

**VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIANS AND (IM)POSSIBILITIES FOR IDENTITY  
AND POLITICS**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Violence against lesbians and (im)possibilities for identity and politics**

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In 2006 South Africa extended marriage rights to gay and lesbian citizens, further signposting their legal inclusion in the post-apartheid order. This inclusion is marked by homophobic murder, signifying the continued social exclusion of those at the sexual margins. The spectre of murder is a political pressure point that has come to dominate local and global imaginaries of queer life in South Africa. This study of violence, sexuality and politics is located in the marriage-murder moment, which signals the paradox of being queer in contemporary South Africa. Against this backdrop, the study explores how lesbian subjectivities are constituted in the discourse of 'violence against lesbians'; what this reveals and conceals about sexual, gender, race and class identities in post-apartheid South Africa; and what such discursive arrangements render (im)possible in relation to how homophobia-related violence might be politically resisted. Violence against lesbians is approached as a discursive surface for the production of meanings, identities and power, with a focus on its productive dimensions in constituting subjectivity and politics. The contending ways of knowing 'lesbians' and the violence they encounter produce the imaginable actions against it. Grounded in feminist post-structuralism, and queer and post-colonial theories, a discourse analysis was undertaken of data from focus groups with lesbian-identified women, media texts, and 'official' texts from activist organisations and public institutions. The findings show that homophobia-related violence is a contested discursive terrain wherein normative power relations of sexuality, gender, race and class are both reproduced and resisted. Largely staged around black women as victims and black men as perpetrators, violence is understood in highly sexualised, racialised, classed and gendered registers that draw on apartheid and colonial tropes. In particular, the discourse of sexuality articulates with a politics of race within homophobia-related violence as a

knowledge regime. This is seen in the 'blackwashing' of homophobia and its discursive mobilisations to make racial attributions – intersected with sexuality, class and gender – about the causes and characters of, and 'cures' for, violence. Discursive investments in the spectacle of violence against lesbians, as a particularised form of black and queer suffering, deflect attention away from the social conditions in which violence – as an instrument of power – finds form. The spectacularisation of violence against black lesbians legitimises the 'naturalness' of homophobia, disarticulating it from the multiple modes of violent othering with which it is imbricated. In exploring the discursive resources for political agency against violence, the study finds divergent forms of agentic possibility. Some subject positions seek to adapt or regulate gendered behaviour through the promotion of feminised self-care strategies that individualise and depoliticise violence. Others assume homonormalising discourses that bolster gender, race and class hegemonies and their associated queer ascendancies. At the same time, the normalisation of violence and the regulatory practices that seek to constrain lesbian subjectivities are contested. A politics of law and order provides a dominant frame through which violence and conceivable actions against it are constructed. Through a discourse of hate crime, the cause of violence is individualised, and the law and the state are positioned as central to its prevention and punishment. In contrast, activist discourses locate the causes of violence within prevailing power relations that continue to render queers racially and economically precarious. The findings point to how violence against lesbians operates as a marker of queer inclusion and exclusion. Violence against lesbians does the work of race, gender, sexuality and class hierarchisation within the dominant social order. It both settles and unsettles apartheid rationalities, and, in doing so, exposes the contingency and precarity of queer subjectivity in post-apartheid South Africa. The findings suggest that homophobia-related violence charts a story of differentiation, both amongst queers themselves and in their relationship to others. These differentiations have race, gender, sexual and class coordinates which, together and apart, assert particular views of what constitutes queer livability on the one hand, and queer violability on the other. Whilst some discursive frames for countering violence provide liberatory potential, others constitute new forms of regulation, scrutiny and disciplining of queer subjects. The study aims to contribute to the production of

knowledge that might, in the face of violence, re-imagine power and advance the political aspirations of marginalised subjectivities.

*November 2015*

## **Keywords**

violence, sexuality, identity, homophobia, gender, politics, feminism, lesbian, discourse analysis, post-structuralism





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## DECLARATION

I declare that *Violence against lesbians and (im)possibilities for identity and politics* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Melanie Judge

November 2015

Signed.....





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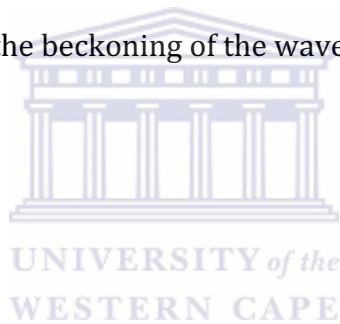
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In memory of Aimee and the beckoning of the waves.



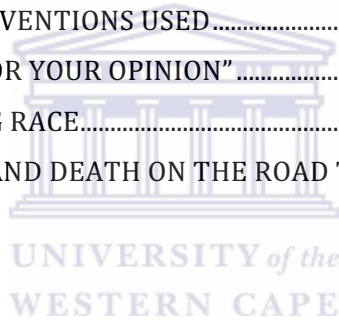
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## INTRODUCTION

*And when we first came here  
We were cold and we were clear  
With no colours in our skin  
'Til we let the spectrum in*

*Say my name  
And every colour illuminates  
We are shining  
And we will never be afraid again*

Extract from 'Spectrum' by Florence and the Machine

When embarking on this research, I was questioned about why I chose to focus on the *discourse* of violence rather than on its *material* manifestations. At a time when predominantly black queers are dying violent deaths in South Africa, what could my interest in discourse possibly contribute to struggles against violence?

For some years now I have been preoccupied with the normative conditions that produce violence against queers and the particularities of their representation. This links to an interest in how homophobic violence connects to wider systems of violent inequality in South Africa that operate to legitimise and re-entrench its uncritical reproduction. In the mid-2000s, whilst in the employ of a lesbian and gay activist organisation, I participated in numerous dialogues, seminars, and strategy meetings seized with the question of how best to respond to the killings of black lesbians. I was struck by how these activist-led conversations were animated by intense contestations and confrontations regarding the causes and targets of, and required responses to, this violence. The different positionalities from which violence was understood by diverse activist groupings had surfaced conflicting knowledges about violence, and consequently, about what responses it demanded and by

whom. These epistemological struggles were inflected with race, gender and class content. Simply put, people seemed to know violence differently and in ways not unconnected to their own race, class, sexual and gender positionalities and locations. How were we to talk collectively against violence across such fractured planes of identity and politics? In the process of seeking strategies to respond to violence, deep fractures within queer communities had been brought into view. Violence facing black lesbians in particular had surfaced a political tension between the universalities and particularities of queer experiences in post-apartheid South Africa. Talking about homophobia-related violence constituted a discursive negotiation of contemporary race, gender and class power relations: the very relations through which such violence is routed. How violence and its queer targets were to be understood and engaged with had emerged as a site of political contestation where conflicting truths (and the interests they support) were vying for primacy in the crafting of political possibility. These conversations had also forced my own confrontation with the differential precariousness, suffering and rage amongst queers, in and across multiple social locations. These early encounters of my own thinking *with* violence (to the extent that my own subject position as white and middle class is entangled in certain forms of violence) and thinking *against* violence (my political intentions as a lesbian and a feminist activist) had compelled me to recognise my complicity in violence and the responses and resistances to it. My interest in the constitutive capacities of discourses of homophobia-related violence and the implications for identity and politics emerge from this context.

The struggle against violence accepts that violence is one's own possibility. If that acceptance were not there, if one postured rather as a beautiful soul, as someone by definition without violent aggression, there could be no ethical quandary, no struggle, and no problem. Such a position of virtue or principle of purity would disavow or repress the violence from which such positions are wrought. (Butler, 2010, p. 171–172)

An exclusive focus on the exteriorisation of violence – violence as residing outside one's own being – prohibits a view of the self as situated *within* the violent social relations



against which one wishes to speak and act. My own positionality is entangled in numerous symbolic and material violences. Of particular relevance to this study, I occupy a subject position bound up with historical and contemporary configurations of race and class supremacy. The violence done by white bodies to black bodies in and through institutionalised racism, situates me as an embodied knower forged from this legacy and its enduring effects. In contemporary South Africa violence works as a racialised dividing line within the discursive field in which I seek to know things, and be known, in non-oppressive ways. My ethical intention to think *against* violence, rather than *with* violence, poses a necessary countenance to my posturing as a 'beautiful soul'. It is from this place of discomforting quandary that I seek to both know and write.

South Africa's political transition to democracy relocated queers from the bad side to the good side of the law. Enabled by constitutional recognition and protection<sup>1</sup>, a process of law reform towards gay and lesbian formal equality culminated in the historical passing of the *Civil Union Act* in 2006, enabling same-sex couples the right to legally marry. These developments signalled lesbian and gay inclusion in the democratic imaginary, at least in principle. On the one hand, the transition from colonialism and apartheid to a democratic order in which gay and lesbian citizens are equal before the law, is indicative of a radical rupture between past and present.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, despite these formal equality gains, homophobic murder and other forms of violent exclusion still permeate the lives of the majority of South African lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people. In recent years, much national and international attention has focused on violence against black lesbians in particular.<sup>3</sup> The murder of black queers has emerged as a political pressure point for contesting meanings about the limits of equality, freedom, justice and democracy, around which possibilities for identity and power converge.

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<sup>1</sup> The new *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, promulgated in 1996, explicitly affirms the right to equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender, amongst other grounds.

<sup>2</sup> In the Constitutional Court ruling in the case of *Minister of Home Affairs v. Fourie* (2006), commonly known as the same-sex marriage case, Justice Albie Sachs stated the following: "Finally, our Constitution represents a **radical rupture** with a past based on intolerance and exclusion, and the movement forward to the acceptance of the need to develop a society based on equality and respect by all for all" (p. 37) [my emphasis]. The judgement compelled the legislature to develop a remedy to address the exclusion of gays and lesbians from the right to marriage, which resulted in the historic passing of the *Civil Union Act* in November 2006.

<sup>3</sup> A number of high-profile cases dealing with the rape and murders of black lesbians in South African townships are cases in point: the rape and murder of soccer player Eudy Simelane in 2008; the murder of Zoliswa Nkonyana in 2008; the murders of Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Masoaa in 2007; and the beating and rape of Millicent Gaika in 2010.

What I term the marriage-murder moment marks the paradox of same-sex marriage (signifying inclusion in law) and homophobic murder (signifying murderous exclusion). Dominant discourses of marriage and murder, in which violent exclusion is a signifying feature, mark the political moment in which this study is located. To the extent that marriage signifies freedom, equality and inclusion, murder marks their limits. In this sense murder is a materialisation of violent exclusion and the failure of the 'happily ever after' promise of legal inclusion. This coexistence of inclusion and exclusion characterises the contradiction of queer subjectivity in post-apartheid democracy. This contradiction urges a confrontation with the sexual, gender, race and class differentials of queer liveability. More particularly, violence and its relationship to inclusion and exclusion, force into view the paradoxical ways in which both murder and marriage signpost queer life in post-apartheid South Africa. The context of this queer paradox, and the political contestations it provokes in times of violence, form the backdrop to the study.

Violence against lesbians is a prevailing interpretive framework for queer subjectivities in post-apartheid South Africa. The social and historical conditions that shape violence against queers and how it comes to be dominantly known and made meaning of, surface the intersection of power and its resistance. I approach violence as material and discursive, as a knowledge regime, and as a powerful mode of interpellation. I draw on Gail Mason's (2002) research on homophobia-related violence as a way of knowing, in order to explore the constitutive effects of the discourse of violence against lesbians. In doing so I am cognisant of the multi-dimensional content of, and context for, homophobia-related violence and its intersection with other forms of violence. As a dominant discourse in South Africa, violence is one way in which queer subjects come into social and political view. As a regime of knowing, the discourse of homophobia-related violence generates the conceivable possibilities for social action against it. My emphasis on how violence against lesbians is known is not an attempt to diminish or obscure the materiality of violence. Instead, it is aimed at providing a fleshing out, so to speak, of its discursive content. My particular interest, therefore, is on how violence against lesbians operates as a discursive surface for the production of meanings about identity, power and politics in the post-apartheid context. I approach violence as multi-dimensional in that its relationship to sexuality, in the form of homophobia-related violence, is entangled with other processes of

violent othering. I enter the topic of enquiry through the lens of lesbian subjectivity as a process of violent becoming that intersects with other dimensions of identity formation and articulation. I am aware that some of the central terms I use as my entry points to this study are unstable, and that they might also work to hide or amplify particular meanings about that of which they speak. This relates in particular to 'lesbian' as a social and political identity, and to the term 'homophobia-related violence'. By both deploying and simultaneously deconstructing these terms, I hope to counter their circumscriptive effects, thus broadening my analytic field of vision. My entering through 'lesbian' – as a marginalised identity category – whilst simultaneously recognising the instability, fluidity, and internal contestability of the term, as well as its intersection with other identities, enables me to situate the lesbian as a speaking subject in the discursive domains of violence and its politics. This is a political act to bring sexual differentiation into view whilst at the same time unsettling the seamlessness with which the connection between 'lesbian' and 'violence' is normatively asserted. Whilst I situate lesbians at the centre of this enquiry, given the predominance of discourses of violence and lesbian sexuality, I approach subjectivity as in flux and contingent, and thus also mobilise the concept of 'queer' to articulate this. I also enter the study through the notion of 'homophobia-related violence', recognising that it is both material and discursively produced within a wider matrix of violence in which other dimensions of discrimination and social exclusion are implicated.<sup>4</sup>

I adopt a post-structural feminist and Foucauldian theoretical orientation that recognises the mutually constituting dynamics of discourse, knowledge, subjectivity and power. From this vantage point I investigate the discursive production of truths about 'who dunnit?' and 'what's to be done?' in regard to homophobia-related violence in South Africa. I set out to explore how contesting ways of knowing 'lesbians' and the violence they encounter in discourse construct the causes, characters, consequence of, and 'cures' for violence. How violence against lesbians is discursively constituted provides the terms for conceivable action against it. As such, I give attention to the implications of the discourse for how homophobia-related violence might be politically countered, and by whom.

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<sup>4</sup> See Section 4.2 for a more detailed explanation of how I define and apply key concepts such as 'lesbian', 'queer', 'homophobia-related violence' and race.

The study explores the productive capacities of the discourse of violence against lesbians in shaping subjectivities and political possibilities. Located at the intersection of identity and politics, I attend to how violence is known in discourse, and the effects on (re)formulations of meaning, power and politics. A particular interest is in how sexual, gender, race and class identities and power relations are discursively configured and what political possibilities these configurations enable and foreclose in countering homophobia-related violence.

I undertook a feminist Foucauldian discourse analysis of data generated from focus groups and institutional texts (including print media texts and official texts from political organisation and institutions). I structure the analysis around a series of discourse themes that produce a set of ideas about what the discourse of violence against lesbians does. In charting the work of the emerging discourses I sought to surface the discursive struggles to ascribe and fix meaning around particular versions of reality, and the implications of these for how violence against lesbians can be known and acted upon.

I situate my enquiry within the broader literatures that concern intersectionalities of race, gender, sexuality and class identities and oppressions, and apply these to lesbian subjectivation and to homophobia-related violence in post-colonial contexts. I seek to put theoretical approaches to work within the localised particularities of identity and power formation. The study critically engages the ways in which violence is dominantly represented by surfacing the discursive contestations that arise within and against these representations. I also set out to problematise discourses that entrench racial, sexual, class and gender inequalities and constrain queer political agency. My aim with this work is to contribute to the production of knowledge from which to act in ways that might advance the political aspirations of marginalised subjectivities and re-imagine the exercise of power in more equitable and just ways.

The thesis is structured around eight chapters. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 provide the theoretical and contextual grounding for the study. Here I trace the various literatures and concepts that inform my epistemological and ontological positioning. Chapter 1 offers a conceptual approach to subjectivity through the lenses of feminism, post-structuralism, intersectionality, and queer and post-colonial theories. I locate lesbian subjectivation

within these frameworks and in relationship to wider discursive practices of gender, sexuality, race and class in post-colonial contexts.

Chapter 2 focuses on the domain of politics and on queer agency as conceptualised from feminist and Foucauldian vantage points. I critically discuss key features of global sexuality politics, with an emphasis on how homophobia in Africa is politically and discursively engaged. I also provide an overview of the history of lesbian and gay political organising in South Africa and situate the study in a post-apartheid political present.

Chapter 3 explores violence as a site of material and discursive production, and hones in on how homophobia-related violence can be approached as a way of knowing (Mason, 2002) that is constitutive of subjectivity and political possibility. I delineate various permutations of violence as a function of historical and contemporary oppressions. I also detail theoretical and political engagements with violence against lesbians in the South Africa context.

Chapter 4 outlines my methodological approach, as well as the practical means of data collection, selection, analysis and write-up. I detail my general strategy of deployment and deconstruction, as well as how I tackle my own locatedness in the topic of enquiry and the research process.

Chapter 5 concerns processes of lesbian subjectivation and how focus group participants make meaning of violence against lesbians. In this regard, I present analysis and findings on participants' subjectivities as forged in their talk about being lesbian from diverse identity locations. I also explore what participants' talk about violence against lesbians reveals about sexual, gender, race, class and age identifications, and how these are discursively negotiated in making sense of violence.

Chapter 6 explores how the characters and cause (the 'who dunnit' and 'why') of homophobia-related violence are constructed in the institutional texts, and their effects on how contemporary power arrangements are affirmed and/or disrupted in discourse. The chapter also considers how participants speak back to dominant media representations of lesbians and violence.

Chapter 7 presents analysis and findings that concern the political actions against violence made possible in discourse. Here I discuss the discursive resources made available to counter violence. I also unpack the strategies and subject positions that participants

advance or denounce concerning how violence and its politics can conceivably be resisted by lesbians themselves.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter, in which I draw out a number of the key findings and further discuss their implications for political possibilities and impossibilities in encountering, and countering, identity and politics in times of violence.



## CHAPTER 1

### **BECOMING LESBIAN: SUBJECTIVITY AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF SEXUALITY, GENDER, RACE AND CLASS**

This chapter provides the epistemological and ontological grounding for the study, drawing on post-structural feminism, post-colonial theory, queer theory, intersectionality and critical race perspectives. Violence is to be located within the “tacit cruelties that sustain coherent identities” (Butler, 1993, p. 115). Accordingly, an understanding of lesbian subjectivity framed by violence requires an initial engagement with the literatures on subjectivities more broadly and within discourses of sexuality, gender, race and class. I commence by outlining a post-structural conception of subjectivity, emphasising its constitution in discourse and processes of violent othering. I then discuss post-colonial feminist epistemologies, and provide an intersectional and queer perspective on the multiplicities of sexual subjectivity and its social and historical locatedness. Given the study’s focus on lesbian identities, I also explore literatures on the co-constitution of sexuality, gender and desire, and gender performativity, as well as how the lesbian comes to be positioned within normative orders. In order to locate lesbian subjectivation within the historical conditions of its making, the last part of the chapter discusses the racing, classing, gendering and heterosexualising of subjectivity during colonialism and its contemporary permutations. Against that backdrop, I then discuss the construction of sexualities in Africa and implications for how queer subjectivity is dominantly framed.

#### **1.1 “Until further notice”: The post-structural subject**

Modernity, marked by its totalising “grand narratives” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 37) and triumphal universalisation of Western culture (Hall, Held and McLennan, 1992), produced a logic of human identity based on the Cartesian subject as a rational, unified and authentic being.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, post-modernism is seized with a world of “multiple cause and effect” and a “limitless array of historical and cultural specificities” (Lather, 1991, p. 21). Post-modernity

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<sup>5</sup> This conception of the subject is grounded in Descartes’ 17<sup>th</sup> century notion of the rational and universal self, and shaped the humanist orientation of the Enlightenment.

is therefore “the condition of contingency” in which “[e]verything that is, is until further notice” (Bauman, 1996, pp. 50–51). As the logic of late capitalism, and given its collapsing of the old boundaries between theoretical disciplines, post-modernism has given rise to uncategorisable and interdisciplinary paradigms of thought (Jameson, 2009). Signalling the death of the metanarratives (Eagleton, 1987), these post-modern paradigms deconstruct the notion of a singular truth (Burman and Parker, 1993) and attend to how theories of identity are themselves implicated in power.

As a theoretical formation of post-modernity, post-structuralism situates language as central to the analysis of social relations, meanings and power; and as the site where subjectivity is constructed (Weedon, 1987). This marks a shift away from the Enlightenment’s notion of the individual as imbuing an essential self, and toward the idea of subjectivity as multiple, contradictory and a product of discursive practices (Weatherall, 2002, p. 141). More specifically, a Foucauldian post-structural notion of identity views it as generated by the reiterative power of discourse, which produces and regulates that which it names (Butler, 1997c; Foucault, 2006). Through the discursive work of social recognition, the subject is thus brought into being (Butler, 1993). This coming into being draws on Althusser’s (2008, p. 44) notion of “interpellation” which is the ideological process<sup>6</sup> through which the subject is hailed, or recruited into existence, thus enabling the reproduction of structural power relations.<sup>7</sup> In its emphasis on cultural contexts, post-structuralism recognises that subjectivity is locationally mediated (Pallotta-Chiarolli and Pease, 2014) and forged both psychically (Butler, 1997c) and in relation to socio-historical conditions (Mama, 1995). As such, identification is produced through recognition and within conditions of social existence that are both material and symbolic (Hall, 1996).

Post-structuralist thought draws on psychoanalytic traditions that root subjectivity in the unconscious<sup>8</sup> and in the relationship between self and Other. According to Freud<sup>9</sup>, identification is “the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person” (1922, VII para. 1). This centrality of the Other to the formation of the self is reflected in post-

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<sup>6</sup> Here ideology is understood as the “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of their existence” (Althusser, 2008, p. 36).

<sup>7</sup> Some post-structural thinkers, including Foucault, reject the notion of ideology in that it implies there is a truth outside of itself (Mills, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> The notion of an unconscious breaks from the modernist tradition of the conscious and rational subject.

<sup>9</sup> Freud’s psychodynamic interpretation of the subject places biology as the key determinant of identification processes.



structural notions of subjectivity as relational, contingent, precarious and marked by ambivalences (Butler, 2010; Fanon, 2001; Goldberg, 2009; Hall, 1996). Power is also central to the post-modern subject in that identity production is linked to the historical “marking of difference and exclusion” (Hall, 2000, p. 17). Butler (1997c, p. 2) defines subjection as “the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject”. In this sense the Other is central to subjectivation, as subjects are formed through the power effects of exclusions (Mouffe, 1991). This relationality of one’s being to the being of the Other is mediated by a “constitutive outside”, defined by Mouffe (1991, p. 78) as “an exterior to the community that makes its existence possible”<sup>10</sup>.

Post-structuralism has unsettled the humanist binarisms of colonial Western epistemologies. As a post-structural forerunner, Derrida’s deconstructionism toppled the modernist conception of binary oppositions. Derrida views the binary as arbitrary and unstable wherein one of the oppositional terms always takes on a normative status relative to which the Other is devalued (Derrida, 2001). This articulation of alterity beyond the dialectic has influenced much post-structural theorising of the relationship between self and Other. Drawing on Lacan (1977)<sup>11</sup>, Žižek (2000, p. 596) conceives the Other as both the threat and the excess that signals the “theft of [one’s] enjoyment”, as the basis upon which the Other is hated. Lodged firmly in fantasy and projection, the object of identification is, however, “as likely to be the one that is hated as the one that is adored” (Hall, 1996, p. 3). These linkages between subjectivation and othering processes also take form through what Laclau (1990, p.33) describes as the “determinate relation of identity to power” through the marking of particular identity terms.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, meanings, as attributed through discourse, hold varying social statuses within the symbolic regime of language (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001). In this respect, post-structuralism draws firmly on structural linguistics, and more explicitly on Saussure’s (2011) concept of signification as the process by which meanings and their differences are constituted within language as a symbolic

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<sup>10</sup> Importantly, the Derridian concept of a “constitutive outside” is not the opposite of an ‘us’, but rather a symbolic representation of what makes an ‘us’ impossible (Mouffe, 2009, p. 12).

<sup>11</sup> For Lacan (1977), subjectivity occurs in the moment of realising the separateness between self and m/other and is thus embedded in psychodynamic origin.

<sup>12</sup> Laclau (1990, p. 33) puts it as such: “It is the same with the black-white relationship, in which white, of course is equivalent to ‘human being’. ‘Woman’ and ‘black’ are thus ‘marked (i.e. marked terms) in contrast to the unmarked terms of ‘man’ and ‘white’”.

system. Lacan's (1977) delineation of subjectivation foregrounds the symbolic, which enables the subject to enter into the law of the father (i.e. the phallogocentric<sup>13</sup> order). The symbolic order structures and sustains subjectivity (Leland, 1992) by locating the subject within the organising principles of culture and in subordination to the paternal law (Lorraine, 1990). This is particularly relevant in view of heterosexism constituting a symbolic order that hierarchically codifies sex, gender and sexuality (Peterson, 2000, p. 59), and into which the queer subject is inaugurated.

The post-modern subject represents a radical departure from humanist notions of the rational and autonomous human that operates outside of social and cultural fields. In this sense, post-modernism's anti-foundationalist underpinnings enable a view of subjectivity as contingent, unstable, relational and embroiled in social power relations. It also recognises that subjects are constituted in historical, material and cultural contexts. This makes possible a view of lesbian identity as historically and socially located, and as multiple and imbricated with power.

## 1.2 Coming into being through discourse

Largely prompted by Foucault's elaboration of discourse, the social sciences underwent a discursive turn that brought the textual dimension of social life to the forefront of theorising subjectivation (Weatherall, 2002). In approaching the psychological aspects of identity as historical rather than biologically predetermined, Foucault's historicisation of subjectivity up-ends psychoanalytic traditions. In viewing identity as a "regulatory fiction", Butler (1990, p.33) and Foucault (1998, 2006) conceive of subjectivity as a product of discursive practices that are economic, social and political, and whose meanings are sites of power struggle. From this perspective, discourse is a resource that makes available ways of being and doing in the world (Willig, 2008). Accordingly, individuals' investments in particular discourses are motivated by power, more especially the rewards and liabilities associated with particular discursive positionalities (Hollway, 1984). Hall describes this relationship between identities and the locations they occupy as "points of temporary

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<sup>13</sup> Lacan's privileging of the phallus in the production of the subject is accused of being implicated in the very phallogocentrism it describes (Rose, 2005, p. 60).

attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct” (1996, p. 6). As a system of meaning-making beyond linguistics, discourse has productive capacities (Butler, 1993; Weatherall, 2002) in that it does not merely describe the material world; rather, it produces, reproduces, categorises and shapes it (Parker, 1992). For Foucault, discourse is material, in that it constitutes “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 2006, p. 54). Such an expansive notion of discourse comprises a wide range of social strategies as well as their administrative and technological apparatuses (Wetherell et al., 2001, p. 390).

Discourses naturalise their own power effects (Carabine, 2001; Foucault and Rabinow, 1991) and assert their primacy in constituting social meaning (Jorgenson and Phillips, 2002; Smith, 1998). In this way, the power of discourse works through naturalisation, which refers to processes to fix difference and secure closures of meaning so as to preclude other possible meanings (Hall, 1997b; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001).<sup>14</sup> This naturalisation of the social field is furthered by the institutionalisation of discourse through political, cultural and social modes as well as in disciplines of theory and practice (Davies and Harré, 1990). Central to Foucault’s conception of subjectivity is the normalisation of power and its regulatory force through disciplinary regimes. Foucault is seized with how people govern themselves on the basis of truths about their identities. He argues that, “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (1998, p. 100). This knowledge-power nexus<sup>15</sup> draws together discourse and subjectivity in that it is through knowledge and its truth effects that subjects are inaugurated by discourse into the exercise of power (Foucault and Faubion, 2002). In exposing this relationship between truth and power, Foucault politicises knowledge production, exposing how power is infused in the generation and legitimisation of knowledges (Lather, 1991).

According to Foucault (2004), human behaviour is also controlled and directed through governmentality<sup>16</sup> as a modality of power. Subjects are rendered governable

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<sup>14</sup> These dynamics are enabled through the exclusionary mechanisms of discourse (Foucault, 1981).

<sup>15</sup> According to Foucault (1998), knowledge-power produces the conditions in which objects, subjects and their relationships are constituted.

<sup>16</sup> By governmentality, Foucault (2004) refers to a political rationality that governs the subject through the operation of power.

through the workings of bio-power<sup>17</sup> which structures that which is considered normal and that which is deviant (Foucault, 1998). Through normalisation, discipline and control, the norms of gender, sexuality, class and race constitute domains of power and subjectivity, the productions and maintenances of which require perpetual reiteration. This presents a highly productive perspective for a study concerned with contending discourses of homophobia-related violence, and the positions and practices these make possible. For Foucault, subjects can be both complicit in sustaining oppressive power, as well as being resistant to its working. Power acts through, rather than upon subjects, who are then drawn into circuits of social exchange, both reproducing and transforming them (Foucault and Faubion, 2002). This articulates power as generative rather than solely oppressive, which marked earlier psychodynamic and Marxist theories of identity.

In sum, a Foucauldian approach to subjectivity sees it as “an ongoing process of ‘becoming’” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p. 53). Foucault’s conceptions of subjectivity and its relationship to discourse, as well as to power, is not only concerned with what discourse *says*, but also what it *does* (i.e. its effects on identity and knowledge-power relations). In viewing subjectivity as forged through discourse, these theorisations are particularly apt for an enquiry that concerns the constituting effects of violence on subjectivity, power and politics.

### **1.3 A feminist post-colonial and queer perspective**

Whilst there are multiple and contending feminisms, their common thread is the troubling of gender power relations, albeit in varying forms and to diverse effects.<sup>18</sup> Feminist post-structuralism is concerned with the “social and institutional contexts of textuality” in which meanings are produced (Weedon, 1987, p. 25). Given its analysis of women’s subjectivities within language, material realities and cultural practices (Gavey, 1989), post-structural feminism provides a fitting epistemological framework to explore lesbian identities in

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<sup>17</sup> Foucault (2004, p. 246–247) describes biopower as a mode of discipline and regulation concerning the corporeal administration of life whereby power is exercised over life. Biopower presents a historical shift from the sovereign’s exercise of power over life and death, to the enactment of power through this administration of life.

<sup>18</sup> With regard to these variances, liberal feminism (e.g. Nussbaum, 2000), radical feminism (e.g. Rich, 1980; Jeffreys, 2003; MacKinnon, 1989), and post-colonial feminism (e.g. Collins, 1991; Mama, 1995), amongst others, encapsulate significant divergences within feminism through practice and politics.

contexts of violence. In the section that follows, I chart feminist approaches to knowledge and identity production drawing on post-colonial, intersectional and queer theorisations.

### **1.3.1 Knowledge as partial and incomplete**

Feminist theory challenges positivist conceptions of knowledge and truth as being universal and objective (Waugh, 1992). In particular, critical feminist epistemologies dislodge the humanist conception that ideas have an origin or an essential truth, and that knowledge is value-free (Alcoff and Potter, 1993; Lather, 1991; Scott, 1992). As constitutive of social power relations, discourse has effects that circumscribe the domain of what is knowable (Butler, 1993; Foucault and Rabinow, 1991). As a consequence, knowledge is partial, contested, and productive of power (Collins, 1991); and it is thus neither impartial nor outside of history.<sup>19</sup> Subsequently, feminist post-structuralism is itself “a mode of knowledge production which uses post-structuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change” (Weedon, 1987, p. 40–1).

