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This is a version of the article accepted for publication in the Journal of African Cultural Studies published by Taylor and Francis.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjac20/current>

Queer Worldmaking in Wanuri Kahiu's Film *Rafiki*

Abstract

This article argues that Wanuri Kahiu's film *Rafiki* is an exemplar of worldmaking in queer African cinema. By analysing key scenes from the film, I uncover the ways in which *Rafiki* offers queer Kenyans a visual affirmation of a queer world which exists counter to the world of hegemonic heteronormativity in Kenya. Key contributors to *Rafiki*'s worldmaking potential, I argue, are the director's use of tropes of futurity, horizon, and queer utopic space in the film's plot and narrative. Extending the idea of queer utopic space to the viewing experience of audiences, I show how the practice of queer worldmaking extended beyond the screen to the space inside the cinema in the seven days that the film's ban was relaxed and *Rafiki* was screened in Kenya.

Keywords: Rafiki; queer; same-sex; film; worldmaking; futurity; utopic space; Kenya

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This article explores ideas of queer futurity and queer utopic space in Wanuri Kahiu's film *Rafiki* (2018). I argue that through formal elements like the plot and narrative of the film, as well as in the viewing experience of audiences, we see evidence for the assertion that the film

is perhaps the most important contribution yet to queer African cinema, and that it has radical worldmaking potential.

In their article “Sex in Public,” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner popularise the term “queer worldmaking” as a way in which to theorise a process by which heteronormative structures are challenged in order to create a world where queer people can thrive (1998). For Thomas Nakayama and Charles Morris, queer worldmaking is a “messy enterprise driven by a vision of another world, another way of living,” that fights for a more equitable future (2014: vi). Notwithstanding the definitions here, there are myriad ways in which queer worldmaking works in praxis, as Nakayama and Morris usefully point out: “Queer worldmaking takes place in all kinds of places, at all different times, involving all kinds of people, who work toward creating a different world” (2014: v).

Kenyan artists and scholars have for some time been engaged in queer worldmaking processes, building an archive of work that subverts the heteronormative expectations of the Kenyan state in order to create spaces where queer kinship and community can flourish. Prominent amongst these artists and scholars is Neo Musangi (2014, 2019) whose performance art, text, visual and audio installations challenge the systems that perpetuate inequality. Another prominent figure is Kevin Mwachiro has published an anthology called *Invisible-Stories from Kenya’s Queer Community* (2013), on which the Kenyan queer film *Stories of Our Lives* of 2014 was based. It is a collection of voices from the queer Kenyan community sharing their lived experience with the aim of letting queer Kenyans know that “they are not alone” (Mwachiro 2013: 4). Eddie Ombagi’s work on queer utopic spaces in Nairobi’s clubs, cruising cafes, and bars explores the ways in which such spaces offer community, friendship and love (2019). In this article, I explore how Wanuri Kahiu’s film *Rafiki* adds to this archive with a story of love between two young Kenyan women. The film was banned by the Kenyan Film Classification Board, not only because of its lesbian theme, but also because, according

to the objections from Ezekiel Mutua the Chief Executive of the Film Board, of the dangers posed by the film's "hopeful ending" (Mutua 2018: 2).

My argument is that *Rafiki* is an exemplary film because of its queer worldmaking potential. Its story of same-sex love between two Kenyan women is a visual affirmation of a queer world which exists as a counter to the world of hegemonic heteronormativity in Kenya. For Jeffrey Bennett, writing about the ways in which queer people articulate their identities, the "visual affirmation of queer lives" is oftentimes "the first step in instigating productive modes of worldmaking and kinship" (2014: 222). It follows, then, that a film featuring a story of queer love and desire with a happy, hopeful ending would be an example of the kind of visual affirmation that Bennett describes. This is particularly significant in Kenya, where the legal framework continues to deny the possibility of a queer existence, and a discourse of "anti-homonationalism" is commonly employed by politicians and religious figures with the aim of excluding queer people from the "imagination of the nation" (Van Klinken 2018: 652). In a country where queer people's existence is denied, *Rafiki* challenges the settled patterns of heteronationalism and compulsory heteronormativity. It does this, not only by offering a visual narrative of same-sex love, but, more specifically, as Taiwo Adentuji Osinubi points out, by allowing viewers to "imagine the queer habitation of the neighbourhood, the church, political and juridical institutions and public spaces" (2019: 73).

