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Exploring Black Lesbian Sexualities and Identities In Johannesburg

Zethu Matebeni

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, 2011

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work and it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

_____

Zethu Matebeni

_____ day of _____ 2011

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my mother, Dorothy, whose encouragement, prayers, unwavering love and support from the initial to the final stage of this process enabled me to continue believing in this project. Without her total acceptance of who I am and what I do, this would have not been possible. Thank you for teaching us to be free to be who we are and to always seek happiness, love, light and laughter.

My deepest gratitude also goes to my family and many friends for their emotional and physical support, love and endurance throughout this process: Adie Vienings, Astrid Jensen, Benédicte Alliot, Billie-Jean Nieuwenhuys, Tu Huyn, Bronwynne Pereira, Busi Kheswa, Gabi Ngcobo, Henri Gunkel, Kanyisa Sodladla, Nomathemba Memela, Paul Mokgeti-Heath, Sakhumzi Mfecane, Siya Mayaba, and Thandi Matebeni.

When I started this process I was very insecure, as an academic, but also insecure about how I would represent the stories I collected. Without the academic nurturing of Ariane Vuckovic, Awino Okech, Brigitte Bagnol, Elaine Salo, Jacklyn Cock, Jane Bennett, Julia Hornberger, Khosi Xaba, Rehana Ebr-Valley, Ruth Morgan, Yvonne Shapiro, and Vasu Reddy, this thesis would have not reached conclusion. Phillippa Yaa DeVilliers, who became my writing coach in the middle of the first draft, has been a great source of inspiration. I am indebted to her for giving me the space to explore writing and teaching me to trust myself enough to write how I like.

I am deeply grateful to Eka Williams of the Ford Foundation for the generous grant to the University of Amsterdam. My sincere gratitude also goes to the colleagues at the LGBT Studies at Yale University for granting me the most precious and rewarding time as a Visiting Assistant in Research.

WISER has been an enriching academic home. I am blessed and honoured to have been one of the fellows at WISER and am heartily thankful to Deborah Posel, John Hyslop, Achille Mbembe, Najibha Deshmukh, Adila Deshmukh, Josephine Mashaba, the PhD fellows and other colleagues at WISER for creating a stimulating and encouraging environment. The rewards of being at WISER have been beyond measure.

This would not have been possible without my Supervisors: Irma DuPlessis, Sarah Nuttall and Graeme Reid. It was them who encouraged me to breathe and let myself go in the writing. Even at the most vulnerable of times, I felt totally safe in their guidance and feedback. A deep thank you goes to them.

Most importantly I want to thank the people who shared their lives and stories with me: Maphefo Mthombeni, Makhosi Ndlovu, Thuli Madi, Lesego Magwai, Lesego Masike, Nonhlanhla Zwane, Joyce Malope, Jomo Nkabinde, Smilo, Mary Louw, Gugu, Tebogo Nkoana, Ntatheng Mlambiso, Yolisa Matu, Lerato, Matshidiso Mofokeng, Esther Ntuli and many others who chose not to be named. This would have never happened without you. Thank you for teaching me about life, friendship, love and myself. This is for you, for your resilience and your enduring love!

Contents

Declaration **1**

Acknowledgements **2**

CHAPTER ONE: Exploring Identities **6**
- **Introduction** **6**
- **Feminist: "…I do not want to call myself that"** **9**
- **Mapping the terrain** **25**
  - *Identity* 26
  - *African Feminism(s)* 30
  - *Lesbian: theoretical stances* 36
  - *Race* 50
- **Conclusion** **55**
- **Chapter Outline** **58**

CHAPTER TWO: Reflections On 'Fieldwork' **61**
- **Introduction** **61**
- **Positioned in the field** **62**
- **The nature of the field** **67**
- **Johannesburg as the field** **69**
  - *Recruiting and selecting participants* 73
  - *Conducting life story interviews* 80
  - *Archival material* 87
  - *Ethical Considerations* 89
- **Dynamics and Implications of fieldwork "at home"** **92**
- **Analysing data** **100**
- **Conclusion** **102**

CHAPTER THREE: OUTing The City **104**
- **Introduction** **104**
- **Locating Johannesburg: 'Joburg, Jozi, Town'** **107**
- **Race, class, consumption and sexuality in Johannesburg** **109**
  - *Race and class in the apartheid and the post-apartheid city* 110
  - *Homosexuality and the city* 117
  - *Lesbians in the city: management of space* 120
- **Shifting modes of inhabiting space: lesbian transitions** **123**
  - *A city of contradictions: "a place of free expression, an illusion"* 125
  - *Negotiating a heteronormative space* 131
  - *Being at home* 133
  - *The malls' 'flaunters'* 134
  - *Expanding zones and boundaries: new integrations* 142
- **Concluding remarks** **146**

CHAPTER FOUR: What Violence Means To Us **148**
- **Introduction** **148**
- **Violence towards gender and sexuality** **149**
  - *When rape is "corrective/curative"* 155
- **Narrating lesbian murders** **159**
  - *A robbery gone wrong? Why they killed Eudy Simelane…* 160
  - *"Looking for their next target": outrage at the murders of Sizakele and Salome* 169
  - *While they all watched: Zoliswa Nkonyana murdered on the streets* 172

The "erasure" of lesbian identity: 'packaging' and unpacking violence 174
'Packaging' crime 177
Erasing 'lesbian' from lesbian murder 180
Conclusion **184**

CHAPTER FIVE: "**I Want To Wear In A Way That A Lady Can Look At Me And Want Me"** **188**
Introduction **188**
The use of style **190**
Localized lesbian styles: class, cultural expressions and race 192
Styling to conceal 199
In Contest: Lesbian Ladies, Kings and Queens **201**
"I'd like to see you playing, but also being serious about serious issues" 201
"Miss Naughty by Nature" 206
"Amadod'ethu!" Our Men! 207
"All a person needs is confidence" 210
Making sense of the contests **214**
Representations of butch and femme: forms of subversion, eroticism and agency **217**
Butch and femme under threat? 223
The many faces of butch and femme: everyday experiences of black lesbians **225**
Disrupting 'butch' and 'femme' 226
Beyond butch and femme… 234
Conclusion **236**

CHAPTER SIX: "It's All About 50|50": Sex, Intimacy And Pleasure In Lesbian Relationships **237**
Introduction **237**
Pain and pleasure: researching lesbian sexuality **242**
Some critical trends in literature on female same-sex intimacy **246**
Attraction, desire and sexual pleasure **263**
"…Any woman, whether you're butch or femme - I go for 50|50: you do me I do you. It's just how it is." 270
Conclusion **280**

CONCLUSIONS **282**

Bibliography **288**

CHAPTER ONE: Exploring Identities

Introduction

This thesis tracks its journey from 1999, when as a young graduate student I arrived in Pretoria from the Eastern Cape to join a network of women who were exploring their diverse histories and backgrounds and looking for an institutional context in which to do so. We met at *Ikhaya Lothingo* (Home of the Rainbow) in Sunnyside, Pretoria, what has now become the organization OUT LGBT[1] Wellbeing. Diverse in our composition (young, mid-age and older women), different in our racial and cultural classifications, our political associations as well as our sexual orientations, we formed the *Uthingo Women's Group* – a group whose life-span ran close to 10 years. It was in this grouping that my own sexual orientation and sexual identity was questioned and defined, by myself and others, even if very loosely at first. In the same year I encountered feminism, an ideology whose exposure until then had been only through University textbooks, as a personal question. Through *Uthingo,* I was exposed to women who called themselves radical feminists and African feminists, and I had to choose and account for a branch of feminism to which I felt attached. This was not an easy task, as I will explore later in this chapter.

[1] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

That same year ILGA[2] (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) hosted its 19th World Conference in Johannesburg, the first time that the conference had been organized on African soil. The conference culminated in the election of a black lesbian from Johannesburg as the Association's Secretary General. Although unrelated, and not realized by me at the time, these two moments (personal exposure to feminism and representation of black lesbians at an International lesbian and gay body), would resonate throughout my adult life.

It was only in 2007 when I started this research that I became conscious of what it meant to be part of *Uthingo Women's Group* and the meaning of an ILGA conference in Johannesburg. Both these moments culminated in a 'rupture' that is unraveled throughout this thesis. At the initial phase of this research, I was determined not to focus on feminism or race issues, in particular blackness. I thought it best to leave out feminism because my own position in relation to feminism was ambivalent and 'troubled' – troubled by what feminism presented in my own life as a black lesbian in South Africa and feminism's contentious position in the continent and other similar contexts, often viewed as a Western construct[3]. To some extent, I felt that feminism(s) had very little resonance in my life and I would rarely encounter it in my day-to-day existence, a feeling possibly arising out of the fear of what claiming a feminist ideology brings about.

[2]The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), founded in 1978 is a world-wide network of national and local groups dedicated to achieving equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people everywhere.

[3] Uma Narayan (2008) provides a thoughtful critique of this view and the position that women in Third-World contexts find themselves in when relating to feminism. Narayan's arguments resonate with some of my own initial and current thoughts and feelings about feminism or being seen as a feminist.

At the same time I felt that blackness was an obvious identity and category that required no explanation or exploration, having grown up in the Eastern Cape under the tutelage of Black Consciousness and the African National Congress. As the research developed, it became clear that omitting both feminism and issues of blackness and race in a study concerned with exploring black lesbian identities and sexualities in Johannesburg would not only be an oxymoron, but would also undermine the importance these two issues play in relation to black lesbian lives. In actual fact my own positions became strongly challenged as I began to see the centrality of feminism(s) and blackness not only in my life, but also in this research. This thesis explores these identities and sexualities in Johannesburg, paying attention to the meanings of multiple identities of race, class, gender and sexual identity among black lesbians.

This chapter starts with an exploration of feminism and feminism's position in relation to lesbians in Africa through a detailed description of one moment where feminism's interplay with lesbianism and transgender issues become sharply visible. This takes place at a *Leadership Institute* held in Maputo in 2008 on *Building Lesbian Feminist Thinkers and Leaders for the 21st Century: Feminist Response to Patriarchy and Homophobia in Africa.* This *Institute* offers a compelling starting point for this thesis, not only because it dramatizes the complexities of gender, sexuality and other identity politics, but also because it locates these locally, regionally and globally. Further, it points to how the interplay between feminism,

gender, sexuality, class and race is a complex and layered one. Although this debate is not new, as experience among feminists from many contexts shows (Moffett, 2008; Narayan, 2008 and Reddy, 2004) an interesting turn that focuses on (lesbian) identity, silence, safety and national politics emanates from the *Institute.*

An account of the *Institute* provides for an easily navigable entry point to this thesis, as it introduces many of the concepts used and arguments developed throughout. As a result, the second part of this chapter is concerned with the different analytical categories used throughout this thesis: lesbian, black[4], and identity. This section grapples with theoretical shifts relating to each of these categories while locating them in South Africa and beyond, as well as the contested meanings and even usefulness, of identity itself. The chapter then tackles two tasks, which recur in the remainder of this thesis: it battles with the complexities and contestations of gender, race, class and sexual identities as well as 'opening-up' the category lesbian through a range of experiences, forms of intimacy, and through a politics of nuanced localized gender, race, space and class structures.

Feminist: "...I do not want to call myself that"

Flight SA 142 at the Johannesburg OR Tambo International Airport to Maputo is packed with businessmen and women, diplomats and dignitaries jetting off to high-

[4] This thesis focuses mainly on the experiences of African lesbians in South Africa. However, I use the terminology black, following popular discourses, and noting how black Africans are the majority of blacks in South Africa.

powered meetings. We have all been invited to attend a five-day *Institute* in Maputo on *Building Lesbian Feminist Thinkers and Leaders for the 21st Century: Feminist Response to Patriarchy and Homophobia in Africa.* The Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)[5] decided to host its third Leadership *Institute* in 2008 in Mozambique.

LAMBDA, a Mozambican organization for sexual minority rights and member of CAL, facilitated the logistics for the five-day *Institute,* which attracted more than sixty delegates from all regions in the African continent, the majority from South Africa[6]. CAL, a network of organizations, is the first African body that seeks to be ''the voice and face'' of African lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women. The leadership *Institute* is one of the ways in which CAL aims to ''build the capacity of African lesbians and organisations.'' CAL does this through utilizing ''African radical feminist analysis in all spheres of life,'' according to its constitution.

Participants were invited through various organizations across Africa that are affiliated with the coalition or are part of the broader LGBTI[7] sector. While the institute remained specific to lesbian and feminist participants, various individuals and groups that did not identify as lesbian or feminist were present. Included in the

[5] The Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL), founded in 2003, is a network of organizations committed to African lesbian equality and visibility. CAL is the first non-profit organization in Africa to work on the equality of lesbian women at a continental level. It is a membership-based organization open to both individuals and organizations working to support the equality of African lesbians. The funders include international donors such as: MamaCash, Global Fund for Women, Sigrid Rausing Trust, The Astrea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, Heinrich Böll Stiftung and HIVOS. CAL operates through a Secretariat, which is located in Johannesburg.

[6] Participants were representatives of: South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Namibia and Botswana

[7] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex

groups and individuals were transgender men, commercial sex workers, and bisexual women.

I was travelling with three other colleagues working in LGBT organizations in South Africa who were invited to represent their organizations. My invitation was of a special nature. I was the only participant not representing any organization at this meeting, but having been well known as an activist, researcher and former board member of a lesbian organization in South Africa, I was allowed to attend the *Institute.*

A gathering of this nature may be easier to imagine taking place in South Africa than anywhere else in the continent (given South Africa's relaxed Constitution on lesbian and gay equality as well as the number of participants representing South Africa). Mozambique, however, was strategically selected to host this *Institute*. A neighbouring country to South Africa, it is one of the many African countries where homosexuality is illegal. The penal code of September 16, 1886's articles 70 and 71 impose security measures on "people who habitually practice acts against the order of nature" and is still in existence. The code criminalizes both sexual acts between two women and sexual acts between two men. Unlike its constitutionally progressive neighbour, Mozambique has 'not witnessed' violence, crimes or anti-gay action by authorities towards homosexual people because of their sexual behaviour or orientation[8] (LAMBDA Mozambique). Mozambiçan organizers of the *Institute*

[8] In the next chapters I explore the different ways in which homosexuality has, in the past and currently, been exposed to various forms of violation in South Africa.

claimed Maputo was "quite a safe city", a notion almost foreign to many South Africans.

Airbus 319 lands at Maputo International Airport an hour and fifteen minutes later. The air is hot, with a sweet exotic smell. It is a short walk from the plane to the airport doors, where an airport official welcomes us. The official walks towards the four of us. Noting her dress code, the way she walks and her masculine frame, we look at her and each other smiling and say in unison, "she is a dyke.[9]" Moira, the official, approaches, shakes our hands and asks us to locate our names on the list she is carrying. Like us, she too has probably spotted our 'gayness' or assumed that four women with short and strangely styled hair, and travelling without male company should be coming to a "special kind" of visit. We are not carrying any placards or posters to identify ourselves. As we tick our names off Moira's list, we spot two other colleagues from Ghana and Senegal we have been with at LGBT conferences and gatherings in other parts of the world. They are elegantly dressed in their traditional wear.

Moira collects our passports and walks across the airport hallways to get them stamped while we wait for luggage. I am struck by how Moira moves her small and masculine frame with confidence and authority. In the airport halls, she was the

[9] Moira's presentation of self and my own reading of Moira is a poignant moment for me (and my colleagues) as it suggests a reading of her body as lesbian, and thus our own 'safety' at the airport. I am cautious in saying this, as it should not be assumed that all women who look like/present themselves like Moira should be assumed lesbian. In Chapters Five and Six I develop this line of argument further, suggesting the way style (dress, clothes, demeanour, stance and gender role) reconfigures gender assumptions, as well as spaces.

only female official. Without her short plaited hair, it might have been impossible to tell her apart from the other male officials. In this very male-dominated space, Moira seemed to be at ease. There was something intriguing about Moira's authority and position. She perfected her role as an official and looked identical to her male colleagues. Her pointed black shiny shoes, green shirt and straight-fitting pants dressed her body as comfortably as it did theirs. Although her 'dykeness' mesmerized, in this space Moira was competently performing another role.

We were escorted to our bus that had been waiting outside with a few familiar faces. Pati, a research participant I had interviewed many times during my fieldwork in Johannesburg, was among those who came to pick us up. She had travelled a few days earlier to help with organizing the *Institute.* Pati was dressed in comfortable khaki men's pants and a black short-sleeved t-shirt with the word 'feminist' printed in bold white colour. Immediately we saw each other, she started telling me about how people gazed at her and commented about the way she had been dressed the previous night. She had put on her best men's suit for the opening ceremony of the *Institute*. Some patrons at the hotel where they were staying were puzzled by her look and this angered her. How could they be so insensitive about her style and dress when "they knew the kind of event taking place at the venue?" she asked.

It is a twenty-minute ride from the airport to Hotel Girassol in central Maputo. Like most of the architecture in the city, the hotel relies on colonial Portuguese design with modern-style finishing inside. The hotel reception and halls were full of large

posters and banners of the *Institute* and its content in English, French and Portuguese, representing the diverse participants from more than ten African countries. It was impossible for any patron in the hotel to miss that this gathering was for lesbians and feminists and was concerned with "dismantling patriarchy and homophobia in Africa" (as the posters read).

Having never attended such *Institute*s before, or been 'developed' into a lesbian feminist leader, I wondered and was curious, possibly skeptical, about how such 'building' would take place. The hotel conference room was filled with more than sixty participants from a number of African countries. Many identified as lesbian and/or feminist, including transgender men, heterosexual women, a transgender[10] woman and bisexual women. The *Institute* introduced participants to a concept of African Feminism, as prescribed in the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists (*Charter*) developed by the African Feminist Forum (AFF, 2006).[11] My skepticism was further ignited.

I was reminded of a newspaper article published by *The Heritage,* a Ghanaian newspaper, during a conference hosted by the AFF in Accra two years earlier. The newspaper had as its headlines and front-page article "After Blockade of Gay Conference Lesbians Meet in Accra. They meet as NGO for Women's

[10] In broad terms transgender people are individuals whose gender expression and/or gender identity differs from conventional expectations based on the physical sex they were born into.

[11] The AFF Charter of Feminist Principles was launched at the 3rd International Feminist Dialogue in Accra, Ghana in 2006. http://wwwafricafeministforum.org

Empowerment.[12]" Reading the article, I was surprised by the journalist's pre-occupation and fascination with lesbians, particularly from South Africa, who were only a handful of the eighty participants attending the AFF conference. The article singled out South African lesbians and described them as "beautiful and ugly, tall and short" and "come from a country where they claim their rights are violated". The latter statement brought an uncomfortable realization that some Africans frown on the lax human rights laws in South Africa[13]. Use of the term 'claim' implies that it is ludicrous for certain groups to state injustice, especially when such groups should not in the first place be accessing the human rights available to all South Africans. Not only was the article disturbing for its sensationalist tone and ludicrous representation of lesbians. It also neglected to mention the conference's main content: 'feminist' or 'feminism'. The article's omission of the words 'feminism' and 'feminist' forced me to wonder about the relevance and position of feminism in Africa as well as the general silence about feminism in many parts of the continent, including South Africa.

A similar kind of silence loomed in the Maputo *Institute*'s hotel hall, with its sixty participants. Engaging with feminism was difficult, more so when prescribed by a feminist *Charter* that said nothing about lesbians, bisexuals or transgender people.

[12] Ana Karimatu, ''After Blockade of Gay Conference Lesbians Meet in Accra,'' The Heritage, November 20, 2006. The NGO referred to is Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), an organization in Johannesburg serving and promoting rights of black lesbians in South Africa. The journalist had interviewed one of the founding members of the organization. The AFF meeting took place after the Ghanaian government refused hosting a gay conference.

[13] In a newspaper article "Is Qwelane good for Uganda? There must be a better ambassador for SA" by Liesl Gerntholtz and Dipika Nath (2010) the two question the meaning of the appointment of one of South Africa's homophobic journalists as ambassador for South Africa in Uganda. They further question how South Africa's equal rights policies are viewed by other African states.

This made me wonder about the usefulness of feminism in relation to lesbian lives in Africa.

The implication was that to understand how to be an African Feminist is to master and adopt the *Charter*, which starts by naming and defining feminists, and recognizing the diversity of those who call themselves African feminists:

> "By naming ourselves as Feminists we politicize the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African Feminists. We are African women—we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with 'Ifs', 'Buts,' or 'However'. We are Feminists. Full stop." (African Feminist Charter)

The hotel hall room erupted, participants became uncomfortable and an unsettled air filled the room. It soon became clear that this naming of feminism was causing some discontent among the *Institute's* participants. Participants felt that this conceptualization of a feminist was too rigid because it implied that adopting African feminism is more valued than other categories. '"Ifs', 'Buts,' or 'However'" were interpreted to mean that one is feminist only to the exclusion of all other categories and a feminist category had to stand alone. One participant, after going through the principles of feminism, as specified in the *Charter*, said ''I agree with

some of the principles of feminism, BUT from what I've seen with regards to feminists, I do not want to call myself that.'' The participant's statement was not surprising for a number of reasons: most of the *Institute's* presenters conversant with feminist ideology were unlike the majority of the participants. Some were directors of organisations in their countries, thus of higher social status; or they were the few white and coloured participants at the *Institute.* Their positions suggested that (and were read as meaning that) feminism was more accessible to them than the majority of black participants who were volunteers or non-management staff in their organisations. These differences highlighted the racial and class divisions that have long existed among feminists in other parts of the world.

Engaging a diverse group of participants with a mode of feminism silent about their existence proved problematic. Participants felt silenced and alienated by a mode of feminism that seemed not to recognize their differences as lesbians, transgender people, sex workers or bisexual women. Furthermore, the language used by feminism assumed that participants would easily grasp some of the commonly used terms, such as 'patriarchy' and even feminism. Such language similarly seemed alienating for the second- or third-language speakers in English, Portuguese, and French. These concepts had to be thoroughly 'work shopped' and discussed through a series of exercises. Many of the participants also could not understand why they had to spend their time and energies ''dismantling patriarchy'' when they could ''barely survive'', as some put it. The debates about African feminism further failed

to 'lift the veil' on race issues, particularly on blackness. Only during a discussion on lesbian experiences across the continent were debates on race and nationality given a platform. Around feminism, silence on these various categories was conspicuous.

It became quickly evident that a discussion on feminism that excluded a range of experiences and sexualities would not win. Participants were eager to talk about their own experiences in their countries or host countries. What seemed like a boxing match between self-acclaimed lesbian-feminists mainly from South Africa and Namibia and trans men[14] from Uganda, Zambia, South Africa and Botswana though very difficult and emotionally charged, animated this discussion[15]. The heated discussions quickly turned towards debating gender presentations and role-taking.

Lesbian-feminists rejected any lesbians taking roles, particularly butch and femme roles[16] that they claimed many of the participants at the *Institute* exhibited. They argued such roles mimic patriarchy, a system whose dismantling was at the heart of the feminist project. These assertions of butch and femme mimicry were only met with giggles and sighs of disagreement from the floor. It was difficult to ascertain the meanings of the sighs. Although it became clear that there were disagreements with

[14] Trans men or sometime called (FTM-female to male) is a transsexual man: a person who was assigned a female sex at birth, but who identifies as male (and does not necessarily change themselves physically).

[15] What brought about this 'boxing match' was firstly the way in which feminism was made synonymous to lesbian and how these two seemed to be positioned next to each other (lesbian-feminist). Secondly it was how lesbian-feminism was positioned as rejecting trans identities.

[16] Butch and femme are terms often used to loosely describe lesbians' approximate adherence to traditional masculine and feminine gender roles respectively. These terms will be developed and problematised throughout this thesis.

what lesbian-feminists claimed, none of these claims were openly challenged. Participants kept quiet in their discomforts, but the silence suggested layered and complex meanings, which were too easily and simplistically refuted by a rejection of butch and femme.

Lesbian-feminists further argued against trans men's involvement and participation in the *Institute* as well as in African feminist structures. This baffled many of the transgender participants who were invited by the organizing body. The *Charter* makes a strong statement about men's leadership positions in feminist organisations. It states "Women's organizations and networks should be led and managed by women. It is a contradiction of feminist leadership principles to have men leading, managing and being spokespersons for women's organizations." This caused obvious commotion, as many participants at the *Institute* read this statement as challenging trans men's involvement in lesbian and feminist organisations. Trans men were rejected in such spaces because they were not only seen as 'men' but also as beneficiaries of patriarchy. Another boxing match exploded as these associations of trans men's positions were not received lightly. Trans men defended their positions by arguing how lesbian groups and organizations have used trans people's visibility, without recognizing their struggles, to advance lesbian and gay agendas. Many of the trans men were members of lesbian organizations, leading them and managing programs advancing lesbian issues[17]. They further shared how in their

[17] Here it should be noted that the trans movement is a fairly new movement in South Africa and in the rest of the continent. South Africa now has the first non-profit organization for trans people, Gender Dynamix, officially registered in September 2006. This organization has brought rise to a vibrant trans movement/organizing in the continent (see http://africatransvoice.blogspot.com/). It

intimate relationships with some lesbians and heterosexual women, their partners compel them to portray a particular type of masculinity within relationships. Many claimed to be resisting this coercion and "hegemonic masculinity[18]" for a different way of being 'men' and transforming or creating masculinities that are sensitive to what it means to be women. The debates around trans men's inclusion and involvement in feminist work and in the *Institute* in particular could not be resolved, forcing many of the trans men to leave the room in total anger and annoyance, with some even asking "why are we here then?"

After a heated and possibly damaging discussion about transgender issues and the inclusion of trans men in the *Institute* – another similarly challenging discussion emanated about the category lesbian. Like trans 'identities', lesbian 'identities' were not addressed in the *Charter*, which was used as a tool and guideline for discussing African feminism. Although it seemed the *Charter* was silent about lesbians, lesbian-feminists argued that the clause "freedom of choice and autonomy"[19] in the *Charter* is inclusive of sexual freedom and sexual orientation.

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should also be noted that most Trans people in South Africa started out getting involved or associating with the Lesbian and Gay movement in various ways, although this is changing with Trans visibility.

[18] Although this was not the actual phrasing used, trans participants at the *Institute* referred to a form of masculinity that positions women as men's subordinates. I borrow this term from R.W. Connell (2008).

[19] One of the ethics that the *Charter* proposes for African Feminists is "Freedom of choice and autonomy regarding bodily integrity issues, including reproductive rights, abortion, sexual identity and sexual orientation." Robert W Connell, "Gender as a Social Practice," in *The New Social Theory Reader*, 369-375 (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Though no conclusion or definition could be reached about who is a feminist or lesbian, interesting experiences were discussed about what it means to be lesbian in various countries. These were all generally experiences relating to safety and protection of those who name themselves lesbian and claim a lesbian identity in their country. A participant from Ghana stated how in her country they use the commonly known language of 'supi' to refer to their lesbian relationships. She argued it was safer to use the socially acceptable term 'supi' than lesbian, as 'supi' was less threatening[20].

Other participants from Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, Kenya and Uganda pointed out the difficulties of living openly as lesbians or to be gender non-conforming in their countries. Many have and continue to face criminal charges, forcing some of them to seek refuge in countries such as South Africa, America or Canada. The response of national governments and their officials made living a full lesbian (or gay) life in some countries unbearable. Participants stated how they had been named various derogatory terms and considered an "abomination, worse than pigs and dogs"[21].

Participants from South Africa referred to the difficulties black lesbians face in South Africa with the rise of hate crimes and "corrective/curative" rape towards

[20] Girls at boarding schools or women in Ghana forge 'supi' relationships, or rather practices, which may or may not be sexual in nature. Rather than referring to these relationships as lesbian, Ghanaian women use 'supi' to conceal their same-sex relationships so as to avoid homophobic sentiments, but also to enjoy and claim these relationships without interference. Chapter Six further explores 'supi' relationships in Ghana.

[21] The Zimbabwean president is notorious for lashing out against lesbians and gay people in his country. Similarly state officials from Namibia, Kenya, Zambia and Uganda have called for "arrest on sight," of all lesbian and gay people; and have called gays and lesbians "top enemies of the national government"; and "external threats". Marc Epprecht (2004) elaborates the discussion on African statesmen's responses to gay and lesbian people.

lesbians – a form of rape that is 'intended to "cure" lesbians' of their 'aberrant' sexuality[22]. For many participants at the *Institute,* these defined the meaning of being lesbian in Africa: a constant challenge and negotiation between realizing one's full identities and withstanding the risk of being violated or criminalized.

For the participants living in Mozambique, these experiences were shocking and unimaginable in their country as they had never heard of violence towards lesbian and gay people or criminalization of same-sex acts, although the latter were still in their Statutes. Officials in Mozambique seemed quite lax about gay and lesbian issues, and were even supportive of the *Institute.* To the surprise of many at the *Institute*, Mozambique National TV sensitively covered the *Institute* during prime time news. This showed how national government was in support of the *Institute* being hosted in their country as well as the way in which lesbian rights were articulated as human rights on national television.

As the day ended, the discussion focused on a lengthy exploration of transgender and transsexual struggles in Africa. The idea of the discussion was to offer a feminist analysis of transgender and transsexual struggles in Africa. It is still unclear what such an analysis offers. What is clear is that a very forceful and critical transgender 'movement' in Africa was advanced through the debates at the *Institute.* Many trans people related personal stories of struggle and humiliation they have faced in their countries and personal lives. They also talked about how they have showed

[22] Chapter Four explores "corrective/curative" rape and engages with debates relating to violence towards black lesbians in South Africa.

resilience and in some cases sued governments for victimization and illegal conduct[23].

The *Institute* ended with mixed emotions, with trans people feeling excluded from lesbian-feminist organizing and lesbian-feminists feeling a great sense of accomplishment, having organized a successful and well-attended *Institute.* The latter's accomplishment was also affirmed by some who stated that they would name themselves feminist or advance the feminist agenda in their own contexts. What remained unclear was the position of those lesbians not necessarily attaching themselves to feminism and other participants who were neither lesbian nor feminist nor transgender. For some, the majority of the discussions were similarly alienating and many maintained their own silences.

Participating in this conference surprisingly revealed to me that even within (certain) lesbian and feminist circles, there are hegemonic generalizations and essentialisms that assume a unified interpretation of the categories lesbian and feminist. Such generalizations efface the problems, perspectives and political concerns of women marginalized because of their class, gender, race, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. This *Institute* raised questions about the kind of

[23]One participant, Ugandan (transgender lesbian) activist Victor Mukasa explained how he had sued the attorney general following a 2005 raid at his home in which documents were seized and his friend Yvonne Oyoo was arrested, assaulted and sexually harassed. Mukasa was not present at the time of the raid. In a landmark victory, the High Court of Uganda ruled in December 22, 2008 that constitutional rights apply to LGBT people and that the actions of the government officials that molested Victor Mukasa and Oyoo were unconstitutional, inhuman, and should be condemned. Victor had won the lawsuit.

lesbian subject that such an *Institute* relies on. It appeared to me that the lesbian subject that such an *Institute* intimates is one who cannot accommodate a multi-layered experience, a subject whose experience is rigid and frozen in the face of feminist ideology. This is clearly in contradiction to the narratives of many of the participants present at the *Institute* and the many whose lives are the focus of this thesis.

The irony of this, however, is that such *Institute*s, even though relying on essentialisms and 'unifying' categories, remain the few spaces freely accessible and able to accommodate diversities among Africans, lesbians, and feminists, and where you can be all and none of these categories. This *Institute* made clear that feminism, lesbianism, and transgender, as political and social categories need to be further interrogated and made more easily accessible, relevant and understandable in dynamic and political terms. Feminist interventions though should be cautious about their own 'false' achievements, which may go unnoticed, such as counting the number of feminists by the distribution of free t-shirts with slogans 'feminist'. If such interventions continue without a thorough reading of the context, then they would miss the telling sentiments of many participants of such *Institute*s:

''We're not feminists, but we'll take the free T-shirts!''

On the flight back to Johannesburg I pondered my own participation and impressions of the five-day *Institute.* The five days in Maputo were both liberating and frustrating: liberating because the city allowed one to roam around the streets

freely and feel quite safe. At the same time I felt frustrated by the outcome of the *Institute.* I left Maputo with the same sense of skepticism about feminism with which I arrived. To my slight annoyance, I felt not only 'un-developed' in lesbian-feminist thinking and leadership, but also uncertain of where lesbian politics in Africa could be located. These made me further question my already 'troubled' association with feminism(s). Concurrently I felt encouraged about advancing this research, and exploring many of the questions that remained unanswered and sometimes unasked at the *Institute.* The next sections and chapters in this thesis explore many of these questions.

Mapping the terrain

In the discussion of the *Institute* above, a number of concepts surface, including lesbian, feminism, blackness, and identity. These have been referred to without any speculation or analysis. In the next sections, attention is paid to all these concepts, evoking their use as theoretical and social constructs. The discourse employed almost invariably draws on the notion of 'identity'. In the first instance, I unpack this concept and its varied meanings and consider its analytical usefulness. I subsequently outline the feminist project and the key critiques that have been rendered against it from within. Then, I position lesbian as an important and significant category in the female same-sex scholarship in Africa and beyond. Within

this scholarship, I highlight the importance of focusing on black lesbian as a category that emphasizes the relevance of scholarship on race and blackness in South Africa.

Identity

Different positions can be called upon to understand 'identity'. As a starting point, Giddens (1991:54) offers an understanding of a person's identity as "not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going". Drawing from Charles Taylor, Giddens concurs that one has to have a notion of how s/he has become that person and where they are going to have a sense of who they are.

Numerous positions contest identity as a concept because it is difficult to pin down. Cooper and Brubacker (2005:59) see identity as a trap, a virtual thing and impossible to define empirically. They question whether what Giddens and many others refer to as 'identity' could be something else or explained using different terms that may do the actual work of the process described. They argue that identity can mean "too much, too little, or nothing at all". Not only does their argument allude to what Muñoz (1999:5) sees as "the fiction of identity" but also suggests that 'identity' is highly contested, it is uncertain. The term is ambiguous; its meanings are contradictory, and "encumbered by reifying connotations". Attaching adjectives such as: "fluid, multiple or negotiated" to identity further "traps one in the word" (Cooper and Brubacker, 2005:89).

In its different usage identity can highlight both "sameness and difference", or even reject the idea of essential sameness. For Cooper and Brubacker (2005:66, 71-88) this suggests the "elusive" nature of identity. It is for these reasons that they suggest alternatives that might stand in for 'identity' and do the theoretical work identity is supposed to do without confusing, contradictory connotations. Such terms include: identification (a relational or categorical process undertaken by self or by others); self-understanding (a subjective process); and intersectionality, which capture connectedness between other categories including class, gender, race, sex and sexual orientation.

Identity has also been rejected, along post-structuralist lines, because it can function as an "instrument of regulatory regime" and serve the language of dominant culture in a restrictive manner. In particular, Judith Butler attacks lesbian and gay identity categories and contests their meaningfulness. She sees identity categories "as sights of permanent instability" (Butler, 1993:308). This notion of 'instability' that Butler and other post-structuralists attest to, is not new, as Carol Guess (1995) and others argue (and will be explored in a later section). Referring to the category 'lesbian', Butler states that she wants to leave it permanently unclear what this sign signifies (1990:13-14). Michael Warner calls Butler's position a close association to a "post-identity stance" (Garber, 2001:187). Quoting Seidman, Green (2002:532) challenges Butler's stance as it follows the trappings of queer theorist's work, which has a

tendency of deteriorating into "vulgar anti-identity politics". Queer theory will be explored in a later section in this chapter.

A much more useful way of engaging with the contested positions of 'identity' is produced by Craig Calhoun (1994) whose theoretical historicisation and development of this analytical and descriptive concept is linked to the notion of identity politics. Calhoun starts off by noting how the "problem" of identity is a distinctively modern discourse. Evident in the social changes of modernity is the way in which identity invokes the problem of 'reflexivity' – which in turn is brought by the problems of self-recognition and recognition by others. This aspect of identity is present even in this current study, taking prominence in the second chapter, which carefully deals with reflexivity in the space of academic research and the interconnected terrain of identity categories. It is similarly played out throughout this thesis, sometimes leaving the project of identity ambiguous.

Calhoun's frame is relevant for this study in two ways: it challenges prominent rejections of "essentialism" (without necessarily elevating essentialism), and consequently argues that the struggles of identity politics should be taken seriously. Surveying identity theories (essentialism, social construction and post-structuralism) Calhoun (1994:18) argues that we cannot just quickly discard essentialism. Referring to human rights, he notes how this notion was "grounded on a presumed essential commonality of human beings" and that in essence, the claims to rights are essentialist. Similarly is how some feminist thinkers have argued for

"risking essentialism", an argument that shows that under certain political (and possibly intellectual) circumstances "self-critical claims to strong, basic and shared identity may be useful". Such circumstances would include situations where a particular category of identity (for example gender, sexual identity etc) has been subjugated or repressed in dominant discourse. As a response to this, all those labelled by that category would claim 'common' value based on their shared identity category, thus implicitly invoking identity in an essentialist way. In this way, identity becomes politically useful.

While post-structuralist projects (including queer theory, explored later), which emphasise the importance of language and propose that subjects are created by the discourse in which they are embedded, and dispense with identity, some projects reclaim it (Calhoun, 1994:19). The feminist project and gay and lesbian movements have similarly made use of identity, although not without any contention. Similarly, Calhoun (1994) argues for the retention of identity, in its use in identity politics. The struggles of identity politics include the pursuit of recognition, legitimacy (and sometimes power), not just (individual) expression or autonomy. Such a project is political because it requires others (be it groups, organizations, the state etc) to pay attention and to respond to those who refuse their identities to be reduced or displaced (Calhoun, 1994:19).

Although theoretically contested, the category of identity remains useful in daily talk and academic discourse in various ways. This is not to say that identities are stable

or coherent. On the contrary, even within these identity groups, individuals occupy different and multiple subject positions, which need to be understood. Calhoun's (1994:19) cautionary remark that "our task must be to remain seriously self-critical about our invocations of essence and identity" is of most relevance. In the next sections I explore different concepts that have, at times, been termed 'identities', among other things, for various reasons. I explore these concepts not only to show the slippery nature within each, but also to invoke their usefulness for this kind of project.

African Feminism(s)

The exploration of the *Institute* above raised questions regarding the importance and relavance of feminism and feminist positions in Africa. The *Institute* highlighted the complicated relationship between race, class, nation and gender on the continent, as well as some of the ambivalences and critiques that feminism continues to encounter in the continent. In this brief exploration of African feminism(s) I follow the same trajectory and consider the ways in which such a project is linked to the current study on black lesbian experiences.

The project of feminism strives to realise equity and justice for all women. Feminist theory relies on its commitment to knowledge production focusing on the reappropriation of women's histories and the emancipation of women (Benhabib, 2008:161). Feminism is a "refusal of oppression and a commitment to struggling for women's liberation from all forms of oppression – internal, external, psychological,

emotional, socioeconomic, political and philosophical (Amina Mama in Salo and Mama, 2001:59). Although not always explicit, there is an intrinsic relation between the feminist project and other struggles (related to race, nation, class and sexuality). I will briefly track the various debates that make these connections explicit.

Linking women's liberation to national liberation in South Africa, Hassim (2004) tracks debates about feminism within the ANC from the Nairobi Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1985. It was at this conference that the ANC reasserted its stance that "there could be no women's liberation without national liberation" (Hassim, 2004:449). This stance was also a direct challenge to a pro-American intervention that was advocating for an apolitical feminism, i.e. outside national politics. Within this discourse, Hassim argues, the feminist project for the ANC was a deeply political project, linked to national politics.

Writing in *Agenda,* a pioneering feminist publication in Southern Africa, Cheryl de la Rey (1997) recounts the debates that historicised the emergence of feminist debates in South Africa. Emanating from the "Women and Gender in Southern Africa" conference in January 1991 was the "difference debate" which brought issues of class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation into feminist theory. Race, and class to some extent, took prominence in South African debates and writings, while other categories fell through the cracks. Even the ways in which race (and class) were debated at this conference was problematic. The unitarist approach to identities

limited the ways in which women's identities are simultaneously experienced and are part of the total context (de la Rey, 1997:7).

Many feminist writers made their voices heard in *Agenda.* The publication fostered a rich and critical environment for debates on feminism. Among those were the journal's issues dedicated to African Feminism. Introducing the concept African Feminism Desiree Lewis (2001) notes two themes that have been pre-occupations of feminists in Africa: the naming and meanings of feminism in Africa, and African feminists' engagement with western feminism. Critiques of the latter issue have become of less concern, with the former taking more centre stage. Lewis titles her Introduction *African Feminisms* to allow for the myriad ways in which feminists in Africa name themselves (including names such as: womanist, black feminist, African feminist, postcolonial feminist, Third world feminist, Stiwanism[24]) and other forms of diversities that recognise geographical, racial or national differences. Lewis argues that the mobility patterns of feminists, the diversity of feminists in the continent, as well as global networking and exchanges between feminists in Africa and other parts of the world (particularly the US) make it impossible to essentialise African feminism. Similarly Gqola (2001b:17) argues how the language of naming African feminism is itself "slippery", but this does not preclude the similarities that each of the "feminist conscious" spaces propagates.

[24] Social Transformation including women

African feminism is characterised by geographical and political fluidity. The *Charter*[25]*,* read at the *Institute* presented earlier, bears witness to this. Even the ways in which African feminism is approached are different. In their conversation Elaine Salo and Amina Mama (2001:60) critique the ways in which Mikell (1997:4) views African feminism as "heterosexual, pro-natal and concerned with many bread, butter, culture and power" issues. Mama argues that Mikell's definition of African feminism is based on "deductive generalisation and observation" and that the content of her feminism is "deeply conservative" (2001:60).

There are ongoing tensions existing for women in Africa claiming feminist identities. Much scholarship on feminism in Africa shows that many African women are at odds with feminism (Oyewùmí, 2003) and others, while they may carry out a broad feminist agenda, for different reasons, eschew the label 'feminist' (Frenkel, 2008, Essof, 2001). Some people even go to the extent of adding a "disclaimer" by saying, "I am not a feminist, but I do believe in women's equality" (Mama in Essof, 2001:124). Feminism is a contested term for many reasons including the way in which feminism, as a named category, lacks significance or relevance for many people, or should be named differently (Mama in Essof, 2001); represents a foreign concept; or for some people enacts exclusions (Reddy, 2004); feminists are often potrayed in popular discourses as having "negative qualities" (such as they all hate men or are lesbians, Dryden et.al, 2002:114). The latter issue has also been raised in other contexts. Cock and Bernstein (2002) write about how some prominent

[25] In defining African feminists, the African Feminist Charter states: "We have multiple and varied identities as African Feminists. We are African women—we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent"

political figures in the ANC were sceptical of associating with feminism because of its association with lesbians.

Lesbians on the other hand felt marginalised by feminism because of its association with heteronormativity. Mary Hames (2003) and Wendy Isaack (2006) highlight the silence among South African feminists and within the women's movement when it comes to issues of same-sex sexuality/homosexuality. They argue that feminism was instrumental in opening up the debates about race, class and gender but it failed to recognise the sexual differences between women.

Other, harsher, criticisms have been directed at the notion of African feminism. Jacklyn Cock and Alison Bernstein (2002:171) argue forms of feminism such as Black feminism or African feminism can be seen to take "essentialist positions" in relation to feminism and tend to assume that identities are fixed or rely on "socio-economic, cultural and/or biological heritage". This notion can exclude, or produce negativity towards others. However, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) would argue against Cock and Bernstein's (2002) assertion. Her study on *Black feminism and Black Political Economy,* which uses Black feminism as a theoretical frame, shows how focusing on black women's lives and experiences has contributed to the theoretical understanding of the meaning of Black political economy in the US. Such work has also illustrated how the intersections of race, class, gender and nation can shed new insights on Black political and economic life and how society is structured and organised.

Notwithstanding the diversities and tensions in the naming of African feminists, what feminists in Africa agree upon is the importance of recognising the diversities, complexities and breadth of African feminist thought and action (Msimang, 2002:54; Arndt, 2002). The assumption that discourses of feminism constituting 'Africa' adequately represent theory, practice and experiences of those who constitute themselves 'African' should be challenged, Reddy (2004:3) argues. This is not useful. Amina Mama argues that the concept of feminism in Africa, as contested as it is, should be retained and owned by "filling it with meaning" (Salo and Mama, 2001:125).

In conversation with her students, Natasha Erlank takes up the challenging (and uncomfortable) task of defining African feminism and giving it meaning, considering all the contestations of the concept. This definition suggests that African feminism should include: "the study of the oppression of women in Africa, the search for patterns, as well as the recognition of the uniqueness of different African societies. But it should also include the study of women's choices and successes" (Dryden, et.al, 2002:117). This view of feminism positions feminism not only as an academic theory, but also as practice and recognises local power relations.

Erlank and her students suggest that we should think of feminism as a "relationship…because it points us to the power of an opposition expressed as a relationship, rather than some monolithic term like feminism, which excludes as

many as it accommodates" (Dryden, et.al. 2002:117). However, we should not abandon the term, as it is still useful. Instead we should guard against seeing feminism always as an identity. The practice of 'feminism' should be separated from the identity 'feminist'. The conceptualisation of 'practice' and 'identity' is the focus of the next section that looks at theoretical stances on the category lesbian.

Lesbian: theoretical stances

What does it mean to identify as lesbian and what is the relationship between lesbian and feminist categories? These two related questions are the main concern of the next sections. Three theoretical positions have advanced scholarship about the lesbian subject: lesbian theory, lesbian-feminist theory and queer theory. These are related positions but differ in their conceptualization of identity politics.

Lesbian-feminist theory

Lesbian-feminist theory subscribes to the notion of a unified, stable and coherent 'identity' arguing along the lines of the feminist project that women should not be discriminated against. However, lesbian-feminist theory has been noted for its frequent disregard of class, race, sexuality, gender and cultural differences.

In defining lesbian, lesbian-feminist thinkers view lesbianism as the emotional and psychological identification of women with other women, which has existed for centuries among women. Faderman's (1981) and Smith-Rosenberg's definitions (in

Newman, 2002) describe a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other. In these relationships, they add that sexual content may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. The two women prefer to spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other. It can be argued that these definitions are problematic in many contexts where women have to spend extended periods together without the presence of men, as is the case in many African contexts such as Lesotho where migrant labour conditions take men away from their homes (Gay, 1985). Such definitions render many women lesbian, which may not be the case.

In another instance Adrienne Rich (1993:239) defines 'lesbian' along a "continuum" which includes "a range – through each woman's life and throughout the history of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had a consciously desired genital experience with another woman". In this sense, 'lesbian' can be expanded to embrace many more forms of intense relations and exchange taking place between women, and various forms of interconnections between women. Many have criticized Rich's 'lesbian continuum' as "blurring the boundaries between lesbians and heterosexual feminists" or non-lesbian female relationships, for lacking historical specificity, erasing sexuality, failing to recognize the "costs of claiming lesbian identity," and "prioritizing gender over race" (Garber, 2001:128-135). Zimmerman (1981) argues that Rich's understanding of lesbianism eliminates

'lesbian' as a meaningful category and renders it elusive by equating it with any close bonds between women.

