with newly circumcised

young men as "warriors" or *morans* (a Kenyan English and Swahili word derived from the Maa *ilmurran*, "warrior"). At a time when boys should have set themselves apart from girls to express their readiness to become morans, the MP's image and her statement affirmed and amplified concerns that binary gender roles were becoming blurry. This threatened the heteromasculinity that some now imagined as foundational to ethnic culture; men would no longer be "*real* men."

But it might be less clear what, if anything, this had to do with homosexuality. In fact, the MP did not identify the teen in her image as homosexual. Nor was there any explicit indication that this young person claimed a sexual orientation or had engaged in sex. Drawing on the language of global queer liberalism, one would have seen her as a transgender woman. But, unlike youths and LGBT activists in Nairobi or Mombasa—Kenya's largest cities—who commonly identified as such, a rural, Maa-speaking teen, without formal education, most likely did not. What is more, third-person pronouns in Maa (*niniye*, pl. *ninche*) and Swahili (*yeye*, pl. *wao*) are not gendered, thus making it easier to conceal gender ambiguity than English pronouns (hence, my use of gender pronouns here is more in tune with queer liberal politics and faces a certain challenge of translation). So, calling the pictured teen a "boy" and referring to her (or them?) as "he"—in English—asserted a biological interiority that was incongruent with her appearance. A new global surge of anti-homosexual rhetoric since the late 2000s certainly provided educated northerners with a discursive framework for apprehending the MP's revelation. Conservatives across the country deployed the English category of the "homosexual" as interchangeable with the derogatory Swahili *shoga*—"faggot" (also S: *fagoo*)—to refer to a wide spectrum of gender and sexual nonconformities pertaining primarily to people they saw as biologically male, including transgender women. The anti-homosexual rhetoric in response to the MP's post was certainly a reaction to gender nonconformity. But, as I will show, much more than gender was at stake.

In the Kenyan national public and on social media, the term "homosexual" often works to identify, name, and denounce persons said to embody cultural and sexual styles that are "foreign." Homosexuality's foreignness may pertain here to several fractal distinctions of culture and space. At one level, homosexuality figures as a Western affliction threatening the African nation from the outside. Conservatives across the world—from Brazil to Russia—have called this "the gay agenda" and described it as a white LGBT movement forced upon non-Western nations by Euro-American governments, lending agencies, and human rights activists (Gevisser 2020; Sperling 2015). At another level, within the nation, Kenyan elites have long attributed homosexuality to

regions and ethnic groups that the state's Christian nationalism has marginalized, such as, for example, coastal Muslims (Porter 1995, 147). They have also associated homosexuality with tourist resorts or, more recently, public health NGOs, where foreign consumers and reformists appeared to use their capital to dictate how local intimacies should change.

As part of this nationalist spatialization of sexual immorality, schools and villages have played important roles. To Kenyan elites, schools have long represented both necessary avenues to development and progress *and* dangerous places that exposed African children to Western colonial values and sexual perversions. In recent years, the national media has repeatedly reported that boarding schools across the country faced "outbreaks" of *gayism* or *lesbianism*, terms referring less to immutable sexual identities than to contagiously expanding afflictions of desire. In contrast to schools, villages have figured in the national imagination as quintessential loci of cultural innocence, moral purity, and heteropatriarchal regeneration—safe havens from the "perversions" of modernity and globalization. Urban elites, for example, often sent their sons to the "home" village to undergo circumcisions and participate in initiation ceremonies, claiming that rural customs strengthen "soft town boys" and socialize them in the virtues of masculine endurance.[1] For elites, Keguro Macharia argues (2013, 283), villages are "intimate museums devoted to maintaining 'traditional' forms of intimacy." Thus, encountering homosexuality amidst rural "girls of the beads" surely came as a surprise to many. Moreover, the MP took this photograph in Samburu County's lowlands, a place that locals have seen as "isolated" and therefore more invested in "true" pastoralist culture (Holtzman 2004, 75). Her social media followers were outraged then that a "boy" from the lowlands—an "intimate museum" of their ethnic culture—wore a bead necklace and claimed femininity.

This outrage illustrates what Basile Ndjio (2016, 115) describes as an intensified "culturalization of sexuality" in late capitalism, that is, a set of "enduring efforts . . . to construct a more racialized and autochthonized form of sexuality . . . [as] a marker of racial and ethnic identity and an index of social categorization." Since colonialism, the definition of ethnicity in Kenya has revolved, in part, around intimacy (Macharia 2019, 119). Eager to reject racist colonial stereotypes that associated black bodies with sexual perversion, nationalist elites have often turned to ethnic customs in search of an enduring heteronormativity that would resonate with Christian notions of respectability. The culturalization of sexuality and the ethnicization of intimacy have, if anything, intensified with the political and economic transformations of late capitalism. Over the past few decades, Samburu, who have long been marginalized by Kenya's post-independence leaders (mostly Kikuyu from the central region of the country),

have sought new avenues to power and resources through ethno-nationalist claims. Their ethno-nationalist politics—at times also involving other marginalized Maa-speaking groups such as Maasai and Chamus—revolved, among other things, around claiming sexual respectability and foreclosing colonial stereotypes of pastoralists' promiscuity. Colonial and post-independence leaders have long used such stereotypes as ideological alibis to marginalize Maa speakers economically and politically (Meiu 2017, 40–64). Culturalizing sexuality and disavowing homosexuality, local elites then sought to participate more fully in the Kenyan public sphere by redeploying its cultural grammars to their advantage. If ethnicity was to become a stable criterion of citizenship, respectable sexuality had to define Samburu relations of ethnic belonging.

A Twitter post from March 15, 2019, illustrates how sexuality became a central criterion of ethnic respectability in this context. Another Samburu politician, Naisula Lesuuda, shared an article entitled "Tribe Where Same-Sex Marriage Is Allowed in Kenya."[2] The article described a custom common at the Kenyan coast to the Indian Ocean, where a wealthy widow could marry—through bridewealth payment—a younger wife, thus continuing to grow her lineage even after her husband's death. The author, Eddy Mwanza, suggests that, under the country's Penal Code's criminalization of "carnal knowledge against the order of nature," such traditional arrangements should be persecuted. Initially published in *Kenyans*, a Nairobi-based newspaper, the article circulated on Twitter with a catchier image: a photograph of five Samburu women with colorful bead necklaces. The article shocked Lesuuda. "Are you serious?" she wrote. "Why use Samburu Women Picture in this story?" She reassured her followers that in her culture, "same-sex [relations] are outlawed." And her followers responded with an outpouring of anti-homosexual outrage. As bead necklaces made women identifiable as Samburu, associating them with homosexuality, educated and elite Samburu defended ethnicity by performing a culturalized aversion for same-sex relations.

To return to the MP's provocative Facebook post featuring what she saw as a "boy with beads," I suggest that the outrage it provoked should be understood as part of this wider political and historical context. This is a context in which many perceived gender and sexual nonconformity as symptomatic of globalization; anti-homosexual rhetoric as a central means for the culturalization of sexuality; and sexual respectability as key to the pursuit of ethno-national citizenship. To better understand the outrage the MP's post generated, it is productive to think here of the *homosexual body* imagined in ethno-nationalist politics as distinct from—though also constitutive of—the gender- and sexually nonconforming people whom it eventually comes to describe. Moral panics over homosexuality, scholars have shown, do not

always require the homosexual to be anything other than an empty signifier, a specter that is initially independent of the concrete bodies upon which it is later inscribed (Bosia and Weiss 2013, 5; Murray 2012, 17–18; cf. Mayer and Sauer 2017). This signifier can generate fear and panics before any concrete bodies have been identified as its referents. At the same time, however, across the world, the homosexual is also an overdetermined signifier, predefined as involving foreign, devious forces that undermine local culture and heteropatriarchal reproduction. Meanwhile, the concrete bodies to which this signifier attaches itself at any time do not have to be *known* in order to be recognized as homosexual. The MP's Facebook followers did not know, for example, who the person behind the bead necklace was—her name; how she identified; or, following local modes of situating persons socially, to what clan and lineage she belonged. Looking away from the camera with her face barely visible, the protagonist was, if anything, an absence or an appearance hollowed of social identity. This empty appearance then gained an interiority and an identity suddenly when it encountered, on social media, the abstract homosexual body—an object foreign to itself. This encounter then produced the "boy with beads" as an "obvious" target of outrage and repudiation.

What mediated this encounter, among other things, was the bead necklace. Once the MP described the young person she photographed as a "boy," an incongruity emerged between this revelation and the large, visually imposing necklace that claimed, on behalf of its wearer, the identity of a "girl of the beads." But the necklace was more than simply a marker of rural femininity. In northern Kenya, this artifact has long generated social anxieties of its own. First, since the 1930s, colonials, missionaries, national leaders, and development workers have associated such necklaces with a custom known as "beading." In this custom, a moran offered a girl such bead necklaces and, if she accepted his gift, they commenced an intimate relationship which allowed them to have sex. British colonials and missionaries repeatedly tried to ban beading, seeing it as immoral. Since around 2010, the custom has gained new attention from child-rights and girl-empowerment NGO workers. Horrified that beading allowed "underaged children" to have sex, they called on rural Samburu to abandon both the custom and the beads (see chapter 4). Educated and elite Samburu, familiar with these humanitarian discourses, also saw bead necklaces as "sex objects"—proofs of unfolding sexual relationships. So, many might have perceived the bead necklace in the MP's photograph as evidence that the "boy" had sex with—or otherwise tried to seduce—morans. It is also important to mention that the idea of seduction has been significant to how the national media depicted *gayism* and *lesbianism* as contagions that "broke out" and—through seduction—"spread" among youths.