While there have been significant changes in the way that African cinema addresses queerness (for some recent scholarship see Böhme 2015; Green-Simms and Azuah 2012; Green-Simms 2019), *Rafiki* stands out as exemplary of a very small number of films that offers its viewers a hopeful ending, and thus avoiding the practice of many popular African in-video films that "negotiate homosexuality out of commercial, sensationalist and/or political considerations" (Van Klinken 2018: 251). These films more often than not use the death of queer characters to drive the narrative arc, and to restore the heterosexual order (Green-Simms

and Azuah 2012). There are a small number of queer-themed Kenyan films, for example *Stories of Our Lives* and *Nairobi Half Life* (2012). Contrary to the narratives of these films, *Rafiki* is the first full-length queer Kenyan feature film to celebrate queerness.

In *Rafiki*, Kahiua tells an upbeat story of two very different young women: the gender fluid and academically gifted Kena (played by Samantha Mugatsia) and the feminine and somewhat flighty Ziki (played by Sheila Muniya), who come from opposite sides of political and class divides. The women, both about eighteen years old, have just finished high school and are preparing for university. They fall in love, court, are discovered and then forcibly separated, as Ziki is sent overseas as a punishment by her parents, and Kena remains in Nairobi. While most of the final half of the eighty-two minute film shows Kena alone, the lovers are united in the film's final scene. This is the scene that failed to comply with the morality standards of the Kenyan Film Classification Board, which singled out the scene for "creating the impression of a happy ending to a troubled lesbian relationship" with the objective of "normalis[ing] homosexuality in Kenya" (Mutua 2018: 2).

That the Film Classification Board reacted in this way, I argue, acts as a confirmation of potential of the vital strategies of queer worldmaking at work in *Rafiki*. This is apparent, as stated above, in the way that the film's queer love story and hopeful ending subvert the heteronormative expectations of the Kenyan state that, through its legal framework and homophobic discourse "promote[s] an invented national heterosexual citizenship centred on marriage and family, while erasing queer bodies, desires and practices from Kenya's history, present and future" (Van Klinken 2018: 652). Additionally, however, as my discussion will show, *Rafiki* stands out as exemplary in the way in which it not only creates the impression of a happy ending for its queer protagonists, but, through the visual affirmation of this ending, offers a kernel of hope for queer Kenyans and provides them with a glimpse of what a queer Kenyan future could be. For West *et al*, "the ability to imagine one's self in a time and place

far removed from the present, with the freedom to act upon these desires must not be dismissed as a frivolous folly” (2013: 58). In offering its queer protagonists a future, then, *Rafiki*'s final scene textually produces, for its viewers too, the possibility of a queerer world.

The queer worldmaking potential of *Rafiki* is underscored by the philosophy of its director, who refers to her Afrofuturist aesthetic as “Afrobubblegum.” In a TED Talk devoted to explaining her work, Kahiú describes the concept of Afrobubblegum as her intention to produce art that depicts Africans as “vibrant and loving and thriving and living a vibrant life” (2017). Kahiú points out that, to date, much of the art and films that are focused on or that come out of Africa is development-funded, and therefore heavily agenda-driven, depicting Africa as a serious place where “only serious things happen” (Kahiú 2017). The idea behind Afrobubblegum, Kahiú asserts, is that if there were more images in art and film of Africans as vibrant and thriving and “living a beautiful vibrant life”, it follows that Africans viewing such art would think of themselves “as worthy of more happiness” (Kahiú 2017).

