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**Sexual politics, place and agency:
Discourses of gender non-conforming young people
on the urban peripheries of Cape Town**

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Sexual politics, space and agency: discourses of gender non-conforming young people on the urban peripheries of Cape Town (A draft)

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Abstract

There has been little documented research on the experiences of gender non-conforming/queer (in this paper, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersexed) persons in peripheral and predominantly 'coloured' suburbs in the Western Cape of South Africa. This paper will focus on how sexuality and space intersects in the lives of young gender non-conforming persons residing on the urban peripheries of Cape Town. The discussion will be framed within an engagement with feminist research methodologies, particularly intersectionality theory. How do these young women and men talk about their sexual identities – how is the personal and the political understood, and what kinds of resistance to normative constructions of race and sexuality do they articulate? How does geographical space, mediated by South Africa's history, and class, located within the socio-economic, impact on how gendered and sexual identities are experienced?

Background

There has been little research conducted on the possibilities of expressing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexed, and queer identities in peripheral and predominantly 'coloured'¹ suburbs in the Western Cape of South Africa. Most research in recent years (see ActionAid, 2009; Gqola, 2007; Mkhize, et al 2010; Nel & Judge, 2008, Sanger, 2010) has focused on discrimination and gender violence against black African (read in the most limiting construction of 'black') lesbians in South Africa's townships. In short, most studies have centralised the ways that heteronormative² values give rise to, and sustain, violence against black African lesbian women residing in South Africa's townships. As noted by Zethu Matebani (2008, p. 89), "Much work that is written about black lesbians often positions us as victims of violence, hate crimes or relates our existence to that of gay men." These studies have essentially excluded the specific experiences of persons living on the peripheral suburbs of Cape Town, in spaces designated as 'coloured' through forced removals.³ We can merely speculate, for instance, that under-resourced and marginalised communities such as those on the Cape Flats of Cape Town would be 'ideal' spaces for the expression of various

¹ The contentious term 'coloured' will refer to the racialised construction that saw people of 'mixed race' forced into the peripheral suburbs of Cape Town, as part of the 1950s Group Areas Act in South Africa.

² Norms around gender and sexuality that naturalise and centralise heterosexuality, while pathologising and demonising same-sex desire and homosexual identities.

³ As part of the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act 'legislated race-based residential segregation in 1950 and caused the forced removal of approximately 750,000 people in urban areas between the 1960s and 1980s' (Salo, 2003, p. 364).

kinds of violence against gender non-conforming persons. But, essentially, we do not really know what the experiences of young, queer people in specific spaces in South Africa are: in spaces with a predominantly 'coloured' community, we know very little about how, sexuality, race, gender, and space works.

As part of an International Congress of Psychology fellowship in 2012, my initial intention was to explore the dynamics that make possible the expression of gender non-conformity for youth, and the kinds of opportunities available to these young people to re/invent their identities in specific spaces – urban peripheral suburbs of Cape Town. In a localised and context-specific study, conducted over 13 months, I engaged 31 participants (8 biological men and 23 biological women) in 10 communities. On the Cape Flats, these included Bellville-South, Bridgetown, Delft, Elsies River, Grassy Park, Kuils River, and Mitchell's Plain. For the Southern Suburbs, the communities included Ottery, Lansdowne, Rondebosch East, and Wetton.

In general, the paucity of research focused on 'coloured' communities suggests that there are many realities which remain unexplored, and undocumented in mainstream research. Elaine Salo's work on gendered personhood in the peripheral urban locations of the Western Cape has, in many ways, been fundamental in beginning the conversation on the intersections between race, gender, space, and sexuality in marginalised, predominantly 'coloured' communities in South Africa. One aspect of her research, which centres on how 'cultural flows' from the global north does not necessitate an assimilation of these values by youth in the global south, is significant in understanding how youth on the Cape Flats recreate identities through mediating their local contexts in multiple ways (see Salo 2003; Salo et al 2010). Further, as Salo and Davids (2009) narrate in their study of the meanings of femininity in high school Matric Balls in urban South Africa, "few historical studies have reflected upon the manner in which *previously marginalised black communities prior to forced removals* have acquired multiple new meanings since resettlement" (Salo 2003, p. 348, my emphasis). My research is a contribution to feminist thinking around the mediations between race, gender, class, sexuality, and space in South Africa, with a specific interest in how space mediates non-conforming gender and sexual identities.

