

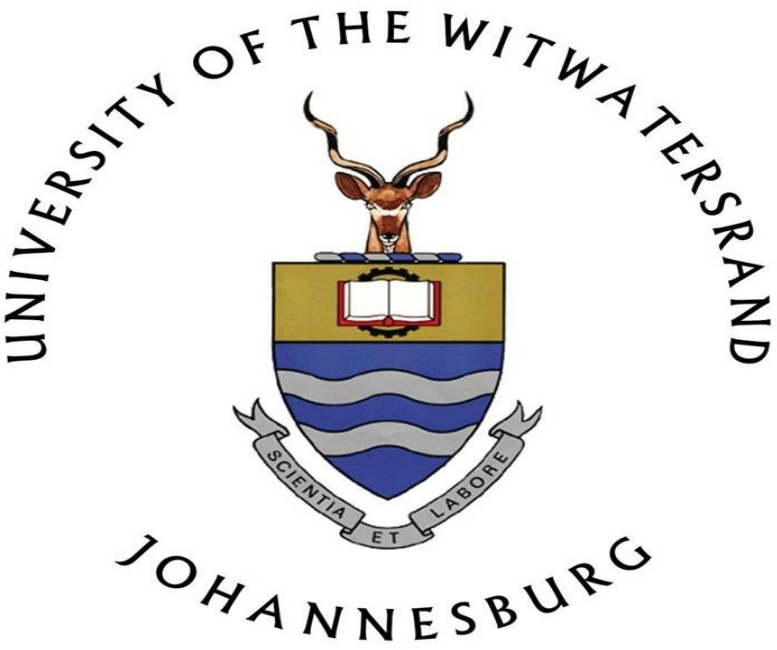
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School of Literature, Language and Media Studies

Representations of black queer identities in South African film and visual culture: Transgressive vulnerability as a mechanism for imagining and claiming space, visibility and freedom.

by

Lwando Majikijela

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in

Media Studies

In the Faculty of Humanities

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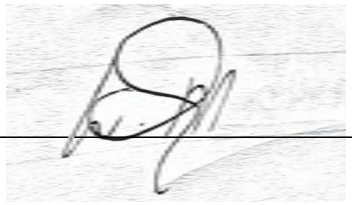
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Abstract

In South Africa, there have been widespread debates on space and visibility of gender and sexual minorities amongst scholars from different fields, including queer, feminist, anti-racist and cultural theorists. A great deal of this scholarly interest stems from how gender and sexual minorities have been subjected to forms of discrimination, homophobia and violence despite the promises of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) to protect queer rights. In the post-apartheid period, queer people still find it challenging to live visible and freer lives in the spaces they move in. Livermon (2012: 300) claims that the lives of "black queer people in specifically black cultural spaces continue to be policed", which suggests that South Africans broadly have not included queer people in the idyllic construct of the rainbow nation. This state of affairs raises questions of how queer subjects are understood and understand themselves in South African spaces, and how they are disconnected from spaces that uphold heteronormative values. In addition, it highlights the limits on queer visibly and restrictions on queer performativity, when these performativities and visibilities are met with discrimination, oppression and violence.

Film and visual culture have been important platforms to push back against these restrictive social and cultural structures. In this project, I explore four films, namely *Simon & I* (2002), *While You Weren't Looking* (2015), *Out of This World* (2018) and *Inxeba (The Wound)* (2017), and discuss how black queer subjects are represented in films and visual culture particularly in relation to spaces they move in.

Queer people are often framed as vulnerable in public discourse. Butler (2014) claims that vulnerabilities can be thought about as the birthplace of resistance; this is what Butler et al. (2016) refer to as vulnerability as a condition that can lead to objective ontological claims for acquiring visibility, freedom and space for liveable lives. This project will explore two main topics, namely (i) how space, visibility and freedom are represented in queer visual narratives and other associated texts in post-apartheid South Africa, and (ii) rethinking forms of vulnerabilities as agential and as opening space for resistance in these visual media and visual performativities. The project will analyse how black queer subjects are represented in film and mainstream media in order to demonstrate the important interventions made by the visual texts explored in this thesis. The project uses queer theory, including the work of Bulter (2014), Macharia (2009, 2019) and Ahmed (2006) to understand forms of visual performativity as related to vulnerability. The project uses qualitative visual content analysis

to unpack the complex social and cultural dynamics represented in these texts, and the analysis demonstrates how these visual texts are themselves sites of resistance and of imagining and claiming "liveable lives" (Butler, 2014) that the transgressive vulnerabilities allow for.

Keywords: black queer representation, queer film, space, visibility, vulnerability, sexuality, South African film, resistance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

During apartheid and in the post-apartheid era, the ideas of visibility, belonging, representation and freedom were and are contested within various communities in South Africa; these debates are taking place among queer subjects (Livermon, 2014 & Munro, 2009) in South Africa, as well as among black South Africans broadly (Kumalo, 2019). Importantly for the purposes of the current study, queer theorists and activists have stressed the vital role of creating visibility and belonging within spaces and communities that are often dominated by exclusive and marginalising heterosexist ideologies (see Andrews, 2019a; Matebeni, 2013; Msibi, 2009, 2011 & Muholi, 2006). Queer spaces, communities and forms of visibility emerge to contest the widespread idea of queer subjects as outsiders to the prescripts of "authentic" blackness and the widespread view of blackness as linked to heterosexuality (Macharia, 2019). Visser (2013) argues that queer spaces serve as a political challenge to the notion that diverse sexualities should be excluded from public[1] social orders and identity frameworks, especially when viewed through binary gender constructs and simplistic labels. Therefore, Livermon (2012) argues that queer subjects create forms of alternate spaces or transform the already existing spaces to emphasise their visibility, belonging and freedom.

These dynamics are illustrated in the four films that are the subject of this thesis, namely *Simon & I* (2002), *While You Weren't Looking* (2015), *Out of This World* (2018) *and Inxeba (The Wound)* (2017). In these films, the queer characters resist dominant heterosexist spaces through forging spaces that are embracing of their sexuality, or spaces that allow for queer identities and desires to be expressed. The alternate spaces are liminal or heterotopic spaces that are created by queer people to resist spaces that have been marginalising, and instead create spaces that can be used for purposes of representation, visibility, freedom and belonging. The ideas of "alternate space" and "visibility" are important to realising a shift in queer narratives. Skeggs (1999) refers to the idea of "shift" as a political description of the

[1] Visser (2013) suggests that concepts of space and place have constantly been contested and (re)negotiated. Thus, when referring to space in this project, I will adopt Massey's (2005, qtd. in Visser, 2013: 268) description of space, which explains that "space is both process and social product, arising from and conditioning everyday spatiality practices; it both constitutes and is constituted by social relations", whilst "place refers to the locales and locations in which these social relations are inscribed". I will adopt the notion of space to refer to how queer people visibilise their identities in places they inhabit. Furthermore, the idea of public space used in this thesis is employed from the framework developed by Judith Butler (2014), postulating that public space is an arena of marginalisation and a site of resistance against this marginalisation.

way justice, visibility and freedom can be imagined. Skeggs (1999) suggest that the notion of "shifting" narratives encourages forms of recognition and visibility. Skeggs explains that recognition is a political and social act, as "to be recognised as something always invokes systems of knowledge, classification and disciplinary power" (1999: 220). This suggests that the idea of public space, defined through discourses of political and social relations, relies on decisions about what *ought* to be visible or recognised and what should not. For example, the South African public city or township spaces might be policed by discourses of "appropriateness", where two men or women showing affection might be construed as something *not to be recognised* as belonging to these public spaces. This is the reason why certain forms of visibility are seen as legitimate, whilst others are considered illegitimate.

Butler (2004) claims that forms of legitimacies are tied to heterosexual norms, and individuals in many societies *ought to be* heterosexual in order to legitimately exist and be visible in public spaces. Thus, the visual presence of queer subjects in public spaces is considered illegitimate. For instance, in the film *Inxeba (The Wound)* (Trengove, 2017), the idea of public or shared space is constructed from a hyper-masculine perspective. This emphasises that in the space of Ulwaluko (Initiation), queer masculinity[2] is considered illegitimate since it is conflated with subordinate, vulnerable masculinities and it clashes with hegemonic masculinity, and the characters in the film are unable to publicly display or even acknowledge their queer identities. They thus create alternate spaces in order to experience their queer desires. On another level, the film itself can be seen as an alternate "space" created for the visibility of queer people when queer people face hostility and marginalisation in broader South African publics (Andrews, 2021a). The public backlash that the film received demonstrates widespread heteronormative cultural policing, especially against *visible* black queer bodies (Andrews, 2018).

Skeggs (1999) argues that the fact that public visual performativity of queer identities are considered illegitimate are part of the reason why queer narratives are silenced and marginalised. However, these alternate spaces created by and within films allow for the inclusion of narratives that have been continuously excluded by heteronormative social structures. This project seeks to explore how visibility and space are constructed in queer

[2] The term "queer" is used in this thesis to refer to a radical and disruptive approach of rethinking gender and sexuality as fluid and multiple within dominant oppressive ideologies. The adjective queer also refers to people from gender and sexual minority groups or with nonnormative gender expression (Andrews, 2018). Queer masculinity is defined "as ways of being masculine outside hetero-normative constructions of masculinity that disrupt, or have the potential to disrupt, traditional images of the hegemonic heterosexual masculine" (Heasley, 2005: 310).

narratives. The project will explore how the films *Simon & I, While You Weren't Looking, Out of This World* and *Inxeba (The Wound)* are narratives that act as forms of resistance in South Africa, challenging discourses around public spaces that are socially ordered as heteronormative, such as townships, rural areas and pockets of cities. These films represent black queer characters in ways that demonstrate vulnerability and resistance. I argue that the characters' vulnerability is the root of their resistant potential as they renegotiate public spaces or create alternate spaces where their identities and relationships would be excluded or oppressed. Through my analysis of the four central films, I show how film itself can act as a mechanism for black queer people to *make space for themselves* to work towards *livable lives* in South Africa. I explore these films as social documents that speak to broader realities in South Africa while offering transgressive and disruptive possibilities for imagining black queer South African lives. However the films also present the stark realities of violence, queerphobia and microaggressions such as discourses of homosexuality being "unAfrican" that queer people regularly face in South Africa, and thus the films are not idealistic in their depiction of alternate spaces for queer people to experience freedom and belonging. Instead, the films offer forms of visibility that enable recognition, and thus open spaces for broader conversations around what it means to be black and queer in South Africa in ways that challenge dominant heterosexist discourses.

Background

Inxeba (The Wound) (2017), directed by John Trengove, is a South African film that explores male Xhosa initiation in a rural area of the Eastern Cape province. The film focuses on "portraying the experiences of Xhosa men who participate in the secretive initiation ritual known as 'Ulwaluko'" (Andrews, 2019b:1). The narrative focalises three main characters, Vija, Xolani and Kwanda. Two men, Xolani and Vija are tasked as caregivers (Amakhankatha, 'mentors') to assist the initiates (abakhwetha) during the process of the initiation. Xolani is assigned to look after Kwanda, a young gay initiate from a wealthy family whose lifestyle is associated with urban upbringing and privilege, and Kwanda is resistant to the initiation process (Andrews, 2019b). Xolani and Vija have a sexual relationship that is rekindled annually when they meet in the initiation space, and their relationship is discovered by the initiate Kwanda in the film. Xolani "view[s] Kwanda with a gaze of annoyance and a distinct sense of anxiety" (Andrews, 2019b:2), because of the way that Kwanda embraced his same-sex sexuality, which Xolani consistently suppressed because

of the assumption that these desires are considered sacrilegious to Xhosa culture and tradition. Thus, the film invokes questions of how black queer people are excluded and erased from heteronormative spaces, and how the idea of visibility is significant to the notion of (re)claiming space, considering the fact that the portrayal of a same-sex affair in these heteronormative spaces is regarded as humiliating and seen as a threat towards the Xhosa culture and tradition.

In the context of this film, asserting queer visibility takes place when black queer subjects reject the prescript of conforming to heterosexist norms, and authentically voice and visibilise aspects of their diverse sexualities as they appear in public spaces (see Livermon, 2012; 2014 & Skeggs, 1999). Thus, visibility plays a significant role as a constituent of space; who is able to be recognised determines understandings of these spaces, and the initiation space in *Inxeba (The Wound)* seems to be defined as "sacred" due to its heterosexist ideological underpinnings that erase Kwanda, Vija and Xolani's sexualities. Livermon (2012: 300) proposes that the concept of queer visibility "refers not only to the act of seeing and being seen but also to the process through which individuals makes themselves known in the communities as queer subjects". This demonstrates that spaces, and the communities that define these spaces, become major elements of the expression of queer identities, and that queer identities are affirmed through visibility. Kwanda demonstrates this trough his refusal to be silent about his sexuality in the initiation space, and his persistence that Kwanda should be honest about his sexuality, even as this presents many complex psychosocial dynamics for the queer characters. Queer visibility is a form of freedom and belonging, one that is resisted by those who are invested in heterosexist discourses, but also at times resisted by queer characters themselves due to their own vulnerability to harm or rejection.

My argument is that narrative can be an important form of visibility in claiming space for queer people, which is part of the work undertaken by film. This is demonstrated through the unapologetically queer character of Kwanda, who consistently resists the notion of blackness as defined through heterosexuality and asserts his identity and gender performance in a space that tries to impose traditional masculinity and heterosexuality onto him. Kwanda continues to enact forms of visibility of his non-normative gender and sexuality in a black cultural space, challenging popular discourses that disregard the existence of diverse sexualities in Africa, even as these sexualities are constantly policed by heteronormative social structures (see, Macharia, 2009; Msibi, 2011 & Currier & Migraine-George, 2016). Thus, *Inxeba (The Wound)* (2017) as a film can serve to push back against the invisibility of black sexuality

diversity in public discourses and public spaces, and express the experiences of queer people in broader public spaces. This thesis will explore the film in relation to other queer visual media in South Africa, primarily the films *Simon & I, While You Weren't Looking* and *Out of This World* to show how visibility in these narratives can resist heteronormative oppression and claim "space" for queer people. These texts will also be used to show how visibility is important to spark debates about queer identities that can ultimately lead to greater recognition of gender and sexuality diversity in South Africa, particularly for black queer subjects.

Simon & I (2002) is a documentary film directed by Bev Ditsie and is set in the ostensibly cosmopolitan city Johannesburg and the townships on its outskirts, including Soweto and Sebokeng (South of Vaal). This is a film that follows the narratives and the experiences of two queer activists Tseko Simon Nkoli and Bev Ditsie, who worked during apartheid to fight for the inclusion of queer subjects within the institutionalised laws that oppressed queer people, inscribed under a heterosexist and racist apartheid regime and that still linger into post-apartheid South African society. The dominant ideologies that underpinned these apartheid-era laws include hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity, Calvinism and Christianity, and these laws embody deeply-held heterosexist cultural practices and traditions that were conflated with 'morality'. This background will be explored in relation to the public imaginary and the public spaces that made black queer activism a powerful force during apartheid and in the post-apartheid era. As represented in the film, black queer bodies were and are marked as what Livermon (2012:299) would refer to as "the constitutive outside of blackness", where black queer bodies are labelled as unAfrican or against cultural values. Thus, the idea of black queer subjectivity within such spaces becomes difficult to imagine and perform as it is outside the dominant heteronormativity.

Especially at the time the film is set, namely the dying years of apartheid and in South Africa's transition, black queer people faced a form of double-outsider status, both as black subjects during apartheid as well as queer subjects within the black community. Thus, there were many challenges for black queer people in the early queer activism in South Africa such as the formation of groups like GLOW (Gay and Lesbian Organisation of Witwatersrand) and GASA (Gay Association of South Africa). Van Zyl (2009: 368) explains that belonging is a "thick concept which includes affective and cultural elements making visible the limitations of citizenship through contextualizing the politics and power dynamics in discourses of human rights". This suggest that the lens of "belonging" makes visible forms of oppression of

subjects that are marked as "other" in contexts of heteronormativity, and thus representing belonging or unbelonging in texts like film can be an entryway into understanding the experiences of marginalised subjects. Although the documentary film represents the experiences of various queer subjects within various racialised groups, it is evident that racial groups experience freedom, representation and belonging in different ways. For instance, the struggles of being a black queer subject involves the complications of fighting for subjectivity in black cultural communities that continue to police and marginalise black queer subjects, and the fights against the dominant white regime that oppressed black people and that oppressed all queer subjects (see Visser, 2013 & Reid, 2010). However, for white queer subjects, queerness was often viewed as the sole struggle to visibility and belonging in their social spaces, and the issue of race was not a significant discourse towards acquiring freedom, visibility and belonging (see Visser, 2013, Reid, 2010 & Matebeni, 2014). Thus, the experiences of black queer subjects in terms of visibility, belonging and freedom are unique in the South African context, and the struggle of Simon Nkoli and Bev Ditsie was simultaneously about blackness and queerness, as both of these activists express in the film. These elements in the text, and the way that the documentary is able to do work of increasing and nuancing black queer visibility, will be compared to later documentary films and visual texts such as *While You Weren't Looking, Out of This World*, *Inxeba (The Wound)* and Zanele Muholi's documentary film *Difficult Love* (2010). This comparison will show how the documentary by Ditsie spoke to many of the ways that later films and visual texts constructed visibility around black queer subjects, and enabled forms of claiming space through these texts and the subjects that they represent.

Out of This World (2018) is a documentary series filmed in Johannesburg South Africa. The series showcases the producer and host, America rapper and activist Mykki Blanco, journey to South African to explore the queer culture, in particular black queer creative culture in the post-apartheid South African setting. The series highlights realities and lived experiences of queer people in spaces where queer voices are often marginalised and silenced. The film primarily shows the narratives of queer people in city spaces in Johannesburg, but complexities are also highlighted around queer experiences in parts of the townships around Johannesburg. Visual creative activists including FAKA, Umlilo, Bradley, Nkulsey and the designer Rich Mnisi express their upbringings and experiences in townships, which are spaces that still appear to have not changed much for queer people even after the birth of democracy and the constitution that promised the protection of the rights of queer people in

South Africa. Some of these visual activists highlight the fear, discrimination and vulnerability that queer people experience when (re)thinking inclusion of queer people in township spaces. Discourses in these spaces are still largely queerphobic; for example, Fela Gucci mentions how words such as 'stabane' (faggot) are still used in township public spaces to discriminate and perpetuating violence towards queer identities. Thus, the use of such derogatory terms reinforce certain form of subordinated masculinity that is conflated with vulnerability. Livermon (2012) argues that enforcing queer narratives in heterosexually-structured spaces create new forms of spaces that are essential for queer subjects to realise visibility, freedom and belonging. Hence, the series aims to provide queer people the spaces to voice issues surrounding the politics of their gender and sexual identities. These subjects use transgressive vulnerabilities in order to assert visibility and to be recognised within public spaces that are not accepting of queer people or identities.