Second, if, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, colorful plastic beads became emblematic of Samburu ethnicity, the fact that they were made of plastic and industrially produced led many to question these objects' autochthony. In recent years, rural female prophets have called on women to abandon plastic-bead necklaces, arguing that wearing them leads to infertility (Straight 2007, 37ff). Meanwhile, state attempts to prevent environmental pollution through plastic waste have further solidified local ideas that plastic is a dangerous foreign substance that threatens local bodies, nature, and cultures. It is no coincidence then that plastic also has come to evoke the idea of foreignness more generally and to refer at times to migrants, refugees, and homosexuals (see chapter 5). On social media, for example, a Samburu man described homosexuality as a "polluting plastic import" that does not fit "the chemistry of Africans," and others warned that micro-plastics consumed in water are what is causing it. So, even as necklaces were emblems of ethnic culture and rural femininity, their plastic materiality underscored the growing impossibility of telling apart what is autochthonous from what is foreign: both plastic and homosexuality, it seemed, embedded themselves in culture and, to everyone's astonishment, could suddenly appear local.

In the MP's post, then, the bead necklaces sexualized the main protagonist and, through their material substance, further associated her with anxieties over foreign pollutions. The implicit argument went something like this: if a "girl of the beads" could be revealed to be a "boy," then foreign forces have already turned culture inside out, inhabiting it at its core. Or, if the threat of homosexuality was indeed coming from outside the nation, it now announced its presence from *within* rural ethnic culture. And so, wearing bead necklaces, the homosexual could easily be misrecognized as autochthonous. The bead necklace in the MP's image reminded elite and educated locals that neither culture nor nativist heterosexuality were the stable bases of ethno-nationalist attachments that they needed them to be. Children, the very promise of a collective future, were now at risk of early sexualization and *gayism*. This then explains, in part, the response: a rush to disavow loudly homosexuality as foreign, un-African, or against culture and to rescue the young from the intimate plights of globalization.

Over the past decade, anti-homosexuality campaigns across Africa, Eastern Europe, Russia, South and Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean, among other places, have made global headlines. Political leaders, hoping to occlude their complicity in market liberalization and legitimize the state as a source of moral protectionism, have named homosexuality a salient danger to the nation. In East Africa, Uganda's infamous "kill-the-gays bill" in 2009 also emboldened leaders in Kenya, Malawi, and Tanzania to call on police and citizens

to purge their countries of homosexuality. (A similar bill was signed into law in Uganda in 2023.) However, in everyday life, this alleged homosexual threat—a signifier at once empty *and* overdetermined—was not easy to identify or pin down. To make the homosexual body a more stable target of outrage and violence, leaders, media, civil society groups, and citizens have therefore deployed a vast set of unlikely objects. Bead necklaces and plastics, as the northern Kenyan example shows, represent such objects that help constitute targets of anti-homosexual sentiment. Such objects may appear trivial to the violent politics of homophobia. But they are not. Their deployment in the political imagination constitutes the homosexual body in quite evocative ways, displacing and condensing anxieties over wider political and economic contexts and new conditions of social life.

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Queer Objects to the Rescue explores a set of objects that have played an important, though not readily recognizable, role in state and popular attempts to rescue intimacy and citizenship in Kenya. These objects are central to understanding how the homosexual body is constituted as a target of outrage, repudiation, violence, and exclusion. But they are also important departure points for understanding emerging historical developments in the role of intimacy to citizenship, more generally. Offering a set of *ethnographic detours* through the meanings, logics, and political deployments of such objects, this book pursues what Lauren Berlant (1997, 12) calls "a counterpolitics of the silly object": "a mode of criticism and conceptualization that reads the waste materials of everyday communication in the national public sphere as pivotal documents in the construction, experience, and rhetoric of quotidian citizenship." Pursuing objects, I show how political imaginaries of intimacy and citizenship are not always tied to something readily recognizable as "sex" or "sexuality." Nor do they always pertain to common sexualized targets of state exclusion, such as the homosexual, the prostitute, the transgender person, the refugee, the immigrant, or the terrorist. Rather, sexuality-rescue projects, including anti-homosexuality campaigns, also work *through*—that is, disguise themselves in, build on, and borrow from—anxieties over and aspirations related to objects. To understand and critique the politics of homophobia, I suggest, it is important to take these objects seriously.

This book then is an exercise in ethnographic imagination as political critique. If the homosexual body is not a ready-made object against which violence is expressed, but rather is itself constituted through the imaginaries involved in such violence (Judge 2017), then it is important to ask: What do the objects *through* and *around* which people express fears and anxieties over homosexuality reveal about intimacy and citizenship in the late capi-

talist postcolony? In the past two decades, political homophobia, a tactic of power deployed by leaders, elites, and their supporters across the world, has "gone modular," Michael J. Bosia and Meredith L. Weiss (2013, 6) argue, "being imposed in a consistent way across diverse contexts." However, for political homophobia to do the work of power across these contexts, it must also resonate with local fears, anxieties, and aspirations. In other words, it has to (be made to) become meaningful. For this, the homosexual depends on a vast arsenal of objects that are central to the "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld 1997) of any given national or ethno-regional public. And, like the homosexual, some of these objects (plastics, for example) are quite cosmopolitan in that they now do comparable political work across national boundaries. Pursuing such objects ethnographically offers a more complex picture of the social, political, and economic struggles that find expression in and shape intimate citizenship today.

Intimacy and Citizenship

Like elsewhere, in Kenya, debates over citizenship have intensified in the last four decades as the country has grown dependent on international loans and foreign investments and migration amplified both within and across its borders. With rapid urbanization, rampant unemployment, and a shrinking welfare state, 83 percent of Kenyans have turned to the informal sector—the so-called *jua kali*, "hot sun"—to make a living.[3] Competition over erratic income opportunities and decreasing access to land have sometimes exacerbated efforts to distinguish between ethnic groups, coastal and upcountry people, nationals and foreigners (Oucho 2002). A new imaginary of citizenship has featured labor migrants from Uganda and Tanzania, Chinese investors and laborers, and Euro-American tourists and humanitarians as problematic figures who shape local markets in ways that, at times, disadvantage Kenyans. It has also featured asylum seekers from Somalia and South Sudan as escalating security threats related to Al-Shabaab terrorism and the "radicalization" of Kenyan young men (Bachmann 2012; Kassa 2018). Private appropriation of public resources, fiscal inflation, and a rising gap between the rich and the poor have also rendered the inclusionary promises of citizenship suspicious (Blunt 2019; Smith 2008). Of late, speculation in the media that the government was selling citizenship—national ID cards and passports—to wealthy foreign nationals to pay off international debts has amplified such suspicions.[4] So too have, for example, the struggles of Makonde and Nuba ethnic groups to be recognized as citizens, after the government had denied them national ID cards ever since their forced relocation to Kenya during the time

of British colonialism (Balaton-Chrimes 2016). And so, the very question of *what it means to be a Kenyan citizen* has been saliently debated.

Dorman, Hammett, and Nuget (2007, 8) argue that in Africa and beyond, global market reforms have threatened state-level national identity, making urgent "elite attempts to retain power through the molding of citizenship." "Citizens," they suggest, "are encouraged to rally around the state against external hordes" (8); they are urged "to exacerbate tensions and foster a strong sense of oppositional collective identity" (20). Redefinitions of citizenship have also sustained an urge to close off borders, secure autochthons, exclude foreigners, and anchor power closer to home, in various national, religious, or ethnic sovereignties (Geschiere 2009; Geschiere and Meyer 1998; Tonkens and Duyvendak 2016). As part of this effort, figuring out who truly belongs and who is an alien is a daunting task, albeit one pursued with much energy, urgency, and sometimes violence (Appadurai 1998; Nyamnjoh 2006). This quest has also intensified what Tonkens and Duyvendak (2016, 3) call the "culturalization of citizenship," "a process in which what it is to be a citizen is less defined in terms of civic, political or social rights, and more in terms of adherence to norms, values and cultural practices." The "culturalization of sexuality" (Ndjio 2016, 115) discussed above is an example of such a means for the culturalization of citizenship. The turn to autochthony has thus prompted calls to rehabilitate morality and exclude those who do not adhere to the values "of the land" (Tonkens and Duyvendak 2016, 6–8).

Debates over the meanings of citizenship have focused centrally on intimacy. As the hyphen between *nation* and *state* has come sharply into question (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001), political leaders claim to rescue and securitize normative intimate arrangements as bases of national identity, precisely to realign the nation with the state: to legitimize, that is, the state as the ultimate protector of national values. M. Jacqui Alexander (2005, 25–26) describes these late postcolonial transformations of intimacy and citizenship as "heteropatriarchal recolonization," a process through which "the state can produce a group of nonprocreative noncitizens who are objects of its surveillance and control . . . to veil the ruses of power"—to occlude leaders' own complicity in market liberalization. To legitimize state authority, leaders promise to protect their citizens from what they describe as the "perversions of globalization," to rescue traditional gender roles, nativist sexuality, and family values as seemingly durable foundations of citizenship. Through militarization, policing, and mass mediation, they deploy what Paul Amar (2013, 17) calls "tactics of hypervisibilization," "the spotlighting of certain identities and bodies as sources of radical insecurity and moral panic." Across the world, homosexuals, transgender people, prostitutes, and sexualized racial and ethnic

Others—whether "incestuous" indigenous people or "sexually aggressive" immigrants and refugees (Mack 2017; Partridge 2012)—constitute hegemonic targets of hypervisibilization and heteropatriarchal recolonization.