Building on the cultural and historical specificities of epistemological claims, feminist standpoint epistemologies situate women’s subjugation at the centre of knowledge production, thus eschewing universalisms (Harding, 1993; Hartsock, 1983).<sup>20</sup> Approaching knowledge as situated works against what Haraway (1991, p. 189) terms the “god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere” that is exemplified by Western patriarchal epistemologies. To view discourse as productive of knowledge is also to recognise that what is claimed as ‘known’, is constitutive of power. Eisenstein (1988) puts it as follows: “There can be multiple standpoints, multiple truths, and multiple sites of power/knowledge. This multiplicity can lead to a radicalised theorisation of power if we recognise the hierarchical relations of truth” (p. 11).

Importantly, feminist epistemologies offer a corrective to the failures of leading post-structuralists (including Foucault, Derrida and Lacan) to adequately account for gender and sexual difference (Potts, 2002), despite that sexual and gender dominations are

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<sup>19</sup> This aligns with Foucault’s archaeological approach to the history of ideas, in which he denounces “the innermost secrets of the origin” and calls for the abandonment of its “discipline of beginnings and ends” (2006, p. 154–6).

<sup>20</sup> This perspective attributes “epistemic privilege” to marginalised subjects, thus imbuing them with epistemological authority (Harding, 1993, p. 63).

firmly rooted in identity construction (Bartky, 1990). In sum, post-structural feminism provides an understanding of women's subjectivities as multiple and contextually located. It also recognises the exclusionary dynamics that produce subjects, and challenges the terms of theory itself (Duffy, 1995). My thesis positions lesbians as knowing subjects and therefore as productive of situated knowledge-power. The ways in which lesbians know violence provides epistemic possibilities for challenging the conceptual frameworks that make violence against them possible (Lee-Lampshire, 1999, p. 5). In my attempt to centre lesbian identity in this study, I also draw on post-colonial critiques of feminism as advanced in the theory of intersectionality in particular. This is critical to addressing the tendency of standpoint theory to homogenise and essentialise the category 'woman'<sup>21</sup>, which is multiple, unstable and internally contested.

### **1.3.2 Thinking through post-colonial feminism and intersectionality**

Post-colonial theorists have deconstructed global racialised histories so as to expose the knowledge-power relations of the present (Said, 1995; Spivak, 1993).<sup>22</sup> In doing so, they reveal how Western cultural hegemony – as a ruling knowledge – is both produced and maintained by Western epistemology.<sup>23</sup> Post-colonial theory grounds conceptions of identity firmly within the historically arrangements of globalised power relations. It recognises that “identity is not simply free-floating or arbitrary, but is significantly delimited and conditioned by social (and material) relations of power, by ideology and by historical patterns of privilege” (Hook, 2003, p. 108). By extension, post-colonial feminists challenge Western feminism's Eurocentric and universalising narratives<sup>24</sup>, thus reconfiguring its concepts and political intentions (Lorde, 1984; hooks, 2000a). By way of example, Mohanty (1988) exposes how Western feminist discourses produce problematic representations of the Third World woman.<sup>25</sup> Such positions contest the fixity and

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<sup>21</sup> By way of example, Mason (2002) accuses standpoint theory of reproducing an essentialist and liberal notion of women's subjectivity. Also see Braidotti (1993) and Flax (1997) for further critiques of standpoint theory as deterministic.

<sup>22</sup> Spivak's (1993) work on the subaltern concerns how colonial texts erase the experiences and subjectivities of the colonised.

<sup>23</sup> By way of example, Said's work on orientalism (1995) demonstrates how colonial meaning-making was central to power's hold over the colonial subject.

<sup>24</sup> Western feminism's liberal and individualistic roots lie in the Enlightenment's conception of the subject (Eisenstein, 2004, p. 182).

<sup>25</sup> Mohanty (1988) argues that the dualisms of powerful/powerless and victim/agent have served to marginalise the Third World woman and centre the Western subject.

universality of the category of 'woman' and its implicit exclusions. Rooted in black feminist thought, post-colonial feminists' attention to the racialised and sexualised relations of colonial rule have generated new forms of knowledge that critique Western feminist erasures (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 2000b; Mohanty, 1988). In theoretically and politically exposing how colonised Others are seen and known through the Western gaze, post-colonial feminism refuses the racialising, sexualising and gendering terms of that gaze. These refusals are undergirded by an acknowledgement that race, class and gender operate as interconnected forms of inequality (Collins, 2000). Operating as interlocking systems of oppression (hooks, 2000a) these inequalities constitute what Collins (1991) terms the "matrix of domination" (p. 225). This is significant because the prioritisation of specific dimensions of identity, as sites for political mobilisation, may conceal that they do not operate as "separate axes of power" (Butler, 1993, p. 117). In this sense, an exclusive focus on women overlooks the multiple permutations of othering they face (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996). As a category of analysis, gender should not be understood in isolation from context, nor as a 'pure' influence outside of other systems of identification (Grosz, 1994). As such, intersectionality offers an alternative to the single-axis framework of Western feminism's historical erasure of black women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). Consequently, in assuming an intersectional approach, this study recognises that racism, homophobia and misogyny are each vectors of power that deploy one another for their own articulation (Butler, 1993, p. 18). As my research seeks to contextualise violence against lesbians within multiple and intersecting forms of oppression, and resistances to them, such an understanding is critical. In rejecting "an additive approach" on how different subject locations are related, intersectionality considers the contradictory positions within multiple modes of domination (Young and Dickerson, 1994, p. 4). This is critical in that the participants in this study are simultaneously interpellated as women, as lesbians, as black or white, rich or poor, amongst other categorisations. These categories are not freely deployed; rather, they are constituted within prevailing power arrangements. I find Lykke's (2010) definition of intersectionality particularly productive in that she describes intersectionality as both a theory and a method with which "to analyse how historically specific kinds of power differentials and/or constraining normativities, based on discursively, institutionally, and/or structurally constructed socio-cultural

categorisations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue and so on, interact, and in so doing produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations” (p. 50). Although I focus on lesbian subjectivation in particular, an intersectional lens draws the mutually reinforcing categorisations of race, gender, sexuality and class into the centre of the analytical frame. This is critical in accounting for how structural conditions and social processes impact on women’s lives in ways that are interactive, reciprocal and cumulative (Ngan-Ling Chow, 1996, p. xix). Important too, is that intersectionality attends to how hegemonies of sexuality, race, class and gender are co-constituting (Schippers, 2007) in ways that shape subjectivities. I now turn to what a queering of the subjectivity further contributes to the theoretical underpinnings of this study.

### **1.3.3 Queering the subject**

Grounded in a post-structural conception of identity, queer theory challenges the identity-rootedness of LGBTI studies and politics. It does so by debunking the notion of sexualities and genders as stable, and by deconstructing normative gender binaries and the naturalness of sex (Jackson, 1999; Jagose, 1996). In emphasising the multiplicity of identity, queer thinking expands contemporary sexual politics beyond the constraints of hetero-homo binary definitions, thus offering an anti-essentialist understanding of subjectivation (Epprecht, 2008; Gunkel, 2010; Namaste, 1994). Queer theory is rooted in a discursive understanding of power in which sexual subjects are formed through the signifying practices of dominant gender and sexual regimes. As a political project, queer perspectives rework abjection into political agency by resignifying homosexuality (Butler, 1993, p. 21), thus drawing the sexual and gender margins into the centre of theorising sexualities. Akin to the aforementioned Foucauldian conceptions of the materiality of discourse, a queer analysis collapses the distinction between structure and agency (Valocchi, 2005).

Critiques of queer theory include that it inadequately considers the material bases of power (Seidman, 1993; Valocchi, 2005), that its deconstructive impulse tempers political possibility (Jeffreys, 2003), and that it excludes an analysis of race and reinforces racialised hierarchies (Allen, 2013; Petzen, 2012). In relation to African sexual politics in particular, queer, feminist and anti-racist scholars and activists have taken up and reformulated queer



theory and politics in productive ways (see Ekine, 2013; Epprecht, 2008). This is illustrative of how Western theories can be put to use in African contexts in ways that are cognisant of contextual particularities (see Nyanzi, 2011).

I employ a queer perspective precisely because it dislodges the fixity of lesbian identity, providing a non-minoritising view of sexual and gender subjectivity that destabilises the heteronormative order. Alongside intersectionality, queer theory supports my overall strategy<sup>26</sup> of troubling the terms of 'being lesbian' so as to unpack its intersectional and contradictory character within the discourse of homophobia-related violence. In reading queerness through a post-colonial lens, I seek to keep close the gendered, racialised and classed materialities in which queer lives are differentially constituted.

#### **1.4 Productions and performances of sexuality and gender**

Having traced the broad ontological and epistemological framework for the study, I now move to a pointed discussion on the social construction of sexuality and gender as domains for the production and performance of subjectivities. I discuss how sexuality is a site of generative power, as well as being co-constitutive of gender as performative. I delineate how the lesbian comes to constitute a sexual Other within hegemonic constructs of sexuality, gender and desire. In the latter part of this section, I situate sexual subjectivity within post-coloniality and its impacts on identity, as simultaneously raced, classed, gendered and sexualised. I then discuss constructions of African sexualities within this wider framing.

##### **1.4.1 Sexuality as discipline and defiance**

In Foucault's (1998) account, modern sexuality is deployed as a modality of power that produces sexual subjectivities. This is a view of sexuality as a process of coming into being, and thus into meaning, through the productive capacity of discourse and its attendant truths. Feminists have critiqued Foucault's conceptualisation of sexuality for sexist bias

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<sup>26</sup> See more on my overall strategy of deployment and deconstruction in Section 4.2.

(Alcoff, 1996) and for its inadequate treatment of both women and gender (de Laetis, 1987<sup>27</sup>; Gavey, 2004; McLaren, 2002). The latter charges are staggeringly apparent in that, as Stoler puts it, Foucault produced “a history of sexuality without gender” (1995, p. 93). Notwithstanding these criticisms, Foucault’s theory of sexuality has been productively deployed by feminists (see McLaren, 2002; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Sawicki, 1991; Stoler, 1995).

The production of sexuality through discourse encompasses the social regulations and categorisations around which cultures and politics are organised (Weeks, 2003). Discourses of sexuality and the power they constitute are manifest in disciplines such as medicine, law, biology and religion, functioning as modes of regulation (Foucault, 1998). Operating as regimes of truth, these discourses name, categorise, describe, explain and judge their objects (Foucault, 2004). The matrices of knowledge-power that govern sexuality circumscribe the limits of what is considered normal and natural and therefore socially acceptable. In this sense sexuality is productive and is not only a site of control and regulation, but also one of contestation and resistance (Foucault and Faubion, 2002; Weeks, 2003). This offers a conception of sexual subjectivity as not just a surface on which repressive power is enacted, but also an agentic site through which power is tested and contested. Such a view of sexuality, as a deployment of power, is highly productive for a study that attends to the constituting effects of discourses of violence, whilst at the same time recognising that sexuality is a manifestation of both discipline and its defiance.

Foucault’s conception of power has, however, been criticised for, amongst other reasons, not accounting for the ways in which certain subjects come to occupy particular subject positions (Hall, 1996), for overly de-centring the power of the state (Brown, 1995), and for its inattentiveness to how colonialism and racialisation are implicated in the production of power (D’Cruze and Rao, 2004; Gilroy, 2001; Stoler, 1995). However, Mbembe and Meintjies (2003) contend that racism is in fact central to Foucault’s conception of how life and death are regulated by the state, whilst Stoler (1995) offers a compelling post-colonial reinterpretation of Foucault. Stoler (1995) rearticulates Foucault’s history of sexuality by relocating it within a history of empire. In doing so, she

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<sup>27</sup> De Laetis offers a corrective to Foucault’s theory of sexuality through her notion of a technology of gender, which recognises gender as “both the product and process of its representation” (1987, p. 5).

demonstrates how a Foucauldian conception of sexuality is a product of a particular politics of race that is bound up with the constitution of the bourgeois subject through the construction of the colonised Other (Stoler, 1995). I find Stoler's account highly constructive in exposing the historical limits of Foucault's account of sexuality, whilst also demonstrating how this bias can be productively revealed by means of Foucault's own analytics (Stoler, 1995).

#### **1.4.2 Gendered sexuality and performativity**

In her queer, feminist reformulation of Foucault's theory of sexuality, Butler (1990) positions gender as central to sexual subjectivation. Butler argues that the body is not sexed until it is given meaning through discourse about its own naturalness (Butler, 1993, p. 24). In this sense, the discursive materialisation of the sexed subject marks the emergence of a heterosexual matrix of intelligibility (Butler, 1990)<sup>28</sup> through which sexual and gender practices and desires are identified, classified and socially ordered. Together with the male/female sex binary, Butler contends that gender differentiation is further achieved through the practice of heterosexual desire (Butler, 1990). Here she draws on feminist ideas of heterosexuality as compulsory (Rich, 1980) and as constituting the patriarchal mandate to which males and females are required to conform, and in relation to which gender is policed (Bem, 1993; Lee-Lampshire, 1999; Rubin, 1984<sup>29</sup>). These constructionist approaches to gender view it as a social practice rather than as the expression of a presupposed identity, and therefore as "something we do" rather than "something we are" (Weatherall, 2002, p. 156). As a social construct, gender assigns meaning about a person's identity, value, and status (de Lauretis, 1987; Kramer, 2011; Lister, 1997). De Beauvoir, whose philosophy of gender (2010) is formative of constructivist thinking about gendered identities, asserts that, "being a woman is not a natural fact. It is a result of a certain history" (1975). By extension, femininity – which is central to the ontology of 'woman' – is inscribed onto the female body as a condition of gender (Lee-Lampshire, 1999, p. 3).

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<sup>28</sup> This matrix of intelligibility refers to the constructed logic of how sex, gender and desire that produces a coherent sexual identity and corresponding gender identity (Butler, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> I take leave of Rubin in so far as she considers feminism to be a "theory of gender oppression, not one to be presumed to be a theory of sexual oppression" (1984, p. 125), thereby disarticulating sexuality from gender.

Gender and sexual difference, and the relationality between them, have been variously theorised by feminists.<sup>30</sup> However, Butler (1990) shifts the emphasis from difference to performativity<sup>31</sup> in positing that gender is constructed through the forced reiteration of norms. These gender norms operate through the embodiment of masculinity and femininity that are aligned to the idealisation of the heterosexual bond (Butler, 1993, p. 231). As a consequence of this, the production of masculinities and femininities through performance are social practices rather than internal markers of an external gender system. Gender performativity is a “stylised repetition of acts” that produces a stable gendered identity (Butler, 1990, p. 191). The theory of the performative practice of gender builds on Foucault’s conception of power as diffused, relational and decentralised, as previously discussed. Consequently, it invests the subject with the potential for resistance.<sup>32</sup>(I discuss the implications of this for political agency in Sections 2.1 and 2.2). Gender performativity allows for an understanding of lesbian identity as a process of becoming through perpetual doing, redoing and undoing.

In locating gender within wider ideologies and power arrangements, Butler (1990) situates the compulsory logic of sex, gender and desire within hetero-patriarchal and heteronormative cultural hegemonies. She posits that being a man or a woman gains coherence through an oppositional binary gender system that establishes a “causal continuity” among sex, gender and desire (Butler, 1990, p. 31). Gender is thus kept in place by this fictional heterosexual matrix and its constitutive categories (Butler, 1990 p. 46). This schema by which sex, gender and desire come to be recognised and ordered requires an intelligible conception of the homosexual (Butler, 1990, p.104). Consequently, the binary configuration of normalised heterosexuality and repudiated homosexuality is central to the production and sustaining of gender and sexual normativities (Butler, 1990). Hegemonic masculinity is necessarily heterosexual (Peterson, 2000) in that within its rules ‘a real man’ is not a woman and is not gay (Harris, 2011). Both hegemonic masculinity<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> MacKinnon (1989) approaches the relationship between sex and gender as one in which the latter is the sexualisation of inequality between men and women. Irigaray (2007) contends that there is only one sex (i.e. the masculine) which is constituted in relation to its Other (the feminine). Wittig (1983) posits that the masculine is normative and that, as a consequence, there is effectively only one gender, that of the feminine.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Performativity’ was coined by Austin (1962) to refer to utterances that do things rather than just describe things.

<sup>32</sup> Butler (1990) draws on drag and butch/femme performances as illustrative examples of how ‘true’ sex and gender can be subverted and denaturalised.

<sup>33</sup> Hegemonic masculinity refers to the forms and functions of patriarchal dominance in all modes of life (Connell, 1987).

and hegemonic femininity<sup>34</sup> are thus predicated on the vigorous disavowal of the homosexual (Connell, 1987; Schippers, 2007) and, as such, the gay/lesbian subject is the quintessential threat to masculine and feminine status (Bem, 1993). These formulations recognise that there are dominant cultural forms and practices of masculinity and femininity in relation to which gendered subjectivities are configured. Importantly though, I recognise that there are multiple masculinities and femininities, including female masculinities (Halberstam, 1998), and that these are both discursively and materially produced (Gill and Scharff, 2011; Mehta, 1999; Morrell, 2001).

In further underscoring the co-constitution of sexuality and gender, Tamale's (2011) notion of gendered sexualities is particularly useful in accounting for the ideological and historical aspects of both sexuality and gender, and how these are interrelated. In taking up Butler's (1990, 1993) conceptualisation of sexuality, gender and desire, I seek to assert their denaturalisation and note how dominant modes of gendered practice constitute the lesbian as a sexual and gendered Other.

### 1.4.3 Embodied subjectivities

To approach lesbian identity as embodied within particular socio-cultural contexts, is to recognise that subjectivation takes place in and through bodies. The somatic turn in post-modernist thinking situated the body as a historical and normative construction within tropes of Western modernity (Bordo, 1993; Grosz, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997). As cultural markers, bodies are implicated in gender power relations (Blackman, 2008; Bordo, 1993; Grosz, 1994). Braidotti's corporeal materialism foregrounds female embodiment, arguing that it is to be understood "as neither a biological nor a sociological category, but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological" (1993, p. 7).

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The concept has been variously critiqued, including for being too narrow (Hearn, 2014) and for providing an inadequate account of how race and class contexts shape masculine identifications (Morrell, Jewkes, and Lindegger, 2012). What I find particularly productive in the concept is its attention to men's systemic dominance and oppression over women, as well as how men themselves are organised hierarchically. It also recognises how men draw "patriarchal dividends" through modes of subordination over women and over other men (Connell, 1995, p.79). Connell (2000, p. 3) recognises that a culturally dominant form of masculinity in a given setting is "not total dominance [as] other forms of masculinity persist alongside" it. Despite this, hegemonic masculinity is often erroneously considered as overly deterministic and as not considerate of the multiplicities of masculinity.

<sup>34</sup> Here I draw on Schippers's definition of hegemonic femininity as "consist[ing] of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2007, p. 94). Hegemonic femininity also orders the relations between women around ascendant and subordinate positions (Schippers, 2007).

In her work on the feminine disciplining of the body, Bordo illustrates that the female body is “a site of struggle against docility and gender normalisation” (1993, p.184). Similarly, Bartky (1990) explores particular forms of feminine embodiment to expose how the disciplinary regime of normative femininity inscribes an inferior status to the female body. It is also argued that these dominant modes of feminisation are imposed on black women’s bodies in order to domesticate them and ensure conformity to the codes of Western femininity (Lewis, 2005). Albeit from varying conceptual vantage points, these articulations of female embodiment all underscore the centrality of the body in the constitution of gender, race, class and sexuality.

The social construction of the body is central to both Foucauldian and feminist thinking. For Foucault, subjectivation happens corporeally such that the normalising force of social disciplining brings the body into materialisation (Foucault, 1995). Through rendering the body docile, these normative practices govern its conduct. This is why Foucault claims that “the soul is the prison of the body”, thus emphasising how regulatory norms work on and through bodies (1995, p. 30). More specifically, sexual regimes of the body are regulated through “sanctions” and “seductions” (Rose, 2005, p. 319), determined within a heterosexual hegemony that crafts the terms for which bodies matter (Butler, 1993). The queer body is a disruption of gender and sexual normativities (Halberstam, 2005) that renders it unintelligible and as “the spectre of its own impossibility” (Butler, 1993, p. x). Queer bodies also inhabit and are inhabited by space. Queer geographies reflect how space is heterosexualised and how queer transgression resists these spatialised limits (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Binnie, 1997). Yet Oswin (2008) cautions against approaching queer space as solely determined by the homosexual/heterosexual binary, which she argues elides the simultaneously raced, classed and gendered dimensions of both space and queer identities themselves.

#### **1.4.4 Heteronormativity and the lesbian Other**

The discourse of modern sexuality, significantly influenced by Freud, has produced a discourse of sex that, according to Potts (2002), is foundational to the vocabulary of heterosex as a hegemonic system. It is within this heterosexual hegemony that the material and symbolic abjection of lesbian identity is to be located. Freud’s (1922) theorisation of

sexuality is significant in that it produced a dominant and historically enduring schema for understanding sexual subjectivity.<sup>35</sup> In positing homosexual disavowal as central to the successful resolution to the Oedipal complex, Freud constructs sexuality in and through gender, and presumes desire to be heterosexual (Hook, 2006). In challenging this schema, Butler (1990) argues that gender and its congruence with sexuality is a social obligation rather than a natural state. Freud has been variously critiqued for his othering of women and their sexualities.<sup>36</sup>

Against this backdrop, heterosexuality operates as the privileged, universal and unmarked sexuality in relation to which the lesbian is minoritised, problematised and marked (Butler, 1990; Halperin, 2003; Stoler, 1995). As the repudiated sexual identity within a classificatory system that defines the terms of the sexual, the lesbian represents a cultural impossibility (Butler, 1993, p. 111). The invention of the category of 'homosexual' in the late nineteenth century is also a product of Western culture (Lind, 2005), as is the pathologisation of lesbian sexual identity (Faderman, 2001). Central to this is the hetero-homo distinction which, according to Sedgwick (2008), is of determinative importance for all sexualities, due to its universalising and naturalising effect. Consequently, homosexuality is "a category that only exists in relation to normative heterosexuality" (Jackson, 1999, p. 154). The homosexual is thus recruited into social existence through a "shaming interpellation" which signifies the prohibition that is inherent to heterosexuality (Butler, 1993, p.226). As a "relationship of power", heterosexuality is both compulsory and institutionalised (Seidler, 1995, p. 170), requiring an externalised Other in order to reproduce itself.<sup>37</sup> Heteronormativity<sup>38</sup> is a useful concept for understanding the disciplining effects of heterosexuality and its articulation of norms that reinforce sexual

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<sup>35</sup> In his theory of psychosexuality, Freud delineates a process of 'normal' sexual development within which the homosexual is the consequence of immature and maladapted sexual development. Whilst Freud himself never vilified homosexuals, psychoanalysis produced a powerful set of terms that render the homosexual normatively 'deviant' and 'perverse'.

<sup>36</sup> Freud's theory of sexuality is critiqued for positioning the phallus as a privileged signifier of sexual subjectivity (Butler, 1993, p. 61), for its phallogocentric conception of the sexual through which feminine identity is othered (Benjamin, 2005; Irigaray, 2007; Mitchell, 1974), and for linking psychological abnormality to the classification of non-heterosexual female desire (Faderman, 2001, p. 320).

<sup>37</sup> In arguing the fictional character of heterosexuality and its performative reproduction, Butler asserts that "gay is to straight not what copy is to original but what copy is to copy" (Butler, 1990, p. 42).

<sup>38</sup> Defined by Berlant and Warner, heteronormativity refers to "the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged" (1998, p. 548).

and gender hierarchies (Beasley, 2013; Seidman, 1993). Supported by heterosexism, this works to naturalise and valorise heterosexual desire (Peterson, 2000), in relation to which the lesbian is constructed as non-normative.

'Lesbian' has been defined as both a sexual and political category. This is reflected in ideas that the existence of the lesbian destructs the myth of the category of woman (Wittig, 2007) and represents a resistance to patriarchy (Rich, 1980). Building on Connell's (1987) theorisation of gender hegemony, Schippers (2007) contends that the lesbian is a "pariah femininity" that is socially undesired and stigmatised due to her "refusal to embody the relationship between masculinity and femininity demanded by gender hegemony" (p. 95). This accords with notions of the lesbian as representing a subordinated femininity within the gender hegemony (Collins, 2004; Connell, 1987). Consequently lesbian subjectivity is "a site of ambiguity within the regime of gender" (Mason, 2002, p. 62). In sum, I approach the lesbian as a socially devalued and marked sexual and gendered subject, and as a product of dominant regulatory regimes that are both hetero-patriarchal and heteronormative. Coined by Hart (1994), 'heteropatriarchy' co-articulates the dual operations of both patriarchy and heterosexualisation which, according to Alexander (1997), enables the continuation of colonial gender and sexual power relations. Within the wider framework of subjectivity as intersectional, fluid and contested, I also approach 'lesbian' as an ontologically unstable term, recognising that it is navigated by subjects in multiple and contradictory ways.

## **1.5 Sexual subjectivities in (post)colonial contexts**

In the section that follows I outline how post-colonial articulations of race, gender, sexuality and class are brought to bear on understanding sexual subjectivities in the post-colonial context. By way of the concept of the 'coloniality of power', I commence with a discussion on the enduring effects of colonial discourses on identity construction. I then hone in on sexualities in Africa, paying particular attention to how non-normative sexualities are discursively framed so as to locate queer subjectivities within these historical permutations.



### **1.5.1 The coloniality of the power and the gendering, heterosexualisation and racing of nations**

As I have already argued, post-colonial feminism provides a historical account of sexual, gendered and raced subjectivities that considers the durable effects of colonialism in the present. Post-colonial theory and politics challenge the foundations of Western rationality and its myths of 'origin' and 'progress' (Gandhi, 1998, p. 36–37).<sup>39</sup> These myths rely on constructions of 'civilisation and reason' (as white), and as antithetical to 'savagery' (as black), 'emotionality' (as woman) and 'sexuality' (as the racialised Other), in relation to which the propertied white male is rendered invisible (Eisenstein, 2004, p. 75). These colonial negations of alterity represent the colonised Other as subaltern (Gandhi, 1998; Spivak, 1993). Thinking such colonial effects into the contemporary moment is well captured in Quijano's notion of the 'coloniality of power' (2000). As a concept distinct from 'colonialism',<sup>40</sup> coloniality accounts for the fact that the organising structures, practices and legacies of colonial power arrangements persist into the present (Quijano, 2000).

Women's bodies are symbolic border posts for the nation's honour and morality (McClintock, 1993; Schuhmann, 2001). As reproducers of the nation, women are also the embodied property of men and signify the private, rather than the public realm (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Waugh, 1992). The civilising mission of the West produced contradictory gendered embodiments in the form of hierarchies amongst women wherein those stigmatised as raced or classed Others were positioned "outside the ambit of recognisable humanity" (D'Cruze and Rao, 2004, p. 502). This articulates how colonial power operated to dehumanise, through its relational gendering, racing and classing of women. Moreover, colonial narratives naturalised the rule of white men, rendering black women and black men incapable of self-government (Mohanty, 1991). Colonialism was deeply patriarchal and, as Mbembe states, was a form of "phallic" domination (2001, p. 13). The

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<sup>39</sup> These refer to the myths of the 'true origin' of the individual and the nation, and the "emancipatory myth of progress" and its teleological effects (Gandhi, 1998, p. 36–37).

<sup>40</sup> Maldonado-Torres's (2007) reworking of Quijano's definition of "coloniality" is particularly useful in elaborating its distinction from the term colonialism: "Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations" (p. 243).

representation of black women as ‘nature’ and white women as ‘civilised’ was central to colonialism’s racist tropes. In her analysis of black women’s bodies and their historical depictions, Lewis (2005) asserts that “[t]he black female body is wholly charged by the normative meaning vested in whiteness and masculinity [...] and is scripted negatively – as unreliable, sexually hyperdeveloped, untrustworthy, excessive, irrational, immoral” (p. 12). Black womanhood has also been constructed as passive and as imbuing the status of an ‘inevitable’ victim (Collins, 1991; Gqola, 2007; Jungar and Oinas, 2011).

National identities also constitute sexual borderlines through the policing of sexuality (Nagel, 2000) and the sexualisation of racial and ethnic Others (Rogers, 2012). This sexualising and gendering of nations is also deployed in post-colonial nation building. In this context, masculinisation – and its racialisation and sexualisation of subjectivities – characterises advanced capitalism in post-colonial contexts (Alexander, 1997). Nyanzi (2014b) argues that the African heterosexual body and heteronormative procreation are central to a modernist nation-building project. In this sense, the ruling sexuality (heterosexuality) and the ruling gender (hetero-patriarchal masculinity) converge as a function of post-coloniality, to produce and sustain a set of conditions in which queer sexualities are systemically marginalised in the concept of nation. Heterosexism shapes citizenship (Alexander, 2005; Carabine, 1996) within the patriarchal power relations in which the state is implicated (Connell, 1987<sup>41</sup>; Lister, 1997, p. 42).<sup>42</sup> These arrangements result in the denial of equal and substantive citizenship for lesbians (Fester, 2006) and for women in general.<sup>43</sup>

Whilst much theoretical attention is given to how colonialism shaped subjectivities through discourses of race and gender, there is less consideration of the regime of heterosexuality, with which the colonialist project was centrally preoccupied. In reading

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<sup>41</sup> Connell is criticised for excluding race and thus offering only a partial analysis of citizenship (Mohanty, 1991). Connell is also rejected by many post-modern theorists for his emphasis on power as a structural oppression (Beasley, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> I acknowledge that there is a considerable literature on the relationship between spatiality and gendered subjectivity, including how spatial orders were constituted in colonialism (Mills, 2005); however, these are beyond the present scope. I do, however, discuss the gendered and sexualised nature of space (Oswin, 2008; Pain, 1997) with particular reference to violence and gender fear in Section 3.5.

<sup>43</sup> It is beyond the present scope to detail the various and contesting literatures on women’s citizenship. The constraints of liberal conceptions of the nation state, and women’s citizenship therein, has been variously criticised by feminists (Gouws, 2005; Lister, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Such critiques include the false separation between the public and private spheres; the decontextualisation of individuals into rational rights bearers; and the emphasis on citizens as producers and consumers of liberal economies (Dietz, 1992; Knight Abowitz, and Harnish, 2005; McClure, 1997).

the colonality of power through an intersectionality lens, Lugones (2007) underscores how heterosexism was integral to the ways in which gender and race intersected in the production and functioning of colonial power.<sup>44</sup> I find this centring of heterosexuality in the making of colonial subjectivities particularly productive. Lugones (2007) also contends that the effect of the “categorical separation of race, gender, class, and sexuality” has produced an indifference on the part of those men who are “racialised as inferior” toward systemic violences against black women (p. 188). She argues that through the violent heterosexualisation and gendering of colonialism, colonised women were racially inferiorised whilst white bourgeois women “have consistently counted as women so described in the West” (Lugones, 2007, p. 202). Other queer and feminist theorists have focused on this continuity of colonial heterosexualisation in post-colonial settings (Alexander, 2005; Ekine, 2013). The scholarship on the colonial continuations of apartheid, and with particular reference to the interwovenness of sexualities, gender and race in South Africa, is discussed in Sections 2.5.1 and 3.2. It suffices to say that situating sexual subjectivities within an understanding of the colonality of power reveals how, as Mbembe contends, “[s]o often, Africa epitomises the intractable, the mute, the abject” (2005, p. 7).