Filmed in Cape Town, *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) is a film that is set in post-apartheid South Africa, which represents the gender and sexual politics and lifestyles of queer people in the city of Cape Town and the outskirt township Khayelitsha. The film centres on two queer relationships. Dez and Terri are a mixed-race couple married for 20 years. Dez is an affluent black real estate agent who has many affairs outside her marriage. Their adoptive daughter, Asanda is a born-free child that describes herself as 'an experiment' whose identity is forged in racially and sexually diverse city spaces. She meets and engages in a relationship with an openly queer woman Shado from Khayelitsha. Throughout the film, these queer women demonstrate dynamics of queer identities within spaces in Cape Town city and the township Khayelitsha. Visser (2013) argues that public spaces play a significant role in realising the possibilities for visibility and recognition of diverse sexualities in predominantly heterosexist spaces. Thus, *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) intends to understand how spaces in the city are interconnected with spaces in townships (and vice versa), both giving meaning to identities and experiences in the other. As the film explores the public township and city spaces, it interrogates how queerness has been depicted and assumed to be associated with middle-class, urban sensibilities as a result of the queer movements that were dominated by white queer elitist narratives, which can still be seen in the way that Pride Parades in South Africa are fashioned within these homogenising lenses. The film explores the idea of conspicuous consumption in the city space, and how this serves as an "idealised" version of queer belonging and forms of freedom. This is shown in the vast differences between an affluent queer family that lives in the suburbs, and Shado with her friends in Khayelitsha who

are still marginalised as queer women. Thus, the film offers a rare representation of the complex relations between the black township spaces and the neo-liberal city spaces for queer people, which will be explored in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

Therefore, the four primary visual texts analysed in this thesis, namely *Simon & I, While You Weren't Looking, Out of The World* and *Inxeba (The Wound)*, will be read as representing how queer subjects interact with and within heterosexist spaces that discursively exclude them, and how they wrestle with belonging and visibility in these spaces. Furthermore, Livermon (2012) suggest that queer subjects create spaces or communities of their own when they are marginalised in public spaces, and these alternate spaces serve to challenge heteronormative oppression. This thesis considers whether these subjects are able to truly experience selfhood and belonging in spaces that are hostile to openly queer subjects. For instance, this could apply to the rural initiation space in the film *Inxeba (The Wound)*, where the characters Xolani and Vija find it difficult to embrace their relationship because of the heteronormative spaces they occupy which favour traditional, hegemonic forms of masculinity. The thesis also explores how vulnerability is not only an ontological condition of queerness in South Africa, but might open spaces of transgression and be a component of claiming public space through queer visibility in visual media.

Aims and Objectives

Aims

This thesis focuses on the representations of black queer people in film and visual culture in South Africa. Queer people are often viewed as outsiders to gender norms in South Africa, and their bodies and performativities are policed in public spaces. For lesbian and gender nonconforming women, they are often the subject of "corrective rape", especially in township spaces. For men with same-sex sexualities, they are often viewed as unmasculine or even as unAfrican. Connell (1995) argues that subordinate masculinities are often conflated with femininity, which is located as vulnerable. This vulnerability is emphasised by the recent spate of killings of queer people in the country (Makhaye, 2021). Thus, this project aims to explore the idea of vulnerability not only as the constant fear of physical and psychological harm that many black queer people experience in South Africa, but also as a form of transgression and a challenge to heteronormativity. I suggest, in concurrence with Butler

(2014), that in these films, vulnerability is the birthplace of the very possibility of visibility, belonging and freedom. The project will illustrate the possibilities of transgressive vulnerability through the discussion of current experiences and lived realities of queer people, in particular, black queer people in South Africa as represented in visual media and culture.

Objectives

The research project will primarly focus on four films, *Simon & I* (2002), *While You Weren't Looking* (2015), *Out of This World* (2018) and *Inxeba (The Wound)* (2017). These films explore the experiences of black queer people in post-apartheid South Africa. As much as the films are important to provide visibility to queer people, questions around hate, violence, safety, belonging, heterosexist ideologies and oppression still remain at the forefront of these films, and there is little sign that queer people are included in discourses of "rainbowism" that were particularly popular in the early post-apartheid years. In addition, scholarship has reiterated that queer subjects are vulnerable in heterosexist South African public spaces, and that they are seeking greater visibility, recognition and freedom in these spaces (Currier & Migraine-George, 2016). Therefore, this project will explore how these forms of vulnerabilities create possibilities for resistance and challenging heterosexist ideologies. The project will analyse films to demonstrate how black queer people have engaged with their vulnerabilities to challenge their erasure in dominant heterosexist discourses, and how these films constitute and simultaneously represent forms of alternate space that are employed by black queer people.

Rationale

Queer people are regularly subjected to violence and discrimination in South Africa (see Currier & Migraine, 2016 & Reid, 2010). These lived realities emanate from the ongoing discourses around queer subjects as "threats" to South African traditions and cultures (Currier & Migraine, 2016 & Msibi, 2011). The thesis explores queer narratives in visual media in South Africa and demonstrates how these forms of representation enable visibility, freedom and belonging, both discursively and through the depiction and creation of alternate space.

Film serves as a significant medium that reflects narratives that are personal and relatable to various communities. Thus, queer film allows for the representation of queer realities through what Topinka (2010) refers to as alternate space. These alternate spaces are liminal or

heterotopic[3] spaces that are created by queer people to rethink and reimagine spaces that have been marginalising, as spaces that can be used for the purposes of greater visibility and thus affirmation that queer identities are indeed African and deserve greater dignity, recognition and protection. Andrews (2018, 2019a) suggests that during the apartheid period, queer narratives and experiences have lacked authentic representation in film in South Africa. This lack of representation excluded queer realities in this popular medium and thus constructed queer narratives as taboo in public visual media. Therefore, post-apartheid queer film serves as a significant space for the expression of queer experiences, which allows for visibility and the greater recognition of queer subjects by broader society (Cloete, 2017). Furthermore, queer film allows queer filmmakers, actors and documentarians to have the agency to create, shape and imagine narratives and histories that have been excluded and marginalised for many years.

In addition, Gray (2020:771) proposes that media are a "crucial terrain on which techniques of power like self-regulation and management operate through capacities to increase the desire for and reach of visibility". This suggest that media serves an imperative role in creating visibility and recognition for queer realities. Andrews (2018) suggest that after the democratic constitution legitimised the rights to freedom of people of every gender and sexuality, particularly those who have been marginalised, media then became an intrinsic platform to reiterate and surface the histories of queer people, which created a form of recognition of what queer people had been through. Thus, queer film and visual media are essential spaces that allow for representation of queer histories and realities. They are spaces for reflection and a means of critical and humanistic engagement with social realities, and can present nuanced portrayals and diverse perspectives of queer experiences in South Africa. This thesis aims to show how film and visual media have been important in the representation of diverse black queer realities in democratic South Africa, particularly through the theoretical lens of transgressive vulnerability.

[3] By liminal and heterotopic, I refer to theories of Lacan that have been linked to queer experiences in South Africa by Grant Andrews (2018; 2021a). Liminality in this project is used to refer to "queer people's state of in-betweenness within society, both present and excluded, as well as [referring to] the abstract spaces outside of space where queer individuals can find a sense of freedom and demonstrate their queer desires which, based on cultural attitudes and mores, ought not to exist" (2018, 54). Heterotopic spaces refer to spaces that are created by queer people to resist spaces that have been marginalizing, and instead create spaces that can be used for purposes of visibility and belonging. Andrews (2021a: 87) explains that heterotopic spaces are "real spaces that challenge the assumptions of social power hierarchies, and that exist as spaces-outside-of-space where boundary crossing and fluid boundaries are key features, and can include visual media that reflect the 'real'".

Research Questions

- How are black queer characters or people represented in visual media in South Africa, and how do these representations potentially impact on public discourses of freedom, visibility, vulnerability and belonging for black queer people in the country?
- How do South African theorists understand black queer visibilities and the role of visual media in promoting these visibilities?
- How can the idea of transgressive vulnerabilities offer new ways of reading black queer South African films?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review will explore several important thematic concerns related to the research questions for this study. Primarily, the literature review will explore the importance of black queer freedom and visibility in Post-Apartheid South Africa, and critically review scholarship on the experiences of queer subjects within cultural, political and socioeconomic spatiality. Furthermore, the literature review will explore how notions of vulnerabilities can be imagined as the very possibility of resistance; this is what Butler et al. (2016) refer to as vulnerability being a condition that can lead to objective ontological claims. The literature review will also talk about the representation of queer subjects in films, documentaries and other visual media in South Africa. Lastly, the literature review will focus on the representation of queerness in the mainstream media.

Black Queer Freedom and Visibility in Post-Apartheid South Africa

For a number of years, black queer struggles have been an important topic of post-apartheid conversations of oppression and human rights in South Africa (Andrews, 2019a). The discussion of black queer subjects within the South African context have always rested upon 'cultural belonging', including families and communities that seek to negotiate and police identities within heteronormative public spheres (Mayhew, 2007). heteronormative conceptions of "authentic" black identities exclude black queer subjects who are assumed to exist outside the prescripts of blackness and Africanness. Macharia (2019:19) in his book *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy Across the Black Diaspora*, claims that African identities or blackness is discursively linked to the idea of heteronormativity, suggesting that many "African and Afro-diasporic scholars have wedded a [heterosexist] genealogical imperative to an ethnographic imagination, producing black legibility – personhood – through this wedding". Andrews (2021b) argues that linking black identity to heteronormativity is a major reason why queer experiences and identities are erased and delegitimised, and why black queer people are prevented from 'sowing' and 'scattering' (Macharia, 2019:19) their narratives within the black diaspora. In the article "Queer(y)ing Freedom: Black Queer Visibilities in Post-apartheid South Africa", Livermon (2012) discusses belonging as central to discourses of freedom for queer subjects in South Africa; belonging comprises "securing legal [and] political rights, […] deliberate destabilization of heteronormative notions of black identity [and] forms of legal/constitutional freedoms and social and cultural freedoms"

(Livermon, 2012: 299). The films discussed in this thesis engage in the work of delinking blackness and heterosexuality through representing black queer identities and visibilising black queer experiences. These characters exist in spaces that ostensibly exclude them and navigate tensions between assumed freedoms and ever-present vulnerabilities.

Livermon (2012) claims that the idea of freedom is central to the rights and dignity of queer subjects; however, this is often limited to the political and economic forms of freedom and equality, with little visible attention paid to conversations around sociocultural politics and everyday lived realities. This thesis will explore constitutional, social and cultural freedom from the perspective of the lived experiences of queer subjects as represented in visual media. This freedom includes being able to move through spaces as *visible* queer subjects who experience a sense of belonging, including being able to comfortably disclose and embrace their gender and sexual identities without the threat of losing their lives, being harmed, discriminated against or excluded. This is what Butler (2004:7-8) refers to as "liveable lives". The extent to which these forms of freedom can be represented or even imagined on film will be used to discuss broader lived realities of black queer people in South Africa, and these films will also be read as tools for making space for queer visibility.

Importantly, the project explores the idea of space in a form of consolidated physical and symbolic spaces (Visser, 2013), comprised of different communities and places such as suburbs, cities, rural land and townships. The idea of space is explored from a physical and symbolic perspective in order to understand how queer subject are understood within and often disconnected from these spaces or communities, and to discuss how queer people exist within these spaces and communities. Livermon (2012) contends that queer visibility can be understood beyond the familiar narrative of only working to destabilise heteronormativity, but rather as a positive signifier that represents the lived experiences and dignity of black queer subjects. Queer visibility as a positive signifier creates alternate space that is accessible and usable for representation of queer experiences. The creation of space enables the gender and sexual identities that are excluded in public spaces to be visible and recognised, affording dignity and recognition. Ahmed (2006) suggest that space becomes a point of departure that allows queer subjects to have a voice and express their experiences. Inhabiting space, particularly public space, reinforces the idea of proximity and contact for queer subjects without any subjects marked as the 'other' or outsider to these spaces (Livermon, 2012). By visually depicting queer subjects inhabiting spaces that might be constructed as

heteronormative, these films demonstrate forms of inclusion and belonging of queer subjects in the geographies of South Africa, despite the vulnerabilities that they experience.

Ahmed (2006) confronts the idea of belonging as having to always fit within the prescripts of heterosexuality. Ahmed (2006) highlights that the dictates of "fitting" are part of the reason why queer subjects often feel uncomfortable and agitated in various spaces. The idea of fitting situates power within heteronormative structures to dictate and police performativity of gender and sexual identities, even in political and social spaces claimed by queer subjects (Ahmed, 2006). Butler (2014:1) notes that "space is not always a site that we can take for granted as the public ground for certain kinds of public assemblies, but space is also a public good for which people fight". This emphasises that space is an arena and an outcome of acquiring freedom and recognition. Butler (2014) argues that "the demand for freedom is a demand for a certain kind of inhabitable ground and its meaning and force derives precisely from the lack of inhabitable ground." Space enables freedom for ostracised subjects. However, in line with Ahmed's (2006) argument, this should not be conditional on "fitting" within heteronormative structures of what is deemed as "acceptable" ways to inhabit this space, as this will merely serve to reinforce the power of heteronormativity and continue to position queer subjects as secondary or "other". Rather, inhabiting and claiming space in truly free ways would entail authentic (and in many ways transgressive) expressions of queer identities and performativities in public spaces, where queer people stake their claim to liveable lives.

Livermon (2012:300) posit that "visibilities for black queers specifically in black cultural spaces continues to be policed". This suggests that black queer subjects are often understood to threaten cultural conventions, since queerness is assumed to be incompatible with African black cultures. A point of friction between Ahmed and Butler's theories is whether a positive definition of black queer identities can be represented in (public) space, or whether these are always forms of destabilisation or challenge that situate them as "outsider". The current study uses this friction to ask: are liveable lives possible for black queer subjects, particularly in South Africa, or does the hostile public space undermine any notions of belonging and freedom?

Thus, to expand on Butler's idea of (re)thinking 'space' as an arena for fighting for recognition and freedom, I suggest that visibility is vital to acknowledge the diversity within black communities and to resist heteronormativity, but it also acts as a mechanism for the potential surfacing of positively-defined black queer South African identities. This is what

Butler (2014) terms ‘unrestricted freedom’ and ‘livable lives’, a society that embraces the diversity of embodied subjects that move through public spaces. This concept of spaces embracing diversity is a way of moving past conceptions of black queer subjects as defined mainly through defiance or their status as outsider. The Constitution of South Africa becomes a significant place to provide the queer subject with the promise of space for the exercise of their freedom and movement. Section 9(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, specifically contains protections against discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexuality. Livermon (2012) argues that queer people “occupy the intermediary space in post-apartheid politics, serving as a litmus test for the success of constitutional democracy” (302). This suggests that if the rights of queer people are not respected, this would call into question the validity of the Constitution and its ability to protect vulnerable groups. The queer subject thus occupies a central and simultaneously marginal space, a space of *defining* South African democracy while *challenging or destabilising* concepts of blackness, Africanness and post-apartheid publics. This complex space leads to unique ways of being for the queer South African subject, and visibilities are thus recognised through multifarious vulnerabilities (the litmus test that constantly fails, the centre that does not hold). Vulnerability (threat, danger, exclusion) is constituent of black queer subjectivities and visibilities, and the vulnerable post-apartheid democracy is at the same time enmeshed – and its legitimacy undermined – in this figure of the black queer subject.

Representation of Queer People and Experiences in Films

During apartheid, queer lives and narratives were limitedly represented in film and “public […] works” within the South Africa context (Andrews, 2019b: 1), due to the suppression “unwanted” voices by homophobic apartheid structures. Andrews (2018) explains that even today, very few South African films from major studios represent queer narratives, particularly black queer narratives. Modisane (2010), argues that “film studies have become a renewed subject of interest, where LGBTQIA+ studies become the […] objects of research on queer film culture as social practice”. After the fall of apartheid, a greater number of queer voices found expression in film, and film served as a form of visibility for queer people. Cloete (2017) emphasises that film serves as a medium that reflects people’s narratives that are personal and relatable to the communities they represent. Cloete (2017) claims that since films are often rooted within culture, there exists a complex relationship between film, culture, ideology and audience. In strictly heteronormative societies like South Africa, film is

produced from a heteronormative ideological framework because of what Rushbrook (2002:200) refers to as "stylization and repetition" of heterosexual cultural and traditional acts that appear inevitable and natural. Rushbrook (2002) suggests that heterosexuality is naturalised in public space, through the policed cultural and ideological performances. This framework works to invisibilise the displays of queer experiences in film and normalises heterosexuality and heteronormative desires.

However, despite these homogenising forces, film can also serve a transgressive role, and visual media can act as heterotopias which challenge dominant ideologies through creating unique forms of public space (Andrews, 2021a). Topinka (2010) refers to Foucault's idea of heterotopic space, explaining that heterotopias are "sites of resistance, sites in which epistemes collide and overlap, creating an intensification of knowledge" (2010: 55). This suggests that heterotopias create alternates spaces, while paradoxically remaining both separated from and connected to all other spaces. Andrews (2021a:7) claims that "YouTube videos and the communities they create can be understood to function as heterotopic, creating a space both real and unreal, and linking the viewers and producers of the videos in an intimacy that has heterotopic potential to disrupt offline spaces". This is what Topinka (2010) refers to as alternate spaces that offer possibilities for disruption and the inclusion of marginal queer identities online and offline. This suggest that Youtube creates an alternate platform for an inclusion of diverse narratives. For instance, the documentary series *Out of This World* serves as what Andrews (2021a:7) refers to as a "mirror", creating forms of accessibility to queer people who find it difficult to embrace their identities as a result of the heterosexist offline spaces to be able to embrace and celebrate their identities. In this case, film forms a similar form of alternate space. Many queer subjects have used film to inhabit spaces where they are discursively constructed as not "fitting". This can be seen in documentary films like *Simon & I*, where documenting the struggle to claim space in the post-apartheid legal framework is itself a way of claiming public space through making queer lives visible. This is also evident in the documentary film *Out of This World*, where queer subjects tell their own stories and represent their own lives in post-apartheid South Africa, occupying spaces where they experience vulnerabilities. *Out of This World* (2018*)* uses the visual medium to explore queer cultures and identities of the so-called born-free generation in South Africa. This allowed for the agency of queer people to narrate their own lives through film.

Alternative distribution modes are significant in increasing the impact of these films, and both *Simon & I* and *Out of This World* gained large audiences on social media sites like

YouTube. Andrews (2021a:1) suggests that "YouTube has provided a platform for many queer vloggers in South Africa to find audiences and to represent queer lives via a public medium". The YouTube platform allows for many queer identities to be represented in a variety of ways, which differs from the mainstream mass media that usually portray the experiences of queer people as secondary and in stereotypical terms.

Queer representations in film have enabled for a gradual shift in perception of queer subjects (Cloete, 2017). Homosexuality has been outside the prescripts of social acceptability because of the assumption that it contradicts cultural and religious beliefs (Connell, 2005). Thus, many cultural and religious groups resist films that represent queer lives (Chambers et.al, 2018).

Cloete (2017) contends that film, particularly queer film in post-apartheid South Africa, explicitly displays the narratives of queer subjects in what is referred to as a "new queer representation". New queer representation creates a space of reflection, nourishment, and renewed engagements that are inclusive of queer subjects. With the rapid growth of production and consumption of film in South Africa, queer film in post-apartheid South Africa are seen as important tools to confront various forms of social stigma held by homophobic and transphobic individuals, and queer communities rally around these films and view queer film festivals as important events in increasing visibility for queer people in Africa (Andrews, 2018), and are often viewed as a type of "media activism" (Loist & Zielinski, 2012). *Inxeba (The Wound)* received widespread homophobic backlash, interwoven with discourses of tradition and culture. In a nation that emerged from apartheid with progressive constitutional principles, the rights of individuals who are gender and sexual minorities must be protected (Ilyayambwa, 2012), which I argue includes the right to representation in public visual media and the right to consume such media.

Simon & I reflects not only on the narratives or experiences of the two gay activists, but also encapsulates the experiences of many queer people who protested for the inclusion of the queer subjects within the South African Bill of Rights. This is what Cloete (2017) explains is film's unique storytelling potential for queer people. The film allows these queer subjects the ability to express their narratives of fighting for visibility and belonging. Film as a form of space allows for visibility of queer experiences. Narrative film becomes a medium that enhances critical public engagement with queer realities as opposed to being associated purely with entertainment and leisure. In addition, documentary film enables the archiving of

material that could be used to inform and educate as well as to challenge dominant heterosexist narratives (Cloete, 2017).