Beyond sexual types, in recent years, in Kenya, disputes have also intensified over sex education, abortion, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, teenage sexuality, customary widow inheritance or woman-to-woman marriage, and the "spread" of *gayism* and *lesbianism* (see, for example, Okech 2019; Van Klinken 2019; Wangila 2007). Questions over emerging forms of kinship, cohabitation, love, and consumption have intersected saliently with anxieties over sexuality—a key fetish of nationalisms, past and present (Mosse 1985). These have given rise to arduous debates on the street and on social media, in public panics and protests, but also in the regulatory practices of the government and NGOs preoccupied with surveying, medicalizing, or criminalizing intimacies. With the help of the media, leaders and reformists have spread the idea that rescuing nativist sexuality as a foundation of intimate life would grant people more easy access to resources, normative arrangements of gender, family, and reproduction, and, therewith, a respectable, prosperous future (cf. Cynn 2018). But this presupposes, first, securitizing intimacy from various moral threats. And these threats often appear ambiguous, fleeting, difficult to pin down—spectral forces yet to be revealed. David A. Murray (2012, 17) argues that part of these forces is a "spectral sexuality": "a threatening, perverted, and/or sick sexualized body or group of bodies [that] are continually incarnated in discourse but never fully instantiated in the flesh."

The process of imagining, identifying, objectifying, and repudiating such moral threats is constitutive of what I refer to as *intimate citizenship*. Ken Plummer (2011) defines the term as a set of practices and discourses concerned with private life as the basis of political recognition. Berlant (1997, 5) uses it to describe the late capitalist reorganization of citizenship away from the promise of a collective participation in the national public sphere toward a "constricted nation of simultaneously lived private worlds." It is "a condition of social membership produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating in . . . the family sphere" (5). "The dominant idea," Berlant shows, "is of a core nation whose survival depends on . . . the intimate domains of the quotidian" (4). Once private worlds appear threatened by the globally recognizable sexualized threats mentioned above, the state pursues intimate noncitizens and offers them up to secure "native (hetero)sexuality" (Alexander 1994, 6). But how are intimate noncitizens imagined? And how are they made into threats that citizens are likely to recognize and from which they would then desire to be protected?

I suggest that to understand why citizens themselves often invest such sexualized threats with apocalyptic imaginaries, it is important to explore how they come to be assembled and deployed at any given time. Focusing on objects, I show how logics and sentiments associated with homophobia emerge not simply in relation to the reified category of *the* homosexual, but across a vast social terrain of struggles with bodies, work, reproduction, respectability, and futurity. Tracking objects ethnographically, I show how desires, fears, and anxieties shift across domains of social life to produce various targets of exclusion. Bead necklaces, to recall the example with which I opened this chapter, made anxieties over rural femininity, child sexualization, environmental pollution, and the very feasibility of ethnic autonomy central to the production of the homosexual in the moment I outlined. The meanings of such sexualized threats are at once overdetermined, that is, readily recognizable across the world, *and* underdetermined, open to the contingencies of their encounters with the myriad mundane objects that lurk around them in any given context.

Queer Objects: Decentering Sexuality

To understand why sexuality has become such a central criterion of intimate citizenship today, it is necessary to attend to its less visible, less recognizable objects; to show how these objects produce inclusion and exclusion, reorient desires, and shape particular kinds of subject-citizens; to understand how they subvert, transform, and reproduce state power or local, regional, and national attachments. I see these objects as *queer*, among other things, because they trouble presumptions of sexuality as a distinct domain of being and experience. And this even as they help produce and sustain the fantasy of a distinctly sexual domain. These objects, as I will show, may also challenge normative understandings of sexual citizenship as anchored in identity, rights, and legal recognition, offering unique insights into how such understandings emerge in the first place. Engaging ethnographically and historically with such objects, this book approaches sexuality politics through representations and practices located not only *inside* the conventional domain of the sexual but, more importantly, *outside* it. Objects thus decenter sexuality and show how its political salience rests on its myriad constitutive outsides.

Donald L. Donham (2018, 8) critiques "the attribution of an illusory power to the concept of sexuality: that is, that sexualities are consistent states of being, relatively stable forms of personhood, that stand behind and produce, cause, and organize erotic attachments." Refusing the idea of sexuality as an essence or identity, Donham argues, we would be better positioned to

understand situational erotic attachments to myriad fetish-objects, including "race, color, wealth, language accent, lower-class style, smell, being dressed in a leather jacket or fur," and more (11). Here, Donham suggests, "the very process of eroticization may necessarily involve some 'objectification,'" but what is objectified is not reducible to gender as a determining factor of sexual orientation (15). Building on these insights, I explore how objects of a more broadly construed *erotic* investment—including the erotics of commodity consumption or collective mobilizations—both trouble sexuality *and* sustain its dominant role as a political fetish.

I use the term "queer objects" to de-essentialize sexuality and reflect on how its fetish-power depends on desires, fears, aspirations, and anxieties displaced from vast domains of social life. Sara Ahmed (2006) offers this term not to denote an essential class of things but to attend to how we position ourselves in relation to them. Bodies orient themselves in space and time, and are oriented by social pressures, with reference to particular objects. Objects, for example, direct us toward certain modes of living over others, toward pursuing some futures and not others. Some objects, Ahmed argues, must remain out of reach, relegated to the background, kept away from the normative alignments of family, reproduction, and genealogy. They become queer when our reflection brings them forward and, in focusing on them, generates unsettling effects. Foregrounding them gets things out of line and, in so doing, potentially reveals something new, unforeseeable. "Queer objects," Ahmed (2006, 169) suggests, "support proximity between those who are supposed to live on parallel lines, *as points that should not meet*. A queer object hence makes contact possible . . . creating other kinds of connections where unexpected things can happen." Yet, *pace* Ahmed, to me, queer objects do not always have to be "out of reach." Like the bead necklace or the plastics I described above, these may be artifacts widely used in everyday life. Hiding in plain sight, they can be—and often are—employed in the making of normative arrangements, without also being recognized as such. What makes such objects queer is their relational potential to reveal how normativities are produced and sustained, a potential that ethnography itself can activate.[5]

Foregrounding specific objects, then, can take us beyond a dominant domain of sexuality. Ethnography has already illustrated this possibility compellingly. In *Chisungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia*, Audrey Richards ([1956] 1982) shows how elderly women inculcate sexual values in the young novice by ritually aligning her body, at different times, with reference to different ceremonial clay figurines called *mbusa*. Mbusa, meaning "things handed down," include over forty types of pottery figurines with names such as "the water pot," "the hoe," "the garden," "the crocodile," "the porcupine,"

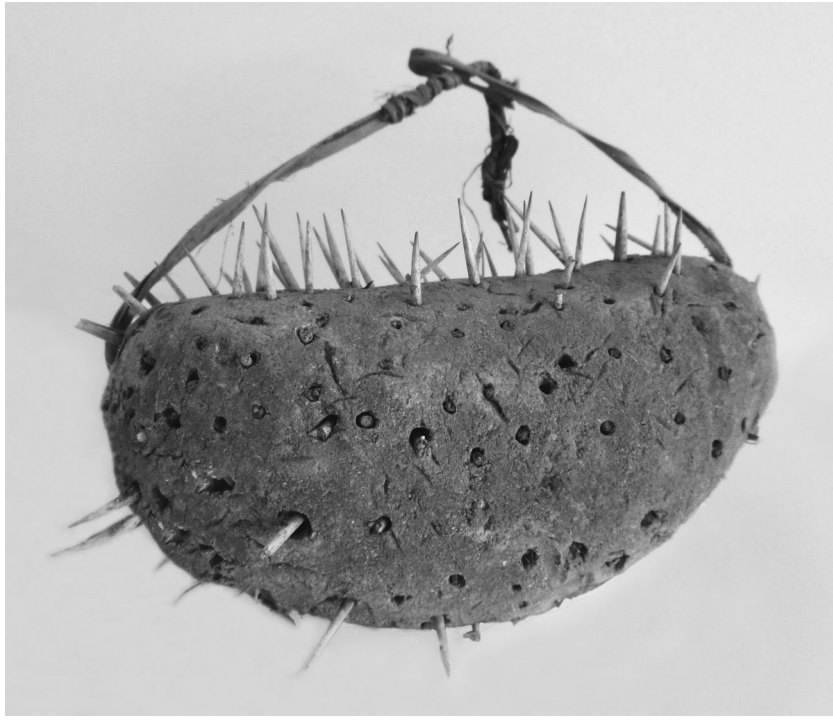

FIGURE 1. "The Porcupine," *mbusa* figurine used in Bemba girls' initiation rituals to represent a young man and the injuries sex with him may cause a girl. Moto Moto Museum, Mbala, Zambia. Photo by Mary Mbewe.

and "the man who is a fool" (59; 101–3). Each mbusa is accompanied by the performance of specific songs and gestures that reveal its secret meanings. "The figurines," Richards argues, "not only act as mnemonics for the songs but . . . they also come to represent moral attitudes and obligations . . . in a quotable form" (163). In other words, each mbusa involves and condenses meanings and sentiments associated with different domains of social life. Revisiting these objects, Henrietta L. Moore (1999, 13) argues that they "act as mnemonics not for the linguistic meaning embodied in verbal exegesis, but for the physical experiences which make up the lived world of sexuality, fertility and gaining a living, as well as for the long reflection on those activities which is the *chisungu* rite." In this rite, the novice learns basic moral norms through repetition "based on the body's orientations and movements" (1999, 15). Sexuality, then, whether as norm, practice, or pleasure, does not inhere in persons but in orientations of desire acquired and performed through one's positioning in relation to objects. I see queer objects as similar to the mbusa (and indeed, mbusa *as* queer objects)

in that they condense meaning and orient bodies in space and time to produce legitimate kinds of persons and citizen-subjects.