Doing feminist research

Intersecting identities, situated-ness, and multiplexed subjectivities

What is important is to analyse how specific positioning and (not necessarily corresponding) identities and political values are constructed and interrelate and affect each other in particular locations and contexts (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 200).

What Yuval-Davis refers to here is how intersectionality, as a "major analytical tool... challenges hegemonic approaches to the study of stratification as well as reified forms of identity politics" (2006, p. 201). In her discussion *Intersectionality and Feminist Politics* (2006), she emphasises the importance of exploring the "particular ways in which the different divisions are intermeshed" (p. 200), and how "the specific social, political and

economic processes involved in each historical instance is important” (2006: 200). Recent feminist scholarship, however, has seen a critique of intersectional theory, particularly as the latter has evolved from Kimberlé Crenshaw’s initial conceptualisation in the early 1990s in the United States. Crenshaw’s focus on the intersections between race and sex, as an intervention in the ways that race ‘difference’ was *not* being conceptualized by first-wave feminists, has been critiqued by Jasbir Puar, who argues:

“... in precisely in the act of performing this intervention, it also produces an ironic reification of sexual difference as a/the foundational one that needs to be disrupted—that is to say, sexual and gender difference is understood as the constant from which there are variants. As transnational, postcolonial, and critical race theorists have pointed out, the centrality of the subject positioning of white women has been re-secured through the way in which intersectionality has been deployed” (Puar, 2011, no page).

The documented research on the rape and murder of black lesbians in townships alludes to, but in fact, obscures, the politics of space and its interconnections with race and racism in South Africa’s present. A post-colonial feminist analysis allows for the naming of race and space as a ‘specific positioning’ that requires unpacking. In many ways, the focus on sexual identities (as the foundational subjectivity that Puar speaks of above) and violence has obscured the complex mediating specific positioning of race and space, as these operate in gender and sexual violence. The current climate in South Africa, which strongly leans toward discourses of reconciliation and rainbow-nationhood, has allowed for a certain kind of lull that is discouraging of less liberal forms of race and racism talk. As Pumla Gqola (2010, p. 16-17) importantly articulates:

While it has become customary to insist that we need to move beyond race markers in South Africa, I see this project as premature given the continued ways in which race continues to matter in South Africa in social, political and economic ways. Identities marked as race have also taken on added meanings in addition to, and other than, those bestowed through slavocracy, colonialism and apartheid. Part of the anti-racist and post-colonialist critical project needs to take these meanings seriously rather than placing them under erasure and denying the agency with which they were invested with new, conflicting meanings by subjects thus classified, and self-identifying, over 350 years. To identify as Black in its various gradations, therefore, is always more than simply rehearsing ‘an archive of one’s victimisation’.

My research is an exploration of the intersections between race, gender, class, and sexuality in the lives of gender non-conforming young people, in specific spaces, at a particular moment in history. The focus on geographic situatedness - and its close ties with race - provides a lens to explore how space and its interconnections with the socio-economic, mediates the experience of gender non-normativity.⁴

⁴ This term will be used interchangeably with ‘gender non-conformity’ to illustrate how heterosexuality operates as normative.

In and out: race, space, class, and sexuality

In an article which reflects on the research encounter between a 'coloured' woman and herself (also raced as coloured), Zimitri Erasmus writes that "not much has been written regarding power dynamics in cases where the researcher and informant share an identity and history" (2000, p. 74). She notes that sharing elements of this history and identity do not mean that "problems of power" disappear (2000, p. 74), but that these "problems" emerge in various ways. Even though I was, in some ways, constructed as an 'insider' by respondents residing on the Cape Flats, I was also construed as an 'outsider' because I live outside of the Cape Flats in a middle-class community closer to the city. Markers of difference were emphasised through my use of English, and participants' use of English (at times, 'kombuis' Afrikaans, i.e. mixed English and Afrikaans), as well as the resources I had access to (a car, for example). All these acted as symbols of race, class and education. So, on the one hand, I was an insider to the participants, and on the other, I was not.