Representation of Queer Identities in Mainstream Media

Media often reflect ideologies and social norms, and can impact on social dynamics in societies (Carter & Steiner, 2004). Even though media never fully reflect or mirror complex realities, these media are often assumed to construct hegemonic meanings of what ought to be accepted as reality, and mass media are particularly influential in this way. Gray (2020:771) proposes that media are a "crucial terrain on which techniques of power like self-regulation and management operate through capacities to increase the desire for and reach of visibility", noting that media can impact on identities in complex ways. Carter and Steiner (2004: 1) suggests that "media are important for many reasons, including their long-acknowledged power to represent 'socially acceptable' ways or being or relating to others, as well as to allocate, or more usually withhold, public recognition, honour and status to groups of people". This is what Butler (2004) speaks to in the book *Undoing Gender*, which articulates the interrelatedness of desire and recognition. Butler (2004:2) claims that "desire is always a desire for recognition […and] it is only through the experiences of recognition that any of us becomes constituted as socially viable beings". Butler (2004) suggests that queer subjects are viewed as less than human by dominant heteronormative powers, and this type of qualified recognition does not lead to liveable lives. In addition, this disparaging view of queer people as unrecognised "other" is reinforced by the ideological functions of the media, as media often confer recognition to the dominant and assumedly "appropriate" gender and sexual identities, in this case, heterosexual and cisgender people. This marginalises and delegitimises queer representation.

Connell (2001) refers to recognition as primarily given to those favoured by heteronormative constructions of power and legitimacy, and notes that queer subjects are often side-lined or erased in social institutions like the media. This results in little or no representation of queer subjects within the mainstream media. This is because "representation is attached to power, and […] the invisibility of the queer community is evidence of powerlessness" (Spargo, 1999:20-22). This is visible in post-apartheid South Africa, where queer representations in the mainstream media often lead to widespread public outcry and are characterised by forms of erasure (Andrews, 2018), even after the ratification of the Constitution that enshrined the rights of queer subjects.

There is widespread misrepresentation of queer identities in mainstream media because of heterosexist social norms that view heterosexual and cisgender identities as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’. However, progressive changes brought greater visibility of queer individuals in post-apartheid South Africa (Andrews, 2018). Some examples of greater queer visibility in media include Logo TV and the GLAAD Awards in the US and the Feather Awards in South Africa, which play a significant role in challenging the social norms that continuously work to exclude the representation of queerness in mainstream media and thus the recognition of queer South African people.

In South Africa “cultural discourses such as the notion that ‘homosexuality is not African’ continues to play out” (Handerson & Shefer, as cited in Ntozini & Ngqangweni, 2016: 1311). This is because same-sex expression and attraction have often been associated with western origins. Epprencht (2008) contends that same-sex sexualities in Africa have a long history and stretch back to pre-colonial times. However, due to social norms, many queer people are afraid of performing non-normative gender expression or displays of same-sex love and affection in public spaces. With the rise of human rights discourses in South Africa, queer people began more forcefully to claim their identities, which made it easier for them to forge a sense of belonging. Van Zyl (2011) claims that belonging becomes a measure of our social and political forms of exclusion, and speaks specifically about the debate over same-sex marriage: “belonging helps with understanding how people view and experience the social and psychological dimensions of rights and provides an entry into the historical and social contexts for examining cultural tensions in same-sex marriage in South Africa” (Van Zyl, 2011:336).

The literature review has explored the significance of the constitution and its centrality to social and cultural freedom, particularly from the perspective of lived experience of queer subjects as represented in visual media. Furthermore, it has discussed the importance of delinking blackness and heterosexuality through representing diverse black queer identities and visibilising black queer experiences. This representation of queer identities and visibilities is essential since it counters the myth about queerness as “unAfrican” and enforces the recognition of queer experiences as legitimate and authentic. The recognition and visibility of queer people challenges the understanding of queerness as signifying merely a destabilisation of heteronormativity, but rather locates queer as a positive signifier in South Africa, that can represent the lived experiences and dignity of black queer subject. The literature has also explored the representation of queer people and experiences in film and

mainstream media. Andrews (2021a) asserts that film can serve a transgressive role and visual media can act as heterotopias which challenge dominant ideologies through creating unique forms of public space. Film and mainstream media can affect identities in multifaceted ways, and the misrepresentation of queer subjects within film and media can result in erasure and silencing of queer identities. Thus, this literature review has demonstrated how film and mainstream media can serve a significant role in the visibility, freedom and belonging of queer people. This literature informs my reading of the films and other associated texts discussed in this thesis, especially in reading the way that queer people claim space *in* and *through* these texts.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Queer(y)ing vulnerability: exploring the resistance of black queer subjects in post-apartheid South Africa

Vulnerability has been a focus in debates around progressive media that represents queer experiences (Straube & Tainio, 2019). Vulnerability can be defined as "the degree to which a system [or person/ group] is susceptible to and unable to cope with adverse effects" (Adger, 2006: 269); however, this definition can be expanded when applied to queer rights and queer media. Straube and Tainio (2019:210) claim that vulnerability has long been a "battleground" used to highlight issues of representation, visibility, violence, human rights, discrimination, victimhood, recognition and agency. This implies that discourses of vulnerability can be catalytic to forms of political strength and power. Straube and Tainio (2019: 210) agree with the political strategy used by marginalised subjects to redefine vulnerability, conferring to vulnerable groups "a voice, experience, or a life that matters".

In addition, employing vulnerability from a lens of resistance and power, enables what hooks (2003:94) refers to as the "oppositional gaze". The oppositional gaze is a perspective that acknowledges and simultaneously challenges dominant institutional relations of power that have marginalised and projected forms of vulnerability onto oppressed identities. Hence, the use of 'gaze' in this context does not only suggest the will of the 'spectators' to stare back after decades of oppression, but also the ability of these oppressed subjects, in this case queer subjects, to critically confront forms of power that have constructed them as vulnerable. This idea of 'gaze' is important, since it encompasses forms of resistance, opening room for agency and recognition. Thus, the oppositional gaze becomes a critical point of departure that is in line with queer theory, which offers possibilities of resistance against heteropatriarchal structures.

A 'queer conception' is described by Barnard (2004) as the capability to be radical and confrontational in the arena of (re)thinking gender and sexuality as fluid and multiple, whilst functioning under dominant oppressive ideologies. Moreover, as queer perspectives are seen as working against normative structures of gender and sexuality, these perspectives allow for questions around which people are perceived as vulnerable and who is not, whether vulnerability is gendered or linked to particular bodies (even racialised bodies), and who is

portrayed as agential in discourses of vulnerability. Vulnerability itself can be queered, and become a powerful critical tool to analyse and disrupt systems of power through a queer conception. This form of vulnerability becomes transgressive as it disrupts the assumed position of the vulnerable party as powerless and *acted-upon,* and instead situates the gaze, and forms of power and resistance, within the state of being vulnerable and "outsider".

Thus, this thesis employs the concepts of "queer vulnerability" (vulnerability from a critically queer perspective) and "transgressive vulnerability" (vulnerability as resistance) as critical lenses to explore visual forms of representing queer subjects within heteropatriarchal power structures. This suggests what Barnard's (2004) notion of queerness and hooks's (2003) notion of the oppositional gaze refer to, namely how purported "outsiders" can access power within their marginalised positions. This is visible in the film *Simon & I* (2002), where queer subjects adopt radical approaches to challenge heteropatriarchal structures such as religion, culture and tradition in attempts to erase and silence the voices of queer people. In addition, queer subjects created movements, including Pride marches, and advocacy and activist groups like Gay and Lesbians of the Witwatersrand, GLOW, that work toward greater visibility and operate in public spaces. These movements were born from positions of vulnerability, and were instrumental in ensuring the adoption of queer rights legislation in South Africa and in highlighting the voices of black queer people in particular. Matebeni (2018: 316) claims that "resistance, subversion, acceptance, claiming space, celebration, liberation or visibility are [primary] themes [in scholarly work on] Pride". Furthermore, pride events are a way to challenge "dominant attitudes towards homosexually" and to "contest an existing power" (Bruce, 2013: 613, 619), and thus use visibility as a means of resistance. These elements of Pride marches speak to the larger discourses of framing resistance as a response to vulnerability, and this idea will be explored in films like *Simon & I* and *Out of this World* later in this thesis.

Straube and Tainio (2019: 210) propose that vulnerability is important in these challenges to power structures, as it "always means to confront the modern notion of subjectivity as 'autonomous, independent, and self-sufficient'". This suggest that vulnerability allows queer people to be cognisant of power imbalances that affect them, and thus to more consciously resist them; the idea of being assumed as vulnerable and as *not belonging* pushes queer people to recognise social structures that oppress them, to organise as a "vulnerable group", and to forge spaces to express their narratives and identities in public spaces. One of these structures is the oppression of queer people's right to love. Msibi (2013: 106-113) discusses

the concept of "denied love", which comprises systemic and social oppression of "same-sex desire, intimacy and agency" in a democratic South Africa that promises the protection of queer rights and freedoms. Intimacy and love for queer people in South Africa is also constructed by Matebeni (2013) as "difficult love", a type of intimacy that is fraught with cultural and social tensions. Msibi (2013) notes that the idea of 'love' has always been constructed from a heterosexist perspective, which presumes heteronormative gender binaries. Msibi (2013:105) suggest that people in same-sex relationships are frequently "denied the right to experience being loved by, and loving, their same-sex partners". Thus, queer people still have limited agency to express love and intimacies with their same-sex partners, especially in public spaces. Msibi (2013: 105) holds that in post-apartheid South Africa, social structures are still "maintained through heteronormativity to deny same-sex love by constructing it as an aberration, an attempt to force those who engage in these relations to internalise and accept these constructions". Hence, queer people, specifically black queer people, are still involved in political action in an attempt to acquire what Butler (2004) refers to as liveable lives.

The ideas of denied and difficult love illustrate how queer people are oppressed even in spheres as fundamentally human as feeling or expressing love, especially in the arena of public space. However, this love persists, as the various films discussed in this thesis demonstrate, and this offers the space for what Straube and Tainio (2019) refer to as potential resistance. Queer love is something that causes vulnerability, as it is "denied" by heteropatriarchal forces and "difficult" for queer people due to the multiple forms of oppression and violence that they face; however, it opens transgressive potential when this love is recognised and visibilised, such as through film.

Since the idea of same-sex love has been assumed as unAfrican and seen as a Western construct, claiming spaces to visibilise such love has been generally difficult. As queer people actualise their identities, desires and relationships in predominantly heteronormative spaces, they demonstrate what Straube and Tainio (2019) refer to as the potential for resistance drawn from vulnerability. Straube and Tainio (2019:211) suggest that vulnerability "shares kinship with concepts such as precarity, subordination and abjection", but is not limited by this kinship, and can also be a source of power. Thus, queer bodies, queer love and queer performativities in public spaces like Pride parades are simultaneously vulnerable and transgressive. In this context, vulnerability is intimately connected to the possibility for resistance and socio-political change.

Hassan et al (2017) suggest that the idea of space, and the concept of 'safe space' has been contested for many years in relation to queer communities. Alternate or 'safe' spaces were often seen as a means of overcoming the vulnerability and erasure which queer people faced in public spaces, as queer people were often disallowed from being "openly" queer due to the fear that public recognition might promote visibility and validation of queer subjects. Hassan et al. (2017: 94) claim that queer spaces, and processes of *queering* spaces, can serve to disrupt heteronormativity. It can be argued that 'safe space' for queer people in post-apartheid South Africa is a paradoxical concept, since it assumes hostility in broader public spaces that forces queer people to remain *invisible* in so-called safe spaces; people using these spaces are fundamentally not *safe* as they still suffer stigma, violence and discrimination in their everyday lives. Safe spaces are thus inherently vulnerable spaces that might limit freedom and recognition, as they are often out of the public view and subject to threat from a queerphobic "outside", and they are formed as responses to broader public discourses of queerphobia and marginalisation of queer people. The idea of space, and particularly space for liveable lives, seems to be something that must be fought for by queer subjects in public arenas. Participants in Hassan et al.'s study argued that most black queer people in Cape Town are forced to utilised "public, unsecure, thus unsafe spaces" because of the lack of access to secure and discreet physical spaces for gatherings (Hassan, 2017:96). Thus, many queer people do not have the freedom to inhabit spaces that promote forms of visibility, recognition and belonging. This leads to queer subject mobilising and resisting limitations within spaces that infringe on their rights and their ability to live their true identities. Space thus becomes an important element in discourses of vulnerability and belonging, and the contrast between "safe spaces" and public spaces seems to suggest that queer people negotiate and perform their identities in complex ways in relation to the spaces they find themselves in.

Queer performativity in post-apartheid South Africa

The concept of performativity has been discussed by scholars as a form of action in which individuals may be "understood to deviate from, as well as emerge through, the ritual and repetition of contexts found in everyday life protocols" (Crouch, 2002: 1945). Performativity considers embodied practice and can also interrogate how bodies relate to spaces. Thus, performativity can be a way to create or reimagine spaces that provide greater potential for individuals to challenge heteronormativity. Space allows for various forms of subjectivity and

performativity, which allow people to interact with their surroundings. Visser (2013) suggest that space is used differently in various places and communities, thus, the performativity of queer subjects varies with the context of each particular space. Crouch (2002: 1946) claims that the "practice of space constitutes lay geographic knowledge: through the power of individuals to configure and refigure knowledge, in the process of embodied spatialization". Space become an arena through which queer subjects visibly perform and express their sexual and gender identities, and queer performativity can also transform space, such as bodies marching in Pride parades might reposition public spaces as sites of inclusion and belonging. This is demonstrated in the documentary *Simon & I*, where cities become accessible spaces during the transition and post-apartheid periods in South Africa for queer people to assert their rights to liveable lives. In addition, the idea of usable space is also demonstrated in the documentary film *Out of This World*, which utilises urban CBD spaces in order to assert visibility for queer people. This highlights what Crouch (2003: 1954-1957) refers to as "performing becoming, becoming in performativity", suggesting that in forms of performances and performativity, space is an arena for the enactment of particular kinds of embodied identities, or what Butler (2004) refers to as stylisation that materialises the subjects.

This allows for the negotiation of space that gives rise to possibilities for visibility, freedom and belonging. This is to an extent evident in post-apartheid South Africa, where spaces that where initially used as 'battlegrounds' by marginalised queer people, including cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town, have now to some degree become spaces for queer people to live secure and liveable lives. These dynamics are demonstrated in the film *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) and the documentary *Out of This World* (2018), where Cape Town and Johannesburg public spaces are now used by queer people to navigate their identities, and the spaces allow them to address politics around gender and sexual identities of black queer people.

Film serves as an essential instrument that allows queer people to imagine and represent liveable lives and complex forms of vulnerability, especially in a country where queer people still suffer widespread stigma and marginalisation. Martin Botha (2012:248) explains that "images of gay men and women are limited and still on the margin of the film industry. [As of 2012,] one ends up with less than 20 short films, a few documentaries and less than 10 features with openly gay and lesbian characters". While there have recently been a greater number of visual media depicting queer people or characters, queer people are still rarely

depicted in South African film. The use of film offers great possibilities for the nuanced representation of marginalised queer identities (Andrews, 2018). Film potentially serves a major role in social change, as it promotes visibility, combats stigma, dehumanisation and stereotypes, and can promote the rights of queer people (Andrews, 2018). Hence, film possesses transformative potential as it can imagine and document queer histories and lived experiences in socio-political contexts where queer identities have been marginalised and silenced for years. Film can also create "space" for visibility, and show queer people occupying public spaces where they might be invisibilised, such as the rural initiation space in *Inxeba (The Wound)*. These visual depictions challenge dominant heteropatriarchal discourses that queer people do not belong in certain South African spaces or should remain unseen in "safe spaces".

In this thesis, the framework of transgressive vulnerability will be used to analyse how queer figures in South African films navigate spaces and their identities in the texts. The queer figures are vulnerable in the traditional sense, through facing threats and realities of harm, violence and exclusion. However, vulnerability does not merely take a passive form, but the figures represented in these films also consciously employ forms of vulnerability in order to challenge heteropatriarchal norms, what I term transgressive vulnerability. This includes expressing intimacy and "difficult" or "denied" love in spaces where these intimacies and love are often stringently policed, including townships and rural areas in South Africa. This transgressive vulnerability also includes participating in processes of "coming out" (like Tseko Simon Nkoli coming out to his fellow trialists during apartheid), public performativities of queer identities like Pride marches, and forms of claiming belonging such as fighting for greater legal recognition of queer people. By visualising these transgressive vulnerabilities, the films create alternate space that sparks greater visibility for queer people and challenges the invisibilising of queer people in public spaces in South Africa. I discuss my methodology for analysing the films in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Qualitative Research

This project will employ a qualitative research approach, which aims to provide clearer understanding on complex psychosocial issues (Tracy, 2013). This suggest that data collected from qualitative studies offer researchers an opportunity to explore cultural insights and nuanced understandings that might possibly not be accessible in experimental and survey techniques (Tracy, 2013). Babbie and Mouton (2007) concur with these ideas of Tracy (2013), suggesting that qualitative research methods serve an important purpose of exploring human action from the perspective of these particular humans. Lee (1999: 4-7) explains that qualitative research approaches "typically assume that multiple subjectively derived realities can co-exist". These multiple subjective realities are made possible by the notion that individuals can apply their unique interpretations to the understanding of organisational phenomena. Thus, with the research project exploring four films *Simon & I*, *While You Weren't Looking*, *Out of this World* and *Inxeba (The Wound)*, a qualitative research approach will be an essential approach for the research project, since it aims at understanding the lived experiences of queer people as reflected in these texts as well as how these texts represent queer people, specifically black queer people. A qualitative research approach deals with interpretation and exploration of sociocultural ideologies, and this research project discusses queer visual narratives as affected by, and in turn might affect sociocultural and political structures.

Data collection

As part of collecting data, I analysed four documentary films: *Simon & I, While You Weren't Looking*, *Out of This World* and *Inxeba (The Wound)*. I engaged closely with the representations of queer characters in the films, and thus I captured still frames of these characters operating within various spaces as data points, and also looked at elements like scene composition, music and sound choices, acting choices and dialogue in the films as data points for my analysis. I used these data to understand how black queer characters are constituted or represented in relation to heteropatriarchal structures depicted in the films. The underlying themes explored in these films were vulnerability, visibility, belonging,

recognition and freedom of queer subjects, particularly black queer subjects. In collecting data, the project focused on several relevant aspects, including visual representation, performance, language and the plot structure to study the way these themes were addressed. I also collected data from reviews, scholarly articles and archival materials related to the subjects of these films, including an analysis of Tseko Simon Nkoli's prison love letters in relation to the film *Simon & I*, in order to demonstrate forms of transgressive vulnerability in these letters. Other relevant visual media were also briefly discussed as they spoke to the content of the primary texts.

Method of Analysis

The research project will make use of visual content analysis for the purposes of analysing data. Importantly, visual content analysis is significant as a method since "it acknowledges that society is enacted in talk, text, and other modalities of communication and that understanding social phenomena cannot be achieved without understanding how language operates in the social world" (Stemler, 2001: 137-146). Van Leeuwen (2001) claims that visual content analysis plays a key role in providing the widely utilised kinds of evidence in the disciplinary field of media studies. Visual content analysis is referred to as a "systematic observational technique" because it is often utilised for testing hypotheses about various ways in which people, circumstances and events are represented by the media. Stemler (2001) suggest that visual content analyses inquire into social phenomena by treating data not as a physical event but as communications that are created and disseminated to be seen, read, interpreted, enacted and reflected upon according to the meaning they carry for their recipient. Hence, the goal of content analysis is to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study (Stemler, 2001). Van Leeuwen (2001) suggest that visual content analysis also allows for quantification of samples, which refers to observable content that is classified into distinct categories. This suggests that visual content analysis "allows description of fields of visual representation by describing the constituents of one or more defined areas of representation, period or types of images" (Van Leeuwen, 2001:11-15). Since the focus of the project is on four films, visual content analysis will be significant to compare these films and explore various ways in which these films represent nuanced experiences and lived realities of queer people, as well as how forms of vulnerability, visibility and freedom are enacted and demonstrated in these visual texts.