To better explain the relation between objects and sexuality, it is important that I first clarify briefly what I mean by objects. Following a Marxian approach, I see objects not as "things-in-themselves," but as processes through which, at particular moments in time, certain surfaces or substances may come to appear as self-contained, thing-like entities. Here, the very separation between subject and object, as Theodor W. Adorno (1998) argues, is but an effect of ideology. Capitalism, for example, requires transcendental, rational subjects to remain distinct from the seemingly self-contained, stable objects they exchange and consume. In contrast to these "wishful projections," Adorno suggests, the "object becomes something at all only through being determined" (246, 250). And "in the determinations that seem merely to be affixed to it by the subject, the subject's own objectivity comes to the fore" (250). Following Adorno's dialectic of subject and object, I explore how people produce particular objects to externalize and displace intimate anxiety and how, in the process of objectification, particular citizen-subjects emerge.[6]

But, the reader might ask, am I not also actively participating in the objectification of the things that I describe here? Describing objects may certainly solidify the impression of their objectivity. After all, is ethnography not a way to represent worldly processes in an objectified form? In this case, I think ethnographic objectification is a necessary first step of my analysis—an excuse, if you will, to move away from the homosexual as a reified target of violence and show how various other objects constitute this target. In this sense, then, I embrace the critical potentialities of objectification, what Michael Taussig (1993, 1) calls its ability of "not awakening[,] but petrifying life," so that "living things . . . abruptly release their significance." I imagine my ethnographic pursuit to be similar to the *chisungu* ritual, where elderly women, the so-called *nacimbusa*, use clay figurines to objectify—indeed, "petrify"—otherwise abstract societal attributes they want the novice to experience. But like the *nacimbusa*, I am also only invested in my objectifications for this fleeting, momentary experience. At the end of the rite, the *nacimbusa* destroy these figurines. So too does my ethnography: as soon as my reader has perceived these objects, my analysis pursues their dialectical emergence and dissolution in context: how they produce and are produced by various subjects and social worlds. What interests me in any object, then, is less its objectivity. Rather, I explore the tensions between, on the one hand, its historical objectification, the centripetal process of its constitution, and, on the other, the centrifugal forces that entangle it in the making of intimate citizenship, its aspirations, anxieties, and subjectivities.

FIGURE 2. Turkana *ekidet* doll. Author's collection. Photo by George Paul Meiu.

It is precisely this process of alternating objectification and dissolution that often also grants things their transformative force in ritual. Consider the example of the *ekidet* fertility dolls from northern Kenya (fig. 2). Among Turkana engaged in fishing, these dolls were made of palm nuts, beads, fish bones, leather, and rope. Resembling a penis, the *ekidet* was an androgynous object that also represented a girl with long hair, an apron, and beads. A young girl received this doll from her mother and would play with and care for it as if it were her baby. The source of fertility that the doll embodies rests precisely in its capacity to objectify *the space between*—and thus also dissolve—mundane normative objectifications such as male and female, infancy and adulthood, the body and its parts. Fertility came from the subversion of such separations—and potentially from their enjoyment in the play with the penis-*cum*-girl-*cum*-baby.[7] For me, the *ekidet*'s ritual logic illustrates another important analytic strategy I wish to pursue through queer objects: an intentional and temporary objectification of the *in-between* things as a way to de-objectify and de-essentialize more normative objects of political mobilization, such as the (homo)sexual body.

Objects—their materiality, textures, and substance, but also the mimetic qualities involved in their objectification—can push our imagination to ex-

plore sexuality's various *elsewheres*. I see queer objects as points of access to what Sigmund Freud (1913) calls the subject's "other scene" (*der andere Schauplatz*), the social unconscious of the subject, that which is disavowed for the subject to emerge and against which the subject is to seek its coherence in perpetuity. Drawing on Freud, Jacques Lacan (1988, 194) puts it thus: "What . . . we call a subject [is] quite precisely, what, in the development of objectivation, is outside the object." In other words, objects may represent the subject's disavowed history, its "other scene": the thingification that needed to happen for the subject to gain some semblance of coherence.

For Lacan (1985), as for Freud (1905), sexuality is a central means for the subject's production. But rather than a stable aspect of the subject's identity, Lacan sees sexuality as a signifier, a domain of language (i.e., the Symbolic), through which we ascend to full subjecthood (i.e., Oedipal heteronormativity) (Dean 2000). In many contexts, this signifier helps sublimate erotic possibilities and pleasures other than reproductive heteronormativity. It turns desire away from what Freud (1905) calls the myriad "aim objects" or "erotogenic zones" of early childhood (mouth, anus, hands, feet, etc.) and condenses it on normative genitality, the only legitimate form of sexual expression. Or, as Lacan would see it, we come to desire those objects that most fully promise us "the desire of the Other"—something like social recognition.

Yet the affixion of desire to genital intercourse, that which is normatively recognized as the sexual, remains unstable. Thus, the very signifier "sex" is slippery. "Beyond all sexual content and practices," Alenka Zupančič (2017, 22) argues, "the sexual is not pure form, but refers instead to the absence of this form . . . an absence or negativity that has important consequences for the field structured around it." What is repressed, Zupančič claims, is not desire as such but the knowledge that "sex" lacks a concrete signified. In other words, what we should not know that we know, what should remain unconscious, is that "sex" is based on an absence or "ontological negativity." This ontological negativity, for Zupančič, drives insistent efforts to pin this signifier down through science, medicine, law, or commodity consumption. Hence, one might argue, sexuality itself is an unstable objectification, one that appears concrete only in its invocation in language and one that, not unlike the Marxian commodity, must continuously disavow the history of its production and erasures.

This is why it is important to analyze sexuality not from the domain it claims to denote (itself an ontological negativity or absence), but from its "other scene"—those zones in which, according to Freud (1905), only "perverts" linger. To the extent that queer objects relate to sexuality's various disavowed *elsewheres* and can help decenter the sexual and explain its historical

centrality, an ethnographic imagination that dwells on them is itself "perverse," in the Freudian sense: it lingers where it must not, delaying arrival into normative subjecthood, thus raising unsettling questions about its importance.

Like slips of tongue that bring the unconscious into speech, queer objects connect scenes that explicitly invoke the sexual (e.g., anti-homosexual violence) to the *elsewhere*, scenes apparently unrelated to it: they slip background into foreground, aspirations and anxieties from one domain of social life into another, and thus often short-circuit their separation and reveal their co-constitutive entanglements. For example, saying, as the man I mentioned above did on social media, that gayism is "a polluting plastic import" can reveal the extent to which Kenya's "war on plastic" has shaped and has been shaped by the logics of anti-homosexuality rhetoric. Gayism thus becomes akin to the environmental pollution of Africa's "nature." Normative liberal separations between sexuality politics and environmental politics make this intersection hard to see. But plastics as queer objects lurking in between these domains subvert their taxonomic separation and reveal their co-constitutive entanglements. Operating on multiple scenes at once, objects such as plastics may also constitute instances of what Lacan (1977) calls the *objet petit a* (the object small-other)—the object-cause of desire—through or against which an ideal intimate order is to be pursued, rescued, and achieved, a promise of wholeness, happiness, and fulfillment ultimately realized. The repudiation of plastic can work at once to bring forth the fantasy of an unpolluted local nature *and* a "natural" sexual and gender order unpolluted by foreign "perversions."

To de-essentialize homophobia and understand its historical emergence, *Queer Objects to the Rescue* explores the production of its sentiments and logics beyond what is readily recognized as the (homo)sexual body. If a focus on same-sex politics has dominated research on intimate citizenship, this book troubles, methodologically and analytically, liberal categories of identity. It attends, as it were, to the "other scene" of sexuality, to objectifications that tell more complex stories about what is involved in the production of the sexual subject-citizen.

These objects, I show, constitute what Robert Lorway (2014, 9) calls "technologies of citizenship," that is, ways to commensurate particular forms of intimacy into national belonging, to channel desires into normative heteropatriarchal frameworks. By sustaining a shared popular concern with how to foreclose or optimize their presence, some of these objects constitute ways to generate "desire for desire of the state" (Butler 2002)—the fantasy that the state can securitize intimacy and the nation from corruption or pollution.

But, as we shall see, citizens often also turn such objects against the state, to imagine themselves as part of a moral nation that has been, if anything, betrayed by its political class, elites, and leaders.

Queer objects, to reiterate, can be used at once to securitize national sexual propriety *and*, as I shall do, to decenter hegemonic targets of sexualized exclusion. In this regard, I take "queerness" not as an essence of things (or people) but as a potentiality that emerges relationally, as a methodological "turning toward . . . certain objects, things, and persons" (Davidson and Rooney 2018, 3).[8] Echoes here of Walter Benjamin (1999, 459), who argues that such emancipatory potentialities can be activated in otherwise oppressive media "by a displacement of the angle of vision," so that "a positive element emerges . . . something different from that previously signified."

Before I outline how queer objects relate to the political economic contexts in which Kenyans craft futures and how the idea of "rescue," as an orientation toward objects, has become central to intimate citizenship, it is important to show how anti-homosexual sentiment has played out in Kenya. To do so, I move from Samburu County, in the north, where we encountered the controversy over the "boy with beads," to the coast to the Indian Ocean, my second major research site, where, in the past years, anti-homosexual demonstrations have made global headlines.

"Operation Gays Out"

On February 12, 2010, two to three hundred people, mainly young men but also women and children, approached the building of the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) in the coastal town of Mtwapa. Some of them held up closed fists, sticks, and stones. Others crossed their arms in front of their faces as if to say "time was up." Young male motorbike cab operators, so-called *bodaboda*, stopped traffic along the road and led the procession. They honked loudly while protesters followed them jumping and chanting. "No to homosexuals," they cried. *Wachomwe kabisa*, "Let them be burned to death."[9]

When the demonstrators arrived at KEMRI's compound, they forced open its tall metal gate and pushed away the security guard. For many of them, this was the first time to catch a glimpse behind the high concrete walls that concealed the building from the street. Rumor had it that the organization worked safely hidden behind these walls to "promote homosexuality" or "lure young men with cash into gayism," as town residents told me a few months later. KEMRI had opened its Mtwapa office recently. Using funds from the Kenyan government and foreign donors, it responded to public health research findings which, in 2004, identified so-called MSM or "men who have sex with

men" as a "key population" in the transmission of HIV in the country (Moyer and Igonya 2018). KEMRI health workers provided medical care to people they identified as MSM and carried out further research on their health. Town residents, however, saw the organization as supporting homosexuals with money and health benefits that others lacked. "There have always been *mashoga* in Mtwapa," a young man who had participated in the demonstrations told me in 2017, using the derogatory Swahili word. "But KEMRI brought them out and encouraged them. And many more came to Mtwapa because of KEMRI." Thus, to locals, the organization appeared to remunerate same-sex intimacies with welfare services and institutionalize homosexuality by offering it firmer social and spatial grounding in the township.