Furthermore, these definitions have been heavily criticized for 'desexualizing' lesbians. Calhoun (1995:11), who refers to three publications of American lesbian autobiographies in the 1970s and 1980s, shows that in these feminist narratives, 'lesbian' is defined as "the truly woman-identified-woman". She argues that in these narratives, sexual desire hides under 'love' and the sexual aesthetics of butch and femme roles are denied. Furthermore, the "woman-identified-woman" has no distinct sexuality, to the extent that one might say, "she has no sexuality at all". Calhoun sees a problem when lesbianism is desexualized and argues, "when feminist woman loving replaces lesbian genital sexuality, lesbian identity disappears into feminist identity and sexual difference between heterosexual women and lesbians cannot be effectively represented" (Calhoun, 1995:11).

Another set of criticisms against lesbian-feminist theory argues that a feminist frame "operates in various ways to closet lesbians" (Calhoun, 1995:8, 29-30). Calhoun (1995) shows the limits of feminism in representing lesbians and how feminist theorizing has failed "because it has not begun with a full-blown theory of heterosexist oppression" that captures lesbian differences. The reliance of feminism on gender, and thus "placing lesbians within the category 'women'" only allows lesbians to be seen as "women with a different sexuality" and not as lesbians (or other categories they may carry), an important 'identity' category.

Class, racial and gender divisions between lesbian and feminist circles challenge the 'union' between these two categories. It is not obvious that every lesbian is a feminist or every feminist pro-lesbian. On the contrary, because both categories are so contested, they can be at total odds with each other. As experience in the West has shown, it is not enough to think that 'lesbian' meets feminist in lesbian-feminism (Butler, 1990). An example of this became clear at one moment at the *Institute* explored earlier where lesbians asked whether a lesbian in Africa should be fighting for advancing women's rights or for their rights to be a lesbian, which is a silenced category or 'identity' label in many countries.

Lesbian theory

Like lesbian-feminist theory, lesbian theory argues for non-discrimination. However, the latter diverges from the former in viewing sex and sexuality. Unlike lesbian-feminists, lesbian theorists take the sexual nature of lesbian relationships seriously. Farquhar (2000) places sex and sexuality at the core of defining or understanding 'lesbian' referring to the importance of lesbian sexual styles and 'codes'. This is in contrast to the definitions presented by lesbian theorists above. Ferguson (1981:160) highlights the importance of the sexual narrative in defining lesbian. She argues that the ability to take one's own genital sexual needs seriously is a necessary component of an egalitarian love relation. So, a definition that fails to highlight sexual agency undermines lesbians' challenge to dominant heterosexual ideology and is not sufficient. Homosexual practices by themselves are not sufficient

or definitive constituents of a homosexual 'identity'. If this were the case, then bisexual women could be lesbian.

In addition to the sexual context, such theory argues, a kind of political context is required in a definition of 'lesbian'. Furthermore, a woman who takes on a lesbian 'identity' does so by making a self-conscious commitment or decision. Although some women may be identified as lesbian through association, it is also important that they themselves be conscious of an identity they are taking on. Ferguson (1981:166) proposes her own definition, which, in addition to sexual content, captures the element of self-consciousness:

> "A lesbian is a woman who has sexual and erotic-emotional ties primarily with women or who sees herself as centrally involved with a community of self-identified lesbians whose sexual and erotic-emotional ties are primarily with women; and who is herself a self-identified lesbian".

Although sex and sexuality are at the core of Farquhar and others' definition of 'lesbian', this can also be contentious. Chapter Six deals with some of these contentions, and in particular the association of sexual experience with 'identity' labelling. As noted by Rust (1992:367), when woman 'identify' as lesbian having had sexual experiences with men did not necessarily change the way they 'identify' themselves. Rust suggests a link existing between sexuality and sexual identity, also argued by Halperin's (1993:417) assertion that "sexuality generates sexual identity". Numerous accounts collected by Rust of many lesbians who had sexual

experiences with men show that these experiences did not lead them to change the way they identify themselves - they were not bisexual, but lesbians who experienced heterosexual experiences.

Other theoretical shifts advanced by lesbian theorists question the origins and agendas of different constructions of lesbian identity (Calhoun, 1994). Lesbian theory has been aware of contextual differences between lesbians and is cautious about cross-cultural approaches to lesbianism, as 'lesbian' in many societies is seen as a Western 'identity' and an import. Whilst lesbian theory is more accommodating of a broad range of understandings of what 'lesbian' may be, lesbian theorists have been critically thinking about an approach to 'lesbian', which has come under 'attack' by postmodernist and poststructuralist positions that render 'lesbian' problematic. Wolfe and Penelope (1993) have been among those arguing for the 'protection' of a 'lesbian' category before postmodernists deconstruct it. They argue it is the task of lesbian theory to ensure that such deconstruction does not take place as it renders lesbians even more invisible. Instead, lesbian theory should (re)construct lesbian identity. Lesbian should not be taken to imply a permanent self-identity or a term whose meaning goes unquestioned or whose definition is stable (Guess, 1995). On the contrary, as this thesis will show, amongst other things, the term lesbian is not only contested, but is constantly re-imagined and is made unstable by the people representing it.

Queer theory

Taking its cue from Foucault (1978), feminism and from Derrida's theory of deconstruction, queer theory has been greatly influenced by poststructuralist theorists who find identity politics inherently problematic and are critical of the liberationist ideal of the liberation of the true self and of sexuality as a singular unified force that has been repressed (Sullivan, 2003:41). The main thesis of queer theory, according to Marcus (2005), is the belief that sexual identity is flexible and unstable. It is necessary to focus on the intersectionality of racial, sexual, gender and class identities as this problematises the notion of a unitary lesbian and or gay identity and community. Even those criticizing queer theory see relevance in queer theory's position when challenging "sociological discourse and its tendencies to employ crude, reductive conceptions of gay and lesbian 'identity' and 'community' as a monolithic empirical unit of analysis" (Green, 2002:537). Queer theorists argue there is no one type of gay or lesbian identity and identities are not fixed: they cannot be categorized and labelled since they consist of varied components. Furthermore, understanding one's sexual identity on the basis of the gender of one's sexual partner needs to be challenged and critiqued as these take precedence over other identity categories such as race and class (Sullivan, 2003:38-9).

'Queer' itself is a problematic and contentious term as it is not clear to whom or what it refers. Its use and definitions can be blurry and contradictory as Green (2002) argues in reference to how Michael Warner (1993) uses 'queer' in his seminal text "Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory". In this text

Warner "equates queer with homosexuals and situates lesbian and gay identities in opposition to 'regimes of the normal'". In this sense 'queer' is treated as a subversive subject-position that all homosexuals may claim for themselves. In some instances queer is used interchangeably with lesbian and gay. In other instances 'queer' seems to "represent a metaphoric epistemological position" (Green, 2002:533). Others have also noted the slippage in using 'queer' to refer to lesbian and gay identity in particular and not considering heterosexuality. "Queer is supposed to signify the instability of all sexual identities" (Marcus, 2005:196) and reject categories of sexual orientation: heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual. However, by rejecting sexual orientation categories, queer theory neglects the "social roles" occupied by both homosexuals and heterosexuals (Green, 2002:522).

The definitions of queer theory are similarly problematic, as Sullivan (2003) shows. Halperin (2008:200-1) follows Green's critique of the metaphoric use of the term queer when he argues "queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which queer theory necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence". Sullivan finds Halperin's definition problematic by arguing that most of the world's population is at odds with the normal, whether through sexual style, tastes or choice. Furthermore, such a definition is not restricted to gays and lesbians as it can be taken up by anyone who feels marginalized as a result of their sexual practices or tastes. To Sullivan, this then means that anyone can be queer, which renders the term 'queer' elusive.

Harsh and numerous criticisms have been lashed out against queer theory and the use of the term 'queer' for: rendering invisible, unknown, 'unspeakable', and erasing the histories of lesbians and lesbian scholarship and criticism; not focusing on gender differences between men and women, silencing women; excluding activist audiences through its message and language (Garber, 2001:187-9); ignoring differences of race, class, gender, sexual orientation and age; privileging gay men or being male-centred; building on gay male notions of performative femininity; veiling differences between lesbianism and gayness; (Jeffreys, 1994:459-69).

Of most interest is Carol Guess's (1995:23) analysis of the 'false' binary position existing between queer writers and lesbian writers. She contests queer theorists' claim that lesbian identity is stable, by showing that in lesbian texts lesbian identity is not a unified subject position but a "mesh of permeable boundaries" (Guess, 1995:23). What queer theorists are doing by deconstructing 'lesbian identity' is in actual fact not new at all, she argued. Lesbian has been deconstructing itself all along by questioning who is lesbian. This flexibility and "adaptability" of the term lesbian is overlooked by some queer theorists so they can posit 'lesbian identity' as an "over-stabilised concept against which 'queer' appears more protean, more vague, more inclusive (Guess, 1995:23). The lesbian category continues to "offer trouble" since it is "produced by antagonism, division and conflict" (Guess, 1995:23). Guess concludes by arguing that we cannot give up on the homosexual identity while it remains stigmatized (Guess, 1995:35-6). In short, it can be concluded from Guess's argument that if lesbian is already unstable and is self-(re)constructing, which

implies that it does the work queer or queer theory is doing, then the position and relevance of queer and queer theory is on shaky ground.

Claiming lesbian as an identity

The category lesbian is problematised at many levels: both inside and outside its structures. One critique arising outside the lesbian category is what Rich (1993:229) calls "compulsory heterosexuality", a tough imposition that presumes most women's sexual preference is either implicitly or explicitly heterosexual. This is made visible by the social conditions inhibiting women from adopting a 'lesbian identity' when in same-sex relationships including: the invisibility of lesbians and silences surrounding lesbianism; harassment and violence; potential rejection by family members and society; and shaming the family (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1995; Sharma, 2006; Swarr and Nagar, 2003). The interrelatedness of women's identity categories such as race, class, gender and sexuality are simultaneously experienced and are constant reminders of the social, political and economic power struggles that women constantly engage with (Swarr and Nagar, 2003:493).

Claiming a 'lesbian identity' is also challenged at institutional and national levels. The earlier description of the Maputo *Institute* alluded to these challenges in relation to some countries in Africa. Similar experiences resonate in other parts of the world. Here I only refer to selected works in the Antilles and the Caribbean as these writings shows close approximations to the African context and to the

experiences articulated by many participants at the Maputo *Institute* explored earlier.

A collection of gay and lesbian writing from the Caribbean raises experiences resonating with those of lesbians (and other gay people) in Africa. Writing on experiences in Cuba, Mabel Cuesta (2008) shows how lesbian visibility threatens the fundamentals of various institutions, to the extent that any women suspected of lesbian behaviours would be silenced in various forms deemed appropriate by that institution. Thus, making one's personal life public and naming oneself as lesbian becomes a very political act in relation to entrenched institutional cultures. In a different case in the Caribbean, Rosamond King (2008:91) links 'lesbian' to citizenship and nationality declaring, "to live openly as a Caribbean lesbian one must, or should, emigrate." This resonates with the challenges that many African lesbians face as statesmen who claim homosexuality is un-African force them out of their countries. For many, like those in the Caribbean, countries such as South Africa, America and parts of Europe become their refuge creating Diasporic sexual identities due to 'forced' migration.

Other challenges to naming oneself 'lesbian' are taking place among lesbians themselves. Recalling a conversation between two black lesbian poets from the Diaspora, Audre Lorde and Astrid Roemer, Gloria Wekker (2008) highlights the differences and use of the term "black lesbians" for black women who love each other in different contexts (referring to the Netherlands and the USA). In this

conversation, Roemer challenges the naming of lesbian by arguing that naming certain actions and behaviours that women do is not necessary because their meanings are embedded in their actions and everyone is aware of them and knows them. "There are after all, things which aren't to be given names – giving them names kills them. Simply doing things without giving them a name, and preserving rituals and secrets between women are important to me" (Astrid Roemer as quoted by Wekker, 2008:376). Lorde responds by emphasizing her 'identity' as black lesbian because for her it makes her aware of her own strength and shows her vulnerability too. Naming herself lesbian also breaks the silence and allows other lesbians who cannot speak to have a voice, live and be able to name themselves. Challenging Roemer's notion of 'secrets' Lorde distinguishes between "the secrets from which we draw strength and the secrecy, which comes from anxiety and is meant to protect us." Such secrecy veils people's true lives and identities[26].

Like Lorde, Rich (1979) and Guess (1995) similarly argue for the importance of naming or using the name 'lesbian'. Rich (1979:202) argues that not affirming the word 'lesbian' is to "collaborate with silence and lying about our very existence". For Guess (1995:21) the use of 'lesbian' challenges not only the "hegemonic heterosexist sex|gender system, but dominant lesbian ideologies as well".

Theorizing lesbian against same-sex sexuality

[26] Chapter Six extends the discussion on secrecy.

In this section I position lesbian as an important category in female same-sex scholarship in Africa and beyond. Within this scholarship, I highlight the importance of focusing on black lesbian as a category that emphasizes the relevance of scholarship on race and blackness in South Africa.

Much work focusing on lesbians and homosexuality in the continent is generally covered under the theme 'same-sex sexuality' or 'female-same-sex' relations (Murray and Roscoe, 1998, Morgan and Wieringa, 2005, Arnfred, 2004, Hoad, 2007 and Epprecht, 2004). This can be a problem as just like 'feminist' 'same-sex' hides lesbian differences as well as other differences that may be more pronounced. Leila Rupp (2001:287) argues that 'same-sex' "lumps together phenomena that are quite different", and hides and overshadows differences such as age, gender or class by focusing on "sexual acts involving two genitally-alike bodies". Furthermore, it does not name lesbian (as a category), which carries political importance.

One of the limits of same-sex scholarship has been the reading of forms of female sexuality and bonds alongside 'lesbian' or female homosexuality. Such readings have included in particular 'mummy-baby' relationships taking place in Lesotho, South Africa and in other Southern African countries among young girls and women; female friendships; and women marriages (Gay, 1985; Gunkel; 2010; Kendall, 1998; Morgan and Wieringa, 2005). Judith Gay (1985:111) notes that such female bonds point to "features of female sexuality and affective relations between same-sex partners" that are not necessarily common in some Western cultures. However, she

herself is in two-worlds about the meanings of these bonds and relations. She refers to two studies (Blacking, 1959 and Mueller, 1977) that have shown similar patterns on mummy-baby and female friendships, which insist "there's nothing essentially homosexual or lesbian about these relationships because they do not replace heterosexual relations with boyfriends and husbands". However, Gay is persuaded to argue, "rather than deny any homosexual aspects, these relationships point to the normalcy of adolescent homosexuality that is rigidly censored in Western societies". Gay's argument is not convincing as these relationships also take place between married or older women[27] (see Kendall, 1998).

The problems posed by 'same-sex' scholarship are susceptible to Kath Weston's (1993, 1997) caution and Deborah Amory's (1997a) analysis of "cultural imperialism" and the criticisms against anthropologists and others who roam the world "in search of cross-cultural evidence of the universality of homosexuality" (Amory, 1997a:8). Weston argues this is "ethnographic cataloguing of same-sex desires and practices around the world" and calls for local, community-based studies highlighting a "complex construction of sexuality as informed by race, class, gender and nation" (Weston, 1993:157-85 as quoted in Amory, 1997a:8). Similarly Reid and Walker (2005) challenge the way sexuality in Africa is viewed – what they see as a creation of a false dichotomy between "us" and "them," and the making of generalizations for the whole of Africa, as seen in various works they quote such as "African Sexuality" (by Caldwell, 1987 and 1989). They argue that these do not

[27] These lines of scholarship are further developed in Chapter Six.

address local and cultural nuances and the historical specificity of the diversity of sexualities in African societies.

By zooming in on the intricate lives of black lesbians in Johannesburg, this thesis offers a narrowed in-depth view of localized forms of sexuality that capture the complexities of black lesbian life. Situating black next to lesbian intimates the interplay between these categories, without suggesting that one takes priority over the other. It also shows the centrality of both blackness and lesbian to the subject position and to the thesis as a whole. In this sense, black lesbian becomes a sexualized, racialised and gendered identity category.

Race

The previous section emphasized the importance of localized and nuanced studies on sexuality that offer complex constructions of the interplay between race, gender, sexuality, class and nation. In this section I focus on race scholarship in South Africa and beyond to offer ways in which this scholarship becomes relevant in exploring black lesbian sexualities and identities in South Africa. In addition, I address the 'problems of race' that have briefly emerged in both the description of the *Institute* earlier as well as in the theoretical and conceptual shifts in relation to the category lesbian.

Two dominant and opposing discourses of race have become popularized and critiqued in race scholarship: the essentialist approach and the 'colour-blind' approach. Both approaches, as Omi and Winant (2008) referring to North America and Erasmus (2008) focusing on South Africa argue, resonate and materialize similarly in different contexts and different parts of the world. The former approach looks at race as an "*essence"* (Omi and Winant, 2008:405) or as Erasmus (2008:173) simply puts it: race appearing in "everything and everywhere" The latter 'colour-blind' approach sees race as a mere *illusion* (Omi and Winant, 2008:405) or as just "nothing and nowhere" (Erasmus, 2008:173). Omi and Winant (2008) and Erasmus (2008) offer heavy criticism on both approaches and reject them in favour of a motion that views race as 'unstable', 'fluid' and with embedded meanings. Erasmus (2008:174) argues that race should be seen as a "social construct embedded in history and politics with fluid and changing rather than fixed and given meanings". Similarly Omi and Winant (2008:405) argue that race should be understood as an "unstable and 'decentred' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggles". Like Omi and Winant (2008) Erasmus (2008) sees race in relation to power and politics, a move she notes she borrows from Fanon, and later, Gilroy. John Harting Jr's (2010) analysis of Du Bois's very early study on racial dimensions of black people's lives and experiences in the U.S. affirms Erasmus and Omi and Winant's approach. Harting Jr (2010:129) shows how early on Du Bois found that race was "so mutable and evolving" that he rarely "rested on any single formation of the significance of race". In his analysis Harting Jr shows how Du Bois conceptualized blackness in a number of ways in one text.

Even though the concept of race is 'mutable' and offers 'uncertainties' and sometimes contradictions, it continues to play a fundamental role in shaping inequality and in representing and structuring the social world (Omi and Winant, 2008 and Erasmus, 2008). Instead of 'essentializing' or abandoning race (or assuming that by ignoring it, race will go away), Erasmus argues for a project that is concerned with "unmaking race" (2008:177). This project would consider race as a "socio-historical and political construct that is culturally contextual and situation specific" (Erasmus, 2008:178).

Let us consider the possible shifts that are taking place in race scholarship in South Africa and the formulations of a project that would be "unmaking race". Social and historical accounts of race link race and race-related theories to the rise of a world political economy, political processes, class, ethnicity, human body types, nation (Winant, 2000:172-181), and culture (Erasmus, 2008). In South Africa specifically, the apartheid project linked culture, nation, class and race in very harmful, often violent, ways. Erasmus (2008:171) argues that apartheid discourse made race 'real' in material and non-material ways. The effects of such discourse are felt, though differently and in most complex ways, even in post-apartheid South Africa and are made visible in the ways people use and see race in everyday life. Erasmus notes how class and socio-economic status is increasingly becoming a marker of racial inequality among black people. She mentions in particular the wealth disparities between black people and how these make race 'real' and 'unreal'.

Another notion of race is that popularized through the work of Black Consciousness. Drawing from Steve Biko's Black Consciousness (BC), the major force in black politics since the 1970s and influenced by Franz Fanon, Kgositsile (2004) argues that some black South Africans feel the need to be 'freed from race'. He argues for moving away from racist ideology, perception and defining ourselves as black, white, coloured or Indian. Kgositsile calls for the re-politicization of the concept of blackness, as done by the BCM (Black Consciousness Movement) and turning blackness into a "philosophical alternative that was powerfully anti-racist" (Kgositsile, 2004:146). BCM shaped ways of talking about black identity in South Africa. Positioning blackness not just as skin colour, but also as a construct linked to economic, political, historical and social processes. BCM suggested that black identity was signified by a type of "suffering" (Chipkin, 2002:571) and to be black implied resenting the apartheid project. Anyone who suffered oppression because of the colour of their skin, including coloured and Indian people, was included in the category black (Hirschmann, 1990:4). This meant that restoring black identity was a philosophical as well as a psychological project focusing on self-affirmation of the black person. For whites, being black was not a possibility as they could never be black (Ratele, 1998:60) nor totally identify with blacks when they enjoy privilege and "live in the sweat of another" (MacDonald, 2006:118).

In current day South Africa, although many still hold onto BC, contemporary uses and discourse on race and blackness suggest that race and blackness continue to

undergo reconstruction. Kopano Ratele (1998:61) observes this when noting that black is not what it used to be; it has changed its imagery. This change is taking place in the "politics of bodies and identities as well as the reconfigurations of material and psychological spaces that are making it increasingly difficult to 'hold blackness'". This change is synonymous with what Gilroy (2000:21-36) observes in black American culture. Gilroy asserts that the imagery of blackness in black American culture has changed due to consumerism, cosmetic imagery, visual and technological enhancement and modification. Black cultural icons have, through visual culture, shifted the look of blackness from "abjection" to signify beauty, prestige and being an asset.

The image of the black South African is similarly changing. Notions of self-styling are emerging particularly among young people. These show how style serves as a marker of identity or distinction of race (Nutall, 2004). It is not only the imagery of blackness that is changing, but also the mechanisms of race and blackness. Referring to John L Jackson's *Harlemworld: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America (2001),* Hartigan Jr (2010) remarks on how Jackson argues that people in Harlem are in the business of "doing race". This becomes evident in modes of being produced in everyday life. Jackson develops a "performative model of race" (Hartigan, Jr., 2010:144) that shows how race is a performance played out in everyday life in Harlem. This model of race as "performative" delinks the way in which particular behaviours are connected with certain races.

In South Africa, Pumla Gqola's (2001a) analysis of power, language and representation through popularized metaphors offers another view of how race is reconfigured in contemporary South Africa. Gqola focuses on the uses of language in the making of identity. Quoting, she remarks, an "engagement with identity requires several practices of formation where systems of power are constructed, resisted, and subverted and mediated in and through linguistic agency (Gqola, 2001a:95). She focuses, among other things, on the popular discourse of the "rainbow nation" and how this has been crafted as central to the unified 'South African identity'. Even though this discourse is valued for symbolically representing South African diversities (gender, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, geographic location, education etc), Gqola argues that this metaphor is problematic, as it has 'fixed' identities. She thus concludes that the notion of a 'rainbow nation' is something of an illusion as it hides difference, political struggles and the socio-cultural histories of the South African body politic.

Conclusion

Current shifts in the study of identity, lesbian, feminism, race and blackness suggest that the usefulness of identity categories is in their instability and how they are constantly reshaped. Although some positions argue for identity categories to be rejected, as they seem to be either unified or identity too elusive and fluid, others argue that these categories are self-deconstructing either in their definitions or cultural contexts. Abandoning identity categories will not make them disappear, or

make them un-useful. Instead, this would limit our understanding of the formations, experiences and interplay of categories such as nation, race, class, sexuality or gender. In particular, this would veil the way political identities have been formed in our societies, as is the case in South Africa.

The question of making identity categories useful lies at the heart of this thesis. This project does not only take seriously how these categories intersect with each other, but also reveals how each can shape certain political projects (e.g. the feminist project; the lesbian and gay movements etc). Race, class, nation, gender and sexual orientation, as shown in the earlier sections all do similar work. On the one hand they each "link structural inequity and injustice" and on the other hand each identifies and represents its subjects. Because of the 'mutual determinant' nature of these categories, the boundaries between them are not always clear and thus political conflicts are often invoked in some or all of the categories simultaneously (Omi and Winant, 2008:412). The 1980s South African gay and lesbian liberation movement is illustrative of this.

In the gay liberation movement of the 1980s in South Africa, the linkage between race, gender, nation, sexual identity and class was not only visible, but also vocalized by prominent lesbian and gay activists. At the forefront of this liberation was Simon Nkoli, a well-known gay and later an HIV/AIDS activist. Nkoli, a black gay man, arrested in 1984 and charged with high treason along with twenty-two other political activists, was instrumental in linking the gay rights agenda to the broader

goals of the anti-apartheid struggle. He fought against the oppression of all his identities and made a significant mark in gay and lesbian politics as well as racial and class politics, arguing that the fights against racism and homophobia were inseparable. Bev Ditsie (2001) a black lesbian in Johannesburg who worked closely with Simon Nkoli at the time recalls one of Simon's poignant speeches:

> "The speech [Simon Nkoli] made when he said, "*In South Africa I am oppressed as a black person and I am oppressed because I am gay, so when I fight for my freedom, I must fight for both oppressions*. *I am black, I am gay, I cannot put my struggles as a primary or secondary struggle, and they are all one…"* I realized what he meant. That not only am I black and gay but I am also a woman. And they are all one struggle for my freedom" (Ditsie, 2001).

It is such political projects called by these two activists that resonate in this exploration of black lesbian sexualities and identities in South Africa. The use of 'black lesbian' as an identity category in this thesis takes into account the different positions explored earlier: the shifts in race and blackness as well as the connections between black and other categories such as nation, class, gender and sexual orientation. Although this thesis foregrounds blackness with lesbian, it does not forsake the interconnections with class, nation and gender. It also does not undermine lesbian connections with whiteness, which is not the focus of this study. The nuances of the interconnections between race, class, nation, gender and sexual orientation resonate in all the chapters. I hope that the value of this thesis lies in the drawing out of black lesbian as an identity from which knowledge-production can take place and a "potentially privileged site for the criticism and analysis of cultural discourse" (Halperin, 2008:199 quoting Foucault).

Chapter Outline

The first chapter has offered theoretical and analytical tools with which to navigate the following chapters. Chapters Two to Six enlarge on each of the categories discussed above, exploring localized and nuanced ways in which ethnographic practice, space, violence, style and sexual negotiation render visible the interplay between identity categories. All these chapters are based on ethnographic records and detailed interviews with multiple women.

In **Chapter Two** I explore the notion of 'fieldwork' by looking at my own positionality as a black lesbian insider|outsider in the 'field' and the different methods employed during fieldwork. This process poses both the 'field' and 'fieldwork' as notions that should be problematised in current scholarship. It asserts that both notions are not necessarily useful in 'uncovering' the 'field' when the 'field' itself is in constant motion and flux. Coupled with this sense of mobility of the self, the research, research methods, research participants as well as the actual 'field' is the complex intersection of the researcher's identities with the 'field', the research participants and the challenge of maintaining boundaries in the 'field'. This chapter also argues for the importance of unveiling differences in the 'field' and how this offers a richer and more nuanced experience of the 'fieldwork'.

Chapter Three explores the relationship between urban space, in this case Johannesburg, and sexual identity. Johannesburg, a major African metropolis, is

looked at through the vantage point of black lesbians who inhabit both the inner city and its outskirts. Their experience of Johannesburg show the city to be a sexualized, racialized and classed city, where differences contribute to the cosmopolitanism and dynamism of the city. At the same time, by occupying different spaces in the city, they reconfigure the city's landscape and expand it to accommodate sexual diversity.

Related to the issue of space and black lesbian identity, in **Chapter Four** I explore the difficult territory of violence, which has become a common phenomenon that many black lesbians have to deal with in their daily lives. I briefly present three murder trials of black lesbians brutally murdered between 2006 and 2008 in Johannesburg and Cape Town. In this chapter I use the courts as a 'field' where existing concepts of violence, justice, victimization, death and loss are evoked. These trials are located in broader discussions and everyday public discourses of violence in South Africa. This chapter draws a painfully striking but direct link between sexual orientation, nation, class and gender in the face of violence and death.

In **Chapter Five** I tackle the very controversial arguments of butch and femme identities or roles among lesbians. Positioning these as forms of style, including, among other things**,** dress, clothing, stance, activity, eroticism, expression and markers of 'identity', I engage with some literature on butch and femme and suggest that this gender binary limits a more nuanced way of exploring black lesbian identity. Through a brief exploration of Ms Lesbian contests/pageants in

Johannesburg, I show that this cultural form expands the butch and femme dynamic. The chapter then moves onto discussions and representations of style, broader than butch and femme, which are prevalent in lesbian daily life.

Chapter Six: "It's all about 50|50" highlights the central thesis on differences and equality in relation to sexual pleasure and intimacy in black lesbian relationships. Scholarship on lesbians or on female sexuality in Africa has tended to desexualize female same-sex relationships. In this chapter I firstly look at the implications of fieldwork on sexually charged research. These highlight my own ambivalences about writing on sex, pleasure and intimacy. Secondly, the chapter offers an analysis of various literature on female same-sex intimacy in South Africa and globally, and explores ways in which sexuality is negotiated in lesbian relationships. It further offers new alternatives for engaging with the meanings of power and sex between women, highlighting sexual agency and egalitarian sexual relations among black lesbians.

CHAPTER TWO: Reflections On 'Fieldwork'

Introduction

In October 2007, I prepared myself to "enter the field", a concept I struggled with throughout the lifespan of the PhD. The supposed field, the city of Johannesburg and its outskirts, became an area of great familiarity, whether through walking, via public transportation, or through interacting with people in their houses and/or public spaces. The city's spaces - streets, restaurants, clubs, cafe's, shopping malls and non-governmental organisations became sites for fieldwork. While some of these spaces were already familiar to me, having lived in Johannesburg for a number of years, I entered them with a certain newness and intention.

In this chapter, I describe the methodology I adopted as well as the problematic of reflexivity, among other things, I engaged with in the course of this research. The chapter explores the dynamics and benefits of doing research or fieldwork within one's grouping. Narayan (1993), Jackson (1987) and others have called such research 'native[28]' or 'at home'. Furthermore, I will also engage with the challenges of researching a grouping whose sexual experiences are rarely researched in South Africa, or are explored with particular, and most often limited, gazes. Based on life-

[28] Weston, in referring to Bhabha (1994) and Narayan (1993) problematises "Native" and argues that it is a term that keeps people in their place by essentialising their characters, bounding their communities, and otherwise subjecting them to the disciplinary legacies of racism that emerged from colonial rule

history interviews and participant-observation the chapter shows some of the methodological implications and challenges of researching black lesbian sexualities.

Positioned in the field

Much written work about black lesbians in South Africa often positions black lesbians as victims of violence and hate crimes (Isaack, 2008 and Gontek, 2009) or relates their existence to that of gay men. The multiple methods deployed in this research, which will be explored later, were useful in uncovering and revealing various ways in which black lesbians can be read and represented. Most importantly, the methods highlighted the experiences of many black lesbians in and around urban settings. It was vital to use mixed methods as these allowed for various interactions in the field, and eliminated dimensions of data that would have been concealed under one method.

Embarking on research on sexuality, particularly black lesbian sexuality, presented various dilemmas, with a range of implications. In the first instance, the environment where I conducted fieldwork posed its own threats and discomforts. Not only is South Africa a pervasively patriarchal society, even when its progressive Constitution recognises all forms of equality including gender equality, but it is also homophobic and the notion of homosexuality as "un-African" still prevails (Reid and Dirsuweit, 2002:104).

It can be said that South Africa offers immense paradoxes. On the one hand, the country has the most progressive Constitution with a widely-praised Equal Rights Clause. On the other hand, many South Africans live under severe measures of inequality, and for some attaining equal rights ends on paper. The everyday lives of those South Africans threatened by violence, rape, and murder, make a mockery of the Constitution. At the same time, they challenge the assumption that the mere existence of the Constitution translates to its access and implementation. Yet the Constitution does also allow some South Africans to defend themselves against prejudice and inequality, or to invoke a different order – hence the paradox and complexity of the situation.

Among the many who are affected by these paradoxes are black lesbians. Reported rapes and murders of black lesbians, because of their sexual orientation, in the townships of South Africa are frighteningly a 'common phenonemon'[29]. The media is full of reports about violence towards black lesbians and offers media time to religious fundamentalists and conservatives who are quick to lash out against gay and lesbian people (Rossouw, 2009). Such complexities and possible dangers in the environment forced me to negotiate my use of space, but also how, where and when I felt comfortable and free to be known as a lesbian or that I was doing research within black lesbian groups.

[29] Among the many lesbians raped, murder and tortured are Zoliswa Nkonyane, a 19-year-old black lesbian murdered in Khayelitsha township (Cape Town) in February 2006; Sizakele and Salome, a black lesbian couple raped and murdered in 2007 in Meadowlands (Johannesburg); Thokozane, a black lesbian raped and murdered in 2007, Ezakheni (KwaZulu-Natal); Sibongile, a black lesbian raped and murdered in 2008 in Strand (Cape Town); Eudy, a black lesbian murdered and suffered attempted rape in 2008 in Kwa-Thema (Johannesburg); Khanyiswa, a black lesbian murdered in 2008 in New Brighton (Port Elizabeth); Ncumisa Mzamela, a 21 year old black lesbian burnt to death in Inanda (KwaZulu-Natal) in 2010… And there are many others whose victimization, rape, and murder remains unreported and undocumented.

In the second instance, I was preoccupied with notions of representation in relation to black lesbian women. In South Africa black female bodies have been misrepresented as exotic objects, and diseased bodies amongst other things (Enwezor, 1997). Black lesbian bodies have been speculated about, mainly through a heterosexual gaze and in relation to gay men, exoticised, and othered. Part of engaging with such research was to challenge these objectifications, as well as to resurface the depth, complexities and challenges that exist in doing research in ones' own 'home' and in the rich lives of many black lesbians in and around Johannesburg. The decision to embark on this research was not only political, but also deeply personal. Not only was I seeking to explore my own identity as a lesbian woman who is part of a larger lesbian grouping, but I also yearned to understand the diversities amongst black lesbians and how we make sense of such diversities and the meanings attached to these while at the same time maintaining individuality.

The fact that I have been a member of lesbian organizing and formations in Johannesburg and Pretoria for a decade now, did not pass by unnoticed by the research participants. Instead, it presented various complexities. I quickly learnt that the relationships and experiences I shared as a participant in these formations long before re-entry into the 'field' as an ethnographer were crucial in informing the ethnographic lens as well as gaining easy access to the field and participants. My position as a black lesbian with no particular gender identity (I did not prescribe to the butch and femme distinctions that many lesbians in Johannesburg follow), living

in the suburbs, of working-class origins/background (I quickly learnt that my education level rather than my monthly student grant repositioned me in the class hierarchy), Xhosa-speaking and from the Eastern Cape, foregrounded my position of insider and outsider. I struggled with the dualities of insider-outsider, researcher and researched, friend and researcher, participant and participant observer, as well as the implications of intimacies in the field (for more on this see Matebeni, 2008). Many times I felt I was none of these, but both and all at the same time. This was a complex negotiation between just being a friend when needed or being a friend who is also capturing people's lives. At the same time, there were European researchers doing similar work in some of the spaces I inhabited. On these occasions, I was like other research participants, being researched. Other times, I wanted to be a participant and wished not to be aware or observe what was going on around me. All these positions and more played themselves out fully in the field and provided crucial insights in interpreting my observations and experiences. While I am aware of the various ways in which constructions of my gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity may affect this research, a disturbing thought about how such declarations may be exposure to "an insidious sort of surveillance" (Weston, 1997:172) looms. This is the challenge I face daily in the academic world, which asks of the researcher to reflect on her/his own position in relation to the research subject. Although this may be less difficult to do in other parts of the world, writing as a black lesbian and about black lesbians in South Africa carries a possibly dangerous and heavy burden of exposing the research participants and myself to a form of surveillance that is difficult to manage outside the PhD.

Although I was careful to reflect on distance in the field, as warned by field researchers (Davies, 1999), this proved to be sometimes difficult, sometimes I thought it impossible. Part of that reflection was the realization that I was always in the field and the field was always and continued to be a part of me. It was my daily experience, my life. Even when I retreated to my private home, the field was present. There was no place to run to, no place to hide. Leaving the field behind was not a possibility. As Vered (2000:9) argues it is not possible for ethnographers to leave the field behind because "the field has now become incorporated into their biographies, understandings and associations." Similarly, Weston (1997) argues that "hybridity" of the researcher and her/his inability to distance herself in time or space from the people she studies blurs the distinction between researcher and those being researched. For such a researcher, "there is now, here is there, and we are them" (Weston, 1997:175).

While I felt engulfed by the field, the field presented moments of rapture and reflexivity. The friendships I made with the twenty participants who shared their life stories with me were very rewarding. I also became a regular at the various sites where I conducted fieldwork. While such friendships and intimate relationships can allow various forms of access to the field and to people's stories, sometimes presenting as forms of trust, they can easily be "exploited as an investigating tool" (Vered, 2000:3). To remain true to such friendships, there were many secrets shared and stories that cannot be told that will never be revealed in any manner.

This would be a betrayal of the trust I gained from participants and with those I interacted in the field (Jacobs, 1996:296).

My closeness to participants and their daily lives also meant I could 'verify' their stories or get more information about their stories through interactions in our circles. While many of these friendships and relationships were rewarding, they were not always easy to maintain. In part, they further blurred the distinction between being "in the field" and "out of the field." Decisions to delineate the 'field' from the everyday were linked to how, when and what I recorded. There were moments though, when even the decision to record or not record became a difficult one. Sometimes it was linked to how I felt about what was shared in the interview by the participant, or what I observed and where, and other times it was about what I felt I could share with the outside world about black lesbians.

The nature of the field

Much work has problematised the notion of the field as a place away from home for the exploration of "Otherness". In calling for the 'field' to be subjected to scrutiny and reflection, Gupta and Ferguson (1997:2) suggest rethinking the notion of the field in contemporary Anthropology. The idea that the 'field' is the place where the distinctive work of 'fieldwork' may be done, that taken-for-granted space where an "Other" culture or society lies waiting to be observed and written" has to be problematised. Furthermore, the distinction between 'field' and 'home' leads to a "hierarchy of purity of sites" – the idea that home cannot be the field because the

field is the place awaiting discovery. Vered (2000:6) strongly challenges this notion by arguing that the world is so deeply connected that no place, 'field' or 'home', can simply exist, waiting to be discovered. In actual fact, these are related territories.

Studying sexuality has always been a project of studying the "other." Passaro (1997:152) experiences this when another anthropologist informs her that her study of homelessness in New York is a "much better idea than studying lesbians" (her own grouping). Weston (1997:164) similarly reflects on studying sexual groups that one belongs to and notes that it is "academic suicide" studying lesbians and gay men. Through her research she challenges the assumption that an epistemology of "Otherness" is the best route to "objectivity." Amory (1997b) expresses similar challenges that African Americans studying Africa experience as they can be deemed to be "too close" to be "objective". Gupta and Ferguson (1997:17) further argue that the project of "Otherness" is positioned in the multiple ways in which "colonialisation, imperialism, missionasation, multinational capital, global cultural flows, and travel" bring the spaces of 'home' and "other" together. They add that fieldworkers not interested in the anthropological project of exploring "Otherness" may encounter difficulties. Such difficulties are similar to what Passaro (1997) reflects on - her own closeness to the field. Part of that closeness was the social distance she was travelling to the field. Questions about her closeness to the field implied that she might be "too close to see well." This implied that to study "Otherness" allowed for "objectivity" driven by the element of distance (1997:153). She adds that she was never asked whether she was "close enough." Like Passaro

(1997) being within the field was a daily occurrence for me. There was no need to re-enter the field every day and this closeness benefited the ethnographic lens.

Johannesburg as the field

Thinking of Johannesburg as a site for fieldwork was directed by my involvement in and around the city. I had considered fieldwork in other cities and rural areas in South Africa. However, the dynamism offered by Johannesburg was more appealing. Johannesburg offered a multiplicity of individuals as well as sites. I was also aware that in South Africa, particularly, many lesbian and gay people or social movements are generally associated or more visible in cities than other contexts. Participants that I met and recruited had come to Johannesburg through various routes and in search of different opportunities. I was less curious about the narrow reading of Johannesburg (a reading of unequal economic relations and segregationist policies), but more interested in a reading of the city of Johannesburg that allowed space to be considered both in its physical dimensions and social or symbolic aspects (Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004). I selected Johannesburg as a field site for its diversity of experiences and possibilities and also because it is home and convenient. This in part challenged the notion that 'home' is stationery while the 'field' is a journey away. Secondly, it pointed to the notion that "home is as peripatetic and multisited as fieldwork has increasingly come to be. Fieldwork 'away' and at 'home' is similarly episodic and fluid" (Vered, 2000:8-11). Gupta and Ferguson (1997:4) also noted that

in the field, whether 'away' or at 'home', "people, objects and ideas are rapidly shifting and refuse to stay in place." This is the nature of the interconnected world. In Johannesburg particularly, this becomes very visible.

The nature of cities, their density and cultural make-up, suggests that sexual diversity and freedom are urban phenomena (Knopp, 1995:149). While rural settings were not the focus of the research, some participants in the study had come from such settings to Johannesburg. Various factors propelled them to Johannesburg, including: being out as a lesbian; the need for better socio-economic lifestyles; or they were "running away" from experiences in their rural settings. Such experiences influenced how Johannesburg is read and perceived, as Thabi, one of the participants in this research says:

Thabi*: At some point I felt that I was tired of hiding myself - the fact that I was attracted to women and wanted to be with women. I thought it best to come to Johannesburg because of the friends I had here in Jo'burg who were openly gay or lesbian. [In Durban] I would just get bored while I liked a girl in the group…but we could not talk about that. As time went on - some people at University got to know that I was with women. I would deny it. People would pass funny comments and I would feel that those things didn't sit well with me and I realized how difficult it was to be…. And those things bothered me so much. So, when I got to Jo'burg, I felt that I was good and I got the freedom of being... And there was a sort of lesbian community that was visible...*

Johannesburg has long been the sanctuary of many gay and lesbian people. Even during apartheid when many spaces in the city were restricted for black South Africans, groups of gay and lesbian people used various spaces in the city of Johannesburg for cultural and socio-political reasons. These were mainly social

spaces, such as clubs and bars, as well as churches and political organisations (Gevisser, 2004 and Gevisser and Cameron, 1994). Various works have shown cities to be important as they offer a certain amount of anonymity and 'escape' for many gay and lesbian people as well as for the realization of their sexualities (Leap, 2005; Valentine, 1993 (a,b) and Adler & Brenner, 1992). This is important for many black lesbians, particularly those in townships, who cannot freely walk in their areas as they may be targets of violence and hate crimes. In their localities they have to be masked, invisible and hide their identities in order to protect themselves. This became evident even during fieldwork when some participants preferred to present for interviews in the city than in their communities and neighbourhoods.

The limitation of conducting interviews in public spaces such as bars and coffee shops was not being able to feel free to record interviews as recording devices attracted attention from other patrons. This meant that interviews in such spaces became more intimate and relaxed, as in conversations between friends. Differences in interviewing styles became visible when meeting a participant in an organization or in their home or work. Fieldwork was conducted in various sites and this allowed my position as participant observer to be changed too (Gupta and Ferguson (1997:33). In each space, each participant and I took different positions. In public spaces, the participant and I were sometimes read as a couple, which attracted some attention from passersby. In other instances where a participant was in her 'territory' (as Yoba shows later), I felt like the participant, participating in someone else's 'field'.

My active role in lesbian organizing also did not cease and many people with whom I interacted in various spaces knew I was doing research. I was able to combine the different styles and sites of fieldwork with various kinds of volunteering and advocacy work. While I entered various sites, I did not spend equal amounts of time in them. Some sites I only entered for particular events, for example, court proceedings. Other forms of participation were more permanent, for example my involvement in various organizations or regular participation in social events. Had I pre-selected particular sites or a singular unit of analysis, what I observed and experienced would have been greatly limited.

In what follows, I list a few of the sites where fieldwork was conducted. There were numerous other sites where I was a participant observer, but in which I did not capture or record the activities for different reasons. Low light and high sound in some clubs and bars, for example, prevented me from hearing or seeing what was going on. In such situations it was better to be a full participant. The sites covered various areas in and around Johannesburg as shown below:

Inner city:

- Lesbian and gay organisations in Braamfontein: Behind the Mask (BTM); the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project (in Yeoville) and the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) in particular hold numerous meetings, social events and discussions for black lesbians;
- Simply Blue (a gay club in Braamfontein);
- Chosen FEW soccer team which trains in Braamfontein and belongs to FEW
- Conferences for black lesbians hosted by FEW
- Art and photography exhibitions by black lesbians around the inner city

Suburbs:

- Bars and clubs: *Playground* in Rosebank; and *Open Closet* in Melville
- Shopping malls which usually are places for film festivals (Killarney and Rosebank) or places where people hang out;
- Private houses for discussions and meetings or parties
- Lesbian and gay pride march in Rosebank

Townships:

- House parties and social events in community halls and private homes
- Court cases of black lesbians murdered in Soweto and Springs
- Funerals of black lesbians in various townships
- Pride marches in Soweto and KwaThema
- Ms township lesbian contests in Soweto

Negotiating consent in all these spaces was always important, particularly when audio/video recording had to be used. Usually consent was verbal and in some/few cases it was written. How and when I recorded determined my role in the field. While I was always in the field, I did not record every event and experience in the field.

Recruiting and selecting participants

In addition to field observation or participant observation, I recruited participants for life story interviews. Atkinson (1998:8) describes such interviews as "fairly complete narrating of one's entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects. [It] is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another". I chose to conduct life stories because they give voice to

participants and allow them to be "heard and recognized by others" (Atkinson, 1998).

In recruiting participants for life story interviews, I used the term *lesbian* cautiously, even though many women used the term to name themselves. Following Kennedy and Davis' argument (1996:192) that the term "freezes human sexuality into two dichotomous fixed practices – heterosexual and lesbian" and not reflecting historical reality, I chose to give participants the choice and decision to name themselves. Using the term lesbian from the onset would have implied that some identities are fixed throughout their lives, which is not the case. Some of the women referred to themselves as lesbian only after particular events in their lives. Although I found it unavoidable to use the term lesbian, while recruiting participants for the research I preferred to refer to women who had been/are in relationships with other women. This notion afforded inclusivity and had less direct connotations. But it also had implications for who got recruited to the study, which posed slight complications at times.

My brief in recruiting was that I was looking for women who had been or are in relationships with other women. In initial talks with participants I did not explore terms such as lesbian, bisexual, and local terms such as *stabane*[30], although these did come up before and during interviews. With participants I knew prior to the research, I was aware of how they referred to themselves and I did not want to

[30] The term refers to a hermaphrodite figure, but in local day-to-day talk it is used as a derogatory word for gay and lesbian people. however, gay and lesbian people have re-appropriated the term for their own use.

influence their participation by limiting the research to lesbians only. However, during interviews participants named themselves lesbian. These were qualified by styles, gender / role-playing associations such as butch, femme or versatile. Naming oneself lesbian was also related to having had sexual relations with a woman. I did not recruit nor come across any self-identified lesbians who had not had sexual relations with another woman.