### **1.5.2 (De)constructing sexualities in Africa**

African sexualities have long been the objects of the colonial gaze, with African bodies figuring a central target of colonialism’s civilising mission towards the barbaric sexual Other (McClintock, 1995; Tamale, 2011). The result was racist and exoticised constructions of African sexualities as primitive, savage and hypersexual (Hart, 1994; Kaler, 2009; Posel, 2005; Tamale, 2011). These colonial articulations cast the sexual subjects of opposing civilisations (Europe versus Africa) within a set of racialised, sexualised and gendered terms. The making of Western sexualities has relied on the production of racialised non-Western Others (McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 2000). On this score, McClintock (1995) investigates how relations of empire fetishised the colonised, whilst Alexander (2005) focuses on how these colonial narratives are remobilised through contemporary the

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<sup>44</sup> In her historicisation of gender and heterosexuality in Latin America, Lugones (2007) describes heterosexuality as “not merely normative but as consistently perverse when violently exercised across the colonial modern gender system so as to construct a worldwide system of power” (p. 187–88).

sexualisation of the 'native' (Alexander, 2005). This co-configuration of the racialised Other (as savage) and the white (as civilised), is foundational to both colonial and post-colonial discourses of sexuality. Central to this is the historical production of the anthropological fiction of the essentialised, singular African identity (Epprecht, 2008). This fiction threads through binary representations of heterosexuality as "normatively African", and homosexuality as "deviant and Western" (Lewis, 2011, p. 209). Colonial policing of sexualities also took the form of the criminalisation of same-sex practices and identities in Tanzania (Chacha, 2004), Kenya (Thomas, 2000), South Africa and elsewhere in Africa (see Amadiume, 1987). The invisibilisation and stigmatisation of same-sex sexualities is thus intertwined with the production of a hegemonic culture of heteronormativity, sustained through a constrained rendering of African sex and sexuality (Epprecht, 2008 p. 168). The myth of a homogenous, heterosexual African sexuality relies on the concealment of the multiplicity of sexualities and genders (Mama, 1995; Tamale, 2011; Lewis, 2011). The myriad forms of sexual and gender identity, including of same-sex sexualities in Africa, is well documented (Epprecht, 2008; Morgan and Wieringa, 2005; Murray and Roscoe, 2001). However, Desai (2001) cautions against a Western romanticisation of alternative sexualities in Africa, whilst Davies (2014) similarly argues against depicting pre-colonial Africa as devoid of gender contradictions. What is perhaps more productive, is to attend to the contemporary economies of heterosexuality that continue to invisibilise African sexual agency (Sanya, 2004), whatever its permutation.

Culture is central to the governance of the social and to the exercise of power over life (Hall, 1997a).<sup>45</sup> The conditions of empire produced Western cultures of classed respectability, racial purity and gendered vulnerability (McClintock, 1995) that relied on particular constructs of African culture. Africanness is dominantly represented as primitive, anti-modernity, inherently misogynistic, and as an obstruction to the advancement of human rights and equality (Bracke, 2012; Kaler, 2009; Oyewumi, 2002; Tamale, 2011). These colonial representations and their positioning of African women as perpetual victims efface the contradictory character of African experiences (Oyewumi, 2002; Kaler, 2009).

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<sup>45</sup> I find the Comaroff and Comaroff's (1992) definition of culture as "the semantic space, the field of signs and practices, in which human beings construct and represent themselves and others, and hence their societies and histories" (p. 27) particularly useful in its recognition of the changeability and contingency of culture, and how it is imbricated in processes of subjectivation and social ordering.

Discourses of culture frequently produce an othering of Africaness in that ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ are deployed to denote African culture in particular (Shefer, 2002). It is also argued that colonialism’s abjection and distortion of culture has disfigured the histories of black people (Biko, 1978). I concur with Tamale’s (2007, p. 164) emphasis on the contradictory functions of culture, which she describes as “a double-edged sword” that is wielded both to enhance women’s access to sexual justice and to denounce it. Post-colonial discourses of tradition and culture are also deployed to prop up myths about African sexuality (Lewis, 2011) and to bolster ruling nationalisms in which black women continue to be subordinated (Mama, 1995). Through such cultural norms and practices, women’s sexuality is policed within the constraints of heterosexual marriage and motherhood (McFadden, 2003). Bhana, Morrell, Hearn and Moletsane (2007) argue that “the emotive power of culture” works against transforming patriarchal and heteronormative notions of sexuality. However, this formulation situates patriarchy and heteronormativity *outside* of culture. I would argue that it is through and within cultures that the normativities of patriarchy and heterosexuality come to be constituted. Similarly, Ratele (2007) contends that the politicisation of cultural belonging serves particular power interests and creates the conditions under which contestations over gendered and sexual inclusion are played out.

Fanon (2008) links homosexuality to Western culture in implying that because black people do not experience the Oedipal complex they cannot be homosexual. Yet Fanon fails to problematise the heterosexualising effects of colonial impositions on Africa sexualities.<sup>46</sup> Productively though, Fanon articulates the reciprocity of race and culture in describing how the racist inferiorisation of African culture results in it being “abandoned, sloughed off, rejected, despised, becom[ing] for the inferiorised individual an object of passionate attachment” (cited in Fanon and Haddour, 2006, p. 27). The deployment of African culture to do the work of colonial indirect rule (Mamdani, 1996)<sup>47</sup> makes such a “passionate attachment” – as an act aimed at reasserting the repudiated culture – all the

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<sup>46</sup> The sexism of Fanon’s work (Fuss, 1994), as well as its reliance on heteronormative notions of sex, sexuality and desire, constrain its usefulness in understanding co-articulations of queer sexuality and race in colonial and post-colonial contexts.

<sup>47</sup> Mamdani (1996) refers here to the indirect rule of apartheid whereby a white racial minority ruled through the tribalisation of ethnicity, enabled by local power arrangements (i.e. by so-called traditional leaders).

more strident. One manifestation of this is the construction of homosexuality as incompatible with African culture. The repertoires that craft this incompatibility rely on the deployment of culture for political ends (Kaoma, 2009). Ekine (2013, p. 80) argues that culturalist discourses and their rhetoric of homosexuality as ‘un-African’ reflect contestations regarding the definition of ‘authentic Africanness’. Perhaps, in this context, cultural contestations around Africaness can be read as performing a cultural revalorisation of sorts.<sup>48</sup> The active invisibilisation of non-heterosexual sexualities in Africa might also represent what Bhabha (2000) refers to as, “those whose very presence is both ‘overlooked’ – in the double sense of social surveillance and psychic disavowal – and, at the same time, overdetermined – psychically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic” (p. 354).

As this section has shown, constructions of sexuality in Africa are the product of historical and contemporary formations and their material, discursive, ideological and institutional effects. Consequently, discourses of sexuality, gender, race and class are shaped by colonial and post-colonial narratives and their acculturating effects. Lesbian identity in Africa is installed within these broader epistemes of meaning and materiality.

### **1.5.3 Intersecting whiteness, queerness and class**

The establishment of racial identity is a reiterative practice that intersects with other identity performances (Distiller and Steyn, 2004; Duncan, 2002). Moreover, race is a key form of social cleavage, domination and resistance (Rustin, 2002, p. 184). The institutionalisation of racial separation under apartheid is considered an expression of white supremacy (Fredrickson, 1982, p. 239) and, predictably, race has become a “primary constituent identity in South Africa” (Distiller and Steyn, 2004, p. 7). As previously discussed, cultural discourses were central to colonialism’s racist rule and, by extension, to the apartheid system of governance. Erasmus (2001) contends that culture came to do the work of race during apartheid. It is because of the primacy of race to the technologies of

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<sup>48</sup> One example of this is the *Traditional Courts Bill* in South Africa, which reflects attempts to erase sexual difference and freeze-frame African culture. In asserting a cultural instrumentalism, the Bill aimed to secure the dominance of traditional leaders and institutions over matters of sexuality and gender. Another instance where culture was deployed to resist sexual diversity is in the proposed constitutional amendment, put to Parliament by the National House of Traditional Leaders, to *remove* sexual orientation as a ground for non-discrimination from the Constitution. For more on these examples, see Judge (2011b; 2012).

both colonialism and apartheid, that I wish to pay particular attention to its implications for how queer sexualities in South Africa are conceived of. Whilst the post-colonial orientations I have outlined thus far enable a critical engagement with racism and racialisation, the operations of whiteness in the construction of racialised sexualities is often overlooked. In order to attend to the role of whiteness as a dominant mode of power, I draw on some key concepts from critical race theory, to which I now turn.

Through its historicisation of racial categories and the conditions that produced them, critical race theory exposes how the structures, relations and identities that underpin race function (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). In doing so, a critical race orientation deconstructs the racialised character of power and privilege, as well as the structural, spatial and discursive dynamics of whiteness (Deliovsky, 2010; Frankenberg, 2000; Fredrickson, 1982). Critical race theory draws particular attention to how white privilege functions as an invisible norm (Brah, 2000; McIntosh, 1989). From this vantage point, whiteness and blackness are approached as socially-constructed categories that produce ways of relating, thinking, knowing and doing, through which they become normatively reproduced (Ward, 2008; Ware and Back, 2002). Carolissen, van Wyk, and Pick-Cornelius (2012, p. 42) refer to “conceptual whiteness” as the internalised social values and status associated with whiteness in relation to blackness, which is configured as a lack. This accounts for how whiteness operates not only materially, but also symbolically and discursively. The recognition that there is no ontological basis for race (Ware and Back, 2002) links with how, as Fanon (2008) contends, black people can adopt whiteness as an acculturated mode of being and doing.

Critical race theory has been critiqued for re-centering white people by neglecting to politically intervene against white power. However, I concur with Dottolo’s (2014, p. 104) assertion that a direct interrogation of whiteness is critical to the dismantlement of the racialised hierarchies that determine the terms for being ‘fully human’. As a concentrated site of discursive and material power, whiteness works co-constitutively with other modalities of power such as heterosexuality and middle-classness. In her work on the production of white femininity, Deliovsky (2010, p. 19) approaches whiteness as a positional superiority; an ideological and relational category that intersects with gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality; and as an unmarked identity. Hegemonic femininity is thus

raced as white, in relation to which subordinated femininities (such as ‘the lesbian’) are constructed (Collins, 2004<sup>49</sup>; Deliovsky, 2010; Schippers, 2007). Hart (1994) contends that in the imagination of white heteropatriarchy, the lesbian, the woman of colour and the prostitute, are all defining Others in the production of white hetero-femininity.

Turning now to the intersection of race and queerness, Kennedy (2014), through her notion of “white normativity”, examines how whiteness is integral to the construction of gay and lesbian normativity based on racialised hierarchies.<sup>50</sup> Read in a context such as South Africa where white privilege is historically entrenched, the interplay between homonormativity and reproductions of whiteness is of particularly relevance to this study. The racialisation of gayness as a marker of whiteness (Livermon, 2012; Morrissey, 2013) further elaborates how sexuality and race are mutually implicated in articulations and representations of queer subjectivity.

In considering the classed dimensions of racialisation in South Africa, it is noted that racial capitalism was central to apartheid (van der Westhuizen, 2007). Race and class are co-articulated through capitalism’s various exploitations. Goldberg’s (2009) concept of the ‘racially marginalised’ usefully interlinks race and class in emphasising the spatial and economic aspects of marginality alongside the material effects of racism. I concur with the idea that class mediates the impact of racism on black lives in South Africa (de la Rey and Duncan, 2003). As such, I wish to avoid the narrowness of the ‘race vs. class’ debate<sup>51</sup> (Norval and Howarth, 1998) by thinking the two concepts together. The inseparability of race and class is perhaps best summed up in Hall’s (1980) formulation of race as the “modality in which class is lived” and through which it is both “appropriated and fought” (p. 342). Class has also been identified as a significant dimension in the lives of lesbians (Sanger, 2013<sup>52</sup>; Taylor, 2011). Working class bodies are normatively represented as “beyond governance” and as symbolic markers for the nation’s morality (Skeggs, 2005, p. 965). Skeggs (2005) argues that class privilege operates through gendered respectability,

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<sup>49</sup> Collins (2004) refers to a “pecking order” amongst women that produces “hegemonic, marginalised and subordinated femininities” (p. 193).

<sup>50</sup> Kennedy (2014) uses the term ‘white homonormativity’ to indicate the intersections amongst whiteness, homonormativity, and lesbian visibility.

<sup>51</sup> The ‘either race or class’ debate concerns how inequality can best be understood and addressed (Worden, 1994).

<sup>52</sup> In one of the few studies on gender non-conforming coloured queers, Sanger (2013) finds that class, as both a material and spatial configuration, is a significant factor in identity expression.



resulting in some classes being valued over others. Middle-class identity is reproduced through the invisibilisation of class (Pallota-Chiarolli and Pease, 2014), and is the embodiment of moral authority and citizenship (Young and Dickerson, 1994). In this sense, the 'lower' class body is the marked Other in relation to which middle-classness constructs itself.

In this chapter, I have introduced a number of intersecting theoretical lenses through which I approach subjectivation, more specifically, lesbian subjectivity in post-colonial settings. The research approaches subjectivity as fluid, intersectional, historically contingent, and both constitutive of and constituting a multiplicity of becoming. I have drawn centrally on Foucault, by means of post-colonial feminist and queer reworkings, to provide the analytics for understanding how identities, meanings and their power effects are constituted through discourse. Consequently, lesbians are interpellated through norms and regulations that govern gender, sexuality, race and class. I have described how queer subjectivity, as intersectional, comes to be seen and represented in discourse and in relation to gender, race, class and sexual hegemonies. I have also drawn attention to how the colonial organisation of knowledge – including its permutation in theory – shapes contemporary rationalities of sexuality, race, gender and class. The chapter reveals that 'becoming lesbian' is bound up with the tacit violence that is intrinsic to the constitution of self, Other and the prevailing social order. I now turn to political subjectivity and the politics of sexuality as modalities through which possibilities and impossibilities for resisting violence against lesbians are fashioned.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **DOING THE POLITICAL: IDENTITY OF POLITICS, POLITICS OF IDENTITY**

Politics holds out the promise of the manageability of unspeakable loss. (Butler, 1993, p. 209)

As this study concerns the implications of discourses of violence for both identity and politics, it is necessary to present how I conceive of 'the political' and of political agency, and to locate this within an understanding of global and local sexuality politics. I commence with a discussion of feminist and post-structural debates on political agency, and how it may be productively approached within the epistemological framework for the study. I then discuss how Foucauldian and feminist politics converge in ways that are conducive to exploring sexuality as a site of political resistance. Against that backdrop, I proceed with a critique of some aspects of global LGBTIQ politics, with a focus on the politics of homophobia in Africa. I also explore Butler's concept of precarity (2006, 2009, 2010) as a conceptual and political tool for understanding violence and queer subjectivities in post-colonial milieus. In the last part of the chapter, I provide a brief overview of the history of lesbian and gay politics in relation to South Africa's transition to a constitutional democracy. Finally, I discuss the dominant discourses of (same-sex) marriage and (homophobic) murder as signifiers of the political moment in which this study is necessarily located.

#### **2.1 The agent of politics**

Feminist post-structuralism has long critiqued the political as a site of ontological and epistemological production that is saturated with gender (Phillips, 1998). Given its concern with how power is exercised to either sustain or subvert dominant interests, and its view to changing oppressive power arrangements, feminism is inescapably political. But who counts as its political subject, and in whose name are feminist political claims advanced? What are the possibilities for agency made available within feminist post-structural

formulations? Feminists have rigorously debated the question of whether it is both possible and desirable to base a politics on the notion of an essential and unitary subject (Braidotti, 1993; Butler, 1992; Butler and Scott, 1992; Flax, 1992; Fraser, 1992; Phillips, 2010). As previously discussed, post-colonial and post-structural feminisms destabilise the notion of the universal woman and, along with it, the very basis of a feminist politics of emancipation. According to Butler (1992), feminism itself has constituted the subject-woman, reinforcing the idea that there is such a common subject. Whilst some contend that the post-structural displacement of identity is central to a feminist political project (Butler, 1992; Mouffe, 1991), others contest it for diluting feminist action (McClure, 1992; Chow, 1992) and for delinking women's identities from their social locatedness (Moya, 1997). In relation to queer politics in particular, Jeffreys (2003) argues that it has resulted in the demise of the lesbian 'I' of sexual politics, thus hindering lesbian political struggle. Similarly, McClure (1997, p. 108) cautions that, at precisely the time when marginalised identities are asserting their rights in unprecedented ways, the categories through which they articulate political resistance are being deconstructed. In particular, Butler's theorisation of subjection – on which I primarily draw – is challenged for providing limited recognition of agency (Benhabib, 1991; Salih, 1997). Bordo (1993) charges Butler with linguistic essentialism that obscures how structure impacts human agency. I contend that these critiques reflect a narrow reading of Butler's agentic subject. Whilst arguing that subject formation is an effect of power, Butler also asserts that such power produces the "condition of possibility for a radically conditioned form of agency" that "exceeds the power by which it is enabled" (Butler, 1997c, p. 15). This offers a conception of agency that is greater than the subordinating effects of power that bring the subject into being. With regard to gender performativity, Butler (2010) recognises the subject's capacity for reiterability, thus accounting for how norms operate in non-deterministic ways. Notwithstanding how discourse constrains agency<sup>53</sup>, Butler's subject is necessarily constitutive of agentic possibility in that she is imbued with the potential to subvert<sup>54</sup> power (Butler, 2009). This

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<sup>53</sup> Drawing on Derridian thinking, both Foucault (1998) and Butler (1998) assert that there is nothing outside of discourse and that, as a consequence, political agency is contingent upon the discursive, in ways that are both enabling and inhibiting.

<sup>54</sup> Butler (1990) refers to this as 'subversive resignification', a mode of resistance aligned with Foucault's "reverse discourse" (Foucault, 1998, p. 101) through which new meanings are produced.

conceptualisation enables an anti-essentialist politics that invites coalitional identifications (Butler, 2006; Stone, 2005).

Further troubling the essentialism integral to the notion of unitary subjectivity, Braidotti's (1993; 2013) account of the nomadic subject situates the non-unitary character of female subjectivity at the centre of feminist possibility. The political potential of viewing the subject as multiple and fractious is similarly contemplated by Mouffe (1991) in her theorisation of political subjectivity. She approaches the social agent as an "ensemble of subject positions" (Mouffe, 1991, p. 77) offering a stark contrast to liberalism's bounded subject. In her radical reinterpretation of the liberal concepts of liberty and equality, Mouffe (2009, p. 69) advances the establishment of "chains of equivalence" across identificatory mobilisations and around a political 'we' that in turn modifies its constituting identities. In putting these political possibilities to work in the context of contemporary struggles, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) expand on the Marxist notion of socialist struggle, reconfiguring it as a multiple-issue contestation made up of intersecting oppressions.<sup>55</sup> These post-structural and feminist reformulations of identity and struggle offer radical epistemological and political potential. More particularly, in relation to sexuality struggles, they provide an alternative to the essentialism and homogenising effects of identity-based politics (Yuval-Davis, 2012). Plural notions of political subjectivity enable intersectional politics as an alternative to the 'Oppression Olympics'<sup>56</sup> (Hancock, 2011) of LGBTI identity politics. I find Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) conception of 'the political' highly productive in its encompassing of the multiple ways in which the social is constituted.<sup>57</sup> Added to this, I draw on the idea of the political as inclusive of discursive acts across many different contexts (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigi and Liebhart, 2009, p.3). Approaching the sphere of politics so expansively, and beyond formal and organised politics alone, allies with Foucault's (1998) notion of power as political and as residing everywhere.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> This presents a counterpoint to Marxism's privileging of class oppression as the primary form of domination and, by extension, as the primary basis for its political resistance.

<sup>56</sup> Hancock (2011) uses this phrase to describe how identity-based political groups pit themselves against each other in order to advance narrow political gains. She argues that intersectional and solidarity-based politics offers an antidote to these dynamics and their thwarting of wider political transformations.

<sup>57</sup> Here Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) concept of 'radical democracy' offers a political framework shaped around a plural, dynamic and relational conception of identity.

<sup>58</sup> Here Foucault (1998, p. 93) contends that "[p]ower is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere".

The field of discourse is also the field of political possibility. As has already been argued, discourses are definitively political in that they constitute subjects within social, economic and political realms (Parker, 1992); they enable the exercise of material power (Gavey, 1989); and they make positions available from which subjects can act (Davies and Harré, 1990). Accordingly, subjects navigate their identifications in contexts, taking up or denouncing particular positions in discourse, and as political acts. The terms of politics itself are discursively defined such that “[d]iscourse in practice, linked with power, is then at work in the definitions of terms we use in political debate” (FIIMG, 2015, February, para. 5).

Post-structural feminism’s emphasis on the discursive is necessarily embedded in political terrains. Because it provides “a critical interrogation of the exclusionary operations by which positions are established”, post-structural feminism also deconstructs the very bases on which feminist theory and practice come to be politically constituted (Butler and Scott, 1992, p. xiv). This is significant given this study’s pursuit to unsettle the terms on which lesbian subjectivity and homophobia-related violence are politically constituted.

Feminism has also problematised neoliberalism’s impact on political agency. Pointing to the double-bind inherent to victim/agency politics, Jungar and Oinas (2011) caution that the “insistence of victimisation and the celebration of agency naturalise neo-liberal ideas about the autonomous individual”, producing a socially dislocated notion of agentic subjectivity (p. 248). Mohanty (2013) argues that the convergence between post-modernism and neo-liberalism has depoliticising effects that obscure how structural inequalities and historical oppressions shape agency. This relates to how neo-liberalism displaces political discourses through the marketisation of all spheres of life (Brown, 1995). In her account of the impact of neoliberal and post-feminist narratives on thinking about agency, Menon (2014) cautions that when women’s agency is cast as the ‘freedom to choose’, it represents a reassertion of dominant capitalist, patriarchal values. This is also reflective of how agency is construed within a wider predominance of post-feminist discourses of individualism, choice and empowerment (Gill and Scharff, 2011). The individualistic strategies produced by such discourses can be read as symptomatic of what

Bourdieu (2003) contends is the depoliticisation of globalisation.<sup>59</sup>

Materialist critiques of post-structural influences on politics assert that it is discursively reductive and inattentive to the unequal distribution of resources that shape particular identifications (West, 1992; Fraser, 1995; Fraser, 1997). It is also challenged, amongst others, for overlooking the materiality of gender and class oppressions (Davies, 2014; Taylor and Ussher, 2001). Fraser (1997) marks a clear distinction between culture and the material, thus distinguishing injustices of recognition from those related to redistribution. Within this logic, she positions gay and lesbian struggles as a response to 'status injuries' and thereby constituting a politics of (cultural) recognition detached from material oppressions (Fraser, 1997). Human rights struggles are strongly rooted in politics of recognition, which Bauman (2001) argues rely on the perpetual reproduction of difference.<sup>60</sup> In asserting the limits of these political strategies, Bauman proffers that "recognition is deceitful or at any rate incomplete unless coupled with distributive corrections" (2001, p. 147). Importantly, such arguments underscore the centrality of material justice in the pursuit of more equitable modes of sociality. However, Butler (1997b) rightly contests the stark distinction between the material and the cultural on which many of the aforementioned arguments rely. She posits that queer politics is misrepresented as "inessential to material life" and is thus misconceived as being exclusively cultural when in fact it is integral to the political economy and, consequently, to the materiality of life (Butler, 1997b. p. 38). This approach to the material and the culture as co-constituting, and thus as a point of political convergence for sexuality politics, is productively formulated by Corrêa, Petchesky and Parker (2008) as follows:

Treating sexuality as something separate from political economy ignores the fact that health care access, affordable housing, adequate nutrition, safe environments, and secure livelihoods are indispensable for safe and pleasurable erotic experience to be real. This false dichotomy not only obscures the necessary enabling conditions for sexual rights across lines of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and geography. It also disregards the materiality of sexual expression and well-being, a materiality rooted,

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<sup>59</sup> Bourdieu (2003) contends that the normative term 'globalisation' is the effect of a deliberate policy of depoliticisation.

<sup>60</sup> Bauman (2001, p. 142) argues that the over-articulation of difference in asserting human rights claims is a feature of "liquid modernity", a period in which conflict and disengagement are the dominating terms of social coexistence.

not in some essential biological drive or genetic predisposition, but rather in the ways that bodies 'matter' and become materialised through the same regulatory norms and power relations that produce gender, class, race, ethnicity, and geography to begin with. (p. 220)

## 2.2 Feminist politics powered by Foucault

Power is a distinguishing feature of the political (Philips, 1998); and in feminist post-structuralist ontologies, it is implicated in the construction of identity as a site of permanent political contest (Butler, 1993, p. 222). As already stated, Foucault's notion that power is everywhere renders the political everywhere. One might argue that Foucault was seized with the politics of politics (i.e. what politics *does*, rather than what it *is*). In Foucault's own words, he puts it such, "I have never tried to analyse anything from the point of view of politics, but always to ask politics what it had to say about the problems with which it was confronted. I question it about the positions it takes and the reasons it gives for this" (cited in Foucault and Rabinow, 1991, p. 385). This view politicises theory by interrogating its role as a commanding narrative in current practices of domination (Sawicki, 1991, p. 46).

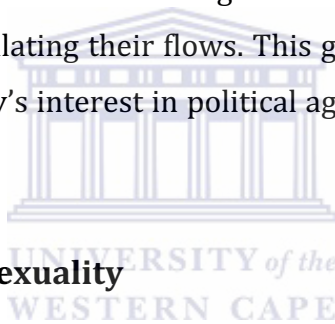
Feminist critiques of Foucauldian thinking on politics include that it holds a view of human agency that is limited to discourse (Kiguwa, 2006; Hollway, 1989; Wetherell et al., 2001), and that it pays insufficient attention to how power is located in the state (Brown, 1995). However, Foucault has also been variously put to work to advance feminist politics (Bartky, 1990; Mason, 2002; McLaren, 2002; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Stoler, 1995; Sawicki, 1991; Weedon, 1987). In locating power across the social field, and in linking its micro and macro operations and effects, Foucauldian notion of politics has much in common with feminism. Feminism's politicisation of the personal, as reflected in the adage 'the personal is political', connects local and global circuits of power across a diffused political field.

Foucault's articulation of power as not only oppressive, but also generative, has had

a significant impact on contemporary political movements.<sup>61</sup> In so far as he “centre[s] the analysis of discourse within the field of political action”, Foucault provides tools for both political critique and resistance (Hook, 2001, p. 3). His notion of subjugated knowledges as forms of resistance also provides alternative chartings of the political field (Sawicki, 1991, p. 26), yielding new sources of knowledge (Hall, 1997b). To concur with Weedon (1987):

If Foucault’s theory of discourse and power can produce in feminist hands an analysis of patriarchal power relations which enables the development of active strategies for change, then it is of little importance whether his own historical analyses fall short of this. (p.13)

In sum, both feminism and Foucault recognise power as simultaneously productive and oppressive, as exercised across all social planes, and as constitutive of possibilities for political agency. The lesbian operates with and against these circuits of power and politics, at once formulating and reformulating their flows. This generative view of identity and/as politics is conducive to this study’s interest in political agency against homophobia-related violence.



### **2.3 The politics of queer sexuality**

Conceptions of homosexuality have great political possibilities both in the service of oppression and in resistance to it (Bem, 1993). Described as “an especially concentrated point of transversal for relations of power” (Halperin, 2003, p. 27), Foucault’s conception of sexuality situates it as a mode of, and for, politics. This politicisation of sexuality - recognised as an effect of power - enables a view of queers as political subjects. I recognise that there are myriad forms in which sexuality politics is staged. In light of my focus on violence and identity, I choose to focus on particular forms of political subjectivity that link to the politics of gay truth and injury. With this in mind, I now critique three dimensions of contemporary LGBTIQ politics, their regulatory effects, and how they hinge on a particular form of identity politics that reproduces discourses which are problematically homonormative, gendered, classed and raced. As a counterpoint to these modes of politics,

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<sup>61</sup> See for example Halperin’s (1995) explication of how activists in the United States mobilised the Foucauldian notion of knowledge as power to lobby for a government response to the then HIV/AIDS crisis.



I then discuss what the concept of precarity contributes to topographies of queer political resistance in post-colonial contexts.

### **2.3.1 The global gay in times of homonationalism**

In the context of globalisation<sup>62</sup> marginality has become a “space of power” in which the social margins have come into representation (Hall, 1997a, p. 34). The politics of identity recognition has been a primary mode of political engagement and expression deployed by those at the sexual margins. Predominantly couched in a discourse of human rights, this global politics of representation draws on legal rights to advance identity-based claims.<sup>63</sup> The last decade has witnessed the burgeoning of an international political movement grounded in the identificatory categories of ‘LGBTI’. Its primary focus is the pursuit of equality in law<sup>64</sup>, more particularly marriage equality in the West and the decriminalisation of homosexuality in post colonies. This form of sexuality politics is grounded in what Bernstein (1997) calls “identity deployment” as a mode of strategic collective action.<sup>65</sup> As a dominant political strategy for socio-cultural change, it is challenged for naturalising homosexuality<sup>66</sup> and reinforcing gay assimilationist tactics (Seidman, 1993). In its emphasis on marriage equality and integration into dominant cultural norms, gay and lesbian identity politics is criticised for producing ‘good gays’ who don’t destabilise existing power formations (Oswin, 2006; Richardson, 2004; Warner, 1999). Duggan (2003, p. 50) describes such politics as one that does “not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depolitised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption”. Defined as ‘homonormativity’ and as the “sexual politics of neoliberalism”<sup>67</sup>, this formation of global gayness and its politics hinge on a normative gay figure that fits the logics of heteronormativity (Duggan, 2003; Puar,

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<sup>62</sup> At the same time, Hall (1997b) also argues that globalisation produces a homogenisation of cultural representations.

<sup>63</sup> Following World War II, human rights have operated as a dominant ideological discourse for responding to multiple forms of violence (D’Cruze and Rao, 2004).

<sup>64</sup> Feminists have long debated the intrinsic limitations of an equal rights strategy given its emphasis on individualism, its failure to reach beyond formal rights, and its overlooking of difference (see Gouws, 2005; Hawkesworth; 2006).

<sup>65</sup> This draws on Spivak’s (1996) notion of “strategic essentialism” as a basis for collective, strategic political action.

<sup>66</sup> By naturalisation, I refer to a ‘born this way’ discourse in which homosexuality is hinged to biological predispositions. This discourse has its roots in the bio-medical sexual categorisations of the early twentieth century.

<sup>67</sup> This definition joins the dots between the exclusionary operations of homonormativity and the production of the citizen-consumer within capitalist, liberal democracies.

2007). The universalising effects of homonormativity represent urban gay life in the global North as “dominant, complete and unassailable” (Brown, 2009, p. 1507). It is also argued that the global gay discourse is buoyed by ongoing Euro-American efforts to universalise sexuality (Massad, 2013). Its consequence, according to Massad (2013), is the imperialist exportation of the hetero-homo binary to peripheral economies in order to further capitalist expansion. An effect of this is falsely equating the recognition of homosexuality with the acceptance of modernity, such that gay rights come to characterise and assert Western cultural advancement (Butler, 2010). I argue that the campaign for marriage equality in the global North has been a master constituting narrative of the global gay discourse.<sup>68</sup> Global gayness is grounded in notions of liberal individualism that split the subject into disconnected sets of identification in which gayness assumes political primacy. The effect is to disarticulate gay politics from wider political struggles related to other identity positions that constitute queer subjectivities (such as race, class, gender and ethnicity). Building on Foucault’s (1990) work on care of the self, Brown’s (2003) concept of ‘self-care’, as a form of neoliberal governmentality, can be usefully applied to the individualising and depoliticising functions of the global gay discourse. According to Brown (2003), neoliberal governmentality is a rationality and a form of social organisation that:

interpellates and constructs individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life. It figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for ‘self-care’ – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions. (p. 6)

This accounts for how strategies of self-care, buoyed by discourses of consumption, individual choice and responsibility, emerge as primary modes of queer agency within the global gay discourse. These privatising impulses reflect what Mohanty (2013) describes as neoliberalism’s collapsing of the social onto the personal, resulting in the flattening and depoliticisation of difference.