Chapter 5: Vulnerability and black queer identities in *Simon & I* and the prison love letters of Tseko Simon Nkoli

The documentary film *Simon & I* (2002) was directed by activist, artist and filmmaker Beverley Ditsie and filmmaker Nicky Newman. The film critically explores how narratives and lived experiences of queer people in the apartheid and transitional periods were impacted by discourses of vulnerability, visibility, belonging and freedom. The film demonstrates ways in which queer people fought for inclusion in spaces that were violent, heterosexist and that were governed by institutionalised laws of white supremacy inscribed under the racist apartheid regime. These apartheid laws, while racially motivated, simultaneously sought to oppress and erase queer rights and narratives.

Visser (2008) asserts that many public spaces naturalise the dynamics of heterosexism, reproducing oppression and invisibilising queer people in ways that are unquestioned. Thus, these public spaces become violent and harmful to sexual and gender minorities. Public space becomes an arena of marginalisation and simultaneously a site for resistance against this marginalisation, since public spaces play a significant role in recognition and visibility of queer identities and the disruption of heteronormative assumptions that govern these spaces. This corroborates Butler's (2014:1) idea of space as "not always a site that we can take for granted as the public ground for certain kinds of public assemblies, but space is also a public good for which people fight". Butler emphasises that public space is an essential platform to address the acquisition of freedom and recognition for queer people. Hence, as seen in Ditsie and Newman's film, queer people assert forms of political power in heteronormative spaces as ways to confront compulsory heterosexuality and advocate for the inclusion of marginalised queer identities. Queer people assert power through their vulnerabilities, performing queerness in the very spaces that oppress them, and they utilise their vulnerabilities as a source of political strength. In this project, vulnerability is understood as a form of resistance and transgression.

Visser (2008) states that oppression, marginalisation and violence against queer people are informed by dominant ideologies such as Christianity, Calvinism and hegemonic masculinity that perpetuate stereotypical assumptions about homosexuality, positing that queer people are 'un-African' and 'ungodly,' and queer men in particular are unmanly. This discourse of

idealised hegemonic masculinity and the idea that queer men are ‘unmanly’ is a large factor in situating queer men as vulnerable. Additionally, discourses of queer people transgressing dominant and idealised ways of being contribute to various types of intersectional oppressions in relation to class, gender, race and gender performativity in the South African context. These dynamics are displayed in the documentary film, where the existence of black queer people in black cultural spaces seem to expose a double-outsider status attached to constructs of race and identity, which suggests an intersectional form of struggle that comes with being black and queer. This creates challenges for black queer bodily and social performativity in black cultural settings, which lead to conflicts around ‘belonging’ for black queer people.

Although the film attempts to represents the lived experiences of various queer people within various racial groups, it is important to note that the experiences of queer South Africans are not homogeneous and are deeply marked by race and class. For instance, the struggles of being a black queer person could involve fighting for racial equality, fighting for inclusion in black cultural settings that continue to oppress and discriminate against queer people, and resistance against dominant heterosexist regimes that policed the sexualities and gender performativities of queer people generally (see Visser, 2013 & Reid, 2010). In contrast, for white queer people, even though cultural aspects also impacted on their sense of belonging, queerness was often the major struggle to visibility and belonging in social spaces, since the issue of race was not an impediment to acquiring freedom, visibility and belonging during apartheid, or in post-apartheid systems that are still largely colonial and that privilege the white minority in South Africa (see Msibi, 2011; Devji, 2016; Visser, 2013). Livermon (2014) and Visser (2013) assert that during the apartheid period, the white racist regime policed diverse sexualities under the policies the Immorality Act of 1927, which largely constrained the visibility and freedom of queer people. Almost all public spaces became spaces that discriminated and violated queer people in order to invisibilise and erase queer experiences.

Black queer people have experiences that are unique in the South African context due to the long history of racial exploitation and the heterosexist legal framework. This chapter discusses ways in which black queer identities have been constituted and represented in geographical spaces that are marked as heteronormative, particularly black cultural spaces, and also demonstrate ways in which queer vulnerabilities are attached to notions of political power in order to resist restrictive ideas of ‘acceptable’ performativities and identities. The

attachment of vulnerability to queerness offers a lens to how queer people assert forms of power, critique power and how power is used in representing queer identities. Therefore, in the context of the film, vulnerability is necessary to disrupt heterosexism and to acquire freedom and visibility, and both Ditsie and Nkoli demonstrate vulnerability in the film. To think of vulnerability from a black queer perspective is to employ political power to expose and resist various forms of oppression attached to race, class, gender and gender performativity, which will be discussed in this chapter. This chapter explores how the documentary film *Simon & I* (2002) represents the struggle of queer people to be included in the constitution and to have legal protections after the fall of the white supremacist regime, in ways that asserted both vulnerability and belonging. After the rights-based campaigns and pride marches of the late 1980s and 1990s, queer people demanded equality of the grounds of "sameness" (Richardson, 2005). However, this ignored the differences that existed in the lived realities of queer people, thus, it in some ways undermined the freedom and visibility of black queer people in black cultural spaces. Although the idea of unity and 'sameness' is significant in realising the objectives of queer people in terms of the protection of rights, freedom and visibility, the discourse of 'sameness' ironically appears to be a schism in queer racial groups. This is because the discourse of 'sameness' shelves important discussions on issues of race, class and gender identities, such that it focalises white queer males in spaces that are suburban and more conducive to freedom and visibility, whilst excluding black queer people in spaces that are often violent, have less access to resources, and have gender norms that create unique forms of discrimination and oppression. Black queer people thus resisted these discourses of "sameness", and still do in order to highlight the unique challenges they face in South Africa, such as creating Alternative Pride to challenge white gay hegemony in constructions of Pride in South Africa (Andrews, 2019a).

Therefore, as part of this chapter, the struggle for equality of the grounds of 'sameness' and 'difference' will be explored to demonstrate the double-outsider status that complicates ideas of freedom, visibility and belonging for black queer identities. Lastly, the chapter will explore the prison love letters of Tseko Simon Nkoli as a mode of resistance against the politics of recognition in the apartheid white regime that policed and marginalised queer people.

Representation of black queer identities in heteronormative spaces

The notion of 'Otherness' or 'difference' is highlighted in the opening scenes of the documentary film *Simon & I* (2002) that asserts the existence of black queer people in black cultural spaces. Zanele Muholi, in one of her mini-documentary films *Difficult Love* (2010) asserts that to think of difference evokes heteronormative perceptions of gender, which espouses the heterosexist "gender nuclear taming" convention. The idea of difference raises significant questions of what it would mean or take to reimaginemarginalised people as 'rightful' citizens in spaces that invisibilise or violate them. Human's rights activist Wendy Isaacs, who is a participant in Muholi's visual activism work, argues that societal perceptions on queer people's expression of 'difference', which often necessitates processes of 'coming out' and curtailing or policing gender performativity and sexuality, privilege and normalise cisgender and heterosexual identities and ways of being. Hence, in spaces that are heteronormative, 'different' gender performativities are perceived as a threat, as dangerous and unwanted (see Macharia, 2009 & Visser, 2008), demonising queer people as the 'abnormal' other. Therefore, Beverley Ditsie asserts at the start of the film: "I was made to feel dirty and guilty all the time" (Ditsie & Newman, 2002), positioning queer people as vulnerable to social stigma and even violence.

Butler (2014: iii) argues that "one way of marginalising a population is to distribute vulnerability and precarity unequally in such a way that essentialist notions of vulnerable populations get established within social discourse and policy", suggesting that the mere fact of identifying certain groups as 'different' produces uneven levels of power that positions particular groups as inferior and 'othered'. This exposes these groups to forms of hate and violence, intermingled with discourses of vulnerability. These dynamics are demonstrated in various scenes in the film *Simon & I*, where many people who perceive queer people as different voice their encouragement for the murder of queer people, suggesting that they are less than human, do not deserve life or dignity, or that they are mentally unstable, underdeveloped or plagued by demons or other supernatural forces. These comments exemplify heterosexist power supported by violence and social marginalisation (see Matebeni, 2013; Gqola, 2010; Ditsie & Newman, 2002).

Rethinking vulnerability and 'difference' require what Matebeni (2013: 405) describes as "unrobing, dissecting and rejecting" colonial gender structural hierarchies that confer power to hyper-masculine men, whilst displacing marginal identities to positions of physical and social vulnerability, where vulnerability is in this sense defined as being weak and susceptible

to harm and as a lack of power. Vulnerability, instead, is imagined as a form of resistance and transgressive engagement with dominant systems from the perspective of marginal voices. This makes 'difference' relationally resistant and transgressive, which allows opportunities for the visibility and belonging of sexual minorities (Straube & Tainio, 2019). Both conceptions of "difference" and "vulnerability" will be adopted to refer to dynamics of queer identities that were seen as forms of weakness but can be reimagined as forms of agency and power for queer South Africans. The notion of difference emerges as a major instrument to highlight the double-outsider status of both being queer and black during the apartheid period in South Africa and in the transitional moment in which Ditsie and Newman's documentary was filmed. This is demonstrated in the early scenes of the film, when Ditsie explains the complexities of existing as a queer woman who is constantly aware of her "difference", and existing as black in spaces that are marked by heteronormativity informed by religion, culture and tradition.



Figure 1: 1996, Queer activist Beverley Ditsie at the Joburg Pride march. (Rose Pereira Collection, Gala Queer Archives)

Ditsie's comment in the early moments of the film demonstrate her position as "different": "My name is Beverley. I grew up in Orlando West, Soweto. People look out for each other here and there is deep respect for religion, tradition and culture, so it's not easy to be different" (2002). In this scene, Ditsie emphasises homophobic discourses in the predominantly black spaces in Soweto, but it is notable that these spaces became significant arenas for visibility of black people and the navigation of diverse identities. Ditsie demonstrates the contrasting and intersectional dynamics of race and sexuality, and interweaves her narrative with discourses of safety, security and hostility in these heterosexist spaces towards those considered "different". Ditsie claims in the film that to exist in black heterosexist spaces during the apartheid period carried significant forms of unity and support amongst black people that prided themselves on taking care of one another. Therefore, township spaces such as Soweto offered a range of possibilities for visibility and recognition for black individuals, since it functioned as a space with various political and social groups that worked to overthrow the dominant white supremacist government in apartheid South Africa. Essentially, Soweto became a space that celebrated the experiences of black South Africans, but publicly these were limited to the heteronormative experiences that were regulated through culture, tradition and religion (Livermon, 2014; Visser, 2013).

The opening scene demonstrate paradoxical elements of love and care, through people looking out for each other, that runs parallel and is in contrast to the suppression of queer 'difference' in the film.

Ditsie suggests that being a heterosexual person living in Orlando West provided a far better chance to experience abundant love and care, but that these spaces were inhospitable to queer people due to the appeal to a homogenous African identity that is heterosexist and conforms to traditional gender roles. This is currently apparent through the ongoing murder and 'curative' raping of queer women in townships such as Kwa-Thema Johannesburg, where Noxolo Nogwaza and Duduzile Zozo both were raped and murdered for their sexual identities. Lewis (2016: 209) quotes Muholi's argument in "Thinking through Lesbian Rape" that "the rape of [queer women] constitutes an attempt to discipline African women's sexual and erotic autonomy by reinforcing their identities as heterosexual women and as mothers". The horrific violence of these murders demonstrates the vulnerability of queer people in black public spaces in South Africa; these murders are described here to highlight the treatment of queer people in the country[4]. In Nogwaza's case, she was brutally raped and

[4] South Africa's constitutional mandate was the first in the world to protect queer people from discrimination as a result of their diverse sexual and gender identities and South Africa was among the first countries to legalise

murdered with her head crushed on a rock and her teeth scattered all over the incident area, whilst Zozo was raped and murdered, and when her body was discovered, it was found that a toilet brush was forcefully shoved into her vagina. Muholi (2010) claims that these violent acts are informed by paradoxical pseudo punishment and control tactics that are intermingled with religious discourses of 'love', that queerphobic people direct towards queer people in spaces that are ideologically framed as incompatible with their identities. In addition, Matebeni (2013, 2014) argues that identities assumed as 'different' are met with violence because of the assumption that queerness is antithetical to African culture and tradition.

This constant threat of violence and bodily control is visible in one of the scenes of Ditsie and Newman's film, where Ditsie was threatened with attack for actively fighting for queer people's rights and freedom. Ditsie explains: "I was in my room when I heard voices outside, calling my name. I run into the lounge and my granny opened the door and told me to hide. About twenty men were surrounding our house, demanding that I should come with them so they can teach me a lesson" (Ditsie & Newman, 2002). In this scene, there is a clear display of how the idea of homophobia and 'difficult love', wedded to dominant toxic patriarchal masculinity, creates what Brunow (2018) describes as the 'ambivalence of visibility', which is the drive to invisibilise queer people through the acts of murdering them with the intention of the complete erasure of queer people in societies and history. Thus, being 'visible' as a queer person can lead to the drive for those in dominant positions to want to invisibilise the queer person.

Ditsie's visible performativity was met with forms of homophobia, a dynamic which still exists in post-apartheid South Africa. For instance, Muholi's photographic work *Faces and Phases (2006)* created in the post-apartheid era still faced tremendous backlash and homophobic remarks since it confronted heterosexism, 'corrective rape' and the marginalisation of black queer people. Imma (2017: 228) asserts that Muholi's work in *Faces and Phases* "is successful in disrupting narratives and visual projections that allow for black [queer] visibility only through victimisation". This supports Gqola's (2011) argument that the projection of queer people as hypervisible through the lens of victimisation exposes queer people to continuous sexual and physical violence. In addition, Brunow (2018) claims that through hypervisibility of the sexual violence and murder of queer people, homophobia

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same-sex marriage. However, all the promised change that comes with legislating queer rights, were instead met with alarming numbers of queer people murdered and raped because of being different. Numerous queer people, both men and women experience sexual violence, attacks and murder that seek to assert dominance over identities that are 'different' (Muholi, 2010).

becomes seen as commonplace and becomes normalised. This creates the "ambivalence of [queer] visibility" since it reinforces fear, violence, hate and murder, which in this case is demonstrated through Ditsie's pursuers seeking to "teach [her] a lesson" that might lead to forms of 'corrective' rape and even death. Munt (2008: 14-247) claims that "for queer individuals, visibility comes with an increased risk of vulnerability in forms of surveillance, policing, pathologising, homophobic and transphobic violence […] and modes of shaming". This is evident with Ditsie, as her fight for visibility is located in her vulnerability, as it is met with violent homophobic remarks and threats to her safety and her life. This is why Schaffer (2008) emphasises that the ideas of visibility and invisibility are interrelated, suggesting that the mere fact of being visible in a space that is unhabitable is connected to forms of invisibility, since dominant heterosexist spaces attempt to completely erase queer experiences because they are seen as antithetical to homogenous African identity and gender binary norms. These threats constrain the voices and agency of queer people, which result in queer people being unable to live openly.

Ditsie suggests that to have lived in the apartheid period as visibly queer was exactly like what activist Funeka Soldaat describes as a ticking time bomb, with queer people almost expecting violence and not knowing when it would occur (Muholi, 2010). These threats of violation against queer people did not disappear with the adoption of a constitution that promises protection for queer people but is still rife in democratic South Africa. Muholi (2010) states that "hate crimes have become a binding factor for the queer community" in South Africa, supporting Matebeni's (2013) assertion that hate crimes, particularly 'curative' rape, physical attack and murder of queer people, have become part of the psyche and connective tissue of (particularly black and poor) queer people in South Africa. This suggests an ingrained, collective memory that instils fear and anger in queer people and haunts them with questions of their own belonging. Logan (1996) argues that homophobia is enacted through ignorance and fear of others. These psychic conflicts and exposure to acts of hatred and violence cause fear for queer people and push some to even commit suicide; in the film, Ditsie attempted suicide due to her feelings of exclusion. Thus, in the black heterosexist spaces represented in the film, queer women experience being vulnerable since they suffer from a "triple discrimination" of being queer, black and women (Lewis, 2016). For instance, Funeka Soldaat, who is one of the participants in Muholi's visual works, explains that she thinks of men as enemies and fears engaging with them because of hate crimes that they

frequently enact on vulnerable queer women in South Africa. The lack of media exposure for many of these deaths, or the lack of attribution of the acts of violence to queerphobia, might signal another form of invisibilising for queer people, as hate crimes against queer people become so commonplace as to be unremarkable in mainstream conversations and media. Pumla Gqola (2006:83) contends that queer women in South Africa have been a "highly visible manifestation of the undesirable", suggesting that the violence is a form of deliberate erasure of queer women by mostly heteropatriarchal men motivated by hatred. Townships such as Soweto are sites of multiple forms of violence and discrimination against queer people. This is explicitly demonstrated in the film *Out of This World* (2018), where queer activists affirm that even under the protection of queer rights by the constitution, Soweto communities still perpetuate forms of heterosexist hate and violence that ultimately drive queer people to death by murder or suicide. Therefore, it can be argued that "difficult love" is instrumental in forms of violence and exclusion, including the casting out of queer people from their black identity, which is discursively linked to heterosexuality since queerness is assumed to be "unAfrican" (see Matebeni, 2013; Msibi, 2013 & Macharia, 2009, 2011).

Queer people during apartheid were viewed in the public imaginary as threats to be extinguished. This can be seen in the film *Simon & I*, where clergy and cultural leaders projected dehumanising remarks of hate and discrimination towards queer people. In this way, vulnerability from the position of victimisation served as a vantage point for queer people to address issues of human rights, visibility and freedom; vulnerability was the driving force behind demands for dignity and change. The notion of vulnerability evokes a critical alternative gaze, which serves as a mechanism for resisting discrimination and addressing violence through forms of visual activism, which I argue Newman and Ditsie's film engages in. This alternative gaze confronts the cultural narratives of victimisations by conceptualising queer vulnerability and precarity as impetus and prerequisite for resistance. Barbara Sutton (2007: 143) observed that "the body (clothed or Unclothed) is a tool of protest par excellence. Most political protest is enacted through the body – from marches to political theatre, to the chaining of the body". Hence, Ditsie demonstrates forms of resistance through her vulnerable bodily performativity, seeking to assert her identity through her gender-nonconforming dress codes that appeared hyper-masculine, with straight leg jeans, traditionally masculine suits and bucket hats. This challenged the gender binary underpinning heterosexist ideology, and thus disrupted the dominant ideology's power to invisibilise queer

people. Ditsie's *visibility* in the documentary portrays a transgressive image, which is also found in the work done by Muholi's photographic participants, which are demonstrated with a resistant aesthetic and fashioning to defy the standard constructions of dominant gender norms that are deemed "acceptable" for public spaces. Imma (2017: 229) claims of Muholi's photography that "Muholi's participants stand in confident and composed postures, eyes intent on the camera/viewer. They are not victims to be consumed by a sympathetic yet politically indifferent viewer", but with their visible vulnerability, participants display a transgressive image which asserts the right to visibility, recognition and belonging. Therefore, the visible performativity of Ditsie's gender identity in heterosexist township spaces were forms of resistance, even as she was vulnerable as a lesbian woman. Thus, Ditsie's queer identity can be read in terms of Muholi's intended fashioning and aesthetic expression of queer lesbians as resistant and confident, supporting Imma's (2017: 228-231) assertion that Muholi's "photographs enact a remapping of the townships, [where] queer [people] are recorded as living and belonging instead of only [viewed in relation to] the violence that is hypervisibilised".

In one scene in the film, Ditsie buys cigarettes in a township space filled with hypermasculine men, an image which might seem to place her in a vulnerable position, but which is ultimately a form of asserting belonging. This image also has resonances with cases of homophobic violence in South Africa, for instance, Millicent Gaika was raped and brutally beaten by a man after asking for a lighter for her cigarette (Muholi, 2010). Ditsie's performance of lighting a cigarette around men in the township space thus is read in the current moment as particularly *vulnerable* and as a visual and bodily form of resistance. As a queer woman, her masculine walk and dress code, and the act of lighting cigarettes in front of men transgresses social codes that would position her as vulnerable, which demonstrates agential expression in spaces that are dominated by traditional gender norms. In one scene, Ditsie expresses her happiness for how her mother dressed her as a boy when she was a child and for being cast for male roles when she was a child actor. This is similar to the character Dez in the film *While You Weren't Looking* (2015), where Dez's gender performativity reads as masculine and thus confronts normative gender roles. These two lesbian figures represent resistance against the heterosexist regulatory framework that polices and dictates how queer people should perform gender, and Ditsie feels a sense of affirmation in being viewed as masculine: "I was very proud when they casted me as her son, rather than her daughter" (Ditsie & Newman, 2002).