In the recruitment brief I also did not explore the category black. Participants read the brief and interpreted it on their own. Even though black as a category was not qualified in the brief, my own problematic in conceptualizing black meant that I would, or attempt to, recruit African, Coloured and Indian women. The latter two were not easily accessible. One participant identified as an Indian, and "politically black". Due to some constraints, she was not included in the research. Another participant, although she comes from a Coloured background, claimed a black lesbian identity. She has been included in the study.

In recruiting participants, the following criteria were stipulated:

- Black women who in their lifetime had identified as lesbians and were in relationships with other women;
- Black women who had not identified as lesbian but were currently in relationships with other women;
- Black women who had not identified as lesbian but had been in relationships with other women.

These criteria made it possible for two transgender men to be part of the study, but I later had to revisit their inclusion in the research. It is important to highlight my struggles in including or excluding transmen in the research. Two participants in

this research claimed a trans identity: Yoba, whose transition started after our fourth interview, and Tete, who was already identifying as a transman when we met and only started hormonal therapy and had sex re-assignment surgery after our interviews. Both had fully consented to participate in the research as they felt they fitted the criteria stipulated in the information sheet and consent form. About a year after our interview, Tete contacted me to request that I do not include him in the research as a lesbian or a woman who was/had been in relationships with other women. That request has been fully respected.

Yoba did not make such requests and Yoba's interview is kept the way it was recorded. In some of our interviews, Yoba directly mentioned that he was questioning his gender identity and whether he was really a lesbian or a "masculine female" or a trans person. I did not interview Yoba during and after his transition although we keep regular contact. Although I make attempts to represent Yoba as a trans person, this is a challenging task. In some cases, I struggle with the pronouns to use for Yoba (he/she) and other times I am drawn to representing him as a transperson, although this does not truly reflect our engagement during this research. For personal and political reasons I will refer to Yoba as a trans person (using he), but for academic reasons his interview will represent him at a time when he was part of lesbian circles. This also suggests the ways in which both lesbian and transgender are not stable categories as well as the limits of gender pronouns.

Recruitment of participants for life-story interviews took place in various places in and around Johannesburg. I met a few of the participants through civil society organizations and in social spaces (clubs, bars, cinema, private homes, functions and parties etc) which young black lesbians frequent. There were also other participants who I met through informal lesbian networks or who were recommended by someone I had met. In short, I employed what is generally termed the 'snowball' method to identify and locate participants. I also relied on multiple initial contacts to identify participants that were generally outside my regular circles. I further attempted to conduct key informant interviews with people in lesbian organizations or owners of spaces for black (lesbian) women (e.g. bars and clubs). The latter were not possible as key informants were always busy.

I met a few of the participants at the two organizations housed in Braamfontein. Both BTM (Behind The Mask) and FEW (Forum for the Empowerment of Women) are spaces which young black lesbians frequent. The latter also has a soccer team and the players meet at the offices of the organization on Tuesdays and Thursdays. During these days, one is guaranteed to find a group of young women sitting around the gardens and chatting. While I encountered many possible research participants on these particular days, I ceased to recruit them in group-settings. Participants were always recruited individually, even when I was aware that they were in a relationship.

Participants at times, without any recruitment, offered themselves to participate in the research. There were a few occasions where possible participants requested me to interview them. The reasons varied from curiosity to wanting to have someone to talk to. There were also other participants that I met through lesbian networks. I had asked one participant, Pati, to link me to other black lesbians outside our circles. She then told me about two lesbian soccer players she knew, who had never been part of gay and lesbian organizations and who would be keen to participate in the research. After a few telephonic conversations, they agreed to meet with me. I had anticipated visiting them in their neighbourhood, but they preferred coming to town. I was also introduced to one other participant, Aya, who was also not part of the organizations' circles. Although Aya preferred to meet me in town, she could not afford the transport costs and settled for meeting at a nearby shopping mall in her area. The following times we met, she insisted on coming to town.

The mobility of participants made it difficult to maintain close ties with them, even though we were in the same city. Those participants I met outside lesbian circles were the most difficult to keep in touch with because very few people knew of them. Some I only met once and the efforts to see them again proved to be in vain. This meant that even when I had follow-up questions to explore with them, I was not able to do so. In these circumstances, while I felt that the 'data' was compromised as it presented gaps, this highlighted the ever-changing nature of the field. Not only were participants moving around the field setting, their identities were also shifting and changing. During fieldwork some participants came out to family members and

others transitioned and claimed transgender identities. These shifts brought complications to participants' narratives and experiences. At the same time they opened the scope for new research questions. Moreover they pointed to the multiplicity of the field. In this sense, the field was "episodic and fluid" (Vered, 2000).

One participant I knew from lesbian circles, Nestar, approached me requesting that I interview her. She also told me that a friend of hers wanted to be interviewed. When I tried to find out whom this friend was and why she wanted to be interviewed, Nestar told me that her friend had been raped and needed someone to talk to. Although I hesitated and thought of referring the friend for counselling first, I agreed to meet both Nestar and her friend, separately.

The first contact with a participant was rather uncomfortable, particularly those I did not know and had only first met in social spaces. An extract from my field notes on 16th November 2007 shows this:

> *I met 'Yoba' at a Saturday night party in Playground about a month ago. She is tall, looks in her 20s and was in a black suit. She seemed quite drunk. She came to shake my hand – I was sitting on the couch, drinking. I asked for her name and number and she willingly obliged. I told her I would call her later in the week. She gave me a suspicious look and I told her there were no romantic intentions…A few days later after the second time we saw each other, I rang her up – she remembered me and said we should meet at Southgate Mall. I arrived at Southgate at about 12h45. I was nervous. I phoned her from one entrance and she told me where to meet her. She was coming from the food court. There were lots of people walking around, some having lunch in the various food chain stores. I saw her from a distance; she was wearing a black t-shirt, brown board shorts, and lots of bling! And sunglasses. From a distance, she looked like a guy, but her feminine body structure said something else. When I*

> *approached her, she shook my hand. I did the same although this felt very awkward and somewhat uncomfortable. I wondered if I should have given her a hug or just said 'hello'. The handshake was gentle, but firm. She was very much in-your-face in every way and everyone was looking at us. She took over her space; she walked like a king and walked tall. I felt like a little girl next to this big masculine woman, although she was much younger than me…*

Participant's choice of where we met later appeared to be very strategic. Initially I had thought these were spaces of convenience: we were at the closest shopping mall to where the participant lived, went to work or schooled. However, as the experience with meeting Yoba shows, while I was observing us being observed by the people in the mall she seemed oblivious to what was going on. Yoba was in control of her space. She was in a familiar zone and for her this was a meeting rather than what for me was an 'exploration of the field.' The interaction was formal, hence the handshake. We did not know each other and we were meeting because I wanted to listen to her life story and she wanted to know why. There was no familiarity and thus no need for a hug. Just like her handshake, her presentation was firm, direct but welcoming.

Conducting life story interviews

The fieldwork produced twenty life-story interviews with black lesbians in Johannesburg. Interviews were each between one hour to ten hours long, once off or over a period of time. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and given back to the participants. A significant amount of time was invested in explaining the study

to participants. Many read the information and consent forms over a period of weeks before committing to an interview, which in some cases spanned over six to eight months depending on the participant's availability. With one participant, the interviews were very regular, occurring every three to four weeks for a period of eight months. At times, I felt these became counselling sessions and there were interactions that I did not record within the eight months.

I cannot overstate the deep level of trust that I gained with the participants. The nature of the interviews conducted required participants to 'bear it all'. This was sometimes uncomfortable for both participant and I. For a long time I could not overcome the deep sense of being intrusive and carrying the weight of the information I collected. At other times, I could not remain 'purely' a researcher when a participant had shared with me difficult moments in her life. There were constant struggles between needing to 'intervene' in a participant's life and remaining objective. These struggles remain unresolved, both personally and in social research.

Almost all participants self-identified as lesbian. Although none of the participants specifically named themselves black, except for two, I read their participation as confirmation of eligibility under the recruitment criteria. Black, was not an assumed category. Its significance was sometimes explicit and other times clandestine in participants' narrations of their lives. In all the interviews, black did not appear alone. It was simultaneously articulated with various other categories.

The life story interview focused on a range of topics[31]. Usually, initial interviews triggered memories of past events and so participants were happy to return for follow-up interviews to talk about those recollections. There were difficult and tough moments, particularly when participants related their experiences of violence, homelessness, abuse and being infected with HIV. Such interviews had value for participants as they were heard and were allowed to share painful as well as pleasant experiences. Participants and I laughed and cried together, at other times emotions were uncertain or even slightly erotic. I learnt during this process that being a good listener had value.

Participants had control over the direction of their story. I directed the interview so participants could say what they wanted to say, but also highlight moments of significance in their lives. For example, for one participant boarding school was important because of the relationships she formed with school mates; for another it was the missed opportunity of meeting and talking to her parents that preoccupied her interview; or being allowed to take a girl as her partner to her school's matric dance. While these were all different interviews, these moments all represented the same thing to the participants. They were all related to their love for women and claiming that attraction and to some extent, their sexual identity.

[31] The topics covered in the interview included: growing up; schooling; family; cultural settings and traditions; religious practices; sexual onset and experiences; coming out (or not); framing one's identity; relationships and love; sexual experiences; work and experiences; experiences as a woman (political, social, economic); being in Johannesburg – experiences as a woman, lesbian & other categories; accessing services; historical events and period; life as a young adult; adulthood; hopes and dreams / vision for the future.

Interviews were conversations that flowed with ease. They all followed the same structure at the beginning: "tell me a bit about yourself…" The participants guided me towards the moments that were significant in their lives. The opening questions allowed participants to elaborate on themselves and in most cases, they talked about being in relationships with women or their first awareness of sexual attraction to a woman. These were responses I could use as follow-up questions about sexuality and love. The following extracts from Jo and Thabi show this…

Int: Please tell me a bit about who you are, where you are from, where you were born etc– just some information about yourself.

Jojo: My name is Jojo, but they call me '…'. I grew up in Pimville and went to school in…

Int: Do you know N?

Jojo: Yes, I do. She's a cousin. I'm 17 years. My parents are dead. My friend is S. Right now I'm not working… At home they don't have a problem with the way I am. The only relatives I'm with now are my uncle and aunt, my uncle's wife. I live alone. I live in Tembisa, but I'm based everywhere, but I'm full time in Tembisa.

Int: So, do you have siblings or are you the only child?

Jojo: I'd say that I'm a foreigner because my mother is from Zimbabwe and my father is from here, but I never got a chance or time to hear from them what's going on. I think I have brothers but they are not here, they are in Zimbabwe…

Int: And when did your parents pass away?

Jojo: I've never seen my parents. My uncle used to live with my mother, so when she died I stayed with him until he got married.

Int: ok. And just with growing up, what are some of your memories? Is there anything that you feel was nice?

Jojo: I'd say that I didn't enjoy my life because I never got the opportunity to tell my parents of the way I am and to get them to know.

Int: What do you mean about the way you are?

Jojo: You know, there are parents who want sons-in law and so forth and I wanted them to know that it would not happen with me.

Int: So, you feel you never got a chance to tell them?

Jojo: Yes, because I have never seen them. But my uncle knows and he doesn't have a problem.

Int: How did he know?

Jojo: He asked me "why do you not play with girls, why don't you wear skirts"? I told him that I don't like boys, I just like girls…

Similarly, Thabi follows the same structure in her interview.

INT: Please tell me who you are, where you were born – just some information about yourself.

Thabi: *My name is Thabi…I won't tell you my middle name, which starts with P. It's a Zulu name. My last name is…I was born in Soweto, 1976... I grew up there until I was about 11 or 12 - that's when my mother remarried. My biological father passed away when I was 3 years old, in 1981. My mother was a single parent until 1987. She remarried and we had to relocate to KZN. We lived there and I finished my high school there and I went to university also in the same area. At some point I felt that I was tired of hiding myself - the fact that I was attracted to women and wanted to be with women. I thought it best to come to Jhb because of the friends I had here in Jo'burg who were openly gay or lesbian. I decided that I have to come this side after I had finished at the university. So, in 1999, I think it was in October/ November, I came this side… One time there was an advert from (an LGBT organization) and I applied for it... I was fine with being a lesbian or a woman who was attracted to other women or loves other women, but I never thought there was a need for a person to work for an LGBT organization. I thought that was now outing oneself to the whole world. My parents were ok at home about my sexual orientation. Initially, my mother was not - I'll tell you all about it later…*

In the two extracts above, Jojo (17 years old) and Thabi (32 years old) talk about their sexual orientation and coming out, but in different ways. They both highlight these at the beginning of their interviews, as background detail about who they are and their families. In some instances, participants did not foreground issues related to sexuality. These were left out till the end of the interview. Similarly, discussions on relationships, sex and love came as participants allowed them. Many participants felt comfortable giving details of their sexual lives, others not. Participants were allowed to direct their own story, to leave out the parts they did not want to reveal and allowed space to talk about the moments of their life stories that were significant to them.

Participants were fairly young, ranging from ages 17 to 41 years. The following age brackets are presented to show when participants came of age in post-apartheid South Africa as well as the age they were during the apartheid era (shown in brackets). These distinctions are important as they can suggest the various ways in which participants' narratives and experiences differ or are similar. Eight of the participants were between the age group 17-22 (1-6 years); five participants in each age group 23- 27(7-11 years) and 33-37 (17-21 years). There was one participant for both age groups 28-32 (12-16 years) and 38-42 (22-26 years). From these categories, it can be seen that thirteen participants were between age 1 and 11 years in 1994, and seven were between 12 and 26 years that same year. For the most part, I could relate well with participants over 22 years as we shared similar socio-cultural experiences, such as growing up in the township, schooling, family life and 'coming out' experiences. For those under age 22 years, their experiences were less 'hung up' on the histories and effects of apartheid, but focused to some extent, on the 'freedoms' afforded by the post-apartheid moment. There were distinct differences particularly with regards to the 'coming out' narrative. It seemed that younger participants considered 'coming out', in some form, very early from the moment they were aware of their attraction to other women.

Half of the participants lived in the townships either with their families or alone in a rented backroom of someone else's house. Some had their own houses. Less than half were renting flats in town or Hillbrow (a suburb near the inner city) or lived in the suburbs alone or with their families.

The majority of the participants had part-time or full-time employment. Four participants were unemployed (one living off an allowance from her girlfriend and another from her retired mother). One participant was somewhat self-employed (making ends meet through various means). Four of the participants were students at tertiary institutions. Six participants had not finished high school and three had matric certificates but did not continue with their studies. Of the twenty participants, six had post-matric qualifications, including college certificates and postgraduate degrees.

Most participants did not have children, while five had children and some of them had grandchildren. A few of the participants had been married through traditional custom and had left their male partners or were divorced. In one case, a mother, without the participant's knowledge or consent, had arranged the marriage.

The issue of where interviews would take place arose a number of times. I had recruited participants who lived in townships such as Soweto, Tembisa, Spruit, Benoni, and KwaThema. Some lived within the city centre and other areas within Johannesburg. All participants preferred to meet either in the city centre or in a shopping mall closer to their area. Only three of the participants allowed me to go to their homes or neighbourhoods and conduct interviews there. This was possible because the three lived alone or with their children, so there was no presence of older family members. Meeting in participants' neighbourhoods was limited to

socializing and possible networking. A number of the participants were interviewed at their workplaces. I was familiar with and had been granted permission by all the organizations where the participants worked and it was not difficult making arrangements for a quiet room where the interviews would take place. However town or the mall was always a preferred place for interviews. In particular, the younger participants (less than 25 years) and those who lived with their families opted to meet in town or a nearby shopping mall. The next chapter explores the use of both spaces in this research.

The mall had symbolic value as it showed that participants were part of the urban city and showed their own sense of being cosmopolitan and hip. The mall also offered a sense of safety for many black lesbians and allowed them to be anonymous as they could be part of mall 'culture'. It is a space where you do not feel threatened or are seen as a threat. Although initially unanticipated, the mall soon became a logical place or site for conducting this kind of research. For many gay and lesbian people who live with their parents, family homes generally lack privacy because the spaces are controlled by others. This also means that one's identity is usually concealed or suppressed. An opportunity to be out of the family home and to be able to express oneself fully thus becomes important.

Archival material

Archival material utilized for this research was all housed and collected by the Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA), renamed Gay and Lesbian Memory In Action. Since

1997 GALA has been excavating and archiving the lives and experiences of gay and lesbian people in South Africa. The archives' preoccupation was the absent and biased representation of gay and lesbian people in the formal institutional archives, church and state records. Reid (2002:200) argues that the importance of such an archive is invaluable because of the scarce and "rare" information on homosexuality in general archives.

The archives were the first port of call for this research. I had spent time going through the various records, identifying gaps in the archive and going through historical records that could form part of the research. Furthermore, it was necessary to think of ways in which I could triangulate archival material with life histories as well as participant observation data. The field is not only seen from one lens: historical material was important; being part of the field was another as well as talking to people. Gupta and Ferguson (1997:34) refer to many others who argue that historical material is widely valued in ethnography as a supplement to "real fieldwork."

Organizational records from the 1960s to 90s as well as the gay and lesbian movement during the same period form the most comprehensive collections of the archives. Outside the collections from the Oral History project that the archives hold from 2002 to 2006, there are very few records of lesbian women. The bulk of such records are from lesbian women who were part of gay and lesbian organizing in Johannesburg in the 1980s and 1990s. The archives have rich material collected

from various gay and lesbian focused print media from 1982 to 2005. Almost all the archival material related to this research was also analyzed and it offered rich and textured historical accounts on issues related to black lesbian women in Johannesburg.

Outside the archives I had also collected various news clips and media records addressing issues related to lesbians. These ranged from audio recordings of radio programs, TV drama series, and magazine clippings to web forums and blogs. These were also analyzed.

Ethical Considerations

During fieldwork a number of dilemmas arose, including ethical ones. The first came when I asked participants to read and complete consent forms. While participants received consent forms a week prior to the interview, when we met, many felt it was not necessary to fill in these forms as they knew me and I was part of known circles. Time was invested in going through each form and emphasizing the importance of consent and research participant's rights. Such investment was not in vain, as Tete's request not to be included in the study shows. It was always important to insist on written consent, not only to follow research processes, but also to instil into participants the importance of owning one's stories and experiences and guarding how these are represented. This is one of the major problems faced by black South African lesbians. With the rise of hate-related crimes and violence towards black lesbians, many lesbians have found themselves being recorded and their stories

published in local and international media without their consent. In some cases, their lives have been misrepresented and portrayed only as poor, powerless victims of crime in a homophobic society.

The second ethical issue arose when we talked about anonymity and I informed participants that I would provide pseudonyms. Some participants felt that because they already do not use their original name, they did not need a pseudonym and it was important to maintain their new name as it defined who they are. Only one participant insisted on not using her birth name, as she was worried that her parents did not know about her sexual orientation and she did not have an assumed name. Naming participants by their names continues to be one of the struggles I deal with. For many of the participants in this research, the difficult process of 'coming out' is one that signifies and affirms the participant's identity. It is ironic that a project dealing so explicitly with identity has to conceal, for ethical reasons, the names of participants even when they want them used.

The importance of naming was not only relevant to participants, but also to the people they mentioned in their interviews, who I only refer to by the first letter of their name. All such identities had to be protected. I further had to take out any identifying information about participants to the extent that nicknames (assumed names) had to be recast. However, as a compromise to many of the participants who want to be named, I created pseudonyms that maintained the significance and importance of the participants' assumed name. Throughout the research I have used

first name pseudonyms to identify participants. Some wanted to identify in this manner, but many were unhappy about being hidden as they spent most of their lives hidden, and had now 'come out'. They were not completely satisfied with the decision to use pseudonyms. This decision allows participants to change their minds in the future: whether to be named in other publications or in the case where they do not want to named.

The political implication of protecting anonymity needed to be taken into account and clearly negotiated with participants. Some groups have the privilege of not having to hide themselves and not lead a double life. Within lesbian groupings, many people do not want to be known, while others, for political reasons, may want to be known. If participants wished for their identities to be revealed, these wishes were fully listened to and respected. Furthermore, when each participant received a copy of her transcript, she was able to contact me and request certain information be removed or changed at any time during the study. There was another contentious side to confidentiality and anonymity. Black lesbian groups in Johannesburg tend to be small and people know each other quite well. It may be possible in some cases that participants could be known through parts of their story, even without any of their identifying information.

Recording interviews was also difficult at times and had to be negotiated. While most participants allowed for the audio recorder to be utilized, there were moments when interviews or sections of interviews were not recorded or it was not

appropriate to record. For example, discussions about violence being perpetuated towards a participant were difficult to hear and thus record. I was unable to put the recorder on as a young participant told me about her experience of being abducted and gang raped by a group of men. While this interview is not audio-recorded, it is one I battle with every day as it continues to ring in my head and in my memories. Just like I struggled putting the recorder on, I continue to struggle living with a memory that cannot be easily turned into a transcript. I was also unable to record an interview when a mother talked about how her children were also abducted and gang raped. One participant told me in confidence that she was a *sangoma* (a traditional healer) and requested that I switch the recorder off when talking about her role as *isangoma.* This was to respect various cultural and traditional secrets about being a traditional healer.

Most conversations did get very intimate at times. Many participants were not shy to give details of their sex and romantic lives. They were happy to say how they attract lovers, what they do in bed and how. Some of the details were excluded from the audio recording, as they mentioned other participant's names.

Dynamics and Implications of fieldwork "at home"

In the following sections I wish to engage with some of the rewards and challenges that I experienced during fieldwork. Much has been written about researching one's own grouping, and various phrases developed: 'native anthropologist' by Narayan

(1993), 'anthropology at home' by Jackson (1987) and 'insider research' by Styles (1979). I see this research as researching within – within oneself, as well as within one's group. I will start here with the obvious, my own positionality as a black, lesbian, classed woman coming from outside my 'field site,' Johannesburg and speaking mainly Nguni languages. The variety of my identities played out differently at various times. As an insider in black lesbian groups, I had greater ease in fitting in without altering the setting. I was known, recognized and people could reach me easily when they needed to. I also possessed considerable amounts of background information on black lesbians. In that sense, I knew some of the subtleties of lesbian 'culture' (Kennedy and Davis, 1996).

The question of writing myself into the text arose occasionally. It was clear that there was more to writing than just putting words together. As Geertz noted "getting themselves into their text may be as difficult for ethnographers as getting themselves into the culture." He further adds that for ethnographers to be a convincing "I-Witness, one must, so it seems, first become a convincing I." In this sense then, "ethnography takes a rather introspective turn" (Geertz, 1988:79). Reflecting on her field experience while conducting research on gay and lesbian community members, Weston felt that her 'insider' status was not only limited to her stating or writing about it. It went beyond that. She argues that it is difficult to manage the constant shifts between being an 'insider/outsider' or researcher and researched. Of more relevance for this research is Weston's (1996:276) challenge and caution about the inequalities of power present in the writing process. She

contends that an inaccessible language and a tone of omniscience can easily alienate those in the study area. This is one major preoccupation in this research – to leave the text as accessible as possible.

At the same time I always had to be mindful of how I would put myself in the ethnographic picture, what my motives were and how I would negotiate loyalty to the group that I was part of, but also researching (Lewin and Leap, 1996). While there were many times when I felt like an insider, there were also times when I felt totally isolated, even in the most familiar spaces. I could not claim total detachment/attachment from the study nor from such spaces. Like others, Davies (1999:182) argues that the "question of being an insider in any given situation is far from unproblematic. It is difficult to imagine any individual so unreflective that they consistently feel a complete insider in any situation even within their own family." Anyone doing ethnographic work will possibly find they feel detached even from the most familiar spaces or inclusive groups.

My identity as a black lesbian was an asset in terms of gaining access. I was able to enter spaces where other 'outsiders' might find difficult to enter, as was the case in the following extract…

> *It's the last Saturday of the month and we make our way to 'Playground', a monthly event organized by a lesbian couple. 'Playground' is hosted at bar Capitol. The bar is located at a popular spot in Rosebank, opposite the design district with numerous clubs and bars catering for the middle to upper-middle class patrons. Capitol, the bar, is opened everyday for light lunches and after-work drinks. People from diverse sexualities, racial groups and identities*

> *come here to hang out on a daily basis. However, many of these patrons are chased away on the last Saturday of each month, as the bar becomes exclusively lesbian or for women loving women…On these nights, lesbian women can bring a male gay friend, but he has to be strictly gay (a kissing test at the door is conducted to prove him as such). He must kiss another male person (possibly gay) and must always be accompanied by his lesbian friends at all times, even inside the bar. On these nights, onlookers and "gay gazers" are always seen near the bar, trying to get in or constantly negotiating with the tall, very dark male bouncer strategically positioned at the bottom of the stairs leading to the entrance. The bouncer not only checks you out, he also assesses your 'gayness' by looking at you up and down and staring straight into your eyes. Only after asking you a series of questions about your gayness does he then allow you entrance to the space.* [*Playground*, 27 January 2007][32]

Researchers who are not lesbian or gay would have not easily accessed this space. While such screenings and tests benefit and protect lesbian women inside the club, they may come across as very rigid, offensive and exclusionary towards people who are not part of the gay and lesbian community. Such screenings are meant for that - to demarcate space and put boundaries between people. They are also a form of maintaining safe spaces for many lesbians who do not always feel welcome in heterosexual spaces. While many patrons accept or approve of such screenings, they limit sexuality and could even bar women and men who do not identify as lesbian or gay but are in same-sex relationships or are lesbian and gay-friendly. At the same time, such screenings limit 'gayness' to kissing, a problematic reading of sexuality and sexual identity. Some questions asked, for example "are you sure you're gay?" can easily "put you off" from entering or even having a good time.

32 Fieldnotes, *Playground* at Capitol, Rosebank, 27 January 2007, 10pm - 02 am

My status as a researcher within also meant that I could easily gain a level of trust with participants. This made it possible for me to obtain sensitive information that may not be accessible to others. Thirdly, issues of language and translation (which are usually problematic – see Sideris, 1986) were easily negotiated, as the cultural gap between researcher and participant was small, even though some participants were Tswana and Sotho speaking. The fact that I had the ability to speak more than one South African language meant that I could easily understand some of the connotations of different words and phrases used.

Prior to starting the research I was aware of some of the challenges I would face. While my identity as a lesbian has been an asset in terms of gaining access, I had to be cautious of the implications this might have on my academic career as my study could be dismissed on the basis of writing "for my own group" and my work being "tainted by personal concerns". Like Okely and Callaway (1992) who highlight the ethnographers "autobiographical reflexivity", Clifford (1986) argues that ethnographers studying their own cultures offer new angles and visions and depths of understanding. I struggled with how I would maintain distance from the participants, as many of them became friends. At the same time, my ability to go deeper into the lives of the participants, to be trusted and obtain sensitive information, which revealed new and exciting worlds, proved to be an asset.

While studying populations close to one's identity can give one access to various aspects and open possibilities for relations that enable one's knowledge, advance

knowledge about participants' communities and cultures could lead one to easily gloss over things one thinks one knows. Furthermore, there could be emotional blocks that are caused by shared social oppression of lesbians, which could limit one's clear thoughts about a particular topic (Kennedy and Davis, 1996:184). I struggled with thinking critically about violence towards black lesbians beyond how such crimes were described and presented in society. Following is an extract from my field notes at a funeral of two friends who were brutally murdered, which shows my own predilections:

> *Today is a very sad day for me…Thursday morning I received a phone call from a friend of mine, Zam, telling me that two friends had been murdered after a lesbian party in Soweto. Not very long after that, I get a call from my cousin, informing me of the same incident and telling me that he heard it on Metro fm. On Friday night, I call Zam from our guesthouse to hear the story and she mentions that this was probably a hate crime, that Sizakele and Salome were murdered because they were lesbians. She describes how their bodies were found, what they looked like and the fear and discomfort she felt at the party in Soweto that Saturday. Immediately as I put the phone down, I tell B the story. We both have sick feelings in the stomach and immediately feel very conscious of our surroundings. We fear walking out and being noticed that we're a couple. Friday night passes and the only thing we can talk and think about is this brutal murder. …*
> *[At the hall during the funeral service] A few of the priests who were at the funeral represented LGBT groups. Some priests from the Hope Unity Metropolitan Community Church talked and asked people in the hall to forgive those who had done this violent crime. It was a very emotional service, people stated crying. Someone else came on the stage and said we had to be careful because the murderers or their friends were possibly around us and looking for their next target. This made the hall and many of us very tense. As we were going out of the hall, some people were saying that because of fear, they will go back to the closet, and rather live a heterosexual life as they feared for their lives. We were all very scared and couldn't stop wondering who the murderers were.*
> *[*Meadowlands, 14 July, 2007*]*[33]

[33] Bapedi Hall, Meadowlands and Avalon Cemetery Soweto: Funeral of Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Masooa, 14 July 2007, 8h30 - 17h00

Melissa Steyn (2001) concurs that while the researcher studying one's 'in-group' has privileged access in researching hers/his culture or group, there are pitfalls in that you have to be mindful of shared cultural processes with those one studies. Steyn's cautionary points were sometimes evident as I glossed over some of the participant's views, as is seen in the extracts of the interviews with two participants: Simi and Aya. At certain times, shared cultural understandings with participants limited me from gaining depth on some issues. Participants freely used terms such as '*you know mos; of course you know; obviously'* as seen in the extracts below.

Int: So, you call yourself a lesbian?
Simi*:* *Yes.*
Int: What does it mean for you to be a lesbian?
Simi*:* *[giggle] I don't know how I would say this.*
Int: When did you start calling yourself a lesbian?
Simi*:* *No. I didn't call myself that, people called me that. Obviously a girl who dates other girls is a lesbian, isn't it?*
Int: I don't know. I'm asking you.
Simi*:* *[giggle] - no, you know.*

Like *Simi*, in her interview *Aya* relates to me at a very personal level. Both participants recognized the similarities between us and we used shared subtleties of being lesbian. However, like Weston (1996) I did not always feel as an insider and my identity did not always feel close to those I was working with. Discussions around butch and femme for example, felt alienating as the question of my gender identification arose in numerous occasions. A few people felt that the label 'dyke' would be the one that I would be comfortable with. Similarly, Aya battled with my self-presentation:

Aya*:* *What are you exactly? [Pause] I don't know what you are. I can't say you're butch or femme.*
Int: …What is it…is it clothing, is it hair, is it…?

Aya*: It's clothing; it's hair…Um – [hesitating], Okay, you're butch!*
Int: Butch because of?
Aya*: Because of the way you dress, I suppose. I don't know, I don't know - it's the way you dress, I think. It's hard to just put a label on something and then you have to justify it somehow. What if that label is not even right? So, ja - I don't know what you are.*

There was also another dimension to fieldwork that I continue to engage with. Dubisch's (1995) exploration of relationships in the field between informants and researcher became crucial. Such a relationship brings into play hierarchies of knowledge and power that are not necessarily discussed in the field. The relationship becomes difficult as the researcher tries to maintain her or his true identity beyond being just a researcher. This can affect and challenge one's thinking about oneself, one's identities, accounts of one's own sexuality and how one relates to others.

Throughout the research I had to remind myself of the complex implications of the intimate nature of my interviews and of the relationships that were formed between the participants and myself. For all the participants, it was the first time they had talked openly and fully about their lives and shared intimate details of their life history and sexual life. While I was aware of the benefits that my closeness to the participants presented, I also had to be mindful of what such closeness and intimacies could represent (Blackwood, 1995).

During this research I encountered people who wanted to 'bare it all' (inside or outside my own circles), thus giving me unrestricted access to their lives and to the

'field'. This did not always feel comfortable. Maintaining close ties with participants also meant that they were aware that I could follow-up on their stories and get further details of their lives, even beyond the fieldwork period. This also allowed me to gather data, sometimes about a participant, through various sources. The latter issue intimates an unclear boundary of being "in the field" and "out of the field". For some researchers who have researched lesbian or same-sex relationships as participant observers, the 'field' was less difficult to negotiate as the researcher's study would come to an end or they would literally leave the area where they did research or end a relationship they had with an informant in the field (for example, Gloria Wekker, 2006; Kennedy and Davis, 1996; Esther Newton, 1996; Evelyn Blackwood, 1995). For me, this was not necessarily the case. Even when 'fieldwork' ended, in the sense that I stopped recording interactions and interviews, I continued being a participant observer. While this continuation has allowed me to enhance and inform my analysis and interpretation beyond the 'recording' in fieldwork, people continue to see me as a researcher. Recently some friends were joking that I know too much about people and their lives in our circles. All this perhaps intimates what Weston (as quoted by Gupta and Ferguson 1997:35) argued, "In an interconnected world, we are never really out of the field"

Analysing data

Data analysis was a continuous process, which took place throughout fieldwork. I searched for patterns in the data using a variety of coding and thematic techniques

and analysis. The aim was to situate these themes in relation to the research questions. The themes assisted in generating the overall idea of what the research data was suggesting. Transcripts were read in relation to each other and with other sources. Through these readings I looked for emerging themes about how lesbian identities are formed, similarities in experiences and expressions. There were commonalities in the narratives about sexual and emotional life. For example, how participants related to men was usually experienced as difficult or challenging in terms of one's sexuality. However, sexual life with a woman was seen as a source of pleasure, exploration and knowing about oneself. In some cases it was related to power.

I opted to include a technology layer to the data analysis process. This was helpful in storing, managing and linking documents. I used NVIVO 8 to assist me with this process. Data was coded firstly manually, up to axial coding and eventually using software. I was always conscious of the limits of data analysis software. Data analysis was not only mechanical and analytic; it was a deeply reflective process. Like Kennedy and Davis (1996) I had to reflect on issues of representativity and the responsibility of writing for a close lesbian community as I could easily be ostracized or viewed as having "othered" black lesbians. That kind of responsibility extended toward advocacy for the people on whom this research focuses.

Writing about love and sex was difficult because these are rarely written about in relation to lesbian women in our contexts. At the same time there were untold

stories about violence between intimate partners. While these existed and came across strongly in interviews, I wondered about the implications of writing about them for the lesbian community. Related to these is also the implicit power related to interpretation and the research hierarchy. I saw such power inequalities as going beyond interpretation, but embedded in the ethnographic project too. Clifford (1986:3) notes, "ethnographic work has indeed been enmeshed in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities, and it continues to be implicated. It enacts power relations. But its function within these relations is complex, often ambivalent, potentially counter-hegemonic." Questions such as who owns what has been written, and the implications of how it is written, continue to be challenging. These and many other are struggles I constantly reflect on.

Conclusion

This chapter problematizes the notion of insider/outsider as well as the 'field'. In ethnographic research, these concepts are sometimes taken for granted even though they reveal constant shifts, complexities and nuances. Doing research within one's group offers various opportunities but at the same time can be very complex and challenging. While the researcher may find such research as an opportunity to learn about herself/himself, the dynamics in the 'field' may raise many unexpected complexities requiring serious negotiations of power and position.

These complexities suggest the notion of 'decentering' the 'field' as well as the importance of various ways of creating and collecting data about sexuality and identity, particularly on black lesbians in Johannesburg and possibly other African contexts. Furthermore, this chapter challenges existing conventions of the 'field' and fieldwork by showing that the theoretical concept of the 'field' can be at 'home', and such fieldwork can be multi-sited, dynamic and fluid.

This study shows that engaging with some of these complexities is a continuous process. At times the complexities can be somewhat easily negotiated – when the tension of the binaries (insider/outsider, friend/researcher etc) threatens integrity. At other times, the complexities are more trying and are ongoing struggles about knowledge creation and how this can transform the injustices in our lives.

CHAPTER THREE: OUTing The City

Introduction

Space is integral to many 'gay[34]' people's lives and to identity formation in general. Where and how you are located as a gay, lesbian or trans person determines how you will be perceived in that particular space and in turn your experience of that space or place. At the same time, that space may be reconfigured by the presence of gay, lesbian or trans people's visibility in it. Being visible as a lesbian or gay person can be tricky. On the one hand it can make one easily identifiable by other lesbian and gay people (as illustrated in Chapter Five) and thus create a sense of belonging to those who share a common sense of identity. On the other hand, it can mark visible lesbian and gay people as 'other', thus creating a sense of exclusion and making people feel like outsiders.

In this chapter I am interested in exploring the experiences of black lesbians and the related meanings of urban spaces for this group in Johannesburg. Johannesburg[35] is an interesting, dynamic and cosmopolitan urban landscape, which is "characterised by stark contrasts" (Beavon, 2004:1). These contrasts are visible in many areas,

[34] Gay here is used to refer collectively to lesbian and gay people. In other cases, when positioned next to men, it is used to refer particularly to gay men.

[35] Johannesburg in this Chapter and thesis refers to the Johannesburg Metropolitan Area demarcated in the 1990s (see Beavon, 2004). It includes: Randburg, Sandton, Roodeport, Soweto and Johannesburg Central. In some cases, I refer to Johannesburg and surrounding areas, which in actual fact is the Witwatersrand area which includes: Johannesburg Metro, Krugersdorp, Edenvale, Germiston, Springs and Benoni. I will make these distinctions throughout, without referring to Witwatersrand, as it was not an area mentioned by any of the participants.

including in the different ways in which people experience themselves within the boundaries of Johannesburg. Johannesburg as a space also differs quite significantly from other urban spaces in South Africa. It is a city that has a long history of gay and lesbian activism and involvement, having hosted the first gay and lesbian pride march in Africa, and has a number of visible spaces and landmarks celebrating and commemorating the lives and contributions of gay and lesbian people in Johannesburg[36].

The chapter starts off with an extract from an account by a well-known black lesbian activist and film-maker in Johannesburg, Bev Ditsie. Her experiences as she occupies the different spaces in Johannesburg illustrate the contrasts and complexities in the ways in which black lesbians, in particular, experience and inhabit space in Johannesburg. Born and having grown up in Soweto, Bev Ditsie, recounts her experiences in her township after appearing on national TV at the first gay and lesbian pride march in 1990 in downtown Johannesburg (Simon and I, 2001; Ditsie, 2006 and www.noneonrecord.com).

Pride is an important event for many lesbians, gay and trans people because it is where they can make themselves visible as well as occupy space through 'walking about' the city. Pride has become such a popular event and form of activism in Johannesburg that recently it has been extended to two townships in Johannesburg: Soweto, and the in the surrounding area KwaThema (outside the Johannesburg

[36] For more on this see *Josi: the Queer Tour*, 1999 directed by Reid and Alberton.

Metro). The extract below captures Bev Ditsie's experiences in her community after her courageous "coming out" story on national TV. Although this was an opportune moment for gay and lesbian organising in Johannesburg and the country as a whole, demonstrating the visibility of black lesbians in the country, it presented difficulties for Bev and her family as threats from people in her community loomed. Her experience highlights the sense of exclusion, fear and marginalisation that continues to be felt by many lesbian and gay people in many parts of the world.

Her insistence on representing black lesbian and gay voices among the mainly white organizers and marchers at the lesbian and gay pride march had unexpected results:

> *"...I think its one of those things where I asked them (the organisers), why is it that there is no woman of colour, girl of colour who is going to be part of the representation? Because if it's only going to be white people who are going to be on the podium in the first pride march in Africa then what it is – is white influence non stop! I think I asked, "wouldn't it help us to have a black lesbian talk?" And it was like 'yeah, yeah, yeah! You wanna do it? You wanna make a speech? So I made a speech. Those cameras around me didn't mean anything, until it hit the news…*
> *Wow! Church groups, parent's groups, school group, and teachers' groups – you name it. Everywhere there was a whole petition to get me killed, to get people like me. It's like - "we understand when it's these white people, we understand it's a very white thing to be doing, so, we understand. But when YOU stand up and tell us it's all South African, oh - well you're starting to insult people's sensibilities and you are shaking their moral ground, and you are shaking their own firm beliefs!"*
>
> *It was a frightening time; you know - the threats to the family, threats to my mother, threats to my grandmother and my sister – guys coming around my house wanting to "teach me" I'm a woman. That was something I did not expect, like I could not walk to the shops without hearing at least one person or some car passing by (making a hooting sound) asking "is that her?" saying, "Bitch, we're going to get you, you're a woman, you faggot!" Every time I heard noises outside I kept thinking, am I being attacked? People would threaten and say to me "we're coming for you!" That actually got my parents totally and completely supporting me*

because the implications were if they do not support me, then who is? So my grandma became my rock…

I was sitting in my room when I heard voices outside calling my name. I ran into the lounge and my granny opened the door and told me to hide. About twenty angry men were surrounding our house demanding I come with them so that they could teach me a lesson. They wanted to rape me. The worst thing is that they threatened to take my grandma if I didn't come with them. My grandmother stood at the door and said, "Come in, but one of you will die with me…" So, I was escorted for about two weeks after the pride march. My mom would put on her converse, she'd put on her jeans and she'd say 'we need to go there – let's walk'. I was scared, all the time. So, ja – I just pushed so hard, and I stuck out like a sore thumb and said "Ok, alright, look - I'm right here, I ain't moving, I ain't budging!"

This extract offers a compelling starting point for a chapter on space, in particular on Johannesburg. Not only does it highlight the common notions of associating homosexuality with whiteness, but it also shows the distinguishable ways in which sexuality is/not negotiated spatially. At a lesbian and gay pride march in the inner city of Johannesburg, Ditsie had made iconic history by talking openly as a black lesbian. Less than 20 kilometres from the inner city, in Soweto, presenting as a lesbian challenged societal norms. These are the continuities/discontinuities and contradictions with which this chapter is concerned. Sometimes they are overt, other times hidden. It is the complexity and dynamism of Johannesburg as a space that evokes these, but also how identities shift and reconfigure such a space.

Locating Johannesburg: 'Joburg, Jozi, Town'

As already suggested in an earlier footnote, the reference to Johannesburg in this chapter is to the Johannesburg Metropolitan Area as demarcated in the 1990s (see

Beavon, 2004). The Johannesburg Metro includes: Randburg, Sandton, Roodeport, Soweto and Johannesburg Central. The Central Johannesburg area includes the inner city, the suburbs (mainly northern) as well as the townships. The inner city includes the central business district (CBD) as well as residential neighbourhoods: Braamfontein, Yeoville, Berea, Bellevue and Hillbrow, which were formerly part of the southern boundaries of the northern suburbs, but have ceased to be seen as such. They have been currently seen in popular imagination as what Czegledy (2003:30) calls the "economically depressed appendages of the inner city". Reference to the inner city will follow local talk, which uses variations of 'Jo'burg, Jozi' or just 'town/downtown'. In some cases, I refer to Johannesburg and surrounding areas, which in actual fact is the Witwatersrand area, which includes: Johannesburg Metro, Krugersdorp, Edenvale, Germiston, Springs and Benoni and their townships.

The suburbs referred to in this chapter are mainly in the northern part of Johannesburg and include areas around, but not limited to, Melville, Rosebank, Randburg and Sandton. The townships within the Johannesburg Metro (popularly referred to as *kasi, elok'shini)* include Soweto, Alexandra, Tembisa, Spruit and others within Johannesburg surrounding areas (these include KwaThema, Vosloorus; Tembisa; Rabie Ridge; Spruit). Most of the townships and suburbs are not part of central Johannesburg, but research participants referred to themselves as occupying parts of the Johannesburg Metro on a daily basis. The Johannesburg inner city and its nearby suburbs were spaces for work, school, socializing and had a number of

venues catering for black lesbians. Though many areas included as field sites were not geographically part of central Johannesburg, participants demarcated these boundaries themselves, noting the experiences that were part of 'Johannesburg' and those not.

Delineating spaces and areas seems easy in geographical terms, but this proves physically impossible at times in the local imaginary. It is unclear when Hillbrow becomes Berea, or Berea - Yeoville or Yeoville - Bez Valley and whether the latter forms part of the inner city. The same applies to the northern suburbs, when Melville ends and becomes Parkview or Westdene is sometimes difficult to tell. Similarly, it is difficult to tell the meaning and demarcation of Johannesburg when one talks about Johannesburg. Usually being specific about which part of Johannesburg is being referred to is necessary. Johannesburg as a location is sometimes a location of "the mind" (Chipkin, 2008:401), an imagination, a representation of an idea as in when one leaves the rural areas of South Africa to enter the urban landscape of the Gauteng province in search of a job. The popular discourse of "going to *eGoli"* (the place where to look for "gold", money) is indicative.

Race, class, consumption and sexuality in Johannesburg

The next sections explore the different ways in which Johannesburg can be understood, as a post-apartheid city that carries deep meaning in terms of both race and sexuality. The racial-spatial order separated and policed people according to

racial lines. At the same time, homosexuality was outlawed and had to operate below the surface, and was similarly policed. In the next sections I discuss the effects of this racial order and its manifestations in current-day Johannesburg. Two themes specific to Johannesburg will facilitate this discussion: blackness and class, and homosexuality and the city.

Race and class in the apartheid and the post-apartheid city

As argued by Beavon (2004), since the discovery of gold in 1886 Johannesburg, the population has been heterogeneous with regards to race, class or creed. However it remained mainly male-dominated for the most part of that century as many men worked in the mines. Even before the apartheid laws were put in place in the second half of the 20th century, Johannesburg was already formally segregated on racial and class lines. Three pieces of legislation implemented the geography of segregated Johannesburg: The Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 (drafted in 1912 and finalised in 1923); the 1930 Amended Act (which was the basis of the apartheid legislation after 1950); and the 1934 Slums Act (used to clear slums through re-zoning or evictions). Beavon (2004:95) argues that even prior to apartheid, segregated Johannesburg was "consciously crafted rather than simply allowed to evolve on racial lines". In particular, the 1923 Act had such racist content, which restricted urban Africans to "white" areas only for the use of their labour. These severely dehumanising restrictions deemed Africans "temporary sojourners" in the urban areas (Beavon, 2004:97; Mbembe and Nuttall, 2008:22). Johannesburg thus was

legally designated a "white" area, and during apartheid Africans were forced to obtain permits (pass laws) to enter the city and make sure to leave it before dark.

Before the 1980s black (Indian, coloured and African) people could not live in the inner city because of "race-based zoning" of urban areas (Gotz and Simone, 2003:128). The 1976 Soweto uprising was a significant force for change in the ways black people were treated. Beavon (2004:23) argues that the progressive elements of the business community and owners of apartment blocks in inner Johannesburg accepted the 1976 revolt as a "wake-up call". Coupled with mounting internal and international pressure against the apartheid regime, many of the white (foreign) people who lived in the inner city (Hillbrow in particular) left the country. As a result, many of the apartment blocks were left empty.

New employment opportunities for coloured and Indian people opened up in the inner city. Because of the long distances between the 'group areas' of coloured and Indian people as well as lack of suitable and affordable housing in these areas for working people, Indian and coloured people sought accommodation near or in the inner city. All of these factors contributed to what is considered the "greying" of the inner city, allowing Africans, Indian and coloured people (although with some challenges) in the inner city (Beavon, 2004:213-6). Many whites subsequently moved from the inner city, taking their businesses with them and relocating to the northern suburbs, abandoning many of the inner city's buildings and offices (Tomlinson, et al, 2003:6). In the northern suburbs "new city centres of the north"

boomed (Chipkin, 2008) leaving the "old city centre" to black people and the new northern suburbs to whites. Beavon (2004) considers the possibility that the northern suburbs may become a sort of "neo-apartheid city" in functional terms.