Kahiú's Afrobubblegum philosophy aligns with the notion of queer futurity put forward by José Esteban Muñoz as a utopian practice that envisions queer horizons out of the experiences of minoritarian queers who, as Muñoz puts it, “have been denied a world,” but “are not without resources” (Muñoz 1999: 200). Such resources, for Muñoz, can be found in queer aesthetics and performance that, he argues, have utopian potential in the way that they envision queer futures stemming from minoritarian subject experiences. Following on from Muñoz, but extending his ideas on queer futurity and the queer aesthetic, I draw on the notion of queer futurity, alongside Afrobubblegum, to uncover the ways in which Kahiú builds a queer world. She does this not only through a same-sex love story between her two protagonists, but also through the use of tropes of hope, horizon and future-oriented movement, driven throughout much of the film by what I will show is the lead character Kena's queer utopic gaze.

The notion of queer futurity and the praxis of queer worldmaking offer counter-narratives to the dominant discourses of evolution that have traditionally equated changes in the ways African states respond to the prohibitive legal frameworks, and the societal attitudes towards non-normative sexualities, as catching up with the West (Massad 2002; Nyeck and Epprecht 2013; Tamale 2013). This evolutionary model can be seen in the attention that *Rafiki* received from some western media outlets, that drew attention to the controversy around the film focusing largely on the ban (see for example Ghoshal 2018; Kohn 2018; Taubin 2018).

Descriptions of *Rafiki* that focused on the ban, to the detriment of the more complexly activist aspects of the film's story, spatialise a narrative aptly captured by Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt in their exploration of queer world cinema as one in which "the West is the first to open its arms to queers and the rest of the world eventually follows" (2016: 76). The fixation on the film's ban by the western media elides the more important discussions about the contributions made by *Rafiki* and the ways in which the film celebrates queerness and creates a queer utopic gaze. For this reason, as this article will show, there is a story to tell about the film's ban; but from the angle of worldmaking rather than through a narrative of evolutionary progress.

What I seek to do in this article can be thought of on two levels. Firstly, in the following section, to draw attention to key scenes in *Rafiki* that contribute to the success of the film's queer worldmaking potential. Secondly, to highlight the ways in which, both because of, and in spite of, the film's ban, the practice of queer worldmaking extended beyond the screen to the space inside the cinema in the seven short days that the film's ban was relaxed and *Rafiki* was screened in Kenya. While the former centres the analysis on tropes of futurity, horizon, and utopic space in the film's plot and narrative, the latter centres on the notion of queer space-making as it is understood in the work of Eddie Ombagi, who explores the ways in which queer spaces of leisure and pleasure, that sit outside of the public imaginary, contribute to queer

worldmaking through their ability to create spaces in which queer kinship and community thrive.

For Ombagi, queer spaces in Nairobi (such as nightclubs, bars, and cruising cafés), offer avenues of survival tactics for queer users because of their precarious and ambivalent nature. Such spaces, Ombagi argues, take on utopic form in the way that they are imagined, understood, archived and recalled by queer users (2019: 108). For these users, such spaces transcend the purpose for which they were originally designed and attain meaning through the people who occupy them (114). In this way, even the most ambivalent space has the capacity to take on utopic form, through the ways that it acts as a catalyst to the creation of a sense of belonging, community, and kinship for its queer users. In the discussion that follows, I extend Ombagi's notion of queer space-making to the physical space and atmosphere in the Kenyan cinemas where *Rafiki* was screened.

Before discussing cinema space as queer utopic space, it is important to understand the events that followed the decision by the Film Classification Board to prohibit the release of *Rafiki* in Kenya. When the Kenyan Film Classification Board banned *Rafiki* for reasons connected to the film's lesbian content and its hopeful ending, Kahiua filed a lawsuit against the Board and the Attorney General so that her film might be eligible as Kenya's entry in the International Feature Film category of the Academy Awards. In order to be eligible for consideration for an Academy Award, a film must be shown in its country of origin for a period of seven consecutive days. The ruling in the lawsuit, brought by Kahiua against the Film Classification Board, declared that the ban could be temporarily lifted so that *Rafiki* could be shown to local audiences and therefore qualify to be considered as Kenya's entry into the Awards. During the short seven-day period, *Rafiki* played to packed theatres in three Kenyan cities: Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu and, according to press releases, "became the second highest grossing Kenyan film of all time" (Hlaethwa 2018).