Puar’s notion of ‘homonationalism’ extends the critique of homonormative politics by exposing how homophobia is politically deployed in nation-building in ways that

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<sup>68</sup> Same-sex marriage discourses tend to draw on assimilationist tropes that align with a heteronormative symbolic ideal (Judge, 2014a). The idealisation of marriage sets up a hierarchy of relationship statuses within queer communities (Warner, 1999). In addition, marriage equality struggles are concerned with assimilation into a “subordinating system of sexual regulation rather than confronting that system” (Spade and Willse, 2000, p. 42).

position the Western homosexual in antagonism to a racialised Other (Puar, 2007). Puar (2007) argues that the effect of this is to efface the assemblages and multiplicities of othering that are mobilised against each other by the state. Similarly, Butler (2010) contends that contemporary sexual politics and its queer subjects are deployed to rationalise war and racism. These homonationalist political discourses<sup>69</sup> are also produced and sustained through particularised notions of 'homophobic Africa', which I explore in more detail in Section 2.3.3.

### **2.3.2 The limits of gay truth and injury**

Notions of gay truth and gay injury have been central to LGBTI identity-based politics. 'Coming out', a discursive and material process, marks the truth of gayness as an identity category for which political recognition can be asserted. A Foucauldian deconstruction of coming out views it as a mode of confession and a regime of truth which offer the terms that make self-recognition possible (Butler, 2005, p. 22). Accordingly, LGBT rights-claims are firmly fixed to the declaration of a non-normative sexual and/or gender identity, in turn producing unitary subjects defined as 'gay', 'lesbian' or transgender.<sup>70</sup> Haritaworn labels these coming out narratives "bootstrap performances" in that they "turn the ongoing flow of the everyday into a 'before and after', 'falsity and truth' or 'the wrong and the right'" (cited in Haritaworn, Kuntsman, Posocco and Povinelli, 2013, p. 561). These constructions of a gay truth obscure the fluidity, contingency and intersectionality of queer identities that, as Butler (1993, p. 195) posits, are never entirely fixed by the signifiers of 'homosexual', 'gay' and 'lesbian'. In countering the tendency to hinge politics to a truth of subjectivity, Brown (1995, p. 43) argues for "a politics unarmed with truth".<sup>71</sup> This destabilisation of identity truths enables the recognition of new forms of rights and their political possibility (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). Moreover, reformulating sexual politics

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<sup>69</sup> Puar (cited in Greyser and Puar, 2012, p. 842) cautions against taking up the concept of homonationalism in an identitarian way in that it might then be "used to distinguish a good queer subject from a bad queer subject (which is of course ironic because that distinction between good and bad queer subjects is precisely what is produced by homonationalism)".

<sup>70</sup> Similarly, a truth of 'woman' has been central to the foundationalism of much second wave feminist thinking and politics.

<sup>71</sup> Other post-structural feminists, such as Flax (1997), also advance the need for a political vocabulary free from the illusion of its own innocence.

around the multiplicity of subjectivity displaces the hetero-homo binary (Namaste, 1994), signalling more expansive imaginaries for both queer politics and personhood.

The widespread violence, marginalisation and exclusion of queers have demanded that injury be a dominant site of political resistance. As a violating interpellation, injury produces a set of terms for political mobilisations (Butler, 1997a, 2006). Through a politics of mourning (Butler, 2010), together with other forms of articulation, injury has spawned powerful social movements through which queer visibility and resistance are constituted. However, when reliant on an essentialising truth, the reification of injury can work against a more radical politics. In other words, strategies that are conditional on the production of subjects defined by their injurability (Butler, 2010), fail to transform the terms on which such injury is made possible. A “permanent identification with suffering” through the “cult of personal experience” (Brown, 2005, p. 92) works to reduce injury to individual experiences, thus cleaving it from historical conditions and context. A primary political strategy against queer injury is the promotion of hate crime legislation. Hate crime law is criticised for reinforcing hegemonic notions of mutually exclusive social groups (Rosga, 1999), for obscuring the intersection of sexuality with other forms of violent oppression (Spade and Willse, 2000), and for legitimising the racialisation of state security and violence (Reddy, 2011). In this regard, Moran (2004, p. 935) critiques the gay and lesbian movement’s “law and order politics” in responding to violence<sup>72</sup>, arguing that it configures homophobic violence as exceptional thus dislocating it from the systemic conditions in which it is legitimated. The framing of violence as a hate crime renders oppression a private matter devoid of context (Mohanty, 2013) and this further individualises injury. Halberstam (2014, July, para. 15) calls for a situated politics of injury that considers its performative effects: “[L]et’s acknowledge that being queer no longer automatically means being brutalised and let’s argue for much more situated claims to marginalisation, trauma and violence.” A contextualisation of queer injury, one that recognises the multiple and intersecting features of its constituting oppressions and subjectivities, provides a political horizon beyond the confines of LGBTI identitarian logics.

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<sup>72</sup> Moran (2004) argues that a law and order politics constructs violent crime “as *the* problem of social disorder and a more brutal regime of criminal justice as *the* solution” (p. 947).

### 2.3.3 (Un)doing 'homophobic Africa'

The notion of 'homophobic Africa' has emerged as a dominant discourse within local and global sexuality politics. How homophobia is socially, economically and politically deployed in Africa is variously theorised. Currier (2010) posits that homophobia signifies a gendered strategy of political deployment<sup>73</sup> to bolster nationalist African leaders. Similarly, Ratele (2014, p. 116) contends that homophobia is a defence of heterosexual African manhood against the 'threat' of homosexuality, working to deflect from the development-related failings of ruling patriarchs.<sup>74</sup> Kaoma (2009) proposes that the denunciation of homosexuality by African leaders is more a politically expedient attack on the West than a definitive position on human sexuality.<sup>75</sup> Mutua (2001) argues that, through the 'savages-victims-saviours' construct, the West's interest in homophobia in Africa installs its saviour status, based on the construction of Africans as barbaric and savage.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, other scholars view the West's mobilisation of civilising discourses, leveraged through gay and women's rights, as reinforcing racist rescue narratives to 'save the African gay'<sup>77</sup> (Bracke, 2012; Tauqir, Petzen, Haritaworn et al., 2011). Global 'attitude' research<sup>78</sup> and the production of maps of homophobia (Jungar and Peltonen, 2014), are examples of political discourses that reinforce a false duality between 'African homophobia' and 'Western tolerance'.

Through the prism of black queer suffering, violence is central to tropes of 'African homophobia'. Allen (2013, p. 552-553) argues that the West projects homophobia onto Africans through the production of "political empathy porn". Gunkel (2013) similarly exposes how the sensationalist "image of a tearful and presumably suffering but unidentified black woman" (p. 69) is used by international anti-homophobia campaigns to

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<sup>73</sup> Currier (2010, p. 111) argues that political homophobia is implicated in the historical erasure of gendered and sexual dissidence that buttresses 'phallic masculinity'.

<sup>74</sup> I would argue that dominance is always tenuous given its incompleteness and ultimate contestability.

<sup>75</sup> Kaoma (2009) argues that African reactionaries have exploited the false association of homosexuality with neo-colonialism in order to gain legitimacy.

<sup>76</sup> This maps onto what Cole (2012) calls the narrative of the "white saviour industrial complex" in which humanitarian aid to Africa works to validate white privilege.

<sup>77</sup> The focus of European LGBT movements on saving 'other gays' in Africa and the Muslim world shifts the focus away from their own countries thus thwarting anti-racist politics (Haritaworn et al., 2008).

<sup>78</sup> One example of this is the Pew Research Centre's reports on attitudes to homosexuality across the world. One such report, titled "Global Divide on Homosexuality: Greater Acceptance in More Secular and Affluent Countries" states that "publics in Africa and in predominantly Muslim countries remain among the least accepting of homosexuality" attributing this to their having failed to adopt Western free market philosophies and capitalist consumerism (Kohut, 2013, p. 1-3).

perform a discursive violence.<sup>79</sup> Others argue likewise that this spectacularisation of homophobia foregrounds lesbian death (Matebeni, 2014) and victimhood (Triangle, 2011).<sup>80</sup>

Representing Africa as naturally and exclusively homophobic is strongly contested by African queer and feminist scholars and activists. The single narrative of 'homophobic Africa'<sup>81</sup> (Ndashe, 2013), the notion of an African monolithic 'wave of homophobia' (Thoreson, 2014), the spectacle of homophobia and the media's naturalisation thereof (Mwikya, 2013), all constrain articulations of African sexualities and the cultural and historical conditions in which they are forged. Moreover, as Sigamoney and Epprecht (2013) argue, the very formulation of homosexuality as 'un-African' rests on presumptions of the "fixedness of African prejudice" (p. 84). Labelling homosexuality 'un-African' reflects how homophobia is racially marked (Gunkel, 2010). Such political and theoretical contestations surface both the possibilities and limitations of how homophobic violence is framed in post-colonial settings.<sup>82</sup> The notion of homophobia is rigorously critiqued for relying on a dominant form of gayness that invisibilises the operations of race (Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz, 2008; Haritaworn, Tauqir, & Erdem, 2008; Tauqir, Petzen, Haritaworn, Ekine, Bracke, Lamble, ... Douglas, 2011), for dislocating homophobia's intersection with other dimensions of power, such as race, gender and class (Rosga, 1999), and therefore failing to situate contemporary queer exclusions historically and contextually.<sup>83</sup> Research also indicates the limitations of the translatability of 'homosexuality' and 'homophobia' in tracking and describing the prejudices that queers face (Sigamoney and Epprecht, 2013). These critiques have spurred calls for a more complex delineation of multiple social, cultural and historical factors that give rise to violence against non-conforming genders and sexualities. Against this backdrop, the tendency to naturalise and singularise Africa as

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<sup>79</sup> Gunkel (2013) argues that these campaigns exploit victims for the purpose of publicity.

<sup>80</sup> In response to online campaigns driven by graphic images of violated, black lesbians, Triangle Project (2011, p. 1) issued a statement arguing that, "[t]he public exposure of bruised and battered faces and bodies of survivors is unethical and sensationalist ... the voices of survivors are largely absent. Once again black women in Africa are being cast as voiceless victims, as voiceless faces."

<sup>81</sup> Similarly, queer anti-racists engage with how the Muslim gay is constructed in ways that "raise the question of which stories are being circulated and how they contest or reinforce racism" (Haritaworn et al., 2008, p. 71).

<sup>82</sup> See more on my theoretical and conceptual approach to the intersection of homophobia, sexuality and violence in Section 3.5.

<sup>83</sup> Given its emphasis on the 'phobic', the concept of homophobia is also seen to "psychologize away the injustice" (Martindale, 1995, p. 68).

homophobic prompts narrow solutions often limited to legalistic interventions that are dislocated from local queer movements (Ndashe, 2013). Consequently, queer activists and scholars assert the need for a resignification of homophobia in post-colonial contexts (Ekine, 2013; Gunkel, 2013; Judge, 2014b; Nyanzi, 2014a). This includes theorising its plurality and historical contingency (Thoreson, 2014). In the context of the deradicalisation of global gay politics<sup>84</sup>, Alexander (2005) urges a queer, feminist, emancipatory approach that centres decolonisation, “simultaneously imagined as political, economic, psychic, discursive, and sexual” (p. 65). These debates on how homophobia in Africa is to be best articulated and engaged illustrate the entanglement of queerness with a wider set of geo-political terms and terrains.

## **2.4 Politics within precarious conditions of life**

To ground subjectivation in the external arrangements that shape life, Butler theorises human precarity as the “conditions that threaten life in ways that appear to be outside of one’s control” (2009, p. i). Queer temporalities disrupt the normative narratives that govern human recognisability (Halberstam, 2005). In light of these disruptions, precarity offers a theoretical and political articulation of how those whose genders are unintelligible come to be at heightened risk for violence (Butler, 2009). In her description of how precarity is rendered, Lorey (cited in Puar, 2012b) foregrounds the insecurities of living under capitalism. Precarity also accounts for how social existence is achieved in relation to those who are “socially dead” and thus excluded from the sphere of imagined life (Butler, 2009). In this regard mourning operates as a political act related to how “certain forms of grief become nationally recognised and amplified, whereas other losses are unthinkable, ungrievable” (Butler, 2006, p. xiv). This ungrievability is determined by which bodies are considered normatively human (Butler, 2006). The discursive and material battles over who counts as human are configured within and through powerful historical tropes that defined its terms. Whiteness, together with heterosexuality, are key benchmarks for what

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<sup>84</sup> Alexander (2005) argues that the inequalities of globalised power results in a deradicalisation of queers, black people, and other subordinated subjects in that they adopt “hegemonic forms of being and knowing” (p. 8), and, I would add, of being known.

is considered 'normal', and thus 'human' (Biko, 1978; Dottolo, 2014). What counts as human is also inextricably linked to the material and psychic dehumanisations of colonialism (Fanon, 2001) and apartheid, constituting the injurious conditions in which subjectivities are formed. In making a claim on the category of human through the politicisation of grief, previously unspeakable sexualities contest the cultural sphere (Butler, 2006).

I find precarity particularly productive in situating queer injury firmly within the differential social conditions that make certain queer lives liveable and grievable, and others not. Consequently, a politicisation of precarity enables an account of injury that is not reduced to individualising and personalising accounts alone. When applied to post-colonial contexts, precarity necessitates an encounter with the dehumanising effects of colonialism and apartheid.<sup>85</sup> This encounter pins precarity to what Mbembe (2001) refers to as the racialised conditions of life and death that, I would argue, constitute "what counts as a liveable life and a grievable death" (Butler, 2006, p. xv). Mbembe (2005, p. 19) challenges what he refers to as the Fanonian "cul-de-sac", being the "dead-end of the generalised circulation and exchange of death as the condition for becoming human". He does so in order to affirm a political imagination beyond necropolitics<sup>86</sup>, and one that situates the "disposing-of-death-itself as central to a politics of freedom" (Mbembe, 2005, p. 19). From this vantage point queer suffering co-articulates with the gendered, sexualised, classed and raced conditions of life (and death), as the modalities through which queer lives are differentiated. The political potential of precarity relates to "how the (all but) common condition of human suffering and vulnerability and of the destabilisation of grief might reconfigure a new collective politics" (Haritaworn et al., 2013, p. 559).

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<sup>85</sup> Political aspirations to humanise blackness is a central feature of the Black Consciousness political tradition. By way of example, Biko (1978), in his rejection of Western values, argues that "the great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face" (p. 47).

<sup>86</sup> Mbembe's notion of necropolitics relates closely to precarity in its account of the violence of social existence, whereby populations are "subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (Mbembe and Meintjes, 2003, p. 40).



## 2.5 Over the rainbow<sup>87</sup>: Queer political transitions in South Africa

The section that follows briefly charts the trajectory of queer political identity in South Africa from apartheid to democracy. It then critically discusses the achievements of the lesbian and gay movement in the post-apartheid period. My aim here is to situate the study in the contemporary ‘marriage-murder’ moment and its attendant paradoxes, of which violence is a signifying feature.

### 2.5.1 From the gaze/gays of apartheid to democracy

The production of a series of Others was central to the formation and rule of apartheid and its political imaginary (Norval, 1996) in which racialised, gendered, sexualised, ethnicised and classed identities were centrally figured. Apartheid’s rootedness in patriarchy (Horn, 1991; Manicom, 1992) installed sexuality and gender as key dimensions of social ordering and control. The centrality of heteronormativity to sexual and gender subjectivation during apartheid also extended to the anti-apartheid struggle in that, as Xaba (2001) argues, ‘struggle masculinities’ were caught up in performances of visible heterosexuality. The intertwinement of race and sexual identity formulations during apartheid is reflected in the literature (McClintock, 1995; Ratele and Shefer, 2013; Scully, 1995). So too is apartheid’s governance of bodies, sexualities, and the raced and gendered ordering of sexual lives (Ratele, 2001; Ratele and Shefer, 2003; Posel, 2011). Apartheid was also a schema of racialised spatiality in which – using mechanisms from pencil tests to pass laws<sup>88</sup> – the policing of bodies was a central strategy. The state had an “instrumental and paranoid” preoccupation with the regulation of sexual behaviour (Hoad, 2011, p. 120); and Christian nationalist ideology affirmed the sexual ‘purity’ of the white nation whilst denouncing homosexuality as immoral. A raft of legislation installed a regime underpinned by white

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<sup>87</sup> I am invoking the double meaning of ‘rainbow’ here: firstly, to signify the political transition to a non-racial democracy as encompassed in the representation of South Africa as the ‘rainbow nation’; and secondly, in reference to the ‘rainbow flag’, an international icon of LGBT identifications and a symbol of the inclusion of LGBT rights in the country’s legal and constitutional dispensation.

<sup>88</sup> The pencil test was used by apartheid officials to ‘determine’ and assign ethnic identity, by inserting a pencil into a person’s hair. The pencil test is an example of what Nuttall (2004, p. 735.) refers to as apartheid’s “common sense approach to racial classifications”. The pass laws required black people to carry a ‘reference book’ to authorise their presence in whites-only areas during apartheid.

supremacy, heteronormativity and the assertion of hetero-patriarchal masculinism.<sup>89</sup> While apartheid legislation criminalised sex between different races, it did not initially outlaw homosexual sex explicitly. It was only in direct response to the increased visibility of gay male subculture in city suburbs, that the 1966 *Amendment to the Immorality Act* extended its prohibitions to include sex between men.<sup>90</sup> Later – in 1988 – same-sex activity between women was also legislated against (Hoad, Martin and Reid, 2005).

In 1982, the first national gay organisation, the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA), was established. Prior to that, gay political action had been erratic and irregular (Gevisser, 1995). In 1988, the first black-led gay organisation, closely aligned to the United Democratic Front<sup>91</sup>, was formed (Croucher, 2002). The formation of Gays and Lesbians of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) was largely a response to the failure of GASA's racial politics to intersect a gay rights agenda with the wider struggle against apartheid (Cock, 2003; Croucher, 2002).<sup>92</sup> Such political chasms that concern the relationship between sexual and race oppressions are an enduring feature of queer politics in South Africa.

During the transition to democracy the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE) was established with a mandate to ensure the inclusion of 'sexual orientation' as a ground for non-discrimination and equality in South Africa's final democratic Constitution<sup>93</sup> (de Waal and Manion, 2006). For this the organisation claimed a historic success<sup>94</sup> and in 1996 the final Constitution was promulgated, ushering in a new legal dispensation for South African queers.<sup>95</sup> In light of constitutional inclusion, the first

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<sup>89</sup> Such laws included the *Population Registration Act*, the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Act* and the *Immorality Act*. The latter two prohibited sex between races.

<sup>90</sup> A police raid on a gay party in Forest Town, an affluent white suburb in Johannesburg in 1966, prompted the government to take steps to criminalise male homosexuality (Hoad, Martin and Reid, 2005).

<sup>91</sup> Established in 1983, the United Democratic Front was an alliance of civil society organisations that opposed apartheid.

<sup>92</sup> In 1987, GASA's was expelled from the International Gay and Lesbian Association for not formally opposing apartheid. This was a defining moment for the gay movement as it brought the intersection between sexual and racial oppressions to the fore of gay politics (Gevisser, 1995).

<sup>93</sup> The principles of democratic constitutionalism have provided a master frame for the post-apartheid order and for LGBT rights struggles within it.

<sup>94</sup> Often overlooked in this history is the role of the Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists (OLGA), founded in 1992, in lobbying the African National Congress (ANC) Constitutional Committee to include lesbian and gays into its draft charter (de Waal and Manion, 2006; Hoad, Reid and Martin, 2005). This paved the way for the inclusion of legal protections for gays and lesbians in the final Constitution.

<sup>95</sup> South Africa is lauded as the first country in the world to explicitly include the right to non-discrimination and equality on the basis of sexual orientation in its Constitution - in Section 9(3) of the Bill of Rights, commonly referred to as the 'equality clause' (Government of South Africa, 1996). I would argue that the legal codification of 'sexual orientation' – for which the equality clause provides the discursive terms – is a symbolic stand-in for 'gay and lesbian' given the unmarkedness of heterosexuality as the hegemonic sexual orientation.

democratic vote signaled a “double victory” for black queers (Perreira, 2015). Constitutional recognition ushered in a historic course of action that resulted in LGBTI people shifting from *out-laws* to *in-laws*<sup>96</sup> in the eyes of the state.

Relative to the stifling conditions of apartheid, democracy provided the political space and opportunity<sup>97</sup> for the gay and lesbian movement to find firmer footing in the body politic. The Constitution’s human rights principles created what Laclau and Mouffe (2001), in reference to the Declaration of the Rights of Man, describe as the “discursive conditions which made it possible to propose different forms of inequality as illegitimate and anti-natural and thus make them equivalent forms of oppression” (p. 155). Consequently, the post-apartheid era has witnessed the proliferation of a politics of representation through which a range of sociopolitical identities have staked equality claims.<sup>98</sup> Drawing on discourses of human rights and constitutionalism, identity-based politics produced an account of lesbian and gay identities as those for whom rights are violated. On that basis, gays and lesbians systematically challenged laws and practices that, under apartheid, had criminalised their sexualities, and violated their humanity, dignity and equality.<sup>99</sup> Commencing with the repeal of sodomy laws<sup>100</sup>, a number of court victories saw the extension of legal benefits and protections. This included immigration rights<sup>101</sup>, pension benefits<sup>102</sup>, joint adoption and co-parenting rights<sup>103</sup>, and the legal designation of ‘permanent same-sex life partnership’ by the Constitutional Court. These incremental gains towards formal equality culminated in the granting of the right of same-sex couples to marry in law (Berger, 2008; de Vos, 2007), with South Africa becoming the first country in Africa to make this possible.<sup>104</sup> Driven largely by judicial fiat, the campaign for marriage

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<sup>96</sup> ‘Out-laws’ refer to the erstwhile criminalisation of homosexuals during apartheid, and ‘in-laws’ to the status made available by virtue of marriage rights for same-sex couples.

<sup>97</sup> On this point, Croucher (2002) argues that, alongside the advent of democracy, the ANC’s formal commitment to human rights played a key role in creating political opportunities for the advancement of gay and lesbian rights post 1994.

<sup>98</sup> Neocosmos (2014) argues that a politics of representation has predominated South African political struggles in a neo-liberal environment.

<sup>99</sup> The foundational principles of the Constitution are dignity, equality and the advancement of human freedom.

<sup>100</sup> See *Minister of Home Affairs v. Fourie; Lesbian and Gay Equality Project v. Minister of Home Affairs* 2006 (1) SA 524 (CC)

<sup>101</sup> See *National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality v. Minister of Home Affairs* 2000 (2) SA 1 (CC)

<sup>102</sup> See *Satchwell v. President of the Republic of South Africa* 2002 (6) SA1 (CC)

<sup>103</sup> See *Du Toit v. Minister of Welfare and Population Development* 2003(2) SA 198 (CC)

<sup>104</sup> The *Civil Union Act*, which grants same-sex couples the right to marry in law, was passed on 30 November 2006. This Act is distinct from the *Marriage Act* which remains exclusive to heterosexual couples (Judge et al., 2008). Despite being a separate piece of legislation, the Act grants rights that are fully equivalent to the *Marriage Act*. For more on the equality debates regarding marriage legislation, see Bilchitz and Judge (2007) and Judge, Manion and de Waal (2008).

equality was *not* rooted in a mass movement (Bilchitz and Judge, 2007), yet it came to dominate the political imagination of LGBTI politics.<sup>105</sup> Notwithstanding the homonormalising effects of marriage equality campaigns (as previously discussed), law reform has significantly expanded the participation, visibility and political voice of queer citizens in a democratic order that formally recognises them as equal citizens. Some contend that the achievement of legal equality bestows respectability and belonging (van Zyl, 2011), advances the humanisation of citizens (Cameron, 2012)<sup>106</sup> and reinforces queer political identifications (Reddy, 2006). Also, strategic litigation<sup>107</sup> for the rights of LGBT people has significantly expanded equality jurisprudence in South Africa.<sup>108</sup> However, the law reform strategy relied heavily and almost exclusively on legal and juridical means to effect social transformation. This reflects what Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) refer to as the “shift of the political into the domain of the legal” through the appropriation of “lawfare” and its resultant “domestication of difference” (p. 54–55). The centring of legal interventions in the struggle for queer justice risks what Brown (1995, p. 28) calls the “bartering of political freedom for legal protection”. Liberalism’s reduction of citizenship to a legal status (Mouffe, 2009), along with the limitations of individual rights in addressing the structural and ideological bases of inequality, also points to the constraints of law in enabling substantive equality.

The consumerist culture of neo-liberalism also plays a defining role in post-apartheid queer politics. Even before the transition to democracy, the South African state had embarked on a policy of neo-liberalism, which became increasingly elaborated after 1994 (van der Westhuizen, 2007). It is common cause that neo-liberalism spurs the privatisation of sexuality (Carabine, 1996). Posel (2011) points to how the “cultural logic of

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<sup>105</sup> Warner (1999) makes a similar argument with regard to the equal marriage campaign in the US.

<sup>106</sup> According to Justice Cameron (2012), now a judge of the South African Constitutional Court and a longstanding gay activist, legal rights “confer the dignity of moral citizenship. Moral citizenship is a person’s sense that he or she is a fully entitled member of society, undisqualified from enjoyment of its privileges and opportunities by any feature of his or her humanhood” (p. 16). Cameron is also credited with providing the road map for the NCGLE’s strategic litigation process toward legal equality for gays and lesbians.

<sup>107</sup> For details of the public interest litigation strategy for gay and lesbian rights in South Africa, see Marcus and Budlender (2008).

<sup>108</sup> Deputy Chief Justice Moseneke (2007, n.p.) stated the following in an address at the opening of the Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival: “I think I should just pay tribute to gay and lesbian structures that actually helped wittingly and unwittingly in the development of equality jurisprudence in this country. All those struggles around rights of gay and lesbian people have in many ways allowed the [Constitutional] Court and allowed our Constitution and many other people to be able to express themselves around issues of equality”.

late capitalism” valorises forms of consumption that are coupled with the “overt sexualisation of style, status and power” (p. 133). This is reinforced by capitalism’s reliance on racialised, sexualised and gendered hierarchies of power (Alexander, 1997; Eisenstein, 2004). In tracing queer citizenship and consumerism in South Africa<sup>109</sup>, Rink (2013) demonstrates how the framing of queer freedom has shifted from sexual citizenship to consumer citizenship. Similarly Alexander (2005, p. 71) explicates how the “gay marketing moment” connects white gay citizenship with white gay consumption, reflective of how earning power is normatively linked to raced and classed agency. These political shifts, through which queer consumption comes to signify freedom, align with broader dynamics in the development of a consumerist culture. Mbembe describes this as “[t]he shift from a society of control to a society of consumption”, representing “the conflation of the form and substance of democracy and citizenship with the rule of consumption that has mistakenly been given the name of a transition to democracy” (2014b, n.p). In neoliberal settings, gay political organising becomes increasingly corporatised and commercialised. Consequently, sexual rights struggles are increasingly incorporated into contemporary technologies of governance (Corrêa et al., 2008). The effects are the depoliticisation, domestication and bureaucratisation of sexual politics. Such dynamics characterise what Hart (2002, p. 12–13) describes as the naturalisation of neoliberalism in South Africa and its delimiting effects on political subjectivities. These contemporary arrangements signal, as Rancier (1995, p. 11) contends, how “politics is the art of suppressing the political”.

### **2.5.2 Queer contestation and the marriage-murder moment**

Norval contends that the discourse of apartheid “instituted imaginary horizons which structured all social relations [...] serv[ing] to delimit the sphere of the thinkable” and “interpellating subjects into stable, ‘normalised’ forms of identification” (1996, p. 27). This imaginary has impacted post-apartheid sexual and gender politics. Despite the fashioning of a democratic nation, prevailing regimes of racialised and gendered power continue to regulate sexual and gender subjectivities (Steyn and van Zyl, 2009). Posel (2011) argues that post-apartheid is characterised by a politicisation of sexuality associated with the

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<sup>109</sup> Rink (2013) traces queer consumer-citizenship through an analysis of a commercial map of gay and lesbian social venues in a middle-class, predominantly white suburb.

anxieties of nascent national identity formation.<sup>110</sup> Also, deep class and race fractures prevail in both gender politics (Bonnin, Deacon, Morrell and Robinson, 1998) and queer politics (Cock, 2003; Craven, 2011; Livermon, 2012). With regard to the latter, Cock (2003) traces the raced, gendered and classed limitations of the South African gay movement during the 80s and 90s arguing that it advanced a reformist rather than a revolutionary agenda. Honing in on that movement's deployment of strategic essentialism and a rights discourse, Oswin (2007) argues that whilst the political narrative relied on the "poor, black gay or lesbian", the activism overlooked redistributive imperatives. She contends that leading queer organisations<sup>111</sup> were not able to "shake off the yoke of the binary that divides South Africa's gay and lesbian community into haves and have-nots because it played a role in producing this binary" (Oswin, 2007, p. 666). The early movement is also described as elitist, hierarchical and driven by white, middle-class gay men who stood most to gain from law reform efforts (Lind, 2005; de Vos, 2007). Much criticism has been levelled at how predominantly white LGBT organisations, both locally and internationally, fail to engage systemic racism in which they too are implicated (Alexander 2005; Craven, 2011; Haritaworn, et al., 2008; Ward, 2008). These critiques expose how securing the rights of privileged queers (in terms of race, gender and class status) are implicated in the exclusion of racially and economically marginalised queers in particular. This privileging of the rights and visibility of a particular stratum of queers is what Richardson (2005, p. 524) terms the "acceptably visible", namely those who leave normative economic and gender inequalities largely untroubled.<sup>112</sup> From this perspective, it might be argued that the process of bringing queers into the ambit of the law has produced unintended consequences that have disciplined and de-radicalised domestic queer politics. The form and function of law reform had a largely pacifying effect on queer political mobilisation in the first decade of democracy in South Africa. This is linked to wider depoliticisations of civil society following

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<sup>110</sup> Posel (2005) argues that in the early years of democracy building "sexual violence, then, had rapidly become a trope of degradation, violation and moral frailty in all its manifestations" (p. 247). This situates rape as an effect of the democratic nation's coming into being and elides how sexual violence itself is integral to the constitution of 'the nation' and its associated identifications. Post-apartheid nation building is necessarily imbricated in the (re)making of classed, raced, sexed and gendered subjectivities. For more on this see Samuelson (2007).

<sup>111</sup> This is with reference to the NCGLE and its successor, the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project.