Erasmus lengthily discusses this complexity of sameness/otherness in the following narrative, based on her relationship with Mrs. Benny:

Being a historically classified coloured woman myself and from initially working-class parents, there is a sense in which I am *from* Mrs Benny's world. I recognized some of her cultural references and shared some of her experiences. This was manifested in moments of recognition between us. Simultaneously, being middle-class now and having a sense of cultural distance from the worlds of working-class coloured women enabled me to see and value the particularity of her world. These partialities created particular positioning on the part of both Mrs Benny and myself in the research process. The moments of recognition were manifestations of a loose ensemble of experience, which can be seen as part of a medley of that which goes into the making and re-making of gendered coloured identities in South Africa (Erasmus, 2000, p. 79).

As a formally educated researcher in the 'middle' – in terms of 'race', class and sexuality – I was particularly sensitive to not perpetuating what bell hooks calls "class elitism", a "useless", "politically nonprogressive", "narcissistic, self-indulgent" performance that serves to "create a gap between theory and practice" (1994, p. 64). When some participants asked about my sexual orientation, there appeared to be an understandable claim to an authentic sexual identity on the parts of some young women identifying as lesbians. I spent time responding to this question, since participants shared with me very personal narratives of their own. At moments during the interview phase of the project, and depending on the context (how the participant and I felt with each other), I began to disclose this freely, not only when participants asked. As a woman in a non-heteronormative heterosexual relationship, or as a "non-straight-identified heterosexual" (Jeppesen, 2013, p. 147), it was very important to respond in ways that were not defensive, but to engage the question and respond as a feminist. It was significant to highlight my disidentification with normative constructions of heterosexuality in order for participants to understand that my aim was not as voyeur to their 'difference' as queer subjects.

I also attempted to connect with the participants through reminders that, although we did not share a sexual identity, we do share a history. At times, I used the lingo they used, or we shared experiences of the community, for example. For participants who lived on the Cape Flats, especially those without tertiary education (sometimes not grade 12), our material differences appeared to be starker, and our personal and political values more dissimilar than with participants who lived in more middle-class communities. Naturally, some of this was mediated by the difference in age between the participants and me. Material assets mattered so that the car I drove, how I dressed, and the language I used, were signifiers of identity, and thus our differences. It didn't matter that these material signifiers were not excessive – it mattered that I had them. I *felt* middle-class and educated, especially within these spaces where personal and community resources were scarce.

However, outside of the interviews, I also had to create boundaries that were not too flexible, to the extent that I was expected to play multiple roles – as researcher, therapist, friend who was constantly available - in ways that I could not manage. In becoming the therapist, I became aware of my shifting subjectivity as a researcher. I tried to respond appropriately when participants were struggling with decisions, and the difficulties of being young adults in the context of being unemployed. Most of the time, these conversations took place over new media such as *whatsapp* and *blackberry messenger (bbm)*. The participants' lives began to matter to me – I felt a sense of wanting to protect them; to help them make better decisions. My age - being older and more experienced in the world - meant that I had to be conscious of not behaving as a parent, since I was, in fact, closer in age to the participants' parents, rather than the participants. At the same time, I felt that I too had to 'give', to tell stories, in the knowledge that this would enable trust and respect in the relationship. Initially, investment in the girls' lives became very important to me in the research process, but I had to create boundaries around what to give, and not to give. In one instance, the parents of a participant wanted to develop a relationship with me. Again, I had to create a margin where these parents understood the significance of my connection to their daughter to be the central relationship. Similarly, the participants' began to trust and become protective of me too. However, there was constant negotiation in my head around what to say/not say to participants, what to 'allow' when sexual innuendos were made, and when not to judge their decisions and choices.

Despite the racialised history that we shared, the differences between the participants and I substantiate Kirin Narayan's idea that a "native" researcher is "assumed to be an insider who will forward an authentic point of view to the research community" (1993, p. 676). While in some ways, my point of view of the research process and my engagement with the participants was that of an insider, I was also located as an outsider to their communities, and their daily lives. I could easily, without self-reflection, become the 'observer' to their lived realities. My sensitivity to the dichotomy of observer/observed, however, assisted in how I worked at being a participant in the research process, rather than a voyeur of their lives.

While there were moments when the participants and I were able to discuss oppression in its multiple forms, and how this impacted on their lives, as well as my own, the space for this was mostly with participants who lived in more middle-class communities. Even though I never made a claim to a 'coloured' identity, the attempts I made to create a dialogue about

race as imagined, but with material effects, were not very successful with participants on the Cape Flats. With participants in working-class communities, it would have taken a lot more time to reach the point where an open discussion around power, oppression, and discrimination would be possible. Even though participants were able to articulate unfairness, or a situation where they experienced violence, for instance, for the working-class gender non-conforming young people in my study, there appeared to be a disconnect between these experiences and how they understood them as oppression or discrimination.