A few demonstrators entered KEMRI's offices and, some minutes later, reemerged in the street, dragging out two male health workers. The two men wore red T-shirts with the Swahili inscription *Komesha UKIMWI, tumia kondom*, "Prevent AIDS, use condoms." Political and religious leaders had already called the explicit language of sex education "pornographic" and warned that it could endanger children. In August 1995, for example, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Nairobi and the imam of Jamia Mosque organized a major protest in Nairobi's Uhuru Park, where demonstrators burned sex education materials in a large bonfire to eradicate perversion—foreign NGOs' alleged attempts to sexualize children (Kiama 1999, 116). For the demonstrators in Mtwapa, the T-shirts confirmed that these KEMRI employees were involved in the "business of gayism," a business that, for them, meant accepting foreign aid in exchange for turning local young men gay through early sex education. The crowd beat the two health workers severely.

Around the same time, a twenty-three-year-old man, a security guard at KEMRI, approached the building to begin his shift. People in the crowd recognized him as an employee of the organization and accused him of being homosexual as well. They beat him along with the other two men. By the time the police arrived, demonstrators had already poured paraffin on all three, preparing to light them on fire. Police wrestled the three men out of the protesters' hands and drove them to the Mtwapa Police Station, where they were jailed along with two other suspected homosexual men. Earlier that day, police had accompanied a smaller crowd to the home of the latter two and arrested them because they found them wearing matching engagement rings, an indication that they had planned to marry each other. All five men were charged with "carnal knowledge against the order of nature," under Section 126 of the Penal Code. As I learned later, not all of them identified as gay. What made these men recognizable as homosexual in this context should become gradually evident throughout this book.

Town residents concluded their demonstration by gathering in front of the police station. There, local leaders took turns addressing them. "We thank God," said Bishop Lawrence Chai of the National Council of Churches of Kenya, "for saving this town from being turned to Sodom and Gomorrah . . . as we may have been on the verge of being doomed had these evil criminals managed to conduct this evil exercise within our neighborhood."[10] Sheik Ali Hussein of the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya said: "Even if blood needs to be spilled, it [gayism] won't happen. For something like that to happen, all the people of Mtwapa would have to be dead."[11] Finally, the Mtwapa police chief told journalists: "We are grateful to the public for alerting the police. They should continue co-operating with the police to arrest more. [Gayism] is an offense, an unnatural offense . . . repugnant to the morality of the people."[12] Construing the apparent institutionalization of gayism as a moral threat of catastrophic proportions, local leaders mobilized and reoriented collective desires toward securitizing, at all costs, the intimate lives of Mtwapa's residents.

Infamous for its vast sexual economies, including brothels, nightclubs, street sex work, an underground pornographic film production industry, and a large gay and lesbian community, Mtwapa has figured in the national media as the country's "sin city"—a place where national ideals of intimacy and respectability come undone. Over the past four decades, the location has grown from a small cluster of fisher villages of a few thousand residents at the time of the country's independence to an urban area of 51,000 in 2010. The town's spectacular growth is tied primarily to its various sex-for-money exchanges, involving Kenyans, wealthy foreign and domestic tourists, development workers, and expat retirees primarily from Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. Seasonal migrants and migrant settlers from all over Kenya—now, the largest percentage of Mtwapa's population—have been attracted to the town's unique money-making opportunities. Though central to state revenues (registering, for example, one of the highest real estate values in the country), Mtwapa is nevertheless peripheral to national sensibilities, a place that middle-class Kenyans regard with suspicion and shame. In 2010, residents demonstrated against KEMRI and gayism in part because they too thought that, in Mtwapa, things had gone too far.

The demonstration had been in the making for at least a month. In January that year, rumors began circulating that a "gay wedding" would soon take place in town. A local man told his barber—jokingly, by some accounts—that he would marry his male partner on February 12 in a nearby luxurious tourist resort. Shocked, the barber told his imam, and, in turn, during Friday prayers, the imam urged his congregation to be vigilant about the growing

spread of gayism. Regional radio stations Radio Kaya, Baraka FM, and Radio Rahana also picked up the story, calling on their listeners to actively prevent gay weddings and chase homosexuals out of Mtwapa. In response to these rumors, Bishop Chai organized what he called "Operation Gays Out," a group of people committed to purifying the town of homosexuality. On February 11, he and Sheik Hussein held a joint press conference and, as the national newspaper *Daily Nation* reports, urged people to "investigate" KEMRI for "providing counseling services to these criminals" and to "take the law into their own hands."[13] They intended Operation Gays Out as a "rescue campaign" that brought together different town residents against a common threat. Young men, including the bodaboda, and women's groups, coastal people and upcountry migrants, Christians and Muslims demonstrated together. Anti-homosexual protests in Senegal in 2008 and in Malawi in 2010 also targeted HIV clinics that catered to MSM and blamed them for "promoting homosexuality" (Biruk 2015; Coly 2019). These parallels illustrate how anti-homosexual imaginaries and their modes of expression travel transnationally via media and political discourse.

Operation Gays Out also coincided with—and was informed by—growing instances of anti-homosexual rhetoric across East Africa. In October 2009, in neighboring Uganda, Member of Parliament David Bahati introduced a bill that promised to strengthen anti-homosexual legislation by punishing same-sex acts with life imprisonment and, in some cases, death. Despite the bill's global condemnation, Uganda's president Yoweri Museveni eventually supported it, spurring numerous violent attacks against LGBT Ugandans (Kintu 2017). The same month, two Kenyan men, Charles Ngengi and Daniel Gichia, made national headlines in Kenya after marrying in London, where they lived at that time. Their wedding, Evan Mwangi (2014) shows, sparked furious debates among Kenyans, many calling on their state to strip these men of citizenship. Mwangi notes that, claiming they shamed the nation, "some advised the media against calling the couple 'Kenyan men,' suggesting that they simply be referred to as 'men,' with no mention of their nationality" (103). To be homosexual, in other words, was to be a noncitizen. In December 2009, just a bit over a month before the Mtwapa demonstrations took place, in Malawi, a gay couple was arrested for having performed a traditional engagement ceremony (Biruk 2015, 449). Kenyan and international media broadcast their trial, amplifying fears that gay weddings were suddenly on the rise across the region.

Importantly, this was also a time when Kenyans were debating drafts of a new Constitution. Citizens would vote on this draft in a referendum later that year. Along with abortion and Islamic courts, the possible decriminalization

of homosexuality was a most contentious issue related to the new Constitution's nondiscrimination clauses (Parsitau 2021). If Western leaders, international lending agencies, and human rights groups called for the protection of sexual minorities, most Kenyan political leaders promised their voters that the new Constitution would secure them against the "perversions of globalizations." In response to the Mtwapa demonstrations, for example, Grace Kakai, district commissioner in Kilifi, the administrative division where Mtwapa is located, called on the government to follow Uganda's example and tighten anti-homosexuality laws "to suit society's concerns."[14]

This wider context is helpful for understanding how the homosexual came to be perceived as a cause of intimate trouble and a legitimate object of violence. But it does not explain how the concrete male bodies targeted by protesters in Mtwapa had been recognized as homosexual. This is a question I address throughout this book. But I shall begin to answer it here by turning, once more, to objects. Consider, for example, KEMRI's building. A large, elegant two-story villa-type house, painted in clean white, with blue door and window frames, and surrounded by high walls with barbed wire and metal gates, it resembled—and was built among—the homes of the wealthiest town residents. In Mtwapa, most of these residences have been built, within the last three decades, by young Africans married to or in long-term, long-distance relationships with elderly white men and women from Europe. These houses contrasted sharply with the homes of poorer residents, mostly mud and stone structures with thatched or iron-sheet roofs. Poor residents passed by such imposing compounds daily, speculating on the hidden flows of wealth that sustain them. KEMRI's building attested to such wealth. Furthermore, the fact that, in this building, many MSM received health services or payments for participating in research solidified locals' perception that foreign wealth now expanded gayism, indeed that gayism was a business. This phenomenon was not exceptional. Rather, it exacerbated locals' general sense that spectacular wealth was obtainable through illicit sex: non-normative sexual arrangements that included sex work, intergenerational intimacies, porn shoots, or same-sex intimacies. Trying to reveal what was hidden inside KEMRI's building, demonstrators expressed anxieties over how the commodification of illicit sex has become central to the production of wealth, all along undermining respectability.

This becomes even more evident when reflecting on another object: the engagement rings police and demonstrators used as evidence to arrest two gay men in their home. Rings are emblematic of the dream-wedding fantasies produced by a growing middle-class wedding industry (Muhonja 2017, 35–52). Dream weddings, however, remain out of reach for most Kenyans.

According to the Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics, in 2014, nearly 60 percent of Kilifi County residents and 63 percent of the national population had never married officially.[15] In this context, wedding rings are aspirational tokens of deferred respectability, elements of a "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011), a continuous investment of hope in things that, amidst socio-economic precarity, can hardly come true. The very possibility of gay weddings thus became threatening precisely because heteronormative ideals of matrimony were difficult to achieve. Among the protesters, a woman shouted: "What will happen now that they [men] have turned to each other? Who will marry our daughters?"[16] For locals, the rings might have amplified a sense of stolen possibility: a concern that marriage, a key token of respectability, was being fundamentally redefined at the very same time that most people struggled to acquire the means for its realization. Emblematic of a more general predicament of uncertainty, the rings point to a displacement of desire and fear onto the homosexual body, a body to be pursued and excluded for a collective future to be rescued.