This shift changed the face and form of the 'old' inner city. Today's inner city is a melting pot, which represents a breakdown of boundaries, zones and classifications. Its inhabitants come from as far as the distant and neighbouring countries, the country's provinces as well as the close-by townships. It is a place of constant motion, people coming and going and is the first port of entry for many in the Johannesburg Metropolitan Area. Gotz and Simone (2003:129) suggest that the inner city represents a "vacuum of belonging, where almost no one presently living there can claim an overarching sense of origin…or profess a real wish to stay".

Although the face of the inner city has changed over time, that of the townships remain the same. Away from the city, the townships were created to keep "each race in its proper place, economically, politically and culturally" (Chipkin, 2008:121 quoting Posel). In Johannesburg, putting African people in the largest southwest periphery townships, Soweto, manifested this. This kind of system, Chipkin (2008:128-9) argues, revealed the careful planning and architectures of inequality and exclusion. In addition to being thrown to the far ends of the inner city, African people were allowed only since the 1980s to own "immovable property" (Chipkin, 2008). Those into business also had to deal with restrictions with regards to trading as businesses were not allowed to flourish. Richard Maponya, one of the most

successful businessmen in Soweto explains this: "If you had a licence to trade, you were even restricted on the goods you could sell. You were expected to sell necessities, such as sugar, maize, bread and rice. If you were found selling asparagus, you were punished as it was called a luxury" (Posel (2010:170) quoting Hlengani 2007). This careful planning of the apartheid modern state directly resulted in denying black people the opportunity to create their own wealth (Chipkin, 2008). This was also to ensure that blackness remained as distant from whiteness as possible. If sophistication, "luxury" and affluence (consumption of particular goods) were spotted among those outside white communities, this was not only deemed as a form of "racial mimicry", but was also duly punished (Posel, 2010:170).

Soweto, like many townships in South Africa, is one of South Africa's identity markers. Even though townships are generally represented as "sites of poverty, oppression" or "zones of danger, despair and pathology" (Mangcu, 2003:283), in post apartheid society everyone wants a piece of them, whether through t-shirts, a poster or an experience. Soweto has become a place where black people continuously create a cultural space and a very important social history in South Africa. Though Soweto may be seen as one of apartheid's "greatest triumphs", it has also become the "source of its greatest failure" (Chipkin, 2008:217). One of apartheid's failures was not imagining what could become of Soweto or what black people could make of Soweto or of the township (*ekasi/elok'shini)* generally. Part of that current imaginary includes seeing the inner city as a "proper extension" of

Soweto and a "place of escape from the townships" (Gotz and Simone, 2003:129).

The physical and symbolic boundaries between the post-apartheid inner city and the township have slowly narrowed. These two have becomes "inextricably linked" (Mbembe, Dlamini, Khunou 2004:499). No longer is the city the place that is not accessible or that requires a set of permissions, but it has increasingly become 'everyday' space, a city for "passerby". The inner city, which was the main shopping hub for African people in Soweto, is also being 'replaced' by the presence of upmarket shopping malls in the township. Forms of consumption among African people are resurfacing, becoming more pronounced and visible in the post-apartheid city that is without any restrictions. Elements of "desirability, accessibility and opportunity" are as important in the township as they are in the city or the northern suburbs (Rosebank and Sandton), as Khunou (in Mbembe, et.al, 2004:499) observes. Desirability drives the township and its dwellers (Khunou in Mbembe, et.al, 2004). These are different forms of desirability: the desire to leave the township; and the desire to consume. Khunou in Mbembe et al (2004) as well as the popular jazz artist Simphiwe Dana in her song *Sizophum' Elokishini* (We will get out of the township) note this sense of desire. The desire to leave is complicated by the feeling of always being drawn back to the township whether through family ties or community ceremonies (Khunou in Mbembe, 2004:500). Jacob Dlamini's (2009) controversial *Native Nostalgia* similarly illustrates the intimate bonds and forms of connections and community that were at once characteristic of everyday township life. These are not without complications. Bev Ditsie's earlier account is suggestive

in the ways in which the close-knit community can work together to exclude those seen as outlaws.

The desire to consume is visible in the ways in which commodities such as cars; beauty, fashion, clothes and cellphones have become celebrated and esteemed accoutrements among the Johannesburg's urban youth. As in the 'old' or "new" inner cities these are sought after commodities. Observing popular media and advertorials circulating in the townships, Khunou notes "if you can have it in Sandton, then you can have it in the township, too" (Mbembe, et al, 2004:503). This suggests that one can be in the city while in the township. The interconnection between the city and township is further made visible by the physical presence of shopping malls.

Writing about consumer behaviour in Johannesburg, Tomlinson and Larsen (2003:49) argue "the measure of a township inhabitant's wealth is how far they travel to purchase goods and services". The two attest that township consumers perceive retail centres in the townships as "second-rate" or of inferior quality. This made township shoppers, who could afford to travel, prefer to travel far to shop. Retail centres in the township thus became the "preserve of the poor". Tomlinson and Larsen's argument might have held true before the creation of upmarket shopping malls (such as Maponya mall opened in 2007; and Southgate mall opened in 1990 – both malls caters for consumers from Soweto and surrounding areas). What Tomlinson and Larsen miss is apartheid's workings in a post-apartheid state, a politically and economically segregated context and climate that failed to offer 'first-

rate' shopping or browsing experiences or superior quality to township consumers. Maponya's comment earlier illustrates the limitations black people in Soweto faced with regards to retail (Posel, 2010). It is also evident that although the pattern of large malls was in place already by the 1980s, these were concentrated in the northern area (with mainly white people). By 2002 Soweto only had one shopping facility, which forced people to continue travelling to the CBD or elsewhere to shop, argues Beavon (2004:251). It is not that township shoppers did not want to shop in the township, but that what was offered to them in the townships prior to developments of upmarket malls undermined their tastes and affordability. Shops in the CBD cater more exclusively for consumers in the Southern townships, as those residing in the northern suburbs long ago ceased shopping in the city centre (Beavon, 2004:251).

Maponya mall caters for black people of different classes. A meeting with one of the participants in this current study, Yoba, a 25-year-old working at Maponya mall shows the shifts that Maponya mall institutes in relation to township consumer behaviour. The same can be said for Southgate mall (located as you enter Soweto from downtown Johannesburg). This is extracted from field notes at Maponya mall in Soweto:

> *It is Sunday just before midday. I'm at Primi Bazala, Maponya mall in Soweto, waiting for Yoba. Yoba has lived here in Soweto since childhood with her family. I arrive quite early for our third meeting / interview. Yoba told me she would walk from Grace Bible Church, about 500m from the mall. Maponya mall is surprisingly busy, being Sunday and all, but I managed to find a quiet table at Primi Bazala (an Italian chain restaurant, Primi Piatti found in upmarket shopping malls in the northern suburbs). The owner of the restaurant is a member of the black (mainly) Harley*

Davidson rider's club, The Sopranos. Anytime now, his fellow bikers will arrive. As usual, everyone will gather around them, admiring their lovely and loud machines. Men and women who've recently acquired black wealth will flaunt their bikes and entertain spectators. Maponya mall is all about that - you can flaunt your wealth in your own backyard and other black people can look at you and say, "you've made it, you've arrived". For many, being here matters more than being in Sandton. There you're part of the many, but here you can be the elite, 'ibhujwa' (a township association of bourgeois) *and show off your new ride whether in the form of Harley Davidson, Bentley or Porsche. Some of the 'amabhujwa' attend the same church as Yoba and come to Primi for Sunday lunch. Yoba has been attending Grace Bible Church for a couple of years now. She joins the many who iconize Pastor Musa more than Jesus and go crazy about his inspiring sermons. The church is always full - with well-dressed and famous people. Yoba chose to meet at the mall because it's closer to church, but also because this is where she works. However, this Sunday she will not be serving any clients - she will be the client. Yoba arrives just after 12h35. She is wearing a (men's) suit and is very smart. She orders a drink and starts telling me about working at the mall. She loves the business, but hates serving people. One of the best things about her job is that she can wear anything to work. She appreciates this as it allows her to be herself at work. Today, she was happy to be seen, not working.*

[Maponya mall, Soweto, April 2008]

Homosexuality and the city

Historical accounts of Johannesburg's 'gay' spaces - clubs, bars and popular spaces from the 1950s to 1990s - offer a racialised and sexualised view of urban spaces in Johannesburg in this period (Gevisser, 1995) This chronology starts by noting how the South African legal system's discriminatory laws and prejudices, influenced by Roman Dutch law since the 1800s (Cameron, 1995), prohibited homosexual attraction, even among individuals from the same socio-cultural background. This was considered both a threat to white civilization and 'un-African' (Reid and Dirsuweit, 2002: 104).

This chronology refers back to the 1960s police raid of an all-male party in one of Johannesburg's affluent suburbs, Forest Town. Following apartheid's restrictions, this space had no black people present. It was mainly a drag party in white Johannesburg and some people were arrested for masquerading. Gevisser (1995) calls this the closest equivalent to New York's Stonewall. Even after the event, the first gay movement set up in the form of the Legal Reform Fund excluded black gays. The movement was careful not to align itself with Black anti-apartheid movements of the time, as it feared antagonizing the state (Gevisser and Cameron, 1995). Subsequent to this was the formation of a national organisation GASA (Gay Association of South Africa) in 1982, which resembled gay movements in the US and Europe at the time. Operating in a tense political climate in South Africa, GASA's mainly white middle-class gay male members were forced to deal with their political conservatism when Simon Nkoli, a black gay man and anti-apartheid activist, joined GASA in 1983. Not only was GASA unable to address and respond to Nkoli's issues about GASA's 'apolitical' and segregating stances, GASA failed to address broader political issues that were highlighted by Nkoli's arrest in 1984 after a rent boycott in his hometown. GASA argued it could not support Nkoli, as it claimed that Nkoli had played a minimal role in the South African gay movement and because GASA had an 'apolitical' constitution. This saw GASA's exclusion from the International Gay Association as well as the collapse of the gay movement (Gevisser, 1995:48-61).

By the late 1970s and 80s a few more spaces and bars in the inner city started opening up to lesbians. These had been catering mainly to gay men. Like all spaces in the city at the time, these were reserved for 'whites only'. Only since the 1980s did spaces such as Hillbrow and Yeoville become accessible to black gays and lesbians, following the general 'greying' of the inner city. In the 1990s the clubs started filling with black clientele. Gevisser (1995:38-42) attributes the bourgeoning of 'gay life' revolving around bars and clubs in Johannesburg to gay people travelling between New York, San Francisco and Amsterdam. He further suggests it was the presence of gay people in Hillbrow that turned the neighbourhood into one of the first deracialised areas in Johannesburg in the 1980s. As white gay people moved out of the inner city into the northern suburbs, following trends of many other white people, Hillbrow started losing its "gay flavour".

Black gays and lesbian soon began finding prominence in Hillbrow. In 1994 at the Harrison Reef Hotel on the 7th floor, the Hope and Unity Church members gathered for fellowship every Sunday. This black and gay-affirming church also became the space for social gatherings. Beauty contests and drag shows would be organised by members of the church for the general gay and lesbian community. The hotel itself had much significance and was seen as a home for gay and lesbian people who attended many of the social functions and events at the hotel and organised by the church (Gevisser, 2004 and Josi, 1999).

In close proximity to downtown Johannesburg, Braamfontein soon became a historic place for many gay and lesbian people. This is where GLOW (Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand) was launched and where the first gay and lesbian pride march in Africa took place in October 1990. It was also where the well-known gay and AIDS activist, Simon Nkoli lived and worked in the 1980s.

With so many restrictions on black people's movement and occupation of space, this meant that black lesbian and gay people socialised in the townships. Of particular historical significance for black gays and lesbians in the Johannesburg Metro and its surrounding areas was KwaThema township, where MaThoko's (Thokozile Khumalo) house and shebeen created the largest and most visible black gay population. In the 1980s MaThoko's home was home, refuge, meeting and socialising space for many black lesbian and gay youth in her community, playing a significant role in gay and lesbian community organisation. Her space created a generation of young black lesbian and gay activists. Gevisser (1995:67-9) contends that the KwaThema township gay scene can be linked to generalised youth rebellion in the townships, with its roots found in 1976 and then in the mid 1980s forms of activism. Some of these are still present in current township gay life.

Lesbians in the city: management of space

At the forefront of questions about the relationship between space and sexuality or sexual identity have been, to a large extent, geographers and anthropologists. Adler

and Brenner (1992), Bell and Valentine (1995), Lewin and Leap, (1996, 2009) and Valentine (1993 a&b) can be considered among the pioneers on the work on space and sexual identity. These works agree that space is gendered and sexed and that there is a mutual relationship between space and sexual identity and how the two impact on each other.

A more focused theme emanating from studies on sexual identity and space suggests that lesbians have a particular relationship with urban spaces, an articulation of careful management of time and space. Studies in different parts of the world similarly illustrate the stark differences existing in the ways in which lesbians and gay men inhabit space. While the latter dominate space (such as clubs, bars and cafés etc), lesbians rarely have territorial aspirations. They attach more importance to social and interpersonal networks and relationships (Adler and Brenner, 1992:24-5). William Leap's (2005) study of how lesbian and gay people in Cape Town claim gay space in the city reveals similar notions.

Through the use of segments of life story narratives Leap (2005) examines intersections of same-sex sexualities and geographies in Cape Town, focusing specifically on the depiction of space and spatial practices during the 1990s. He argues: "sexuality entwines closely with geography in the contemporary cultures of Southern Africa" and that the city's sexual geography can be read in personal as well as social terms (Leap, 2005:235). His exploration of how lesbians occupy the city proves that rather than invoking any public location, lesbian experience in an urban

setting is invoked through the social network. Lesbians regularly situate lesbian place(s) within more inclusive public spaces rather than within specific bars, clubs and usually, instead of discussing particular sites, they situate their remarks about spatial practices within larger discourses of visibility, privacy and safety.

Pertinent for this current research are ideas developed by Valentine (1993a) who looks at the ways in which the power of heterosexuality has dominated both private and public space, while also exploring lesbians' experience of everyday spaces. In a study among lesbians in England, Valentine argues, "to be lesbian or gay is both to perceive and experience the heterosexuality of the majority of environments". In most cases this perception and experience is negative and usually alienates lesbians from most spaces, including the home, work, or public services and spaces. This is a problem for many lesbians, as they have to constantly negotiate and manage inhabiting most spaces. Such management directly translates into lesbians managing their own presentation and identity in spaces. In cases where such management or negotiation fails, results could be dangerous for lesbians, as anti-lesbian sentiments and abuse is common in most contexts.

Like Valentine, Corteen (2002:261) notes the heterosexualisation of spaces manifest through "repetitive and regulatory performative acts of both heterosexual desire and gender identities". For spaces to be heterosexualised, they have to regulate "sexual dissidents" whose gender expression and sexuality make them visible. Many lesbian and gay people experience markers of gender expression and sexuality such

as appearance and self-presentation as sources of both anxiety and pleasure. Negotiating heterosexual space therefore means monitoring and regulating oneself and one's behaviour.

This chapter expands the works and arguments posed by Adler and Brenner, Valentine, and Leap, as these understandings cannot be easily transposed onto a city like Johannesburg. In addition to the ways space is heteronormative, Johannesburg is also a post-apartheid city that carries deep meaning in terms of race, class and sexuality. Zooming in on Johannesburg's black lesbians reveals how their visible occupation and position within urban spaces shifts and reconfigures the spaces and boundaries of urban life. Focusing on black lesbians allows for discussions that are specific to Johannesburg and centred around two themes: blackness and class, and homosexuality and the city.

Shifting modes of inhabiting space: lesbian transitions

Fieldwork in Johannesburg was characterised by constant negotiations and navigations of the complexities and uncertainties of urban life. This was so for me as it was for the research participants. The geographical locations, which presented as sites for fieldwork, were vast and dynamic. So, too, was the Johannesburg "of the mind", which allowed for an imagination of Johannesburg that presented no limits. Writing about these proves to be a challenging task as both the geographical and metaphorical Johannesburg is fragmented and sometimes seems to converge.

Johannesburg has been likened to other developed and dynamic cities in the world (Nuttall & Mbembe, 2008; Chipkin, 2008). Calling Johannesburg one of the "critical nodes of Southern Hemispheric capitalism and globalisation," Nuttall and Mbembe (2008:8-11) argue for projects on Johannesburg that highlight the "metropolitan modernity of the city". This calls for a deeper and diverse exploration of urban life in Johannesburg, not only looking at the city's architecture and apartheid's created inequalities, but also its "forms, signs" and rhythms. Their study is an exploration showing the cosmopolitanism of Johannesburg and also an urban space that is fluid and in constant motion. I use this notion of Johannesburg to view the ways in which transitions in the personal identity of the participants in this research echo other transitions that were already happening. The implication is that identities are viewed in relation to the demands and changes of modern times.

Johannesburg physically changes its look and spaces as well: streets change names or become one-way routes; new traffic lights are erected, others are removed; road lanes are added, some are closed for certain vehicles; shops, bars and restaurants close down or relocate while new ones open. The city has its own life, which changes and shifts. Passaro (1997:151) calls this feature an "uncontrolled, chaotic and unmanageable" postmodern space like any in a globalised world. The movements and shifts of both people and things in Johannesburg are not only unpredictable, but also difficult to monitor. This is what makes Johannesburg difficult to hold on to but also to let go.

The physical as well as the symbolic aspects of Johannesburg were sometimes stretched. One example in made by Pati, a 42 year old mother of three, who when leaving her rural home in KwaZulu-Natal, took a taxi to Johannesburg only to be dropped in Germiston where the taxi ended (in the surrounding areas of the Johannesburg Metro).

In this study Johannesburg was viewed from the vantage point of participants who live or engage on a regular basis with the thought of being part of the pace of a leading African city. Using this logic, participants were able to differentiate between Johannesburg and other localities in proximity to Johannesburg that offered different dynamism. This was evident in how people talked of Johannesburg and its difference to other parts of Gauteng province or other provinces in the country and the meanings people attached to being in Johannesburg. For these reasons, Johannesburg seemed a logical place as a field site because it offered a multiplicity of experiences, sites and possibilities. As John Matshikiza puts it, Johannesburg is "the perfect haven, all things to all people" (2004:482).

A city of contradictions: "a place of free expression, an illusion"

Though participants had an idea of what Johannesburg represented in their lives, this idea was in constant flux and sometimes ambiguous. They presented Johannesburg as the space of contradiction: you could be free in Johannesburg, but at the same time had

to 'watch your back'. Aya pointed out the contradictory nature of Johannesburg very strongly when referring to how she operates at home (in Benoni) and how when in Johannesburg. Her move to UJ (University of Johannesburg) residence signalled her first stay elsewhere without her protective and very religious parents and environment.

Aya*:* *…when I came to Jo'burg I was finding me - the whole finding me thing; and then I said that Jo'burg is a place - it's a place of free expression, free! It's all an illusion, like to put it down – it's an illusion, it's an illusion.*

Int: What are some of the illusions?

Aya: *An illusion of doing things without any consequences. Illusions of no repercussions; illusions of this is fun, this is great fun - whatever it could be, whatever it could be, whether it be drugs, whether it be alcohol, whether it be partying all the time, whether it be... It's an illusion of no repercussions and it's an illusion of yeah - no repercussions, no guilt, no nothing, you know, ja.*

Int: And how does that make you feel?

Aya: *That makes me feel not so good because you realize that there are certain things that you wouldn't do, you understand. There are certain things that you wouldn't do but you sort of just do them anyway…You sort of just do them because you are alluded into this feeling of there's no repercussions, I mean - I'm not gonna get caught, I'm not at home, like what the hell - let me just do it anyway so, ja. The whole point is that, the other me that is in Jo'burg understands choices and utilizes those choices a lot, to the last degree but at the same time when I come back home I realize that the other me knows that the choices made are not really good for me, do you understand?*

Int: [Earlier] You used the term 'turn of events in your sexuality' what does that mean?

Aya: *turn of events means umhm* [pause] - *when you look at me and the way I grew up, I identified as a straight woman. When I moved to Jo'burg I identified as lesbian. Wow these characters! …The character I am here at home and the character I am in Jo'burg, like even sexuality is different. Like, should you put the two people together, they look totally different. Yho! Ja – that's what I mean – turn of events!*

Aya's Johannesburg allows her to negotiate her identities. At home (within the Greater Johannesburg area), she is one thing and in Johannesburg another. For Aya, this sense of Johannesburg is not necessarily a physical location, but a state of mind. Repeating that Johannesburg is an illusion suggests that the place itself does not

exist, but only in the mind. The illusion is also the false sense of permanence that Johannesburg offers. Her battles with what Johannesburg offers cannot be reconciled when she is back at home, where her other identity emerges. She expresses being 'trapped' in a world of illusions, and the only way to get out of this world is to manage her two contrasting identities.

Many other participants related to the contradictions presented by Johannesburg. Flo (a 24 year old who walks through Johannesburg's inner city everyday) and Nestar (a 22 year old soccer player who takes a taxi from the East Rand to Johannesburg's inner city twice a week) relay these in relation to walking in the physical space of Johannesburg. Though they feel it is important to be noticed by people in the routes that they take, this could also pose some danger. Both argued that people in the streets must be able to recognize you, but not know your routes. This is a way of navigating and negotiating the city. It is related to safety, but also to the sense of owning and yet not owning the city, the idea of being a "passerby". They suggest that one must leave only the element of recognition, but no trace or path that can be followed:

Flo*:* *Some people (on the streets) call me "Jah man". I've decided to make peace with it although I'm not a Rasta - chances are they're seeing something I don't see, probably dreadlocks. And then other people, mostly guys, it's not hello - it's "hola, hola"* [township slang for hello] *and I move on. It's (the inner city) very accessible then when people greet you that way cos you'd get to a place and get lost, if you meet a chap and can speak his language, chances are you'll get what you want. But, if you can't speak his language, you won't get the place that you want. So, I find it very accessible. And I think chances are that the people on the street see that I'm a girl, but maybe "she's a tomboy or a lesbian" - it doesn't get to me - as long as a person won't confront me in a disrespectful way. I haven't been confronted, but there are those who*

approach me and want to be my friend…People see that you pass by there all the time and it also becomes safer in the sense that you can trust that the people know that you pass there often. If anything bad happens to you, people will notice - they know you're a regular there.

Int**:** Do you think people notice you?

Flo: *Yes, they do. That's why I change directions when I walk. I don't use the same route because I think that someone out there is watching me and he/she will see a loophole and notice my routine and paths and the things I do on my path. But, if I change my route - one day I'll take Rissik street and the other I use Harrison or I use Rissik but turn elsewhere and then the trace or the path disappears and you don't see what's going on…*

Nestar similarly feels this contradiction of walking around Johannesburg. The familiarity of people gives her a sense of safety and security, but she has to be vigilant as people can challenge that sense of safety.

Nestar*: I don't like going around at night because I always have to think of my safety first. Mmh! If a guy comes to you and says 'hi mabhebeza' [*hi baby*] - behave like you're no longer a lesbian, behave like a straight chick. You have to make sure that you don't make this person angry because you don't know this person's intentions. If you tell him you're a lesbian, you don't know if he's a rough person and if he'll shoot you or rape you and call his scheme [*gang*] to come for you… If the person comes to you non-violently, I will also be non-violent. If the person is aggressive, I will also be aggressive. But I must check if this person has power or not…I've made friends on the way in the various streets I pass. I always greet people and make sure I'm fine with them and cool with them. Whatever they call you, maybe mabhebeza, even though I hate the word - but you must be cool and talk to the person. I've made friends with amapantsula[37] on the street and they do recognize me when I'm walking in town. If something happens to me I'm sure they'll think of helping me because they know me. Even some Nigerian guys see me and they greet me as bhujwa* [bourgeois]*. In their minds they see that I'm a girl dressed in men's clothes but they don't know that I'm a lesbian. I also don't tell them that I'm ijita [*slang for guy*]*

[37] A township dance form that emerged in the 1950s. It represents a way of life, dress and speech (tsotsitaal) and is considered symbolic of township culture. It also describes somewhat who has a particular street-smartness

Flo and Nestar suggest two contradictions taking place as they walk in Johannesburg: being anonymous and yet known/recognisable as well as feeling safe and under threat at the same time. They deploy a complex negotiation of trust in the streets, what Giddens (1990:82) may refer to as "civil inattention", a level of politeness accompanied by protective devices that people use when encountering strangers and acquaintances in public settings. Inhabiting space is not taken for granted as it can pose threats if one does not follow the 'rules' of being 'streetwise'. This forces participants to negotiate use of space and manage their identities in public spaces, a feature very common among gay people's use of space. Nestar shares how she has to manage her own behaviour and identity on the streets:

Nestar: *…When I'm walking with my girlfriend in the streets I have to pretend that we are friends. When guys approach me I must pretend that I'm a femme girl, knowing very well that I'm not like that. I'm used to being greeted with 'hola'* [township slang for hello]. *I can't hold my girlfriend in public. I can't dress the way I want to in public because when people see me dressed like this they're going to insult me and beat me, or even rape me - so I'm afraid of those things, you see…When I have to go home I'm always in a hurry because I leave the city late and I still have to go and catch a taxi. When I get to the taxi I have to behave lady-like and soften my voice when I'm greeted. I have to think of my safety first because sometimes these guys greet you just to provoke you and to see what kind of person you are.*

Similarly Pati, a 42-year-old lesbian talks about how her dress code protects her from potential violence. Like many, she has to monitor or self-govern her looks, presentation and how she is perceived by others (mainly men):

Pati: *You know, the thing is the opposite gender that I don't want – if they could see me feminine, they would bother me even more. I think [the way I dress] it's a disguise because at times, some people don't discover who I am. At one time, the thugs hit me with a gun and I fainted. They took my fancy sneakers and my cowboy hat and my belt. Do you think if they'd discovered I was a woman they wouldn't have raped me? They didn't discover…*

Inhabiting spaces in Johannesburg is governed by complexities, as Flo, Nestar and Pati suggest above. This complex dynamic entails negotiating spaces as well as managing one's identity. The latter can mean, in certain cases, concealing one's identity in order to negotiate Johannesburg or other urban landscapes. Not concealing or managing these can make one easily identifiable as lesbian. In Pati's case, this concealment is both of her feminine body as well as her sexuality. On the streets, she "passes" as a heterosexual man, a 'covering' she claims prevents her from being targeted as a woman. For others, concealment allows them to negotiate safety in public spaces. By modifying their dress codes, walk, stance, public expressions of closeness to same-sex partners they avoid antilesbian/gay abuse (Valentine, 1993a,b).

Modifying dress code, self-presentation and behaviour are experiences expressed by lesbians in other parts of the world too. These markers of identity can be a source of discomfort as one navigates through the city. Shani Mooto (2008:254) experiences the same difficulties when going out to town on the main streets of Trinidad with her girlfriend. Like many in this current research, she felt and saw people looking at both of them with heterosexual gazes – men imagining her girlfriend's femininity "next to them" or imagining Mooto as something they need to 'put right' because of how she looked and her masculine gender identity.

Valentine (1993b:242) referring to Hall (1989) considers this ability to constantly negotiate landscapes and manage one's identity and behaviour as lesbians'

"heightened awareness to the usually hidden matrices of behaviour, values and attitudes in self and others". As this chapter has shown, black lesbians remain vigilant to all nuances and assumptions of everyday interaction. These are spatially negotiated. Many live what Valentine (1993b) calls "multiple sexual identities" as they have to be one thing at home and another elsewhere. Nestar's mother captures this multiplicity of identities when talking to Nestar about how she inhabits space:

Nestar: *My mother would say, "My child, you have two lives, M's[38] life and Nestar's life. When you are at home, Nestar disappears, she's not a lesbian, she's just an ordinary girl and has to clean, cook and iron. When you're outside you can do whatever you want as long as you don't get into trouble because most people don't understand your lifestyle."*

Negotiating a heteronormative space

As illustrated above, some areas (as well as streets) within the city were not easy to navigate. Entry in some was easily negotiated; other spaces required much effort because I, as well as the participant(s), was not always an insider in them. For example, a photo shoot that took place in a public derelict structure in an open field in Yeoville reveals this. Although this was a public space, being in it felt like being an intruder. Possibly the positions taken by those occupying the space was hierarchical. Even though the space belonged to no one and everyone, certain groupings perceived themselves to be the rightful occupiers of the space. This is a similar notion to that articulated by Khunou (in Mbembe et al, 2004:500) about the

[38] M is Nestar's birth name but is only used by her mother. She uses the name Nestar (also a pseudonym) that her peers use on a daily basis.

city, that the "city is a no man's land. Everybody has a stake in the city and can call it home." Extracts from field notes suggest this notion:

> *It is a Saturday afternoon; I'm on the bus to Yeoville for a fashion shoot. My friend working for an LGBT organisation in Johannesburg asked me to take part in a shoot showing off vintage clothing on a lesbian body. There are 12 other black lesbians. We're all dressed in smart old and borrowed clothes: men's suits and formal dresses. The photographer decided to use a derelict building in an open space in Yeoville as a site and background for this shoot. On arrival, there's a church proceeding in the veld, one with a large group of people dressed in white – with men on the left hand side and women on the right had side seating on the ground. They seem to be from the Shembe Church.. Next to this large group there were various small groups of about 10 people in front and behind the large group. We went up the ruins of the two-storey building...The photographer carries on undisturbed by the church service next to us. An interesting ritual is taking place among the churchgoers. It seems like a baptism, cleansing, healing or a ritual to cast away demons. A male member of the church keeps pouring water on one female member's head. She screams and cries uncontrollably and sometimes goes into a trance setting her to shake her body. Her screaming and crying distracts us. We watch the ritual with awe. The churchgoers now turn their direction towards us, with the 'possessed' woman screaming louder and louder as we all watch her. While screaming, she looks at us. It soon becomes clear that parts of her screams are to get rid of us, or this is how we interpret her screaming. This becomes evident twice, once when we decide to leave and walk to the bus – the screaming abruptly stopped. The second time when we were leaving the churchwomen also decided to leave – abandoning the ritual and the 'possessed' woman immediately calm. We decide to keep playing the "staying and going game" with the church group. Both our group and the churchgoers interact this way for a while. We would pretend to leave and they would be quiet. We'd rush back to the ruins and the screaming and crying would continue. We did this a few times until the photographer got annoyed. We then left and they continued praying.*
>
> [Saturday, 26 May 2007, Yeoville Open Field]

In the scenario above, it was unclear why the church people seemed to want to get rid of us. Possibly occupying what seems to be their 'everyday' prayer space could have been viewed as problematic. It may also be that we had intercepted their ritual, which suggests why they kept attempting to get us to leave. It can further be

speculated that our visibility, as women dressed as men (for some) and enacting heterosexuality was seen as problematic by the churchgoers. This could have caused an uncomfortable scenario for those whose outlook was conservative, as their moral (religious) judgements would have countered what they were witnessing.

Being at home

Other sites, which were interesting but less easy to access, were participant's private homes. Meeting participants at their private homes for interviews was only by invitation. Only those participants who owned houses allowed me entry into their homes. Those renting or living with older family members rarely allowed interviews at their homes. These were arranged in a nearby shopping mall or inner city. In some cases, the interviews took place at one of the LGBT organisations or sometimes at the participant's place of work.

The three participants who invited me to their private homes all had children and lived with them or occasionally with a partner. Two lived in four-roomed apartheid-style houses designed for black nuclear families in the townships. The houses had no running water inside and no bathroom. Bathroom facilities were in a room outside the house, accessed through the kitchen entrance. A common sight in the kitchen and in one of the bedrooms was in the form of buckets filled with water, for drinking, cooking, washing dishes or bathing in the morning. One participant lived in the inner city with her children in a block of bachelor apartments. The apartment had communal bathroom and kitchen facilities.

The three participants garner support from neighbours who know they are lesbian. All three are quite active in their communities and are well-known community members. Having children also gives them an elevated social standing in their neighbourhoods as they are seen as one of the many other female-headed family units. They are also respected for their social role of motherhood and participation in community life, which seems to occupy importance over sexuality. The way in which these women are positioned in society, primarily as mothers in a society whose households are predominantly female headed, can be seen as blurring women's multiple positions and identities. On the one hand, this renders these women invisible as lesbian mothers, hiding their sexual identity. On the other hand it allows for them a form of social acceptance as mothers and as part of larger community.

The malls' 'flaunters'

The shopping mall was a popular spot for many of the young participants as a site for interviews and socialising. Initially it did not appear to me as a logical site for fieldwork or conducting interviews, but it was called upon regularly. Current writing on shopping malls views them as fascinating spaces because they offer a sense of safety, protection, free walking and no worries. Like the city, the mall is a place where people look "smart, lean, clean and beautiful" regardless of racial classification. In South Africa particularly, the mall offers a sense of forgetfulness –

one forgets about the past and present anxieties and focuses on the post-apartheid rainbow moment where people blend in. People visit the mall to escape and to feel at one moment, equal with others. Whitehead (in De Vries, 2008:302) goes further and suggests that a visit to the mall signifies "progression". It is both an entertainment and an outing. Malls bring people together and they are at the same time "antihistoric and nostalgic" (De Vries, 2008:301-304).

Even though at first bizarre, the idea of the mall as a field site later seemed to be closely linked to the complex positions occupied in relation to sexual identities, explored above. It was both the anonymity and sense of belonging in the mall that attracted participants to the mall. In his research on black gay men of the South in the United States, Johnson (2008) notes that some of his informants refused to meet him at their houses and preferred more "neutral" spaces for interviews because his "gayness" (seen in his effeminacy) "could implicate them by association". For participants in this research, associating with me did not seem to be problematic. On the contrary, it suggested participant's own desire to been seen as lesbian or in a particular way. In actual fact, it was difficult to tell whether the mall, as a space, was neutral or not. In some cases, participants felt completely at home in the mall.

The relationship between consumption and identity has been explored in a number of ways. Posel (2010:172) illustrates this in her analysis of how the apartheid racial regime in South Africa "co-produced regimes of consumption". The end of apartheid signalled the possibilities of freedom for black people on many fronts, including the

possibility to acquire. Talking about the opening of Maponya mall in Soweto, Posel (2010:173) concludes that this mall, like other malls in South Africa, had become a "site of racial politics because South Africa's history linked it inextricably to the regulation of consumption." The opening of upmarket malls in people's backyards, so to speak, signalled the close connections between racial identity and acquisition practices. Clearly, then, consumption is central to identity and it has been argued that the sites of consumption or consumer culture can be seen as sites for the production of identities.

Meeting at the mall induced, or rather required, a certain level of performativity. The mall is a place where you are seen, but also go to see - as a window shopper but to also follow current trends. That seeing is both material and symbolic. For this research, the mall soon became a space for an interesting interplay of identities of class, sexuality, race and space. For younger participants the mall was a space where they could embody a modern and hip urban culture. This was their stage to perform a particular image or style, whether *iPantsula*[39]*, iBhujwa*[40]*, iTaliano*[41] or *hip-hop* for

[39] Amapantsula emerged as a township style and form of dance in the 1950s. They were renowned then and, to a lesser extent now, as trendy dressers, swanky dancers. Gqola (2001:19) notes how amapantsula were "highly visible in townships (and more so in the South African media now), amapantsula were dangerous men and women. Their choices to join this movement were influenced by its standing in the community. The associations with glamour, transgression and agency were seen as attractive." Ipantsula represents a way of life, style, dress and speech (tsotsitaal/street lingo) and is considered symbolic of township culture.

[40] *Ibhujwa* is a style used by many young people to connote their sense of urban hip. It's a word borrowed from bourgeois, but in the township is not necessarily linked to class, but taste and ability to express a unique sense of style as well as language. It can be seen as an interpretation and mixture of localized/township version of hip-hop and punk styles.

[41] Also a form of style that represents some kind of sophistication in the township. Usually *amataliano/amantariano* dress in Italian clothes or expensive, branded clothes. This may not necessarily represent their class status or affordability, but their sense of style.

themselves and for the consumption of others. Chapter Five explores these varied styles in more detail.

Many of the participants I met were participating in consumer culture, but they were also 'flaunting' themselves and being 'consumed' by me as the researcher, but also by the public. The mall qualified as a "theatre of consumption" and the place where the "flâneur" strolls and looks. The mall's environment gives the impression of being elsewhere (Mansvelt, 2005 :61-2).

The mall was the place where participants could be seen as they chose. It was also the place where they could be who they wanted to be and 'pose' for the research and the researcher. In actual fact, we (participant and I) were both performers and the stage was the mall. We were both aware that we were, in some way, performing for each other and for those around us. A meeting with one participant, Aya, at a mall close to her home shows this. Aya, 20 years old, carefully negotiates how she 'flaunts' certain behaviours at the mall. Until a year and a half ago Aya had been living with her parents in their Benoni suburb home. She recently moved to the University residences where she studies. As it was midterm vacation, Aya and I met at her neighbourhood in Benoni. She had opted to come to Jozi, but did not have taxi money and could not ask her parents, as she would have to divulge the reason for her trip. We resorted to meeting at a shopping mall in her neighbourhood. She had walked from home to the mall with her childhood friend. They had both lived and gone to school in the same area. The suburb was a middle to upper-class area and

seemed like a small town, with all necessary amenities in one place and everyone knew each other and each other's children and parents.

On arrival, an hour late, Aya told me she "was doing her hair and could not figure out what to wear". She had dressed in very smart leggings and a black minidress. Her hair was styled in a Mohawk with thin plaits on each side. After apologising for keeping me waiting, Aya quickly added that if I were a smoker I would have not had a problem because the cigarette would have kept me company. I found this statement at first quite absurd, but later learnt its significance in Aya's life. It took us a while to find a place to sit mainly because Aya kept looking at the people in each restaurant and coffee shop. The mall was not big and there were only a handful of places where you could sit. After finding a comfortable spot in a corner eatery, we started chatting. The conversation was tense. The only time I had talked to Aya was over the phone and she had asked me a lot of questions about the meeting and how I got to know of her. A friend had told me about Aya and mentioned that she was not in any of the lesbian circles in Johannesburg although she was in one of the Universities in the city and had a girlfriend. Aya, her friend and I sat comfortably in the smoking section, but none of us were smoking. It was the only quiet section in the eatery with two other patrons. Glass panels separated the smoking section from the rest of the eatery. Aya kept looking around and seemed rather distracted and uncomfortable. For more than an hour she talked in riddles. When she started getting comfortable she stated:

Aya: …*when I'm in Jo'burg I'm comfortable because everything just allows me. It's just flowing and when I come here* (meaning Benoni)*, I have to think*

about it. Is it really me? Is it me that person in Jo'burg or is it me the person here? And when I'm here, like right now - I'm really craving a smoke but M who I used to go to high school with is sitting right there and she doesn't expect that of me and one of the girls who's waitressing here, B, used to go to high school with me. But if I was in Jo'burg…I'd have a smoke! ...People don't know me (in Jo'burg); they don't know me at all. I don't have to answer to anybody, but here I'd have a couple of faces I'd have to answer to.

Int: And you worry that if M sees you smoking she would spread the word or something?

Aya: *I don't know what she'd do about it, but all I know is that I'd feel crap knowing that she knows…*

In this extract, Aya experiences being "seen", in this space so close to home, somewhat negatively. It limited what she could and could not do or be seen doing. However, it also suggested that there were possible things that could be done at the mall, not allowed at home with parents around. However, there seemed to be a sort of social surveillance that the mall produced, one similar to that performed by visible security guards and cameras, only that it was done by people she knew. Aya's experience of the mall in her neighbourhood intimated the dynamics of small town living. Even though she was in the suburb, Aya found the interconnections between people limiting, thus admiring the anonymity provided by Johannesburg's inner city life. At the same time, she showed strong disconnections between the mall where she is (home) and Johannesburg. Aya made clear distinctions between being "here" and "there", meaning home and Johannesburg respectively. In each place, she carried a particular identity. Throughout our interview she was very conscious of the space and talked about the distinctions between being in Johannesburg and being at home, even though both spaces were urban and only 30kms apart. It was not surprising that our follow-up meetings took place in the inner city or at distant malls from her suburb.

Aya's focus on reporting on taking time to choose an outfit to wear for the mall and "doing her hair" and wanting to smoke suggests the desire to 'fit in' to mall 'culture'. She dresses up for the mall to be noticed. Similarly, the malls allow her to think of smoking, behaviour she cannot do in front of her parents or those familiar to her. The mall conjures a feeling of being in a 'free' space, a space where she can 'flaunt' certain behaviours and identities.

As 'flaunters', black lesbians also appropriate associations of gay lifestyle that they are usually accused of, as seen in studies such as Valentine's (1993a:403) where many heterosexuals note their dislike of the way homosexuals "flaunt their sexuality in public". This attitude is rather absurd as heterosexuals dominate all spaces taking for granted the heteronormative nature of space.

Ara Wilson (2004) exploration of sexual subjectivities (*tom* and *dee* culture) in a Bangkok mall in Thailand raises a number of interesting thoughts that resonate with the current study. Reference to this study also shows how the relationship between cosmopolitan mall 'culture' and sexual subjectivities is a transnational phenomenon. Like many, Wilson (2004:111) notes how the market economy of shopping malls influences identities and relationships. She illustrates how the mall's cosmopolitanism attracts and provides an important stage and resource for contemporary urban identities. In addition, malls are public spaces of the city, spaces that encourage social life and 'theatres' of consumption and leisure. For

lesbians (*toms* and *dees* in Bangkok's case) malls form spaces that are away from home, spaces where one can learn and polish the "accoutrements of sexual identity and relationships" (Wilson, 2004:121). This is enacted by the ways in which malls provide a sense of anonymity through the possibilities of 'blending in' with the different styles. In the case of many malls in South Africa, these styles cut across different class (and sometimes racial) categories. In Bangkok, Wilson (2004:114) argues, this similarly holds true. The ways in which malls offer varied forms of consumption facilitates entry and the staging of consumers from different socio-economic backgrounds. The mall's function as a site of staging urban identity "quietly incorporates a diversity of sexual and gender positions and liaison," Wilson (2004:114) concludes.

Lesbians thus become at once visible and invisible in the space of the mall. The mall functions as an economic and social space that allows for, and even fosters the presence of black lesbians (Wilson, 2004) through appropriations of forms of styles and 'cultures' cultivated by the presence of malls. However, the importance of class distinctions in the production of lesbian identities in the space of malls should not be overlooked. Writing about the process of commodification and the formation of lesbian or gay identities in the US, Hennessy (1994:68-9) argues: "the formation of a gay or queer imaginary in both corporate and academic circles also rests on the suppression of class analysis". Hennessy suggests that the lesbian or gay identity made visible and "marketable" in popular culture is a very class-specific "bourgeois"

imaginary. This is problematic because it reproduces a lesbian or gay subject that is "marketable" but makes invisible the divisions of wealth and labour.

This chapter takes this caution seriously. As Chapter Five argues, the relationship between class and style is not a simple one, even in the space of the mall. What these chapters show is how style is not only about affordability and one's class position, but also related to forms of expression, creativity, pleasure and freedom.

Expanding zones and boundaries: new integrations

One of the most interesting and exciting features of black lesbian life in Johannesburg currently has been the opening of new physical and imagined spaces: '*Open Closet*' and '*Entabeni* Gaydor'. The former, which recently found a permanent home in a club in Melville, is a monthly event taking place usually on Saturdays and public holidays. It attracts mainly a young black crowd, below 40 years old from all over the Johannesburg Metro and its surrounds, including areas around Pretoria. Every month, black lesbians inhabit this north-eastern suburb to attend '*Open Closet*'. It is housed at Roxy's, which is normally a bar/club catering mainly for heterosexuals during the week and most weekends, but caters only for gay women and their gay-friendly friends once a month. Entry fee is R50 with a membership card and R60 without. '*Open Closet*' is also a social networking space, using various forms of multimedia and has more than a thousand 'Facebook' members who usually fill up the space each month. '*Open Closet*' sells to its clientele "quality

lifestyle entertainment" as well as a safe and secure space for gay women – both important commodities in Johannesburg. Style, fashion, music, beauty, youth, sexual identity and freedom are appropriately packaged for clients who inhabit this space. The events are themed accordingly, including: *Black Chic and Bling! Wigs, Weaves and Funky Hats; Work Clothes Party;* and *Flaunt Your Style.*

'*Entabeni* Gaydor', located in Orlando West in Soweto near one of the most famous tourist spots in Soweto, shares its premises with a local *spaza* shop. It is very active during weekends mainly, filling up with black lesbians and gay men, and occasional straight men and women. It is easily noticeable as it has a permanently flying rainbow (gay) flag[42] outside the premises. Located on a higher plain than most houses in the area, the bar is appropriately named '*Entabeni*' (at the mountain) suggesting a higher place one looks up to. Arriving at '*Entabeni*' one is also at full view of everyone. It is in an open space in front of houses allowing one to be noticed and equally notice who enters and exits the venue. This feature serves as both a security measure and an opportunity to 'show off' new fashions, cars or be seen talking on the latest cellphone.

What is interesting about both spaces in not that they are run by black lesbians or attract diverse clientele. Like their clientele, these spaces are permanently visible in everyday environments. They are not concealed spaces, but well-integrated spaces in the different areas or communities. This is important for a few reasons. In the

[42] The rainbow flag, sometimes called the gay flag of the gay pride flag, is a symbol of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) pride and LGBT social movements which has been in use since the 1970s. The colours reflect the diversity of the LGBT community.

first instance the permanence (even temporary permanence) and visibility of such spaces challenges the ways in which many environments are heteronormative. Valentine (1993a) and others have already alluded to the problematic of such spaces. These spaces and events, like Gay and Lesbian Pride March, show that even though spaces and environments are usually deemed heteronormative, they can be challenged. These spaces then shift these representations of space and by so doing create new zones in existing landscapes.

In the second instance, there is the lesbian representational issue at stake in these spaces. By appropriating business locations as spaces for sexual identification, perceptions and representations of black lesbians shift to being 'classy', stylish, hip, cosmopolitan and part of the urban mindset and business-minded. This functions as a way of transforming the cityscape, allowing for the integration of sexual diversity.

In these spaces, black lesbians are also integrated in mainly heterosexual communities. This is an important feature of current black lesbian and gay life as it locates lesbians in existing 'everyday' township and suburban spaces. By doing this, black lesbians open up boundaries of urban life forcing heterosexualised spaces to make space for sexual diversity while at the same time appropriating these spaces for sexual inclusion.

These are not limited to bar and club spaces. There are also particular family restaurants in shopping malls that have become popular spaces for black lesbians.

Spur family restaurants particularly in Carlton Centre in the inner city as well as Maponya mall regularly host black lesbians who are visibly noticed as stylish and exhibiting a specific 'lesbian look'. By occupying such spaces, black lesbians reconfigure spaces that are assumed to be heterosexual and thus make a statement of infusing class, status and sexuality in a commodity-driven space. Other such spaces include community halls, where film screenings, beauty contests or meetings are held; streets and parks for protest, parading or playing football.