Moving between different homes - my current residential home, the home where I grew up, and the academic home I had created - enacted a “multiplex subjectivity with many crosscutting identifications” (Narayan, 1993, p. 676). The shifting between these spaces enabled intense reflection on the slipperiness and non-fixity of our identities as racialised, gendered, classed, and sexualised subjects within a post-colony such as South Africa. It also allowed for an examination of “the ways in which each one of us is situated in relation to the people we study” (Narayan, 1993, p. 678). I experienced feelings of frustration, and at points, hopelessness, at the situation I saw young people struggling to survive – poverty, unemployment, a lack of navigational capacity to plan their lives and set goals, homophobia, and sometimes outright denial of the homophobia they experienced within their families and communities. But, I also saw agency in moments – the ability to, within these trying circumstances, desire to do things differently, and to dream.

What the participants said

My analyses of participants’ discourses are a co-construction. While I have tried as much as possible to provide the space for participants to ‘speak for themselves’ in the research, the analysis presented here is my own; based on my feminist epistemologies and thinking. Some of the participants’ narratives I share here, can obviously be read, and hence, co-constructed, in multiple ways.

Space, place, and sexuality

Salo et al. (2010) note that race-based laws “imbued physical space with political and socio-economic meanings” implicating the everyday lives of black people (p. 300). The apartheid project “effectively led to the creation of a marginalised socioeconomic underclass that mapped fairly closely onto race.” Nineteen years after the formal abolition of apartheid, the “black underclass continues to live on the margins of cities such as Cape Town” (p. 300).

In speaking about Cape Town as a space where they could live as gender non-conforming persons, participants in this study referred to both the city centre of Cape Town (Cape Town central business district), as well as Cape Town the city, in comparison to other cities in South Africa. Of the participants who grew up in other provinces, all of them felt that Cape Town was more open to, and more accepting of, gender non-conforming persons.

Cynthia, a 20-year old lesbian, completing her 2nd year in Linguistics at the University of the Western Cape, grew up in the Eastern Cape, and had the following to say about Cape Town as a city:

I find it easier to be open in Cape Town 'cause ...here there's an urban area, you find a lot of different people here so this is a different culture, whereby in the Eastern Cape there's a fixed culture. Sure it's urban but there's more of a fixed culture in the way of thinking, you find very few people who are gay and out, you could see someone is gay obviously, but they gonna [say they are] straight or bi cause it's easier if you say you're bi.

Bevan, a 21-year old gay male from Johannesburg who had recently moved to Cape Town, and was working as a service representative at a television network company, similarly felt that:

Yes, in comparison to Jo'burg, it's so easy to be gay in Cape Town. In Jo'burg I couldn't be true to myself... I was out in Jo'burg, everyone knew I was gay, but at the same time it was 'ha, Bevan is gay' and in Cape Town, I found it so easy [because] gay people are all over.

22-year old Sarah, originally from Oudtshoorn in the Western Cape, and completing her 4th year in Law at the University of the Western Cape, spoke of her experiences in her hometown as an 'out' lesbian:

Cape Town, I must say, has in different ways empowered me seeing that I'm a lesbian and this is the capital of the gays... For me it was easier being around people who are also gay in Cape Town than people who are also gay in Oudtshoorn... You would see gay guys (it's not that much), you would see them okay, they're gay, they would call them 'moffies' or whatever. But for lesbians to come out in Oudtshoorn is still not easy.

Similarly, 25-year old Lana, a 4th year Education student at the University of the Western Cape, felt that Oudtshoorn was a particularly difficult place for her to be openly lesbian. Lana felt comfortable being out in Cape Town, where she was studying for her degree, but not in her hometown. She articulated that this is the reason she does not want to go back home, that Oudtshoorn "is small".

All the participants saw the city centre, Cape Town, as more 'open' to diverse sexualities. Alison, a 21-year old unemployed lesbian who had been out for many years, from Mitchell's Plain, noted how:

There are lots of gays, lesbians, gay clubs and stuff like that. It's lekker⁵ there, there you feel at home, you feel comfortable because there's lot of lesbians and gays like you who treat you equally so you feel 'fitted in' there... At home, it's different; I must look around me if I can kiss Wendy.