What would it mean, then, to foreground such objects—objects that lurk in the background of the essentialist categories of the homosexual body? And what can these objects tell us about the production of anti-homosexual desire and sentiment? Thinking with such objects demonstrates, for example, how the homosexual body as an objectification of sexuality politics is so salient today precisely because it comes to congeal myriad things beyond itself: struggles with inequality, work, and wealth; gender, marriage, and respectability; nature and pollution; the dissonance between the surfaces and essences of things; and much more. Each object analyzed in this book takes us across domains of social life where aspirations, anxieties, and fears are mobilized to produce not only the homosexual, but all kinds of "troublesome" bodies.

Toward a Political Economy of Homophobia

Euro-American liberal media depicted the events in Mtwapa as exemplary of rising homophobia across Africa. Images of the protesting crowds circulated widely, underscoring the violence and irrationality of an "African homophobia" and the importance of rescuing LGBT Africans from African homophobes. Articles with titles such as "Religion, Politics, and Africa's Homophobia" (BBC, 2010) or "Why Africa Is the Most Homophobic Continent" (*The Guardian*, 2014) and films such as *Africa's Last Taboo: Homosexuality* (BBC, 2010) have featured the Mtwapa demonstrations or similar incidents through the binary framework of a "pink line" (Gevisser 2020)—homosexual "victims" versus homophobic "perpetrators." While this reading can certainly

be tempting when dealing with violence, it is nevertheless problematic. The language of global queer liberalism derived from Euro-American LGBT activism not only reifies the homosexual as an essential, universal category of subjecthood but also deploys homophobia to render black Africans nonmodern, irrational, violent Others (Awondo, Geschiere, and Reid 2012; Hoad 2007; Mack 2017; Puar 2007).

Images of violence, to be sure, have long played a central role in how Africa has been construed as lack, absence, or backwardness (Mbembe 2001; Mudimbe 1988). In January 2008, only two years prior to the Mtwapa events, Kenya made global headlines when, following its contested presidential election, violence erupted across the country. Then too, Euro-American media depicted violence as backward interethnic feuds or timeless tribalism. It is important, then, to explore further how forms of violence that, at a certain moment, become legible as homophobic—or, for that matter, ethnic—emerge at the intersection of regional, national, and global processes. Vigdis Broch-Due (2005) argues that if approached through the "thick" social relations in which it unfolds, violence is more than simply destructive. It is also generative: it is deployed to produce difference and identity, a sense of certainty in the face of ambiguity, or to render more tangible, more concrete, various utopias of "unpolluted" moral society. Understanding violence as part of its "thick" relations is not to relativize it. Rather, it is to attend to the complex logics and grammars that allow for its reproduction. It is doing so without, at the same time, reifying racist stereotypes of African political irrationality.

Homophobia is not a self-explanatory, universal category. Or, as Martin Manalansan (2009, 45) puts it, "there is no 'pure and simple' homophobia." Instead, sentiments, signs, logics, and grammars that become intelligible as homophobic at any moment require careful explanation. Murray (2009, 2) suggests that there is "a significant lacuna in understanding how and why certain sexuality and gender categories and practices come to be taboo, excluded, and/or repellant." "We must . . . focus on the other side of the coin," Murray argues, "that is, do research that focuses on understanding the causes, dynamics, forces, structures, and 'logics' which work to create, oppress, marginalize, and/or silence sexual alterity." Neither merely a product of a colonial exportation of sexual science or Christian morality, nor simply an outcome of the global proliferation of LGBT activism, anti-homosexual sentiment and violence involve complex articulations and contradictions between the discourses of leaders, institutions, popular culture, and civil society, among other things (6–8).

To understand the politics of homophobia in the African context requires first interrogating two persistent paradigms. First, as I have already intimated,

the distinctness of an African homophobia. Rising violence against African gays and lesbians has lent urgency to scholarly engagements with sexuality on the continent. Scholar-activists have sought to make visible, through ethnographic and historical data, same-sex identities and practices that political and religious leaders now work to suppress or efface (Epprecht 2008; Nyeck 2019; Tamale 2011). With the rise of internationally funded LGBT activism on the continent, scholars have also studied emerging forms of queer activism and the social worlds to which they give rise (Currier 2012; Lorway 2014; Reid 2013; Rodriguez 2019). In these contexts, they show, homophobia has emerged not only through political leaders' strategic incitements to violence, but also through transnational religious networks, mass media, changing forms of consumerism and gender, and popular reactions against leaders or Western interventions in African affairs (Ireland 2013; M'Baye 2013; Msibi 2011; Ndjio 2012; Nyeck 2013; Thoreson 2014). Many scholars have also become wary of how homophobia in Africa is approached as distinct, exceptional. Essentialist logics, no doubt, are at stake in both conservative claims that homosexuality is "un-African" and liberalist portrayals of a "homophobic Africa" (Awondo, Geschiere, and Reid 2012; Hoad 2007; Gaudio 2009). Simple attributions of homophobia to various subjects or parts of the world—whether Middle Eastern or African people, states, or cultures—reproduce the "sexual ideologies of racism" (Hoad 2007; see also Puar 2007). It is important, then, to understand the deployment of anti-homosexual rhetoric as part of a wider global repertoire of governance (Bosia and Weiss 2013) and how particular states implement such global strategies of power (Currier 2018). Of course, local histories, categories, objects, and desire are central in rendering such global deployments of anti-homosexual rhetoric intelligible and meaningful. Indeed, there are also historically particular inflections in the politics of homophobia in African contexts. But attending to these historical particularities is very different from uncritically invoking an abstract "African homophobia" as an object-cause of violence.

Second, it is important to interrogate critically the seeming exceptionalism of the (homo)sexual in contemporary politics of intimate citizenship. Homophobia presupposes the homosexual subject as a target of its sentiment, violence, and possibility. Yet, homophobic discourse and violence is also productive of the homosexual as its object (Judge 2017). To de-essentialize homophobia, it is necessary to look at its production beyond the ready-made sexual subject; in the case of this book, to trace objects that, from the background, are constitutive of this target of repudiation. In this sense, merely carrying out ethnography of LGBT subjects is insufficient for understanding homophobia. It is also insufficient to stick closely to scenes, discourses, and

practices that are immediately recognizable as homophobic, scenes such as those of the Mtwapa demonstrations. Following instead various objects that constitute the (homo)sexual body as an object of disavowal, hate, and violence, I show how anxieties and aspirations from across a wide array of social domains come to be displaced onto and thus constitute this body.

My approach involves strategies of contextualization and critique that I like to call, following Rahul Rao (2020), a "political economy of homophobia." This approach, Rao argues, entails "taking seriously the material and social anxieties to which the figure of the queer is indexed as an evidentiary scapegoat, as well as the extant evidentiary architecture within which such a move might appear plausible" (162). A political economy of homophobia can "account for social antipathy towards figures read as queer, without lapsing into orientalist accounts of a timeless and irredeemable 'African' homophobia" (162). Pursuing queer objects ethnographically allows me to explore precisely such material and social anxieties as well as the conditions of possibility that make the homosexual body a salient object of fear and hate.

At the time of the Mtwapa demonstrations, I had been doing fieldwork in Kenya for five years. In 2005, I began working primarily in Samburu County, but in 2008 I also joined northern migrants to Mtwapa, where they made a living in coastal tourism. In the weeks that followed the demonstrations, BBC journalists Robin Barnwell and Sorious Samura produced a documentary film called *Africa's Last Taboo: Homosexuality*. Steven, a Samburu migrant I knew quite well, figures prominently in the documentary. Video footage from the demonstrations shows him calling for homosexuals to be burned to death. Asked by Samura, later that year, if his views had changed, he promised to kill his own son or brother if he ever found out either was homosexual.

Steven lived in relative poverty at the coast. He came from a region and an ethnic group that—not unlike Kenya's gays, lesbians, and transgender people—had long been vilified and marginalized by the government for their difference, a difference also deemed sexual. Like many Samburu men, since the 1980s, he drew on colonial sexualized stereotypes of the erotic Samburu warrior to engage in transactional sex with women from Europe, a phenomenon I describe elsewhere (Meiu 2017). Throughout the decades he spent at the coast, however, Steven did not acquire savings. Although he was in his late forties—an "elder" by Samburu standards—he had no house or livestock in the north, and, at the coast, lived in so-called "come-we-stay" relationships, intimate relations with women that were, though common, much less reputable than marriage. I had trouble reconciling Steven's words on *Africa's Last Taboo* with his own non-normative life, what many of our common acquaintances saw as his own "unsuccessful" struggles to acquire respectability. Like Steven, many Mtwapa

residents lived in poverty, deferring expectations of marriage and family to indeterminate futures. How then was demonstrating against homosexuals, gayism, or the KEMRI organization meaningful for them? What did they expect to achieve by imagining a town, a region, or a nation purified of homosexuality? And how can one begin to understand this violent demonstration without reifying queer liberalism's essentialist categories of race and sexuality?

As a gay man myself, I did not always find it easy or comfortable to think about anti-homosexual discourse at length or to listen with care to people, like Steven, with whose opinions and views I so radically disagreed. But researchers and activists at KEMRI and other Kenyan LGBT organizations inspired me to find patience and strength to do precisely that. Unlike some Euro-American liberals who simply demonize those they deem homophobes, my Kenyan colleagues did not have the luxury to do so. In a context in which same-sex relationships were criminalized and police often sided with anti-homosexual protesters, they had to tread carefully. In the years following the 2010 Mtwapa protests, KEMRI, for example, initiated a set of "sensitization" campaigns to understand how and why homophobic imaginaries emerged and to educate people to move past such imaginaries. It is ironic perhaps that by 2017, KEMRI featured Steven, of all people, as their "success story," someone its staff had managed to sensitize to same-sex struggles. This inspired me to listen carefully to those with whom I disagreed and imagine a political-economic approach that attends closely to the complexities of homophobia's reproduction.