<sup>112</sup> Reid's (2013) work illustrates how, in rural areas, homosexuals' disruptions of gender and sexual norms demonstrate alignments with hetero-patriarchal narratives of 'ladies' and 'gents', whilst simultaneously resignifying and queering these narratives.

the demise of formal apartheid. I would contend that the law reform process was simultaneously a failure and a success.<sup>113</sup> The success relates in part to the production of new imaginaries for queer desires and demands for inclusion within the wider sphere of democratic possibility. Democracy's queer is a legitimate claimant of rights, constituting a radical resignification of apartheid's queer, previously concealed within the narrative of nation. The concrete benefits and protections of law have enabled an unprecedented (queer) run on rights, so to speak: rights that are claimed and realised in both symbolic and material ways.

In further considering queer (racialised) exclusions, Livermon (2012) points to how “cultural politics consistently mark the black queer body as the constitutive outside of blackness and the queer body is subsequently racialised as white” (p. 314). This racialising inscription of black queers as un-African<sup>114</sup> and as anti-nation<sup>115</sup> is also reflected in the anti-queer rhetoric of political leaders. Rather than assuming that such inscriptions work deterministically however, Livermon (2012) asserts that black queers are reworking the space created by legal inclusion through claims on public visibility and belonging (Livermon, 2012).<sup>116</sup> Queer political contestations also concern erasures of gender. This intersects with how women in South Africa have been dominantly positioned in nationalist scripts in ways that perform a historical denial of women's subjectivities (Samuelson, 2007). Gqola (2007) posits that, despite constitutional affirmations of women's rights and dignity, state feminism, in its emphasis on discourses of empowerment, elides the contextual, historic and systemic features of gender and sex oppression, producing a stifling politics of representation and bureaucratisation (p. 114). Notwithstanding the

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<sup>113</sup> My reference to both failure and success recognises how, as liberation tools, legal rights offer paradoxical possibilities for oppressed groups (Brown, 2000).

<sup>114</sup> In 1987 Ruth Mompati, a then senior member of ANC, justified the party's lack of a policy on homosexuality by stating in the British media that “they [gay people] have nice houses and plenty to eat” (Hoad, Martin and Reid, 2005, p. 148). It's clear that Mompati's view on homosexuality changed, as evidence in her foreword to a book that traces the history of gay and lesbian rights in South Africa (see Hoad, Martin and Reid, 2005). Winnie Mandela claimed homosexuality is un-African during her kidnapping and assault trial in 1991 (Gevisser, 1995). In the public hearings on the *Civil Union Act*, homosexuality was described as un-African in a number of public submissions including those by the National House of Traditional Leaders and the African Christian Democratic Party (see Judge et al., 2008).

<sup>115</sup> An example of this is the Minister of Arts and Culture's walk-out of an exhibition that contained works on the lives of black lesbians. The Minister called the work “immoral”, stating that “[o]ur mandate is to promote social cohesion and nation building. I left the exhibition because it expressed the very opposite of this” (Van Wyk, 2010, n.p). Conversely, representations of white homosexuality have *not* been dominantly represented as anti-nation in public discourses.

<sup>116</sup> Livermon (2012) terms this a ‘cultural labour’ undertaken by black queers, and through which they express desire and non-conformity.

enduring effects of colonialism and apartheid, democracy ushered in new political horizons on which identities and politics could be fashioned. This refashioning is marked by high levels of political contestation, both inside and outside of queer communities. Queer politics in South Africa, like other political configurations, is deeply inflected with gender, race and class content. The differential subject locations that constitute queer communities have not yet yielded shared political platforms that both recognise and disrupt these differentials. In the mid-2000s, the marriage discourse held primacy in constructing queer political possibilities, buoyed by the affirmation of the gay subject in law. However, the fiction of a cohesive queer identity on which the law reform politics relied, became fractured by the increased politicisation of violence against black queers. The marriage discourse that had captivated the gay cause, both locally and internationally, was to be eclipsed by growing political mobilisations against murder. This political organising, unlike the forms of organising that had characterised the marriage campaign, provides a discursive space for the articulation of the un/freedom of black queers in particular. The co-existence of extreme poverty and conspicuous wealth, along with the structural and material conditions that both produce and sustain them, are factors in the extent to which queers can or cannot enjoy the benefits, protections and possibilities of legal and constitutional equality. These material conditions, and their disproportionate effects on queer lives, intersect with modes of contemporary inclusions and exclusions related to gender, race and class in particular. In this regard, queer resistance to violence has emerged as a political site where the contradictions of queer oppression and queer opulence, and their respective race, gender and class coordinates, are increasingly exposed.<sup>117</sup> The emerging activism against homophobic violence, led by black lesbian organisations<sup>118</sup>, amplifies the embattled terrain of queer livability in post-apartheid South Africa. The political antagonisms constituted by the marriage-murder paradox might also point to contending narratives of liberation<sup>119</sup> and queer subjectivity. At the symbolic level,

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<sup>117</sup> The Pride march of 2012 (see Appendix 10) is one moment of political antagonism in which the dominant form of sexuality politics was contested through public resistance to the raced, gendered and classed exclusions in operation within queer communities.

<sup>118</sup> Organisations such as the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (formed in 2002) and Free Gender (established in 2008) are two such examples.

<sup>119</sup> Here I borrow Scott's (1999) notion of a "narrative of liberation" as comprising "a more or less structured story that progressively links a past and a present of domination to an anticipated future of Freedom" (p. 201).



the former is a proxy for an included gayness that indexes whiteness and consumptive capacity. The latter represents the exclusion and precarity of black queer lives. The marriage-murder paradox marks democracy's limits in relation to how queer freedom comes to be imagined, both materially and discursively. It is a political present that signposts queer differentiations and their scripting of both life and death.

Violence against lesbians is a lightning rod in the democratic landscape, attracting fiery contestations about democracy, identity, power and politics. Political strategies to engage homophobia-related violence are vast and varied; and include policy and law reform, direct protest action, public education, prevalence tracking, research and criminal justice interventions, amongst others.<sup>120</sup> Political mobilisations led by LGBTIQ organisations in response to homophobic and transphobic violence accelerated from the mid-2000s, in response to a number of widely publicised rapes and murders of black lesbians. In 2011, the government established a national task team to address 'gender and sexual orientation-based violence'<sup>121</sup>, and a number of hate crime cases have come before the courts. Due to the efforts of activist organisations, the murder trial of Zoliswa Nkonyana<sup>122</sup> set a precedent as the first time a court of law considered the sexual orientation of the victim as a factor in the motive for murder (Lewin, Williams and Thomas, 2013).

Within the LGBT movement more broadly, conversations about violence often surface marked divergences in political priorities, modes of mobilisation and politics. In recent years, 'black' has been foregrounded as a mobilising identity around which lesbians, along with other non-conforming gender and sexual subjectivities, have shaped a political agenda that situates violence in relation to historical exclusions based on race, gender, sexuality and class.<sup>123</sup> Grounded in an intersectional politics that links multiple forms of

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<sup>120</sup> One of the first campaigns to draw public attention to violence against black lesbians was initiated in 2003 by an activist organisation, the Forum for the Empowerment of Women's, and titled 'The Rose Has Thorns' Campaign. The 777 Anti-Hate Campaign was launched in 2007 and strongly advocated for a legislative and policy response by the state to violence. A multi-sectoral task team is currently developing a monitoring system to record cases of hate crimes and to strengthen criminal justice and psychosocial responses (Breen and Nel, 2014).

<sup>121</sup> In 2011, largely in response to an international advocacy campaign launched by Luleki Sizwe (a support group for lesbian survivors of violence), the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development established a national task team to address violence against LGBTI people.

<sup>122</sup> Nkonyana was killed in 2006.

<sup>123</sup> Forum for the Empowerment of Women, Free Gender, and the Coalition of African Lesbians (started in 2003) are examples of such political mobilisations focusing on violence and discrimination against black queers.

violent oppression, these political articulations have assumed centre stage in the response to violence. Black lesbians and queers emerge as a primary source of political discourse on sexual orientation and gender identity rights and freedoms (Mkhize et al., 2010), reflecting how political actors are “standing inside the terms” (Goldberg, 2000, p. 171) of self-ascribed identifications (in this case ‘black’ and ‘lesbian’) as the basis of a politics against violence. The expression of public grief and suffering in response to the killings of black lesbians increasingly animates the struggles against violence. This marks a shift in the focus of post-apartheid queer politics from the courtroom<sup>124</sup> to the kerbside. The emergent politics is increasingly characterised by the co-articulation of black and queer suffering, working to re-situate the latter within a wider domain of resistance against the enduring legacies of institutionalised and systemic discrimination.

In this chapter, I chartered a course through the literatures and debates on political agency and sexuality politics from a feminist Foucauldian vantage point. I critically engaged the form and function of various modes of politics in the field of sexuality, exploring their global and local iterations. I located my understanding of homophobia in Africa within wider discourses of sexuality, global power relations, and Western cultural, economic and political impositions. The chapter also explored how precarity widens the scope for thinking through the contemporary conditions that shape queer life. I then briefly sketched recent developments in LGBT politics in South Africa, pointing out some political schisms that concern how queer freedom is both imagined and (un)realised. Finally, I described the contemporary marriage-murder moment, constitutive of a material and symbolic paradox in which this study of violence, sexuality and politics is necessarily located.

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<sup>124</sup> The courtroom was the primary site for law reform politics in the period from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. Subsequently, there has been an increase in community mobilisation and public protest related to LGBTIQ rights and justice struggle, with a particular emphasis on violence.

## CHAPTER 3

### KNOWING VIOLENCE: THE MULTIPLE COORDINATES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIANS

Given the centrality of violence to this study, it is necessary to delineate my understanding of it, both conceptually and contextually. I recognise at the outset that violence is multifarious in form and function. Prompted by feminist concerns, my particular interest is in the social and political function of homophobia-related violence as a mode of disciplining and an effect of power. This is not to suggest that the psychological<sup>125</sup> and inter-personal dimensions of violence are unimportant, but rather to claim a particular emphasis in alignment with the study's primary concerns. This emphasis is also informed by an understanding of violence as both material and discursive, and as a knowledge regime. I begin by outlining why it is productive to approach violence as material-discursive (Hearn, 2014). I then draw on Mason's (2002) application of Foucault's notion of knowledge-power in her approach to homophobia-related violence, as a way of knowing and seeing the world and queer subjects within it. In taking a feminist angle on knowledge production, I then explore various permutations of violence so as to construct a wide view of violence against lesbians. I present violence as rooted in colonialism and apartheid; as an instrument of gender and sexual oppression; as structural and symbolic; and as a feature of state power and domination. Finally, I explore particular knowledges about violence against lesbians in South Africa, as the primary location for the research.

#### 3.1 Knowing matters: Violence as material-discursive

Nowhere were assumptions regarding the 'knower,' the 'known' and the 'knowable' taken more for granted than in sexuality research conducted on colonised populations such as those found in Africa. (Tamale, 2011, p. 13)

Violence is simultaneously material and discursive. It is simultaneously painful, full

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<sup>125</sup> The violent modalities of systems of oppression operate through psychological violence. See Rustin (2002) and Fanon (2001) on the psychic rootings and routings of violence in the context of racism.

of pain; and textual, full of text. (Hearn, 2014, p. 9)

Power is in part a relationship of struggle over the truths that govern life. As has already been argued, knowledge-power works to authorise particular truth regimes that in turn discipline the social field. In this sense, knowledge is a practice of power (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012) and politics, the latter necessarily involving a battle over knowledge claims (Brown, 2005). Every knowledge system or discourse enables a particular way of deciphering fact from fiction and produces possibilities for action.

For Foucault, the forging of truths in and through subjection is imbued with violence in that “[k]nowledge does not slowly detach itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason [...] rather, it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence” (cited in Foucault and Rabinow, 1991, p. 96). My emphasis on how violence against lesbians is known does *not* seek to efface the material manifestations of such violence, but rather to think its discursive and material content alongside one another. Hearn (2014) understands materiality as “reproduction in the fuller sense, as both reproduction of the social relations of production, *and* the reproduction of society through ideas, ideology and discourse” (p. 7). In emphasising the materiality of discourse as inclusive of contexts, acts and effects, Hearn (1998, 2014) provides a productive concept of “material-discursive”. Considering violence as material-discursive enables a spacious and interconnected view of both these co-constituting dimensions of violence. As already discussed, Foucault collapses the division between the material and the discursive. This offers an account of the discursive effects of the material, and the material effects of the discursive (Hook, 2001). Consequently, the overarching Foucauldian orientation of this study aligns with a material-discursive approach to violence. A discursive view of materiality has epistemological value for exploring the work of discourses of homophobia-related violence as fields of knowing.

Scholars contend that discourse is fundamental to the operations and reproductions of racism (Duncan, 2003), sexual violence (Gavey, 2004), homophobia (Mason, 2002) and colonial and post-colonial oppressions more broadly (Fanon, 2001; Said, 1995; Stoler, 1995). In this sense, discourse is central to both the continuation and the dismantlement of oppressions such that the struggle to counter violence is then, by necessity, both a material

and discursive one. As Foucault (1981) puts it, “[d]iscourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle” (p.52–53).

Violence has the capacity to shape the ways that we see, and thereby come to know, these things. In other words, violence is more than a practice that acts upon the bodies of individual subjects to inflict harm and injury. It is, metaphorically speaking, also a way of looking at these subjects. (Mason, 2006b, p. 174)

Mason’s (2002, 2006a, 2006b) work on homophobia-related violence has been highly influential to this study. In her research on Australian women’s experiences of homophobia-related violence, Mason (2002) explores the epistemological force of violence through Foucauldian and feminist interpretations. Drawing on the interrelationship between discourse, knowledge and power, she approaches violence as “an instrument of power” by which phenomena and people come to be looked at, seen and known in particular ways (2002, p. 19). This approach to violence, as a way of knowing (Mason, 2002), converges with Hearn’s (1998) articulation of violence as a regime of truth. As with Hearn (2014), Mason considers violence as not only material (comprising physical injury) but also discursive in that, in the case of homophobia-related violence, it is imbued with homophobic content (Mason, 2002).<sup>126</sup> Mason (2002) also explores how injury insinuates itself into the constitution of the gay subject through the epistemological capacity of homophobia-related violence (p. 105). In her application of Foucault’s notion of power Mason asserts that, whilst violence has productive capacities, it does not determine queer subjectivity.<sup>127</sup>

The discursive fields of violence, law, medicine and psychology, amongst others, produce contesting knowledges about the queer subject. These are fields of meaning-

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<sup>126</sup> Whilst I do not attend to the specificities of homophobic hate speech and its related literatures (see Rosga, 2001; Butler, 1997a), it is important to note that such speech is a marker of the homophobic content of violence. As with homophobia-related violence, homophobic hate speech also has constituting effects on queer subjectivities (Butler, 1997a; Brown, 1995; Eribon, 2014). In this regard, Eribon (2004, p. 17) describes gay insult as a performative and constitutive act that produces the distinction between the normal and the insulted.

<sup>127</sup> For critiques of Mason’s approach to violence, see Hartsock (2006) who challenges her interpretation of standpoint theory, and Houle (2006) on how a view of violence as productive and constitutive constrains political strategies against violence. For rebuttals of these critiques, see Mason (2006a).

making where multiple discourses vie as interpretive frameworks for how the queer is to be seen and known. Through processes of signification and subjectivation, such meanings have interpellatory effects on queer subjectivities. Operating as a dominant discourse in the context of South Africa, violence is one way in which queer subjects come into social and political view. As a regime of knowing, the discourse of violence also produces the conceivable possibilities for action against it. More specifically, discourses of homophobia-related violence make acts *of* violence and acts *against* it knowable, thinkable and doable. Such discourses also constitute subjectivities that take up violence, as well as those rendered vulnerable to it. They also enable subject positions in which political agency against violence is constituted. I concur with Bennett's (2010) suggestion that knowledges of violence against LGBTI identities offer new possibilities for theorising gender and violence.

Approaching homophobia-related violence as a way of knowing reveals how different identifications intersect with violence and its possibility. Here my particular interest is in how raced, gender, sexualised and classed categorisations are normalised and/or destabilised through discourses of violence; and what can and can't be seen and done, and by whom, within the discourse of violence against lesbians in particular. As this study assumes a post-modernist perspective, I do not seek out a truth of violence, or of lesbian identity in relation to it; rather, I explore how it is discursively constituted in context-bound ways. Finally, bringing into view the political interests that a particular knowledge of violence supports can work to expand choices in both thinking and acting against practices and knowledges that continue to exclude and oppress.

### **3.2 Historicising violence: Colonialism and apartheid**

Colonialism was a relation of power based on violence of a physical, psychological<sup>128</sup> and structural nature (Fanon, 2001, 2008; Taylor and Shaw, 1998). The violence of colonial power was also central to the cultural othering and disciplining of colonised bodies (D'Cruze and Rao, 2004; Mbembe, 2005). African feminists draw particular attention to how, as a system of violence, colonialism is fundamental to the relationship between

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<sup>128</sup> Here Fanon's (2008) idea of the internalisation of racial inferiority points to the violent psychodynamics of racism.

gender and violence (Bennett, 2010). Colonisers viewed Africa and African women as “waiting to be penetrated, conquered and despoiled”, relate to whom white settler women were constructed as a “civilised femininity” (Mama, 1997, p. 49) associated with interiority and domesticity (Potts, 2002). Sexual violence was a key aspect of the racialisation of sexuality during colonialism, slavery and apartheid (see Ally, 2009; Baderoon, 2014; Gqola, 2010), and was central to white men’s subjugation of black women (Mohanty, 1991; McClintock, 1993; Scully, 1995). According to Keegan (2001, p. 460), in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the myth of ‘black peril’ worked to constitute the figure of the black rapist as the “black brute at the gate” that threatened the “chaste white wife” as the property of the “white patriarchal father”. Similarly, Scully (1995) exposes how the racialisation of rape in the Cape colony constructed white women as victims of black male rapists. These tropes have crafted the gendered and racialised terms for who is considered rape-able, and by whom. They also reflect how sex was constituted as “the central metaphor for racial and gender insecurities” (Keegan, 2001, p. 474) and as a site of colonial anxiety (Scully, 1995). The continuity of these colonial discourses were reflected in apartheid sexual economies that racialised black men as sexually dangerous (see Shefer and Ratele, 2011) and black women as sexual property (Moffett, 2006). Violence was a signifying practice of apartheid, acting as a social, political and economic system that elaborated colonial relations. The apartheid regime used violence to institutionalise race, gender and sexual difference as a means to justify and legitimise the unequal status and treatment of those marked as inferior. More broadly, it is argued that violence is a constitute element of racism (Davis, 2014) and that its strategic use under apartheid was geared to upholding white supremacy (Taylor and Shaw, 1998). According to Abrahams (2004), apartheid state-sponsored violence and the community resistances to it, produced violence as a “first line strategy for resolving conflict and gaining ascendancy” (p. 4). The endemic character of violence in South Africa (Stevens, Seedat and van Niekerk, 2003) has been linked with the country’s transition to democracy, which was mired in state-sponsored violence (Marks and Andersson, 1990; Norval and Howarth, 1998; Taylor and Shaw, 1998). In exploring the relationship between political transition and sexual violence in South Africa, Thomas, Masinjila, and Bere (2013) argue that legacies of normalised violence and trauma underpin its present-day manifestations. Gendered violence within

the anti-apartheid struggle and the silencing thereof (Goldblatt and Meintjies, 1998), also illustrate how gender operated as a concentrated point for violence during the transition to democracy. This instantiates how, as Mohanty (1991) contends, violence against women works to define, code and maintains racialised power relations. I concur with Mama's (1997) assertion that the violence to which African women are subjected in post-colonial contexts is to be understood through the history of imperialism.<sup>129</sup> Consequently, contemporary forms of violence against women in general, and lesbians in particular, are to be historicised within the multiple modes of racialised, gendered and sexualised subjections and subjugations of slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

### **3.3 Violence as ordinary, slow, symbolic and outside of the self**

In his typology of violence, Žižek (2009) poses the following provocation:

Is there not something suspicious, indeed symptomatic, about this focus on subjective violence – that violence which is enacted by social agents, evil individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses, fanatical crowds? Doesn't it desperately try to distract our attention from the true locus of trouble, by obliterating from view other forms of violence and thus actively participating in them? (p. 9)

This calls attention to how the hyper-visibility of certain forms of violence obscures the violence that is inherent to the 'natural' order of social relations. The spectacularisation of homophobia-related violence, which I discuss in more detail later, works to distance and detach it from the everyday conditions that produce it. Žižek (2009) goes on to contend that the fake sense of urgency that characterises liberalism's response to violence participates in this concealment of the logics of everyday violence. I have argued elsewhere that the 'shock and awe' response to incidents of gender-based violence exposes a 'performance of surprise' that acts to mask just how normal particular forms of violence are, thereby enabling a distancing of the self from the conditions of its normalisation (Judge, 2013). Far from being an interruption of the ordinary, violence is folded into the ordinary

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<sup>129</sup> According to Mama (1997), theorising violence cannot be reduced to understandings of males as perpetrators and women as victims; and should be situated within an analysis of the more general violences of colonial gender ideologies (p. 60).



(Das, 2008, p. 283). As a social practice, violence against lesbians is made permissible through normalised homophobic discriminations and exclusions that are also institutionalised. As such, violence must be read “as a diagnostic for deeper, more complex historical forms of sociality” (D’Cruze and Rao, 2004, p. 498).<sup>130</sup> In theorising violence, Kleinman (2000) claims that “[t]he mediatisation of violence and suffering creates a form of inauthentic social experience: witnessing at a distance, a kind of voyeurism in which nothing is acutely at stake for the observer” (p. 232). Integral to this is the consumption of the trauma of the Other (Kleinman, 2000).

Violence is frequently attributed to particular communities or ‘violence-prone locations’ (Das and Kleinman, 2000). The notion of ‘cultures of violence’ reproduces the idea that some social groups and identities are inherently violent (Brankovic, 2014). In another take on the interface of violence with culture, Kleinman, (2000, p. 238) argues that “[v]iolence is what lends to culture its authoritativeness”. This is not to suggest that cultures themselves are only ever violent, but rather that violence – as one form of sociality – is embedded in the social practices in which cultures, and their associated identities, are constituted.

The structural violence of poverty is connected to intimate and interpersonal violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004); and disproportionately effects those at the social and economic margins. Poverty in South Africa is described as a form of ‘slow violence’ (Kruger, 2014), a concept attributed to Nixon (2011) who defined it as violence “that occurs gradually and out of sight” and “typically not perceived as violence at all” (p. 2). The impact of this slow and unseen violence – of which poverty is but one manifestation – is unequally distributed (Nixon, 2011). Moreover, the relationship of the spectacular to the unspectacular is also a feature of slow violence in that the former enables a temporal suspension from the persistence of exclusion (Nixon, 2011). Violence is constituted at the level of the symbolic by working alongside the materialisation of both immediate/spectacular violence and slow/unspectacular violence. Here Bourdieu’s (1989) concept of ‘symbolic violence’ reveals how existing relations of domination are produced and maintained through the exercise of symbolic power. It is through both slow and

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<sup>130</sup> Importantly, Das (2008) draws attention to the instability of the term ‘violence’ and the social and political interests that shape what is named as violent.

symbolic dimensions, and their dominating effects, that violence against women and queers comes to be naturalised.

Processes of othering, which are central to subjectivation and its accompanying normalisations, constitute the conditions that produce and maintain the coherence of identity. These violent beginnings, so to speak, of subjectivity craft contours: the contours of self and Other; included and excluded; valorised and vilified. Yet, so frequently, violence is discursively positioned outside of one's own being and doing. In accounting for this, Butler (2010) argues that violence acts to relocate one's capacity to be violent elsewhere. In doing so, violence installs a seeming impermeability through its locating of injurability to an Other (Butler, 2010). Homophobia-related violence might then be considered an attempt to install the impenetrability of heterosexual identity by affixing injury to homosexual identity. This move to position violence outside of the self is of particular relevance in the context of South Africa's racist past and present. Hook's (2014) analysis of the psychodynamics of racialised life in South Africa draws attention to the avoidances at work in confronting these race and class antagonisms. All too often, argues Hook (2014), strategies are taken up that "engender a veneer of social harmony, participating thus in the odd post-apartheid dramaturgy of non-racialism and non-racism, rather than scratching away at the social and historical wounds of racism that are not yet healed" (p. 28). This performance of harmony conceals (violent) disharmony and its enduring presence in contemporary forms of sociality.

### **3.4 Violent states and law as problem/solution**

Rule of law relies on the legitimisation of the state's authority to wield violence. With regard to how the law is entangled with violence, Benjamin (1978) argues that, "in the exercise of violence over life and death more than in any other legal act, law reaffirms itself. But in this very violence something rotten in law is revealed" (p. 286). Here Benjamin links the juridical operations of the state to the exertion of its monopoly over the means of violence. Similarly, Foucault (2004) asserts that "law is not pacification, for beneath law, war continues to rage in all the mechanisms of power, even the most regular" (p. 50).

Heterosexuality and heterosexism are protected and privileged in law (Mutua, 2001). Homosexuality is configured in law, both marking it as a right and a freedom (e.g. civil partnership laws) and, alternatively, as constitutive of a crime (e.g. anti-homosexuality laws). The notion of law-as-problem (i.e. laws that discriminate) and law-as-solution (i.e. laws that prohibit discrimination) is a master narrative for advancing LGBTI freedom across the globe.<sup>131</sup> In South Africa, the unsettled terrains of same-sex marriage and homophobic murder, as discussed in Chapter 2, have prompted the invocation of law to settle the matter.<sup>132</sup> At the same time, homophobia-related violence is embedded in state-authorized racism and homophobia, and their impoverishing effects (Halberstam, 2005, p. 46). That the law is a powerful tool to challenge discrimination, advance rights and prolong life is undisputable. However, in the same instance that the claim is made for state protection from violence, the nation-state's legitimacy to wield violence through force of law is reiterated (Butler, 2010; Brown, 2005). This has the effect of obscuring the state's own power to inflict injury (Reddy, 2011), its insinuation in violence (Brown, 1995), as well as how queers themselves are subjected to the violence of the law (Moran, 2004). With regard to the latter, Brown argues that a "politics of protection" submits queers to being subordinated, regulated and disciplined subjects of the state (Brown, 1995, p. 173). Putting forward these critical appraisals of the law as a tool to advance queer freedom is not to suggest that the appeal for rights and protection from the state is necessarily a self-defeating strategy. Instead, I wish to caution that as queers increasingly place their demands and desires for both recognition and protection before the state and the law, it is essential to consider how juridical power itself produces and perpetuates violent dominations of race, gender, sexuality and class.

### **3.5 Gender, sexuality and homophobia-related violence**

Violence pervades the lives of all women, whether as its target, by fearing it or in struggling

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<sup>131</sup> Law is installed as a primary mode of queer recognition, for example, through the application of international human rights laws and standards. See the Yogyakarta Principles (2007) on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity.

<sup>132</sup> In the matter of marriage, this legal settlement took shape in the passing of the *Civil Union Act of 2006*. With regard to homophobic murder, there are concerted campaigns to introduce hate crime laws.

against it. As such, violence has always assumed a central place in gender theorising and is a unifying ground for feminist activism (D’Cruze and Rao, 2004). Feminists have long viewed violence as multi-faceted and as inclusive of emotional and psychological dimensions (Morgan and Björkert, 2006) to which physical violence is inextricably linked (Duffy, 1995).

Over the past several decades studies have foregrounded the normativity of violence as a central feature of heterosexual relations.<sup>133</sup> This more critical engagement with the violence of heterosexuality, as a normative and gendered schema, was spurred by third-wave feminism and the onset of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Shefer, 2015). In many understandings of the persistence of gender-based violence in post-apartheid South Africa, the history of apartheid and colonisation is foregrounded. Gqola (2007) links this persistence to violent masculinities and ‘the cult of femininity’ (Gqola, 2007). Although the connection between masculinity and gender-based violence is variously theorised, it is generally accepted as an important one (Connell, 1987; Hearn, 2004; Morrell, 2001). Gender hegemonies and their power effects manifest in violence between men and women, and amongst men (Connell, 1987). In terms of the latter, it is argued that hetero-patriarchal practices are implicated in the high levels of male homicides in South Africa (Ratele, 2008).<sup>134</sup> These trends in male homicide are illustrative of the centrality of violence in both the production and maintenance of masculine hierarchy and men’s domination (Ratele, 2010), a dynamic not unrelated to the violent racialisation of black men during colonialism and apartheid. Violence also reflects power struggles over the maintenance of a particular social order (Brienes and Gordon, 1983, p. 511), through which, I would argue, hetero-patriarchal and heteronormative regimes of social organising are dominantly established and maintained. Harris (2011) argues that violence is integrally linked to heteropatriarchy through which it is culturally inscribed as a masculine practice to defend against shame and to affirm masculinity. These arrangements of heteronormative and patriarchal power are

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<sup>133</sup> Studies that explore heterosexual practices in South Africa show high rates of gender-based violence, including sexual violence and femicide. See CSVR (2008); Jewkes and Abrahams (2002); Machisa, Jewkes, Lowe-Morne and Rama (2012); and Mathews, Abrahams, Martin, Vetten, van der Merwe and Jewkes (2004).

<sup>134</sup> The notion of ‘low return’ presumes that life holds a higher rank over death in the masculinity stakes, and therefore that life is necessarily more valued in the symbolic order of dominant masculinity. The threat of failures in male honour, strength and ascendancy could in part account for why demise might in some instances be a more socially viable option than survival.

historical, systemic and structural (Thomas et al., 2013). In addition to this, it is argued that women's susceptibility to gender violence is fuelled by socio-economic inequalities (Jewkes and Abrahams, 2002). These inequalities, and their intersection with gender, produce and sustain the structural and systemic conditions that subordinate women to men, often through violent means.

As an instrument of social disciplining, violence is integral to technologies of gender (de Lauretis, 1987) and is therefore part of a wider system that regulates compliance with strict gender and sexual codes (Nel and Judge, 2008). As previously discussed, regulatory modes of gender interpellation and subjectivation are materialised in sometimes-violent ways (Butler, 1990). Violence also constitutes the conditions of possibility for gender subjectivity and its legibility, including the production of women's "sexed vulnerability" (D'Cruze and Rao, 2004, p. 499). Hollander (2001), in her analysis of the construction of gender through violence, contends that vulnerability to violence is a core element of femininity which in turn reinforces hegemonic gender norms.<sup>135</sup> This reproduces gendered bodies as either naturally violent (male bodies) or naturally violated (female bodies). Related to women's gendered vulnerability, research on violence has predominantly represented women as victims (Boonzaier, 2008) and as violated (van Zyl, 2005), and – through patriarchal discourses – has feminised the fear of violence (Gavey, 2004; Pain, 1997). As a mode of femininity, gendered fear works to curtail women's social movements and to constitute space in gendered forms (Mehta, 1999; Dosekun, 2007; Valentine, 1989). Discourses of violence against women also produce narratives that blame women for the violence they face (Lamb, 1996). Linked to this is how women are socially obligated to assume individual responsibility for preventing violence through adopting gendered precautionary measures (Stanko, 1990). These discourses of blame and responsibility re-naturalise women's gendered subjectivities as sites of vulnerability to violence. Women's subjectivities are shaped in these wider contexts in which violence, and its fears and culpabilities, regulate gendered identity and practice.