Figure 2: Beverley Ditsie dressed in traditionally masculine clothing walking in Soweto (Ditsie & Newman, 2002).

Ditsie demonstrates modes of queer self-affirmation attached to her gender performativity. Matebeni (2013; 2018) argues that queer performativity is a significant tool to deconstruct the colonial and racialised discourses of domesticity attached to women's bodies. This links to Muholi's argument in her article "Thinking Through Lesbian Rape" (2004), summarised by Lewis (2016: 208) that "in order to combat hate crimes committed against [queer people], activists need to address the histories of colonialism […] that inform the production of contemporary racial [identities…] in South Africa". This speaks to Ditsie's bodily performativity; her intention to escape the traditional gender roles, to visibly be a masculine lesbian in the township, is what might position her as vulnerable but also is a form of activism. She asserts her belonging in the township despite the violence and threats that seek to invisibilise her.

Ditsie and Newman's film demonstrates how restrictive gender norms are maintained by religious and cultural mores. This is shown in a scene where Ditsie explains that her resistance to perform like other girls, through denying wearing dresses, was quickly reprimanded using religion, which labelled Ditsie's gender performativity as 'confusion' that

required ‘correction’ in order to align with heterosexist gender norms. This is visible when Ditsie is told by her mother that God made a mistake by creating her as female instead of male:

> Ditsie: “I was a happy child growing up, always felt like there was something wrong with me. I hate it when my grandma forced me into little dresses” (Ditsie & Newman, 2002)

> And

> Ditsie: “My mom uses to say that God started making me before lunch and when he came back, he had forgotten whether he was making a boy or a girl” (Ditsie & Newman, 2002).

This is what Butler (1990:31) describes as assuming gender as inherent from birth, and instead Butler argues that “genders are produced, and bodies become sexed within heterosexist discourse invested with the idea of natural or essential sex.” Ditsie performs her authentic gender as she navigates her queer identity in the Orlando West spaces, while there is still the expectation that she will conform to gender norms based on the gendered body she was born into. Ditsie’s performativity demonstrates complexly interwoven gendered dynamics as a vulnerable queer woman who embraces more traditionally masculine gender performance, corroborating Crouch’s (2002) assertion that performativity can be a way to create or reimagine spaces that provide greater potential for individuals to challenge heteronormativity. Renegotiated space also allows for various forms of subjectivity and performativity, which allow people to interact with their surroundings more authentically. This implies that when Ditsie asserts her ‘different’ performances in spaces that are heterosexist, she gradually normalises the visibility and recognition of queer narratives in order to enforce belonging and freedom. This does not negate the physical vulnerability that she still faces; as Ditsie’s performativity is portrayed as a threat and dangerous to the Orlando West community, she is located as a potential ‘victim’ of violence, a constant victim of discrimination and as vulnerable. Her vulnerability acts as a drive and an existential condition that creates alternate spaces to assert visibility, and is also a way to claim social citizenship, as she seeks to comfortably assert her “difference” in spaces that order power through

heteronormativity. In addition, the creation of the documentary film formed a new space for Ditsie to assert her belonging, which is similar to Muholi's work, as her documentary films and photographs do the work of confronting issues related to violation and marginalisation of queer people, whilst existing as a significant visual tool to enforce visibility and assert belonging and freedom in heterosexist spaces. This reinforces Andrews (2021a:1) observation that visual media can serve as a key mode to claim visibility, as Andrews suggest that "[visual media such as YouTube] has provided a platform for many queer [people] in South Africa to find audiences and to represent queer lives via a public medium [for purposes of visibility and freedom]". Ditsie and Newman's film offers a form of queer representation that is agential, affirming and transgressive, while also being vulnerable. This is evident through the 'coming out' of Simon Nkoli and Ditsie and the prison love letters of Tseko Simon Nkoli that confronted the racialised heteronormative regime.

Tseko Simon Nkoli's Prison love letters

Tseko Simon Nkoli was a political queer activist who fought for a dual liberation, for both the visibility of queer rights and against the apartheid regime, in an attempt to establish a 'collective' freedom for black people in South Africa (see Pettis, 2015; Carolin, 2018). As a young adult in Sebokeng, Nkoli begin to understand the dynamics of his sexuality, and after 'coming out' to his parents at 20, his parents assumed that Nkoli was possessed. Nkoli's parents tried various methods to attempt to change his sexuality, including visits to traditional healers, priest and psychiatrist, but later accepted his sexuality (Pettis, 2015). The marginalisation for being 'different' was not the only difficulty that Nkoli experienced, but his engagement in political spaces brought more hardship after Nkoli had started enrolling at a secretarial college in Johannesburg in 1980 (Ruth, 2015). Nkoli joined COSAS (Congress of South African Students), in which he assumed a secretarial position in the Transvaal division. Since sexual freedom and power has always been assumed as heteronormative (see Macharia, 2009; Matebeni, 2013). Nkoli knew that disclosing his sexuality would bring backlash as it was assumed as not "masculine". In the quest of exploring his identity, Nkoli joined GASA (Gay Association of South Africa) in 1983 to address the concerns of black queer people in South Africa. However, Nkoli observed that GASA was a predominantly white organisation that embraced white queer identities and stood as "apolitical" towards issues that affected black people, particularly apartheid laws. This is demonstrated through

the lack of support from GASA during the time of Nkoli's imprisonment, "coding their racism in a disdain for Nkoli's political activism" (Martin, 2020: 677). Nkoli and his co-accused trialist were detained, were charged with treason and spent over 420 days in court (Morgan, 2017). A year later, Nkoli was acquitted with most of his fellow trialists and after two years of his release, in 1988, he formed an organisation that represented black gay men and lesbians, particularly in township spaces, since he was removed from GASA as his politics conflicted with the movement.

GLOW (Gay and Lesbians Organisation of Witwatersrand) became the first queer movement in Johannesburg that aimed to represent black queer people. Thus, Nkoli, Ditsie and GLOW became instrumental forces in ensuring the inclusion and visibility of black queer rights and fighting for the inclusion of queer people in the constitution. In addition, Nkoli together with GLOW members, helped to organise the country's first Pride march in Johannesburg, to enforce the visibility and belonging of queer people in spaces that were (and are) heterosexist. During the same year, Nkoli formed an AIDS project in township spaces, which educated queer people about the disease, and with assistance from the GLOW movement, the project became an important resource for queer people in townships, and provided spaces for meetings and support. Essentially, Nkoli worked to ensure that the realisation of democracy not only became an achievement for black heterosexual people, but included the rights of all black people regardless of the sexual orientation.[5]

Tseko Simon Nkoli's story as an early post-apartheid queer narrative

Over the duration of the Delmas Treason trial that lasted for 420 days, the prison letters, and how these letters demonstrated secrecy and disclosure of Tseko Simon Nkoli's sexuality, played a significant role to contribute to a historical archive that preserved nascent queer narratives (Reid, 2002). The prison love letters are excerpts published by GALA (Gay and Lesbians memory in action) that were written between Nkoli and his partner at the time, Roy Shepherd, whilst Nkoli was imprisoned from 1984 to 1988; these letters disrupted the idealised notions of heterosexual struggle heroes, and added to a queer historical archive (Martin, 2020). Brunow (2018) asserts that archives in South Africa often excluded queer

[5] Even though Nkoli was advocating for the freedom of queer people in South Africa, his activism appeared to have blind spots. Nkoli was reluctant to support women's rights or to recognise the unique intersectional vulnerabilities of queer black women, a point that led to a rift between Ditsie and Nkoli (Ditsie & Newman, 2002).

material. Hamilton et al. (2002) add that "archives are both documents of exclusion and monuments to particular configuration of power", and detailed considerations of queer people were excluded in records and silenced for 'tainting' historical records that were framed through heterosexist lenses.

For instance, the film Proteus (2003) directed by Jack Lewis and John Greyson, demonstrates a true story of an interracial couple, Claas Blank and Rijkhaart Jacobsz who were punished and imprisoned for 50 years on Robben Island for accusation of being involved in a same-sex relationship in 1724, and they were executed by drowning in Table Bay in 1735; this film is able to recuperate a queer narrative that was obscured in historical archives, where the nature of the relationship between the two men was often referred to in euphemisms or vague language (Andrews, 2018). Thus, archival material provided few documentary records of same-sex relations as having a long history in South Africa, contributing to discourses of same-sex sexualities as 'unAfrican' and potentially reinforcing hate and violence towards queer people. This has become visible in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that was created to locate documents and other evidence related to the violation of human rights during the apartheid era, where there are few or no accounts of same-sex material formally recorded in this archive (Hamilton, 2002).

Hence, Nkoli's inclusion in Ditsie and Newman's film, his prison love letters and his openness about his sexual orientation in the 1980s were important to queer archives, and confronted the mainstream heterosexist archives that excluded queer narratives. Moreover, his coming out during the period when homosexuality was illegal and seen as a threat in South Africa, created an imagined space of inclusion for queer people especially after the adoption of the 1996 democratic constitution. Many scholars thus recognise Nkoli's influence as central to the inclusion of LGBTQI protections in the constitution (Reid, 2002).

The prison love letters to his partner Roy Shepherd both exposed and transgressed his vulnerability; this includes vulnerability as a form of fear of imprisonment, execution, 'weakness' in deeply personal needs, yearning to be loved and letters that focused on the challenging the invisibility of same-sex relations and heterosexist norms that were upheld in the apartheid era. This is demonstrated in letters written in 1985, where Nkoli's point of view is one of grappling with internal conflict around taking his own life or continuing to struggle when promising Roy that he will endure the pressures of the prison cell and trial:

Nkoli: “I’ll will try to face life-though sometimes I think otherwise” (Morgan, 2017: 13)

And

Nkoli: “Roy dear, please don’t keep this letter with you, destroy them or hide them very far” (Morgan, 2017: 15)

And

Nkoli: “I do really promise Roy. I shall live. I can face life” (Morgan, 2017: 14)

And

Nkoli: “Don’t tell everybody. I’m so nervous now when I am writing’ (Morgan, 2017: 14)

And

Nkoli: “Sometimes I feel like taking my own life” (Morgan, 2017: 17)

In writing the letters, Nkoli employs conflicting discourses of courage and vulnerability during his stay in prison, demonstrated through fear that his sexuality might be disclosed earlier if the wardens read the letters and the fact that this might affect the trial and threaten

his life, freedom and safety. The letters convey double meanings, as Nkoli's sexuality could be seen as 'offence' to the apartheid-era policies such as the 1927 Immorality Act, which criminalised same-sex relations, and the fact that homosexuality is seen as being 'un-African' and how many white-led queer groups chose to remain 'apolitical' during apartheid. Thus, his writing to Shepherd reveals a sense of being vulnerable, which is captured in words such as 'taking my own life', 'destroy or hide letters', 'I'm nervous', 'I will try', 'I shall live' and 'God will decide'. Through these words, Nkoli's vulnerability stems from difficulties in disclosing his sexual identity (and maintaining secrecy) as an anti-apartheid activist within the prison cells that are framed as heteronormative. Carrabine (2005) asserts that prison cells are dangerous spaces, which consist of regular threats and harms including intimidation, assault and abuse that locate certain individuals as vulnerable to the dominant powers of other prisoners and guards or wardens. Essentially, existing in prisons involves what Carrabine (2005) describes as hierarchical legitimacies, with power conferred to 'straight' men (or men perceived to be heterosexual), which Carrabine explains is part of the reason why men occupy separate prison cells from women. Black people were immediately assumed to be 'straight' in prison cells, and popular discourses around prisons locate male rape as a form of asserting dominance and power over 'weaker', feminised men (Carrabine, 2005), which located queer men as invisibilised and also vulnerable. The prison cells can metaphorically be compared to a heteropatriarchal initiation ritual like the removal of the male foreskin in the film *Inxeba (The Wound)* (2017); whilst the pain is extreme, one has to endure and be strong to overcome multiple vulnerabilities and fears, as this leads to being an idealised man in these spaces. Thus, the prison is a rite of passage for the ideal apartheid-era South African black man. Nkoli's experiences of living in secrecy or 'closetness', what he metaphorically defines as 'Wardrobe', consistently imposed forms of vulnerability through his fear of not being able to live a visible, public life, and through fear of fully expressing his love to Roy in front of his cell mates or the apartheid machinery that enforced his imprisonment.

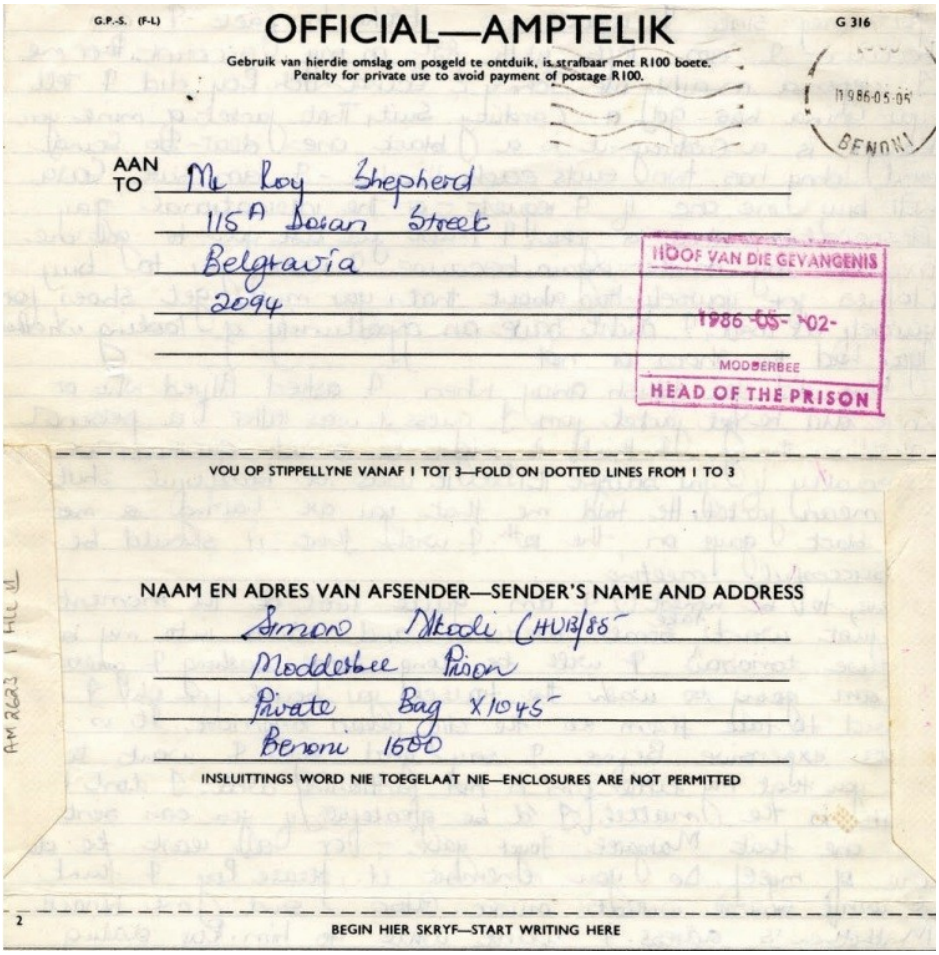


Figure 3: The address section of an original prison letter from Simon Nkoli to Roy Shepherd (GALA)

Nkoli's decision to disclose or 'come out' as queer, combined with his role as anti-apartheid activist, challenged to heteronormative masculinity that was attached to liberation politics and racist white supremacist government laws. Thus, Nkoli became a figurehead of queer liberation through the use of his visibility to enforce the inclusion of queer rights in a clause in the 1996 constitution, and enshrined the narratives of queer people into public and legal archives. Nkoli also faced attempts to have him hide his sexuality by other liberation leaders, and by the white racist government through assumed heterosexuality and the danger associated with the potential discovery of his letters (see Munro, 2009). He received widespread criticism and backlash from several organisations that felt threatened by Nkoli's sexuality, including members of the United Democratic Front (UDF) such as Mosiuoa 'Terror' Lekota, the African National Congress (ANC) leader Ruth Mampatu, Solly Smith and the co-trialists that deemed Nkoli's sexuality as an 'embarrassment' to both blackness and the political struggle (Martin, 2020). The use of the concept of 'embarrassment' suggests a form of threat and disgrace that reductively conflates black culture and tradition with heteronormativity, since same-sex sexuality presumably runs counter to political masculinity

which is read through heteronormativity (see Martin, 2020 & Carolin, 2018). These stances of disavowing Nkoli's public coming out are shown in the documentary film and in public statements by officials about queer rights:

> Gcina Malindi, fellow Delmas trialist: "One of the co-accused said we can't be seen to be on trial with people who are embarrassing us and our organisation and so on, and why put such people together with us?" (Ditsie & Newman, 2002)

> And

> Solly Smith, London ANC representative in 1987: "[We] cannot be diverted from our struggle by these issues. We believe in the majority being equal. Those people (Lesbians and Gays) are in the minority. The majority must rule" (qtd. in Carolin, 2018: 42)

> And

> Ruth Mompati, ANC activist in 1987: "The gays have no problem. They have nice houses and plenty to eat. I don't see them suffering. No one is persecuting them… We haven't heard about this problem in South Africa until recently. It seems to be fashionable in the West" (qtd. in Carolin, 2018: 42)

These homophobic, hateful remarks led to an "ambivalence of visibility" (Brunow, 2018: 176), which resulted in dominant power structures striving to erase and invalidate queer voices that reflected real lived experiences and that could concretise queer historical archives. This is seen in Solly Smith and Ruth Momputi's homophobic critique of queer visibility and experiences in the *Capital Gay* newspaper interview (Carolin, 2018), with extracts reproduced above, in which they stipulated that queer rights should not be prioritised as a

major struggle in the liberation movement. The comments implicitly suggest that sexual minorities are excluded from the oppressed, black polis who should be inscribed and protected in the new constitution, a legal document central to visibility, freedom and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa. Carolin (2018) explains that the homophobic remarks by the ANC leader Momputi reiterated the widespread reading of same-sex sexuality as a decadence of middle-class whiteness, which disavows black queer narratives with notions of white agency and centrality in discourses of sexual diversity, and also resembles recurrent forms of homophobia that are visible in the post-apartheid period. Reddy (2001) outlines homophobia as a form of discrimination that seeks to oppress the agency and freedom of sexual minorities, through appeals to culture, tradition and religion. This highlights how homophobia, hate and violence "co-exist with [a] lack of freedom of expression and lack of rights to equality, dignity and civility" (Reddy, 2001: 83). This is evident in Reid's (2002) argument in "The History of the Past is the trust of the future: Preservation and excavation in the Gay and Lesbian Archive of South Africa", which claims that there is limited queer historical records in various institutional archives including churches, legal archives, police and military archives, and psychiatric and social welfare records, due to homophobia entrenched in the archival processes that had intended to purge the history of queer people. Thus, Nkoli's assertion of his same-sex sexuality, and his love for his partner despite being in spaces that are heterosexist, transgress his vulnerable position such that he can be seen as a figurehead for both queer history and collective national freedom, symbolising a collective archive that includes the (black) queer South African.

This is demonstrated in both the prison love letters and the film *Simon & I* (2002), when Nkoli adopted a strategy of vulnerability through being openly in love and queer. As part of the strategy, Nkoli demonstrates a transgressive vulnerability through the 'weaknesses' of love, yearning to be loved by Roy Shepherd. His struggles inscribed in the prison love letters, that had almost caused Nkoli to give up on life, reshaped Nkoli's vulnerability, in a sense that his weakness in loving Shepherd forced him to live a resistant life, one of courage. This is highlighted in lines such as "Man. I shall 'live' for you Roy" (Morgan, 2017), which signifies a shift from being shamed and feeling vulnerable, to politicising the vulnerability of love as strength to overcome being an outcast (politically, socially and as a prisoner) and challenging the homophobia he had experienced.