In his work on media events, Nick Couldry argues that a “*shared* viewing situation” makes an audience feel that they are part of something big (2003: 61). Building on Couldry, Lindiwe Dovey describes the excitement of collective participation and argues that “the sensation of physically inhabiting the same space as others in the audience... [is]...essential to that experience, however brief” (2015: 16). Couldry and Dovey are describing media events on an international scale, and film festivals which are attended by thousands. At such events, it is argued, audience members get swept up in the grandness of the event and atmosphere.

Comparing the audience experience in a cinema to that of a large live event might appear odd in a discussion about the queer potentiality of the space within the Kenyan cinema, as the nature of the public/private viewing experience seems to be pulling in the opposite direction to the “festive excesses” that accompany such larger events. However, the ban on *Rafiki* and the seven-day release, ensured that the screenings of the film in the three Kenyan cities where it was shown were, in fact, extraordinary events.

My argument is that these descriptions of the atmosphere and the excitement of an event can be extended to the physical space and atmosphere inside the cinemas in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu where *Rafiki* was shown during the seven-day period when the film’s ban was temporarily lifted. Firstly, the media circus around the ban and the ensuing lawsuit turned the film’s temporary release into an event that, while not on a par with the audience size of a film festival or a live media event, did make its audience feel like they were a part of something much larger than simply going to the cinema. Reports in the media described audience turnouts so large that it forced cinemas to open up additional screenings (Griffin 2018; Oduyayo and Odufuwa 2018). Media articles reporting on the event, as well as queer Kenyan bloggers and social media, capture a general excitement from those in the audience who identified as queer. Emphasising the link between collective participation and queer utopic spaces, some viewers

drew attention to the atmosphere (Kimani 2018), while others pointed to the safe space that the cinema offered (News 24 2018).

Much like the queer space inside Nairobi nightclubs, bars, and the cruising café captured by Ombagi, queer strangers who attended the film viewings became part of an ambivalent space, where their queer sensibility created a sense of belonging. This confirms Ombagi's contention that queer bodies ultimately long for community, friendship, and connection. Moreover, there is evidence that this goes further than the geographical demarcations of the cinema in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu, and the wider Kenyan state, and spills out into the queer diaspora. One queer Kenyan student studying at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom, wrote in response to viewing the film abroad: “[it] ties to me to a community in Kenya that I’ve yet to fully engage with, but that I know is waiting for me when I return home” (Sebatindira 2018).

Jill Dolan's work on performance is useful here. Dolan draws our attention to “utopian performatives” that she describes as: “small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present into a hopeful feeling of what worlds might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense” (2008: 13). Dolan's work investigates the potential of different kinds of performance to inspire what she describes as, “moments in which audiences feel themselves allied with each other, and with the broader, more capacious sense of public, in which social discourse articulates the possible” (2). While Dolan is writing here about live theatre performance, much of what she says is compatible with my argument about the screenings of *Rafiki*, especially as she considers the importance of the performance in affecting what she calls “expressions of hope and love...for other people, for a more abstracted notion of ‘community,’ or for an even more intangible idea of ‘humankind’” (2).

For many queer audience members watching *Rafiki*, the space inside the cinema became a place where queer viewers could enact their queer selves. Patently, the cinema is not a space that bears any kind of queer cultural imaginary or logic, yet in the Kenyan screenings of *Rafiki*, the space inside the cinema was as utopic a space as was the queer world presented on the cinema screen. In this way, while by no means enacting a finished utopia in the present, the viewing of *Rafiki* nevertheless allowed queer audience members to move outside what Muñoz refers to as the “prison house” of the here and now of regulatory sexual politics in Kenya, and to “think and feel a *then and there*” of a future yet to come (Muñoz 2009: 1).