Lesbian and gay subjectivities are embedded within the larger regulatory gender regime of which violence is a central element (Butler, 1990). As a form of power, violence

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<sup>135</sup> These are norms in which women are constructed as 'naturally' vulnerable, and men as dangerous.

renders the gay/lesbian subject intelligible within the disciplines of the dominant sexual and gender order (Butler, 1990). In applying Butler's formulation of how threats and their associated dangers compel the assumption of the masculine and the feminine, violence against lesbian/gay subjects can be understood as follows: the "phallicised dyke" must be the phallus, otherwise she will be punished with homosexuality; and the "feminised fag" must have the phallus, otherwise he will be punished with homosexuality (1990, p.103). In this sense, homosexuality is regulated through the policing and the shaming of gender (Butler, 1990). This is also evidenced in violent practices that punish, constrain and seek to 'straighten out' lesbian sexualities through, for example, targeted rape (Nel and Judge, 2008; Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010). According to Hutchinson (1999), homophobic violence:

executes (or 'enforces') the political, social and ideological institution of heterosexism; it punishes non-heterosexual practice, and it aims to prevent future challenge to heteronormativity by employing the threat of violence to attached fear and stigma to non-heterosexual intimacy and desire. (p. 19)

In this way violence operates to keep both men and women compliant with compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980).<sup>136</sup> Both the shortfalls and the overflows of sexuality and gender are regulated through violence as a disciplinary and policing strategy that is employed against all social subjects, crafting the contours of what 'real men' and 'real women' should be, and what happens to them if they are not (Judge, 2014a). I have already presented the limitations of the concept of homophobia, particularly in post-colonial contexts (see Section 2.3.3). Notwithstanding those, I approach homophobia as a modality through which heterosexism and heteronormativity are forcefully achieved and sustained (Adam, 1998), and as "a conceptual tool and a discursive resource for individuals and collectivities to name and respond to their oppression" (Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz 2008, p. 387). To avoid a narrow and decontextualised account of the violence of homophobia, I have elected to use Mason's (2002) term 'homophobia-related violence'. I concur with her motivation for the term, in that "[n]ot only is homophobia itself infused with assumptions about gender, but the enactment and experience of such violence is also shaped by other

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<sup>136</sup> Rich (1980) asserts that the institution of heterosexuality is "managed, organised, propagandised, and maintained by force" (p. 648).

specificities and differences, such as those of race, age and class” (Mason, 2002, p. 14). My use of homophobia-related violence is a conscious consideration of the homophobic dimensions of certain forms of violence, whilst simultaneously recognising that such violence is not exclusively borne of homophobia.

### **3.6 In the middle of violence against lesbians in South Africa**

Better to start, so to speak, knowing in the middle, rather than fantasising a knowledgeable beginning. (Eisenstein, 2004, p. 43)

The first representative quantitative studies on homophobia-related violence were conducted between 2002 and 2006 (Polders and Wells, 2004; Wells, 2005; Rich, 2006). These reveal widespread experiences of verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, attacks on property and secondary victimisation against lesbian and gay people across the country. The racial and class coordinates of what has come to be variously known as ‘homophobic violence’, ‘violence against lesbians’ and ‘hate crimes’<sup>137</sup> are foregrounded in research and reports that draw attention to the disproportionate impact of violence on black lesbians (Gontek, 2009; Graham and Kiguwa, 2004; Hames, 2011; Nel and Judge, 2008; Polder and Wells, 2004; Reid and Dirsuweit, 2002; Swarr and Nagar, 2003). In this sense, homophobia-related violence is a symbolic and material marker of the differentiated experiences of queers, exposing how race, class and gender impact black lesbians’ susceptible to violence. In this regard, Muholi (2004) argues that hate crimes against lesbians signal the insider/outsider status of black sexual identities in post-apartheid South Africa. (For more on the inclusionary/exclusionary dynamics of queer subjectivities in South Africa, see Section 2.5). Research also indicates that following an experience of violence, many lesbian and gay people do not lay charges at the police for fear of ridicule and victimisation from them (Nath, 2011; Polders and Wells, 2004; Wells, 2005; Rich, 2006). Moreover, public visibility and subversion of patriarchal gender roles are correlated with increased rates of homophobic violence against lesbians in particular

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<sup>137</sup> Hate crimes are defined as acts of violence “motivated by prejudice or hatred” (Harris, 2004, p. 12).

(Nel and Judge, 2008). In emphasising the compound impact of race and class on violence against black lesbians and transmen, a Human Rights Watch report (Nath, 2011) finds that: the economic and social position of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people in South Africa has a significant impact on their experience. Those who are able to afford a middle-class lifestyle may not experience the same degree of prejudice and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. However, for those who are socially and economically vulnerable, the picture is often grim. (p. 2)

There is a paucity of research on queer coloured identities and experiences of violence.<sup>138</sup> Apart from the aforementioned quantitative studies, the forms and frequency of violence affecting white lesbians is also largely unexplored.

Activists and academics in the violence and gender sectors attribute violence against LGBTI people to the interlocking dynamics of patriarchy, heterosexism, racism and classism (Holland-Muter, 2012), whilst the rape of lesbians has been linked to performances of hetero-masculinity (Martin, Kelly, Turquet and Ross, 2009). Civil society organisations contend that black lesbians and transgender persons are caught in “the spiral of poverty, powerlessness, routine victimisation and institutionalised violence” and are “raped, tortured and murdered simply because they refuse to conform to dominant heteronormative and patriarchal norms and values” (POWA, 2010, p. 15). These activist discourses situate violence within multiple power hegemonies and their overlapping modes of sexual and gender disciplining.

Some scholars and activists problematise the narrow framing of violence against lesbians within public discourse particularly in the media, and draw attention to the sociopolitical content and context of violence (Hames, 2011; Mkhize et al., 2010; Muholi, 2004; Sanger, 2010). In public discourse, the black urban township is the primary setting for homophobia-related violence, reflecting its racialised representation. This also conceals the rich histories of black queer subcultures in townships and the particularistic ways in which homosexuality is engaged and accommodated within these locales (Gevisser, 1995; Sigamoney and Epprecht, 2013; Reid, 2013). In responding to representations of violence as a product of 'black township men inflicting violence on black lesbian township women',

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<sup>138</sup> See, for example, Chetty (1995) and Sanger (2013).



Sanger (2010, p. 114) contends that such violence should be understood in the context of wider discourses that produce and reinforce heteronormativity and heterosexism. In her deconstructive work on violence towards black lesbians, Matebeni (2013, p. 334) critiques how it is dominantly positioned outside of broader gender, class, sexuality and race struggles. She also challenges the constituting of black lesbians as 'special' victims of a 'special' violence (Matebeni, 2014). Whilst there is little public discourse about violence against white lesbians, black lesbians are dominantly associated with homophobia-related violence through their spectacularisation and hypervisibilisation. These representations of violence against black queer bodies map onto wider discourses of sexualities and homophobia in Africa (as discussed in Section 2.3.3). In challenging the spectacle of black lesbians, Hames (2011) exposes how the media, through "horrific images of lesbians who have been beaten and raped produces a re-traumatising spectacle of those lives" (p. 89). Other queer scholars similarly push back against narrow inscriptions of black queer bodies as sensationalised spectres of violation and victimhood (Gunkel, 2013; Hames, 2011; Matebeni, 2014; Sanger, 2010). As Muholi (2013) states, "each time we [black LGBTI people] are represented by outsiders, we are merely seen as victims of rape and homophobia. Our lives are always sensationalised, rarely understood" (p. 169).

Within this wider spectacle of violence, a dominant way of knowing lesbians is through the discourse of 'corrective' rape.<sup>139</sup> The concept itself has been variously problematised (Hames, 2011; Judge, 2012; Matebeni, 2013; Thomas, 2013). The constituting effect of 'corrective rape' is to produce a truth about lesbians (Hames, 2011) as characteristically raped. The discourse of 'corrective rape' draws on wider narratives of rape (by men against women) as inevitable and inescapable (Marcus, 1992, p. 387), and as part of the normative discourses of sex and gender (Gavey, 2004). The term itself elides the corrective function of all rapes and, as I have argued elsewhere, breathes discursive life into the fallacious notion that men can indeed 'correct' lesbians (Judge, 2011a).<sup>140</sup> Morrissey (2013) argues that media and activist articulations of 'corrective rape' inscribe

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<sup>139</sup> 'Corrective rape' refers to the prejudiced notion that a lesbian woman can be raped to 'make her straight', i.e. to 'correct' her lesbian sexuality. It is mobilised to draw attention to sexual violence motivated by a desire to punish women who subvert expected gender roles, behaviour and/or presentation.

<sup>140</sup> Another limitation of the term is that it obscures the larger sociocultural issues that fuel violence against black lesbians (Nath, 2011).

black South African lesbians “in a discourse of vulnerability that instantiates the perceived powerlessness of this population” (p. 74).

Violence is a “slippery concept” in its destructiveness, productiveness, vastness and nonlinearity (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004, p. 1). As a knowledge regime, violence marks bodies, characterises social relations, and constitutes subjects within social, political, and spatial spheres. In many senses, violence against lesbians is a discursive surface on which battles of sexual/racial/gender/class identity, power and politics are staged and waged. This chapter has advanced an understanding of homophobia-related violence as material-discursive, and as a way in which race, gender and sexual regimes are brought into knowledge. I have reflected on how homophobia-related violence operates constitutively and productively, and as a way of knowing that has power effects. I have provided a view of violence routed through colonial and apartheid legacies and their contemporary permutations. I have also tried to think various forms of violence together so as to expose the multi-dimensional contents of, and context for, homophobia and its intersection with other forms of violence. This wide view of violence – as material-discursive, structural and symbolic, then and now – accounts for how hierarchies of power and inequality produce the conditions in which violence is produced, sustained and resisted. Violence is an instrument in the regulation of social life. It is real (in how it kills, rapes, beats) and imagined (in how it conjures fear, taunts and threatens). Violence against lesbians in South Africa is an effect of power that seeks to discipline, injure and make suffer. Yet, at the same time, such violence is constitutive of the power to resist such discipline, injury and suffering.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the methodology used in the study that builds on and interweaves with the theoretical underpinnings. I commence with an outline of my overall methodological approach, namely a Foucauldian feminist discourse analysis. I then describe my general strategy of deployment and deconstruction whereby I draw on specific concepts related to the research topic whilst simultaneously seeking to trouble their terms. I detail my approach to the categorisation of identities and the naming of violence, and my treatment of these in the analysis. Thereafter I present the central research questions followed by the data selection process. The chapter also discusses the practical method of analysing the data, drawing on a number of methodological guidelines and techniques, and through the application of key concepts from the literature. Finally, I reflect on my own situatedness in the research, more particularly my insider/outside status vis-à-vis the participants and discuss the impact of, and my approach to, these dynamics.

#### 4.1 Methodological framework: Foucauldian feminist discourse analysis

As already established, my ontological and epistemological position is grounded in a Foucauldian conceptualisation of subjectivity, knowledge and power, as elaborated through queer, post-colonial feminist and intersectionality theories. A post-structural understanding of discourse – as a producer of meaning and power in the construction of the social – provides the overarching methodological framework for the study. As already argued, homophobia-related violence is made meaning of through discourse that in turn constitute its causes, conditions and characters and the imaginable responses to it. As a social-constructionist methodology, the study of discourse focuses on the constitution of subjectivities and knowledges in social contexts and exchanges (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001). In recognising that discourse is socially bound, the interaction between text and context is an important feature of analytic approaches to the discursive production of power (Parker, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; van Dijk, 1988). Discourse analysis is

thus centrally concerned with the function of language as “constructive, consequential and constructed”, and beyond the level of the utterance (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 34). In linking everyday language with the production and maintenance of power and inequality (Parker, 1992; van Dijk, 1988), discourse analysis attends to the use and effect of power on subjectivation and social relations. In concerning itself with what counts as truth, an analysis of discourse offers a critical, anti-foundationalist and culturally-located account of knowledge production, viewing it as contingent and multiple (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). I approach discourse as constituting subjects, knowledges and practices and, as Parker (1992) contends, I take “all tissues of meaning as texts” (p. 7).

The multidisciplinary nature of the interpretations and practices of discourse analysis demonstrate its wide relevance from a range of epistemological vantage points. Whilst discourse analysis has its origins in linguistics, various disciplines have engaged its use as a methodological tool for social enquiry. The wide terrain of its application includes post-colonial theory, anthropology, sociolinguistics, psychology and sociology, amongst others. In its concern for how power is exercised, it is argued that discourse analysis holds particular value in understanding South Africa’s political and social challenges (de la Rey, 1997; Burman, Kottler, Levett and Potter, 1997). Discourse analysis has also been productive for scholarship concerned with race, gender and sexual subjectivities and power relations in South Africa (e.g. Boonzaier, 2008; Duncan, 2003; Shefer, 2002; Ratele and Shefer, 2013).

As has already been established, Foucault is concerned with discourse as productive of meanings and effects. He identifies sexuality as “a specific domain of truth” (Foucault, 1998) through which certain discursive positions come to authorise, silence or advance particular knowledges and their powers. Like other post-structural analyses, Foucauldian analysis eschews claims of objectivity in exploring how certain ideas come to constitute themselves as truth in discourse. Such an analytical approach is of particular relevance to a study that concerns the discursive dimensions of violence against lesbians and the knowledge-power effects thereof. A Foucauldian discourse analysis offers a significant departure from cognitivist approaches that centre attitudes, personality, and other individualised dimensions in understanding homosexuality and homophobia. Central to a Foucauldian analysis is the notion that discourse is a resource that makes available ways of

being and doing in the world (Willig, 2008). This relationship between discourse and social practice is particularly pertinent in considering the productive dimensions of queer subjectivity in times of violence. Moreover, a Foucauldian discourse analysis provides a method through which violence, as constituting meaning, relations and subjectivities, can be purposefully explored.

Some scholars argue that an explicit Foucauldian method of analysis does not exist (Graham, 2005, Hook, 2001), and yet Foucauldian thinking is applied through various methodological means (Carabine, 2001; Parker, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 2001; Willig, 2008). Discourse analyses that draw on Foucauldian concepts, and of particular relevance to this study, include explorations of femininity (Bartky, 1990; Wilbraham, 1997), heterosexuality (Hollway, 1984; Shefer, Strelbel and Foster, 2000), bisexuality (Blumberg and Soal, 1997), homophobia (Mason, 2002), post-colonialism (Said, 1995) and racism (de la Rey and Duncan, 2003; Wetherell and Potter, 1992), amongst others.

A post-structural discourse analysis also views language as constituting gender, as a social reality, rather than simply reflecting it (Weatherall, 2002, p. 5). Consequently, feminists have put the study of discourse to productive use in pursuing political change (Mills, 1997) and in problematising universalising truths about women (Gill, 1995). In assessing the contribution of discourse analysis to feminism, Fraser (1992, p. 178) extolls its value in understanding how identities are fashioned in conditions of inequality, how the cultural hegemony of dominant groups is secured and contested, and for contributing to emancipatory political action. However, as a method, it has also invited feminist critique for its relativism and discursive essentialism. In my application of a Foucauldian discourse analysis, I adopt a feminist methodology.<sup>141</sup> This encompasses the centring of the social construction of gender in the enquiry (Lather, 1991), taking women's social locations<sup>142</sup> as a starting point (Harding, 1993; Scott, 1992), along with adopting a critical approach to dominant power relations so as to contribute to emancipatory political change (DeVault, 1999). The politicisation of both sexuality and violence in post-apartheid South Africa demands research that locates lesbians at the centre, rather than the periphery, of social

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<sup>141</sup> I draw on Harding's (1987, p.2) definition of methodology here, namely as "a theory and analysis of how research should proceed".

<sup>142</sup> My centring of women in this study is not based on the assumption of 'woman' as unitary. Rather, it acknowledges that being gendered as a woman has material effects on subjectivity and power.

enquiry. In doing this, I aim to (re)position marginalised sexual subjectivities as active agents who *shape* politics, rather than as those simply *subjected* to it. Feminist methodologies are grounded in a challenge of positivist presumptions that knowledge is objective and politically neutral. As such, they work with an acknowledgment of the multiplicity of truths and assume a deconstructionist approach to these (Letherby, 2003). There is also recognition by feminists that research takes place in the context of unequal and hierarchical social relations (Skeggs, 1994) and is thus impacted by these. As such, feminist methods assert the need for researcher self-reflexivity, recognising that women are not homogenous (Lather, 1991; Wilkinson, 1988). Importantly, though, there is no definitive or single feminist methodology (Boonzaier and Shefer, 2006; Harding, 1987; Letherby, 2003); nor is a feminist method to be found in a “stable orthodoxy” (DeVault, 1999, p. 28).

## 4.2 A strategy of deployment and deconstruction

From a post-structural perspective, description is less about definition than it is about inscription (Lather, 1991, p. 19). Accordingly, it is necessary to recognise that the terms I mobilise in the course of the research – in order to frame the research, undertake the analysis and present the findings – have political implications. Therefore, I adopt a general strategy that aims both to deploy and deconstruct<sup>143</sup> the terms around which the research is shaped. In defining the deconstructive orientation of the analysis, I draw on Macleod’s (2002) explication of analytical deconstruction as “undermining the revelation of essence, de-stabilising meaning as presence, and disrupting dominant, taken-for granted notions of a subject” (p. 8). Added to this is Lather’s (1991) view of “deconstruction as interruption” (p. 13) of hegemonic power relations, which further aligns with my critical approach to the topic in question. In taking up Hoskins and Stoltz’s caution to researchers who deconstruct the very frameworks that participants rely on, I attempt to “hold an analytic perspective while remaining empathically attuned to the ways participants make sense of their lives” (2005, p. 99). I am aware that some of the central terms (which I discuss below) that I use

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<sup>143</sup> This general strategy of deconstruction draws on the approach of exposing the politics of meaning within concepts, noting that no text has “definable meanings and determinable missions” (Derrida and Caputo, 1997, p. 31).

are unstable, and that they might also work to hide and/or amplify particular meanings about that of which they speak. By both deploying and simultaneously deconstructing these, I hope to counter their circumscriptive effects, thus broadening my analytic field of vision. I now explain how this strategy of deployment and deconstruction is put to work in the un/doing of the research's formative terms.

#### **4.2.1 Treating 'lesbian' as a slippery concept**

In the overall conceptualisation of the research and in the formulation of its aims, I explicitly deploy the category of 'lesbian', which I approach as both a sexual and political identity (Jackson and Gilbertson, 2009). In naming lesbians, I am not attempting to force a closure of the category, neither to assert its essence. Rather, I recognise it is an identity that is taken up ambivalently by women, who also use other and alternative linguistic descriptors to articulate their sexual and gender subjectivities. From an intersectional perspective, the question arises as to whether my research privileges 'lesbian' as but one of multiple identity categories within the discourses I explore. In situating lesbian subjectivity at the centre of an exploration of violence against lesbians, might I not embed a self-generated assumption at the heart of my enquiry: namely, that the violence of which I write is foremost about lesbian identity? By privileging the signifier 'lesbian' am I not reproducing a truth about how sexual identification features in the operation of the discourse of violence? However, this is not my intention. It is precisely because of the discursive dominance given to lesbian sexuality in public discourses on violence against lesbians that I seek to critically engage the relationship between 'lesbian' and 'violence' in discourse. Entering through 'lesbian' – as a marginalised identity category – whilst simultaneously recognising this category's instability, fluidity, and internal contestations, as well as its imbrications with other identity positions, enables me to situate the lesbian as a speaking subject in the discursive domains of violence and its politics. This constitutes a political act to bring into view the operations of sexual differentiation at the intersection with other aspects of identity. It also allows me to focus on a highly politicised identity, whilst at the same time unsettling the seamlessness with which the connection between 'lesbian' and 'violence' is normatively asserted. Moreover, dominant representations often obscure the classed, raced and gendered aspects of violence against lesbians. Entering

through 'lesbian', intersectionally, allows me to explore the diversities amongst lesbians. Purposefully, therefore, the study participants occupy a range of raced, classed, gendered and aged locations.

#### **4.2.2 Naming violence, queerness and race**

The form of violence that is the subject of this enquiry is referred to in various ways across the literature and in the data, including as 'corrective rape', 'violence against lesbians', 'hate crimes' 'homophobic violence' and 'violence on the basis of sexual orientation'. Whilst I draw on these phraseologies as they appear, I also introduce the term 'homophobia-related violence' into the analysis.<sup>144</sup> Apart from in Mason's (2002) Australian study<sup>145</sup>, it is not a term that appears in the literature I draw on; neither is it, to my knowledge, in use in South Africa. I use 'homophobia-related violence' as both a political and conceptual tool. It is a term that counters a single-issue representation of violence (Mason, 2002) in that it engages the homophobic dimension thereof, whilst at the same time recognising its relationality with other forms of violence and modes of identification (see Section 3.5 for more on the definition and function of the term).

I use 'gay politics' as a way to describe single-issue politics based on a modernist conception of homosexual identity. I employ 'queer' as a linguistic device to disrupt the presumed coherences embedded in the notion of 'LGBTI'. I also use it to be inclusive of various marginalised sexual and gender identities; and thus I take it up as Ekine and Abbas (2013) do, namely to mark a "dissident stance [...] that seeks to transform, overhaul and revolutionise [...] rather than to assimilate into oppressive hetero-patriarchal-capitalist frameworks" (p.4).

I concur with Duncan's contention that "largely as a result of the contorted logic of apartheid, 'race' remained a significant marker of social, political and economic entitlement and organising" in South Africa (2002, p. 117). Therefore, whilst I recognise that race and racial classification are highly problematic, and view them as socially and historically constructed, they remain relevant in light of persistent race-based oppressions. I use the

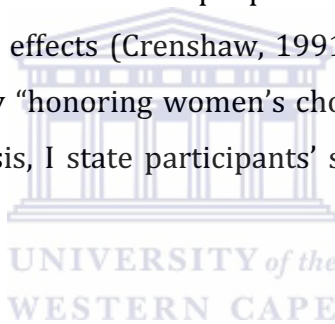
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<sup>144</sup> Whilst the term appears across the write-up, I did not use it in the focus groups as I wished to stay as close as possible to the words that participants themselves chose to describe and articulate the violence of which they spoke.

<sup>145</sup> Whilst Mason's (2002) sample of women was largely representative of the class make-up of Australian society, it mostly comprised women from Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Celtic backgrounds.



term 'black' to refer to all groups who were racially inferiorised under apartheid's imposed racial classifications, (i.e. as 'black', 'coloured' or 'Indian'). Similarly, I use 'whiteness' and 'blackness', noting that they are not homogenous categories and that they reference structural and experiential positions defined within the construct of race (Distiller and Steyn, 2004). By racialisation, I refer to "the historical and political formation and deployment of categories or race and ethnicity" (Norval and Howarth, 1998, p. 3). In the gathering of demographic information about the participants, I was acutely aware of the problematics of asking people to categorise their race, sexuality, class, etc. The risk in doing this is the reification of these categories in ways that are deterministic (Hollway, 2011). I attempt to address this risk by unsettling those identificatory markers through approaching them as unstable, in flux and contingent, in the analysis. Importantly, though, "categorisation is not a one-way street" in that people recast the classifications ascribed to them in ways that have political effects (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1297). For this reason I also "tak[e] women at their word" by "honoring women's choices" (Davis 2009, 40-43)<sup>146</sup> and so, where relevant to the analysis, I state participants' self-described race, class and age identities.



### 4.3 Research questions

As previously posited, I view the discourse of violence against lesbians as a field of knowledge that makes available ways of seeing and being. In this sense, the subjects and objects of the discourse constitute matrices of knowledge-power that enable and disable certain worldviews and practices in relation to homophobia-related violence. The discourse of violence against lesbians and its statements of articulation produce knowledges that acquire authority as truths. Through the constitutive power of discourse, both 'lesbians' and the violence they confront are made recognisable, and thus brought into speech and practice in ways that perform particular functions within larger political and ideological frameworks. These effects of discourse shape the horizons of possibility for action to counter violence, providing resources and positions from which subjects can

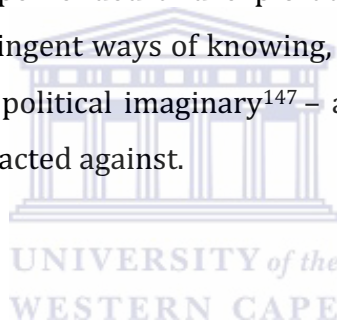
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<sup>146</sup> By this I mean *not* to assume a central, coherent and authentic self, but rather to acknowledge the choice, albeit constrained, that participants make in describing themselves.

know things, speak things and do things. With this in mind, the specific questions I set out to answer are as follows:

1. How are subjectivities constituted in the discourse of violence against lesbians?
2. What do discourses of violence against lesbians reveal and conceal, reproduce and resist, in relation to sexual, gender, race and class identities in post-apartheid South Africa?
3. What are the political implications of the discourse for engaging with homophobia-related violence?

The questions examine the discourse of violence as constitutive of the objects and subjects of which it speaks. They are open-ended and exploratory, thus seeking to surface the multiple, contradictory and contingent ways of knowing, doing and being in the discourse. The questions also concern the political imaginary<sup>147</sup> – as a horizon of possibility – with regard to how violence might be acted against.



#### **4.4 Data collection**

I chose three diverse sources from which to generate data. These include the mainstream print media, 'official' communiqués/statements from political organisations and institutions, and focus groups with lesbian-identified women. Each source is a discourse-producing site in which homophobia-related violence is represented. The media is a powerful public apparatus that shapes popular narratives on identities and violence.<sup>148</sup> The official texts emanate from political structures and processes engaged with violence and with LGBTI people. The focus groups with lesbian-identified women are localised sites of identity formation and expression. Whilst the media and official texts constitute highly public domains of meaning-making, the focus groups reveal the micro-operations of

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<sup>147</sup> I draw on Smith's (1998, p. 76–77) conceptualisation of "the imaginary" as a horizon of intelligibility and possibility for both thought and action.

<sup>148</sup> Media play a powerful role in the production and reproduction of dominant discourses (van Dijk, 1988).

power.<sup>149</sup> Specific advantages of focus groups as a feminist method are that they offer a relatively 'natural' setting for conversation; that the group interaction enables a somewhat contextualised location for talk; and that, relative to other methods, power and control is shifted away from the researcher (Wilkinson, 1999). I now turn to the process of data collection and selection followed for each of the three data sources.

#### 4.4.1 Media texts

This data set includes news articles, editorials, letters and opinion pieces published between December 2011 and November 2012.<sup>150</sup> In drawing a purposive sample, I undertook the following steps:

- Using an in-house media database, I ran an electronic search of all the Independent Newspaper Group<sup>151</sup> articles published between December 2011 and November 2012. I defined the search based on 'lesbian/s' appearing in the article or headline of all the English titles.<sup>152</sup> This produced 652 items in total, which included numerous duplicates, as well as a margin of error.<sup>153</sup>
- I then narrowed the sample down to 182 items according to the following criteria:
  - The article was published in only one of the following titles: *The Star*, the *Cape Argus* and the *Cape Times*<sup>154</sup>
  - The article made reference to violence
  - The article was about South Africa.

During this phase, I removed those articles that appeared in duplicate (i.e. across more than one of the three titles), as well as those articles that the search had erroneously included.

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<sup>149</sup> This is with reference to Foucault's notion of the "micro-physics of power" (1995, p. 26) which attends to how power is produced at a very localised level.

<sup>150</sup> This period was characterised by unprecedented public attention to a number of widely-publicised incidents of rape and murder of black lesbians, and the response of the criminal justice system to these.

<sup>151</sup> This is one of the four largest media conglomerates in South Africa and represents most English-language newspaper titles across the country.

<sup>152</sup> I chose English-language print media titles only, resulting in a monolingual bias.

<sup>153</sup> This refers to items that are entirely unrelated to the search criteria and that were erroneously included in the search results.

<sup>154</sup> Each of the chosen titles is a daily newspaper with wide, urban-based circulation. *The Star* is distributed nationally, with a focus on Gauteng Province; and both the *Cape Times* and the *Cape Argus* are distributed in the Western Cape Province.

The final 42 items were selected based on their richness and relevance to the research questions, and against the following criteria:

- The article made direct references to both 'lesbians' and 'homophobia-related violence'<sup>155</sup>
- The article detailed a recent incident/incidences of violence against lesbians
- The article provided a description of that violence
- The article was longer than 200 words
- The article's headline either directly or indirectly concerned violence and/or lesbians
- The article's main content focus was on lesbians and violence.

Within the final sample, I retained four articles that, whilst still referring to violence against lesbians, focus on violence against gay men or transgender people. I thought the contrast of including these representations might be productive to the analysis. I also retained one article about a high-profile white lesbian, referred to by name, as this was the only one of its kind in the sample. Given the study's particular interest in the intersection of race and sexuality, and in light of the fact that the dominant focus across the articles is on black lesbians, I thought the addition of the said article would provide a valuable touchpoint for exploring the discursive operations of race. See Appendix 1 for a list of the media texts.

#### **4.4.2 'Official' texts**

This data set includes media statements and public communiques released by a state institution or civil society organisation between December 2011 and November 2012.<sup>156</sup> I use the term 'official' to denote that the texts originate from institutions or organisations considered as experts, leaders and/or authorities on LGBTIQ-related matters. The texts express a political view or position on behalf of the institution or organisation. The sample was selected purposively according to the following criteria:

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<sup>155</sup> This includes the terms 'violence against lesbians', 'homophobic violence', 'violence on the basis of sexual orientation' and other phrases that link violence to a lesbian/s.

<sup>156</sup> See footnote 150 above.

- The item emanated from a civil society organisation that works in support of the rights of LGBTI people OR from a state institution tasked to deal with LGBTIQ matters
- The item represented an 'official' position and was issued on behalf of an organisation or authority
- The item was a media statement or public communiqué that concerns violence against LGBTIQ people
- The item was disseminated to the public at large.

Eleven official texts made up the final sample. See Appendix 2 for the full list.

#### 4.4.3 Focus groups

Five focus groups were convened with women who self-identify as lesbian and as women. Given my focus on intersectional subjectivity, an effort was made to include a diverse range of participants with reference to race, age and class. I invited participation in the study by means of a written, electronic invitation sent out to queer and lesbian social networks known to me. I then used snowballing to solicit onward referrals, thus extending the invitation to wider networks. As I sought to also include individuals who are active in LGBTIQ-related political work, I approached four activist organisations<sup>157</sup> to assist me in identifying such persons. These organisations helped to locate and approach suitable participants from their pre-existing networks. In the case of those participants identified through snowballing, I telephoned each prospective participant to confirm their suitability, availability and interest.<sup>158</sup> I followed this up with a confirmatory email in which I specified the venue for the focus group and made the necessary logistical arrangements.<sup>159</sup> For those focus groups where I was assisted in identifying participants, I worked together with one individual from each of the supporting organisations. The criteria for participation and the final composition of the group was then finalised together with that

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<sup>157</sup> These were four non-governmental organisations working in the LGBTIQ sector.

<sup>158</sup> I stipulated that no relatives and/or partners of prospective participants could participate in the focus groups in order to minimise the impact of interpersonal dynamics and over-familiarity in the discussions.