Nkoli's letters can be seen as writing his personal vulnerability as an archive of queer experiences and resilience, and again he filmed this vulnerability in Ditsie's documentary as

he experienced AIDS-related complications. These secretive letter that became archives were methods to create alternate spaces that can register queer realities. Brunow (2018: 176) observed that "[t]he recognition of queer parts is relevant for both political goals in terms of equal rights and legislation and the purposes of community building". Thus, Nkoli's disclosure, the documentary of his activism and the prison love letters serve a form of visibility and recognition for both black and queer communities, which is why he explained the impossibilities of separating struggles as primary or secondary, whilst encountering struggles on both fronts of race and sexuality:

> Nkoli: "I am black, and I am gay, I cannot separate myself into primary or secondary struggle" (Ditsie & Newman, 2002)



Figure 4: Simon Tseko Nkoli giving a speech at the first Pride march in South Africa in 1996. (Ditsie & Newman, 2002)

In this scene from the documentary, Nkoli gives a speech before the first Pride march, and employs an intersectional approach to challenge the supposed incompatibility of being a black queer man, as he is both advocating for queer rights and a black collective freedom against apartheid structures. Hoad et al. (2005) explain that policies such as the 1927 Immorality Act and 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act criminalised sexual acts

between people of different races and homosexuality. Thus, in the pivotal moment of Nkoli's coming out, and inscribing his love for a white partner, he exhibited many forms of resistance, not only against the formal legal framework of the apartheid state, but also against the idea that same-sex sexuality should remain invisibilised until the struggle for racial freedom is achieved, if ever recognised at all. Nkoli confronted the heterosexist and white supremacist laws, whilst simultaneously attaining visibility for queer people in black communities. Martin (2020: 2-9) claims that "coming out, for Nkoli, [during apartheid] was both an intimate experience and a [social and political] pathway to visibility". Martin (2020) suggest that Nkoli's disclosure was an important part of solidifying the international support for equal rights of queer people and black people. In Nkoli's political activism, his fight to create inclusivity for queer communities was indivisible from his anti-apartheid struggles.

Carolin (2018: 39) claims that "[the idea of] coming out appears to interpellate one as a minority subject", suggesting that coming out positions queer people as vulnerable against the dominant heterosexist structures, and coming out is a way of asserting visibility in the face of this vulnerable position. Munt and Sedgwick (2008; 1990) assert that visibility and freedom for queer people is linked to notions of pride and shame. Thus, coming out is, itself, an image that implies *invisibility*, as something was hidden in a 'closet' before this process, and then becomes visible as it becomes vulnerable to rejection, shame and hostility. Importantly, it is through these forms of vulnerability including 'coming out' and being perceived as 'threat' or 'disgrace' that Nkoli transgresses forms of racial and heteronormative exclusion and policing, claiming that "if you are black in South Africa, the inhuman laws of apartheid closet you. If you are gay in South Africa, the homophobic customs and laws of this society closet you" (Nkoli, 1994, 249-50).

This challenges the idea of demanding freedom on the grounds of 'sameness' as well as the idea that queerness is a 'secondary struggle' to racial equality, as this discounts the continued economic, cultural and political struggles still faced by black queer people, especially those living in poverty. For queer people, space is not equal and experiences are not characterised by 'sameness', and is often linked to race and class. Matebeni (2013: 409-410) argues that "the modern apartheid state ensured that blackness remained as distant from white as possible, [and] no racial mixing could be tolerated unless controlled by various laws and polices restricting access and mobility of mostly black people", suggesting strict spatial regulation of racial groups. Apartheid's legacy lingers through racialised spatialities, where many wealthy, urban and city spaces are still disproportionately occupied by white bodies,

and many township and under-resourced spaces are still almost exclusively occupied by black bodies. This is demonstrated in the film *While You Weren't Looking* (2015), where the contrast of suburbia and the Khayelitsha township highlights the everyday realities of black people, particularly black queer people in township versus the city spaces.

Envisioning a truly inclusive queer archive requires an acknowledgement of race 'difference', such that all racial constituencies can be visibilised in a queer archive. A truly inclusive archive enables queer people to see others like them reflected, and also creates spaces that can work towards visibility, recognition and belonging. Thus, democratic queer archives have enabled representation and visibility of queer narratives, such as the work done by GALA (Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action). For instance, in Mikel Stevenson's "Body Of Work" exhibition, two queer people display themselves wearing traditional Zulu beadwork, which is usually worn by young women. The visibility of two queer men wearing Zulu garments gendered as female, confronts the orthodox binary norms of gender and open possibilities for recognition of diverse gender expression.

Nkoli and Ditsie's lives, represented in the documentary film *Simon & I* and the prison love letters of Nkoli, form an important queer archive. To construct certain gender and sexual identities as vulnerable is to potentially affirm the notion of heterosexuality as natural and normative, but the forms of vulnerability demonstrated by Ditsie and Nkoli are in effect methods to challenge the erasure of queer narratives and are the birthplace of their activism. The chapter has argued that queer activists in the film *Simon & I* (2002) demonstrated a dramatic shift during apartheid around the discourses of vulnerability, visibility, belonging and freedom. Although, queer people experienced restrictions and threats of danger from the white heterosexist government, some members of the liberation movement and the general public, queer people used public spaces as 'battlegrounds'. This included everyday acts like Ditsie presenting in a traditionally "masculine" way in a township, to political speeches like Nkoli's where he linked the anti-apartheid and gay rights struggles, to Pride marches through city spaces. These vulnerable performativities led to the disruption of heteronormativity and the refiguring of public space, including thinking of the prison, the township and the city as spaces that included queer people, spaces that represented danger for queer people but also could offer visibility. Thus, the concept of vulnerability in relation to queer identities can be understood as transgressive and resistant, and the documentary film demonstrates these transgressive vulnerabilities in multiple ways. Tseko Simon Nkoli and Beverley Ditsie have

played significant roles in adding to the queer archive in South Africa trough the visual medium of film and through documenting authentic, complex black queer lives.

Chapter 6: The Representation of Black Queer Masculinities on YouTube in the film *Out of This World*

The documentary film *Out of This World* (2018) is comprised of a series of shorts depicting the experiences and lived realities of queer people in Johannesburg, South Africa. The film follows acclaimed activist, producer and host Mykki Blanco, as he explores the queer creative cultures in the post-apartheid South African setting by using the platform YouTube. The film shares lived realities of queer people in spaces where queer voices are usually silenced, marginalised and erased. It visibilises the true stories of queer people in urban CBD spaces in Johannesburg, but also shows the complexities around queer experiences in parts of the townships around Johannesburg.

Johannesburg city and township spaces such as Soweto have been sites of perpetuating sexual violence and homophobia against queer people during apartheid, dynamics which linger to this day (see Visser, 2014; Skeggs, 1999; Livermon, 2012; 2014). "Visibility" was important in the daily practices of oppression during apartheid; violence and discrimination during apartheid were enacted through the use of photography and video to expose queer people's sexual performativities, which were considered 'abnormal' and 'immoral' by the white heterosexist apartheid government (see Matebeni, 2013 & Macharia, 2011). Thus, queer people were hypervisibilised during apartheid in order to shame and police their performativities and sexualities. The camera thus was once the site of oppression and harassment, but now can also be a site of forms of liberation. The dynamics of this visual representation, however, must be scrutinised for its ability to reinscribe othering and oppression. Queer narratives are rarely represented in the mainstream media, and a lot of mainstream queer representation is still framed and produced by heterosexual people who do not share the same experiences as queer people, and thus might speak *for* queer people instead of allowing them to speak for themselves.

Juhasz (2008) claims that YouTube enables people with access to technology to express themselves in whichever way they want, suggesting that YouTube can challenge misrepresentation in the mainstream media which might be linked to certain forms of oppression against queer people. Wendy Chun (2006:2) asserts that YouTube works to "free the flow of information, reinvigorating free speech", supporting Andrews's (2021a) argument

that YouTube offers marginalised people alternate spaces for recognition and celebration of their lives and identities. Hence, it can be argued that YouTube has become an essential social media platform to challenge hegemonic cultural normative spaces, such as the mainstream media that has frequently depicted queer people in stereotypical ways and pathologised same-sex sexualities. Andrews (2021a: 84) claims that "YouTube has provided a platform for many queer [people] in South Africa to find audiences and represent queer lives via a public medium", which suggest the construction of heterotopic spaces that enables visibility of multiple, diverse identities.

This framework describes what the film *Out of This World* (2018) accomplishes, namely visibilising diverse post-apartheid queer identities in ways that validate, affirm and give space for the self-expression of these identities. The film explores how the 'Born-Free'[6] generation within the queer community understand and perform their identities in spaces that continue to marginalise queer people. Furthermore, the film is an example of self-fashioned queer visualities using social media in post-apartheid South Africa, a space that allows some queer people to assert visibility and belonging in their communities.

The film explores how marginalised queer people perform transgressive vulnerability to disrupt the heterosexism and cisgenderism in their environments. Queer people on YouTube often describe vulnerability in offline spaces, but use the online alternate space to form supportive communities and to challenge their positions as marginal and vulnerable (Andrews, 2021a). Ellapen (2007) claims that "despite South Africa's many, multiracial, economically diverse and heterogenous townships, […] township space(s) have been employed as the central location [for] representing black identity and culture" (113-114), and thus townships can serve a dual purpose of both oppressing black queer people and acting as an arena where queer people represent and navigate their identities through public performativities and through visual media (Ellapen, 2007).

With the film *Out of This World* depicting both urban and townships experiences, it can demonstrate forms of belonging and home for queer people in diverse public spaces. The film can provide liminal and heterotopic spaces to queer people in order to visualise their narratives and lived realities. Other queer people can access these shared, and in many ways *public* visual spaces, and the film can confront assumptions of townships as rigidly "heterosexual" spaces as well as challenging the public erasure of queer people. This creates

[6] Born-Free is a youth population in South Africa that is born into the ostensibly free and racially undivided post-apartheid context after the fall of institutionalised apartheid that marginalised black people (Mpongo, 2016).

what Jenkins (2009) refers to as “participatory culture”, a transnational space that embraces multiple identities and actors who can take part in media production and public culture, where there is much more agency for queer people to represent their identities and lives. Hence, Andrews (2021a: 84) argues that YouTube “potentially has a democratised function, allowing for the free flow of ideas and information worldwide in ways where diverse voices find self-expression and a sense of belonging”.

Reddy et al. (2007) note that being queer in Africa involves being regulated by a “heterosexual matrix”, suggesting that compulsory heterosexuality is present in most spaces, and queer performativities are policed (see Butler, 1999; Witt, 1992 & Rich 1980). However, the film *Out of This World* presents queer epistemologies voiced by queer people who exist in diverse spaces, subverting ideologies of compulsory heterosexuality and challenging the framing of queer people as simplistically ‘vulnerable’ and ‘un-African’.

Reddy et al. (2007: 230-234) assert that “African queer sexualities should not be reduced to the representation of symptoms of suffering, mourning and despair, [but it is significant to recognise that] pleasure, celebration, and affirmation, as well as the positive expression of erotic desire, prevail despite ongoing pathologising, marginalisation and persecution”. The authors suggest that representing queer people as purely subject to risk of violence and homophobia, which is characteristic of dominant representations of black queer vulnerabilities in mainstream media, does not tell the full story. The element of “erotic desire” might position queer people as vulnerable, as this desire is the root of persecution, but this can also be represented positively and be liberatory for queer people. This echoes Matebeni (2013) and Gqola’s (2011) discussion of the hypervisibility of hate crimes against queer bodies becoming almost definitive for queer South Africans in the public imaginary. Gqola (2011: 623) employs Muholi’s photographic work in her argument about hypervisibility, asserting that “Muholi's work is less about making Black lesbians visible than it is about engaging with the regimes that have used these women's hypervisibility as a way to violate them”. Thus, the hypervisibility of queer people as vulnerable to harm, might in fact constitute an erasure of diverse queer experiences, and might be a form of violence in itself. While this vulnerability might be an ontological condition of black queer South Africans, it does not need to define queer epistemologies, and vulnerability itself might allow queer people to challenge limiting representations when it is used as a way to claim space and belonging.

In exploring the film *Out of This World,* this chapter will consider Andrews's (2021a) idea of "mirroring", a reference to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage as a form of recognition of an 'other' as self. The idea of mirroring offers an alternate lens in the post-apartheid period to create space for queer narratives and queer belonging. Visual media becomes a platform to surface and archive the histories and lived realities of queer people, where they can visibilise themselves as belonging in public spaces. This has been demonstrated in the previous chapter in reference to the film *Simon & I* (2002); Ditsie and Newman used the camera to preserve queer narratives and to tell authentic queer stories as they fought for inclusion in post-apartheid South African society. This is also demonstrated in the film *Out of This World*, where Blanco (2018) uses YouTube to visibilise the narratives of queer people who have been marginalised and creates alternate space where queer people are able to express and navigate their identities.

Visualising Violence against Queer People in South Africa

In exploring contemporary representations of queer narratives in South Africa, gender and sexuality scholars have produced a broad range of works focusing on 'identity' in the apartheid era. Retief (1993) offers an important insight into how South African queer people were represented in film during the apartheid era. Retief (1993) claims in the article "Under Priscilla's Eyes", that the camera, through photograph and video, served as a tool to police and marginalise queer people, and led to government services such as the police force and the general public raiding queer spaces, particularly the Johannesburg raids during apartheid, and persecuting queer people through the camera lens. Retief (1993:20) asserts that "historical accounts from the period reveals how during raids of queer bars, nightclubs, bathhouses, cruising spots, private residences and other queer friendly spaces, police officers armed with cameras would line people up against the wall and snap pictures of as many faces as possible". Through raids, queer people found in spaces created to enjoy leisure time and to have more freedom to embrace their queer identities, were detained and were photographed in order to be exposed in mainstream media as queer (Muller, 2019). Through surveillance and raiding, queer people experienced restrictions within public spaces for fear of being "exposed" as gay, which made it impossible for them to be open (visible) as queer or to feel a sense of belonging.

This persecution of queer people by state organs and society in general in public spaces still continues in postapartheid South Africa, and continues to have a complex relationship with the camera and public display. For instance, in the Soweto Pride March in September 2010, two occurrences were reported of queer women being victimized by police services. One police officer apprehended a lesbian woman named Maki in a van and drove around the area for hours, whilst using derogatory anti-lesbian terms against her (Amnesty International, 2013). In addition, seven lesbians were arrested in a fast-food restaurant and were victimised in police custody in 2009 after the LGBTQIA+ Pride in Soweto, and one of the victims reported the incident on live television (Amnesty International, 2013). In a raid by police officers a year later, a lesbian woman was attacked with pepper spray because of a noise complaint laid against her. The police officer involved lined up the woman and the other people in her house against a wall, and 11 people were abused in custody (Amnesty International, 2013). Despite publicly reporting on this persecution in media and on television, similar attacks continue to happen, and visibility of violence does not seem to eradicate this everyday occurrence in South Africa.

Reid (2013: 24) explains that "homosexuality and public scandal have been linked through dramatic court cases, some of which date back to sodomy trials, which took place in the Cape in the seventeenth century, and both the 1930s and 1960s saw courtroom dramas and sensationalist media coverage on homosexuality". Queer visibility has thus often been linked to public shaming of queer people into 'closeted' existences. This is demonstrated in scenes in the film *Simon & I* (2002), where queer people experienced hostile treatment in Johannesburg CBD spaces during protests and even Pride marches, for visibly occupying public spaces that were heteronormative, since homosexuality is both assumed to be a symptom of "moral decay" and a threat to the "natural order of things" (Reid, 2013).

City spaces have become much safer spaces for queer people in recent years, and Blanco's film represents Johannesburg as a space where many black queer people come to feel a greater sense of belonging. An important theme in the film is the idea of "home" and how queer people are often made to feel out-of-place in rural or township spaces, and need to escape these "homes" in order to feel a greater sense of belonging in cities. Fela Gucci, one of the members of the duo FAKA[7] that is featured in the film, explains how language is

[7] There are multiple queer participants features in Blanco's film. FAKA is a music and visual performance group of two queer activist, Fela Gucci and Desire Marea. The group works with design and kwaito music to present disruptive queer performances. Rich Mnisi is a creative apparel designer whose work is to create a form of queer representation through commodity culture. The clothing he designs employs a rich and colourful look that is often associated with femininity, and he often shows these designs in spaces like Soweto. Zanele

important component of making queer people feel like they do not belong. Fela Gucci explains that he was constantly called stabane by men in his community while growing up, which translates as intersex from isiZulu but is used as an offensive term for gay or gender nonconforming men in South Africa. Mykki Blanco echoes these feelings of unbelonging in communities that should offer a sense of home, as he left his rural town in North Carolina in the US to run away to New York city (Blanco, 2018).

> Blanco: "When I was 16 years old, I run away to New York City with a dream of being more than my small rural town in North Carolina would allow" (Blanco, 2018)

This story of Blanco's migration from rural to city space creates transnational connections between queer people's experiences of "home". For black queer people like those represented in *Out of This World*, "home" is a paradox, as they are reminded through language like "stabane" that they are unwelcome in hypermasculine, heterosexist spaces, often even in their own families. Running away from home becomes an act of seeking greater freedom, safety and visibility, and finding liveable lives. However, while the city is shown to offer a greater sense of "home" for queer people, there is also a deliberate return to township spaces to *queer* these spaces, to challenge dominant ideologies and to be visibly gender nonconforming in order to transform unwelcoming spaces through visual performativities.

The interaction of space and identity is significant in the visual representations in the film. In one scene, the couple Nkulsey and Bradley are shown on a tall building's rooftop and in their private bedroom in Johannesburg. The couple embrace as they look over the city, with high-rise buildings in the distance. This scene symbolises the freedom that the city offers them to be in an open relationship, but also calls into question their sense of belonging in the city. The moment of intimacy on the rooftop is still out of the view of others in Johannesburg. The couple also describe moments of discrimination that they suffered, which highlights lingering unease for queer people in postapartheid South African spaces.

Muholi is a photographer and visual activist whose work is concerned with body politics, in particular related to black queer lesbian bodies. Muholi's work is dedicated to increasing the visibility of black queer lesbian lives. Nkulsey is a psychology student, model, and activist. Bradley is a dancer and Nkulsey's partner. Glow is a transgender activist who uses her platform to discuss sex, gender politics and health care.



Figure 5: Bradley Kgotlelelo (left) and Nkulsey Masemola (right) on a rooftop in Johannesburg (Blanco, 2018)

Elements of violence and discrimination are also demonstrated in one of the scenes during the Walk of Visibility at Zoo Lake and Johannesburg CBD. The Zoo Lake spaces seem to enable a kind of 'safe space' for queer people to increase their public visibility in predominantly-white middle-class areas, again linking permissibility of same-sex sexualities with white spaces. However, within the multicultural Johannesburg CBD, there were visible reactions of shock and hostility towards the Walk of Visibility in the film. These dynamics seem to construct spaces marked as "white" as more accepting of queer people, even black queer people, in South Africa today.



Figure 6: Mikki Blanco (left) and singer Umlilo (right) during a Fem Walk (Walk of Visibility) at Zoo Lake, Johannesburg (Blanco, 2018).