The utopic space in the Kenyan cinema, that I have been discussing here, is an example of Kahiu’s philosophy of Afrobubblegum in action, in the way in which the queer world within the film combines with the utopic space inside the cinema to create a queer utopic world. Afrobubblegum, as I have already pointed out, aligns on an affective level with Muñoz’s critical methodology that envisions queer horizons out of the experiences of minoritarian queers. One clear way in which queer futurity and Afrobubblegum intertwine in ways that underscore the worldmaking potentiality of Kahiu’s film is through the idea of the trace. In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz asserts that “something like a trace or potential...exists or lingers after a performance...it is never just the duration of the event” (2009: 99). Such a trace, I argue, could be seen among the Kenyan audience that viewed *Rafiki* in the seven days that it was shown in Kenya in 2018.

The final scene of *Rafiki* offers a particularly striking example of the way in which the film leaves a trace, through the way that Kahiu has the scene play out. Here we see the main character Kena a few years later standing on a hill and looking at the horizon as a hand touches her shoulder and softly says her name. From the brightly coloured nails and the smile on Kena’s face, we can deduce that the hand belongs to Ziki, but Kahiu leaves the scene open to interpretation as the camera pans out and the credits begin to roll. Njoki Karu’s song “Stay”

forms the musical backdrop of the scene and the audience's last visual image of both Kena and the horizon is accompanied by the ephemeral sounds of Karu's voice. Here the choice of music seems to underscore the futurity that has been present throughout the film, as the closing credits role and Karu sings: "Walk we me far above the horizon. Play with me, we can put the stars to bed. Watch with me, 'til the morning sun arises. Wait with me, just wait with me 'til the end."

Scenes such as this, for Muñoz, change form, like energy, and live on as important trace and residue in the hearts and minds of those who witness them and matter to those whose history and life possibilities disappear in the majoritarian heteronormative world (2009: 65-66). That Kahiū should choose to end the film this way, then, is important on at least two different levels. First, the combination of these two processes (Kena's gaze and Karu's lyrics), and the fact that we experience them simultaneously at the end of the film - that is, right before the audience leaves the cinema - multiplies the chances, I argue, for the scene to leave a trace on its audience.

The second important point concerns the open-ended nature of the film's final scene. Here Kahiū leaves the future of her queer protagonists open to interpretation, while simultaneously insisting, through Kena's gaze on the horizon, on the "concrete possibility for another world" (Munoz 2009: 1). This is why the film's hopeful ending is so central to the film's politics and queer aesthetics. As Muñoz writes: "Hope, along with its other, fear, are affective structures that can be described as anticipatory" (3). And, if we are to follow Muñoz's contention that "there is always a gatekeeper, representing a straight present, who will labour to invalidate the historical fact of queer lives – present, past, and future" (65), then it is easy to see why *Rafiki*'s final scene caused the controversy with the Kenyan Film Classification Board that it did.

While much of the controversy around the banning of *Rafiki*, as I have pointed out, revolved around the film's final scene, for the remainder of the article I want to explore briefly

a number of scenes from the body of the film that draw attention to the ways in which ideas of queer space and queer worldmaking are visually affirmed within the plot and narrative of *Rafiki*. I do this for two reasons: firstly, to show how the worldmaking potentiality of the film is not only confined to the film's hopeful ending; and secondly, to draw attention to the ways in which Kahiu brings together tropes of futurity, hope, and horizon in the film's plot and narrative.

As the opening credits of *Rafiki* roll, the audience sees Kena, a gender-fluid young woman, on a skateboard navigating the Nairobi neighbourhood in which she lives. Kena's journey around the neighbourhood is interspersed with scenes of children playing and people working as the film depicts upbeat urban life in a city and its parameters (Osinubi 2018). Kena inhabits the space around her with confidence and, as the scene comes to a close, she flips her skateboard and runs up the stairs of an apartment building to find her friend Blaksta (played by Neville Misati) so that they can hang out and play cards at a café with friends. At the café, Kena, Blaksta, and a third friend called Waireri (played by Charlie Karumi), chide each other about girls and haircuts, until the scene is interrupted by the arrival of a new customer - Tom (played by Vitalis Waweru) - whom, we quickly find out from the homophobic reactions of Blaksta and Waireri, is queer. The scene is brief and dominated by Waireri who storms off to get a "real drink" rather than be around "faggots." Waireri does not have a significant role in the film, but his words and actions in this scene are significant reminders of the homophobic discourse that, as Van Klinken points out, works to exclude queer bodies through an overt form of heteronationalism (652).