⁵ In this case, "lekker" means "nice" or "good".

Zakaria and Bevan, 24 and 21-years old respectively, are a gay couple living in Rondebosch-East. In a conversation with these two respondents, they detailed how space and safety work in certain suburbs of Cape Town, and how this is linked to class and religion:

- Nadia: Back to resources, you drive a car, you are mobile and you can go where you want to go. So around Rondebosch-East, Wetton, Lansdowne, where would you be able to go as an individual gay man or as a couple? Where you would be able to express yourself freely?
- Zakaria: Everywhere
- Bevan: There are places like...
- Zakaria: Not outside the Mosque
- Bevan: But like in Moslem Wembley
- Zakaria: That's very true but that was never a joke, hey
- Bevan: No, there are places that have strong....
- Zakaria: Masculine and homophobic...
- Bevan: And also religiously, if you go to Lansdowne for instance, where there's a Muslim population and in Islam it's not okay to be gay, it's harder, it's difficult to go to a place that has a strong religious environment, it's difficult to be comfortable. I didn't feel comfortable in holding his hand in front of all Muslims, thinking that a hate crime could happen, they could have ... done something to us, so I was reluctant to be his boyfriend.

Noting that the Cape Town CBD, some parts of the Southern Suburbs, and the Atlantic Seaboard, are 'at least gay-friendly', Zakaria and Bevan spoke of the community where they live, as well as surrounding areas, narrating the following:

- Zakaria: ...I wouldn't hang out here
- Nadia: What do you mean by 'here'?
- Zakaria: Athlone, Lansdowne, Rondebosch-East, I don't hang out here
- Nadia: Where do you hang out?
- Zakaria: Green Point, Town, everywhere.

Class and socio-economic realities

Physical resources or lack thereof, played a role in how participants' performed their sexual identities. In what follows, Zakaria and Bevan, Coco, and Alison and Wendy, reveal how having and not having resources affects one's possibilities of living as an 'out' gay, transgendered, and lesbian subject:

- Nadia: Do you think it's different when you are a middle class gay man? Do you think it's different for you compared to a working class gay man?
- Zakaria: It backs up what I was saying earlier. If I felt like I could not be financially independent with my parents, I couldn't be strong in my identity 'cause I was dependent on them. How can I assert my identity? My identity is now dependent on them because I'm dependent on their money.

In contexts where participants came from financially struggling families, their ability to live independently, is even harder, and leaves them open to all kinds of abuse. Coco, a transgendered woman from Mitchell's Plain, echoed Zakaria's comment above. Living on the street, wherever she can find a place to sleep, and unemployed, Coco related the following:

I can't be the person that I really wanna be because I don't have a job and I don't have a stable place. That is keeping me back in my life.

Alison and Wendy, a couple living in a wendy house in Mitchell's Plain, explained how they were often subjected to homophobic abuse from Wendy's brother because they lived on the property of Wendy's family home. Not having the economic means to live elsewhere, his threats extended to "burning down" their wendy house:

He makes comments like "wat is die van vrou en vrou - die is verkeerd (*what is this about? Woman and woman – this is wrong*)". [He] is being like this about me being a lesbian because he's very rude. He's gonna burn our wendy house down (Wendy).

Overall, participants who resided in Rondebosch-East, Wetton, and Ottery appeared to have more options than participants who lived in Delft, Mitchell's Plain, Elsie's River and Bridgetown due to economic resources within their families, and resources accumulated through becoming self-sustainable due to formal education beyond high school. For example, where many of the participants who lived in the Southern Suburbs owned cars, or had access to their parents' cars, the majority of the participants I spoke to who resided on the Cape Flats, did not own a car and very few had access to their parents' cars. Participants who are economically more resourced, such as Zoë and Maira from Wetton, and Zakaria and Bevan from Rondebosch-East, could afford to move away from home and live openly as lesbian and gay, perhaps not entirely freely within a heteronormative context, but could, at least, be financially independent of their parents, and hence make their own decisions about who they live with, how to spend their time, and who they spend their time with. For participants like Sarah, Lana, Selwyn, Cynthia, and Seth who moved to Cape Town from another city to study further, they too were able to recreate their identities as lesbian/gay/transgender subjects outside of the confines of the cultural and religious homophobic value systems of their families and communities. Even though these same value systems exist in Cape Town's peripheral suburbs, Sarah, Lana, Selwyn and Cynthia are less restricted by the value systems they grew up in – they are able to redefine themselves, and live more freely, outside of the familiarity of their hometowns. For participants who are less economically resourced, which was more than three-quarters of the participants in this study, they were more subjected to the value systems within their families and communities; it is harder for them to make independent decisions about how they want to live, and who they want to spend their time with as gender non-conforming subjects.