<sup>159</sup> I provided all participants with a flat-fee reimbursement for the transport to and from the focus group venue.

person. The five focus groups took place during March and April 2014, and were comprised as follows:

- Focus group 1: Participants were sourced via a pre-existing network and are volunteers with an activist organisation.<sup>160</sup>
- Focus group 2: Participants were sourced through snowballing.
- Focus group 3: Participants were sourced through a pre-existing network, and comprised volunteers and one full-time employee from an activist organisation.<sup>161</sup>
- Focus group 4: Participants were sourced with the assistance of an activist organisation.<sup>162</sup>
- Focus group 5: Participants were sourced through snowballing, and included one employee from an activist organisation.<sup>163</sup>

Demographic information was gathered by means of a written form that participants completed prior to the start of the focus group. The form gathered the following details:

- Racial categorisation<sup>164</sup>: with the option to select 'black', 'coloured', 'African', 'Asian', 'white', 'Indian' and 'other'<sup>165</sup>.
- Current living conditions: with the option to select 'upper-middle class', 'middle-class', 'working class' and 'unemployed'.
- Sexual/gender identification:<sup>166</sup> with the option to select 'lesbian', 'gay', 'butch', 'femme', 'queer', 'none' and 'other'.

A total of twenty-eight women participated in the five focus groups, two of which took place in Cape Town, one in Tshwane and two in Johannesburg. See Appendix 3 for focus group and participant details.

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<sup>160</sup> The organisation works with black lesbians in the townships of the greater Cape Town area and is volunteer-based.

<sup>161</sup> The organisation is a feminist organisation that advances and defends the rights of black lesbians.

<sup>162</sup> The organisation is a centre for LGBTI archives and education in Africa.

<sup>163</sup> The organisation is a psychosocial service provider to LGBTI communities.

<sup>164</sup> In recognising the problematics associated with the imposition of racial categories, the following was stated on the form: "Please select the racial category which is most applicable to you (within current equity legislation and reflective of historical apartheid categories)".

<sup>165</sup> A space was provided next to the option 'other' for participants to state the alternative category.

<sup>166</sup> I recognise that participants speak a range of different languages and that there is an array of linguistic signifiers they might otherwise use to define themselves. I am aware that the research's reliance on English, to the exclusion of other languages, presents a constraint in this regard. For more on the wide repertoires of linguistic signifiers that queers take up for self-definition, see Rudwick (2006) and Pakade (2013).

The research was ethically approved by the relevant committees of the University of the Western Cape, who ensured that all ethical conventions for research with human participants were adhered to. Based on the Human Sciences Research Council's *Code of Research Ethics* (n.d.), I took up four key principles to guide the research ethics, namely respect and protection, transparency, academic professionalism, and accountability. Participants took part in the focus groups voluntarily, free from coercion, and after giving their informed consent. At the outset of each focus group, I attained written, informed consent from each participant through a consent form (see Appendix 4). Participants were also provided with an information sheet detailing the purpose and intention of the research (see Appendix 5). I stressed participants' right to withdraw from the research at any point and confirmed that the information they shared would remain anonymous and that confidentiality would be safeguarded. I also made explicit that there are no right or wrong responses, that the idea is for full participation amongst group members, and that respect for all opinions was to be encouraged. The intention was to create a space conducive to participation, and to open and affirming discussion. Every effort was made to ensure that no views or ideas expressed were subjected to ridicule or derision, or undermined, and that the integrity of each participant's contribution to the research was equally valued. In my facilitation of the focus groups, I tried to work against the creation of hierarchies within the group by actively promoting equal participation. I also affirmed and encouraged participation, whilst being mindful to not confirm or concur with any particular viewpoints, either directly or inadvertently. I focused on trying to put people at ease. On occasions when the conversation veered significantly off course, I intervened to bring it back into focus. In a number of instances, I tried to draw less vocal participants into the conversation by inviting them to respond to a particular conversation thread or question. This also served to counter the dominance of some participants and to facilitate more even participation across the group.

The focus groups were structured around a set of pre-defined questions relevant to the study's objectives (see Appendix 6 for a list of these questions). At the start of each focus group, I presented the objectives of the research and the focus group, and then invited questions of clarification. After an initial round of introductions, I gently steered the

discussion through the questions.<sup>167</sup> I did *not* pose questions aimed at eliciting whether participants had had a direct experience of violence.<sup>168</sup> Rather, my questions took the existence of violence against lesbians as their starting point.<sup>169</sup> I made every effort to keep the conversation free-flowing whilst ensuring that all the questions were covered. At certain points in the discussion, I drew out convergences or divergences in opinions and/or experiences as a basis to further probe particular issues. I set clear time limits such that the duration of each focus group was between 1.5 and 2 hours. The focus groups were all conducted in English and, where applicable, sections of the discussions were translated.<sup>170</sup> Each focus group was audio-recorded and transcribed.<sup>171</sup> For the transcription conventions used, see Appendix 7. The recordings of each focus groups remained in my safekeeping. With regard to confidentiality, participants' names were changed in the write-up to ensure their anonymity. Copies of the final thesis will be made available to the participants and actively shared with those organisations that assisted in the research. In light of my desire that the study contribute to praxis, I have also undertaken to share the research with other interested parties working in the fields of sexuality, gender and violence in particular.

#### **4.5 Method of analysis: Assembling a conceptual toolbox**

All my books are little tool boxes. If people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged, so much the better. (Foucault, 1996, p. 149)

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<sup>167</sup> All questions were open-ended and their sequencing was adapted to be responsive to the natural flow of conversation in each focus group.

<sup>168</sup> I did not assume that participants had had a personal experience of violence. Rather, my focus was on the group talk about violence, in whatever form participants chose to express that.

<sup>169</sup> I purposefully didn't ask participants about their direct and personal experiences of violence as I did not want to position the 'confession' of the violated lesbian as a necessary mode of entry into a conversation about violence against lesbians. I sought to avoid this dynamic by taking the existence of violence, however defined, as my starting point.

<sup>170</sup> Two participants requested, on a number of specific occasions, to speak in a language other than English. These inputs were transcribed into the spoken language, and then translated into English. Two mother-tongue translators were formally contracted to do this, and each signed a confidentiality agreement.

<sup>171</sup> I note that transcriptions provide a particular version of what was spoken and are therefore not neutral in how they present what is counted as data (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001).



In undertaking the analysis, I identified some key concepts from the literature to actively apply to my analytical reading of the texts. These concepts, supporting a theory-driven analysis, are drawn from my overall theoretical orientation as fleshed out in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. The overarching Foucauldian concepts that I centred in the reading of the data are

- That discourse, knowledge and power are mutually constituting
- That discursive practices are situated within historical and social contexts
- That discourse is constitutive, contradictory and contested, and has power effects
- That power is generative and operates in and across all social spheres
- That regulation, discipline and normalisation are deployments of power.<sup>172</sup>

I also applied a number of other conceptual tools in the analysis, which I now briefly outline.

**Performativity:** I employed Butler's theory of performativity as a mode of analysis of subjection. This includes reading for how regulatory power maintains subjects in subordination; the limits of subjectivation; the iterability of the subject; and how agency is constituted "in opposing and transforming the social terms by which it is spawned" (1997c, p. 29). I applied these notions to how violence and sexual, gender, class and race subjectivities are performatively produced in the texts. I also read for the ways in which interpellation works to "put someone [in this case lesbians] in their place" (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p. 79) through the discourse of violence and subjection to dominant norms. With regard to the focus groups in particular, I looked for how participants push up against the regulatory effects of subjectivity and power in discourse, as well as how they might reproduce these.

**Meaning-making:** Processes of signification are central to meaning-making (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and because meaning is never entirely fixed, the social sphere and identity are sites of continual contestation (Butler, 1990; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). As researcher my work is to "plo[t] the course of these struggles to fix meanings at all levels of the social" (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 24) in the emerging discourses. In this respect, I focused on the knowledges about lesbians and violence produced within these discursive

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<sup>172</sup> I have also taken into account Foucault's methodological cautions, namely to look not only at rule-governed and centralised power in the analysis, but to also consider power's outer limits, recognising that it circulates and "passes through the individuals it constitutes" (2004, p. 27-31).

struggles to fix meaning. Necessarily, this encompasses dominant and dissenting, or counter discourses that are in circulation within the discursive field of analysis. Here I paid specific attention to how a discourse might affirm, contradict or resist culturally dominant or hegemonic narratives. In doing so, I employed the Gramscian notion of hegemony, as power that is exercised by consent rather than coercion, and thus manifests as natural (cited in Simon, 1991).<sup>173</sup>

**Subject positions and discursive strategies:** Davies and Harré (1990) argue that it is through subject positions that the constitutive effects of discourse find force. These positions provide a “conceptual repertoire” and location for subjects to act (Davies and Harré, 1990, p. 46).<sup>174</sup> It is power that motivates individuals to invest in particular discourses (de Lauretis, 1987, p. 16): as such, I read the data for the identifications and investments that particular subject locations open up or close down. Related to this are the discursive strategies that subjects assume or desist. Here I drew on Carabine’s definition of a strategy as “the ways that a discourse is deployed” and the meanings and force of this deployment (2001, p. 286). I analysed what discursive strategies are available to lesbian subjects in countering violence, as well as the positions from which to act that are enabled or foreclosed in discourse. When reading the texts, I paid particular attention to what a given discourse says about the subject who utters it. This enabled me to chart the exclusionary dimensions of discourse (Foucault, 1981) so as to deduce what is knowable and doable (and what is not) about lesbians and the violence they face.

**Contradictions and silences:** Discourses create distinct and contradictory versions of reality (Davies and Harré, 1990). According to Foucault, contradiction is inherent to discourse, as “the path from one contradiction to another” (2006, p. 168). Consequently, discourse is a terrain of irregularities and discontinuities (Mills, 1997) through which contradictions function (Parker, 1992). In addition, as Foucault asserts, “[t]here is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (1998, p. 27). In light of this, I paid attention to how contradictions and silences operate both within and anterior to the discourses of study. Such silences and

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<sup>173</sup> Hegemony establishes the ‘common sense’ of the social (Fraser, 1992, p. 179).

<sup>174</sup> The concept of social position attends to how discourse constitutes the places from which people can act in the social sphere (Davies and Harré, 1990).

contradictions provide a view of the contending possibilities available to subjects in relation to which knowledge-power is produced. Noting the “unsteady task of uncovering discourses” (Walkerdine et al., 2003, p. 180), I did not analyse with the intention of producing a neat story of the data, nor to construct ‘a truth’ of the enquiry.<sup>175</sup> Indeed, my own analysis is itself a site of contradictions and silences, in that I too constitute the contestations that pervade the production of knowledge and subjectivity.

**Text and context:** I note the caution that Foucauldian analyses should not remain solely in the text, and should attend to materiality and wider systems of thoughts (Hook, 2001). In considering the dualisms between text and context that might emerge when doing a Foucauldian analysis (Macleod, 2002), some have called for more attentiveness to the extra-discursive (Hollway, 1995; Wetherell, 1995). As already put forward, I approach discourse as practice and therefore as material. Accordingly, in the analysis, I attempted to situate the discourses within wider epistemes related to queer subjectivities, violence and its politics. However I did *not* attempt a Foucauldian genealogical method, which requires a historicised analysis of the practices, apparatuses and institutions involved in discourse formation (Carabine, 2001; Wetherell, 2001)<sup>176</sup>, as this is beyond the breadth and scope of the study.

**Experience as a medium:** In discourse analysis, there is no reality to be found behind discourse; rather, a set of patterns of representation and their effects (Jorgenson and Phillips, 2002). Consequently, lived experience cannot be taken as an unquestionable originator of “uncontestable evidence and truth” (Scott, 1992). As such, I assume a radical social constructionist stance that takes life history as ‘biographical illusion’<sup>177</sup> (Bourdieu, 2005), personal accounts as constitutive rather than representations of ‘fact’ (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1995), and experience as a product of discursive practice and subjectivity (Thornham, 2000; Weedon, 1987). Accordingly, the analysis works with ‘experience’ as a medium in which things are revealed. I therefore did not engage with the particularities of the histories and life events of participants; rather, I sought to understand how, through

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<sup>175</sup> This is in alignment with a post-structural position that denounces universal and objective truth claims.

<sup>176</sup> Discourse formations include social strategies and administrative and technological manifestations of discourse (Wetherell, 2001, p. 390).

<sup>177</sup> Bourdieu (2005, p. 304) refers to the “biographical illusion” as the life history that establishes the self as consistent and recognisable.

discourse, they produce, negotiate and make sense of that history and experience. In resisting the notion of an ethnographic truth, I read participants' personal experiences in relation to the wider discursive resources made available to them.

**Reading at the intersections:** Applying intersectionality in the analysis enabled me to explore how particular forms of privilege or oppression might reinforce one another. Here I viewed the multiple oppressions at work in texts as simultaneous and intersecting rather than “additive” (Collins, 2000; West and Fenstermarker, 1996). An effect of adopting an intersectional approach is to loosen the grip on universalising categories such as ‘lesbian’ and ‘woman’. Representations of ‘the lesbian’ are never devoid of class, race and other forms of identity content, despite that these dimensions not always being explicitly named. Thus the analysis looked to uncover these workings of intersectional identification, and to expose rather than conceal other forms of alterity imbricated with the (un) naming of a particular identity. I avoided applying a “totalising theory of identity where every identity category is finally and completely known and achieved” (Taylor, 2009, p. 194), rather to apply one that sheds light on the multiplicities articulated by the participants themselves. Intersectionality also draws into view the inclusions and exclusions that discourses constitute, as well as how political subjects, through their resistances, rework these. With reference to the exclusionary dynamics of gender, race, class and sexuality, I read for how diverse forms of power and privilege are both reproduced and resisted.

**Through a critical race lens:** In applying intersectionality, I chose to pay particular attention to the “neglected points of intersection” (McCall, 2005, p. 1774) in my topic of study. One such point is the interaction between racial and sexual identifications in relation to violence against lesbians. Race is frequently theorised through focusing on black women, as most marginalised and stigmatised by race. However, an exclusive focus on blackness can work to elide the co-constituting racialisation of whiteness. I believe it paramount in any critical analysis of race and racism<sup>178</sup> to look pointedly at the operations of whiteness. In doing so, I honed in on the “racialness of white experience” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 51) and its construction of identities as part of my analysis. I am cognisant of the material and

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<sup>178</sup> I find Duncan's definition of racism particularly useful, namely as “a set of ideas and discursive and material practices aimed at (re)producing and justifying systematically unequal relations of power between ‘races’ or racialised groups” (2002, p. 117).

power implications of race for subjectivities, particularly in light of South Africa's past. I approach whiteness and blackness as cultural constructs (Distiller and Steyn, 2004) that shape subjectivity and materiality. (For more on how I define race and racial categorisation, see Section 4.2.2 above). I applied a critical race lens to interrogate whiteness – as a dominant cultural mode that obscures its own oppressive practices – and how it intersects with other identity locations and power effects in discourse.

#### **4.6 Putting the analysis to work**

As a method, discourse analysis is partly intuitive (Hollway, 1989) and, as such, has been likened to “riding a bike” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 169). My precise method of analysis might be best described as intuitively queer in that I put a conceptual toolbox (as detailed in Section 4.5 above) to work by means of a feminist Foucauldian discourse analysis that draws on the methodological guidelines of Parker (1992) and Willig (2008), respectively. In addition, I deployed the thematic discourse analysis techniques of Braun and Clarke (2006) as a way to systematise and organise the data and findings. Halberstam's definition of ‘queer methodology’ is apt in that I adopted:

a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour... [and]... attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence. (1998, p. 13)

In applying Foucauldian concepts, Parker (1992) notes that reality can “both be inside and outside of texts” (p. 34) thus grounding discourse analytics in material structures and practices.<sup>179</sup> Drawing on Foucault, Parker defines discourse as “sets of statements that construct objects<sup>180</sup> and an array of subject positions” (1994, p. 245). My use of intersectionality, critical race theory and post-colonial feminism, alongside Foucauldian

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<sup>179</sup> In this sense, Parker (1992) adopts a critical realist approach and also draws on the notion of ideology. In terms of the latter, Foucault rejects its use as it contradicts his idea that all knowledge is an effect of power and therefore that there is no truth outside ideology (Mills, 1997).

<sup>180</sup> By an object of discourse, Foucault refers to how, through differentiation, discourse defines what it is talked as an object and thus making it “manifest, nameable and describable (Foucault, 2006, p. 46)

concepts, attempts to bring a post-colonial reading to the texts.<sup>181</sup> I employed Parker (1992) to identify discourses in and across the texts.<sup>182</sup> I then looked at how, as objects of discourse, 'lesbians' and 'violence' are articulated in the texts. I explored what kinds of queer subjects are talked about in relation to violence (as an object of discourse), and what versions of the world (in relation to the causes, characters and cures for violence) are constructed in discourse. I also honed in on the effects of the discourse of violence against lesbians (i.e. what it does) with regard to race, gender, sexual and class subjectivities and related power arrangements. I read for how dominant positions and groups are legitimised or challenged, as well as what resources are made available to queer subjects in particular, and their dis/investments therein.

I supplemented Parker with aspects of Willig's (2008) staged method of Foucauldian discourse analysis<sup>183</sup>. This was highly productive for asking questions of the texts that probed for their power effects. I looked for how different discursive constructs are deployed, and what that might achieve in relation to possible actions against violence. I was able to explore how discourse makes particular political possibilities to address violence conceivable. In keeping with Willig, and as previously mentioned, I did not undertake a genealogical analysis; however, I did attempt to locate the discourses analysed within wider epistemes<sup>184</sup> that relate to queer identity, violence and politics.

I also employed a thematic discourse analysis as a technique for coding, organising and writing up the analysis and findings. Thematic discourse analysis is a flexible approach suitable for varied theoretical framework and data types (Clarke and Braun, 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2006). It has been applied to the study of lesbians in the media (Jackson and Gilbertson, 2009), lesbian sexual desire (Ussher and Mooney-Somers, 2000) and gender

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<sup>181</sup> In reviewing Parker's approach to discourse analysis, Macleod and Wilbraham (2006) contend that it reflects a Western bourgeois bias that lacks an engagement with post-colonial theory. They argue more broadly that there is an absence of post-colonial applications of discourse analysis in South Africa. Parker (2006) rebuts their critique, arguing that post-colonial theory cannot be presumed as necessarily radical when deployed in academic discourse.

<sup>182</sup> Here I followed Parker's (1992, p. 6–16) criteria for identifying a discourse, namely, that it is realised in text; constitutes objects and positions subjects; is a system of meanings which relates to other discourses; reflects on its own way of speaking; and is historically located.

<sup>183</sup> These stages include the following: how discursive objects are constructed and located in discourse; the context in which such constructions are deployed and to what effect; what actions discourse makes possible; the subject positions that discourse offers as places from which to speak and act; how discursive constructions and subject positions open up or close down opportunities for action; and how certain ways of seeing and being in the world are constructed and their consequences for subjective experience (Willig, 2008, p. 119–123).

<sup>184</sup> Foucault refers to the state of knowledge at a given time as an "episteme" (Foucault, 2006, p. 211).

relations more broadly (Singer and Hunter, 1999; Stenner, 1993; Taylor and Ussher, 2001). Taking a thematic approach<sup>185</sup> provided me with a structured way to practically manage and organise the analysis. The research questions offered the framework for the initial, broad coding<sup>186</sup> of data. This stage involved highlighting and grouping sections of data together around the primary discourse subjects and objects under enquiry, using both descriptive and *in vivo* codes<sup>187</sup>. I then sorted the coded data into initial discernible clusters, whilst looking for variances and commonalities both within and across code categories. Codes were then clustered into definable discourse themes<sup>188</sup> within each of the three data sets. Then, through an iterative process of reading and re-reading (Braun and Clarke, 2006), and moving back and forth between the key concepts, the literature and the data, I further integrated and consolidated the themes. During this process, I sought to establish an internal logic and distinctiveness for each theme together with illustrative extracts that reflect their 'essence'.

As all social sites are productive of discourse, I did not analyse the data in terms of its sources of production.<sup>189</sup> This is because I view discourse as a vector for meaning regardless of origin. The findings from across the three datasets were also not triangulated. Whilst I read the three datasets alongside and against each other, in the final write-up, I elected to present them alongside each other at some points and separately at others. I did this to draw out the contradictions and convergences both within and across the three datasets without creating discreet and fixed divisions between them. In the write-up, I did not present an exhaustive account of the discourses at work across the entire data corpus; rather, I concentrated on those most productive to addressing the research questions. The findings are partial and limited, as is the case with deconstructive, post-modern readings. In sum, my method is somewhat of a pastiche, weaved from the threads of both theory and methodology. This aligns with other scholarly approaches to thinking both

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<sup>185</sup> Briefly summarised, the phases of the thematic technique involve the following: familiarisation with and coding of data; theme identification, review and definition; and write-up (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

<sup>186</sup> Coding itself is a cyclical process in which initial codes are adapted, retained or dropped, becoming more refined through the process (Saldana, 2003).

<sup>187</sup> *In vivo* codes are direct utterances by participants and are thus placed in quotation marks (Saldana, 2003). In some instances, I have used these codes to name discourse themes.

<sup>188</sup> Identifying themes involves "looking for repeated patterns of meaning" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 86) across the data.

<sup>189</sup> Whilst it is noted that the writing of news articles are constrained by prescriptive and disciplining formats that necessarily inform their content (van Dijk, 1988), these aspects of media discourse were not a focus of my analysis for the reasons given.

methodologically and theoretically as a form of togetherness: what Jackson and Mazzei (2012) describe as “thinking with theory” in ways that complexify the neat division between theory and practice.

#### **4.7 De/facing the researcher: Conscious self-reflexivity from an insider-outsider**

I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. (Foucault, 2006, p. 19)

Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. (Lorde, 1984, p. 4)

The discourse analyst is not outside of power's flows in that she is a politically located “social critic” rather than a “neutral observer” (Wetherell, 2001, p. 384). As the source of the analysis, the ideological views of the researcher shape her account of the research (Sarangi and Callin, 2003); and, as a situated producer of knowledge, she imposes on the data (McCorkel and Myers, 2003) and can enact a “textual appropriation of the researched” (Opie, 1992, p. 53). The analysis is shaped by the researcher such that what is read into, and out of, data is driven by the analytical and ideological frames she applied. The encounter between the researcher and the ‘researched’ also has a psychodynamic dimension in that the desires, projections and defences of both parties are at work in the research encounter (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008). I concur with Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2003) in that the authoritative position of the researcher in producing particular truths should be a point of anxiety. However, such anxiety “does not mean that we should give up research because some things are important politically to be said even if their telling is so full of contradictions” (Walkerdine et al., 2002, p. 195). Feminist reflexivity seeks to engage these challenges of research, as an exercise of power in which the



researcher is central (McCorkel and Myers, 2003; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996). Reflexivity is concerned with how the researcher's own values and interests are constitutive of the accounts of the analysis (Burr, 2003). It is underpinned by a recognition that the researcher is part of the social phenomena she is researching, which means her understandings will always be partially objective and based on her subject location (Haraway, 1991). A Foucauldian analysis acknowledges that "the researcher authors, rather than discovers, knowledge" (Willig, 2008, p. 126). Situating oneself as a researcher in the field of chosen study is critical to both feminist and post-structural methodologies. Such self-reflexivity helps to contextualise the researcher's interpretations, thus supporting methodological validity (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Feminist researchers pay significant attention to othering processes in the research space, particularly as they concern the raced and classed positionality of the researcher (Edwards, 1996; Opie, 1992; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996). Fawcett and Hearn discuss the limitations of researching gender, disability, ethnicity and racialisation "without the researcher having immediate points of identification or direct experience of associated social divisions and oppressions" (2004, p. 202).<sup>190</sup> However, I would argue for a critically reflexive account of the researcher's position as necessarily imbricated with the production of such "social divisions and oppressions". As such, it is necessary to reveal the researcher's locatedness *inside*, rather than *outside* oppressive power relations, and to interrogate the implications of this for the research process, analysis and conclusions.<sup>191</sup> In consciously situating myself in my research, I wish to avoid a performance of reflexivity that is, in effect, what Skeggs (1994) refers to as a narration of bourgeois self-confession that works to appease the researcher. In taking a consciously reflexive approach, I attempt to reveal my face (i.e. my situatedness) and to grapple with the effects of its gaze, to which I now turn.

Differences between researchers and research participants have power implications (Griffin, 1996), as do, I would argue, their similarities. As a researcher, I am multiply positioned in respect of my age, race, class, gender and sexuality. This produces both

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<sup>190</sup> This articulation relies on the notion that the researcher is outside of these "associated social divisions and oppressions". To the contrary, I argue that social inequalities are constituted relationally and thus researchers are indeed inside the terms of oppression and division. Researchers, whoever they are, are implicated in the very gender and race power relations they seek to investigate. For example, men and white people are unmarked categories in relation to which the 'Other' and 'otherness' itself are constituted.

<sup>191</sup> Fawcett and Hearn (2004) also point out that social location and the production of knowledge are linked.

matches and mismatches of identification in relation to the queer subjectivities that are the focus of my enquiry. As a feminist, a queer activist, a lesbian and a middle-class white woman, I bring to the research encounter a diversity of locations and identifications that – both in combination and in contradiction – produce a particular view of, and relationship to, the research question and process. These shifting faces (the multiplicities of my own subjectivity) cannot be wished or theorised away. They open partial and perspectival views that – as is the very nature of subjectivity itself – produce both enabling and constraining accounts of the world and those in it. In revealing a subjective account of my own position in the research, I wish to acknowledge that it serves as a discursive resource for my own interests, and hopefully, in part, in the interest of why, about what, and whom, I write. I write to problematise dominant discourses of homophobia-related violence in which lesbian subjectivities are so deeply enmeshed. I write to trouble the normative and regulatory constraints of hegemonic power relations and their differential and contradictory effects on the potential for queer life. I write to de-legitimise the subordination of queer knowledges and politics. I write to contribute to new political imaginings that might loosen oppression's grip and generate identity and power in increasingly freer ways. I am aware of how my interest in violence and lesbian subjectivities might raise the question of how, as a white woman, I represent black subjects (see Edwards, 1996), particularly in light of white feminists' failures to adequately articulate race and class alongside gender and sexuality (West and Fenstermaker, 1996). Recognition of Western feminism's historical biases and universalising effects behove feminist researchers to address the operations of whiteness in both theory and research practice. This is particularly significant for my research, given the racialised dimensions of identity and violence in South Africa as previously detailed. Noting the intertwinement of the personal, the political and the theoretical in research (Frankenberg, 2000), my own racialisation as white has a face, so to speak, in the research process. Mindful of this, I have attempted to work against making generalised claims based on my own racialisation and class status. I have also paid specific analytical attention to how whiteness and middle-classness are constructed in the research setting, as a means to methodologically engage their effects and my role therein. However, exploring the racialised and gendered dimensions of lesbian subjectivity is *not* analogous to researching the 'black Other'. I reject

the essentialising idea that there is 'a view' that can be fixed to black lesbians; or one that is definitively attributable to white lesbians, for that matter. Aligned with my ontological framing, I approach discourse, whether dominant or marginal, as working in and through subjects in multiple and contradictory ways. Therefore I do not intend to make definitive claims about black or white, or rich or poor lesbians; or to weld static meanings to particular bodies, my own included. Rather, my concern is with how discourse constitutes im/possible meanings about race, gender, class and sexuality, as social constructs with material implications. That said, I recognise that black participants might give accounts to me, as a white person, in ways that are different to how they may relay them to a black researcher (Andersen, 1993). However, there is no single, authentic account of subjects to be given. Speaking is a contextualised practice in which one account is no less valid than another. As discourse constitutes reality and those in it, there is no single truth that I, as the researcher, am to discover about the discourse of violence against lesbians. Instead, the analysis engages the discursive practices (including my own) at work in the data by qualifying the claims I make, rather than presenting them as true or unequivocal. Of course, in the final instance, the claims I make are mine alone; and so I seek to ground them in a feminist politics of location that recognises the contradictory positions I inhabit, and that urges me to speak from where I am, as a form of accountability (Braidotti, 2005; Rich, 1986).

Personalised disjunctures and mis-fittings in inhabiting insider/outsider positions can act as realisations of the long-standing feminist declaration of the personal as political. (Taylor, 2009, p. 196)

As the participant group was diverse, I had been positioned as an insider and/or outsider in ways that varied from group to group and participant to participant. I now wish to reflect on some of the dynamics of sameness and difference – often co-presenting – between myself and the participants. I experienced my location as both an insider (i.e. as similar to) and an outsider (as different from) to be particularly salient with regard to my race, class and activist statuses. For some participants, my public profile as an activist might create a sense of insider-ness, whilst in the same moment, my race and/or class

differences might position me as an outsider. At other points, my whiteness might well generate a perception of me as an insider, possibly contradicted by my activist status. In one group, I was called on as “a feminist” to “share my opinion” on a particular point of discussion. This produced a conflicted response on my part, and revealed a set of contradictory power dynamics at play between myself and the participants. (For more details on this, as presenting both a challenge and an insight for the research, see Appendix 8). In focus groups with activists who predominantly identified as black, I was highly conscious of my racial difference. This is evident in my attempt, at the start of one such focus group, to express my ease with being amongst the participants. In doing this, I sought to establish a relationship of familiarity and *insider-ness* with the group by deploying an activist subject position, as a resource to establish a connection with some of the group members.<sup>192</sup> I view this as a discursive strategy aimed at asserting my legitimacy in the eyes of the group. In another group with primarily white participants, I found myself actively avoiding what I considered to be ‘white talk’<sup>193</sup> (Steyn, 2001) that took place just before the focus group formally started. In this instance, a small group of white participants had tried to involve me in a discussion on the anticipated racial composition of the focus group. I experienced their talk as trying to position me as ‘one of us’, and had concerns about how, if I joined their conversation, I might alienate black participants and reinforce ‘white talk’.<sup>194</sup> In another focus group with predominantly non-activist participants, I tried to minimise my own activist position by, for example, looking surprised when two participants identified me as being politically active.<sup>195</sup> This was an attempt to conceal (perhaps deny) my influence on the discussion, as I had not wanted my own politics to inhibit participants from expressing their views, possibly negative ones, about political activism.<sup>196</sup> These instances illustrate that multiple and contradictory power differentials

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<sup>192</sup> I said the following at the start of the said focus group: “It’s great to be in Johannesburg. I sort of miss it when I haven’t been here for a long time so it’s very cool to be here at [name of org]. And, yes, some of you I know, others I don’t, so it’s very nice to meet you”.

<sup>193</sup> Steyn defines ‘white talk’ as a discursive repertoire concerned with the maintenance of white privilege and that “attempts to manage the intersectional positionality of white South Africans to their (perceived) greatest competitive advantage” which includes, amongst others, “exclusionary tactics and strategies” (2003, p. 6).

<sup>194</sup> I chose to ignore their attempts to draw me into their conversation.

<sup>195</sup> One participant, in talking about lesbians who respond politically to discrimination, stated, with direct reference to me, “I mean you are one of them ...”. In the same discussion, another participant said the following: “You talking about activists? [...] I mean you’re both being proactive”. The “you’re both” referred to myself and one of the participants.

<sup>196</sup> I was concerned that my being identified as an activist might close down participants’ willingness to talk more freely about their views on political activism.

were in motion in relation to the various subject locations I was seen to occupy in the focus groups (i.e. as researcher, public activist, lesbian, feminist, white person, middle-class, English speaker, etc.). The relationship between knower and known is a terrain of mutual imposition. My own location cannot be firmly fixed any more or less than that of the participants. Akin to subjectivity itself, my insider-outsider status represents a shifting constellation of identification and power. Noting these insider-outsider dynamics, and to keep reflexivity alive throughout the research process, I have taken up DeVault's (1999) intention to "aim to write about others *carefully*, in both senses of the word – with rigor and with emphatic concern" (p. 190).