This backlash directed towards the visibility and recognition of queer people locate sexual and gender minorities as "outsiders" who are excluded in public spaces. This is shown in the film when queer people created alternate spaces such as clubs, bars and heterotopic visual spaces through social media and films to find a sense of belonging. For instance, Blanco and FAKA are shown performing in a club at an event called "Canti Power" as a way to visibilise their identities and create affirming spaces for queer people. Fela Gucci from FAKA critiques the "failure of the democratic transition" in the film, suggesting that despite discourses of the "Rainbow Nation", most public spaces are still unsafe for queer people. Interestingly, even gay clubs are shown to be heteronormative and exclude "feminine" performativity in male bodies:

> Fela Gucci: "The gay clubs here [in Johannesburg] are very heteronormative; fem bodies in these spaces are policed and shamed a lot" (Blanco, 2018)

And

> Fela Gucci: “There is a lot of hate crime that have happened here [Spruitview, Katlehong], and no one is held accountable” (Blanco, 2018)

The documentary shows that queer people find it challenging to locate leisure spaces or spaces where they can be themselves, and the scene of Blanco and FAKA performing in the club demonstrates a *queering* of this space that is meant to offer belonging for queer people. The concept of transgressive vulnerability gives this scene added resonance, particularly because of how queer people inhabit spaces whilst aware of the danger and violence that comes with existing as ‘different’ in South Africa. Fela Gucci demonstrates how policing and shame, elements found in broader society, are even present in ostensibly “queer-friendly” spaces, and how “fem” bodies face added scrutiny and exclusion even in so-called safe spaces. Visser (2008) claims that spaces are a significant part in formation of identity and in most cases, heteronormativity still pervades spaces that might claim to be accepting for queer people; in effect, safe access to spaces is contingent on the appearance of being straight and cisgender, regardless of erotic desire. Performativity in these spaces thus also need to be queered or disrupted.



Figure 7: Mykki Blanco and FAKA performing publicly in Spruitview, Katlehong. (Blanco, 2018).

In the film, queer people employ a commodity culture in heteronormative spaces, especially bars, clubs and public streets. This can be seen as parodic of restrictive gender performativity, as queer individuals dress in skirts, wear beards, feminine hairstyles and makeup in public spaces, disrupting binary gender norms.[8] This is shown in one of the scenes where Mykki Blanco and the group FAKA pose as they are filmed in Spruitview, Katlehong, wearing flowing feminine fabric around their lower bodies. The performance subverts the invisibility and erasure of queer experiences in the area where many queer people have been attacked and killed. The Fem Walk in the city is another example of queer bodies asserting their visibility and belonging in spaces where they might be invisibilised. This deliberate walking in spaces marked by homophobia, hate and violence in predominantly black communities such as the Johannesburg CBD and Soweto, is a form of resistance through transgressive vulnerability.

Reid (2013: 2-4) claims that queer males are "associated with femininity", suggesting that this intersects with forms of vulnerability that feminine-presenting individuals face. Therefore, the strategy of displaying queer bodies in feminine apparel both interpellates this vulnerability but also transgresses the "shame" or exclusion that is often associated with non-normative gender expression, as these queer individuals are proud and visible in public spaces. In addition, the Rich Mnisi fashion showcase in the streets of Soweto and the transgender woman Luke Van Der Burg who took Blanco to asylums in Johannesburg CBD whilst wearing feminine clothing, makeup and hair, embody transgression in hostile spaces. Recording these through the camera and disseminating these films on YouTube is a way of using the camera, which once was oppressive to queer people, in ways that are now validating and offer recognition.

The camera might still create vulnerability for queer people even if used for documenting queer experiences, as they continue to face "fear of repercussion, thereby creating the invisibility of the queer community" (Muller, 2019: 1-36). This is illustrated in the film *Simon & I*, where Beverley Ditsie asserts that after she was seen advocating for queer rights on mainstream television, people in her community spaces were openly hostile towards her, and a group of 20 men attempted to invade her home in order to "discipline" her. These

[8] Butler explains that all gender performances are parodic, but Butler warns that "[p]arody by itself is not subversive" and she questions which performances can contribute to the destabilisation of gender and sex, and where those performances take place. In this context, the performance in the film can be read as subversive/resistant parody practice as they aim to disrupt and confront the heteronormative spaces through queer performativity.

visual performativities are thus risky and place queer people as vulnerable, even as they lead to greater visibility.

Blanco's film is also a way of creating space for diverse queer people to be visible and affirmed. With the launch of YouTube in 2005, queer people could curate, record, edit and upload their own stories, rather than merely being subjects in visualities created within heteronormative systems, or by actors and filmmakers who did not share their lived experiences. The emergence of YouTube and other visual social media like Instagram, used widely by South African queer activists and artists, opened possibilities for broader recognition of queer voices, and gave queer people platforms for displaying disruptive images in ways that are much more accessible to broad audiences. The online space functions as a public space for queer visualities to take shape and for queer people to see their experiences mirrored. Queer individuals like the dancer Bradley and designer Rich Mnisi, who grew up in spaces like Soweto and Alexandra, can disrupt heteronormativity in these spaces through visual performances, and authentically tell their stories through Blanco's film. Online spaces for queer people living in oppressive geographical spaces can allow them to express their identities, share their stories and also see others who have similar experiences, enabling Jenskins's (2009) notion of participatory culture. Andrews (2021a: 86) claims that "YouTube offers greater anonymity, and the possibility of expansion beyond offline networks makes it a powerful space for many questioning or closested queer individuals". This suggest that YouTube as a heterotopic space functions like a 'mirror' that reflects what is often invisibilised or persecuted in offline spaces.

Film and visual media also offer an "examination of how black queer people reconfigure the space of the city for their own purposes" (Muller, 2019: 1-36), finding usable spaces in their environments (Livermon, 2012). This is highlighted in a scene in Blanco's film where the participant Bradley, a dancer, explains that his life as a queer person in Alexandra township has always been marked by experiences of homophobic remarks and violence:

> Bradley: "I was bullied a lot because of being feminine and whatnot, so, and also for being a dancer, cause it's like, 'What are you doing in the hood [Alexandra]?'" (Blanco, 2018).

In this scene, Bradley highlights the intersectionality of his experiences, and shows how his identity and gender expression were impacted by the space he existed in. The idea of limiting gender diversity in heterosexist spaces is central to colonial logics[9], which were enforced to sustain power for one group by policing and marginalising others (Macharia, 2019 & Msibi, 2011). Bradley asserts in the film that "It is hard to show affection because you do not know how people will react in a certain environment" and Glow also claims that "[t]here is not many safe spaces, I do not like, I think it is nice to have a place where you feel like you do not necessary have to have people coming at you sideways" (Blanco, 2018). Both participants suggest that black queer people find it difficult to be visible and feel like they belong, and feel surveilled and persecuted in public spaces. However, speaking about these experiences on film is a way of challenging their exclusion. Bradley and Nkulsey display forms of transgressive vulnerability through the public demonstration of their nonnormative gender expression and openness about their relationship, and they can express themselves through dance and fashion.

FAKA has also worked to challenge gender norms through their live music performances and strong online presence on Twitter, blogs and YouTube (Shefer, 2019; Disemelo, 2019 & Malcomes, 2019). FAKA's "widely available public and online performance of Black, queer desire, pleasure and rationality arguably serve to challenge sexual and gender binarism as well as racialised expectations of queerness, contributing to a 'queer archive' (Disemelo, 2019: 221).

In addition, Shefer (2019: 425) proposes that

> FAKA's performances also gesture to the imperative to 'normalize' non-conforming gender and sexual practices and raced stereotypes in order to challenge the continued subjugation of and violences against queer people of colour. Such performances disrupt heteronormativity while also calling into question cultural essentializing discourses such as that of the un-Africanness of gay, lesbian, trans and queer desire and practice.

It can be argued that forms of appropriation and re-appropriation (using heteronormative spaces to make visible the experiences or narratives of queer people) are significant for the self-making of black queer subjects in cities and townships, in a sense that the appropriation creates a platform to (re)claim public space. Moreover, the idea of appropriation also enables

[9] Colonial logics are rigid social norms conferred upon a particular group of people with purposes to sustain forms of power for one group by policing and marginalising others (see Macharia, 2019 and Msibi, 2011).

the formation of alternate spaces, in a sense that queer people use online spaces to negotiate their identities.



Figure 8: Rich Mnisi carrying his fashion collection in the streets of Soweto.

Rich Mnisi, FAKA and queer people who engaged in the Walk of Visibility in Johannesburg CBD appropriated heterosexist public spaces to make visible their narratives and identities. Mnisi displayed his clothing through a fashion show in Soweto. This demonstrates resistance and transgression in the face of vulnerability, as queer people in such spaces claim agency in order to demonstrate their presence and belonging in these spaces. Furthermore, FAKA and Blanco also illustrated resistant performativity during their visit in Katlehong in Spruitview, where the clothes they wore confront heteronormativity. Importantly, these visual and performative demonstrations disrupt the myth of black African identity as homogenous. Queer subjects appropriate public space in order to confront heteronormative ideologies.

Dlamini in Mbembe et al. (2008: 240) explains that "cities and townships are spaces of motion", referring to cities and township as conducive spaces that enable change and development that can be used to challenge social ideals and norms. However, Dlamini (in Mbembe et al., 2008) suggests that cities and township also exist beyond the idea of place but can be understood as a state of mind. For instance, Soweto has come to be seen as a dynamic space for black queer people that affords opportunities for social gatherings and expression to queer subjects. Thus, Soweto becomes a space for the merging of black queer identities into a specifically black spatiality (Livermon, 2012). In one scene, Rich Mnisi identifies Soweto as

a significant space to visibilise queer narratives, stating: “Growing up in a spaces like [Soweto]... love is real” and “[t]here is great support and great teamwork” (Blanco, 2018). The positive reception to Mnisi’s fashion show demonstrated in the film shows that the simplistic view of queer people as vulnerable in township spaces can be challenged through transgressive performativities. This process of ‘homonormalising’ spaces is significant; Muholi does similar work on her photographic collection *Phases and Faces* and her documentary films like *Difficult Love* (2010) in which she and other lesbian women visibly inhabit township spaces in order to surface queer narratives that are often invisibilised.

Soweto becomes a place for re-imagining ideologies around black identities. This is a significant shift from earlier spatialities and the ideological ordering of spaces; Visser (2013) claims that during the apartheid period, spaces available for queer performativity were largely located in white neighbourhoods, which include Hillbrow and Melville in Johannesburg and Greenpoint and Sea point in Cape Town. Neighbouring spaces were occupied by queer men of various racial and class categories (Visser, 2013) who often had little access to these more openly ‘queer’ spaces, and public black spaces were often oppressive to queer identities. This implies that little or no space was available for black queer individuals to experience forms of visibility and freedom. Visser (2013: 269-272) explains, “[h]istorically, black South Africans had no claim to urban spaces until the late 1980s, which makes the notion of a gay neighbourhood in the past problematic and place specific.” This implies that even to black queer men, white neighbourhood spaces become difficult to access because of the race and class identity politics that operated in South Africa (Visser, 2013).

However, claiming space and reappropriating public space has transformed spaces like Soweto into not simply spaces with “gay pockets”, but rather spaces where queer people assert their belonging trough public performativities, and the unique queer culture of Soweto has allowed for the emergence of spatially-defined black queer identities and the understanding of Soweto as a reappropriated *queer* space for artists and activists like those in Blanco’s film. Livermon (2014: 512) explains that “[p]ost-apartheid South Africa has seen the emergence of a vibrant, visible, and vocal black queer community. The emergence of this community, however, has not been without contestation”. Spaces that remained largely exclusive and oppressive become the very spaces that allowed queer people to form new black queer cultures and to assert unique forms of belonging in postapartheid South Africa, like the unique Johannesburg drag culture and fem queer visual culture embodied by groups like FAKA. The camera, through films like Blanco’s, adds to this black queer spatiality

through heterotopic spaces of community engagement, rewriting the story of spaces like Soweto. These alternate spaces have contributed to a range of contemporary black queer narratives, and offered black queer people a chance to share their stories in their own voices.

Chapter 7: Marginal black identities in *Inxeba (The Wound)* and *While You Weren't Looking*.

Inxeba (The Wound) (2017), directed by John Trengove, is a South African film that explores male Xhosa initiation in a rural area of the Eastern Cape province. The film focuses on "portraying the experiences of Xhosa men who participate in the secretive initiation ritual known as 'Ulwaluko'" (Andrews, 2019a:1). The film centres around three main characters, Vija, Xolani and Kwanda. Xolani and Vija are in a same-sex, romantic affair, and are tasked as caregivers and mentors to the initiates. Xolani is assigned to look after Kwanda, a young gay initiate from a wealthy family who is associated with an urban upbringing and privilege, and Kwanda is resistant to the initiation process (Andrews, 2019a). However, complications arise between Xolani and Vija when Kwanda discovers their secret relationship, which provokes Xolani to "view Kwanda with a gaze of annoyance and a distinct sense of anxiety" (Andrews, 2019a:2) because Kwanda embraces his same-sex sexuality. Thus, the film explores how some black queer people feel disconnected from heteropatriarchal spaces like the rural initiation setting. Furthermore, the film explores how Xolani and Vija's relationship is discursively constructed as humiliating and a threat towards Xhosa culture and tradition, and thus they are forced to express their desires in secret. This is in contrast to the second film explored in this chapter, *While You Weren't Looking* (2015) directed by Catherine Stewart, where there is more openness around same-sex sexualities as the film is set in and around Cape Town city. The comparison of these two films, and the different lesbian characters in *While You Weren't Looking*, demonstrates cultural and socio-economic divisions, with black people largely portrayed in impoverished spaces where queer identities are oppressed and excluded, while white people are shown in urban, wealthier spaces which are more accepting of sexuality diversity. Thus, it is important to note that the films echo sociological research (see Livermon, 2012) that demonstrates the lived experiences of queer people in South Africa are not homogenous but marked by race, class and gender. The film *While You Weren't Looking* demonstrates the disparities between queer people in township and urban spaces, and *Inxeba* specifically explores rural spaces which are shown to be even more limiting for queer people who face decreased mobility and various forms of psychological and physical violence.

The interplay of race and space adds additional tensions around queer visibility and belonging. *Inxeba* poses questions of who owns space or land, and who has the capacity or agency to assert belonging in various geographic settings. This is demonstrated in the film in a scene where Xolani pleads with a white owner of a farm on the rural mountain for the group of initiates to cross the land. The scene enhances a sense of unbelonging for the black characters, feelings that the queer characters experience to a heightened degree. Black people still experience constant forms of interrogation about their *right* to occupy or belong in particular spaces, and for black queer people, even the seemingly cosmopolitan city spaces are hostile, as demonstrated in Stewart's film.

While You Weren't Looking focalises queer characters in the city of Cape Town and outlying township Khayelitsha. The film centres on two significant relationships: Dez and Terri are a mixed-race lesbian couple married for 20 years. Dez is an affluent "coloured" real estate agent who has many affairs outside her marriage. Their adoptive daughter, Asanda is part of the born-free generation and describes herself as "an experiment" shaped by her experiences in diverse spaces. Asanda meets and engages in a relationship with an openly queer woman Shado from Khayelitsha township. These queer women demonstrate dynamics and realities of queer identities within city and township spaces, and the movement of Shado, Asanda and the housekeeper of Dez and Terri between the city and the township demonstrate interconnectedness between city and township. The film demonstrates how spaces in the city are interconnected with the ones in townships, and vice versa, where the two spaces are primary signifiers that define the meaning of their counterpart space. As the film explores the public (liminal and heterotopic) spaces in the township of Khayelitsha and the city of Cape Town, it allows access to marginalised narratives of black queer people, and also challenges the way that queerness has been depicted as homogeneous in South Africa in early queer rights movements that were dominated by white, male perspectives. The film also explores the idea of 'conspicuous consumption' in the city of Cape Town, a trend that is linked to an "acceptable" queer identity in heterosexist spaces and that reinforces the erasure of queer people in impoverished communities.

The dynamics of race and sexuality in city and township spaces

The films *While You Weren't Looking* and *Inxeba (The Wound)* offer different perspectives on contemporary black queer lives in South Africa. *While You Weren't Looking* explores how lesbian people exist in the liminal borderlands of city and township, and *Inxeba (The Wound)*

examines how black queer people navigate their identities in spaces central to the notion of dominant masculinity and the idea of a 'real man' in traditional African cultures. Zanele Muholi's powerful question resonates at the beginning of both films, and invokes the image of mirrors and mirroring that is significant to issues of visibility: "What do we see, when we look at ourselves" (qtd. in Matebeni, 2013: 408). The film not only offers a mirror to the characters, as Kwanda serves as a discomforting mirror to Xolani and Shado is an intriguing and titillating mirror for Asanda, but the films are also mirrors to South African queer people who can recognise the intersections of race, class and sexuality that marginalise and oppress some queer narratives and privilege others. Andrews (2021b) claims: "In South Africa, categories and ideologies of race and sexuality are intimately linked, and indeed are co-constitutive […]; there is no concept of race without (at least imaginings) of sexuality, and the shadow of race hangs over public and private intimacies". Thus, this raises questions of how history, in this case the patriarchal white apartheid legacy, has affected the ways people of diverse sexualities look at themselves, and how we represent diverse narratives of queer people and their intimacies in the post-apartheid setting that is still intimately linked to apartheid. The intertwining of urban/progressive and rural/township/oppressive elements in both films allow for tradition and identity to be confronted through discomforting mirrors. For characters like Dez and Terri, it also reflects their own complicity in systems of oppression that gnaw at the edges of their comfortable lives.

Inxeba is a significant film because it does not only trouble rigid heteronormative ideologies linked to hegemonic masculinity, but also creates spaces for the visibility of queer narratives that are often erased even in postapartheid South Africa. In the opening scene of the film *Inxeba (The Wound)*, Kwalo, Kwanda's father seem to demonstrate a sense of anxiety around his son's masculinity, disparagingly stating how 'weak' and 'soft' Kwanda is and ironically imploring Xolani to 'fix' him. Kwanda's father seems to care most about his failed performativity of hegemonic masculinity. Andrews (2021b, n.p.) asserts that "[f]ather figures in the South African imaginary are often representative of rigid patriarchal masculinities that maintain oppressive systems and ideologies". Hence, dominant masculinity has reproduced rigid systems to dictate how love can be understood expressed. This conditions young men to perpetuate the work of rigid patriarchy through subsequent generations.

The queer child seems to be internalised as a "failure" of the father to groom a boy child to become a "real man", and ideal masculinity is linked to both biological and ideological reproduction. The realm of intimacy, desire and pleasure in the initiation space echoes this

reproductive imperative, as a boy child is expected to assimilate to heteropatriarchal norms that position men as powerful, leaders and heads of their families. This is shown in *Inxeba* through conversations that the boys have about sexual exploits with girls, and Kwanda, associated with wealth and the city, is asked in one scene about whether he has seen white girls naked. This reproduction of patriarchal norms in queer sons is also seen in the film *Die Stropers (The Harvesters)* (2018) by Etienne Kallos[10], where a young queer boy Janno's mother Marie appears to be praying for Janno's "slippery" masculinity, as Marie recites: "Dear Father God: make the son strong, make his blood strong, make his seed strong…make his heart strong". This demonstrates how various religious and traditional cultures in South Africa work to assimilate queer people and maintain heteropatriarchal structures, and how dominant hegemonic masculinity is associated with 'strength' and righteousness. Kwanda's father Kwalo shows disdain for Kwanda's effeminate gender performativity, and seeks to eradicate it through the initiation process. This indicates that considering Kwanda's supposedly "weak" masculinity as a part of him, and not simply as something that can be eradicated, would create room for an inclusive framework of desire and belonging in relation to a man's body. Moreover, Kwalo might insist on this act of aligning Kwanda's gender performativity with traditional masculinity because of the similarities in their names; Kwalo seeks to make the son "mirror" the father through name and through heteronormative bodily performatitity, as an effeminate or gay son might signal a "failure" of his own masculinity that is founded on reproducing patriarchal norms.

Importantly, I argue that thinking of desire, eroticism, pleasure and intimacies outside the framework of hegemonic masculinity, as occupied by the son/mirror, immediately challenges the assumed homogeneity of African culture and tradition and homophobic concepts like same-sex sexualities being unAfrican. Kwalo assumes that "strictness", or excessive policing, is the means to quell Kwanda's non-normative gender expression:

[10] Die Stropers (The Harvester) is a film that is filmed in South Africa in the outskirts of Free state. It is a film that is centered on various themes including the Afrikaans white masculinity and ethnic minority. It is a filming that is a set on a farming territory, that is underwritten with strength and masculinity.