In these opening scenes, through the use of metaphors of future-oriented movement and the queer utopic gaze, Kahiu positions Kena as the main catalyst through which a glimpse of queer futurity comes about. While Kahiu injects much of the film's text with utopian performatives and future-oriented tropes, it is through the character of Kena that the film's

worldmaking potential is brought about. The queer gaze is an important part of worldmaking in *Rafiki* and it is through Kena as avatar of the film's queer futurity that the audience experiences the power and potentiality of this gaze.

The film's most striking example of the power in looking – that is, the queer potentiality in Kena's gaze - is in a scene that follows immediately after the homophobic exchange. Following Waireri's dramatic exit, Kahiu's directorial gaze cuts to Kena saying goodbye to Blaksta and walking out into the street. Here a young woman - Ziki - is dancing and Kena stares. This scene stands out both because of the length of time taken by Kena's gaze and because of the bright pink hair of the dancer. Kena stares for long enough to attract the woman's attention. She stops dancing, looks at Kena, then self-consciously looks away. This scene has no dialogue, yet nevertheless it highlights the way in which Kahiu uses Kena's gaze to convey a sense of utopian longing to viewers.

There are several examples from *Rafiki* that illustrate concretely how visual pleasure and queer potentiality are structured through Kena's gaze. I discuss three such examples here. These scenes take place in three locations: on a rooftop; on a lake in a public park; and in a nightclub. Alongside the aesthetic of looking that is emphasised in the film, what also drives Kahiu's narrative here is the director's use of queer utopic spaces. I have already sketched an outline of these spaces, but we can understand the concept here as space that allows glimpses into, and sustains our investment in, a future world where queerness can flourish. What this means in the context of *Rafiki* is best described, drawing on Angela Jones, as “pockets or cleavages of queer utopian space” that free Kena and Ziki from the here and now and allow them room to breathe (2013: 2).

The scene in the film that most effectively illustrates how the use of utopian space plays a key role in determining visualisations of queer futurity for Kena and Ziki follows the first spoken encounter between the soon-to-be lovers. Following an incident where Ziki and her

friends are chased down the street by Kena, who discovers the young women pulling down posters of Kena's father's political campaign (a political election campaign is a sub-plot), Ziki approaches Kena to apologise asking Kena if she wants to "hang out." Kena suggests that they "go get a soda," and the film returns us to the café where the question of queer looking was first pointed out. It becomes clear at the café that Kena and Ziki – whose fathers are running rival political campaigns – are attracting unwanted attention and, after drinking only some of their soda, they move from the café to a rooftop, where they are finally alone. In the context of my argument about utopian spaces, the aesthetic success of this scene lies in Kahiu's use of dreamy visuals whose ephemeral quality is aided by the use of laundry blowing in the breeze and a view of the horizon.

IMAGE 1 GOES HERE

IMAGE 1 Kena and Ziki alone on the rooftop

IMAGE 1 Film still from *Rafiki*

The most striking example of a depiction of utopian space takes place in the scene where the film's protagonists spend the day together driving in a *tuk-tuk* (a small motorised form of transport common in Nairobi) and hanging out on amusement rides and a lake in a park. This is the scene where the young women first vocalise their attraction, and their long lingering gazes turn to physical touching and handholding as Kena and Ziki paddle in a boat on the lake.