It became clear that participants did not regard their communities as safe spaces in which to express their sexual orientation. 'Home' was mostly spoken of as a repressive space that was rigid in terms of gender and sex binaries. Cape Town, the city centre, was described as having a queer presence and visibility; a community that the participants in this study identified as desirable. However, this queer visibility is marked by race, highlighting the

spatial divisions that have been inherited from South Africa's apartheid history. In referring to gay and lesbian social spaces in the Cape Town CBD, specifically nightclubs which are mostly populated by white queers, Maira from Wetton stated how she found these spaces "limiting in the sense like it's hard for them too, like they only know that world. If I'm mixing with them I'm like in their world." Jamie, too, regarded clubs in Cape Town CBD as "white" spaces that she didn't frequent unless she was out with white friends. Lucinda similarly noted the "racial dynamics" at clubs in central Cape Town: even though she used to go to nightclubs, the "dynamics between racial groups" led to her to stop visiting these spaces. Selwyn explained how race and sexual identity are connected, and revealed in which clubs one visits:

...I will be honest and say it's predominantly white, all of the clubs within the CBD to me are predominantly white, with the exclusion of *Rosies* which is situated a block from other clubs, so race definitely plays a role. There's interplay between the type of clubs and the race [of people] who frequent them.

The politics of sexuality and race

Access to formal education, more often than not, impacted on how respondents articulated and named their sexual identities, i.e. as an identity that is personal and private, or as one that is political. It became clear that those who were formally educated beyond high school were more likely to articulate their sexual identities as political, and to note the links between race, class, and sexuality. This appeared to be the case whether participants were from working class or middle class coloured communities.

- Nadia: Do you think that being gay is a political identity?
Zakaria: I think very much, especially in South Africa it should, it must be.
Nadia: Is it political for you?
Zakaria: For me, yes, it must be political. At a class level, I think there's too little politics played in South African homosexual identity. We fought the discrimination against homophobia, it's finished. We have people like Zackie [Achmat]; those are enshrined in our Constitution. They are there, it's finished, no one is gonna take it away from us no matter what Jacob Zuma sings - it's there, they can't take it away. What they can take away is that the laws are different for you and me now as opposed to lesbians in Khayelitsha; those are different things. That's where politics comes in, that is a class thing, that is a political thing...

In the same vein, Sarah spoke about the importance of connecting struggles:

Our rights are violated much more. In terms of the remarks, in terms of the rape, the abuse, physical abuse, the way they categorise us, in terms of fighting against this. I would say socially I don't think there's much more we can do. We can try and form more groups but I think forming more [groups] just shows other people or straight people that *we are groups*, we're different. That is wrong - that's why I enjoy being part or supporting any group, whether we're standing for feeding the cats on

campus, support just to show that there is no difference. There are no differences between me and the next person, especially when it comes to sexual preference.

Sarah's narrative engages Puar's (2011) argument around excess, although this argument speaks specifically about how the category 'woman of colour' within intersectional analysis produces an Other, and hence naturalises whiteness. The 'woman of colour', like a (black) lesbian, "must invariably be shown to be resistant, subversive, or articulating a grievance" (2011, no page). Sarah's narrative critiques the idea of queer gender and sexuality as *excess*; more than heterosexuality, and therefore *different from* and *Other*. Her narrative also points to the unwise idea of one struggle (sexual rights, for example) as separable from another – feeding the cats on campus, for instance. Once sexual rights becomes the primary and foundational struggle, it runs the risk of undermining equally significant struggles, such as racism, classism, land redistribution, and globalisation, for instance. One example of this is the protest (and the resistance to this protest) by the feminist lesbian campaign, *One in Nine*, in late 2012 at Jo'Burg Pride.⁶ In response to *Gay Pride* having become an increasingly a-political space which marginalises (if not ignores) the intersections between race and sexuality, the Campaign aimed to disrupt this norm by demanding a minute of silence for the black lesbians who had been raped and murdered because of their sexuality. The resistance, which I won't go into detail about here, points to the ways in which sexuality, tied to whiteness and consumptive performance in the case of Jo'Burg Pride, silences the intersections between sexuality, black bodies, and place (black lesbians who have been raped and murdered often reside in working-class and impoverished communities). A conversation with Zakaria and Bevan revealed these intersections:

- Zakaria: It's easy to celebrate the right you have; it's not always easy to celebrate a right that someone else doesn't have. So Gay Pride is about celebrating the right you have - it's fine, it's happy, it's lekker. But there are people who are not able to exercise those rights even though they have it and that is not brought into Pride
- Bevan: No, but at the same time, listen to what you're saying: you as a Moslem man [who is] homosexual is not allowed in Islam but you've made the decision for yourself
- Zakaria: I can because I'm wealthy
- Bevan: I wasn't brought up in a wealthy family myself - you need to choose...
- Zakaria: You're wealthy compared to people in Khayelitsha, Bevan, and you're not permanently threatened with rape.

To the exclusion of the participants quoted above, respondents in this study did not name their sexual identities as political, or necessarily make the links between sexual orientation, as a protected right enshrined in the Constitution which was hard fought for, and their sexual identities as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered. This appeared to be the case for how these young, gender non-conforming persons also understood race, and racialisation in the current South African context. When participants did identify as

⁶ See <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-10-12-00-no-cause-to-celebrate-a-racist-pride>;
<http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/dipikanath/2012/10/10/gay-pride/>

'coloured', they meant 'not-black': 'coloured' identities were regarded as a specific category, not necessarily understood as racialised, but as behavioural, cultural, and spatial. The following are some examples:

I don't have a problem in identifying as 'coloured'. Being black, being white, being Indian, being whatever, it doesn't make you, once you don't wanna be proud of what you are, then there's problems (Sarah).

Lameez accepts her identity as 'coloured', noting that "they raised me to tell me I'm coloured so..." For Yasmeen, accent and place is what determines one's racial identity: "maar ek is nie a wit vrou nie; ek is nog altyd 'n coloured want ek bly in die coloured area (*but I am not a white woman; I am still coloured because I live in a coloured area*)."

However, Jamie did not define 'coloured' identities by place. She noted:

Well, nowadays it doesn't actually matter which areas, it's just the whole attitude and perception they [coloured people] give off. So you can get a coloured *gam*⁷ person who lives here in Rondebosch...like a boy down my road...

Leslie, too, differentiated between 'coloured' people by stating:

But I am making an example... wherever you go, you know how to behave yourself. Then you get the coloured people wattie weet nie hoe om hulle self te gedra nie....hulle gaan tekere [*they don't know how to behave themselves...they go crazy*]. I don't like that, 'cause I am not like that. That puts me off.

For Jamie and Leslie, 'coloured' identities are heterogeneous and determined by one's behaviour. Their discomfort in identifying as 'coloured' emerged from their need to distance themselves from these Others who misbehave, and lack self-control. For Sarah, Lameez and Yasmeen, 'coloured' identities have an essentialist value – they are built into who one is. 'Colouredness' has generational value, carried through families, and not located within a racialised history. How 'coloured' communities came to be, and how these young people are implicated in its historical construction, did not emerge in participants' discourses. I must concede, though, that my co-construction of their narratives is limited by the lack of time there was to further explore this; to converse more with the participants about their ideas of coloured identities.

Patricia Hill-Collins' *Black Sexual Politics* (2005) makes note of a "black liberatory politics" that constitutes an in-depth understanding of how "heterosexism operates as a system of oppression, both independently and in conjunction with other such systems" (pp. 88-9). She argues that such a politics would work to affirm black queer⁸ sexualities by acknowledging and making visible "the roles sexuality and gender play in reinforcing the oppression rooted

⁷ Refers to a certain kind of 'coloured' person – not 'civilised', crude, ill-mannered.

⁸ Although there are various contested uses of the term in South Africa, in this chapter 'queer' will be used to refer to persons who identify/are identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, or intersexed. It will be used in this chapter interchangeably with the term 'non-heterosexual', which is arguably, also a contested term as it centralises 'heterosexuality' as the norm from which all other gender and sexual identities are understood.

in many black communities” (2005, p. 89). Some participants spoke directly to the invisibility of heterosexism in their own communities, through marking homophobic violence as an African black phenomenon. Leslie, a 20-year old lesbian from Leiden in Delft stated, for instance that “That people is very otherwise... they don’t like it.” Alison and Wendy, in Mitchell’s Plain, appeared to similarly hold the view that, unlike in their community, homophobic violence is connected to race and culture, so that it is ‘black African’ communities that are intolerant of homosexuality.