This book began from a simple yearning to make sense of events such as the anti-homosexual demonstrations in Mtwapa and the social media outrage at the Samburu girl with a bead necklace. But as I found myself pursuing different objects, I learned that making sense of these events required decentering key paradigms of intimate citizenship and interrogating their production in a context in which the very idea of the future had become elusive, uncertain.

Elusive Futures, Diversions, Dis/Orientations

With late capitalism, there is a growing perception that futures, in general, are difficult to project. In 1980, Kenya's national newspaper, *Daily Nation*, published a cartoon entitled "Forecasters' Road Map of the 1980's: Alternative Prognostications, 1980–1989" (fig. 3). Designed by the World Future Society, "a Washington based association of people interested in what may happen during the years ahead," the map depicts futurity as confusingly rhizomatic. Rather than the straight line associated with the temporality of modernity,

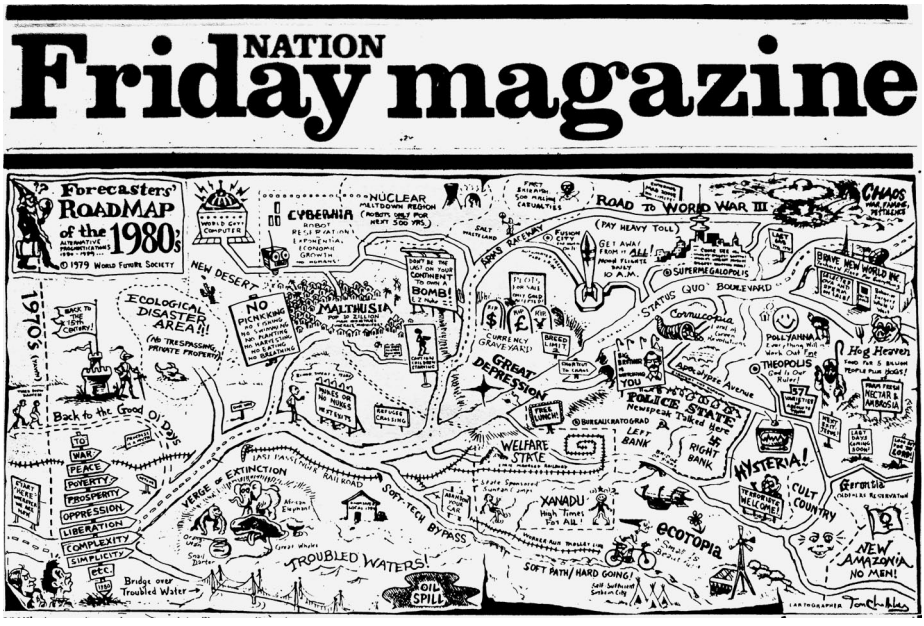

FIGURE 3. "Forecasters' Road Map of the 1980's: Alternative Prognostications, 1980–1989," *Friday Nation Magazine*, Kenya, August 1, 1980.

progress, and development (Koselleck 2004), the future figures here as a net of numerous intersecting and diverting roads, streets, and alleys peppered with imaginatively named stops, destinations, and signs: the "Status Quo Boulevard" leads through "Great Depression" and "Welfare State" to its final destination: "Chaos: War, Famine." Smaller paths are called "Refugee Crossing," "Back to the Good Ol' Days," or "Soft-Tech Bypass" and lead respectively to "Cybernia," "1970s," and "Ecotopia."

Evocative of a sense of temporal disorientation and uncertainty at the time, the map's strong resonance with the realities of Kenyan life must have informed the editors' decision to print it. Kenyans were certainly aware that their futures were rhizomatic (see, for example, Smith 2008), even if they did not necessarily celebrate such futures as ends in themselves. The straight linear time of modernity and progress continued to inform their quests for respectability. But straight time now worked in an ever-more-pronounced dissonance with the rhizomatic future of life-as-lived.

To find one's way across the disorienting terrain of future-making, people have engaged, in part, in myriad forms of speculation. In 2018, in a *Daily Nation* article suggestively entitled "The Making of a Casino Nation," Kamau Ngotho decries "just how deep gambling has dug into the Kenyan psyche."[17]

From gaming machines, lotteries, and online bets on football teams to more elaborate investments in pyramid schemes, Ngotho suggests, a "gambling culture" renders fluid Kenyans' otherwise most durable forms of wealth—houses and land, cars and cattle. "Forget about hard work," a former schoolmate told Ngotho. "In today's Kenya you either make it through gambling or tenderpreneurship." Indeed, anthropologists working across the world have described the widespread perception that, with the rise of neoliberal market ideologies and reforms, crafting futures has become akin to gambling, speculation, and entrepreneurship (Piot 2010; Weiss 2004). Speculation is here more than actual gambling. It is also a future-orientation: a perpetual effort to sustain an engagement with the world as a condition for making livelihoods and actualizing a tomorrow. And people are very much aware of this.

In 2018, across Kenya, in demonstrations that echoed the 1995 Nairobi burning of sex education materials and the 2010 Mtwapa attacks on homosexuals, police and citizens burned hundreds of gaming machines in public bonfires. This they saw as a general "clampdown" on the "culture of gambling."[18] According to Nairobi police officer Kang'ethe Thuku, who coordinated one such demonstration in Nairobi in October 2018, "young school-going children are not spared, hence the need to destroy the machines that encourage idleness and lack of productivity among youth."[19] In these demonstrations, gaming machines—queer objects of sorts—came to congeal an epochal ethos of speculation. The ritual burning of the machines, in turn, was a way to imagine, or incantate, a more secure, predictable future, a future where labor, value, and respectability could be restored to their normative, industrial ideals.

What then if we can recognize that, with the historical transformations of late capitalism, people have become more aware that much of their social life sustains non-normative articulations? That the making of futures often involves subversive means, circumstances, and outcomes? Or that future-making has been quite "queer" even when people have sought to disavow, displace, and repudiate—sometimes quite violently—the "queerness" of their own actions, desires, and livelihoods in order to reclaim (hetero)normative objects of desire? And how would this simple realization help us grasp emerging forms of nativist sexuality and ethno-nationalism in the present?

To understand this, it is important to distinguish between means and ends in relation to how the future is imagined and temporalized. Jane Guyer (2007) argues that the uncertainties of late capitalism have foregrounded anthropological concerns with an "enforced presentism" and a "fantasy future," at the expense of attention to the "near future"—the concrete ways people make a tomorrow. Calling for more "ethnographies of the near future," Guyer

emphasizes the importance of attending to "a time that is punctuated rather than enduring: of fateful moments and turning points, the date as event rather than a position in a sequence or a cycle" (416; see also Goldstone and Obarrio 2017, 16; Piot 2010). As part of an intensely speculative economy, then, non-normative means to the near future may short-circuit long-term plans, the fantasy future, in ways that echo the diversions and disorientations of the map I discussed above.

Ethnographically, I am interested in the dispositions and desires such contradictions generate and the role different objects play—as the gaming machines illustrate—in people's efforts to realign themselves with particular visions of the future. Numerous value-making practices anthropologists have described in recent years evidence these contradictions.[20] In such contexts, as Jeremy Jones (2010) argues for Zimbabwe, "nothing is straight": a shadow economy of various "zig-zagging" survival practices operates in the "shadow" of the "normal." In my own work, I describe such moments of being out of synch with the temporal rhythms of the normative life course and respectability as "queer moments" (Meiu 2015). These, then, are examples of how the dissonance between the means, outcomes, and circumstances of future-making can indeed be read as queer.

If a general queerness can indeed be said to permeate conditions of everyday life today, then an objectified queerness—the homosexual body and the other objects I explore in this book—becomes, like the gaming machines, externalized representation of a generalized epochal condition. They represent objectified *causes* and *symptoms* of affliction: "It is *because* of homosexuals," so the logic goes, "that *our* futures are in jeopardy." In other words, one can argue that the subversive means of near futures are perhaps less troublesome to people than the desire for an explicitly non-normative far future, one that challenges the straight time of national utopia. And thus, the security state's legitimacy thrives off its promise to contain and eliminate bodies and things explicitly dedicated to—or promising to bring about—such a future and to reinstate the straight line of education, development, and progress. Can thinking of queer objects, including the body of the homosexual, as displacements of a general, shared sense of life as queer, out-of-line, exceptional, of futures as rhizomatic, begin to explain what occurred in the 2010 Mtwapa demonstrations?

As I began doing systematic research for this book, over twelve months, in 2015 and, again, between 2017 and 2019, I came to map rescue ideologies and practices of rehabilitation orchestrated between state institutions, humanitarian organizations, churches, and civil society groups. I learned that rescue became a common way to orient oneself toward the future, the nation,

and other citizens. It presupposed the constant evaluation and realignment of people and objects to (re)instate ideal forms of intimacy. Rescue became a way to pursue the straight time of personal and collective "progress" and "development" (S: *maendeleo*) against the backdrop of myriad rhizomatic temporalities. The implicit logic went somewhat like this: *If I do not have the means to acquire respectability in the near future, my desire to rescue intimacy for the far future demonstrates my commitment to it. I am thus a good citizen*. Objects, as we shall see, can become straightening devices in such rescue projects.