> "Jonga apha ndizothanda uqinise isandla kula ntwana yam, yah ehh lentwana ingcwele ubu bhetye bhetye" [listen here, I want you to be stricter with my son, that boy is too soft] (Trengove, 2017).

The word "soft" can again be read as signalling vulnerability and thus positioning Kwanda as outsider. In this scene, even though Kwalo thinks of Kwanda as "soft", his concern is not about the safety of his son or the threat of violence he might face as is assumed to be vulnerable; there is no protective impulse in Kwalo towards his son, who faces forms of isolation and bullying in the initiation space. Importantly, Kwalo is more aware of how sacrilegious Kwanda's masculinity would be towards the Xhosa culture and tradition. Ironically, Kwanda suffers violence from the very person meant to be "strict" with him, Xolani, when he is killed at the end of the film for threatening to expose Xolani and Vija's relationship.

Thinking of Kwanda's body as not fitting the prescripts of Ulwaluko since he is supposedly "soft" and "weak", also invokes ideas of danger or threat towards the culture and tradition that are so prized on the rural mountain setting. As part of completing the ritual, young adolescent boys need to be reconfigured into the gendered practices of manhood, and part of this rite of passage is the removal of the foreskin. Contrastingly, even though Kwanda is circumcised, his identity is still perceived as *not fitting*, or disruptive to dominant masculinity, a disruption linked to non-normative gender expression (Connell, 1995; 2005). Throughout the film, Kwanda is subjected to constant derogatory remarks, which leads him to continuously resist the stigmatisation imposed by men who are considered 'brave' and seen as fitting the prescripts of Ulwaluko. This triggers what Dube (2016) claim to be the paradoxes that exist in the contact zone between heteronormative structures and those with non-normative gender identities, which puts dominant masculinity into 'crisis', a conflict with heterotopic potential. Topinka (2010: 54) asserts that "[b]y juxtaposing and combining many spaces in one site, heterotopias problematize received knowledge by desta- bilizing the ground on which knowledge is built" – new understandings of masculinity, Africanness and belonging can be negotiated through these frictions. The queer characters in the film construct alternate spaces even within the limiting initiation space, and ironically the hypermasculine space of the initiation is the only time that Vija and Xolani are able to be together as they live far apart and Vija is married to a woman. The alternate spaces confront dominant masculinity, albeit in ways that remain secretive due to the vulnerability of these

characters. By visibilising these narratives on the screen through film, another alternate space and queer narrative is given light, and the film itself functions as a heterotopia that can disrupt normative ideologies by creating "space" for queer narratives in South Africa.

Kwalo furthermore points to another dynamic of space, namely the heterotopic domestic space as allowing for "safe spaces" for queer desire to flourish while being simultaneously unwelcoming. Kwalo says to Xolani:

> Kwalo: "Uyabona lentwana ndinokudibana nayo isendlini irhuqe itshomi zayo, ufumane bezifihle ekamereni" [You see, I often see the boy in the house dragging his friends to the bedroom] (Trengove, 2017)
>
> And
>
> Kwalo: "Kodwa Ezintwana Aziqondakali kakuhle, zintwana zezinene zelarhawuti" [I do not trust these boys, these boys have been raised by rich elitists in Johannesburg] (Trengove, 2017).

In this scene, Kwalo unveils a fascinating distinction of how public and private queer intimacies, pleasure and desire are linked to the notion of vulnerability. Kwalo highlights the use of the bedroom as a place to perform private intimacies and fulfil desires, which are often policed in public spaces. In the apartheid era and post-apartheid in certain geographic settings, practices of queer people showing affections were restricted. This is demonstrated in various occasions, as in the film *Out of This World* (2018), Nkulsey asserts that heterosexual people do not have issues with queer people acting as effeminate, but policing takes place when they kiss, demonstrating intimacies and pleasure. Arguably, the visible intimacies and desires displayed between two men in love problematise the notion of love, a concept that has been co-opted into heteropatriarchal norms, what Muholi (2010) would refer to as "difficult love".

This tension between public/private affection, of the desires confined to the bedroom or secret hiding space but that are still hyper-visible in the imaginations of heteropatriarchal men, is demonstrated in the relationships of Xolani and Vija in *Inxeba (The Wound)* and by Claas Blank and Rijkhaart Jacobsz in *Proteus* (2003) who are forced to conceal their

intimacies from public view, but still suffer policing and stigma. With both relationships, the characters hide in deserted houses, abandoned trains and other solitary spaces in order to engage in intimate sexual relations. In both cases, violence and death follow the exposure or visibility of these intimacies, and both instances of death also serve to ostensibly "protect" heteropatriarchal norms and structures from the "threat" of same-sex intimacies. This is illustrated through the execution of Blank and Jacobs, and the death of Kwanda, whom Xolani kills, as Kwanda is also symbolically threatening the hypermasculine Vija who at least publicly performs the role of ideal father and husband. Thus, secluded spaces offer queer people the ability to demonstrate intimacies and desires.

Xolani, Vija and Kwanda, just like Claas and Rijkhaart, are thus in precarious and vulnerable positions, but the very hypermasculine spaces that threaten and seek to erase their identities offer them opportunities for transgression, for refiguring love and masculinity, as the initiation space is where Vija and Xolani reconnect and Robben Island, where Claas and Rijkhaart are imprisoned, gives them space to form a relationship. Even though Vija and Xolani knew the dangers of publicly being intimate with each other as queer people, their intimacies are resistant to the heteropatriarchal discourses that sees queer men as unAfrican and not fitting the prescripts of a 'real man'. The characters thus navigate spaces that position them as vulnerable in order to experience queer intimacies.

In the film *While You Weren't Looking*, Shado, a queer lesbian woman from Khayelitsha, leaves the township spaces of Khayelitsha as she is able to more freely express her identity in the city spaces. However, even in the township, Shado and Asanda are able to be intimate in Shado's room, despite immediately afterwards facing a threat of violation from men who enter Shado's home looking for her brother, Babalo. As demonstrated in the film *Simon & I* (2002) and *Out of This World* (2018), queer people utilise clubs and leisure parks in Johannesburg city spaces to express their intimacies and desires, just as queer people in the Cape Town city spaces in the film *While You Weren't Looking* use clubs as safe spaces to perform their identities and intimacies. These kinds of city spaces are significant as forms of forging freedom for queer people who escape to them from more oppressive settings; Xolani is also seen arriving in Johannesburg at the end of Trengove's film, a sign that he also seeks out the relative freedom of the city. In the films, queer "belonging" seems to only be realised in the cities, whilst still demonstrating a lack of safety, freedom and belonging in township and rural spaces. In Stewart's film, the township is the only space where blatant and violent homophobia takes place. In contrast, Shado finds it easy to display her intimacy in a club in

the city; this is visible with how easily Shado and Asanda kiss in a club without being persecuted when they first meet.

This contrast of city and township/rural space seems to cross racial lines. It is demonstrated in the films *Die Stropers (The Harvesters)* (2018) directed by Etienne Kallos [11], where the white adolescent queer character Janno was adopted by a family in a rural farm in the Free State province. Janno is eager to leave a space that rejects his identity in order to find alternate space to be himself (Kallos, 2018). This rejection is shown when "[Janno] is violently tackled by two boys who laugh at Janno [as he] lies on the ground, viscerally showing Janno that he does not belong" (Andrews, 2021b). Andrews (2021b) asserts that even though Janno tried to live up to his father's expectation, he still failed to perform an Afrikaner dominant masculinity that the other queer adolescent character, Pieter, displayed. Pieter 'wins over the family with his show of strength and red-blooded heterosexuality' (Cinéma Defacto et al. 2018: 4), even though Pieter is not overly concerned about conforming to dominant Afrikaner social expectations as a boy child and still engages in transactional sex with older men. Pieter's astute form of gender performativity, despite his same-sex sexuality, transgresses dominant masculinity. Pieter rebels against the dominant religion which is the foundation of constructs of authoritative patriarchy (Andrews, 2021b).

These tensions around masculine performativity also affect characters in *Inxeba*, and they similarly feel stifled by rural spaces if they do not enact hegemonic masculinity to the satisfaction of other male characters. In terms of Xolani as an initiated man who still desires and has sex with another man, he is a liminal character, both a "real man" according to tradition as he has undergone the initiation ceremony and even perpetuates it to other boys, and someone who transgresses prescripts of masculinity; his "belonging" is contingent on keeping his same-sex intimacies secret and out of public view. Kwanda's character, as a gay man who embodies and embraces the same qualities as Xolani rejects and suppresses, radically challenges ideas of masculinity as he still undergoes initiation while constantly undermining the process through vocal resistance. The film asks if there are other ways to understand intimacy, desire, eroticism and love outside of heteronormativity. Reading Kwanda as a mirror to Xolani problematises cultural, traditional forms of masculinity that would reject the former and embrace the latter.

[11] Although this project primarily explores black queer identities, it integrates visual media on white characters to provide a broader perspective on queer identities in post-apartheid South Africa.



Figure 9: Xolani and Vija embracing by a waterfall (Trengove, 2017)

Matebeni (2011:7-307) asserts that "work on black [queer people] living in Johannesburg shows how [they] remain resilient", suggesting that despite the shadow of violence and fear, queer people fight to assert their identities and to challenge erasure. This is demonstrated in both films discussed in this chapter, as both films offer what Andrews (2021b) describes as "[new] possibilities for disentangling [gender] from heterosexist ideologies". The representation of diverse sexualities in these films presents a counter-narrative to dominant patriarchal gender norms. Andrews (2021b) argues that "[s]ubversive films, which represent the 'outsider' existing within patriarchal social spaces or the patriarch negotiating queer identities and experiences, can offer powerful deconstructions of hegemonic [gender norms]". This suggest that to think of marginalised sexualities as belonging, as already present in spaces that exclude them, challenges narratives that only represent queer people as vulnerable outsiders. Imagining these acts as authentically African, masculine and both vulnerable and powerful, is a queer move that deconstructs patriarchal notions and can offer possibilities for greater inclusivity in South Africa. Visibilising these black queer intimacies is an important part of the transgression found in these films. In *Inxeba*, Xolani and Vija are found by Kwanda naked in an intimate embrace by Kwanda, with Vija's body tightly holding Xolani's body, and in *While you Weren't Looking,* Shado is found in her room after a sexual encounter with Asanda, exposing the concealed intimacies to spectators in the film but also to viewers

who might reject or be "offended" by these images. However, these intimacies in spaces that police and repudiate them, including the initiation setting that finds homosexuality as sacrilegious to Xhosa culture and tradition and townships spaces that deem homosexuality as unAfrican, disrupt dominant gender norms. Thus, queer intimacies displayed in these films frame queer experiences as belonging in these spaces and as African.

In the film *While You Weren't Looking*, Shado's brother Babalo attempts to police Shado's gender performativity. Babalo sees no problem with his behaviour as someone who commits crime when he is reprimanded by Shado, and instead seeks to silence Shado by pointing out her nonnormative gender performativity. Babalo sees Shado's bodily performance, as a masculine-presenting lesbian, as detrimental not only to the community but also to her safety.

> Babalo (Shado's brother): "Ohh okanye ucinguba ento ozenza apha ekasi andiziboni, hiyeke lento yakho yokuvaya apha ekasi ebusuku ewe unxibe ngoluhlobo ulilo mfondini, Jonga uzungathi andikuxelelanga uzokwenzakala apha elotion" [Ohh you think I cannot see what you are doing around the community, stop the act of walking around at night, dress up in this way, listen do not say I did not tell you, you will get hurt] (Stewart, 2015)

In this scene, Babalo directly justifies the horrific acts of violence as punitive or corrective, and frames these as acts that queer people called upon themselves through their performativities. This speaks to Muholi's (2013: 122) argument that "the rape of [black queer women by heterosexual men] reconsolidates and reinforces African women's identity as heterosexuals, as mothers, and as women". Babalo issues a threat to Shado performativity or "ngoluhlobo ulilo*"* (The way you are), suggesting that to be violated as result of being "other" in the society is justifiable.



Figure 10: Asanda and Shado intimately kissing in a club (Stewart, 2015)

Muholi (2010) asserts that to live in South Africa as a queer woman, is to live in fear, suggesting that vulnerability to hate crimes has become a binding factor for the queer female community in particular. Hate crimes, specifically "curative" rapes and the murder of lesbians, have become etched in queer people's consciousness. However, there also seem to be intersections of race and class at play in how lesbian characters are cast as unAfrican and outsiders. This is visible in a scene when Beauty, who works as a housekeeper for Dez and Terri, emphasises to with Terri that lesbian women like Shado often cause "trouble" in communities and are considered "wrong". However, Beauty does not frame Terri negatively despite her also being a lesbian, which might both indicate that she sees queer sexualities as linked to wealth or whiteness, but also she might fear losing her job for offending Terri. Thus, her displeasure with Shado as queer emanates from the idea that Shado is distorting African black culture and tradition, and also can be openly stated because of Shado's socioeconomic position. Arguably, even though Beauty seems concerned about Asanda's safety when spending time with a queer person who she sees as "trouble", Beauty is more concerned about the transgression against African heteronormative culture. Beauty emphasises that Terri is different from Shado, presumably due to being white and wealthy, and Shado's performativity and belonging must be questioned and monitored. The conversation between Beauty and Terri is illuminating of these dynamics:

> Beauty: "That girl!!, trouble"
>
> Terri: "Why do you say that?"
>
> Beauty: "I know girls like her at the township, and the things they do, not our culture"
>
> Terri: "Beauty we live like that"
>
> Beauty: "But you different" (Stewart, 2015)

Lewis (2016) claims that queer bodies have often been positioned in proximity to *pain*, and spaces they find themselves in have been hostile and threatening. This is what Butler (1987: 24) questions by asking: "In case of desire, […] what kind of world makes desire possible?" Thus, it can be argued that Terri's response to Beauty about "[living] like that" demonstrates not only the interconnectedness of desire and intimacies, but highlights intersectional concerns surrounding various racialised queer identities and their experiences. Terri tries to position Shado as similarly part of a shared queer belonging, despite the privileged position that Terri speaks from. Although diverse sexualities linked to "pain" and seen as vulnerable, consistent verbal and physical protests including the one Terri has with Beauty, enables what Muholi (2010) refers to as "furthering the work", which allows for transformation. Asanda's trip to the township to visit Shado highlights the tensions around class. Shado's friends demonstrate a type of othering, locating Asanda as privileged and therefore not the "same" as them. Asanda is seen as not part of the "authentic" lived realities of the other black lesbians living in black township spaces. This also raises questions of what attracts Asanda to Shado; is it the "danger" of township life, the almost privileged fetishization of a poor black body, or is there something that she really likes about Shado? How does Asanda relate to her "blackness" and to vulnerability as a black lesbian? What would Beauty say about her as she is also a black woman, unlike her adoptive parents? Is she also "different" from the township women who have to conform to gender norms? Then, what is the real dividing line, race or class? These questions linger at the end of the film, and demonstrate the uneasy positioning of black queer bodies in postapartheid South Africa despite moves to forge new types of belonging and to challenge discourses of vulnerability.

Even though there is an acknowledgement in both films of queer people as vulnerable to violence and oppression, it is essential to highlight queer narratives that also speak of pleasure, intimacy and love, which the characters in these films show. This kind of positive

projection of queer experiences allows for queer people to feel belonging in South African spaces. The two films ask: can there be alternative narratives of queer people in South Africa, across city, township and rural spaces? Can there be narratives of freedom despite (or in addition to) narratives of pain and violence?

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This research project explored how black queer people are represented in film, visual media and other related texts in postapartheid South Africa, and the ways in which these forms of representation allow for possibilities of freedom, visibility and belonging. The argument of the thesis is that vulnerability is an important component of the forms of resistance that these visual media enact, and that transgressive vulnerability is a form of power for queer people in South African visual media. Thus, the literature review has outlined debates in scholarship, creative works, historical archives and activism around the importance of queer narratives, and explored how queer people assert agency and negotiate their identities within the spaces they inhabit. As much as queer experiences and lived realities are framed within discourses of marginalisation, victimisation and minority status, the project highlighted representations of black queer people that do not solely rely on these traditional ways of representing queer experiences. These 'new' forms of queer representations, that show queer identities as authentic African identities, offer ways to challenge heteropatriarchal norms and increase visibility for queer people.

Therefore, throughout the project, queer narratives are discussed as subversive texts that challenge notions of vulnerability as weakness and that enable agential queer expression and visibility. The thesis, through a detailed literature review and theoretical framework focussing on vulnerability as the birthplace of resistance, also demonstrated how forms of queer performativity and embodied practices are essential for refiguring and claiming certain spaces. The thesis used qualitative visual content analysis to explore the framing of these queer characters or people represented in visual media. The thesis has also demonstrated how transgressiveness or resistance adopted by queer people has taken shape through the use of the films or texts under discussion. Importantly, these texts not only visibilise the queer narratives through mainstream visual media like cinema and social media platforms like YouTube, but these texts become a radical challenge to the postapartheid archive and heterosexist normative regimes that seek to erase queer experiences.

Visible queer experiences in these films, with easy accessibility for the general public, not only challenges stereotypes around queer black bodies, but also provide heterotopic spaces for queer people to reflect and "mirror" their own identities through screens (Andrews, 2021a). These films also allow us to locate and visibilise queer narratives or experiences as

authentically African, and to challenge heteropatriarchal concepts of love, gender and tradition. Furthermore, these films confront discourses of black queer people as defined through vulnerability as solely equalling victimisation, and the characters and filmmakers use vulnerability in transgressive ways to transform spaces. These films allow for new discourses of belonging for queer people, and allow them to rethink their positioning in spaces that might cast them as secondary and as outsiders.

On a personal note, although this project has been fascinating, it has also been challenging, particularly when considering inclusion and exclusion of queer people. I have questioned whether the political leaders in our country are complicit in the exclusion and violence against queer people since responses from government and leaders have been lacklustre. I have questioned whether this battle for belonging and visibility is effective, considering the homophobia, biphobia and transphobia of people in South African society, particularly township and rural spaces. Furthermore, I have questioned the validity of the constitutional mandate to protect gender and sexual minorities; is it just an abstract ideal, or does the constitution assist me and other queer people in ongoing victimisation, since reports of the murder of queer people are all too common?

Certain limitations affected this study. Since this study largely involved visual content analysis, there were issues with accessing some texts that might have broadened the scope of the study, particularly those stored in libraries, archives, museums and other venues that were closed or had restricted access due to lockdowns as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. These limitations meant that only texts available online were included for a large period of the study, and due to significant challenges with data and connectivity I faced during the lockdown in the rural area where I live, even accessing these texts was extremely difficult. A greater range of visual media could form part of future studies on black queer representation in South Africa, and scholars building on my research could also consider the idea of transgressive vulnerabilities in the lives of queer South Africans through interviews with people in township or rural communities, or through producing visual texts with queer participants, for example.

Additionally, the focus on black queer representation excluded many fascinating South African films released over the past few years that focus on white identities, such as a *Moffie* (2020), *Die Stropers (The Harvesters)* (2018), *Skoonheid* (2011) and *Kanarie* (2018). Only a few films could be explored at length, and a few others were integrated for shorter illustrations of particular points. The growing body of queer representation in South Africa

would provide ample opportunities for applying the concepts of vulnerability and space discussed in this thesis to these and other texts.

This thesis also attempted to engage closely with queer theory, including queer theory from Africa and South Africa; however, the focus on vulnerability in this thesis led to a reliance on the work of Butler that perhaps at times overwhelmed the voices of African theorists like Visser, Macharia, Matebeni, Gqola, Muholi and others. Future studies could refocus the lens of this analysis to more prominently employ African queer theory in analysing black queer visual media.

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