For many lesbians, bar spaces play significant roles in lesbian life. Lesbian bar culture has been well documented in other parts of the world (Kennedy and Davis, 1996, Lewin, 1996 and others). Bar spaces realise what Rooke (2007), following Bourdieu, calls the "lesbian habitus". The bar is the space where the lesbian can be lesbian in all manners: in how she holds a drink, walks, dresses, and talks. Such freedom is valuable to lesbians as they can be who they want to be without having to be censored or be cautious or conscious about who is watching. In this space black lesbians can "express their love in an uninhibited and legitimised way" (Cuesta, 2008:140).

The appropriation of heterosexualised spaces and constant visibility of black lesbian space suggests that black lesbians in Johannesburg do not only articulate their notions of space in terms of social networks (an argument developed by Leap, 2005), but also physical space is becoming increasingly important as a marker or location of lesbian identity.

Concluding remarks

The relationship between space and identity is a complicated one. On the one hand, spaces such as consumer-driven spaces may be the terrain for exploring and creating new forms of identity. On the other hand, these spaces and many others can be used to exclude certain people, behaviours and identities. The racial-spatial order in apartheid South Africa inhibited African people from occupying and making use of different urban spaces. These restrictions, although increasingly shifting, continue to be felt and experienced in the different cityscapes. Black lesbians articulate these as they walk in the streets of the city and in their townships.

This is not the case in the shopping malls, the theatres of consumption. What this suggests is an irony of post-apartheid South Africa where it is within the demarcated boundaries of the site of consumption, the space of modernity and freedom, that diverse identities and forms of expression are most often formed and cultivated.

Following the overall argument in this thesis, black lesbians appropriate spaces that have been largely seen as heteronormative and reconfigure these spaces for the inclusion of sexual diversities. This is to a great extent, a deeply political project, one already articulated by Bev Ditsie stance's "*I'm right here, I ain't moving, I ain't budging*".

CHAPTER FOUR: What Violence Means To Us

Introduction

The previous chapters have argued for the importance of the lesbian category as an identity capturing both sexuality and gender as well as the interplay between lesbian and other identity categories such as race, nation, class and space. This interplay has also been interrogated in the previous chapter, which focused on spaces in and around Johannesburg. In this chapter I focus particularly on the ways in which lesbian identity recedes and resurfaces in the face of violence and death in various spaces in South African society. This then demonstrates the ways in which spaces are used to 'invalidate' lesbian sexuality and identity in contemporary South Africa. Included in the spaces looked at are everyday public spaces as well as courthouses.

Experiences of violence, torture and murder suggest that there is a strong disconnect between the 'promise' of a post-apartheid South African Constitution (with all its rights and protections) and the lived daily experiences of black lesbians 'supposedly' protected by the same Constitution. This is evident in the ways in which crime and violence is interpreted and dealt with by segments of the justice system, as well as the ways in which crime and violence is "packaged" to render differences invisible. These two positions, although taking place within the same

terrain (i.e. dealing with crime and violence), show that even in a society noting and celebrating difference and diversity amongst its people, these are not recognised, or in harsh circumstances, are invalidated.

Undoubtedly, violence against lesbians is part of a broader trend of gender-based violence. Even though it may seem difficult to separate anti-lesbian violence from broader violence against women, there are differences between the two. Violence targeting lesbians does so because of their sexual orientation and identity; secondly, lesbians are considered to be transgressing gender and sex norms, by presenting as butch or masculine; and for disrupting the sex|gender order by presenting a sexuality independent of men. Butch lesbians in particular are targeted because their visible masculinity disrupts the gender hierarchy by symbolically claiming male priviledge (Gunkel, 2010; Gontek; 2009).

Violence towards gender and sexuality

Violence based on gender and sexuality in particular is not a new phenonemon. In a historical analysis of violence towards homosexuals, Jenness and Richman (2002:404) trace such violence from as early as the 14th century. Jenness and Richman argue that some violent acts were perpetrated by governments as sanctions against acts of homosexuality, or what was deemed 'sodomy' at the time. In some countries in Africa, these violent acts continue to be committed by some

state officials and homosexuality is deemed illegal in some of these countries' statutes.[43].

Even though homosexuality is legal and a protected sexual right in contemporary South Africa, historically there are cases were homosexual people have been prosecuted. Of the many is a case depicted in the film *Proteus* (2003) by Jack Lewis and John Greyson based on court records of 1725, where two men were prosecuted for "mutually perpetrated sodomy". Jenness and Richman (2002) argue that acts to prosecute homosexual people were legitimated and justified by state representatives as well as private citizens. Laws prohibiting and criminalising homosexuality thus reinforced widespread homophobia and "deterred the open expression or assertion of any sexualities deemed transgressive" (Posel, 2005a:128). Homosexuality was then seen as an abomination, a crime against nature, a sin and a perversion. This legitimated violence targeted at people deemed homosexual.

It appears that such a legacy has left its mark in contemporary societies. Beyond people deemed homosexual, people whose sexuality is seen to be outside the 'norm' often fall victims to violent acts or prejudice. Cases such as those of women murdered in some townships in South Africa because of their HIV status are exemplary of such violence and prejudice[44]. Referring to these violent attacks on

[43] See Marc Epprecht (2004) for an elaborate discussion on some African responses to homosexuality.
[44] Lorna Mlosana, 21 years old was raped in a toilet outside a shebeen/tavern in 2003 in Khayelitsha Township, Cape Town. After raping her, her attacker then beat her to death in a fury when she told him she was HIV positive. (InfoUpdate, 2006). In a similar case, Gugu Dlamini, 36 years old, from KwaMashu Township outside

women disclosing their HIV status, Salo and Gqola (2006:4) argue that these murders are perpetuated by the "misogynistic notion that women are the primary vector of the HI virus and thus deserving of death."

Similarly, cases of women whose sexuality is seen to be independent of men's sexuality face similar prejudice and violence. Yaba Badoe (2005:40-45) explores this in a study of witchcraft in a village in Ghana. She shows how women who are accused of witchcraft, which is strongly associated with "procreative power and sexuality," face being punished, beaten and banished from their own homes. Such an association implies that women who are accused of witchcraft have personal and social independence from men and therefore "transgress" societal 'norms'. Because of their independence, they are deemed to "threaten" men's position and thus face being punished.

In this current research, cases of violation, torture and battering of women whose sexuality is deemed out of the "norm" have not been unknown. Unlike in the scenarios presented above, participant's experiences in this research are directed specifically to their sexual orientation and identity. A few of the research participants shared their own painful and disturbing experiences of rape and other forms of sexual torture and violation because they were seen as lesbian in their townships. Lerato, a 19-year-old student, talked about her experiences of how a notorious gang from her community abducted her and her girlfriend on their way

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Durban was murdered in 1998 after she courageously publicly disclosed her HIV status on World AIDS Day. She was accused of shaming her community and was repeatedly fatally assaulted and threatened (Beat It, 1998).

from school and repeatedly gang raped them for five days. Lerato and her girlfriend were told by this gang of men that they were being "taught a lesson for being lesbians and not wanting men." Even though Lerato was able to retell this experience that took place when she was 15 years old, her girlfriend remains in a psychological institution from the trauma of that week. None of the perpetrators were convicted for the crime, although they are well known in their community. Lerato continues to live in fear knowing that these men may repeat their acts to her or other lesbians in her township.

Hlobo's heart-breaking story of her children's experience shows how such violence and prejudice can break the whole family apart. Hlobo, a 35-year old professional and mother of four, shared the painful story of how her children were abducted and gang-raped because of her sexual identity. She explained how she felt when finding out that her teenage twin daughters had been abducted and repeatedly gang raped by a group of men in their township. The gang claimed they did not want the twins to be lesbians, like their mother. When her children went missing for a day, Hlobo's parental instincts alerted her that "something had gone wrong" with her children:

> Hlobo: …*I looked for my kids at their friends' house and they were not there. Then I started bleeding and felt that something wrong was happening to my kids. I told my mother that where my kids are, they are no longer girls [or virgins]. That was in October. I knew that wherever they were, they no longer had their virginity. At some point, it was around 2pm - they got back and they couldn't walk. I just started screaming and crying. When I was told the story, I found out that the girls were on their way to come see me. As they were passing at their friends' house, some boys come to them with guns. These boys took them and walked with them for miles. As they were walking with them these boys told them they want to teach them a lesson so that they don't turn out like their mother. They*

> *must know that they have to sleep with boys… There were five boys… Some of my family blamed me for everything that happened. They said if I had never fallen in love with women and had not been istabane*[45] *my kids would have never been raped. So, these kinds of things slowly broke my family apart…*

For Hlobo, this was a personal attack not only on her children, but on her as well. She felt the pain and violence committed against her children as a mother, a woman and a lesbian. As in Lerato's case, the men who violated Hlobo's children continue to roam around the streets of that township. They have all escaped being convicted for their crimes, even with Hlobo's unrelenting efforts to get the known men arrested and convicted.

There are many such cases of violent attacks that have been committed towards black lesbians (and their families) in South Africa. Many have termed rapes towards lesbians "curative/corrective" rape (Muthien, 2007, Bucher, 2009, Gunkel, 2010, Gontek, 2009 and Muholi, 2004), a concept I elaborate in the next section. In a paper *Thinking through lesbian rape,* Zanele Muholi (2004) shows how of the 47 lesbian women she interviewed in the Gauteng area, 20 of them reported to have been "explicitly raped" because of their sexual or gender non-conformity. She adds: "four experienced attempted rape, 17 were physically assaulted (three with a weapon), eight were verbally abused, and two were abducted. Twenty-nine women knew their attackers" (Muholi, 2004:4). Among these women, less than half had reported their experiences to the police. Many of these women had little faith in the police or

[45] The term refers to a hermaphrodite figure, but in local day-to-day talk it is used as a derogatory word for gay and lesbian people. However, gay and lesbian people have re-appropriated the term for their own use

the criminal justice system. In a later section in this chapter, I unpack the 'limits' of the criminal justice system in dealing with such crimes.

Two analytical frameworks can be used to understand and explain these forms of violence. The first is what Salo and Gqola (2006:4) phrase as "men's desire to control women's sexuality." The examples of the rape epidemic in South Africa, where one in four men admits to rape (Smith, 2009), are suggestive of this. This can be seen in the ways in which rape towards lesbians is directed at their sexual orientation, claiming that women's sexuality belongs to or is a "property" of men's sexuality. The concept of "corrective" rape in the next section further elaborates this idea.

The second analytical framework, which further develops Salo and Gqola's argument locates women's bodies at the centre of the violent act (Steyn and van Zyl, 2009). This position argues that it is the meanings attached to "non-hegemonic bodies and their desires that Othering is perpetuated, and upon whom different forms of exclusion, oppression and violence are perpetrated. The body becomes the site of discursive power and struggle" (Steyn and van Zyl, 2009:4). Bodies that are seen to carry and transmit disease, lesbian bodies and bodies that are independent of men's sexuality make this power struggle visible.

We have seen both these positions unfold in the various scenarios and experiences of women presented above. However, no scholarly analysis can measure the pain

and torture experienced by many of these women. For many, the physical as well as emotional and psychological scars of these experiences live with them permanently.

When rape is "corrective/curative"

Rape of women is not a new phenomenon in South Africa or even in other contexts. A study conducted by von Schulthess (1992) showed how many lesbian respondents in that study reported "harassment as an inevitable part of life as a lesbian" (Jenness and Richman, 2002:407), suggesting that for many lesbians harrassment and violation are inescapable. Referring to the South African context, Posel (2005b:243) notes how gang-rape in the 1970s became insidiously prevalent in the townships around the country. In Johannesburg, a notorious Soweto gang, the 'Jackrollers', went out to kidnap and rape women in the townships. Lesbians were particularly targeted by this gang (Chan Sam, 1995:187) and other gang-related violence in Soweto (Keswa (Kwesi) and Webster, 1997).

Black lesbians in South Africa specifically have been increasingly seen as victims and survivors of what is now commonly termed "curative" or "corrective" rape, and "hate crimes", two concepts arising out of lesbian and feminist activist circles in South Africa, although the latter has always been used in other parts of the world (Muholi, 2004; Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010). Lesbian-led organizations continuously report numerous cases of black lesbians raped because of their sexual orientation. These occurances have led to what is now termed as

"curative / corrective" rapes, suggesting that such rapes are a very specific form of sexual torture and violence that is aimed at ridding lesbians of their sexual orientation and identity (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010; Bucher, 2009, Muholi, 2004). Muthien (2007:323) defines "curative rape," as the "rape of women perceived of as lesbian by men as an ostensible 'cure' for their (aberrant) sexualities". For Muholi (2004) "curative" rapes are synonymous to hate crimes.

There is vast scholarship that looks at hate crimes around the world and suggests that hate crimes are different from other offences or crimes in a number of ways (Craig, 2002; Herek, Cogan and Gills, 2002; Wells & Polders, 2006). A hate crime is defined as "an illegal act involving intentional selection of a victim based on a perpetrator's bias or prejudice against the actual or perceived status of the victim" (Craig, 2002:86). Perpetrators of hate crimes target victims who are perceived to be members of particular demographic groups. Craig (2002:87) adds that unlike other crimes, hate crimes have a "unique form of aggression that includes the intent to harm." This is visible in what Craig (2002:87) terms the symbolic and instrumental functions of hate crimes. Through its symbolic function, hate crimes communicate a message of hatred to a community, neighbourhood or group that is despised by the perpetrators. In response to a hate crime incident, members of a victim's social group then tailor or alter their actions (by avoiding spaces where the hate crime incident took place for example). This response is what Craig terms the instrumental function of a hate crime. Hate crimes affect not only the victim, but also the members of the victim's social group by instilling fear, vulnerability and

suspicion. The violence of a hate crime is what both Lerato and Hlobo and her children were exposed to in their own community.

Another feature that distinguishes a hate crime from other aggressive offenses is the degree to which it involves multiple perpetrators. Craig (2002:87) argues that "hate crime activity is very much a group activity." The two scenarios above, drawn from Hlobo and Lerato's experiences, which were perpetrated by gangs, illustrate this. Craig (2002:88) suggests that some of the reasons perpetrators of hate crimes operate in groups include: the ability to diffuse responsibility; having safety in numbers as some individuals may be unwilling or unable to inflict harm on others on their own; providing of support and confirming "each perpetrator's bigotry and hatred for the victim's group;" and consequently perpetrators inciting each other towards aggression. All these reasons become visible in the case studies that follow.

There are various readings and meanings of the concept of "corrective/curative" rape. As mentioned earlier Muholi (2004) equates this concept with hate crimes. The exploration of hate crimes above is suggestive of this functional use. At the same time, even though the strategic implications of the use of "corrective/curative" rape may be beneficial for activist circles in lobbying for hate crime laws, a critical reading of the language of "curative/corrective" rape can be ambiguous for some. Stating the actual intention and act of the perpetrator as "curative", can mean or be misintepreted to implicate the victim as 'deserving' of the crime. She (all cases of such reported rapes are women) is being 'cleansed' of something that is 'unwanted',

'abnormal' and outlawed in society. Through "corrective/curative" rape lesbians then become cured and "normalised". Use of the language of "curative/corrective" rape or such terms as analytical tools can produce problems. Seen from the vantage point of the survivor or victim, such terms can be offensive. The use of such language (or the reading of violence as "curative") also suggests an elevated status of the perpetrator who is seen as 'curing' and 'correcting' for the good of dominant culture, while stigmatising and branding the survivor. The use of such terminology can imply or shift the blame from the perpetrator to the victim, who is seen as having 'transgressed' societal norms.

In arguing against the language of "corrective/curative" rape, I am not suggesting that such rapes are similar or even different to other rapes, but that these have a specific purpose, which is both captured (from the point of view of the perpetrator) and not captured (from the point of view of the survivor) in the language of "corrective/curative". From the point of view of the perpetrator, this form of torture and rape may be deemed "corrective/curative", but it's effects and implications to lesbians and their communities are not just brutal and terrifying, but also deeply political. Without suggesting new or alternative terminology for such rapes, it is important to be sensitised about the limits of the language of "corrective/curative". Having developed the argument positioning lesbian as an identity category in the previous chapters, what remains clear about such violations and torture is how these violate lesbian identities and should thus be treated as unique criminal cases.

Narrating lesbian murders

In addition to multiple cases of rape, there are also numerous cases in which black lesbians have been murdered[46]. Unlike the rape cases, these murder cases are difficult to pinpoint as murders relating to sexual orientation or identity, as investigations are weak and there are no survivors in most cases. Through a discursive analysis I argue that these murders, like the rape cases presented above, are cases involving sexual identity and what can be termed hate crimes. In the following section I develop this argument through a detailed descriptive presentation of a murder case of a black lesbian. This description reflects my personal experiences of being in the court and witnessing the unfolding of this case. It is written mostly in the first person to locate my own position as a black lesbian in the courthouse.

Subsequent to this case I briefly present two other murder cases of black lesbians, which I did not attend inside the courthouse, but followed through the media, personal conversations, interactions with activist organizations and a funeral proceeding of the second case. Although the nature and circumstances around each

[46]Among the many lesbians raped, murder and tortured are Zoliswa Nkonyane, a 19-year-old black lesbian murdered in Khayelitsha township (Cape Town) in February 2006; Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Masoa, a black lesbian couple raped and murdered in 2007 in Meadowlands (Johannesburg); Thokozane, a black lesbian raped and murdered in 2007, Ezakheni (KwaZulu-Natal); Sibongile, a black lesbian raped and murdered in 2008 in Strand (Cape Town); Eudy Simelane, a black lesbian murdered and suffered attempted rape in 2008 in Kwa-Thema (Johannesburg); Khanyiswa, a black lesbian murdered in 2008 in New Brighton (Port Elizabeth); Ncumisa Mzamela, a 21 year old black lesbian burnt to death in Inanda (KwaZulu-Natal) in 2010… And there are many others whose victimization, rape, and murder remains unreported and undocumented.

murder case are different, the three case studies show interesting commonalities that raise quesitons in relation to: the nature of crimes and violence towards black lesbians and how crimes towards lesbians are dealt with and understood inside and outside the courts. Focusing on these murder cases allows for a speculation and analysis of the relationship between violence, race, gender, and sexual identity. This is not an attempt to offer answers about violence towards black lesbians, but rather to raise questions that may enable an 'opening-up' and broaden discussions around violence in South Africa. I do this by offering an analysis of the questions and meanings that these three cases illuminate.

> *A robbery gone wrong? Why they killed Eudy Simelane…*
>
> *[On 28 April 2008 I stabbed the deceased several times with a knife. I killed her. I admit she died of stabbed wounds in the abdomen. I admit I know that what I was doing was wrong. I admit my life was not in danger when I stabbed her. I threatened her with a knife while accused number 3 was taking her takkies. I had no right to threaten her. I admit we wanted to rob her, that's why we threatened her. I admit that accused number 2 tried to insert his penis into the vagina of the deceased...while he was doing this I was holding her legs* [the court sighs]. *I knew it was wrong to do this without her consent. I was at a tavern when two of the accused arrived. I had 4 beers and continued drinking until 1:00am when we left the tavern... I didn't know the deceased when I met her on the way. One of the accused suggested raping her, as she didn't have money in her possession. Everyone agreed and we dragged her to the ground. Eudy recognized Themba. Themba gave me the knife and said I "must do something" as she recognized him and could see who he was. He confirmed that she knew him and Themba said "she will get us arrested", so I "must do something". So I panicked, and I stabbed the deceased. No one else stabbed the deceased* [court sighs]. *Khumbulani kicked the deceased to a nearby stream and then we left.]*
> [Petrus Thato Mpiti, 12 February, 2009 Delmas Court]

It was a cold Thursday morning in February 2009, rather strange weather for what should still be summer in Johannesburg. With heavy jackets and boots on, my friend Busi and I made our way to Delmas court, about 80kms from Johannesburg in the East Rand, a journey that took us close to two hours. Word had been circulated through various gay and lesbian organisations in South Africa that the case of murdered Eudy Simelane, a 31 year old Banyana Banyana lesbian soccer player would be heard at the Delmas court over three days. Four men, accused of murdering Simelane would appear at this court. Delmas court is famously known for the Delmas Treason Trial[47], one of the longest running political trials in the legal history of South Africa. This was the site of the prosecution of the celebrated gay rights icon, anti-apartheid and AIDS activist Simon Nkoli, together with the then prominent ANC aligned political leaders.

It may be said that like the Treason Trial, this particular case was similarly political. On arrival we were welcomed by a group of close to 150 angry protestors, mainly young black women. There were a handful of white women, mainly from outside South Africa. Many of the faces were familiar, having seen and participated with them in similar protests in various courts and in funerals. Young black lesbians had come as far as Durban and Cape Town to show solidarity in yet another case of what has been increasingly understood

[47] Simon Nkoli was arrested in 1985 and charged with treason. He was in detention for alleged terrorist activities together with 21 other activists. The Treason trial, which was heard at Delmas, is South Africa's most protracted court cases, ending in 1988 with Nkoli's acquittal.

as “hate crimes towards black lesbians”. Trial was scheduled to begin at 10:00 am, but due to some delays, this had been postponed. A crowd had gathered outside the court singing and protesting against this delay and what some activists called “delayed justice”. Many of those in the crowd had been in Delmas the previous day too, but were all sent home within fifteen minutes after arrival because one of the accused had been summoned to another trial in a different court for a series of other crimes. Turning up at court only to be subjected to yet another delay, was expressed by some of the protestors outside the courtroom as being “drawn up and down, called to court every now and then and then justice delayed”. Emotions ran high as many of those in the crowd talked about this case as a very personal case. For some, the outcome of the case would determine how and when they could utilise the spaces in their communities. Eudy’s murder had taken place in KwaThema, a township that has been well-known for being accommodating to gay and lesbian people and has generated a politicised groups of gays and lesbians. For residents in KwaThema, such a murder challenged their own sense of safety, and suggested that their township was not as safe as they had imagined it to be. For the many black lesbian protestors outside the court, Eudy’s murder implied that the streets of the township are not safe for black lesbians.

Just after 10h30 we made our way back into the courtroom. Court D accommodates close to 80 people. About a hundred people queezed themselves in the four benches seating twenty people each. Among the

protestors were friends and some family members of the accused. They mingled with the crowd in the court, and were only pointed out by those supporters who knew them. Inside the court there were a few older men and women, mainly from the church (as seen in their church uniforms) and a few of the women came from the ANC women's league wearing their green jackets and black skirts. Both groups were there to support Eudy's mother, who is an active member of the church and the women's league. Unexpectedly, commotion erupted as a journalist started clicking his camera. He directed the crowd's attention to the four men entering the court from the holding cells below, followed by a prison guard. The court was suddenly silent, only the sound of moving bodies could be heard as everyone tried to catch a glimpse of each of the men. As soon as they had been taken to their bench, the judge entered the courtroom from the left. The court stood as he entered. Judge Mavundla, a black man seemingly in his late forties, sat down, placing the laptop he was carrying in front of him.

The four accused, all black South African men, facing Judge Mavundla sat with their backs to the audience. They kept their heads down. They were all of similar height and in their early to mid twenties. They seemed comfortable in t-shirts and loose-fitting pants. One of them, accused number two, Johannes Mahlangu, had shoulder-length dreadlocks. Others had very short hair. Accused number four, Thato Petrus Mpiti, initially stood and later sat at a visible distance from the other three accused. The way he positioned himself

from his co-accused suggested that he was separating himself from them. The court was silent, but for the loud voices of angry protestors outside that filled the courtroom.

Judge Mavundla addressed his court, intermittently looking at his laptop. He referred to the case at hand, case number 60, but soon interrupted his address by saying that he could not hear himself due to the loud singing outside. Proceedings took place in both English and Zulu, and were translated by the clerk. The charges against the four men were read out by the clerk. They were accused of assault, robbery, being accomplices to and attempting to rape, and murder. A heavy silence loomed in the court as the charges were read and people's facial expressions changed.

Accused number four, Mpiti, who was seated away from his co-accused, was called to the stand. His defense attorney, a white woman in her thirties, confirmed a few biographical details of her client, focusing on his age, family background, socio-economic status, level of education and income. The defense attorney presented her client as a young man who had been a victim of circumstances: having no job, a low level of education and a child who needed his support. He had also been "trapped" in situations beyond his control: having a sickly mother he had to take care of and fathering a baby whose young mother was unemployed. Unable to secure employment, he resorted to crime.

Reading his statement presented above, Mpiti seemed relaxed. He confirmed that the statement was his and that it was a true reflection of the events of the crime. He indicated that he was not influenced or coerced to make the statement, but chose to offer it at his own free will. Mpiti then pleaded guilty on the counts of murder, robbery with aggravated circumstances; and being an accomplice to attempted rape.

The defense attorney continued questioning her client. She fisrt asked him about his expectations from the court to which he responded there were none. He stated that what he had done was "something very bad" and that he expected nothing from the court. When his attorney solicited the possibilities of change in the accused's behaviour, Mpiti's responded by stating that people not close to him would not know that he had changed. He stated that his desire to change was sincere and his transformation had already begun while in prison. But, following further interrogation about this change, Mpiti stated that he "could not guarantee change" (change being referred to as not committing a similar crime again), but could only offer his "intention to change". He seemed to be clear about what kind of change he was referring to. By now many in the audience could not contain their anger. People muttered angry sighs and sounds dismissing (such as *aargh, hayi suka)* and disagreeing with what Mpiti was saying. The mutterings got louder as Mpiti told the court of the possible 'benefits' he could access while in prison - his intention to further his education in prison and focus on efforts that would make him

"successful" by obtaining certificates on handiworks. He seemed undisturbed by the idea of going to prison. The attorney offered him a final opportunity to state something to the family of the deceased. Mpiti used this opportunity to ask the family to forgive him because he had "confessed" and "decided to come out with the truth and not keep it" to himself.

Upon the court's acceptance of Mpiti's statement, defense gave way to the state prosecutor, Eddie Maloba. Mr Maloba had been involved in this case since May 2008. He had also been pro-active in the case by addressing activists on the process and the proceedings in court. He played a crucial role between the courts, the family of the deceased and the lesbian and gay organisations lobbying and mobilising for the conviction of the four accused. The prosecutor kicked off his cross-questioning by addressing Mpiti: "You admitted that you are the one who stabbed the deceased? No other person stabbed her?". Moans and groans were heard in the court. He continued probing the accused's claim that he did not know the deceased before killing her; that her identity was revealed to him only after his arrest. To this Mpiti responded by stating:

> *"I was informed after my arrest of her name and where she is from. I was told she was a Banyana Banyana soccer player. I also heard about her sexual orientation, while I was in custody."*

By now the whole court was emotional. Some sighs of disagreement are heard from members of the court. Busi, sitting next to me, grabs my hand and squeezes it. She shakes her head in disagreement and I am angry because Eudy was a well-known and visible butch lesbian in her township. Denying

knowledge of her sexual identity so easily was difficult to bear. At this moment Eudy's mother screams and rests on her husband's shoulder.

The prosecutor proceeded to questions about the sexual orientation of the deceased. Judge Mavundla quickly interrupts and authoritatively says: "There is no significance of the victim's sexual orientation in Mpiti's crime". People in the court sighed and sounds of disagreement reverberated in the room. The prosecutor was forced to withdraw his line of questioning. He exhaled, seemingly defeated. Without asking any further questions, he sat down.

At this point, the judge took the opportunity to ask the accused some questions. Focusing on his laptop, he determined the accused's religious affiliations. He also asked about the last time Mpiti was in church and his praying rituals. Looking around the room, I could see how puzzled members of the audience were by these questions. Mpiti responded that he had not been to church in a long time, but may consider going back. The questions felt unending. When the judge had exhausted his questions, he became silent and entered some information on his laptop.

After a short recess, the prosecutor called on two witnesses: the investigating doctor and the mother of the deceased. Mrs Simelane came to the stand. She seemed fragile and walked slowly. When asked to share with the court about her murdered child she said: "I knew Eudy was a lesbian and I had accepted her as a lesbian. The kids she taught soccer respected her as she is. She was my only child..." Eudy's mother

left the stand looking deflated and exhausted. Later, court was adjourned for the following day.

On the third day of trial, Mpiti received a 32-year sentence for his crime – a sentence that dissapointed some activists as they felt life-time imprisonment would have been justifiable for such a crime. The case for Mpiti's co-accused continues. All three claim they are not guilty, but Mpiti has turned state witness and will testify against his co-accused in future.

Eudy's murder affected many people in the lesbian and feminist circles, as well as her family. Her mother has become a vocal person lashing out against homophobia and demanding protection and justice for lesbians and gay people in the townships. The case has also attracted an overwhelming amount of media attention, possibly because of Eudy's role in the national soccer squad as well as heighten activist lobbying for the case to be taken seriously by the justice system. To commemorate Eudy's life a bridge was erected in Eudy's township, Tornado in KwaThema. This bridge is a physical and symbolic act that operates as a way in which black lesbians are (re)integrated in the townships where they are seen as outcasts. At the same time such permanent and functional structures make black lesbian life visible and an important aspect of community life.

Unlike many other cases concerning the murder of black lesbians, as in the ones presented below, Eudy's case may be regarded as highly successful as there has

been a conviction. In similar cases, arrests of the perpetrators have been unimaginable due to various reasons cited including: no police investigation; lack of evidence; and various unspecified delays. However, the judge's assertion that sexual orientation played no role in the murder was a painful and further violation towards many of the lesbain protestors and to Eudy's family. For many in the court, this was yet another way in which the criminal justice system had failed black lesbians in South Africa. I deliberate on this issue in a later section.

"Looking for their next target": outrage at the murders of Sizakele and Salome

In the evening of July 7th 2007 two black lesbians in our circles were murdered at the launch of *Brizz,* a lesbian and gay bar in Soweto the previous night. Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Masooa, a lesbian couple was last seen at the bar taking a friend home. They were meant to return to the bar to join friends. After a few hours, when they did not make it back to the bar and home, their friends started worrying. Their brutally murdered bodies were spotted by a man jogging in the morning near a desolate dumpsite. Their car was parked not very far from where they were found. Sigasa was found with her hands tied with her underwear; her ankles tied with her shoestrings, and had three bullet holes in the head and three in her collarbone. Masooa had a gunshot to her head.

The murder of Sizakele and Salome shocked many people in lesbian and gay organising. Everyone talked about how brutally murdered Sizakele was found and

her friends claimed that she must have "put on a good fight" because she was "a tough butch". The manner in which her body was found raised a number of speculations. Because of lack and failure of investigation, assumptions circulated that Sizakele was probably raped. Other women's groups joined the lesbian and gay community in speaking out about these brutal murders. The deaths of Sizakele and Salome brought rise to and attracted the interest of women's and feminist NGOs that launched their organisations at the two's joint funeral. The funeral itself became deeply politicised. Various HIV/AIDS[48] organisations and women's organisations became spokespeople of the families of the two women at the funeral. Lesbian and gay organisations took the back seat. Priests from the lesbian and gay-affirming church (HUMCC[49]) joined the family churches of the two women on stage. The priests asked mourners to forgive those who had committed this violent crime. The funeral became very emotional, with women screaming and crying. A friend of the two victims came on the stage. She urged lesbians in the hall to be "careful because the murderers or their friends were possibly around us and looking for their next target". This made the hall very tense. As we were exiting the hall, continuing the funeral proceedings to the gravesite, some of the lesbian mourners where heard saying they will go "back into the closet" and live heterosexual lives.

[48] It was suggested at the build-up to the funeral that Sizakele had been working for an HIV/AIDS organization – a position that her close friends claim never existed.
[49] Hope Unity and Metropolitan Community Church. For more on the role of the gay church in South Africa see Reid (2007, and 2010)

Sizakele and Salome's deaths brought rise to a new-formed alliance between lesbian groups, women's groups and HIV/AIDS groups[50]. This kind of alliance was not always visible, as women's organisations and lesbian organisations had been working as separate entities. This newly-developed union afforded Sizakele and Salome's murder significant attention from the media, locally and internationally and highlighted their deaths as a battle against gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS and homophobia.

A national campaign was subsequently launched, the 070707 campaign (based on the date the two women were murdered – 7July2007), to commemorate, highlight and act against hatred towards lesbians. It has been this campaign at the forefront of this murder case and building a memorial bench and planting trees at a community park in Soweto. Like the bridge built to commemorate Eudy Simelane, the trees and bench remembering the lives of Sizakele and Salome are for the use and functionality of the whole community in Meadowlands township.

Sadly in this case, the only suspect identified for this murder subsequently killed himself in 2009 while out on bail. The case is pending, as an inquest has not yet been held.[51]

[50] Sizakele was known to have worked for an organisation for women living with HIV, Positive Women's Network

[51] This is from a personal interview with Emily Craven, Coordinator of the 07-07-07 Act to End Hate Campaign and the Joint Working Group; held on March, 10th 2010

While they all watched: Zoliswa Nkonyana murdered on the streets

In mid-February 2006 news filtered through to members of lesbian and gay organisations that a young black lesbian had been murdered in the streets of Khayelitsha in Cape Town. The story was circulated that on February 4th 2006, Zoliswa Nkonyana, a 19-year old, was approached while walking home with a friend by some girls in their township who claimed that the two "wanted to be raped" because they were "tomboys" and living as out lesbians. The girls incited a group of twenty young men to come and "sort out the lesbians". According to reports, these men then clubbed, kicked and beat Zoliswa to death because she was a lesbian (Thamm, 2006). Her friend managed to escape from the scene and has been in hiding since as she fears for her life. Of the twenty young men accused of her murder, nine were arrested, but none have been convicted. With twenty-one court appearances since February 2006, there has only been one trial, resulting in two of the accused being granted bail. Without the lobbying and mobilization of the lesbian and gay community, this case, like many would have gone unnoticed.

Zoliswa's murder became for lesbian and gay groups a "classic hate crime". It was one of the most violent murders of a lesbian in a public space, not hidden from community members. Zoliswa's father was also not very far from the scene of the murder. He had noticed a group of boys beating someone, but because he feared for his own life, he did not intervene. It was only later that he realised that it was his only child being beaten to death.

At the six-day commencement of the trial, which had been continually postponed for three years, in September to October 2009, the chief state witness who was with Zoliswa at the time of the attack but managed to get away, took the stand to testify. It had been three years since she gave her statement to the police, and almost ten months after giving testimony. She was cross-examined by six defense attorneys in a gruelling session that lasted more than six hours. The aim was to question her testimony and discredit her as a witness. However, she remained composed and focused and implicated all nine of the accused in the crime scene. She also confirmed and clearly articulated that she and Zoliswa were confronted and victimized because they were out as lesbians and attacked because of their sexual orientation.

This trial continued into 2010 with a third state witness being intimidated by friends and supporters of the accused. She testified against the accused in camera, and stated her role in instigating the incident and calling her friends to "sort out the lesbians" (Good Hope MCC, 2009). The nine men, who are between the ages of 19 to 24, have all pleaded not guilty to charges of murder and two of attempted murder for alleged attacks on Zoliswa's friend (the chief state witness) as well as a man (another witness) who was passing by and tried to intervene.

In the morning of September 15, 2010 trial was postponed another time after a defense attorney could not make it to court, and four of the accused escaped from their holding cells at the Khayelitsha Magistrate Court. As none of the accused has been re-arrested, further delays are anticipated, also implying that the safety of all

witnesses and other black lesbians in that township may be compromised. This case will possibly continue into 2011.

The "erasure" of lesbian identity: 'packaging' and unpacking violence

I use Mpiti's (accused number four) statement as an entry point to the description of Eudy's court case and all other cases to take an immediately political position about the way in which the perpetrator(s) of violence are easily "let off the hook" in the act of violence. By using this statement: naming Mpiti and his co-accused, describing them, and giving them a face, I bring Mpiti to book, in a way - arresting him for his explicitly violent crime.

Adrian Howe (2008 in Williams, 2009) observes that in mainstream texts on violence perpetrated by men to women there is a tendency to omit the perpetrator's voice and his role from the act of violence. In such texts, the focus is mainly on the victim or survivor. Williams (2009:79) argues that such texts and narratives "erase" men from violence, "overlooks" their positions as perpetrators and thus become "inadvertently excused" in the studies on violence. Even though not similar to violence towards women, there are a few exceptions to this "erasure", including studies by Sasha Gear (2001 and 2009) on sexual violence and coercion in men's prisons and the narratives of perpetrators of political violence in South Africa by Foster, Haupt and De Beer (2005).

The commonalities in the cases presented above, as well as the rape cases presented earlier illustrate two emerging themes: the ways in which crime and violence towards lesbians is of a particular nature, in the manner in which it is carried out. Secondly a reading of the court cases reveals the 'universality' in the way in which crime is narrated and 'packaged' within the criminal justice system. The disjuncture in comparing these two themes is ironic.

The cases presented above all contain similar attributes demonstrating that these attacks are directed at lesbian identity, and can therefore be considered as hate crimes. The first attribute considers "group activity" as one of the markers of a hate crime. This is visible in all but one contested multiple murders of Sizakele and Salome. In Zoliswa's murder, twenty young men were involved, nine of them accused of her murder and one young woman who had incited the attack turning state witness. Similarly in Eudy's murder, four men were involved. The relationship between the number of people in a group and severity of the crime shows that the two are positively related (Craig, 2002). It is therefore without surprise that many of these cases have resulted in fatalities.

Secondly is what Craig (2002) notes as the intentional selection of the victim coupled with the intent to harm, visible traits in all the cases presented above. In the cases where witnesses are present, this intent is well-articulated by the perpetrators to the victims. In the two cases of gang rape, both Lerato and Hlobo's children were specifically selected for the act to "teach them a lesson" not to be

lesbian. In the event that lead to Zoliswa's murder, the group of men were told to "sort out" Zoliswa and her friend's "tomboyish" and lesbian ways. The pepetrators in all these cases are articulating prejudice and acting on it. In Eudy's murder we can speculate that when one of the perpetrators identifies Eudy and askes his co-accomplice to "do something" - his response through murder suggests that no other alternative exists to dealing with Eudy's life.

The third is the way in which violence towards lesbians operates in spaces that are public, making these sites of violence and murder of black lesbians. Zoliswa was murdered on the streets of her township, on her way home, in the full view of people passing by. Sizakele and Salome were found murdered by a jogger in a public site. Similarly, Eudy was murdered in a public park in her township. None of the black lesbians' murders in South Africa, and there have been a number of them, were in private spaces. All their murders have been public acts. This is not to suggest that violence towards black lesbians takes place only in public spaces, but to highlight the way in which public space is used to 'punish' black lesbians.

One of the first published narratives to come out from a black South African lesbian, Vera Vimbela (with Olivier, 1995:194) similarly tells the story of how she was publicly punished by her family and people in her village in the Eastern Cape. Her family sent her to a local chief in Transkei for a public whipping after finding out that she was a lesbian. She states: "*I don't remember how many lashings I received; all I remember is crying and screaming with pain as the whole village jeered at me*". This

kind of public violence works in ways that communicate to black lesbians that, because of their sexual identity, certain public spaces do not belong to them. In addition, this is a way in which men control not only women's bodies, but also maintain patriarchal spaces. Linking patriarchy to "terrorism" Herek, Cogan and Gillis (2002:14) argue it is not "an exaggeration to conclude that bias-motivated attacks function as a form of terrorism, sending a message to all lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals that they are not safe if they are visible". Terrorism can take can take any form, from battery, rape to murder and can be implied or actual violence to all females regardless of age, sexual orientation, and class (Jenness and Broad, 1994:405). It is a form of frightening, dominating and controlling females.

'Packaging' crime

Listening and witnessing Mpiti's statement and how he and his co-accused murdered Eudy sends an unsettling chill not only because this is a murder of yet another black lesbian in South Africa, but that the manner in which Mpiti 'packages' his crime seems ordinary. One can even say it is logical – it has a sequence; one event lead to another, almost as if nothing else could have happened. In his statement or the manner in which Mpiti's statement was 'packaged' – death/murder was inevitable, a common feature in many criminal trials and endemic violence. Murder was Mpiti's only option and response to: he "must do something" when his co-accused realised Eudy has recognised him. In the 'packaging' of Simelane's death as a 'logical series of events' that escalated to death (i.e. they wanted to rob her; she did not have money; they suggested to rape her; she recognised one of them, and

that lead to her being killed and dumped in a stream) is what Foucault (in Dillon and Foucault, 1980) describes when talking about the danger of violence. Foucault argues "what is most dangerous in violence is its rationality. The deepest root of violence and its permanence come out of the form of rationality we use" (1980:4). For Mpiti, murder became so 'everyday' that his articulation of it was blinded by the excessive violence in the murder. In 'packaging' Eudy's murder in this way, Mpiti presents it as an easily palatable event, stripping it from the torture and excess violence it carries. Through a 'packaged' narrative, he places the murder in a perfect crime scene, presenting the conditions and an envinronement that enabled the possibility of violence: use of alcohol; a group of men; and a woman walking at night.

While I make use of Mpiti's statement as a political entry-point about the perpetrator's role in violence, this same statement is turned "up-side-down" in the courthouse, given an elevated status of a reedemable confession. Two significant moments become inexcusable during Eudy's trial. The first, which can be easily identified as a confessional testimony, had the rhetoric of many crimial trials and mostly the amnesty process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's proceedings. The TRC's aim was not just about "truth-finding", it was more about nation-building, healing and promoting reconciliation (Foster et.al, 2005:11), aspects that were absent in this particular trial. The method of the amnesty hearings was through testimonies, confessions from many perpetrators of political violence. The discourse of the TRC highlighted the importance of the confession, or in other terms, full disclosure. Referring to Payne (2002) Foster et.al (2005:87) note that the

TRC wanted perpetrators to confess, showing a "particular version of moral philosophy in which sinners were required to disclose, to show remorse and to apologise." Similarly, through his confession, Mpiti potrays himself in a morally reasonable fashion, a person worthy of forgiveness because he has "confessed" and "decided to come out with the truth and not keep it" to himself. Following the rhetoric of the TRC, which has contributed to a national culture that emphasised a logic of confession, an imperative to telling, Mpiti utilises the 'healing powers' of truth-telling.

Because of his confession, what may be read as an ironic act of goodwill from his part, Mpiti suggests that his crime should be forgiven (by Eudy's family). Mpiti's confession is not suprising as it follows common practice in justice, medicine and other parts of society. As Foucault (1978:59-61) argues on the confession: it is the "most highly valued technique for producing truth", and that "Western man has become a confessing animal". Foucault further notes the power dynamics at play in the confession: the confession is confessed with the presence (or virtual presence) of an authority requiring the confession, who then "prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconsile". This is the same framework that Foster et.al (2005) use in analysing perpetrators (protagonists in their case) as "actors" in a "theatre" of violence. Mpiti seemingly understands the role his confession plays in his crime, and as the audience we witnessed the 'power of the confession' at play to both Mpiti and the actual trial. The confession (delivered as a statement) held its own position. After its delivery, it

required little cross-questioning or examiniation. The prosecutor experiences this as he attempts to interrogate the accused's statement. It was clear that the "confession" (written statement), a prepared, rehearsed and read-out document had more power than what lay behind it and it held the truth.

Erasing 'lesbian' from lesbian murder

The second moment during this trial takes place right after the "confession", Judge Mavundla's intervention during Mpiti's cross-questioning asserting that *"there is no significance of the victim's sexual orientation in Mpiti's crime".* This disturbing and damaging intervention from the highest person in the court of law made sexual orientation and identity an invisible part of the victim's life and the lives of the many people in the courtroom. His intervention denied common knowledge that Eudy was known by the perpetrators and many others in the community to be a lesbian. The judge's statement had the fault of taking the "confession" at face-value. In his statement, Mpiti clearly pointed out that his co-accused, Themba, knew Eudy and Eudy had recognised Themba (one of the perpetrators). Secondly, Judge Mavundla forecloses the possibility that Eudy was targeted specifically because she was a lesbian, an important factor that makes many lesbians feel vulnerable and unsafe in their communities. Mostly, I want to argue, the judge commits a serious crime - a crime of silencing sexual orientation and identity, silencing it also as a motivating factor in the murder. By doing this, the judge like the perpetrators perpetuates injustice by failing to prevent acts that constitute gross violations of human rights.

The judge's failure in recognizing the importance of sexual orientation and the multiple identities of the victim illustrates what Amartya Sen (2007:4-6) calls a "solitarist approach to human identity". That any person or victim of crime possesses only one identity during that crime limits seeing the myriad of identities within each individual. Sen argues that this is not just "morally undesirable, but descriptively wrong". As Sen puts it, "in our daily lives, we see ourselves as members of a variety of groups—we belong to all of them." Therefore, to rob an individual the multiplicity of her identities is problematic. This is a problematic reading of Eudy's murder as it masks the many ways women experience their lives and how they experience violence.

This form of 'erasure' and 'silencing' similarly takes place in Zoliswa Nkonyane's trial when the state witness, who had instigated the violence towards Zoliswa and her friend, is cross-questioned to invalidate her testimony and to discredit her as a witness. Even though she repeatedly articulates the intent of the crime and her role in it to target Zoliswa's sexual identity, serious attempts are made to dismiss her intentions and those accused of Zoliswa's murder.

In South Africa currently violent acts committed out of prejudice are treated the same way as other violent acts. This means that hate crimes are not captured as specific types of crimes. Non-existent legislation on hate crimes makes it impossible for such crimes to be reported, recorded and investigated as such. The South African

Police Service (SAPS) includes all violent crimes under one register. In short, homophobic crimes or crimes towards lesbian and gay people, or crimes perpetuated by hatred and prejudice will be registered as any violent crimes or forms of assault. The implications of this is that violence based on sexual identity, or perpetuated by hatred remains hidden or invisible in the police records. In a documentary-film investigating hate crimes and rape towards lesbians in South Africa, a police official states (Schaap and Gim, 2010):

> *What is corrective rape? I'm not sure what corrective rape is. As far as we are concerned – corrective rape is not a problem here in South Africa. Based on the way the crimes are reported – if somebody reports a crime of rape, it is investigated as rape. We don't have a phenomenon or a crime category called corrective rape that will be able to tell you that this is reaching alarming proportions..."* (Vishnu Naidoo, SAPS Spokesman)

There have been attempts recently by activist groups in South Africa to mobilise for the inclusion of hate crimes into legislation as a separate category of violence (Gontek, 2009; Muholi, 2004), but these have not been advanced. If such legislation would exist, it would address the motivations and intent of perpetrators of such forms of violence. Moreover, it would assist in addressing such violence through altered institutional responses from the police, judiciary and the courts (Gelber, 2000).