Rescue as Moral Rehabilitation

Many of those involved in the violent demonstrations in Mtwapa saw their actions as ways of rescuing intimacy, and, therewith, their town and the nation. Demonstrators and religious leaders hoped to "save" people from "evil criminals," as Bishop Chai put it. So too did the *bodaboda* who saw themselves as more than motorbike cab drivers; they were also town vigilantes who, in their own words, "do the work of community rescue" (S: *tunafanya kazi ya community rescue*) (see chapter 3). For them, community rescue involved, among other things, catching thieves and, at times, homosexuals, the two categories growingly conflated as "evil criminals." The police also used "rescue," if in a more volatile, performative way. On the one hand, they arrested homosexuals, promising to support locals' efforts to rid the town and nation of "an unnatural offense . . . repugnant to the morality of the people."[21] On the other hand, faced with international human rights abuse accusations, in the following days, they claimed to have actually "rescued" these men from the "angry mob" ready to kill them. Similarly, in northern Kenya, let us recall, the MP's Facebook post prompted calls for her to "rescue" the "boy with beads"—to make "him" into a "real man." Interesting here is less the directionality of rescue (i.e., who rescues and who is to be rescued) and more the fact that intimacy now appeared under its sign: to be a good citizen is not necessarily to inhabit the right kind of intimacies. Rather, it is to desire to acquire such intimacies in the future, through constant rehabilitative efforts.

A key feature of the global humanitarian industry, the moral claim to rescue has come to permeate not only the language of governments and NGOs, but also the everyday life of citizens (Malkki 2015; Scherz 2014). Rather than understand rescue in the narrow terms of transnational humanitarianism or as merely a Euro-American import, I approach it as a historical idiom of "cultural intimacy"—that is, "the recognition of those aspects of an officially shared identity that . . . provide insiders with their assurance of common

sociality" (Herzfeld 1997, 7). Seen thus, rescue reveals important things about sexuality and intimacy in the contemporary Kenyan national sphere. Most strikingly, it reveals how moral incitements to rescue have informed how some Kenyans imagine themselves as citizens, how they consume or mobilize politically, and how they navigate the slippery slopes of their daily lives.

But, far from being merely a Kenyan phenomenon, the deployment of rescue imaginaries is common across the world today. Inderpal Grewal (2017, 5) argues that saving, rescue, and surveillance constitute key modes of governance and subjecthood in "advanced neoliberalism," a time defined, among other things, by "the emergence and management of protests as well as the visibility of insecurities of imperial power." As Grewal notes for the United States, so too in Kenya and elsewhere, "private individuals who see themselves as normative citizens become empowered to take responsibility for maintaining the imperial security state. These individuals, produced as responsible and self-improving and thus products of neoliberal self-empowerment regimes, hope to repair the effects of imperial and neoliberal policies and thereby save the security state" (2). Here, "the will to rescue, to save, to become humanitarians" is a moral claim to "exceptional citizenship" (10) (see also Amar 2013).

In recent years, the language and logics of "rescue" have permeated engagements with intimate citizenship beyond homosexuality, strictly speaking. Kenyans' quests for respectability, social value, and national belonging have involved salient incitements to moral rescue, calls to save intimacy from the corrupting forces of contemporary life and to secure it as a condition for the nation's vitality and futurity. Political and religious leaders, the media, development workers, civil society groups, and other social actors have depicted, if in different ways, various non-normative intimacies as patently responsible for social and economic decay. In response, numerous drives have emerged to rescue citizens from the perils of dangerous intimacy. While very different in scale and magnitude, such interventions have drawn on the language of global humanitarianism and Christian evangelism but also on older, local forms of political protest and collective purification to imagine social and political order in new ways. Anti-homosexuality campaigns are certainly the best-known example of such rescue efforts, where opposing same-sex intimacies is, among other things, a way to secure nativist-*cum*-national heterosexuality as an ideal of autochthonous moral order and to do so for the future.

Ethnographic Detours, or, How to Read This Book

Echoing the life trajectories of many of its protagonists, *Queer Objects to the Rescue* proposes an ethnographic journey that is circuitous rather than linear:

it twists and turns, in ever wider concentric circles, around particular objects. To critique paradigms of sexuality without reifying them, I pursue a strategy of analysis and writing that I call *ethnographic detours*. That is, rather than tackle sexuality politics head-on, my ethnographic narrative moves *around* it, defers arrival, and—as in the Freudian notion of "perversion"—dwells where it must not, in the subject's "other scenes." "In language and life," Paul Stoller (1989, 142) argues, "human beings are meanderers; we continually take detours." Therefore, "*detours* are . . . paths that ethnographers clearly need to take to set themselves straight with the world as it is" (145). While "straight" is not necessarily how I would describe the end goal of my analysis (pun intended), detours help me delay my quest for concrete answers and, in so doing, produce richer, more nuanced findings. If indeed queer objects can be approached as the social unconscious of sexuality, then, as Lacan (2017, 22) puts it, "The unconscious . . . is only ever illuminated and only reveals itself when you look away a little . . . you look away and this makes it possible for you to see what is not there."

My ethnographic detours do not only pertain to objects relative to sexuality, but also to Kenya's geopolitics relative to its forms of intimate citizenship. I have carried out field research in Samburu County, northern Kenya, and in Kilifi County, at the coast. From the point of view of a national public, both places represent sexual and political *peripheries* of the nation. Samburu County figures in the national imagination as remote, underdeveloped, and backward, an image underscored by numerous media stories about the devious sexual lives of its indigenous pastoralist population. Meanwhile, the coast appears as a space of affluence, consumption, and cosmopolitanism, but also one of sexual perversion, sex tourism, prostitution, sex trafficking, and an excessive nightlife (Kibicho 2009). Christian nationalists have long associated the coast's Muslim Swahili with homosexuality to delegitimize their participation in state administration. These geopolitical ethnographic detours then help me approach intimate citizenship, not from within its core claims and discourses, but from its "other scenes," those subjects and spaces the nation disavows as a condition of its respectability. I supplemented research in these places with regular visits to the country's capital city of Nairobi. Shifting between different locales, scales, and actors, I trace and analyze the social poetics of objects related to moral rescue initiatives in Kenya.

Chapter 2 explores how Kenyans come to affirm that rescue is necessary and to desire that their intimate lives be redressed or securitized. Focusing on mundane moments of work and storytelling among sex workers and NGO workers in Mtwapa, the chapter traces the emergence of what can be loosely called the *subject of intimate rescue* as a template of intimate citizenship. If

those who perform acts of rescue claim to occupy a moral high ground in relation to those they see as morally peripheral, rescue, I argue, is not a dyadic relationship. Rather, it is a "threesome": it also involves the perceived gaze of a national public for which rescue is a path to good citizenship.

Chapter 3 takes on the book's first object, the material substance of "male-power" (S: *nguvu za kiume*), a gendered bodily energy that subsumes virility and vitality—one's ability to have sex, sire children, work, and gain respectability. The chapter explores recent panics over the depletion of "male-power" in central Kenya, concerns over its excess accumulation among *bodaboda* (motorcycle cab operators), and various civil society attempts to rescue and reform men as a condition of good citizenship. Across these contexts, "male-power" turns out to be quite elusive, shifting and leaking unexpectedly, empowering women over men and poor youths over powerful big-men. Hence, preoccupation with its surveillance and containment becomes a key technology of intimate citizenship.

Chapter 4 takes as its queer object traditional Samburu bead necklaces. Echoing colonial discourses about morans giving beads to girls to engage in sex with them, girl-empowerment NGOs have recently sought to criminalize the custom and rescue girls from child sexualization. In this context, bead necklaces became emblematic of indigenous intimacies that remain unassimilable to the nation, customary incitements of child and teen erotic desires and pleasures. Analyzing ensuing conflicts between child-rights activists and rural Samburu, this chapter addresses the challenges of what I call *encompassment*: how different social actors seek to enfold or encircle bodies into polities and how, in the process, troublesome sexual intimacies offer new arguments for exclusion and the production of ethnic noncitizens.

Chapter 5 returns to the panics over plastics I briefly introduced above. Exploring a wide array of objectifications—"plastic rice," "plastic boys," "plastic in the womb" as an affliction of fertility, or "homosexuality as plastic import"—I show how plastic has become an evocative idiom of non-belonging and social toxicity in Kenya. Anxieties over health, well-being, social reproduction, and economic uncertainty have found powerful expression in discourses associating plastic pollution with the toxic permeation of bodies, boundaries, and belonging more generally. I argue that the historical objectification of plastics and efforts to define criteria of belonging and intimate citizenship have shaped one another dialectically.

Chapter 6 analyzes adult diapers as a new idiom for depicting the failures of intimate citizenship. Rumors about adults who end up in diapers because they engaged in anal sex, but also illicit forms of work or behavior not necessarily associated with sex, have become common in Kenya. They reflect a

growing preoccupation with the hidden underlayers of social life, of which intimacy is an important part. Such preoccupation, I argue, informs a desire for *intimate exposures*: performative attempts to unmask signs of social failure hidden beneath appearances of normality or respectability, as a condition of good citizenship. As queer objects, diapers demonstrate how anxieties over the body's autonomy and labor capacity become displaced onto the homosexual body.

Chapter 7 returns to the homosexual body, this time by analytically turning it into its main queer object. Revisiting the 2010 demonstrations in Mtwapa and the 2018 panic over the "boy with beads" in Samburu County described in this introduction, this chapter offers some preliminary answers as to what has made the homosexual body such an efficient object of citizenship technologies. At once visible and invisible, concrete and abstract, promising categorical certainty (i.e., to hold an evil interiority) and remaining somewhat unknowable, mysterious, ambiguous, this body, I argue, efficiently resonated with salient social anxieties as well as with its other troublesome objects, including "male-power," bead necklaces, plastics, and diapers discussed in previous chapters.

Offering "ethnographic detours" as a method of thinking around objects, I demonstrate homophobia's complex entanglements in a wide range of uncertainties over intimacy, economy, and the state, in myriad efforts to "rescue" national social life from the effects of globalization. The title of this book plays on this idea. *Queer Objects to the Rescue* suggests that if indeed a rehabilitative language is widely appealing today, then an ethnographic focus on objects may repurpose it to "rescue" our political imagination from the dominant and obstructive fetishes of contemporary investments in intimate citizenship.