For Ombagi, whose work, as I have pointed out, is central to my understanding of the utopic nature of queer space, there are spaces within Nairobi that, despite the prohibitive legal framework, are deemed "within the imaginary of its [queer] inhabitants, as friendly" (108). Such spaces sit outside the public imaginary, as they challenge the function for which they

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were intended and therefore “subvert the systems of regulation and control” (108). Ombagi’s observations provide a particularly useful theoretical model for thinking about *Rafiki*’s queer spaces because they focus on the idea that many of these spaces possess an “ephemeral quality” and can be found in the shadows beyond surveillance and control (109). *Rafiki*’s lake and the nightclub where Kena and Ziki go on their first official date, are two such places where, to paraphrase Ombagi, “the city...breaks down” (117). Here we see Kena and Ziki kicking back, letting loose, and having fun in a way that is indicative of Ombagi’s description of the absence of surveillance. Where the gaze of the state - as well as the neighbourhood gossip - is the weakest, then, the queer gaze becomes the strongest in the film.

I want to push my reading of this scene further by considering its utopic potential through an analysis using Muñoz’s notion of “ecstatic time” (96). In the conclusion to *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz imagines the inexorable potential of the future in terms of the ecstatic. As he puts it, “we must take ecstasy [with each other]” (185). While there is a range of possible registers here, I argue that the carefree happiness and physical intimacy that Kena and Ziki share while holding hands in a paddleboat and, later, kissing in a nightclub takes place in “ecstatic time.” For Muñoz, ecstatic time - the time of queerness - is a time of intense pleasure: “a moment when the here and the now is transcended by a *then* and a *there*” (97). Kena and Ziki’s transcendence comes in two stages. The first of these begins with hand-holding on a boat, moves on to a scene with Ziki’s head on Kena’s shoulder, and ends with the acknowledgement of attraction - (“*I’ve seen the way you look at me*”) - and the promise of a date.

IMAGE 2 GOES HERE

IMAGE 2 Kena and Ziki by the lake

IMAGE 2 Film still from *Rafiki*

IMAGE 3 GOES HERE

IMAGE 3 Kena and Ziki on their date

IMAGE 3 Film still from *Rafiki*

The second stage of transcendence is the lover's actual date which takes place in a nightclub. In the club, Kena and Ziki wear matching heart-shaped glasses, paint their faces, and dance. As their dance becomes more intimate, the scene cuts to the lovers sitting alone behind a curtain of some sort, away from the nightclub crowd. Here Kahiu draws out the connections between the queer gaze and queer utopia, as Ziki questions what it is that Kena thinks about when she thinks about Ziki. Kena responds: "Your eyes."

This, I argue, is an instance of the ecstasy of Muñoz's description, and as the scene in the nightclub moves toward the lover's first kiss, we are reminded once more of the film's positioning of Kena as avatar of queer futurity when Ziki asks: "If we were to do something, just me and you, what would we do?". Kena responds: "Go on night drives, we'd definitely stare at the sky." In this particular scene, however, it is Ziki who pushes the lover's transcendence as her question: "And then what?" impels Kena to lean in, pull Ziki to her feet and kiss her.

Each of the scenes discussed here presents a visual affirmation of queer lives and builds a picture of homonormativity in the way that Bennett describes as the important first step in queer worldmaking processes. In this way, it is clear that *Rafiki* makes an important contribution to Kenya's queer archive alongside the work of Musangi, Mwachiro, and Ombagi that I discussed in the opening section of the article. This is even more true when one looks beyond the narrative of the film, to observe the effect that the banning, and the overturning of the ban, have had on those who attended the screenings of *Rafiki* during the seven short days

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and in the three Kenyan cities. As my discussion of queer utopic space in the Kenyan cinema theatres has shown, *Rafiki* became more than simply a visual affirmation of queer lives through a same-sex love story played out on the cinema screen. The film, the lawsuit, and the story that Kahiu generated in suing the Film Classification Board, created an actual queer Kenyan world through community and kinship inside the utopic space of the three Kenyan cinemas and across the queer Kenyan diaspora. This multiplies the queer worldmaking exemplariness of *Rafiki* and shows us Kahiu's Afrobubblegum effect in action.

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