The responses presented above are evidence of flawed segments of a criminal justice system. This would not be corrected simply by a hate crimes legislation. As Kohn (2001) argues, although referring to the U.S, the justice system is driven by

prejudice, discrimination and forms of social hierarchy that puts "disfavoured individuals" on the margins. So, people who are considered "outlaws" or outside of society's norms, will feel the brunt of this prejuduice. Society, Kohn (2001:259) adds, "generally is premised on a hierarchy of social classes – based on race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, wealth, education level and so on. This social hierarchy transfers to the legal realm…those accused of offending someone above them in social status are likely to be handled more severly than those offending someone below them". Rather than fighting for the inclusion of hate crimes legislation, Kohn (2001) argues, it is the criminal justice system itself, based on social hierarchies and marginalising certain individuals, that must be challenged. The trial presented above and many others can be read as suggestive of this flaw in the justice system. It can be argued that the perpetrators are not brought to book because they belong to a higher status in the gender and sexual hierarchy (Rubin, 1984). The ways in which lesbian sexuality is invalidated, "erased" and "silenced" works in ways that illustrate the injustices in our democratic society.

Laclau's (2003) elaborate philosophical debate on "difference" between universalism and particularism in relations to questions of identity concurs with this notion. He argues that particularism (in this case let us see this in the workings of a lesbian identity) is always in relation to the content of universality that transcends it. Thus, any appeal for "pure particularism" cannot succeed if it asserts itself only as the particular without locating itself in relation to the context (Laclau, 2003:363). It follows thus, we cannot fight and demand 'difference' if that

'difference' emphasises particularism in isolation form what can be shared with the reset of the community (the universal). The rights fought for must be accessible to everyone. Laclau adds that defenders of extreme particularism find themselves in incoherent and ambiguous terms. In defending their "right to difference as a universal right", they are simultaneously asserting that their "demands cannot be articulated into any wider hegemonic operation of the system" (p366). For Laclau this strategy can only have "paralyzing political effects" for those proponents of extreme particularism. This is a similar argument invoked by Kohn (2001) on hate crimes legislation. On the one hand, while such legislation is fighting for the realisation of difference and rights of those violated because of their difference, it is also only a struggle of the internal reform of that particular institutional setting and not of the "hegemonic operation to reform the system", which seems to be flawed.

Conclusion

The realities of violence and violent crimes in contemporary South Africa are frightening. The "culture of violence" in South Africa suggests that many live with a cynical attitude towards crime, a reality that is disturbing and difficult to fathom in a country that is constitutionally progressive. Charlene Smith, a rape survivor, wrote after her ordeal: *Every 26 seconds a woman gets raped, it was my turn last Thursday night,* a frightening statement that is both an outcry against rape in South Africa, but also suggesting that such violations are so 'ordinary', so frequent and almost expected for any woman. It is an angry statement implying that our society has

allowed women to 'wait in line' for such torture, terror and violation to take place to our bodies and our lives.

Many cases of violence against lesbians go unnoticed as there is fear of further victimisation from service providers during reporting (Herek, Cogan and Gills, 2002; Wells & Polders, 2006). Although many reports on violence towards women exist, many usually omit experiences of lesbians. This also means that in studies dealing with the issue of violence against women, lesbians will be ignored. This omission is problematic as anti-lesbian violence cannot be separated from other violence against women. Furthermore, the fear of violence that many women experience is "compounded by sexual identity" (Reid and Dirsuweit, 2002:16). Violence towards lesbians is experienced in multiple ways: as women, black women, and as lesbians.

The experiences of the women presented in this chapter, some lesbian, others not, suggests that violence cannot be looked at as affecting one segment of society. Challenging the dominant culture of violence can also not be a solitarist approach, advancing the rights of only a few. Similarly, challenging the justice system itself cannot be the task of only lesbian and gay people as violence affects also their families and communities. The cases, trials, experiences or lived realities of women in this chapter force us to engage with the complex relationship between gender, sexual identity and eminent violence within a moment and space of democracy.

For many women in this research, they negotiate between living their lives "freely" and also fearing death by rape or hatred. Crimes towards lesbian and gay people and other groups considered to be on the 'margins' of society "threaten the illusion of invulnerability that is so important in one's daily life" (Herek, et.al, 2002:333) and may intimidate members of the victim's community, "leaving them isolated, vulnerable and unprotected by the law" (Blackwell, Ricks and Dziegielewski, 2005:39). This is exemplified in how Eudy's mother expressed that she feared that the murderers of her daughter will also come for her, and how Zoliswa's friend has to be in hiding, away from her family and community. These challenges are not expected in a society that prides itself as constitutionally progressive. For many women who live surrounded by fear and anger, such violence remind us of cautionary notes not to just be a "constitution-obsessed" South Africa (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006:26), but to also recognise that even democracy may not be the end itself.

CHAPTER FIVE: "I Want To Wear In A Way That A Lady Can Look At Me And Want Me"

Introduction

Any thesis on lesbians would possibly be heavily criticized if it were without reference to or an exploration of butch and femme[52] sexual styles[53], gender roles or what is increasingly called identities. The previous chapters have made reference to butch and femme forms in varied contexts, with Chapter Four locating the visibility of butch lesbians within the context of violence towards lesbians and gender non-conforming women. In this chapter I argue, on the one hand, that the current scope of popular discourses of focusing only on lesbian butch and femme styles and 'role-playing' is limited and offers a narrow lens in understanding black lesbian identities in Johannesburg. On the other hand the chapter argues for forms of self-styling and repertoires of cultural performance as additional more useful ways of thinking about lesbian identities in Johannesburg.

While I do not necessarily want to underemphasize the importance of butch and femme categories, in this chapter I also highlight the importance of other self-styling forms existing within and outside the butch and femme binary in the context of

[52] Butch and femme are terms often used to loosely describe lesbians' approximate adherence to traditional masculine and feminine gender roles respectively. These terms will be further developed and problematised in this chapter.

[53] I borrow Lisa M. Walker's (1993:875) use and meaning of the phrase butch and femme styles and not the hyphenated butch and femme in order to "construct identities that exist separately as well as in combination. Walker also follows Joan Nestle's (1978) questioning of the use of the term 'role-play' for butch and femme and how this implies that butch and femme are imitative of heterosexual gender roles. Such use, as positioned by some feminists, denies the complexity of butch and femme experiences. In this chapter I use both these terms, though carefully, to also show the complex ways in which they appear in scholarship and in the experiences of those following butch and femme styles.

Johannesburg. This chapter is not entitled butch and femme particularly for this reason. Instead, it is concerned with exploring issues of self-styling broadly, which are inclusive but not limited to butch and femme categories. I use the notion of self-styling to refer to dress, demeanour, clothing, stance, activity, eroticism and language, which are sometimes hidden in explorations of butch and femme. The use of the notion of self-styling should also not be read as a superficial way (Bell, Binnie, Cream and Valentine, 1994:32) of looking at black lesbian realities, but a serious notion that is part of constructing social categories and a notion full of meaning. Self-styling is also used to refer to both variety and likeness (Eckert, 2004:47).

More than positioning an argument of butch and femme styles and 'role-playing' as subverting gender or suggesting assimilation to normative behaviour, the chapter aims at showing the complexities and contradictions existing within black lesbian forms of self-styling and cultural performance. In many instances these suggest inconsistencies and uncertainties. This chapter will first explore self-styling in everyday life among the current research participants as well as lesbian contests/pageants that have been running since the mid-1990s in Johannesburg. These will highlight the connectedness of gender, class, nation and race among black lesbians in Johannesburg. All these suggest diverse and important social meanings of self-styling including: agency, choice or sense of individualism, concealment, self-display, performativity and expression. Subsequently the chapter will explore limits relying only one butch and femme role-playing as sole means of understanding black lesbian realities.

The use of style

James Ferguson (1999) defines style as "a form of signifying practice," a definition Sichone (2001) and Eckert (2004) agree with, but both extend. To this definition, Eckert (2004:43) adds that it is through style that people create social meaning. As social meanings are fluid, so are styles. Borrowing from Hebdige's use of the concept *bricolage* (1984), Eckert notes that the practices of style involve a process of "bricolage" where old meanings are given new twists, or how new meaning is created from existing resources. This also allows people and communities to interpret stylistic moves in their own way. Style can not mean the same thing to all people, and should not be read as simply resisting hegemony or as ways of resolving social tensions (Hebdige, 1984).

Sichone (2001:375) links style with the freedom that people have to redefine themselves, but challenges Ferguson's (1999) assertion that styles are constructed "under a situation of duress". Instead, he argues, they can be made under "oppressive as well as liberating situations" or even in situations of uncertainty (my addition). Sichone further adds "it is the freedom to make style that is dynamic", and that styles that are contrasting can co-inhabit in the same situation as well as in the same person.

Style can mean different things and can be used also for many reasons, including political ones. Writing about British society and how it has excluded some black people, Blackman and Perry (1990:73) show how some lesbians use styles, (by wearing clothing of their societies as an act of resistance to assimilation in Britain), to "assert their racial and cultural identities in response to invisibility and exclusion". They can do this by wearing headscarves or items representing their own cultures or political affiliations (such as black power/consciousness t-shirts) together with lesbian identity markers (gay ribbons or belts or pins).

In South Africa similar notions expressed by Blackman and Perry (1990) among lesbian communities are regularly visible especially in lesbian and gay Pride marches or other protest actions. Writing about the 1997 Pride march in Johannesburg, Morgan and Reid (2003:376) note how members of a black lesbian organisation "dressed up in women's traditional clothing and adornments. Carrying placards with slogans such as 'Breaking the Silence of Lesbians in Africa', women in beaded Xhosa costumes and long stemmed clay tobacco pipes paraded through the city streets".

All these different uses and meanings of style are visible at particular moments in the lesbian cultural life. In the next sections I illustrate the ways in which style is utilized to: signify performance (of gender); to be part of modernity (contemporary styles); to express one's identity; and for pleasure.

Localized lesbian styles: class, cultural expressions and race

Style is important for lesbians (and gay people generally) as it can be a way in which a lesbian identity is asserted and displayed or a way in which one's sexual identity can be read. It can also allow lesbians to be recognised by others as 'gay' or to show some form of group identity, usually separate from dominant culture (Clarke and Turner, 2007 Blackman and Perry, 1990). This may also require an awareness (from others) of how style is used to identify lesbians, for example by identifying t-shirts, stickers, ribbons, tattoos and haircuts that lesbians use to mark their identity.

The earliest documented narrative in 'queer' writing depicting style among women in South Africa is seen in Gertrude "Gertie" Williams's story published in *Drum* magazine in 1956 and later reprinted in Gevisser and Cameron (1995). Gertie was a coloured cross-dresser who passed as a man at different times in her life and had relationships with women. Although Gertie has been seen as a "lesbian gangster" (Chetty, 1995b:128), it may be argued that the published story could also be interpreted as that of a transgender person or what Judith Halberstam (1998) terms "female masculinity", as in the narrative, Gertie reiterates the desire to be a "whole man". Regardless of the term or identity, which attempts to locate Gertie and many others after her, this chapter refers to Gertie's story to evoke the use of style in relation to the 'queer' female body, which comes across in many writings on 'lesbians' across the globe. In Gertie's narrative a stylistic form and performance comes across in two ways: her ability to permanently pass as a man through dress and mannerisms and the manner in which she "hides her womanliness". These are

visible in her private life (romantic relationships with women) as well as how society positions her in relation to others and what is expected of the gender and role she occupies. Gertie's ability to influence her observers (Goffman, 1959:22), who witnessed her performance of maleness and masculinity, vividly shows the way in which style can bring different meanings to 'reality'.

Since Gertie Williams' story, very little is documented in South Africa in relation to 'queer' (black) women. What exists comes mainly from the late 1980s and early 1990s when many black lesbians involved themselves in gay and lesbian movements. From archival material it becomes clear that many black lesbians at that time followed the styles of popular British and American cultural icons such as Boy George, Tracy Chapman or soapie characters such as Ted Dinard in the popular 1980s American soapie *Dynasty*[54]. These were distinct styles visible through choice of clothes and hairstyles, such as boy cuts or long dreadlocks.

In contemporary South Africa localized styles that are also exhibited by many of the participants in this research include, but are not limited to: *ipantsula*[55] (a local South African style depicting particular inclination for *Converse* takkies (shoes) and jeans or overalls and also following a specific genre of music); *italiyano*[56] (a stylish and

[54] Boy George, Tracy Chapman and the soapie character Ted Dinard were all known or popularly believed to be gay, or lesbian in Chapman's case

[55] A township dance form that emerged in the 1950s. It represents a way of life, dress and speech (tsotsitaal) and is considered symbolic of township culture. It also describes somewhat who has a particular street-smartness.

[56] Also a form of style that represents some kind of sophistication in the township. Usually *amataliano/amantariano* dress in Italian clothes or expensive, branded clothes. This may not necessarily represent their class status or affordability, but their sense of style.

smart township guy, as Jojo shows); *ibhujwa*[57](a township version of the mixture of hip-hop and punk styles - Nestar's trademark) or those visible from the Y-generation of Johannesburg's Y-culture (Nuttall, 2004). There are also various localised styles such as a variation of *cowboy* (as Pati is well-known for).

Johannesburg styles are not easily categorized or coherent, they can be easily referred to as a "bricolage" (Hebdige, 1984) of local elements and reinterpretations of imported concepts. They also represent the hybrid, cosmopolitanism and sophisticated nature of Johannesburg. Even class, which may seem to easily distinguish or is seen as a central divisive factor, is not straightforward. Most lesbians, and most urban South Africans, cannot easily be neatly separated into the structured class positions (lower class, working class, middle-class and upper class). Nestar (22 years old, *ibhujwa)* and Pati (42 years old and mother of three, cowboy), who are both unemployed, manage to self-style in ways that are considered to follow particular trends. They explain how they manage to do this:

> Nestar: *Most people say* (when referring to me) *'Nestar ibhujwa', or the one with the Mohawk or hip-hop. People define me with the style that I'm carrying and what represents me. You have to be noticeable as ibhujwa. People must see it and tell you that you are, not just you saying it. I'm ibhujwa and people can see it, there is a sign showing it. It's a style and most (ama)bhujwa* (plural of ibhujwa) *can dance. I create my own style. I like designing and looking at fashion and what people are wearing. I follow their trends and network. I look at people's styles and make my own combination. I match colours, wear my clothes and hear what people will say. I like the style of (ubu)bhujwa,* (which is) *a combination of skinny jeans and tight t-shirts. It's almost like gay style -*

[57] *Ibhujwa* is a style used by many young people to connote their sense of urban hip. It's a word borrowed from bourgeois, but in the township is not necessarily linked to class, but taste and ability to express a unique sense of style as well as language. It can be seen as an interpretation and mixture of localized/township version of hip-hop and punk styles.

piercings and freaky wild hairstyles. If there's new skinny jeans or hairstyle, I would go for that. I network and mix and match. (Ubu)bhujwa is not so expensive because you don't have to wear labels. You can wear a R10 t-shirt and mix it with something else. It's all about mixing clothes and colours.

Self-styling is not only related to affordability – it may change according to many circumstances. Access to credit and class position may determine what style one chooses, and thus who can be what (Blackman and Perry, 1990:76 and Clarke and Turner, 2007:271). In some situations, age may also determine the kind of style one can access.

Pati (42 years old and mother of three) shows in addition how style can also be an interpretation of eroticism, the ability to be seen by a "lady" and be wanted.

Pati: *There's something I don't like – dressing like 'utsotsi' (a thug). I don't want to look like a threat, that even the cops would stop me in the streets. I like wearing sort of guys' clothes – like a guy who takes care of himself. I like people to see a guy who has some gentleness and humility when I'm dressed. I can't afford clothes, but I make an effort. I've been and would still like to be, but now I don't have money…I'd still like to be a punk. I've been a cowboy – that's my favourite. The cowboy outfit is very expensive and I don't have money now. So, I started wearing suits and ties, but it's not my style really. Also, if you look at my age – suits and ties look good when you look at my age as well. I want to wear in the way that a lady can look at me and want me*.

Yoba (22 year old part-time student) illustrates how she cannot self-style in a particular way, as this does not match her age. Yoba and her friends generally dress in shorts, t-shirts and adorn themselves with necklaces and big rings. Yoba is part of

Sigma kappa phi inc.[58], *a* Soweto-based group celebrating masculinity and gender non-conforming among masculine lesbians:

> Yoba: *now that I've realised I'm 22, I'm tired of looking like a little boy. My mom calls me her little herd boy* [laugh]. *But come to think of it - my friends and I - we do look like teenagers and we're 22. And my oldest friend that I hang out with is 21 and you can't be in shorts all the time. So, I'm trying to change.*

Nestar, Pati and Yoba suggest that localised self-styling is determined by a number of factors, both personal and social. Their choice of style represents a hybridity of local and international concepts (jeans, cowboy, punk) as well as negotiations of expression, attraction, age, and presentation. Pati in particular notes the importance of not looking like a threat, suggesting that self-styling is related to negotiating space and safety (as already suggested in Chapter Three).

Coupled with how a participant dresses and the types of clothes she chooses is the language she uses to refer to herself. In most cases, this becomes evident when participants are called out or addressed by others. For the English language user, this becomes a discussion about pronouns, which are differently organised in local vernacular. In the following extracts, the two participants show that because they self-style in a particular way, others' language and local reference to them should also comply with their presentations. Jojo (17 years old and identifies as *Italiyano*) and Pati state that because of what and how they dress, they cannot be called *sisi*

[58]Taken from their flier- *Sigma kappa phi inc.* - "this is a fraternity that will stand to serve the needs of black masculine lesbians. Simply put, it's a place to be yourself, be understood and be with people just like you whilst empowering each other". Masculine is described as : butch, dyke, boi, stud and even transgender beings. All in all, to create a Butch and Male - soul circle of trust."

(local term used when referring to a female adult, or as a form of respect to an older female):

> Jojo: *…I don't dispute the way that I am and look – I accept it. What I don't want is someone calling me sisi – I don't like that*.
> how do you want people to call you?
> Jojo: *They must just use my name and if they don't know it, they must just say, sorry and wave to me and I would respond.* But you like it when they say '*eita*' (township slang for hello) or '*boss*' (township slang for the Afrikaans term, *baas*)? *Yes, that I like that because those are just* (township greeting) *styles. Actually I see myself as a township Italiyano, you see? That's how it is.*

What is interesting about Jojo's response is that even though she represents a style associated with township masculinity, *Italiyano,* she does not ask to be referred to as *bhuti* (the male equivalent of *sisi).* Instead, she highlights the importance of noticing her style in the way she is referred to. Nestar similarly mentions this, when stating that people refer to her according to her style, "Nestar i*bhujwa"*. Pati, who currently prefers wearing suits and ties states that she prefers to be called 'uncle,[59]' a common nickname for many masculine presenting and older (read as over 35 years) black lesbians in Johannesburg, instead of miss or madam. It can be argued that Pati's use of and preference for the term 'uncle' in everyday talk is subversive, as she forces people outside lesbian circles (those who do not know the meaning and relevance of the term) to recognize her sexuality and gender identity through their use of language.

> Pati: *Most people just call me by my name. I know some people who call me 'sister' and there are some who call me 'uncle' others, 'auntie', but honestly I prefer 'uncle', but anything is fine actually.*

[59] There are many black lesbians, over age 35, named 'uncle' in Johannesburg and this nickname is generally related to age and, to some extent, experience as a lesbian and gender identity. A common joke is that most 'uncles' do not reach the status ubaba (man/father), which according to black lesbian 'culture' is higher than 'uncle' because it shows a more emphasized masculine gender identity, as in Hlobo, one of the participants in the research, calling her partner *ubaba*.

Nestar (22 year old *ibhujwa)* adds a different element to self-styling that takes into consideration racial dynamics. Like Jojo (17 year old *Italiano)*, Nestar portrays *ibhujwa* style, which is common among some young black men. When such self-styling is "modified and transplanted to a woman" (Moore, 2006:132), it can be found to be alluring or cool, as Nestar shows. In Nestar's case, it is white women that find her form of self-styling cool and exotic. She adds that black people see it as "weird". Nestar links race and self-styling by presenting how terminology used by white women complete her image and style. When she is found to be "other" by black people, it is white women who validate her style, and thus who she is, but at the same time find her exotic. Nestar elaborates:

> Nestar: *You see, black women don't understand my piercings and all. They think I'm crazy and ask me why I have so many piercings. A white woman will see me as cool and understand what kind of person I am. If I'm wearing black clothes, a black person's going to say I'm 'into witchcraft' and white people will say 'so gothic.' I'll pierce and black people will say 'I'm crazy' and white people will say 'it's cool'. I've seen a few white women who come here to the organization and say I'm pretty and they want me, you see*…

Nestar is suggesting that race, like gender, can be similarly erotic. Here she describes how both black people and white people, with the latter adding an erotic element to her style, see her as different. Nestar suggests that among black women, her style limits how she is seen or perceived. Among white women, her style is particularly linked to her sexuality and ability to attract white women. This suggestion should not be read as a simple way of reading the complex interplay

between race and gender, but rather as one way in which relationships are complicated by race, class, gender and sexuality.

Styling to conceal

Clothing and appearance play dynamic functions in a black lesbian body. In one way, they mark the body as lesbian with a gender display and also emphasize desire as central in lesbian relations. Furthermore, they allow bodies to be covered and hidden from societal threat and danger, thus allowing some lesbians to be in control of their space, vulnerabilities and claim a position of power. At the same time they can also be a disclaimer of non-violence or of not being a threat (as Pati suggested earlier). They also communicate particular messages of power and control. Pati (42 year old mother of three who prefers *cowboy* style), Yoba (22 year old part-time student) and Hlobo (35 year old professional and mother of four) elaborate on this when referring to their styles as forms of protection from violence and threat, or to cover their feminine body parts:

> Pati: *I don't like girls' clothes...I just don't like them. The thing is – it's the opposite gender that I don't want. If they* (men) *could see me feminine, they would bother me even more. I think* (the way I dress) *it's a disguise because at times, some people don't discover who I am. At one time, the thugs hit me with a gun and I fainted. They took my fancy sneakers and my cowboy hat and my belt. Do you think if they'd discovered I was a woman they wouldn't have raped me? They didn't discover* [chuckle]*!*

I asked Yoba how it comes to be that she dresses mainly in men's suits:

> Yoba: *Ah - I just wanna feel smart, I guess* [giggle]*. I think, as people would say 'I'm dressed in drag everyday'. As in, I don't wear women's clothing. I don't even have women's clothing. The only piece of women's clothing on my body - I won't mention it, but it's quite clear, but when I wear a*

> *shirt and wanna look extra smart and feel, I don't know, manly and want to own myself, own my space - only a smart man can do that…I know I'm a smart individual and I can hold my own conversation. Like initially, I want you to look at me and know I know my business and can hold my own. I want to own my space. I want to be taken seriously. So, right now the suit is my favourite - I'm trying to change the way I dress. It's easy to put on a suit you know and they cover the fact that you've got breasts and everything. I'm trying to like the shirts and the jackets too.*

Hlobo articulates similar views about her choice of clothes, reminiscing about the time when she was involved in political activism and how this coincided with meeting her first girlfriend. Her clothing allowed her to disguise her body and her femininity from the police during a politically unstable time in Johannesburg when all those involved in underground politics posed a threat to the then government[60]. Hlobo's dress-code at that time made it easy for her to be identified by her comrades, and it also allowed her the opportunity to attract other women.

> Hlobo: *She* [my girlfriend] *thought I was a man because I was dressed like a man. I was dressed like that so that the cops wouldn't identify me. I would also wear a cap. Those days I didn't wear earrings.*

The scenarios above all suggest that style for black lesbians is as complex and dynamic as identity itself. Self-Styling has different meanings and these may change according to circumstance, and can follow localised meanings and patterns. In the next section I deal with style in relation to a specific cultural form that has become popular in black lesbian and gay 'culture' in Johannesburg: contests, or pageants. I focus in particular on lesbian contests that span over twelve years.

[60] Hlobo, a former member of the underground armed wing (Mkhonto Wesizwe) of the ANC – the national liberation movement in South Africa

In Contest: Lesbian Ladies, Kings and Queens

In this section I am interested in presenting and possibly making sense of the culturally significant, but scant, history and performance of gay and lesbian (identity) contests in Johannesburg. Outside Johannesburg there have been drag pageants in Cape Town, images and stories of which were circulated through popular media such as *Drum* and *Golden City Post* in the 1950s and 1960s (Chetty, 1995a). In Johannesburg however, the earliest archival record of these contests was captured in 1995 (a poster of Miss GLOW-Vaal in September 1995[61]). In 1996 a pageant organised by the Hope and Unity Church in Johannesburg took place at the Harrison Reef hotel in Hillbrow (Reid, 2010 and GALA footage, AM 2733). On the whole, these contests, while fascinating and visually entertaining, have received very little scholarly attention. This section briefly presents four particular contests, which took place in 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008. These contests also expand butch and femme scholarship by showing its limits in relation to black lesbians in Johannesburg, but also to cultural forms and styles that black lesbians engage in. They also intimate ways in which 'queer' identity has developed in Johannesburg.

"I'd like to see you playing, but also being serious about serious issues"

It was late September in 1996, when the Hope and Unity Church (HUMCC)[62] organised a beauty pageant, Mr and Ms HUMCC. I watched video footage (HUMCC-AM 2733, 1996) covering two VHS tapes: the rehearsals and the actual pageant, and

[61] Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand
[62] For more on the role of the gay church in South Africa see Reid (2007, and forthcoming)

almost fifteen years later I could easily spot familiar faces of some contestants of the pageant. Among the more than ten black gay male contestants were three black lesbians I recognized. Contestants were from the Johannesburg and Durban areas. Watching this wonderful archival footage, I was struck by what seemed odd: the contestants were being coached to walk like 'ladies', if lesbians; and like 'gentlemen', if gay men. A beautiful and flamboyant gay man instructed them on how to do full turns (for ladies – read lesbians) and half turns (for the gentlemen – read gay men). Many seemed unable to perform this task. Gay men found themselves doing full turns, reserved for the three lesbians, while two of the lesbians did half turns (reserved for gay men). The two were also finding it difficult to shake their butts, move and slow down before turning, as instructed. One of them, wearing her cap back to front, complained that she could not manage to make a full turn because of her takkies. In between half turns, she managed to touch her crotch.

The half and full 'turn' exercise was animated. Some of the gay men excelled in shaking their butts and completing full turns, although they were not instructed to. At times they demonstrated to the 'ladies' (lesbians) how to do full turns. Although patient, the coach could not contain his annoyance, making occasional outbursts in Zulu, English and Tswana. Contestants could not contain their laughter - they laughed at themselves and their fellow contestants. Suddenly the laughter ended – the competition got tense, everyone wanted to be able to "turn like a lady" or a gentleman within a few days of the pageant.

"*Guys are not allowed to use their mama voice; you are allowed to answer the questions in your own language; guys are not allowed to wear earrings - these are only for ladies; rings and chains are allowed for guys*". These are some of the instructions that the coach and the organizer gave to the contestants. His reference to 'guys' was to the gay male contestants. Some contestants seemed unhappy about the jewellery restrictions, but they decided not to challenge the instruction. The instructions moved to talking about dress codes and attires for the contest. There were four dress codes: formal, traditional, casual and swimwear. The latter, which stirred an animated conversation about *Speedo's* (a swim suit brand, but here read as swimming trunks) was not welcomed by many of the male contestants. Some refused to wear only swimming trunks, and others even hesitated participating in the contest. Most of the 'gentlemen', including one lesbian (asked to wear bathing suits), prefered to wear shorts. The discussion got out of hand. The coach and organiser had to resort to suggesting that the Pastor of the church would sort out the dilemma, and answer all the contestants' questions.

With everyone at the church, seemingly after rehearsals, Reverend Thandekiso addressed the contestants through an inspiring and jovial sermon about Esther, the orphaned Jewish child raised by her cousin Mordecai in the biblical text of Esther. The Reverend made use of biblical texts that have been used to alienate many gay and lesbian people, interpreting them to inspire contestants and encourage them to participate in the upcoming contest. Likening the gays and lesbians in front of him to Esther, a beautiful Jewish woman who was part of the minority in a Persian empire,

he told a story of how Esther entered the first beauty contest ever. When the Persian king ordered that all the Jews in his empire be killed, including Esther's cousin, Esther entered and won the beauty competition, winning the King's favour and thus saving the Jewish people. Esther, like many gays and lesbians, was from a 'marginalised' group, but she was one of "God's oriented, divine and beautiful people". Still with vigour, Reverend Thandekiso then told the contestants:

> *"It's the first time that this is done by the church…you are here to contest about beauty. Beauty is inside, it is not make-up; you'll still be an ugly person if you are ugly inside…Bring out your beauty and show it to yourselves and demonstrate it to our God…How does God see you when God looks at you as a young person? When you make the twist and turn, you can invoke God in it. Esther was in charge; she was no longer a contestant but became a queen and started making demands. When gay and lesbianism is said to be unAfrican, unChristian, inhuman, unwanted and unnatural – you are called to be beautiful at that time. I'd like to see you playing, but also being serious about serious issues…You are here to represent a kingdom, a kingdom that represents oppression. What you are doing is a continuation of the liberation struggle of the youth in 1976…God made you beautiful…How many Esthers will we have?"*

The Reverend's efforts in linking the beauty contest to religiosity and political activism inspired many of the contestants. Many clapped their hands, shouting "Amen"; even a few hands were raised when the Reverend asked the last question. Suddenly, the Reverend's tone changed. The sermon was over. He was now starting to address the thorny issue of dress code:

> *"Ladies - I mean females* (lesbians) – *we know some are men and some are women. Don't try and be boys – you will wear dresses. Same as the boys* (gay men)– *your time for heels will come, but we want to see males – looking like Shaka Zulu. Don't hide that you are gay, be very free tomorrow and wear the outfits that suit you and make you comfortable"*.

The Reverend's animated instruction for the 'ladies' and the 'boys' seemed to confuse him, as well as the contestants. At one point he realized he had made a mistake by referring to the lesbians as 'ladies'. Very quickly he corrected himself, as he knew that 'ladies' could also be referring to some gay men in the room.

Wewe, a popular lesbian, was among the three judges. She wore a beautiful white suit. The judges' role included asking contestants questions that would determine them proceeding to the finals of the contest. One of the lesbian participants, who was subsequently crowned the 'queen' was asked about gay adoptions and how she would raise a gay child as a lesbian parent. Her response, coupled with her full turns, impressed the judges.

Participants paraded in four different dress codes with the *Speedos* forming part of the display for all the gay male contestants. The "king" and his "princes" were crowned in the gay men's category. The three 'lady' (lesbian) contestants won the contest without much competition. The winning "queen" and her princess did not seem to surprise the mainly lesbian and gay audience. Of all three, she was able to complete a full turn effortlessly.

In the following year in May 1997, a group of black lesbians who were part of the newly formed black lesbian organisation, Nkateko (Shangaan word for success), decided to host their own beauty contest: *Ms Sappho.* It was the first time that lesbians had organised a competition of this nature outside gay male participation.

The winner, Wewe, had been the judge at the previous year's competition. Her second princess, who later became a visual activist and photographer capturing the realities of black lesbian life on camera, captured a series of self-portraits she entitles *Ms Lesbian,* (Zanele Muholi, 2009). In these portraits Muholi parodies beauty contests, using the lesbian title. She challenges the ways femininity is constructed and preserved in the form of beauty contests. Her body, masculine in appearance and with unshaven legs, subverts the notions of feminine beauty.

"Miss Naughty by Nature"

Ms Sappho had been a good attempt at ensuring that lesbians had their own space to contest, outside the gay male's space. However, the attempt soon died, as the initiating organisation, Nkateko – initiated by Bev Ditsie and other black lesbians, was soon non-existent. In 2000 another black lesbian decided to host a black lesbian contest, *Miss Naughty by Nature*. As no organisation existed then for black lesbians, the initiative was thought of as a business venture. The host and organiser, Tumi Ndaweni, had been unemployed and felt the need to create an entertaining space for black lesbians, as the name suggests. For her, this was also a way of creating an income for her livelihood, as she would get some of the proceeds from the cover charges.

Since the 1996 contest, a strong element of fun developed in the competitions, although the contests remained very serious affairs. Recruiting contestants

remained a difficult task. At times, contestants had to be enticed by the possible prizes, which were always meager as sponsorships were limited. Ndaweni, determined to organise a contest for black lesbians, soon realised after numerous struggles to secure sponsors and venues that her efforts would take a political turn. More than just creating a fun space for black lesbians, she was determined to host a competition that raised visibility of black lesbians, and allowed them to claim a space. This had to take place in a space where black lesbians would feel safe (FEW, 2005).

Miss Naughty by Nature showed the "naughty" and fun side of the lesbian contestants. Many were in skimpy tight clothes. Their dance moves were more elaborate than in the previous years. A lot of hip movements and grinding to sexy tunes or hip-hop songs was observed. Contestants' dress codes were also personalized according to their own styles – with the majority following the hip-hop route.

"Amadod'ethu!" Our Men!

Two years after the establishment of another black lesbian organisation, FEW (Forum for the Empowerment of Women), black lesbians in Johannesburg and Pretoria took part in *Miss Lesbian 2004: celebrate the woman in you.* The event was organised by FEW and many black lesbians in support of the organisation. A stylish and hip venue in town, *Horror Café*, was selected for its safety and accessibility.

Since the 1997 contest, considerations of safety in various spaces around the city became paramount for the contests.

Contestants varied in style: a few wore short skirts and tight jeans and matching stomach-out tops, others were in jeans and branded shirts. Unlike in other contests, black lesbians also formed part of the entertainment line-up. One in particular, an acclaimed poet, came dressed in her favourite outfit - cowboy gear. She looked elegant in her masculine appearance. While performing, some in the audience wondered if she was a trans person. Shortly after her performance each contestant, dressed in casual wear, walked across the stage and for less than a minute showed off her dance moves. This was intended to give judges a glimpse into a contestant's personality.

One of the entertainment items performed by some contestants was *Indlamu*, a traditional dance most often associated with Zulu culture and usually performed at coming of age ceremonies, such as weddings. The dance is performed with drums and full traditional attire and is derived from the war dances of the warriors. Ace, a famous soccer player in the black lesbian community, and two others, performed it. The performers wore skin (*amabeshu*), headrings, ceremonial belts, ankle rattles and carried shields and spears. In this dance a man shows off his confidence, control of the weapon, muscular strength and his virility. Ace was leading in song, singing a war song that is supposed to incite aggression and to show fearlessness. The three of them performed this flawlessly, directly looking at the audience comprising of

mainly black lesbians and a few black gay men. While they performed people clapped and an affirming voice from the audience screamed in isiZulu: "*Amadod'ethu!"* [Our men!]. The contestants were taking this performance seriously, and had carefully planned their outfits and co-ordinated their dance moves. They were impeccable in their performance of Zulu tradition. None of the contestants performed the female version of the dance, *Ingoma,* which has similar moves to *Indlamu,* but is danced bare-breasted. At the end of the performance the MC (master of ceremony) requested a round of applause and shouted *"Dear sisters, let's show that we are proud of being women."*

The MC then invited participants to parade in their formal wear. This was one of the decisive items because there was a clear distinction drawn between different clothing styles. In the week prior to the contest some contestants had been practicing various walks and looks by popular cultural icons. A few of the contestants had to borrow clothing items from their gay male friends to enter the competition. Ace, for example, had to run off to buy a tie just before the competition started. Her girlfriend had forgotten to pack a tie with her outfit. Ace had chosen to wear trousers and a shirt with pink stripes, which she claims, showed off her feminine streak. She believed this was the item that won her most of the points. After the competition she states: *"As I was on stage I saw the judges fanning themselves with pieces of paper and they were like – WOW, you are hot!"* she said. It came as no surprise to the audience that Ace won the competition and continued to be one of the most loved winners of the Ms lesbian contest.

In the following year, 2005, lesbian contest followers were surprised by the judge's decision to award the crown Miss Lesbian to a feminine-looking contestant. It had seemed common practice that the winner of the competition would have a more masculine streak, with a touch of femininity (as Ace suggests). There have only been two competitions were a feminine lesbian won the competition. In 1996, Moipone, crowned Ms HUMCC was an obvious win as a "lady" contestant. In the 2005 Miss Lesbian contest, Lami charmed all the judges with her femme confidence, eloquence and understanding of the Johannesburg black lesbian community (FEW, 2005). She took the crown as the only femme contestant among a number of butch-looking contestants, shocking the audience. Most had come to believe that winning a Miss Lesbian contest meant that one had to be butch or somewhat masculine.

"All a person needs is confidence"

With the shifts and changes in the lesbian contests, it came as no surprise that the 2008 Miss Lesbian contest presented two new interesting dynamics. It was held in the township for the first time since its inception, and, two concurrent categories were created: the *kings* (represented by the masculine-looking or the butches) and the *queens* (represented by the feminine-looking or the femmes). An additional special category was also created, *the township lesbian.*

On a sunny Saturday afternoon in November 2008 a *Miss Township Lesbian* contest took place in a community hall in Soweto. The contest had been organised by a popular lesbian, Uncle[63], who unlike the preceding contest organisers, decided to host her contest in the township and not in the city centre. Uncle is very popular in the black lesbian circles because she has always been passionate about creating space and visibility in the townships. She also coaches and manages a black lesbian soccer team and was very instrumental in organising the first gay and lesbian Pride march in Soweto in 2004. As a former *king* in these contests, having won the title as a butch contestant in 2002, she articulates what the contest is about:

> *Ms lesbian is about getting people to be on stage, to perform in different dress codes; swimwear, casual and formal. It's about a group of women getting together and showing off who is more masculine than the other or more feminine than the other. Ms Township lesbian is for both butch and femme lesbians. It is for anyone who believes she is a lesbian. All a person needs is confidence.*

The hall was not very full, possibly because the event was during the day. Uncle decided to host the contest during the day for security reasons. The idea was that by sunset, people should be out of the hall and off to their safe spaces. There were about 60 people in the audience, mostly lesbian women. There were a couple of men, accompanied by their female friends. The contestants included 18 participants, 11 butch and 7 femme, as they were categorised. They were all competing for the titles *king* and *queen* respectively. Most of the contestants were players in the black lesbian Chosen FEW soccer team.

[63] Uncle received her name from a friend who felt that it suits her best to be known as Uncle. This is a name she is generally known by and some people do not even know her real name.

The competition started, the deejay played the theme song, a popular song by American Idol, Jordin Sparks. As the music started, the lyrics “One Step at a time” ushered contestants in two by two onto the stage swinging their hips to the rhythm. They were led by Ace, who looked experienced on the stage and has also held the Ms lesbian title for a number of years. Contestants were ordered in pairs, a butch and a femme. As there were more butches than femmes, the remaining butches came in walking one by one and not paired. The first couple, also happened to be lovers and caused a lot of excitement as they freely showed off their erotic energy towards each other.

It was not difficult to separate the butch from the femme. Some of the markers were clothing and style; jewellery as well as haircuts/hairstyles. Most butches had short hair while the femmes had long hair or a variation of braids. Both had jewellery, but the positioning of it was different. Butches wore their rings on thumbs, chins, around the eyes and a few had piercings on the lips while the femmes had earrings and belly rings. The femmes all wore skirts; dresses or tight pants with jewellery while all the butches wore loose fitting pants and suits. They all started parading one by one and introduced themselves to the crowd and the judges. One of the judges was a white lesbian popular in black lesbian circles. As per all the contests in the past, there were three categories: swimwear, which were sports wear for the butches and bikinis for the femmes; casual wear and formal wear. Some of the butches started performing, showing off their walks. In between each item, a popular drag queen provided entertainment for the audience, performing songs

from local and international female singers such as Lebo Mathosa, Brenda Fassie and Beyoncé.

As in the other contests, contestants had to answer questions from the judges. Questions were in three categories: political (including questions such as "how would you deal with homophobia in your community"?); arts and culture category (participants were asked to sing and dance a song from a 'queer' artist – such as Brenda Fassie); or related to gender (presentations of role-playing). Some of the butch contestants picked the question from the third category on gender. The question read as: 'if you were femme, how would you walk and present yourself?' Butch contestants performed these presentations with humour, coupled with seriousness. Many of the butches in their performance of being femme first took their jackets off, rolled up the shirts while tightening and showing their stomachs, put their hands on their hips and wiggled their bodies as they moved across the stage, flapping their hands in the air or repositioning their hair with very elaborate head movements and smiles on their faces. When they returned to their butch selves, the smiles disappeared and the arms were relaxed on each side of the body, and not on the hips. The walk was also more composed and structured. The audience burst out into laughter at these exaggerated portrayals of femmes. None of the femmes who had entered the competition walked in any way that the butches showed. Clearly, the butches had certain assumptions about femmes. From the laughter in the audience, it was clear that these were merely the butches' assumptions of being a femme and the butches looked more like drags walking

across the stage. Unfortunately, none of the femmes had the opportunity to portray being butch. The four hour long competition ended with the crowning of the *king* and *queen* next to the runners-up first and second prince and princess respectively.

A special category was created for the contestant who portrayed a depiction of a township lesbian. This winner was different from the *king* and *queen,* who took the titles based on looks, confidence, awareness of issues affecting lesbians, and interest in the lesbian community. The winner for township lesbian won based on her township (*loxion*) style and presentation of being out as a lesbian in the township. She had poise and a certain assertiveness about her style. For her formal wear, she looked more like a *pantsula* going to a formal function or event – mixing a business suit with *Converse* takkies, and not wearing a tie. For her sportswear she wore a local soccer team's gear (such as Orlando Pirates) accompanied by the hand gestures representing the team. These are locally known hand signals in the township. She was the only winner in her category and impressed the judges by the outfits she wore, how she walked and talked on and off the stage. For the judges, she had portrayed a kind of 'naturalness' about being a township lesbian, an idea that the judges had created for themselves while judging the contest.

Making sense of the contests

Much can be said about the practice of lesbian (and gay) contests. In one way, it affirms the development of a lesbian and gay identity under harsh and critical conditions. The Reverend's reference to Christianity, Africanity, and humanness

bear witness to this. At the same time, the contests also show the political nature of lesbian and gay identities in South Africa – making specific linkages to youth activism starting in 1976. Through religion, the first contest situated and pursued a politics of beauty as a form of building self-confidence and a lesbian and gay identity. This was a powerful tool of positioning sexual identity politics in religion. Even today religion continues to be used by religious fundamentalists and conservatives as a way to bash and lash out against lesbian and gay people (Rossouw, 2009).

Although these contests are undisputed staging and performances of gender (Butler, 1990), seen in the preparation and seriousness with which contestants take particular roles, they are also more than just performance. They also direct us to the ways in which identities are complicated by notions of forms of styling and the meanings accompanying stylistic expressions.

What is also compelling about these contests is what José Esteban Muñoz (1999) terms a process of *disidentification* called upon by those not in the majority mainstream to negotiate majority culture. They generally do this by not aligning themselves with what excludes them (in majority culture) but by transforming it for their own cultural purposes, as shown by the performance of acts such as *Indlamu*. At the same time, existing cultural elements are used, but transformed for the benefit of those using them. This is seen in how the lesbian contestants employ a hybrid of localised, international and cultural stylistic elements to present their

lesbian identity. Muñoz (1999:28) articulates this as a "survival strategy that is employed by a minority spectator to resist and confound socially prescriptive patterns of identification." This becomes visible in a few instances in these contests: the performance of a traditional male Zulu dance, which can be read as both a normative performance (performed by butch lesbians) but also non-normative (lesbians performing a traditional dance reserved for men).

Muñoz further notes that while *disidentification* may be about "recycling and rethinking encoded meaning" for "minority" groups to be "included, empowered and accounted for" (p31), it is "*not always* an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects" (p5). Sometimes resistance has to be head-on and explicit – the Reverend frames the first contest in this way, as a challenge to existing religious, political and cultural homophobia. Other times, Muñoz adds, minority subjects and "queers of color" have to conform to society's norms to protect themselves from public hostility. These performances should not be taken lightly. As Moore (2006) argues, it is dangerous for non-feminine women to present black masculinity as this rebels against strong conventional norms. Such presentations "attack the core of male dominance; invite openly punitive responses from others and may cause men to question the meaning of their own masculinity" (Moore, 2006:132). In essence, these are powerful processes that allow for (re)negotiation of gender. The ability for women to perform these, and perform them eloquently in public spaces, is a very powerful and meaningful way of reorganizing sex and gender structures.

The contests explored above illustrated a few points. One of them is the ways in which the categories 'butch' and 'femme' are constantly being renegotiated. When the contests started in Johannesburg in 1996, the language of 'butch' and 'femme' was not put to use. In just over a decade, in the 2008 contest, the categories of butch and femme (*kings* and *queens*) had already expanded to include the category of "township lesbian", who is neither butch nor femme, but identified in terms of her self-styling, a notion already developed earlier. The next section builds on these shifts, arguing that 'butch' and 'femme' should make way for less polarized and more fluid identity categories.

Representations of butch and femme: forms of subversion, eroticism and agency

Most writing arguing for or challenging the importance of butch and femme sexual styles and role-playing emanates from North American scholarship. The debates on butch and femme have not been as prominent in South Africa, with the exception of a collection of narratives from Gevisser and Cameron (1995) and Morgan and Wieringa (2005), which both feature personal stories of butch lesbian representations in some parts of South Africa. Both collections fall short of theorizing, as the main purpose was to recover historical accounts of same-sex existence and for the liberation of gay and lesbian individuals (in the former publication); and highlighting the importance of female same-sex relationships (in the latter). Outside these texts are representations of lesbian selves in prison environments, as explored by Dirsuweit (1999) and various publications emanating

out of Potgieter's (1997) thesis: *Black, South African, Lesbian: Discourses of Invisible Lives.*

From North American scholarship and beyond, a number of interlocutors have offered varied positions on the importance of butch and femme categories, including how these categories are subversive and 'expose' heterosexuality, performative and normative, have strong erotic stances, are unstable, conformist or at times seem to be accommodationist under conditions of duress. Among these I highlight just a few of these positions, which are of relevance to this chapter.

In one of her first and early personal essays on butch and femme styles in 1950s lesbian communities in the US, Joan Nestle (1981) elaborates on the type and nature of relationships she had with butch women. Nestle, a self-described femme, argued in response to feminist critique that saw butch and femme styles as an inferior imitation of the male-female roles of heterosexuality. Attacking such critique Nestle explains how none of the butch women she was with, who "included a passing woman ever presented themselves (to her) as men; they did announce themselves as tabooed women who were willing to identify their passion for other women by wearing clothes that symbolized the taking of responsibility" (Nestle, 1981:100). Nestle saw butch and femme relationships as "complex erotic statements, not phony heterosexual replicas", as the feminists attested. Languages of stance, dress, gesture and the ability to arouse another woman were important elements in butch-femme dynamics and for the women involved. In two of her texts, Nestle (1981, 1997) as

well as Case (1993) focus on the erotic language between the butch and femme. This language, which the femme manipulates, is an important element of the butch and femme dynamic (Case, 1993, and Nestle, 1981, 1997). The following chapter explores this eroticism in detail, although falling outside the butch and femme binary.

The erotic language between the butch and the femme is noted in the femme's desire for the butch. The butch, who is on display for the femme, is at the femme's mercies. In this dynamic, the femme holds the erotic power, and the erotic 'gaze'. This is a reversal of expectation of where the dominant ' male gaze' should reside" (Blackman and Perry, 1990:72). This femme desire for a masculine woman can be seen as subversive, and for the skeptics, it can be seen as reinforcing a gendered form of desire. However, both the femme and butch break the rules of being with a woman, by going for a masculine woman (if femme/butch) and for a feminine woman (if butch/femme). This dynamic, as Wilton (1995) suggests, can be a necessary strategy for collective survival and an important challenge to gender stereotypes.