I know the African community is different because there they hit you; they kill you if you are lesbian and stuff because it’s not supposed to be like that...everyone says that is wrong, like it’s wrong for a woman to be with a woman. I know in the African culture that’s not supposed to be and then they do kill you (Wendy, 26-year old lesbian).

However, despite this perception, it became clear across the interviews that abuse of, and discrimination and violence against gender non-conforming persons, were expressed in various ways, both within the home, as well as within the communities where participants lived. Often, when I first posed the question ‘Have you ever experienced violence, abuse, and/or discrimination based on your perceived sexual orientation?’, they would respond that they hadn’t. Only after I offered examples of what this discrimination might look like, would participants reveal that they had indeed experienced some kind of discrimination based on their perceived sexual orientation. This ranged from fathers’ beatings based on perceptions that their daughters are lesbians, to a range of homophobic bullying, abuse, and threats within communities and schools. As Coco, a 23-year old transgendered man living in Tafelsig, Mitchell’s Plain, noted:

In our community we are being judged, being criticised every day and living in fear constantly of what may happen to us - if they [are going to rape or kill us], are we gonna get hurt because of the way we are living?

Agency and resistance

At the end of the day, I was thinking this is something that’s not negotiable and I needed to set boundaries around myself to say you either accept this - not everything, they don’t need to completely accept it - but they just need to keep quiet about it (Zakaria, 24-year old gay male, Rondebosch-East).

Despite the heteronormative value systems built within the society in which participants live, within their communities and homes, and the institutions they inhabit, resistance to the norms which delimit gender non-conforming persons’ ability to make choices about how they express their identities, and what kinds of decisions they make, was evident. This ties into Salo et al.’s (2010) point that “the physical space acquires social and cultural meanings

through individual's quotidian engagements" (p. 300). Sarah, in a conversation with her mother who is deeply religious and struggles with her daughter's lesbian sexuality, expressed the following:

I think me persistently saying that I'm still a lesbian, if we're gonna argue now, in three months I'm still gonna be lesbian, nothing's gonna change. The quicker you accept it, the better it's gonna be on yourself 'cause nothing is going [to change] here.

Jamie, a lesbian who presented as a tomboy, narrated her response to a young man wanting to marry her under conditions which meant appearing more feminine:

He said he wants to get married to me...I must grow my hair... So, I was like...firstly, I am not growing my hair for you or anybody...

In a moment of unusual agency and resistance against patriarchy, for a 20-year old, Maira relates the conversation with her apologetic mother after her father had asked her to leave the family home. Maira berated her mother for allowing her father to kick her out of the house because of her sexual orientation:

...you let your husband throw me out but now you wanna bring food to [me]...you should have stood up for me if you feel so bad, you know what I'm saying, not just let him take over 'cause he's like the man. Like a push over type of a thing... remember you shut me out, now you want me in again... it's not that easy...We need to talk about this, talk about the last year and a half ...A lot changed for me and it's not just like okay now you want me back...let's talk about it...We can't just leave it there; it's a sore, put a plaster on it...I just want you to acknowledge the stuff, acknowledge the fact that I look after myself. She's like, ja, I brought you things. I was 'like your five groceries and your five toiletries saved my life', don't be naïve, like you didn't have to do that; that was for you.

Although most of the participants in this study, across the Southern Suburbs and the Cape Flats, were not as articulate in their resistance as the participants quoted above, throughout the interviews it was clear that being a gender non-conforming subject is not essentially, and only, a position of victimhood within a heteronormative society. Participants regularly negotiate a range of value systems in their families, their communities, institutions, and wider society, in an effort to live out their identities in ways that make sense to themselves. This negotiation is always mediated by multiple factors, central among them being internal and external resources, such as education and socio-economic means.

This study is, however, incomplete in terms of its exploration of how race, class, and sexuality operate as specific positions within particular spaces. I would have liked to spend more time with participants talking about these connections. More research needs to focus on the daily realities of people who have, in some ways, been left out of history, and whose narratives are undocumented. Sexual identities cannot be spoken of in isolation – class and space are central in how young people embody their identities as sexual subjects, and the choices they are able to make about how they want to live.

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