Another position for butch and femme is taken by Gayle Rubin (1992) who argues that butch and femme styles and role-playing appropriate the tools of heterosexuality to serve very different and subversive ends: by directing desire not across the lines of sexual difference, but through an erotic conversation between women (sexual sameness), thus disrupting the linking of sex to gender. Like Rubin,

Eves (2004:487) notes how butch and femme identities tend to disrupt the "continuity between sexed bodies, gender and sexuality" at different points. Through their femininity, femmes link sex and gender in a conventional way but at the same time challenge the connection between gender and sexual orientation by being attracted to women. Similarly butches disturb the link between sex and gender, but unlike the femmes their masculine attraction to women can be seen as conventional, particularly when it is for feminine women. Even though this may suggest the obscurity of the way in which butches subvert gender norms, it may be argued that they transgress the sex and gender binary through the visibility of their bodies. Femme sexuality on the other hand is transgressive when femme charms are given to another woman, not a man. The way in which the femme uses femininity to attract women challenges and changes the meanings of heterosexuality within lesbian subculture (Blackman and Perry, 1990:69).

The third position I look at is from Case (1993) who explores butch and femme styles through the stage production of *Beauty & the Beast* by Split Britches. *Beauty and the Beast* represents a butch and femme couple: the *Beast* (butch) who pursues the *Beauty* (femme), who in turn aims her desirability at the butch. Through this production, Case shows how the butch-femme dynamic (role-playing) exposes heterosexual roles as constructs with a specific agenda, which then lends agency and self-determination to the women who actively choose, rather than passively accept, these roles. For Case, butch-femme roles are not replicas of a heterosexual pattern (an argument developed by some feminists), which disempowers women

and deprives them of subjectivity, but are in fact anti-heterosexual in their ability to empower women in either role by allowing them both to occupy the subject position. She argues that lesbian sexual styles and 'role-playing' offers women the kind of agency necessary to resist the dominant construction of femininity.

Another important contribution has been from Judith Halberstam (1997), which also positions gender identities in various performances, shows, contests and cabarets. Exploring drag king performances in New York and London, Halberstam notes the intersection of gender and race in these performances. Initially the drag king shows were attracting women of colour. Only later did white women start participating in the performances. This is Halberstam's attempt at linking race, class, sexuality and gender – what Muñoz (1999:28) inversely calls a complete "narrative of identification". In this exploration Halberstam (1997:104) defines a drag king as a "performer who pinpoints and exploits the (often obscured) theatricality of masculinity". Drag kings may be either butch or femme in their daily lives and have a certain awareness of their performance and may justify it or see it as just "having fun." This "having fun" is linked to a strong element of theatricality for drag kings, unlike just being a butch woman – suggesting that there is more to drag than just being a butch woman. Halberstam intimates, although unstated, a certain 'ease' and 'naturalness' that accompanies butchness and not drag. This became evident in some contests where butch women won the shows without 'putting much effort' as drag kings, to the disappointment of many of the drag kings. Halberstam's preoccupation with gender theory and how this is applicable in these contests leads

her to question some of the drag kings' understandings of gender. Halberstam (1997:109, 111) suggests that gender is 'bastardised' by drag kings as some described simplistically the performativity of gender as "waking in the morning and picking clothes and genders out of closets and hanging them up at the end of the day". Halberstam chooses to read these drag kings' self-understandings of gender as "elaborate identifications" and not "naïve misunderstanding of the mechanics of identity". In essence, these form part of what shows the queerness of "drag kings and their performance". Halberstam's exploration of drag kings and butches shows how masculinity can be put under scrutiny and be 'performed' by both butch and femme women.

Outside North American scholarship there have been significant explorations of butch and femme styles. I will briefly focus on Saskia Wieringa's (2005) work on "butch/fem" in Jakarta. Wieringa (2005:14) shows that there is a visible community of butch and femme women who bargain for acceptance in their communities by adhering to "established patterns of heteronormativity". Many of the butch-femme couples in Jakarta live in secrecy and silence but this affords them a more public life as a couple than 'out' lesbians. Though living in secrecy and silence as a (lesbian) couple, by doing this, Wieringa argues, the women subvert the norms of their society by being two women (and not a heterosexual couple). In Jakarta, butch-femme communities assimilate to their surrounding, but at the same time pursue a politics of separation.

Butch and femme under threat?

As seen in the first chapter's exploration of the *Institute*, butch and femme categories have encountered some criticism and rejection particularly from some feminist thinkers. There are two broad themes emerging from US scholarship on butch and femme categories. One relates to the category 'woman', which butch women are accused of not "fitting" into, and the other to the butch and femme gender display that supposedly mimics heterosexuality. Lesbians have heavily criticized both these positions.

Some feminists struggle a great deal with lesbians. For starters, those feminists with heterosexual lifestyles often find it difficult reconciling a butch lesbian with the category 'woman' (Zimmerman, 1981:454). For some feminists, a butch lesbian (and even a femme for that matter) goes against the conceptualization of an "ideal woman". Judith Butler (1993) challenges this feminist view of seeing the identity "woman" as the only "house" of femininity. This view assumes that the feminine belongs only to women. But Butler defies this by arguing that gender is a kind of performance, a repetitive performance that is very far from essence. It is constituted through repetitive everyday performances of feminine and masculine roles, with pre-existing social scripts. No identity exists behind the acts that supposedly 'express' gender and these acts express the illusion of the stable gender identity. This implies that the feminine does not belong to the identity "woman", as clearly men can be feminine and thus women masculine.

The second criticism that feminists make argues, as I showed above, that butch and femme sexual styles mimic or are imitations of a (hetero)sexualised structure, from which lesbians are supposedly free. The main assumption underlying this feminist argument is that heterosexual (male-female) roles are built on sexual difference, which inherently contains an unequal distribution of power. Feminists argue that butch and femme roles, like heterosexual roles, are hierarchical, at polar ends from one another and can be seen as oppressive. Therefore, lesbians who engage in butch and femme 'role-playing' are replicating and perpetuating the structure of heterosexuality. Many have critiqued this feminist position that sees butch and femme as merely heterosexual replicas including Butler (1990); Case (1993); Hollibaugh and Moraga (1983); Nestle (1981&1997); and Zimmerman (1981).

Building on her theory of gender as performative, Butler (1990:30) argues that since gender must be continually reproduced, its structure is always vulnerable to "mutation and subversion". So, if gender is essentially performative then the notion of original and copy become superfluous. Rather than butch lesbians copying or imitating heterosexual masculinity, they put on a 'play', as in drag, a theatrical performance of gender and in a sense, separate femininity from the female body (Butler, 1993). Developing this view Case (1993) harshly criticizes feminist devaluation of lesbian butch-femme roles for failing to see the subversive potential of all gender roles as masquerade.

A more cynical critique of the feminist view is offered by Bell et.al. (1994:32) who argue that even if butch and femme were mimicking heterosexuality this would have the "potential to transform radically the stability of masculinity and femininity, undermining its claim to naturalness and originality". Butch and femme then would not only be parodying the seriousness of heterosexuality, but also its essentialism.

On a different note, Hollibaugh and Moraga (1981), both of whom are from working-class backgrounds, argue that this feminist critique against butch and femme fails to recognize that class and race, like gender, are central to role-playing. Reflecting on their personal experiences, the two attest to how the feminist movement in the US has enslaved women by restricting forms of sexuality, sexual freedom and autonomy to something rigid, ideal and unsatisfying. The feminist view of butch-femme role-playing and sexual practices assumed that these roles operate similarly to heterosexual roles, under unequal distribution of power where power is a tool of oppression. In actual fact, Hollibaugh and Moraga (1981) argue that these roles reorganize and reconstruct power by becoming a means of stimulation and erotic playfulness. In the next chapter I develop this argument through focusing on mutual pleasure and an erotic language of 50|50.

The many faces of butch and femme: everyday experiences of black lesbians

Everyday life experiences of black lesbians in Johannesburg suggest that butch and femme categories are not as clear-cut as they seem. They can be expanded to include

areas of uncertainty and at times, inconsistencies. For some lesbians, these are defined within the context of self-styling. For others, they are related to the erotic play and attraction between women. In some instances, they are unclear or are approximations to forms of masculinity.

Disrupting 'butch' and 'femme'

The butch lesbian or the butch role is "most usefully understood as a category of lesbian gender that is constituted through the deployment and manipulation of masculine gender codes and symbols" (Rubin, 1992:467). This then makes both butchness and masculinity performative roles with codes and symbols available for the use of anyone, regardless of biological sex (Butler, 1990, Halberstam, 1997, 1998). But in most cases it is the butch and not the femme, or any other, that carries out this form of masculinity, and thus threatens the dominance masculinity holds. Quoting Judith Roof, Ciasullo (2001:604) asserts that "admitting the possibility that a woman can be a man, that the traits attributed to masculinity are not exclusively masculine, and perceiving lesbians as masculine reveals the threat to masculine supremacy and to a heterosexual system lesbians potentially pose. The butch has the capacity to disrupt the notion that masculinity is an inherently male attribute." She also challenges the idea that only men can have the ability to attract women. This comes across in a number of participants' experiences in this current study. Although many of them do not refer to themselves as butch, they are read as 'butch'.

I refer to their experiences here to illustrate the ways in which the category 'butch' presents limits in many lesbians' subjective realities.

In the first instance is Jojo, a part-time employed 17 year-old, who considers herself *Italiyano*[64] (a stylish, smart and street-wise township "guy"), who not only articulates her own masculinity, but simultaneously rejects the idea of being a 'man'. Although many would mark Jojo as a butch lesbian, she does not use such language to refer to herself. Instead, she sees herself in terms of the way she styles herself, as *Italiyano.* Jojo alludes to the fact that this form of self-styling and her access to money are attributes that contribute to her attracting women.

> Jojo: *"Even some guys think I'm a guy...Not that I want to change and be a man because I see men outside. I'm fine the way I am because I do get beautiful girls more than the men out there who take themselves seriously."*

When I ask Jojo what she thinks attracts women to her, she does not include her masculinity as an attribute, but highlights her self ("*me*"), that is: the way she dresses smart and has expensive clothes; and that she has money:

> Jojo*: "Eish – to be honest I really don't get it [giggle]. I don't know – maybe they like me as a person, because that's what they say, but I'm really not sure. I don't know if these girls like me or like my money. I love dressing up smart and wearing expensive clothes and sometimes you would know that I do have money in my pocket."*

[64] A form of style that represents a kind of sophistication in the township. Usually amatali(y)ano/amantariano dress in Italian clothes or expensive, branded clothes, hence the name *Taliano.* Their self-styling may not necessarily represent their class status or affordability, but their sense of style, sophistication and how they want to be perceived.

It is not only masculinity that is disrupted by Jojo, a seemingly 'butch[65]' character. Jojo, like Yoba and Thado below simultaneously challenge the sex|gender binary. Yoba, a 22 year old part-time student who at one point defined herself as a "masculine female", among other things, illustrates this when she questions her own sex and gender presentation. Asking Yoba how she identifies, she responds with hesitation:

> Yoba: **"***Oh man! I'm finding out I guess.* [Pause]. *I think I've always taken care of myself in terms of self - like I haven't really...maybe it's because of being scared to disappoint my mom and all that. Like I've never really thought and sat down and really thought about this. I have two friends of mine who can definitely say to me "if I could have a sex change tomorrow, I'd do it" and they've sat down and thought about it. Whereas with me, I've been too scared to disappoint my mom because I know she'd just fall over and die* [giggle] *- you know. I'm still deciding. I'm still trying to understand myself - trying to understand if I'm a butch lesbian and this is where it is OR if I'm transgender or transsexual - whatever it is. I'm still trying to get myself around those terms. I'm still you know, like 'would I and can I be 45 and still have the same body parts that I have now?' I don't know. There's certain parts of myself that I like right now. Like I know about the testosterone stuff and things like that...I know when you're changing and you're taking it, it changes your emotions. You become a bit like - hard and more aggressive and what not. I'm not an aggressive person and I don't like being aggressive. I don't feel like I have to own a woman. Like there are a lot of manly attitudes that I don't want to take on.*

Yoba is quite clear about the masculine traits that she does not want to take on. Like Jojo, she articulates a rejection of a particular framework of being a man. This is in stark contrast to the feminist allegation of the 'butch's' proximation to male heterosexual role as presented earlier. While Yoba conflates the gender|sex

[65] I enclose butch in inverted commas as none of the participants I quote refer to themselves as butch. In doing this, I am also showing the limits of the language of butch to write about the participants in this research.

distinction when pondering her identity, she does not assume that the two correspond.

Thando, a 36-year-old professional who presents as 'masculine/butch' similarly questions the sex|gender dichotomy but complicates it with sexual orientation. In her contemplations about her sex and gender presentation, Thando locates her biological sex, not her gender (role-playing), at the centre of her attraction and love for women. She states that women love her because she is a "woman".

> Thando: *"You know, when you're growing up and you're young and you hang around with boys – eventually you end up thinking 'I'm a boy too', but 'OK – I don't have a dick, but I'm a boy too. I feel I love my body the way I am. I don't think I would go for a sex change... There was a time when I wanted to do it and I did some research and I realized: why have a dick that's not going to be useful to me? It's not like I'm going to produce anything, you know. It's just gonna be there, like an object. It doesn't produce anything. So, I felt – No! And I asked myself…'really Thando, if you were to do a sex change, what would you be now? Are you going to be straight now?' ....And I felt, no, no …I'm gay... So it means, if I have a dick, do I have to shag men, or do I have to shag women…? So, I got confused, you know - asking myself those questions. And I said "No!" - For the fact that women are attracted to me - they don't love me because I'm a boy or I look like a boy. They love me because I'm a woman."*

In a different instance, Hlobo illustrates how her 'butch' partner disrupted the "butch norms" and "expectations" by falling pregnant. Hlobo, a 35-year-old professional and mother of four, articulates this well when she expresses her shock at finding out that her 'butch' partner was pregnant, an 'unrealistic' expectation of butches. Hlobo refers to her partner as butch, but uses more localized terms that capture her partner's 'butchness'. She calls her partner *baba,* a Zulu term referring to father, or a man.

Hlobo: "*There was something about butch and femme going on there (*in our relationship)*. She* (my partner) *was very butch - she was a typical butch: having heavy haircuts and wearing man's clothes. She was ubaba (*a man/father*). Then I started getting surprised that she was gaining weight and her breasts were getting full… I couldn't believe that this man of a partner of mine could be pregnant. Where have you seen a pregnant man?"*

Hlobo's shock suggests that her 'butch' partner had gone against the 'norms' of being 'butch'. Jojo, Yoba, Thando and Hlobo's partner's experience all illustrate, in different ways, the ways in which the narrative associating 'butchness' with masculinity is disrupted (Ciasullo, 2001). By falling pregnant, Hlobo intimates that her partner, her "man", is going beyond the limits of 'butchness' and masculinity. Through their (read) masculinity and female body (ability to attract another woman and not a man), Jojo, Yoba, Thando and Hlobo's partner offer many blows to society by challenging various assumptions about masculinity and 'butchness'.

As more visible and recognizable lesbian archetype, which is an important trait in "establishing lesbian visibility and space" (Eves, 2004:481-2) Jojo, Yoba, Thando and Hlobo's partner's visibility one the one hand, as argued in chapter three, disrupts heteronormative hegemony. Through their visibility, they also challenge "mainstream cultural fantasies about lesbianism" (Ciasullo, 2001), which assume lesbians to be two feminine looking women. However, through their bodies and their daily articulations and practices of their bodies, they resist gender domination and normalization. Their bodies become "a site of struggle" (Bordo, 1993:184).

The same can be said of the femme lesbian. However, unlike the butch, the femme

lesbian is usually framed in the language of "marked and unmarked", visible or invisible, within lesbian spaces and the heterosexual world. Her outward appearance, which does not display her sexuality in the same way as the butch, unmarks her as a lesbian (Burgess, 2005). She is rather seen as straight by both straight people and lesbians. This renders her invisible, as she does not have the tropes of lesbianism, or the general assumption of what lesbians (read butch lesbians) should look like.

Looking at various US media artefacts of the 1990s such as magazines, films and TV shows, Ciasullo (2001:578) argues that in such media the mainstream lesbian body is at once sexualised and desexualized. Through her (lesbian) representation as "embodying a hegemonic femininity" and looking "just like" conventionally straight women, the femme lesbian is made into an object of desire for straight audiences. The femme lesbian body is sanitized through her feminizing; she is made to be feminine, for the consumption of straight audiences. She is 'heterosexualised' and 'de-homosexualised' by suppressing her desire for other women. This representation of the identical and straight-looking lesbian plays on heterosexual fantasy and male gaze, representing lesbian women within heterosexual attractive norms.

Femmes are generally not seen as 'real' lesbians (Eves, 2004:491). Other lesbians treat them with suspicion, as some lesbians cannot distinguish between femme and heterosexual performances of femininity. Experiences of femme lesbians show that

when they come out as femmes, they are either not taken seriously, are made to feel 'unreal, inauthentic' or invisible as femme lesbians. They are only visible when paired with their butch partners (Ciasullo, 2001:580 and Eves, 2004). This notion of "fake" and "real" is similarly capture in Sinnott's (2004:81) observations of *toms*[66] and *dees* in Thailand. She notes how the distinction between a "fake" and "real *dee"* would be noted in the choice of sexual partner. "Fake" *dees* were considered as not "real" lesbians because they could be with either *toms* or men. "Real *dees"* would only be with *toms.* There was also a close association between *dees* and "ordinary women", although this was compounded by the gender play between *dees* and *toms.*

Boni, a 20-year-old student, spoke about the difficulties of being marked 'not butch'. Although she does not use the term 'femme' to refer to herself, Boni explains how challenging it is for her as she is 'not butch'. Because of her approximation to heterosexual femininity, Boni states that other lesbians and people in general see her as a "fake" lesbian. However, as she states, it is important for her to be seen as a femme, different to a butch lesbian and be taken seriously. Boni shares the femme dilemma:

> Boni*: "Often lesbians, and everybody in general, they think that a lesbian must have a certain look. They must look butch; they must look like a boy. And then, if I come out like - I'm a lesbian, everybody thinks I'm a fake lesbian, you know. Often, butch lesbians, they don't treat me seriously because they think that I'm a fake lesbian because I'm, I'm… I'm not butch. You know, they think that you must look like a boy, tell all what to do, make up this strong personality, you know, tell everybody what to do and whatever. And I'm like… I'm everything opposite that, you know what I mean? I don't have that. And for me not to have that - they look*

[66] Megan Sinnott (2004) states that *tom* is a popular Thai term that refers to "female 'men' who look to 'women' for love, romance and sex. The term is derived from the English word 'tomboy'. Their feminine partners are called *dees* – a term derived from the last syllable of the English word 'lady'.

at me as Umh…fake, a fake lesbian who just wants to experiment and just wants to become wild, you know…"

Undermining the femme role fails to see how femme sexuality challenges the butch (read lesbian) 'norm'. However, as already argued, the participants in this research already challenge the 'butch' norm. Both the experiences of 'butch' and 'femme' shared here challenge popular and common insights that assume a singular way in which one is or has to be a lesbian (butch or femme). Performances which appear to be outside the "norm" of being a lesbian, like a butch falling pregnant (in Hlobo's lover's case) or defying other masculine traits, or a lesbian being 'femme' (as Boni shows) expand and destabilize existing assumptions of lesbian identity.

The experiences of the women presented here offer new ways of escaping the rut of the oppressive heterosexist norm encountered on a daily basis (Burgess, 2005:234). They forthrightly and refreshingly destabilize socially bounded notions of gender and sexuality. If we pay close attention to all these women's realities we will see that: it is not Hlobo's surprise that is interesting about her "man's" pregnancy; or how other men think Jojo is a "guy"; or how Thando and Yoba consider a sex change; or how Boni is 'not butch', but the ability of these women to "see" the ways in which the language of dominant culture, and lesbian 'culture' for that matter, traps our views on gender and sexualities (Burgess, 2005). What is interesting about these four women's experiences is their ability to resist both butch and sex|gender norms in their context and free themselves from these social 'trappings'. Conversely, I would like to argue, instead of their bodies becoming "a site of struggle" as Bordo

(1993) argues, they are a site of freedom, liberating them from the confines of society's many trappings.

Beyond butch and femme…

As suggested above, 'butch' and 'femme' practices are not always simplistic and predictable. Sometimes they are filled with contradictions and fluidity. Other times, some in the lesbian 'community' reject them or want to destabilize them or want to express themselves in ways outside the butch and femme binary, as argued earlier. It is in such cases that butch and femme become restrictive or limited categories even for some lesbians. A number of participants in this research articulated the rejection of butch and femme for various reasons: they were not terms familiar to them; they were too restrictive in understanding who they are; or they preferred to name or refer to themselves differently. One term that was used by some participants was 'versatile'; a category showing how 'butchness' and 'femmeness' can simultaneously inhabit one person. Both Thabi (a 32 year old professional), to a less extent, and Lizi (a 23 year old professional) to a greater extent stated sometimes (in)directly, how the 'butch' and 'femme' dynamic for them did not capture their subjective realities. Lizi uses the term 'versatile' (and flexible) to describe how she is both butch and femme – a juxtaposition of two images.

> Lizi: *I'd put myself on versatile, I think. Most people and friends say I have a butch mentality and my behaviour is very butch. But I think I'm a very femme woman. I love doing my nails, manicure and all that. I think I'd put myself as a very flexible person….*

Even though Thabi does not name herself as butch, femme or versatile, she expresses her frustrations about being positioned and identified only next to her butch lover. Thabi wanted to do away with gender roles in her relationship.

> Thabi: *I tried to be in a relationship with a butch woman - a really butch woman. I saw that she was butch, but I didn't really bother about being butch. She treated me as a girlfriend although she did everything. She loved cooking and cleaning or washing. If there was a globe that needed fixing, she would rush quickly to get it fixed. If there were people in the house, I'd have to rush to get things organised even though she would help me with the organising. She was the one, the one, doing everything. Then I started seeing that there were roles. I was supposed to be one thing and she would be the other. They used to call me Thabi of so and so - I sort of belonged to her. Why was it not, this person belonging to Thabi? - Even if they knew this person before me. I was this person's 'cherrie'* [girl/lover]*. I felt that these things were boring and that's when I got to be aware of these dynamics that I didn't like.*

When I asked Thabi about the kind of women she is attracted to, she responded by suggesting that she is not attracted to women who present as 'femme' or as 'butch'. She likes "girls who are girls":

> Thabi: *And also, very femme girls with high-heeled shoes, I don't like them, they don't impress me. I just like girls who are girls. And it's not that I like this particular type, but I know that girls in high heels and mini skirts, I don't like. I also don't like girls who would say 'mfethu' [*my brother], *No, I don't like those!*

Both Lizi and Thabi's experience and that of many others presented earlier illustrate Mignon Moore's (2006:123) argument that "gender portrayals are not arbitrary, but in some salient way order or structure women's expectations for and within relationships." Moore (2006) sees the organization and meaning of such gender portrayals, evident through dress code, style and clothing, as central to black lesbian

desire. Undoubtedly, the realities of the women in this shared earlier concur with Moore's argument.

For Lizi and Thabi, the two options of 'butch' and 'femme' can be seen as representing "a trap, a drain, a smokescreen and too rigid" (Ardill & O'Sullivan, 1990:84) for what they really feel and experience. Their ability to move and be 'versatile' within gender categories provides for them room to "escape traditional notions of butch and femme" (Al-Sayyad and Adams, 2006:28). Like Jojo, Yoba, Thando, Hlobo's partner and Boni, Lizi and Thabi present subjective realities that are fluid. These may be more empowering than the confines of binary positions.

Conclusion

This chapter dispenses with the limitations of butch/femme and instead suggests that self-styling and performance are more useful ways of thinking about lesbian identities in Johannesburg. Daily experiences of black lesbians show that varied styles – including localised styles such as *ibhujwa, ipantsula, Italiyano* expand the notions of butch and femme scholarship. These styles, along with gender roles show the complexity and hybridity of being a black lesbian in Johannesburg. In addition, they show that even those deemed butch, challenge the 'norms' of butch lesbians. The complexity of such styles is further made visible in lesbian contests/pageants that show a complicated interplay of language, culture, performance and gender identity and cultural politics.

CHAPTER SIX: "It's All About 50|50": Sex, Intimacy And Pleasure In Lesbian Relationships

> Magy: *I identify myself as butch, but I don't go on the extreme. I'm gonna tell you why. When it comes to my relationships, a woman is a woman, whether butch or femme. Any woman, whether you're butch or femme - I go for 50|50: you do me I do you. It's just how it is!*

Introduction

During the apartheid era the South African government was "deeply invested in questions of reproductive heterosexual sexuality" to the extent that policies such as the 1927 Immorality Act, the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, the Immorality Act of 1957 and the amended 1969 Immorality Act prohibited sexual mixing between different race groups as well as homosexual acts (Hoad, Martin and Reid, 2005). With the ratification of the South African Constitution and its Bill of Rights in 1996, sex and sexuality became topics for public debate and argument. These were not new debates, as Delius and Glaser (2002) show, but they attracted new interest in public discourse about sexual freedom, identity and expression. South Africa's constitution allowed for the protection and decriminalization of sexual practices, identity and expression, and these were now considered a protected right accessible to all. Since the demise of apartheid, liberalization ushered in an explosion of sexual imagery, display and debate, evident in the booming sex industry, explicit television programmes, and various media promoting and selling sex. Discourse on social and political concerns, including the alarming levels of sexual violence in both the public and private spheres as well as debates on

HIV/AIDS, gained much public attention and made sex and sexuality important public issues (Posel, 2004). However, the sex and sexuality talked about and focused on is mostly heterosexual or heteronormative and focuses mainly on male experiences. It also pays particular attention to reproduction and a version of sexual health. There were however some exceptions, in particular those paying particular attention to gay men's sexuality (Epprecht, 2004, Hoad, 2007 and Gevisser and Cameron, 1995).

It is in this climate that writing about sexuality, particularly same-sex desire, attraction, intimacy and pleasure becomes challenging and can be clouded with ambivalence. Firstly, there is the unspoken and intimate terrain that the writer has to enter, which is both eroticized and exoticized. Secondly writing about sex between women in South Africa can cause danger, as it could mean social suicide and publicly "outing" oneself. Stobie suggests that black women are "particularly vulnerable to having expressions of sexuality monitored" (Stobie, 2007:9). Women's sexualities tend to be under surveillance (McFadden, 2003), particularly when they present themselves in the context of lesbian bodies (Bennett, 2006). The writer has to take caution in joining the voices surveying the landscape of women's sexuality. As a lesbian writing on female sexuality, particularly lesbian sexuality, this sort of surveillance puts additional pressure to constantly expose oneself and be exposed in the writing and in how one is perceived. In addition, there is the unnecessary and sometimes constraining burden of exposing the daily lives of many other black lesbians. Moreover, focusing on sexual behaviour may feed into existing

assumptions and stereotypical views that sexual identity is merely about sexual behaviour.

This thesis argues that although there is a strong relation between sexual behaviour and sexual identity, the two are not the same. Although not always the case, "women tend to define themselves as lesbians when they are sexually attracted to other women" (Holmberg, Blair and Phillips, 2010:2). Identification as lesbian or gay "may lead individuals to engage in sexual behaviours consistent with that identity" (Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter,and Braun, 2006:46).

For the researcher there is a constant negotiation between what to say / not to say and how much can be revealed. One also has to ask about the implications of writing about sexuality that has been and is considered secretive and taboo in many contexts. Furthermore, I did not want to exoticize the black female body, but to engage with areas of scholarship that explore the dynamics and power of intimacy between women. Many of these anxieties are not resolved, but I write this as a way of intellectually and emotionally engaging with silences, taboos, power and viewpoints around female sexuality and sex between women. Further it is also to contribute to efforts that challenge how "patriarchy uses sexuality as a tool to create and sustain gender hierarchy in African societies" (Tamale, 2003).

Two areas of scholarship are emerging about female same-sex sexualities in Africa. One is from scholarship on same-sex relationships, focusing particularly on

'mummy-baby' relationships, women marriages, ancestral wives and their female husbands, to name a few; and the other is from activist groups in LGBT organizing or NGOs invested in issues around gender and sexuality. The former will be discussed in detail in the next section. Discussions and writings about sexuality in LGBT organizing (in South Africa at least) as well as in other NGOs interested in the issue are always related to safety, access to resources and health – a biomedical and rights discourse. They are about activism: fighting for access to preventative means or barrier methods for lesbians or other forms of sexual health (Matebeni, 2009). NGO settings have largely carried the responsibility of teaching and learning processes around sexualities; reproductive health and rights (Bennett, 2006) although it may be argued that many have "barely interrogated or deconstructed notions of rights" (McFadden, 2003). The discourse of health and rights cannot be easily escaped as it relates to the political and social climate of South Africa, and to the continent at large where discussions around sexuality are burdened by HIV transmission, risk, violence, gender relations and silence. The rights discourse and health discourses are connected in complicated ways. Experience from local LGBT organisation shows that HIV prevention work has been used as an 'acceptable' route to promote the interests of 'sexual minorities', develop organizations and lobby for rights. It has also been a way to channel funding to LGBT organizations and causes. Reid and Walker (2005:187) articulate a similar sentiment when arguing, "the study of sexuality in Africa has been dominated by biomedical discourses relating to women and reproduction. A consequence of this perspective has been a dearth of research on sexuality and pleasure, particularly for women." Bay-Cheng, Robinson

and Zucker (2009:513) suggest that this may be because "gendered sexual norms that posit female sexuality" are seen as "subordinate, reactive and passive and, therefore, relatively inconsequential compared to men's". They further note that even when female sexuality is the focus, it is already "complicated, censored, or violated by gendered norms and practices". This is also a result of a nineteenth century legacy where "sex seems to have been incorporated into two very distinct orders of knowledge: a biology of reproduction... and a medicine of sex…" (Foucault, 1978:54).

In this chapter I offer possibilities of talking about female sexuality outside these discourses. Firstly, I will briefly look at fieldwork - how researching lesbian sexualities highlighted some of the ambivalence about writing on sexual pleasure. Secondly, the chapter will offer an analysis of various literature on female same-sex intimacy in South Africa and globally, and how debates on sexuality among women are situated in scholarship. Moving away from this literature, the chapter will then introduce ways in which sexuality is negotiated in lesbian relationships and offer new alternatives of engaging with the meanings and power of sex between women. This will be achieved through focusing on subjective dimensions of black lesbians' sexual behaviour looking at desire, intimacy and pleasure (Bay-Cheng et al, 2009) and further highlight sexual agency in black lesbian sexual relationships.

Pain and pleasure: researching lesbian sexuality

During fieldwork talking about sexuality was a complex negotiation between pain and pleasure. Pain related to the sexual violence that was experienced by at least four of the twenty participants in this research. Sexual violence is a constant shadow over the lives of all South African women, as developed in the fourth chapter. Pleasure was related to the amount of detail that a participant could reveal or share. These were sexy discussions that sometimes became erotic, physically stimulating and exciting. The discussions included, but were not limited to: attracting a potential lover, intimacy, desire, sexual acts and dynamics in sexual relationships. A few participants felt that it was too much detail to offer to a researcher, and they were not ready to disclose information about their sexual behaviour. However, in such cases, the participants discussed sex or what people do intimately, with friends and partners and then later referred to themselves. In some cases, a discussion of my own sexual life set the tone for participants, possibly to ascertain if I was indeed lesbian[67], or to gauge how much could be shared by the participant. Sometimes this conversation was layered with insinuations of possible attraction between researcher and participant: to figuring out who was butch or femme or versatile; how negotiations around the sexual act would take place between potential lovers; and whether my intentions were really only about research or I was pursuing other possibly sexual or romantic interests. In one case when I realized that a potential

[67] This happened only with the participants I had not met prior to the interview or who did not know me.

participant was getting the wrong ideas about the interview, I cancelled our meeting, closing the door on any possible opportunity she thought had opened during our preliminary meeting. McEwen's (2009) cautionary points were useful in how she had to diffuse any possible misinterpretations that existed among possible informants because of the sexual nature of her research interest. In another instance, a mutual attraction between a participant and I prior to me starting the research was diffused by through talking about the attraction.

There were also underlying assumptions about what happens sexually between two women. Most participants assumed that since I am a lesbian, I knew what happens sexually between women and therefore initially felt that the conversation on sexual practice was not necessary. Thus, my presence and position sometimes hindered what could be talked about. At other times, it allowed me to dig deeper for nuances about these assumptions.

Generally, participants introduced their lovers/partners or their love for women early on in the discussion. This made it easy to go back to talking about a partner/lover or the first sexual relationship with a girl at a later stage. However, I sometimes found myself getting uncomfortable talking about a participant's sexual behaviour especially when I knew the participant's partner or the person the participant was talking about. In one instance, when a participant realized I knew who she was talking about, although no name had been mentioned, she requested that I do not include that section of the interview in the transcript. I felt like an

intruder or a voyeur in their relationship, even though I had not had a conversation with the other partner. At the same time I felt a degree of curiosity about participants' relationships. These conflicting interests always left me unsettled.

At times I became wary of participants bragging about their sex lives, sexual behaviour or prowess (see Matebeni, 2009). On very few occasions participants were uncertain about their own sexual practices and how they have sex. Most times these seemed to be/were articulated either as a 'given' (that is: 'how else would it happen?") or were unquestioned. However, with further probing, it became clear that every sexual act, especially with a new or potential lover, suggested a series of negotiations.

Even though complicated, discussions around sex, pleasure and desire could never be complete without engaging with issues of safety. Though such issues were necessary, they also alienated participants. At times, such discussions deflated the energy and excitement of the conversation. They also made participants feel judged or under attack, and thus needing to defend themselves. A conversation with Boni, a 20-year-old student, illustrates this:

> Int: And… how is safe sex negotiated?
> Boni: *Safe sex?*
> Int: Ja.
> Boni: (giggles) *It's because I'm very ignorant. Ok. I'm guilty, ok! I'm very ignorant when it comes to safe sex with lesbians because I'm really… I couldn't understand how the transmission can happen. I'm not really educated and I've never done anything to get myself educated… about safe sex among lesbians, you know.*

Such discussions were also exclusionary, in light of the myriad of heterosexually biased HIV/AIDS communication initiatives taking place in the country. Not only could participants not relate to thinking about HIV transmission between women, such discussions were foreign as they have not been part of public discourse, or included in the discourse on health and rights (Matebeni, 2009). In a sense, participants could easily gloss over seeing their bodies as part of cultural discourse (Butler, 1993) and thus distance themselves from issues around risk, health and HIV/AIDS. A further element introduced by this discussion was the possibility of one's partner having a concurrent sexual relationship with a man; or had been sleeping with a man. Both these were not always welcomed and celebrated, as they suggested cheating or bisexuality (see Matebeni, 2009).

Bisexuality is generally mistrusted and is a contentious topic in lesbian circles because it is seen as occupying "a middle ground between the polarities of heterosexuality and homosexuality," or viewed as "sitting on the fence" or "wanting the best of both worlds" (Stobie, 2007:xii). Muthien (2005) realized how "aberrant her sexuality is" as a bisexual in a lesbian space. A further implication was opening up a painful discussion around sexual violence and rape, which affected a number of the participants, as already discussed in an earlier chapter.

After such discussions, it was not always easy to bring the participant back to the conversation. Generally, a new discussion had to start which was not relating sex to safety or linked safety to other general issues such as neighbourhood safety.

Some critical trends in literature on female same-sex intimacy

Female same-sex sexuality in Southern Africa, and South Africa especially has been written in experiences of intimacy and non-sexual relationships between women, or what is increasingly called homosocial intimacy. Various writers (Potgieter, Gunkel, Kendall and Gay, to name a few) have presented narratives on female same-sex relationships in South Africa and Lesotho that either de-sexualize relationships between women (in the case of Potgieter) or argue that "homo-social" interactions and relationships between women are not sexual as they are not seen as such by the women themselves and co-exist with heterosexual relationships.

In this chapter, while presenting these various cases and scenarios, I argue that the omission of the importance of sex in female same-sex narratives is highly problematic as it reduces the importance and power of attraction and eroticism between women and excludes an important aspect of women's lives. Secondly, the 'homosocial' discourse as well as many of these narratives have focused on 'mummy-baby' relationships and assumed this as the main form of intimate relationships taking place between women in Southern Africa, outside female marriages. This narrative on 'mummy-baby' is not only an under-representation of same-sex sexuality in its assumption of a non-existent lesbian identity and sexuality, but it also fails to move beyond a 'fixed' moment of caring, nurturing and preparation for adulthood between women.. This chapter will thus present these

various moments and move beyond them in arguing for experiences and subjectivities that enter the intimate domain of sex and various possibilities relating to intimacy, desire, pleasure, eroticism, and sexual relationships between women.

Two authors I will first engage with are Judith Gay (1985) and Limakatso Kendall (1998) who both produced extensive exploratory narratives of intimate bonds between women in Lesotho. Their studies have been seen as elaborate contributions to research on female same-sex relationships in Southern Africa. In Gay's study, she describes the bonds between the women that are seen as 'mummy-baby' relationships taking place between girls in boarding school. They are explored as being a natural part of growing up and an important source of social ties in adulthood. Gay's study showed how women and girls in Lesotho continued to 'touch each other, kiss each other, fondle each other, and enjoy each other physically, but did not consider this relationship as 'sexual' or even 'lesbian'. Gay argues that by not labeling these relationships as such, women granted their relationships freedom and were able to enjoy such activities without restraint, embarrassment or the 'identity crises' experienced by women in homophobic cultures. These relationships were considered special friendships that were long-term, loving, and erotic and co-existed with heterosexual marriage.

Similarly, Kendall (1998) gives an account of a Mosotho woman who had a relationship with a *motsoalle* (friend). This relationship was also neither an alternative nor a threat to heterosexual marriage. When a woman had a *motsoalle*,

she could kiss her, spend most of her time with her, and even show her how much she loved her. The latter was a physical form of affection, even sexual in nature, but was not referred to in sexual terms. This was because sex was presented as only happening between a man and a woman and required a penis (koai) and also penetration. Kendall articulates that for Basotho women enjoying these relationships, "no koai" meant "no sex" (p233). Thus women were not seen to be having a sexual relationship. Instead, they were viewed as expressing their love for each other. The erotic nature of these relationships was hidden from men and children. This afforded women a kind of 'secrecy' that they could manipulate on their own. This is a different kind of secrecy and silence than that experienced by many lesbian women, a kind of secrecy that affords women the 'space' to have the relationships they wanted to have. The notion of secrecy and silence in female same-sex relationships has been problematised a great deal by many writers in Africa including Arnfred (2004), Dankwa (2009) and Tamale (2003). In Lesotho, Kendall found no women choosing to live in same-sex couples or who defied heterosexual expectations by choosing female lovers exclusively.

Further afield, Gloria Wekker's *The Politics of Passion* (2006) offers a rich account of Afro-Surinamese working-class women whose sexual culture of *mati-ism* allows women the opportunity not to limit their sexuality to either heterosexuality or same-sex sexuality. Describing *mati* ("the Sranan Tongo word for women who have sexual relations with other women, but who typically also will have, had or still have relationships with men, simultaneously) in Suriname in the 1990s, Gloria Wekker

(2008:373-4) argued that these (*mati)* relationships were a "visible feature of Afro-Surinamese working class culture." The relationships had distinct role divisions between the two female partners. Distinguishing between *mati-ism* and black lesbianism Wekker argued that the former intimates that women will maintain relationships with men simultaneously and the latter had more class bearings and "Eurocentric features." A *mati "*career", for most women, she argues, is not a unidirectional path as women could take a man as a lover after having had several relationships with women. For Wekker black lesbian groups have "drawn inspiration from Western influence while in *mati*-ism more African elements have been preserved." In addition to different levels of African elements (such as families of kin, lovers and children) there are different "*class structures"* existing between the two. The *mati* relationships that Wekker referred to follow, to some extent, the model of mummy-baby relationships in Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa (as will be presented later). In *mati*-ism both women benefit with the young woman being taught "mati" work and the older demanding "unconditional love from her young dove." I would add, quoting Mustafa (2006) that these relationships may also be seen as "women's social networks" that "provide multiple social and financial supports".

A more recent and nuanced contribution to scholarship on female same-sex sexuality is from Serena Owusua Dankwa (2009) who explores *supi* relationships, or rather practices forged by girls at boarding schools or women in southern Ghana. While *supi* relationships exist, they may or may not have a sexual dimension and are

layered with silence, secrecy and norms of verbal indirection and discretion even though these are "based on tacit but vibrant forms of knowledge". Dankwa acknowledges that these relationships may co-exist with constructions of a lesbian identity, which is subject to rising tides of homophobia and is not usually referred to. However such intimacy, desire and an erotic context between women is not named or understood as a social identity, but rather "through a language of allusion". In this sense, women in *supi* relationships can continue such relationships even after boarding school without naming these 'lesbian'. Dankwa also notes that some women in same-sex relationships align such relationships with their first *supi* relationship. She argues that *supi* bonds echo descriptions of courting friendships between Venda and Zulu schoolgirls who use gender and kinship terms to relate to their girlfriend and of 'mummy-baby' relationships at boarding schools in Lesotho and South Africa between a slightly older and more active 'mummy' and her younger 'baby'. Both *supi* and mummy-baby were not seen as sexual by the people participating in them or by the environment in which they existed. However, for those who still practice *supi* and claim the sexual nature of that relationship, the content of *supi* seems to be "in flux" and remains "elusive" as the terms of engagement are shifting. While these notions of *supi* may shift Dankwa argues that "concealment is indispensable to female same-sex relationships/practice" and suggests that it is "more than a reaction to homophobic debates". Dankwa's work offers new ways of thinking about same-sex intimacy in Ghana and in other contexts where silence and secrecy take precedence over political visibility and identity.

While relationships between women existed as in the form of 'mummy-baby' relationships (as seen in the context of Lesotho), there were and are also relationships between women in South Africa specifically that are sexual in nature and where women openly choose to live their lives without the presence of men. Many of these relationships are identified as lesbian relationships; with some individuals in such relationships identifying/ied as *tommy boys, Galla man, dyke, manvrou, butch and femme* (see Morgan and Wieringa, 2005; Gevisser and Cameron, 1995; and Dirsuweit, 1999). The earliest evidence of such relationships from the South African gay and lesbian archives (GALA) is from the 1950s, a story of Gertie Williams who was a cross-dresser and passed as a man at different times in her life (Chetty, 1995b). Gertie mainly had relationships with women, as illustrated in her quote below:

> *"All my gang are men, and the only feeling I have toward women are the same feeling any regular man would have. My earnest prayer each night is that God would be merciful to me and change me completely into a man."*

Since Gertie's story appeared in *Drum* magazine in 1956 various strides have been made in South Africa to contribute to female same-sex sexuality scholarship, and to some extent scholarship on lesbian sexualities. The first anthology on gay and lesbian life *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa* (1995) edited by Gevisser and Cameron gave evidence of same-sex lovers and lives through narratives of queer people in South Africa and also reprinted Gertie Williams' story. This collection included one of the few accounts of black lesbian narratives collected by Tanya Chan-Sam on *Five Women: Black Lesbian Life on the Reef*. Of the five women that Chan-Sam documents is 'Bongie's account of a 'mummy-baby'

relationship at boarding school, or what is locally known as *amachicken,* which I will explore in more detail later. In this collection, there is little theorizing, as the main purpose was to recover historical accounts of same-sex existence and for the liberation of gay and lesbian individuals. This collection was groundbreaking in terms of putting sexual identities on the map in South Africa and globally.

Given this, it is rather surprising that the most extensive study on black lesbian lives in South Africa thus far paid no attention to the sexual relationships between women who specifically identified as lesbian. In her thesis *Black, South African, Lesbian: Discourses of Invisible Lives* Potgieter (1997) pays no attention to the sexual relationships between women who specifically identified as lesbian in her research. Instead, she focuses on lesbian feminism, which emphasizes the political positions of some women. She further focuses on non-sexual relations between women and thus contributes to desexualizing black lesbians. By doing so, Potgieter does not explain nor explore the nature of black lesbians' sexual identities, their practices and experiences. Secondly, she leaves it unclear what the nature of lesbianism is in South Africa and rather focuses on the discourse of invisibility. This is, in essence, a misrepresentation, given the activism that some black lesbians participated in during that time (see lifestories of Bev Ditsie and Phumi Mthetwa from the GALA archives and the previous chapters in this thesis). Potgieter failed to define lesbian in the South African context or to fully explore issues of sexuality. Instead, the author refers to feminism's definition of lesbian as "women who love women", which desexualises lesbian identity and takes for granted the meaning of the category 'lesbian' in the local context.

A successful collection focusing on female same-sex sexualities in Africa edited by Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa (2005) is *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives: Female Same-Sex Practices in Africa.* The book documents varied forms of sexual expression by women in East and Southern Africa. Morgan and Wieringa present a diversity of practices and experiences between women in African localities and further attempt to explore their subjectivities, but are highly biased towards female masculinities, as the title indicates. As in the texts already explored above, this collection also presents narratives that are heavily focused on secrecy and silence, a notion that seems to govern same-sex sexuality in Africa. Similar to the Gevisser and Cameron collection, this collection leaves most of the material under-analyzed, particularly the new understandings of sexuality and embodiment, as seen in the contributions by Busi Kheswa, Nkunzi Nkabinde and Elizabeth Khaxas, which would have been most useful for this chapter.

Zandile Nkunzi Nkabinde's (2008) groundbreaking autobiography *Black Bull, Ancestors And Me: My life as a Lesbian Sangoma* written by a black lesbian *sangoma* in Johannesburg explores the dynamics of her sexual and gender identity within tradition and culture. In doing so, Nkabinde highlights the importance and meaning of her lesbian identity in her calling and work as *isangoma* and how these two worlds co-exist, thus stretching identity paradigms and dismantling notions of homosexuality as un-African, untraditional, silent and secretive. She illustrates how female *(i)zangoma* have an old tradition of marrying ancestral wives (*unyankwabe*),

some of whom have intimate same-sex relationships that they keep secret. There is strong social pressure to keep silent about this, though it happens and is known, but Nkabinde, through relating her experience, courageously exposes her life and spiritual practices in the context of a patriarchal and 'secretive' society. Nkabinde's contribution is powerful because it highlights the importance of her coming out and claiming her identity as lesbian in a context that is harsh towards non-normative sexuality and hides lesbian identity among traditional healers. It further challenges the claims made about how African 'culture' excludes homosexuality and homosexual experiences. Similarly Jabulile Ngwenya's novel *I Aint Yo Bitch* (2009) tells the story of a young Johannesburg-based black lesbian hip hop artist, Tebogo. In this text, Ngwenya describes in detail the emotional and the erotic relationship of her main character with her female lover, and how this challenges societal norms of family, sexuality, tradition and culture. Both these texts offer refreshing ways of looking at sexual identity and female sexuality in South Africa and are relevant in this chapter and this thesis. These literary offerings show how sexual and gender identity co-exist within a narrative of race, class, tradition and popular culture – a contribution that is advanced and complicated throughout this thesis.

A recent, elaborate and significant contribution to the literature on female sexuality in South Africa *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* by Henriette Gunkel (2010) delivers rich theorizing about sexual identity in the post-apartheid moment as well as engaging with debates on homophobia and the project of nationalism. Of interest here is Gunkel's fourth chapter on 'Mapping Out Intimacy

and Homo/Sociality'. In this chapter Gunkel notes the distinction between 'mummy-baby' relationships and a lesbian identity, as illustrated in her opening quote by 'Bongie' taken from Tanya Chan Sam's article in Gevisser and Cameron (1995). Gunkel's exploration of 'mummy-baby' relationships shows that at certain moments, these relationships of 'amachicken' or 'mummy-baby' were secondary to heterosexual relationships. Because they became normalized (in school settings) they are not necessarily seen as threats to heterosexual contacts, even though they may be discouraged. The 'amachicken' discourse of "physical attachment between girls" excludes more sexualized contact. "Bongie's narrative shows the possibility of female same-sex intimacy within institutionalized 'homosocial' spaces, in this case girls' only boarding school. This type of "relationship is not constrained by homophobia" but is "policed when the female same-sex intimacy is linked to a specific sexual identity" such as lesbian. Gunkel 'theorizes intimacy as a fundamental dimension of identity and sociality" (2010:110-6).

In the analysis of accounts of 'mummy-baby', in South Africa and Lesotho at least, there seems to be something missing. These relationships are formed for specific reasons: to initiate young girls into particular roles and for play (as discussed in oral history discussions on Umhlobo Wenene FM recorded 2009/03/26)[68]. Tee, a 25 year old professional, and participant in my study similarly illustrates this point clearly when talking about her own 'mummy-baby' relationships at school.

> Tee: *At school, it was that mummy-baby relationships. I did have numerous (mummy-baby relationships). I was always the baby. I*

[68] Radio discussions on homosexuality among Xhosa people in South Africa

> *had many mummies. Actually, it ended when I left high school. My mummy would protect me at school, she'd bring me lunch and I would do the same. Mummy and I would kiss, but not a serious kiss, just a peck. We would go behind the toilets to kiss so that no one else sees us. It [the kissing] used to be once a week or depending on when mummy wanted it and how many times mummy wants it* [laugh*]. And then mummy would ask to know her son-in-law. I would say 'I don't yet have a boyfriend' and mummy would say "in order to be a family, I will show you your father and you must show me your boyfriend, when you have one. This one would be umkhwenyana wami [*my son-in-law*]." This was sort of like a family kind of thing, you know how families do?*

Thus, to read these relationships mainly as suggestions of same-sex sexuality is problematic as these represent and also intimate towards social roles of caring, nurturing, play, forms of intimacies and responsibilities that girls and young women are initiated into in society at particular times and moments. Gunkel recognizes this when referring to one of her interviewees, Tumiso, who fell in love with her 'mummy' by arguing "this suggests that the framework of a 'mummy-baby' relationship is somewhat fixed (possibly reduced to the nurturing, caring, intimacy) and that Tumiso is aware of the fact that she and her *partner* (my own emphasis) exceeded this framework by developing sexual feelings for each other and falling in love with each other" (120).

Thabi (32 year old professional) makes this distinction clear. She illustrates that there was one reason why these relationships took place in her boarding school – for girls to groom, protect each other and keep each other company at night. Such relationships even included their own terminology and language of 'bed-warmers' (*isithontobezana),* in Thabi's case.

Thabi: *There was a word that we used for sleeping partners, but not in a sexual way - that was to warm the bed. We used to call each other the bed warmers 'isithontobezana'. So, the older ones would ask us to be their 'isithontobezana'. That meant coming to sleep with a person in their bed and then we would see what happens*.

Even though in Thabi's case a deeply sexual involvement was attached to the 'mummy baby' relationships she had at boarding school, this was uncommon, particularly because Thabi was already aware of her own sexuality at the time. Thabi 'manipulated' the intimate space of her 'mummy-baby' relationship to explore her own sexuality. Her 'mummy' who now is in a heterosexual relationship later confirms this to her:

Thabi: *I had many mummies - in Standard 6 (grade 8) I had 4 or 5 of them and when they were leaving matric, I had been sexual with all of them [*laugh*]. I was busy. But that's nothing. "M" was the first. Then I was doing Std 7 and there was this girl, "V", who was from Soweto. We ended up kissing, many times. She was much older than us. I think she saw that it was more than playing. She could see that when we were kissing there was a reaction coming from somewhere. There would be some fire. She's the first person to tell me about lesbianism and what it is. That's when I got to know the term and understand how it works. I think by the time I was leaving high school I knew I was probably that, but I was leaving high school and going to university. I wondered what would happen in the real world.*

I ask Thabi - Since you had many mummies, how did you manage whom you were going to visit when?

Thabi*: They would ask me to visit them. When the schedules clashed, I would go to the one who asked first, but I loved "M". I felt that I wanted to be with her first and others could wait. If she called me and she was number two or three on the schedule, I would go to her first* [laugh]. *I think I enjoyed boarding school when it was a trend because no one saw it [mummy-baby] as a bad thing. And it turned out that boarding schools were like that because we heard other people talking about boarding schools they had attended and they would say 'I also have a girlfriend'. When I finished there, I think I'm the only person who still sees women. Some are married with children. Even "M", she's got two children now. [A few years*

later] *we had a nice reunion. I last saw her when I was at varsity. I guess she saw it as I'm her 'bed warmer, isithontobezana, her baby' and she was aware that I was attracted to her. And how she explains it now is that - there were times when she wanted to discourage me and that things were going too far and she also didn't understand what was happening…*

Similarly, Tee (25 year old professional), who moved into a flat with an old friend from school and started exploring with her sexually, found this sexual exploration different from the 'mummy-baby' relationship they had experienced at school. At this time, Tee had not experienced any attraction towards women and was in a heterosexual relationship. It was only her curiosity about her roommate who was dating a girl, which led her to explore sexually with her.

Int: Now you're in your first year in tertiary. When your friend approaches you about the issue of women dating each other, what happens?

Tee: *Actually, she's not the one who approached me. I approached her and asked her 'who is this girl who looks like a boy that you're always with'? She just told me "it's my girlfriend" At first I got confused, but I had heard about this before. So, I ask her "you're doing this thing called dating girls?'. She agrees and starts telling me she loves this girl. I ask 'how do you do things?' and she explains to me and tells me what happens when they have periods and all that. She was very open about it maybe it's because we also had a very good relationship, we were friends. It was easy to talk to her about anything. I thought that my friend would outgrow this and get herself a man. I didn't think it was a serious thing to be dating women. I thought it was just a lifestyle related to being at Tertiary. I thought it would end after some time. She dated girls for a long time. But now, she's married to a guy and she has two kids. But recently I talked to her and she asked me how I was doing since I'm now in a lesbian relationship. Maybe she's thinking of going back, I don't know. But now she's married and has kids.*

Int: what happens the second year?

Tee: *The first year I heard about these relationships and the second year my friend was like, "let me let you taste and feel this thing" So, she started being all touchy and feely and I was getting uncomfortable. So, I'd ask what girls do to her. She would tell me and I would do that*

thing to her then. And I'd make sure that's how they do it to her. Then I'd ask, is it nice when they do this to you? [Laugh]. *I was experimenting but I felt uncomfortable when she was doing it to me.*

Int: How did you feel when you were experimenting?

Tee: *I didn't really understand it. I thought that the mummy-baby thing had ended at school. I never took this thing very seriously to the point that when we were experimenting, I would get very uncomfortable and I'd feel that it doesn't work for me.*

Like Tee, Hlobo and her friend Thandi would "teach each other how to be pros in bed". Both Hlobo and her friend later had boyfriends and Hlobo had a traditional heterosexual marriage and had four children prior to identifying as a lesbian.

Hlobo: *Most of my time I spent with Thandi in the yard at home. We would chat and we started fooling around. Thandi and I were doing Standard Five. I would say to her 'when we're older we should be pros and know how to make love' (to our boyfriends). Then we would start kissing and play card games and then have sex. We wanted to be pros.*

In Lesotho, as in South Africa, intimate bonds between women are seen as a natural part of growing up and an important source of social ties in adulthood. Though they take place in environments that could be termed 'homosocial', these bonds are distinct from lesbian-identified relationships, which have a different meaning and role in subverting heteronormativity. I present this argument because in the studies by Gay, Kendall and Gunkel, the terminology of lesbian is called upon through the use of Adrienne Rich's[69] (1993|1980) notion of intimacy between women, which highlights the 'importance of woman bonding and woman identification for female survival to offer an understanding of these relationships. I find the use of Rich's

[69] Rich (1993:239) defines being lesbian along a "continuum" which includes "a range – through each woman's life and throughout history of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had a consciously desired genital experience with another woman" In this sense, 'lesbian' can be expanded to embrace many more forms of "primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a richer and inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support"

analysis here problematic. A slippage occurs when using Rich who talks about a form of lesbianism while these authors are not focusing on lesbianism, but rather on 'mummy-baby' relationships or special friendships. Gunkel (2010) recognizes her own slippage in referring to Rich's analysis by arguing that such an analysis is invalid, particularly in relation to the exploration of similar relationships in Lesotho by Gay and Kendall.

Though Rich's definition of lesbian seems to be inclusive and encompassing of various forms of interconnections between women, such all-inclusive definitions blur the distinction between lesbian relationships and non-lesbian female relationships or between lesbian identity and female-centred identity, and ignore the nuances of such relationships within an African context. If it were that no distinction existed, then all same-sex connections between women could be read as lesbian. Zimmerman (1981) argues that this understanding of lesbianism eliminates 'lesbian' as a meaningful category and renders it elusive. Similarly, reading female same-sex intimacies and relationships as lesbian, is problematic. Blackwood (2000) argues that the term lesbian does not work in all cases across cultures – in some cases, the term 'same-sex relations' captures the erotic relations between women. This is the case in Lesotho and other areas, as I showed above, where there is no concept of erotic exchanges among women as being 'sexual'. There has also been no lesbian lifestyle option available to Basotho women. Lesbian-like behaviour has been commonplace, conventional, but it has not been viewed as 'sexual' or as an

alternative to heterosexual marriage, which is both a social and an economic part of the culture.

It is undeniable that the erotic dynamic between women in these homosocial spaces presented above is powerful, even though not seen within the dimensions of sexual practice. Such erotic dynamics might offer different ways of looking at female sexuality and the eroticism between women. Hudita Nura Mustafa (2006) suggests this in her observation of homosocial intimacy by focusing on the practices of beautification and dynamics of seduction among women in Senegal. She pays particular attention to *dirriankhe* ("the corporal, sensory and visual spectacle of mature femininity…") and argues that the rituals of beautification, grooming and desire taking place between women, not only "serve to situate the self in a lineage of women" but further "foster solidarity and hierarchy" among the women themselves. This is also evident in the relationships between women already presented as *mummy-baby, supi,* and *mati.* These relationships or forms of female homosociality (Gunkel, 2010), unlike lesbian, as I argue in this thesis and the rest of this chapter, do not similarly reach the potential of subverting patriarchy, heteronormativity and its mechanisms.

As presented in the previous section, scholarship on female same-sex sexuality in Southern Africa has focused on bonds and intimacies between women that are not seen as sexual. This leaves this study to cover new grounds that have not necessarily been explored in terms of sexual practices between women. Anfred (2004) has

however raised the question of sex and what counts as sexual when referring to Kendall and Gay's work in Lesotho. Both works question what sex is between women and the occurrence of sex. While it is clear from both studies that women have 'something' when they love each other – it is difficult to articulate what it is, and whether it is sex or just something physical. This is made even more complicated when Kendall quotes Frye's sarcastic statement "lesbians don't have sex at all. There is no male partner whose orgasm and ejaculation can be the criterion for counting times" (1998:230). In quoting Frye, Kendall complicates her position. It is not clear whether her reference to Frye is similarly sarcastic or suggests that notions of sex (between lesbians) are limited and motivated by a politics and framework of reproduction. If the latter, it is ironic and disturbing that in a study that offers alternative ways of looking at sexuality (in this case, same-sex), such alternatives are situated in the terrain of heterosexual sexual relations, instead of a deeper and nuanced language that prioritized same sex sexuality. Such studies undermine the importance of female sexuality (lesbian sexuality in this case) in "asserting women's agency in erotic sexuality, so it can be freed from its conflation with reproduction, and overturn cultural taboos and claims that define sexual pleasure and freedom as 'dangerous' and 'irresponsible'" (van Zyl, 2005:32)

I emphasize women's sexual agency here because failure to do so undermines lesbians' challenge to dominant heterosexual ideology. In the context of South Africa, where 'corrective' rape (a term I have critiqued and am using warily in this case) is commonplace, it is important to articulate the challenge that lesbians pose

to heteronormativity. The possibility of a sexual relationship between women is an important challenge to patriarchy because it is an alternative to the patriarchal heterosexual couple, unlike what is offered by *mati-ism, supi, mummy-baby* or *dirriankhe*. It also shows that women are not dependent on men for sexual / romantic pleasure and satisfaction. Furthermore, as Ferguson (1981) has argued, the ability to take one's own genital sexual needs seriously is a necessary component of an egalitarian love relation.

Sylvia Tamale (2003) eloquently articulates the challenge presented by sexual relationships between women:

> "*What is therefore particularly threatening to patriarchy is the idea of intimate same-sex relationships where a dominating male is absent, and where women's sexuality can be defined without reference to reproduction. The main factor in the patriarchal equation is missing; that is, power along sex lines, and thus the preservation of the gender hierarchy*".

Attraction, desire and sexual pleasure

It must pointed out upfront that a version of pleasure that I wish to engage with in this section is one that positions the participants in this research as agents in their sexual arrangements and relationships. This position pays attention to participant's experiences and meanings of sex, intimacy and sexual pleasure. This becomes visible in the elaborate extracts from the participants, whose narration of sex, intimacy and pleasure is captured in the discourse of mutuality and equality. Thus, following Foucault's (1978:57) assertion of pleasure as experienced by the subject

position is important: "pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden…but first and foremost in relation to itself; it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul". It is a version that relies on the participant's experiences and perceptions of their own sexual script[70] and not on generic cultural scripts regarding how to enact sexuality. The concept of sexual script was developed by William Simon and John Gagnon (1986) and refers to how individuals reproduce and recognise a repertoire of sexual acts, as well as a set of rules ad expectations surrounding those acts. This concept is useful as it allows for an investigation of how individuals shape and or produce notions of sexuality within their groupings.

Honor McKitrick Wallace (2000:176) argues in her writing about a story of a female protagonist, Ruth: "the traditional narrative" of a "good woman" on female sexuality expects "the female principle be passive rather than active". Looking at Ruth, the protagonist in the story, McKitrick Wallace illustrates how Ruth's articulation of her desires and actions to fulfill them go against the rules of feminine behaviour. By articulating her desires she moves from "passive acquiescence to active desire". Even though McKitrick Wallace presents the story of Ruth to critique feminist narrative theory, Holland et al (1994:24-5) writing on young heterosexual women's embodiment of sexuality observe similar notions in their research. They argue that

[70] Script is used here is used in the context to refer to "a set of stereotypical actions defined by cultural norms that serve as a guide for what feelings and behaviours should occur in a specific situation" (Rose and Zand, 2002:87 quoting Gagnon, 1997 and Ginsberg, 1988)

the version of femininity or "feminine reputation requires a young woman to construct a disembodied sexuality. The woman becomes a passive body, rather than actively embodied". In the next few sections I will present scenarios that argue against this passive role of female sexuality. Rather the participants in this research claim their own bodies and sexualities as active agents in attracting, desiring, pleasing and having sex with another woman. They defy these "traditional" feminine tropes.

In the first instance is Tee (25 year old professional) who finds herself deeply attracted to another woman she has recently met. In talking about this attraction, Tee articulates her own sense of amazement and shock at being attracted to a woman when she is 'straight', which is a commonly questioned feeling of attraction in identity formation (see Rosario et al, 2006 and many others referred to in this study). Even though she struggles with the changes in her sexual attraction and what these may represent, Tee continues to claim her attraction and desire towards her new "crush" and fantasizes about wanting to "love her", "kiss her" or "be very close to her".

Tee: *I had a **crush*** [emphasis] *on some woman here in Johannesburg. I had a huge crush on this woman and I couldn't understand how this was happening. I thought, 'how can I have a crush on a woman when I'm straight?*'.
Int: How did this happen?
Tee: *I would just see this person, but not often, but I would see her and felt mhm! I thought that I would never say anything to her and that I would die with this thought in my head*.
Int: what were you feeling inside?
Tee: *well, I didn't know what to do, I knew a little bit but I'd never really practiced it. I just felt that I loved this woman and I*

wanted to kiss her or just be very close to her [laugh]. *But I didn't know how or what I would do if she were close to me or came on to me*.

Similarly Lizi (23 year old professional) articulates her nervousness at desiring another woman, but continued to explore this desire and actively participated in it through flirting, dressing up for her potential lover, and finally experienced being touched. Both Tee and Lizi express their attraction in verbal declarations of interest and non-verbal behaviours (Rose & Zand, 2002). Lizi also links her experience of being touched with sex, a connection that is often lost in the experiences of young heterosexual women. Holland et al (1994:25) argue that among young heterosexual women "the conception of sex is disembodied in the disconnection between sex and touching". However, as Lizi elaborates, this connection is integral to her experience of attraction, desire and finally sex with a woman. She constructs her body as a mode of desire and attraction for another woman, and is both the desiring and the desired. Furthermore, the sexual activity she describes in not veiled or ambiguous (as will also be presented later). It has a language and she articulates the language as soon as she recognizes that what is being desired is to "shag" another woman. Lizi is not shy to signal her own attraction (Rose and Zand, 2002) towards a girl and succeeds in doing this by flirting and using her own body and beautification as tools to seduce her potential "shag". She elegantly describes this attraction to another woman and the eroticism at play in their mutual desire:

Lizi: *I knew this girl, but I had never really spoken to her until December at a party - my cousin invited me and this girl was there. We were having fun and all. It started raining and this girl wanted to leave and everyone suggested that we go to my house*

since my gran was not there. We got there and we chilled…Then one of the girls said she's hungry and I went to make food for her. While in the kitchen, the girl comes and tells me that my feet are beautiful. I saw then that this girl wants a shag. I had to decide whether I was giving it to her or not. The following day was Sunday and I went to church. This girl sends me a message saying, "thanks for the hospitality". I write and flirt back saying 'there's more where that came from' and I wanted to make it obvious that she could come any day during the week, today or whatever day. She tells me she'll see me the following day [giggle, sigh]. *That was the most nervous day of my life. When I got out of church, I was so worried that she would see me pass her house. I think the main reason I went to church, apart from the fact that I couldn't sleep the whole night, was that she stays very close to church. I dressed up for church and I made sure that I was a looker. I got out of the church and I got disappointed that I didn't see her on my way back home. She sent me a message saying she would see me the following day…Around 5pm she comes with her friend. I started getting sick from nervousness. I ran into the bathroom as soon as she came into the house. I went back and sat with everyone and we started talking. We were sitting on different couches and she asks me to come sit with her. I was nervous so I asked her to come to where I was. At some point I agreed to move and came to sit in between her legs and watched TV. The whole time her friend is sleeping (on the sofa) and I was praying that she shouldn't open her eyes* [laugh*]. I was breathing heavily and probably sweating - I was so nervous, but the girl was not seeing my nerves. At some point, I got a bit comfortable. Then I remembered that the previous day I had worn high-heeled shoes trying to impress her and she never pitched and my feet were sore from that.... So, this lady says "I heard that your feet are sore, let's go to the bedroom and I'll massage them for you". She offers to massage my feet… I got more nervous because she was already massaging my shoulders and now she wanted to move to the feet. Then I agreed and we went to the bedroom. We started talking while she was massaging my feet. Then at some point she moves up to the calves, the thighs and I was getting more nervous. It was dark; she wasn't seeing my face and how nervous I was. I was so nervous; I started talking about stupid things. I had taken three baths before she arrived and I had smoked. When she arrived I even puked, which meant I had to go wash again and brush my teeth, all because I was nervous. The whole time I was thinking that I would jump out of myself and become calmer. I started shaking from being nervous, which is what I do. I thought I was going to be a klutz and she wouldn't be interested after this. She asked me to sleep on my stomach and take my shoes off. Then she*

> *says "take off your jeans, I want to massage your whole leg". I was thinking, 'it's only my feet that are sore.' So, I take off my jeans and she asked me to take my top off. I did that too and slept on the carpet on my stomach and she started massaging me. From the massage, we shagged - Ja, that's how it happened - my first experience. Yho!* [Smile and giggle]

Unlike Lizi, Pati (42 year old mother of three) says that the women that she desires and is attracted to do not actively participate in the play of seduction. A possible reason why Pati experiences this is how she is perceived as a butch (masculine role), therefore an initiator, seducer and chaser in the sexual script. She also recognizes this in how she claims she would be offended if a woman proposed to her. At the same time she wants a woman she likes to sometimes reciprocate that desire. The overlap between Pati's role as initiator and sometimes wanting desire to be reciprocated may suggest some ambiguity and complexity in sexual bahaviour. In one way she seems to be subscribing to "traditional gender roles" prescribing that initiating a relationship is a man's responsibility, with the woman expected to wait and be asked (Rose and Zand, 2002:88). But she also challenges this notion by articulating her frustration at women who "make our relationship look the same as heterosexual…" and how she is expected to take (or assume) the traditional male role of initiator. In her denial of this gender role expectation, Pati challenges this organizing and asserts her position as both initiator and recipient of attraction and desire and a possible mutual sharing of the role of initiator.

> Pati*: I find myself in these relationships that I'm the one who takes the lead. I'm the one who has to propose. Even when my proposal has been accepted, I'm the one who has to make her feel horny most of the time. They don't seduce me. I have to start romancing and seducing them and then they would respond. It's like I have to*

*start everything for them. They don't initiate…They make our relationship look the same as heterosexual because when you're a girl, you don't initiate – you wait for the guy to start. Then you pretend that you don't want and then, [*sigh*] I don't know. At the same time, I feel offended when a girl proposes [uma engishela] to me [*laugh*]. But sometimes I do like to feel that she likes me and I'm not the only one who likes her.*

However, Pati's sexual script may not be a norm for butch lesbians or for a lesbian sexual script. Tee, who recently entered into a relationship with a butch partner, expresses this when talking about the arrangement of her relationship with her partner. She describes her role as "calling the shots" in the relationship, especially during sex.

I ask Tee, you've been with a man and now you're with a woman. Is there a difference and has this affected your life in any way?

Tee: *…It's different in a way because with men I always had that mentality that we got as we were growing up - that a man is superior to you. Things changed when you went further with school. But, as soon as you were in a relationship with a man, you'd always take that passive role and all the responsibilities of cleaning and cooking and so forth. But then there's nothing as nice as sharing these responsibilities with your lover - you could be washing the dishes and she's doing the bed or making breakfast. It's so different. It's nice. I feel equal with my lover now - maybe it's because I've always been intimidated and with men most of the time. Every time I'd be in a relationship I'd feel small and conscious that I'm a woman. But in this case I find myself even calling the shots* [laugh]

Int: does this apply to sex too?

Tee: [laugh] *when it comes to love-making, I'm always the one* [long laugh] - *I call the shots!*

Tee suggests a negotiation of sexual power in the sexual script between her and her partner. She also points out that this was not possible in her relationship with a

man, and in her current relationship she feels "equal" with her lover. In the next section I will explore this sense of equality in the sexual script between women, referring back to the opening quote by Maggy.

> *"…Any woman, whether you're butch or femme - I go for 50|50: you do me I do you. It's just how it is."*

As seen in the quote by Maggy, the notion of 50|50 relates to the sexual script between the two partners. This notion implies a series of negotiations between partners about how sex should take place between them; who penetrates whom and how, and how pleasure is achieved for each partner. Most participants, regardless of age or gender role, without being prompted called upon this notion of 50|50 in talking about their sexual arrangements. Gender expression lies at the core of this sexual arrangement or negotiation of a 'culture' of 50|50. The notion of 50|50 suggests that lesbians free themselves from gender roles (Rose and Zand, 2002) and modify sexual scripts in pursuit of more egalitarian relationships.

The concept of 50|50 is not foreign to South African public discourse. In 2009 the South African government's National Gender Machinery launched a 50|50 national campaign aimed at increasing equal representation of women in political and decision-making structures, as well as gender rights (Warby, 2009). Similarly popular music icons such South Africa's kwaito star Mandoza and the American girl's pop group Destiny's Child have also used 50|50 in their own songs, both claiming that a man and a woman should contribute 50|50 to a relationship. In both

settings, this arrangement has been about economics and the politics of gender relations.

In this research 50|50 intimates the reciprocal and egalitarian nature of a sexual lesbian relationship. It is a language of mutual (sexual) pleasure, sharing and how sex is organized, as Maggy (36 years old and mother of two) illustrates. This notion also challenges and rejects the role dynamics that have become normalized. It is an explicit language that is not veiled or obscured, as Maggy points out: "you do me, I do you". Like Maggy, Hlobo emphasizes the powerful potential of this sexual language and how it calls for mutual sexual satisfaction of each partner:

> Hlobo*: I was familiar with the thing of 50|50 because that's what I was told and that's what I was practicing.*
> I ask Hlobo what 50|50 is.
> Hlobo: *50|50 means "I give, you give" - you understand I give you and you give me. You satisfy me sexually and I satisfy you sexually.*

Like Tee who earlier illustrated her own relationship with a butch as "equal" in how they share responsibilities and chores around the house, Nestar (22 years old) who sees herself as *ibhujwa*[71], similarly articulates the notion of 50|50 in relating to her relationships with women. For both Tee and Nestar, 50|50 is also about how the gender roles in a relationship are organized:

> Nestar: *For me a relationship is all about 50|50. I don't want one person only to spend money and act like a guy. It's all about us being both women. It's all about 50|50 -*

[71] *Ibhujwa* is a style used by many young people to connote their sense of urban hip. It's a word borrowed from bourgeois, but in the township is not necessarily linked to class, but taste and ability to express a unique sense of style as well as language. It can be seen as an interpretation and mixture of localized/township version of hip-hop and punk styles.

everything must be 50|50

In the opening extract, Maggy also suggests that for her, 50|50 should take place regardless of her lover's gender expression. Herself a butch, Maggy articulates a desire for mutual pleasure, participation and reciprocity in the sexual act. This may be contrary to general assumptions about butch lesbians, as Pati (42 yrs and mother of three) suggested earlier and Jojo (17 yrs old) and Simi (19 yrs old) elaborate in the extracts to follow. Jojo and Simi were the only participants who initially claimed not to be practising 50|50 in their sexual relationships. Although both present masculine traits, they do not use the language of butch and femme in their interviews; instead they suggest that they are 'guys', local terminology used to refer to butch-looking lesbians in their township.

After a lengthy discussion about 50|50 both Jojo and Simi, who are best friends, felt that their long-term partners could persuade them to practice 50|50, but this persuasion had to accompanied by a level of trust, intimacy and commitment to a partner. In talking about the sexual nature of her relationship with her girlfriends, Jojo states:

Jojo: *I just like kissing and then do my business – the serious business. And I make sure that she gets satisfied. And I would ask her if she enjoyed it or she needs more. If I find that I robbed her, I'd make sure that where I lacked, I made time to get things balanced*.
Int: and do you allow girls to do the same thing to you?
Jojo: *You know, a girl – a girl will not. My friends allow their girls 50|50. I don't do 50|50. I don't want a girl to touch my breasts. I don't want her to touch me here. She can touch me elsewhere but not here* [pointing to her vagina]*. She can touch my hands, my legs and my stomach – but she mustn't go up or go down*.
Int: and how do you get satisfied?

Jojo: *I get satisfied – just right there* [laugh]*. Girls like robbing you, they sometimes fake that they're having a good time and you think you did a good job all to find out that she didn't feel anything. My aim is that the girl must be happy and satisfied and I'll also be satisfied then. But I don't want her to touch me or do anything. But I'm happy and fine after we do our thing. Do you get it?*

Int: and girls don't ask why they can't touch you?

Jojo: *I tell them straight out – 'you're a girl and I'm a guy. You go under me.' Actually before we even have sex we talk about what we each like and we would talk about 50|50. I'd tell her she would not get 50|50 with me. Maybe I could do 50|50 once I've been with a girl for 6 years and when I know her fully and trust her..*

Similarly, Simi articulates a notion about 50|50 that for her is very intimate and influenced by trust and requiring her to 'let down her guard'.

Int: So when your girlfriend asks you, what do you say?

Simi*: We talk about it before we start dating. First we become friends and we would talk about this. If we end up falling in love, she accepts my proposal then she would say "it's hard to be in a relationship with you Simi because you don't want 50|50". I would tell her that if she loves me then we won't do 50|50 and that would be it. I would tell her that I don't do 50|50.*

Int: So you don't want 50|50?

Simi: It depends on how long. You see, sometimes you're with a person for only three weeks and then you do 50|50 with that person - how is she going to look at you in the streets [uzokuthatha kanjani?]

Int: What does 50|50 mean to you? Where does it start and end?

Simi*: Eish – [*laugh]*. For me, that's why I don't like 50|50 - it means that what I do to you, you will do to me and that's not what I want. At times I would let a girl touch certain places, but not all.*

Unlike Magy and Pati above, Jojo and Simi, who also present masculine tropes, illustrate that they cannot easily practice 50|50 in their sexual relationships. This has to come with a series of negotiations with a potential lover, agreeing that 50|50 would or would not take place and consenting to an agreed sexual arrangement.

This negotiation is an important marker of a lesbian sexual script (see also Matebeni, 2009). Both partners have an equal chance to enter a sexual arrangement that is clear and openly discussed. They can each initiate and refuse sex during this negotiation (Rose and Zand, 2002). This negotiation challenges assumed power relations in sexual behaviour. The negotiation of 50|50 gives power to both parties and as Patricia McFadden (2003) argues: there is a liberating and political force in understanding the "connection between power and pleasure". Bibi illustrates the intimacy in her relationship and how it translates into her feeling pleasure and satisfaction.

Bibi reflects on the intimacy of her own relationships and how it relates to her being satisfied.

> Bibi: *You must have fun in a relationship and explore stuff - do things you've never done before. Communicating your needs and desires, wants and dreams as well as good sex is important. Sex is also important. If you get it all there's no need for you to look elsewhere and have a bootie call, 'cos you're satisfied. If you're happy in a relationship you can work on the few things that you don't like. I'm very happy in my current relationship because we communicate and talk about what we want and (do) not want and how to deal with things. We understand each other and make each other happy and make each other smile. She makes me happy. I'm 100% satisfied with everything even though there are small fights or misunderstandings, but we do talk.*

Jojo and Simi articulate their rejection and hesitation towards practicing 50|50 as a shield and protection of their own feelings. It was also related to their bodies and how they both felt that they were 'guys' and girls should not touch them. However in this articulation they also reveal their vulnerabilities and the need to protect and

shield such vulnerabilities through a rejection of 50|50. At the same time, they both articulate a desire for a relationship with 50|50, given time and trust. Magy, Hlobo and Pati who are all in the same age group (35-40 years), seem to defy the notion of butches not wanting mutual sex and having their bodies touched whereas Jojo and Simi, their younger counterparts, aged 17 and 19 respectively suggest that their rejection of being touched could be linked to their denial of femaleness or wanting to portray a dominant role in a relationship (Wilson, 2009). It remains unclear whether age plays a role in gender roles.

However these differences in age group do raise the question of whether older lesbians are less affected by gender roles (Rose and Zand, 2002). Jojo further complicates this notion of dominance by pointing out that during sex, she is satisfied when her partner gets pleasure. She prioritizes her partner's sexual pleasure and fulfillment above her own. In claiming this position, Jojo shows the complexity and diversity of sexualities. In her sexual script, she expresses that she is a "guy" and a girl must go "under" her and at the same time she derives gratification from meeting her lover's needs: "My aim is that a girl must be happy and satisfied". This may seem contradictory given that "gendered norms prioritize male sexual desire and pleasure over those of women" (Bay-Cheng, et al, 2009:520). In prioritizing her lover's (girl's) sexual pleasure over hers (as a "guy"), Jojo overturns gendered norms and sexual expectations.

The notion of mutual pleasure, reciprocity and touching during sex cannot be complete without talking about penetration, a contentious issue among some lesbians. In some situations it forces a few participants to be reminded of their sexual experiences with men, which for many were unpleasant. Participants would sometimes conflate the idea of penetration with a heterosexual experience and reflect the experience as "my issue was with him, being inside of me…" or preferring a lesbian sexual encounter because "no one is inserting into another".

Jojo and Simi allude to the contention of having a lover reciprocate what has been "done" to her. Both do not seem comfortable with that. Bianca Wilson (2009) found similar patterns in her study among African American lesbians in the USA. She notes that among the participants who "identified themselves as either aggressive, tomboy or dominant" they "rarely allowed partners to penetrate them". Two reasons were offered for rejecting penetration or being touched during sex. "One explanation was that hard studs were not comfortable with the parts of their bodies that defined them as female, mainly their breasts and vaginas. As such, a successful performance of the 'male' role during sex required that the hard stud's female body parts not be touched. Another reason concerned the meaning of being touched and seduced. That is, participants talked about the importance of maintaining the appearance of dominance in the sexual act for hard studs and how being touched sexually or being the 'bottom' took away that sense of dominance and control. The vulnerability of being sexually aroused and pleasured threatened the image of the dominant sexual partner" (Wilson, 2009:305). While this may be the case for Jojo

and Simi, to some extent, they both agreed that this dynamic has potential to change given time and trust.

Furthermore, this dynamic was also related to how they would be perceived by their peers when known to be touched or practicing 50|50. Jojo and Simi are in the same circle of friends, and earlier Jojo noted that her friends practice 50|50 with their girlfriends. Is it possible that Jojo and Simi claim to reject 50|50 as a 'show' or 'staging' as dominant in a sexual arrangement? Simi suggests this when pointing out if you do 50|50 with a girl you've been with for a short time (3 weeks in her case), "how will she look at you in the streets?" In stating this, Simi intimates the deeply intimate space of 50|50, where only her lover has the opportunity to see her vulnerabilities and her letting down her guard. She also demarcates the space of 'the streets' as public (for all to know and see) and the private, constituted in the domain of 50|50. Erving Goffman (1959:22-24) suggests that individuals continually perform during everyday interactions and what we see as observers, are rarely their 'true selves'. This performance, which is in a way manufactured with sets of behaviours and props to influence the observer in a particular way, is used to portray a picture and performance for the "front stage". The "back stage" where the "true self" is revealed and the performance is dropped is hidden from observers. For Simi and Jojo the latter is the domain of 50|50, an intimate space where they can relax and step out of character.

Pati suggests a different dynamic related to the experiences that penetration evokes. She links penetration to a time when she was in a heterosexual relationship and had to engage in penetrative sex despite her desires. Even though she loves the idea of 50|50 and subscribes to a more egalitarian sexual script, she finds it difficult to negotiate penetration in this dynamic. However like Jojo and Simi she may be persuaded to allow her lover to penetrate her, but this would compromise her stance.

Int: So, when you get into sex, do you allow her to touch you?
Pati: *Yes, I like it like that – we call it 50|50.*
Int: So, that means she can do anything to you?
Pati: *As long as we……I love it.*
Int: And the issue of dildos?
Pati: *That's where now I have a problem, but I've used them at some stage. You would see sometimes that the person you're involved with needs penetration. There are people who like to be penetrated. I personally don't like it. Even to do it to someone, I do it because that's what she wants. It's not something I like. I love romance* [smile, giggle].
Int: What is romance?
Pati: *It's feeling with hands, kissing and massaging and things like that, licking, whatever. Spanking is also part of it. I love that.*
Int: You like to be spanked or you spank?
Pati: *Most of the times, I spank because ladies hold back. I also like to be spanked at times.*
Int: So, if you have a girl who wants to penetrate you, what do you do?
Pati: *If I love her, I might end up sacrificing, but actually I don't like it. Sometimes I'd meet someone I really love and who wants to do this thing to me. I think I might end up compromising.*
Int: Why, why don't you like it?
Pati: *Because it reminds me of the time I was suppressing my own feelings and giving myself to a man because I wanted security and because of poverty. At that time, I didn't like it and didn't enjoy this sex, but I enjoyed his company. When it came to sex, I had to pretend that I liked it. I didn't even want it. So when a girl comes and wants to penetrate me – even fingering – I don't like that – I'm reminded of that time…That's how I feel, but I don't discourage people who are into that – and people are different. Some people don't want their breasts to be touched, others like it.*

Unlike the participants mentioned above, Lizi strongly feels that penetration is important in a sexual experience with a woman, regardless of her lover's gender roles or expressions. Like Magy, Nestar and others this forms part of a sexual negotiation and gender roles and is about an egalitarian sexual arrangement. Lizi attests:

> Lizi**:** *Every person I date must know from the outset that I don't want a woman who doesn't want to be penetrated. I like penetrating and being penetrated and that's what I want. I don't mind if a woman is butch or femme as long as they are flexible and has an open mind and know that they are a woman - I'm fine with that.*

Participants were also eager to talk about their own sexual pleasure in the language of having an orgasm / climax. Participants situated orgasms in the context of comfort and intimacy between them and their partner, as Lizi notes: "*it's comfortable and I think that's the reason why I would climax at the end of the day*". For many participants the strong emphasis on mutual pleasure, intimacy, touching, massaging and exploration with varied techniques contributed to their experience of orgasm (Holmberg, et.al, 2010).

Thando (36 year old professional) talked about how she enjoys sex with her young lover, who also boasts that she has many orgasms during sex. Thando situates this in a general conversation about being satisfied in a relationship and her own effort in optimizing her sexual performance with her young and energetic lover.

Thando: *Um - a relationship is a relationship, as long as she's satisfied in the house - what would make her go out and look for things? I'm not a boring person. We go out, we party. I mean, she parties there with her friends. I'm there and I'm not clingy. I don't like someone who will crowd me and she doesn't like someone like that either. She's a young kid, but she must enjoy, but also know that there are certain things that we draw a line on. I mean, I do club-hopping with her and my friends and it's nice. I don't want to be uptight and make her feel that she's young. I don't want to do that. As much as it's tiring - the sex is tiring because she still has the energy. With me - after the second round I'm out. So, I try by all means that I'm always sober and I've got my red bull and it keeps me going. So far so good, you know…She's young and she thinks she's got more experience than me when it comes to sex. Until she confessed the other day that "I thought I used to have them [orgasms], but with you…" I told her 'you need to take your time, relax, there's no rush. You always want to rush - you wanna come five times. Come once and it lasts you for an hour or so, you know.' Ja, so... I'm enjoying sex.*

Orgasm is also just about pure pleasure, as Hlobo exclaims after having sex with her girlfriend for the first time:

Hlobo: *I felt as if I was being reborn. I was a new-born. Oh, I could feel something, something that I'd never felt. Something I only got to understand late that it was a release or a climax - a sensation that I felt in the knees, sometimes in my feet as if I had needles. Sometimes my head was as if it was shaking and my brain was moving. I did this and it was so good! Now, I can't keep my mouth shut...I had never felt like this before. Men didn't know such joy. …This thing is so nice!*

Conclusion

It is clear from this chapter that much has been omitted in literature on female same-sex sexuality. In particular, the focus on sexual behaviour: attraction, intimacy, desire and pleasure offer a rich exploration of female sexuality and sex between women. The confidence women have in attracting other women and sexually

pleasing them cannot be underestimated. A sexual relationship between women has potential to be an egalitarian relationship of mutual pleasure. Furthermore, it also shows that relationships between women are not only bodily, but also social and destabilize existing notions of sex and gender. Through exploring lesbian sexual relationships the chapter has shown that these distinct sexual roles do not only reject heterosexual norms for sex, they challenge them and present different and complex forms of negotiating sexuality.

50|50 emerges from the above as a central ingredient into black lesbian's sexual experience. It is a dynamic that allows both partners to be in control and equally determine the nature and parameters of their sexual arrangement. This arrangement intimates the social and political form and context that black lesbians engage in sexually. It challenges dominant/hegemonic constructions of sex, gender and power relations in the sexual act. Positioning sex as an arrangement of equality powerfully suggests that even relationships of exchange can be equally beneficial to both partners, including the negotiation and achievement of mutual satisfaction, and situates this in its own localised language.

CONCLUSIONS

The question of meaning in relation to black lesbian identities and sexualities has been explored in this thesis, focusing on various dimensions of black lesbian life. As an initial position, this study set out to understand what the category lesbian means, its significance, and how it is experienced in everyday life in Johannesburg. Through ethnographic material and life-story interviews with twenty black lesbians living in Johannesburg and its surrounding areas, a number of conclusions can be reached, which all raise interest in further areas of investigation.

What remains clear from this study is that the formation of lesbian is mutable and evolving, so there cannot be a single formulation of the category. In line with the various works on identity that have been explored, the identity lesbian is in constant flux. It is also both cosmopolitan and grounded in local discourses. Here I am referring to the ways in which sexual and gender identity in South Africa widely make use of English terms as their self-reference, yet retain local paradigms (Sinnott, 2004 referring to Altman). At the same time, meanings attached to black lesbian identity can be seen in two interrelated ways. In the first instance black lesbian identity is expressive. It is shaped by aesthetics, style and pleasure. Secondly, it is simultaneously political – crafting claims to power, and a politics of inclusion.

There are varied ways in which the notion of expression is played out in relation to identity. In particular are the ways in which forms of language make identity. At times, language can work against identity. The discussions above about the "slippery" and contentious language of feminism showed how it has excluded many from associating with feminist identity. In other instances, language has worked as a way of making identity and difference invisible. The discussions on the notion of a "rainbow nation" as well as the ways "queer" operate have similarly blurred the racial, class, gender and sexuality differences among people (Gqola, 2001 and Garber, 2001). In different and complicated ways, the language of the contentious form of "curative/corrective rape", as I have argued, complicates the victim|perpetrator relationship.

However, the use of common language can also facilitate accessibility and group identification. The everyday experiences of lesbians as they walk through the city of Johannesburg illustrate how being "street smart" and speaking the lingo of the street affords one the possibility to easily navigate spaces. This has been similarly captured in the research methods carried out in this current study. Commonalities between the researcher and participants, through the use of language, have similarly afforded rich and in-depth explorations of subjective experiences of lesbian life. One of these explorations has been to resurface the meaning behind forms of self-styling and gender expressions. Within this was the salient language of communicating desire, women's expectations for and within relationships (Moore,

2006) as well as communicating to others one's choice of gender presentation. This exploration suggests a widening of the popular lesbian categories butch and femme.

The ways in which language functions as a source of power and pleasure emerged in relation to sexual pleasure, intimacy and eroticism. The language of 50|50 deployed by many participants in this research, emphasises emotional intimacy, mutual sexual pleasure and trust in relationships. It has been successfully used as a strategy for creating mutual pleasure and equality, while challenging heteronormative and dominant constructions of sexuality. 50|50 has demonstrated that relations between gender (and sex) are not only about power struggles, but about constant negotiation of mutual power sharing and pleasure. They can also make visible the vulnerabilities of those involved.

Participants who may be deemed 'butch' (although not referring to themselves as such), exhibited masculine styles that were in contrast to popular notions of 'how to be men'. Others juxtaposed the two images of 'butch' and 'femme' suggesting an expanded category of the 'versatile'. Many of these participants showed that rather than conforming to popular norms, their emphasis was on being self-expressive. Through this, women were being transgressive and rebelling against strong conventional norms (Moore, 2006:132), norms of being lesbian and being a woman. This was similarly illustrated through ethnographic records of lesbian and gay contests.

Although these contests were not easily read as 'beauty contests', there are however some resemblances. Lesbian and gay contests, like beauty contests, demonstrate the proliferation of Western and global styles and influences (Hansen, 2004:383). This was shown through the use of global forms of fashion and clothing (the discussion on "Speedos") or the restaging of popular cultural icons and their music. However, these were negotiated in the context of settings of local norms of beauty, gender and sexuality (Cohen, et.al, 1996). Secondly, like 'beauty contests' I would argue that these contests are similarly political projects and articulate different political positions located in each country/context. Nakedi Ribane (2006), writing on the history of the beauty industry in South Africa, shows how (heterosexual) beauty contests were always implicated and entangled in the political climate and politics of the times. This was a similar notion utilised by the Rev Thandekiso in the first contest organised by the church where he called upon popular discourses of the 1976 student uprising, political activism and religiosity, and locating these in the 'staging' of beauty. In another instance, the contests were articulated as political forms of creating space and visibility of black lesbians.

This brings us to the second and interrelated crucial meaning of black lesbian, as a deeply political project. In the first chapter, I demonstrated, among other things, the ways in which the feminist project and 'queer' have been criticised for blurring multiple identities. Arguing for multiple and interconnected positions, de la Rey (1997:7) attested: "being a women is not distinct from either black, working class, (and I add) lesbian". This explicitly shows how one's identity cannot be made partial

from the rest. These occur simultaneously. At the same time, these are linked to the moment of democratisation.

Claiming space is a crucial aspect of black lesbian life. It is both about challenging the ways spaces are assumed to be heteronormative as well as reconfiguring spaces for the inclusion of sexual diversity. This operates as a way of crafting political claims to inclusion. The narration of the court case and the perpetrators' doing, which in itself is a political act, has illustrated how the black lesbian identity is linked to the moment of democratisation. In the 'theatre' of the court, perpetrators showed how black lesbians were vulnerable in their own township spaces, as they remained targets of violence and murder. Even in this space of the court, the lesbian identity was similarly vulnerable. The "stripping" of identity by the judge was an act of violence.

Black lesbian claims to inclusion, spaces and safety highlight the ways in which lesbians are resilient, complex and powerful subjects. Although their identity demarcates difference, they powerfully utilise it to claim inclusion (Cock and Bernstein, 2002). In this way, black lesbian identity operates as a way of making democracy/the democratic process accountable not only to itself, but to the larger population (Laclau, 2003:367).

What this study has shown is how lesbians occupy subject positions in which they determine the structures and meanings of their lives. Their narratives show that

they inhabit the world actively, not only as victims or in relation to others, but also as conscious subjects that make meanings of their lives: subjects who are actively engaging with the world we inhabit.

The study of lesbians, or rather the study of the social from the viewpoint of lesbians, has been deeply enriching. However, it has presented its own limits. No thesis is without limitations. Numerous themes emanating from this study have been minimally explored, allowing for possible future explorations. Among the many, a similar study would be enriched through the exploration of, among other things: dynamics in lesbian relationships and partnerships; parenting and family life; the relationship that trans identities play in lesbian identity; as well as explorations of rural lesbian life. These, starting from this current study, can further enrich the understanding of the world we live in.

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