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the methodological approach to the study, and how this was practically applied in the identification and selection of data, and in the analysis and write-up. In adopting a feminist Foucauldian discourse analysis, my method centred on reading for the content, context and function of the discourse of violence against lesbians and its effects on subjectivity, knowledge and power. Analytic interpretations that draw on key concepts from the literature were employed to theorise the significance of the emerging discourses and their broader meanings and effects. The resources, strategies and subject positions made available by discourse, and the implications of these for how homophobia-related violence can conceivably be addressed, were also explored.

## CHAPTER 5

### BECOMING LESBIAN, TALKING VIOLENCE

Drawing exclusively on the data from the focus groups, this chapter is structured in two parts. Part 1 concerns how participants' sexual subjectivities are forged in their talk about being lesbian from within diverse social and identity locations. This discussion on lesbian subjectivation helps situate Part 2 that follows in light of how lesbians negotiate their identifications in contexts of stigma, social exclusion and violence. As such, a look at participants' sexual subjectivities more broadly provides a necessary backdrop to their construction of violence, as a dominant mode of queer interpellation and as explored in Part 2. Part 2 then focuses on participants' talk about violence against lesbians, and what this reveals and conceals about sexual, gender, race and class positionalities, as well as how these are discursively negotiated in their sense-making of violence. I use illustrative extracts<sup>197</sup> throughout the discussion to elucidate the discourse themes that shed light on these dynamics. As explained in the methodology chapter, and at points where it is salient to the analysis, I include participants' self-defined age, race and/or class categorisations.<sup>198</sup>

#### 5.1 Part 1 – Becoming lesbian: Coming out, coming in

In this section, I present a number of discourse themes through which participants articulate their lesbian identities in relation to self, others and queer communities more broadly. The discourse themes concern processes of coming into social recognition, assimilationist strategies, negotiating the lesbian as 'a lack', navigating gender performativities, and cultural configurations of being lesbian.

##### 5.1.1 “That is who I have become”: A lesbian through show-and-tell and coming out

For many participants, identifying as lesbian takes shape through an internalised (psychic) process of self-knowledge, self-recognition and acceptance, as well as through social

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<sup>197</sup> 'FG' is an abbreviation for 'focus group', which is, in all cases, followed by a number that denotes which focus group each extract pertains to. See Appendix 3 for a list of focus group participants.

<sup>198</sup> See Section 4.2 for details on how I approach these self-descriptions and their limitations.

recognition i.e. being known by others to be lesbian. Self-knowledge and its expression in the act of coming *out* (and thus coming *in* to sociability) require that participants make their sexual identity known to both themselves and others. Through processes of 'show and tell' and 'coming out', the 'truth' of being lesbian finds form.

*Fundiswa: It's like you have this duty, this heavy duty that you have to cook dinner, sit everyone on the table and tell them, 'Guys, now I am dating a woman.'* (FG1)

*Andiswa: I didn't know the words lesbian but when I looked on the dictionary, the definition of a lesbian, I found it there.*

*Melanie: What made you look in the dictionary?* (FG1)

*Andiswa: What made me look? Because I was confused. I didn't understand myself so I was...*

*Sindi: People were pointing you as a lesbian so you wanted to know the meaning of the word.* (FG2)

*Nadia: I was fourteen and started realising I actually think I like girls, and I approached my parents, which would be the normal thing to do. And I think they – from then – also not understanding what it was, said 'But then you are a lesbian.' And from then, that is who I have become.* (FG2)

The extracts above reflect the social obligation to be identified and identifiable as lesbian through self-classification and naming. In addition, declaring yourself a lesbian, as well as evidencing that declaration, function as performatives through which sexual identity is inaugurated and rendered recognisable. Becoming lesbian provides a definitional schema through which a stigmatised sexual identity gets socially placed. Similarly, Dimpho and Andiswa below, refer to the social pressure to declare themselves as lesbian. They describe this as having to demonstrate and prove the veracity of their sexual subjectivities through explanatory and evidentiary practices. The burden of proof reproduces a sense of being othered.

*Dimpho: It's like you have to put it in their face or show proof of it. Maybe if I come to you now and say, 'Hey, here's my girlfriend,' and I'm like, 'Oh, ok, I think we now believe you.' But it has*

*to come into reality and they see what they face, and it's like 'Oh, now - ok, I think I can get – I believe now that you are lesbian.'* (FG4)

*Andiswa: I will have to explain, 'This is my wife,' and they are like 'What?' 'No, this is my wife?' Every time you have to explain.* (FG1)

Here the disciplinary power of the discourse of sexuality (Foucault, 1998) is put to work through identification and classification, working as an interpellatory framework that installs the lesbian's recognisability. The need for a sexual identity inscription is described below, by both Jane and Tania, as necessary for group belonging and assimilation:

*Jane: And there's a security if you're feeling part of a community as well. Discovering one's sexuality at the best of times is a nervous and tenuous experience, but then to find that you're actually in a minority. To be able to associate with a certain group, or certain definitions, or a certain tribe, for want of a better word, there's a security in that. And so people do tag that.* (FG2)

*Tania: But the majority of us need to know where we fit in. We need to belong somewhere. And so, by knowing that I'm a lesbian, I know exactly which box to go into. And then, there you go – you know who you are now.* (FG2)

In explaining that it is hard to make her lesbian identification “gel with other identities”, Thando foregrounds how it conflicts with other subject positions she holds (as a “sister” and a “Christian”).

*Thando: She was not exactly against lesbianism but she was trying to understand. It's like you're only one thing, and we're not one thing: I'm a lesbian, I'm a sister, I'm a Christian, I'm a da-da-da. But to people, they can't see them coming together, and especially with culture, with religion, with other things. So it's very hard to put it in, make it gel, with other identities. It tends to stick out.* (FG5)



Thando resists the totalising effect of being viewed as lesbian and how it dwarfs other dimensions of her identity. For her, being lesbian forecloses other possible identificatory positions, specifically those related to culture and religion. (For more on culture and lesbian subjectivation, see Section 5.1.5).

For Soraya and Taryn below, the inscription of lesbian is akin to racial, ethnic, class and religious classifications, as social impositions (something you're "stuck into"):

*Soraya: I can't say it's negative for me, and for me it's almost just like the class you were stuck into.*

*Taryn: Absolutely, it's like you're Portuguese, or you're Jewish, you're a lesbian...*

*Soraya: Exactly, it's like you fill in a form and it's, you know black, or coloured. Oh shit, what am I? Or like when people ... it's like if you look at race, people are proud to be black and whatever, and then you get some people who say, 'Oh my god, don't say black.' So it's like, I'm a lesbian and then some people are like proud to be lesbians, and then you get people who say, 'Don't use that word, it's negative.' So for me it's kind of difficult. (FG2)*

Soraya establishes a chain of equivalence between the stigmatising interpellation of race and sexuality. By referencing to the regulatory practice of "fill[ing] in a form" she associates sexual classification with apartheid's imposed racial categorisations. Soraya also expresses how the positive resignification of racial or sexual identity poses a conflict for her (being "kind of difficult"). Her sense of being 'stuck' in a particular place of subjectivity gestures toward the desire for a more comfortable social location (Taylor, 2009), rather than one that experienced as externally imposed.

*Thando: So if I'm sitting with my friends it would be like, 'Is that person gay?' And I'm like, 'What?! Do you ask if someone's straight? Leave them to pass by!' One of our people in our department, he ... we went to sign our register, and then my friend is like, 'Do you think he's gay?' Why? Always in my head it's just like – and that's when, I don't know – that surveillance where you always have to pick out if someone is this or that. (FG5)*

*Bongi: You have a duty to make sure that you tell everyone about yourself. But there is no one who comes to you and tells you about themselves. (FG1)*

Thando describes the practices of heteronormative surveillance that keeps sexual binaries in place through the interpellation of the lesbian/gay as a sexual Other. Her talk exposes how surveillance strategies operate to position homosexuality in subordination to heteronorms. Similarly, Bongzi's "duty" to "tell" alludes to how the hetero-homo binary is co-constituted through the marking of the latter as a sexual identity that must be defined and announced. In reference to "no one [referring to straight people] comes and tells you about themselves", Bongzi expresses how heterosexuality, by comparison, is not required to declare or confess itself. This is illustrative of how queer subjectivation is installed through the panoptical<sup>199</sup> surveillance of heteronormativity (Mason, 2002) and its heterosexual gaze, and how this produces and maintains homosexual and heterosexual bifurcations. Consequently, the inscription of 'the lesbian' operates as a boundary marker for constituting and asserting the homo-hetero binary (Sedgwick, 2008), and reasserts heterosexuality as compulsory (Rubin, 1984). A further explication of the hetero-homo dualism and its surveying and regulatory features is seen in the discourse of coming out. Participants approach coming out in a variety of ways, including as self-affirmation, as enabling social acceptance, as a rite of passage, and as a social imposition.

*Nadia: Wow. Yes, it does bring us back to, why do we need to come out?*

*Soraya: I know!*

*Nadia: Out to what? I mean, we were born!*

*Tania: I'm completely normal. What's the matter with you!*

*Nadia: What, what, what I don't understand is that I never ask a man why you are dating that woman? (F1)*

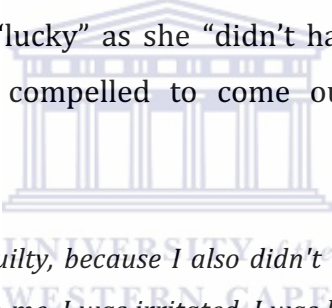
*Tania: My poor parents, you know they never had the opportunity to say anything. Nothing. They didn't have the courage to ask, and I wasn't going to tell them either, because I can't see why you've got to come home and say, 'Mom, Dad, I'm a lesbian.' Nobody goes home and says, 'Mom, Dad, I'm straight.' (FG2)*

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<sup>199</sup> Here Mason (2002) draws on Foucault's (1995) use of the panoptic schema (based on Bentham's panopticon) as a means of understanding how the social is organised through surveillance in order to effect conformity and compliance.

Tania and Nadia discuss how coming out relies on a prescribed confession through which the lesbian is obligated to make herself known whilst heterosexuality does not require such a declaration (“Nobody goes home and says, ‘Mom, Dad, I’m straight”). Here coming out operates through a discourse of confession that asserts the truth of homosexual identity (Foucault, 1998), in relation to which heterosexuality remains undeclared (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 2008). Tania further troubles the regulatory dimension of coming out in her wry reference to birth, as a universalising signification for coming into being. The birth metaphor functions as a literal representation of coming out (of the womb) as an embodied experience linked to human recognition.

Below, Soraya expresses an ambivalent disappointment that there “wasn’t a big coming out” for her. Coming out is figured as an interpellating rite of passage into a queer community of belonging. Gesturing to a longing to have experienced this, Soraya attributes its absence to her having been “lucky” as she “didn’t have to” come out. This infers the unluckiness of those who are compelled to come out, gesturing to its disciplinary dimensions.



*Soraya: I always feel a bit guilty, because I also didn't ... I mean, finding out I was gay was probably the biggest shock to me. I was irritated, I was like, 'I can't be gay! No, no, no, no, no, that must be wrong.' But I mean I just carried on. I didn't come out to my parents or anything [...] There wasn't a big coming out. And sometimes you meet new people and they're, 'Oh, so when did you come out? How did you tell your parents?' and it's like, 'I didn't have to.' [...] I always feel as though there should have been something. Like, maybe something that I've missed. But I mean I was just lucky. (FG2)*

The hailing effect of lesbian subjectivation, what Butler (1990) refers to as a shaming interpellation, renders the lesbian a socially intelligible sexual Other within a heterosexual hegemony and its prevailing norms. As such, becoming lesbian functions as a truth regime that provides the conditions under which self-recognition is made possible (Butler, 2005). Participants take different positions on what it means to identify with, or be identified as, lesbian. The signifier lesbian is variously described by participants as “a badge of pride”, a “term of empowerment”, a “tag” and a “label”. For some, the stigmatisation of a marked

sexual identity is strategically reworked through the discourse of coming out, as a declaration of self-worth. Although participants mostly identify with the term 'lesbian', they articulate discomfort with having to perform a 'show-and-tell' of their sexualities through imposed classifications and heteronormative surveillance practices and their regulatory effects.

### 5.1.2 "Like any other person around": Gender, race and class assimilations

In their identifications as lesbian, participants mobilise discourses of sameness and difference. For some, their sexuality is a differentiator of great significance, whilst for others it "doesn't matter". The latter is frequently constituted through normative assimilations related to gender, race and class statuses:

*Jane (white, middle-class): I've been in relationships with men and women and realised that I am more compatible with a female partner. I have a very, for want of a better word, conservative life. I have two children from my previous relationship. I am in a monogamous relationship. I have a home and a fulltime job, so apart from the fact that I am in love with a woman, I am pretty much like any other person around. So I suppose if that quantifies me as a lesbian, I'm a lesbian, but I don't feel any different, or in any way unusual to any other person around me, except for the fact that I love a person of the same sex. That's the only difference in my opinion. (FG2)*

Here Jane draws on a discourse of normalcy which she signposts through the valorisation of a set of subject positions, namely monogamy, home-ownership and full-time employment. Her reiteration of being "normal" is asserted by means of these social locations and their associated statuses, each of which is linked to meanings and practices with which she establishes her 'sameness'. Simultaneously, she subordinates ("except for the fact that") her sexual identity - as a signifier of her difference - to other normative markers. This minimisation of sexual difference works to bolster the trope of sameness and its homonormalising inflections. Jane's claim on a "conservative life", reinforced through middle-class and homonormative conventions, offsets the difference that being lesbian signifies. Her likeness to "any other person around" is quite specific in its gender and class

designation. In this sense, Jane is like those who have children, who are in monogamous relationships and who are in fulltime employment, positions to which she assigns a universal normality. In not “feeling any different” or “unusual”, Jane invokes a gendered and classed sameness to assert her equivalence with the norm. This strategy draws on assimilationist discourses in which passing into normality (Richardson, 2004) and being the good gay (Warner, 1999) constitute lesbians as respectable sexual citizens. Jane constructs middle-classness by invoking a set of morally-bound cultural values (Skeggs, 2005) related to consumerism and homonormativity. Her mobilisation of material and consumerist discourses to promote queer assimilation exposes how queer consumer citizenship is reified as a mode of social inclusion (Rink, 2013). Jane asserts a neoliberal, middle-class subject position which dominantly relates to an acceptable gayness, read as “a proxy for both production and consumption” (Alexander, 2005, p. 77). Along a similar discursive track, Mandy asserts her normalcy to ameliorate her sexual otherness.

*Mandy (coloured): To be honest with you, I seriously have an issue with these identification type of groups. Yes, it's there in society, you identify yourself as coloured, lesbian, and so forth – that's a criteria that people have placed on us, have given us – but I just see myself as a person. I see myself as a normal person. The only difference with me is that obviously I am loving a woman. But other than that, everything about me is normal. So if you're asking me to put myself in a category, obviously lesbian is the only one that I can relate to, but other than that I don't like...I feel very offended by it, and I just see myself as a person. It's just my preference. Nothing else about me is different from any other person. (FG5)*

In stating “the only difference with me”, Mandy repositions a stigmatised sexuality through its minimisation, whilst reifying a normative standard with which she associates herself through a discourse of normalcy. Mandy is frustrated with “these identification type of groups” because they render her something other than normal. Her reference to the imposition of “criteria” for race and sexuality is illustrative of how identity-related “box ticking” works as a technology of gender (de Lauretis, 1987), and of race and sexuality. She also invokes her own racial self-classification, as coloured, to stress the similar effects between racial and sexual markings.

In one focus group, middle-class status was repeatedly reinforced by a number of white participants, with the effect of erasing the racial and class differentiations within the group and asserting the primacy of a 'higher' class status. This dynamic is reflected in the two extracts that follow.

*Tania (white, middle-class): And I don't think any of us here, around this table, can actually speak for those people who are having such a bad time because we're not in that class system at all. (FG2)*

Tania constitutes the group on the basis of a presumed class similarity. She does this by distinguishing the group members, as a collective, from those "who are having such a bad time". Through a process of classed othering, a 'lower' class status is used to signify those lesbians who are having a "bad time", positioned as dissimilar to the group on that basis. By ascribing the "bad time" exclusively to those who occupy a lower class position, and by asserting the group's own status as middle-class, Tania disavows the class differentials within the group.<sup>200</sup> She also erases how group members themselves might have "a bad time". The homogenising and effacing effect of generating the fiction of an exclusively middle-class group, and reifying that status, is also evidenced in the exchange below, which took place at the conclusion of the same focus group.

*Jane (white, middle-class): Lovely to meet you all. I'm sure we'll bump into each other. Probably at the frozen food section of one of the supermarkets.*

*Taryn (white, upper-middle-class): Buying treats. (FG2)*

The references to "frozen foods" and "buying treats" work to corral "all" the members of the focus group into a shared culture of middle-classed consumerism. Jane's articulation that, "I'm sure we'll bump into each other," installs the classed sameness of the group by configuring the members around a presumed classed-identity. This manoeuvre maps onto wider discourses of homonormativity that conform to and reproduce particular race, class

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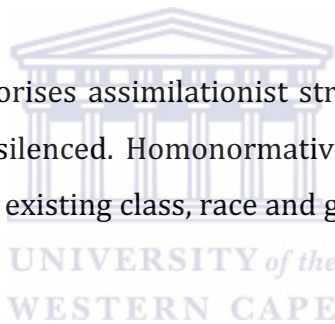
<sup>200</sup> The group comprised three coloured participants (two middle-class and one working-class); two white participants (upper-middle-class and middle-class); one who identifies as 'other' and is middle-class; and another who identifies as Latin and middle-class.

and gender normative standards of respectable (Duggan, 2003; Kennedy, 2014; Seidman, 1993). It also reflects how whiteness (as a marker of class) operates through homonormativity (Ward, 2008; Kennedy, 2014), in relation to which certain lesbian subjectivities become valued and others denounced.

In a counter-discourse to homonormativity and its universalising effects, Dineo distances herself from middle-class lesbians by making visible the material and political differences amongst lesbians, based on their age, race and class locations.

*Dineo (black, working class): But what I've realised, Melanie, is that the older lesbians – ok, let me put it this way, the older lesbians who are middle class, who are lawyers and what what – there is a huge difference, between me and that older lesbian woman who stays in Sandton, who doesn't even care about our issues. She's got her own house, her partner. (FG3)*

The discourse of normalcy authorises assimilationist strategies through which inequality and difference is minimised or silenced. Homonormative affirmations work to discipline sexual deviance by folding it into existing class, race and gender hierarchies of social power and status.



### **5.1.3 “There's a human, and then there is a lesbian”: The lesbian as ‘lack’**

For participants the term lesbian is dominantly associated with a series of ‘lacks’. These relate to gender (a ‘failed femininity’), to being fully human (‘not human’) and to sexuality (not having ‘real sex’), emerging as dominant depictions that participants dis-identify with. As the conversation below reflects, the lesbian is characterised as the embodiment of an incorrect gendering, as flouting gender norms, and consequently, as a subject that is neither fully woman nor fully human.

*Mohau: It's more of people - I don't know if they don't understand or – it's like when you are a lesbian you are an alien. There's a human, and then there is a lesbian. So I think people they feel that I am less of a woman if I am like this.*

*Puleng: Because you are lesbian.*

*Mohau: And yet I am still less of a man, even if I am wearing masculine. So I don't know where do they put me actually. (FG3)*

Further detailing the gender (mis)representation of the lesbian, Nhlanhla, below, expresses how the lesbian is dominantly constructed as outside the normative category of woman. Puleng's description of the lesbian as "a special kind of woman" further articulates this separation of lesbian identity into a distinct category of repudiated sexual and gender subjectivity.

*Nhlanhla: So basically it means lesbians are not women.*

*Puleng: They are women, but a special kind of women. The other thing is that, yes, we have issues that are linked with women issues, we are women, we have the same issues, but yet again we find straight women who discriminate against lesbian women. So automatically women separate us as lesbian women from their circle as women, you know. (FG3)*

These articulations are illustrative of how being human is constituted through 'correct' gendering (Butler, 2009; de Lauretis, 1987). They also demonstrate how the alienation of the lesbian from being fully woman or human, relates to her sexual and gender deviance and consequent status as a subordinated femininity (Collins, 2004; Schippers, 2007).

In one focus group, participants referred to how lesbians are dominantly constituted as not having, or being able to have, 'real' sex. Ilze describes how 'real sex' is defined as penetrative sex with a penis. Accordingly, lesbian sex is not considered sex, and is both socially invisibilised and culturally unintelligible.

*Ilze: And I'm speaking especially in my family, my brother is a farmer and his father is an old farmer as well. I mean they can't think that a woman can be gay. I was in Uganda for three months. Six months all together: three months, three months. And there being gay is totally out of the question; it's only men. When you're a woman in their minds a woman can't be gay, it doesn't exist.*

*Mandy: Serious?*

*Ilze: Only when you're a man, you are gay. When you're a woman, you're not gay. 'You can't be gay, how can you be gay. How do you do it?'*



*Melanie: So why do you think it's that they can't or don't see it?*

*Ilze: They see only being gay as the act. Men with men, penetration with penis, that's being gay. We don't have a penis. So, you're not gay. (FG5)*

*Mandy: And you're a lesbian because you can't get a man.*

*Bontle: Ja, cos you you're afraid of a dick. And it's not even about the sex, it's about waking up next to a woman, waking up to the woman that you love. (FG5)*

Bontle, above, casts lesbian subjectivity outside of the sexual (“not even about sex”). This reflects how, perhaps in reaction to being dominantly defined by sexuality, lesbians actively resist this positioning (Ussher and Mooney-Somers, 2000). Instead, Bontle accounts for being lesbian through a discourse of romantic love (“being in love”) that enables her sexual deviance to be re-presented in conformity to dominant heterosexual culture (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1995).<sup>201</sup>

By marking her body as “big”, Ilze (below) legitimates how she represents a failed femininity. This aligns with wider representations of female excess, of woman as “too much”, and thus beyond the prescripts of the intelligible female body (Bordo, 1993, p. 163). Drawing on a discourse of hegemonic femininity, she positions smaller women as more closely aligned to the requirements of normative femininity, and, consequently, as more socially acceptable.

*Ilze: And then they look at me: 'Ok, you're gay, of course. You wanna be a man cos you're big,' and what what. But, at the end of the day it's not like that. I mean she's gay, I'm gay, and we're both women and so that's it. I mean it's not that. I don't want to be a man at all. But they put you in those folders and say, 'Ok, you're big, you look like a man so you want to be a man, and you're gay. Ok, but oh, you're a tricky one, you are small so how does that work?'* (FG5)

The stigmatising discourse of the ‘lesbian as lack’ draws on hegemonic notions of what it is to be normatively human and to be gendered as feminine. The “heterosexual matrix”, as the obligatory schema for sex, gender and desire (Butler, 1990, p.7), creates the discursive and

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<sup>201</sup> Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) similarly found that, in women’s accounts of transitioning to lesbianism, the romantic love discourse was a strategy to avoid taking up the label of lesbian.

material contexts in which the lesbian is posited as abject. The 'lesbian as lack' works to situate her outside of the phallogocentric symbolic order (Wittig, 2007) and as an embodied failure of normative femininity (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993) in which femininity is already constituted as otherness (Waugh, 1992). The discursive construction of lesbian subjectivity as a gendered lack also reflects the gendering of sexual orientation (Lorber, 1997). Due to her gender transgression, the lesbian is prescribed a subordinated position as a "pariah femininity" (Schippers, 2007). As has been shown, lesbian subjectivation is routed through a multiplicity of lacks, the function of which are to situate subjects outside of normative accomplishments related to sex, sexuality, gender and humanness itself. Participants strongly resist the stigmatising interpellation of the discourse of lesbian as lack.

#### **5.1.4 "Our rules are no femme to femme, no butch to butch": Working through the masculine-feminine binary**

Participants discursively negotiate their gender performativities both within and outside of queer cultures and contexts. For some, the appropriation of masculinity is part of the repertoire of being lesbian, whilst, for others, butch/femme identifications are experienced as constricting and regulatory. For Kekeletso, below, lesbians are expected to conform to a feminine-masculine binary which she problematises.

*Kekeletso: I have been kinda like programmed to say if you're straight, or you're bisexual, or you're gay or you're lesbian. So for me being a lesbian woman, already my mind is programmed that I am allowed to feel attracted towards women only. And for me if I see [name of a man] and say, like, 'Wow he's hot,' I would feel like in a way that is taboo, it's wrong, now I am jumping borders to become something that I am not [...] So I think the behaviour of men have affected us as masculine women and then we come with those rules in our own community. Like the community says, 'You're not allowed to date women, it's wrong,' you know. Then you come back to the lesbian community and they say like, 'No, our rules are, like, no femme to femme, no butch to butch. It needs to be a butch and a femme.' Already we are building the picture of a man and a woman, where in most cases you find the butch is normally who's paying for dinner, who's opening doors, who's pulling the chair, you know, who's taking you. (FG3)*

Kekeletso speaks of the “rules” of butch and femme in terms of an imposition of heteronormativity (“already we are building the picture of a man and a woman”). She views this as impacting lesbian gender performativity through prescribed positions that then regulate and constrain gender expression and practice. For her, the butch-femme coding is “programmed”, thus signalling its internalised reproduction. By contrast, Bontle constructs an agentic lesbian subjectivity that moves into and out of butch-femme gender expressions and representations.

*Bontle: Whether you're feminine but you dress in whatever clothes you want to be dressed in it's fine, but as long as you know who you are. Because I know who I am, I know that I'm very butch. I'm masculine inside but I love my make-up, I love my pink. I'm very feminine outside. So I think it's when it gets to that, that people get tricked out and say, 'What, you can't be lesbian because lesbians are butch!' And that's what I thought when I actually came out. I was this close to becoming ... to, you know, thinking that I'll have to wear masculine clothes to be lesbian. And it's not always like that. There's a variety of us. You can say that. (FG5)*

Bontle asserts the diversity within queerness (“there’s a variety of us”) and its possibilities for gender alterities that trouble the butch-femme and interior-exterior binarisms. Drawing on an individualising discourse of self-knowledge (“as long as you know who you are”), she positions the lesbian as agentic in her choice of masculine and feminine practices. Bontle draws on a discourse of femininity, represented by the ‘lipstick lesbian’ (signified in the utterance “I love my make-up, I love my pink”). This aligns with dominant strategies in which women mobilise normative femininity to express their sexual agency, as a means to rework heteronormative schemas (Mills, 1997).

In further elaborating the disciplinary operations of gender performativities within queer communities, Dineo talks about how her lesbian identity limits the sexual expressions available to her. She seeks permission and clarification from other group members as to the terms of the sexual that are acceptable to being lesbian.

*Dineo: I can be a woman who loves other women and at the same time be attracted to men and still feel I'm a lesbian, right? I'm just posing that to everyone.*

*Puleng: Ja, it can be. It's possible.*

*Dineo: And still identify as - cos for me I feel that saying I am a lesbian is just an identity that one feels is something that is close to them.*

*Melanie: What do people think about that?*

*Puleng: It happens in most cases that most women who love other women do have some attraction to men at times, not all the time. So that will pose a question if those women are bisexual or they are lesbian, but then they identify as lesbian in most cases cos it's something that happens rarely when they are attracted to men. So, ja, I agree with Dineo. (FG3)*

In this exchange, the rules of lesbian sexual desire are negotiated, reflecting how regulatory gender practices constitute the identities through which subjects come to be culturally intelligible (Butler, 1990, p. 23).

By referencing the butch-femme binary and its relationship to lesbian subjectivation, participants reveal how becoming lesbian is instituted through performances of gender. These performances work both with and against hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity and their embeddedness in heteronormative modes of being. How the participants manage their gender subjectivities in relation to queer community and to hetero-patriarchal prescripts, points to what Oswin (2008) contends is the reliance of queer space on the heterosexual/homosexual binary in defining itself. At the same time, butch-femme “rules” are resisted and resignified in ways that diversify possibilities for these lesbian-identified subjects to act within prevailing gender and sexual hegemonies. Here participants are re-negotiating the heteronorms that govern gendered embodiment.

#### **5.1.5 “It’s a Western thing”: Lesbians as outside ‘culture’**

In the extract below, the homosexual is constructed as white, Western and outside the “very cultural”, marked as black. Culture, as a signifying practice, is affixed to blackness, which in turn is naturalised as intolerant.

*Bongi (black): When you look at the news during Pride, it was all white people in front, you know. So, it's like being gay or being a lesbian, it's a Western thing.*

*Fundiswa (other): You have to be white.*

*Bongi (black): You have to be white. If you want to be accepted as a lesbian person, you have to be white. So if you're black, then you're bewitched, because there are no black people who are lesbians and it's not in our culture to be a lesbian. (FG1)*

*Puleng (black): Probably another reason that our issues might be a bit different is because us as blacks, we are more circled in the patriarchal norms, more than the whites because we are more cultural, we have cultural backgrounds and our families are very cultural, our community is very cultural, you know, rather than the white community. (FG3)*

Bongi and Fundiswa draw on dominant representations that situate lesbians as Other to African culture (Livermon, 2012; Namaste, 1994) through the association of gayness with whiteness. In the exchange they reference homosexuality as a marker of Western civilisation (Epprecht, 2008). In reading whiteness as a social practice and a symbolic power (Brah, 2000; Carolissen et al., 2012), the statement that, “you have to be white” to be gay, presumes a cultural assimilation into whiteness as foundational to gayness. Here gayness is linked to the imposition of the West, which Butler (2006) describes as a compulsory Westernisation through which other cultural registers becomes thwarted. Eisenstein’s (2004) formulation of the West as “a state of mind, [and] a set of privileged cultural values” is at work in the constitution of gayness as “a Western thing” and as “hav[ing] to be white”. Puleng too marks black as “cultural” in relation to which homosexuality is then exteriorised. This assertion draws on the concealment of whiteness as a dominant cultural practice and symbolic order, in which blackness is configured as the marked culture. Here the unmarked normative cultural standard, which indexes whiteness and Westernness, is positioned as antithetical to an inferiorised (“bewitched”) ‘black culture’ (Eisenstein, 2004; Goldberg, 2000). These culturalist discourses align with wider narratives of ‘gay as Western’ and ‘homophobia as African’ (Ekine, 2013; Kaoma, 2009; Ndashe, 2013), as well as notions that African sexuality is homogenous and definitively heterosexual (Epprecht, 2008). Participants’ grapplings with the cultural contestations around queer identities in Africa, as reflected in the extracts above, also demonstrate how

culture is configured as a defining feature of race (Hall, 1996).

The discourse of culture also intersects with gender. Below, Dimpho ascribes black men's claim on dominance to both their gender and their race (signified as, "it's cultural").

*Dimpho (black): And it's [violence] much more prevalent in our black community cos guys see themselves as having the power, they can actually come to you and like, force themselves and stuff like that. It's like... it's cultural. They don't understand that they can't inflict that culture upon my life. (FG4)*

In describing black men as "see[ing] themselves as having the power", Dimpho associates that power with the imposition of "culture", coded as black. There is a conflation of race, culture and patriarchal dominance at work in this statement. The deployment of culture to explain black men's gender dominance aligns with wider narratives that collapse cultural and sexual differences in non-Western contexts. This collapsing is a means to assert the supremacy of the cultural standard of Western whiteness, as civilised and rational (Eisenstein, 2004; Mohanty, 2013). In asserting her resistance to the imposition of "that culture" (which is simultaneously gendered and raced), Dimpho mobilises a discourse of agentic individualism ("they can't inflict that culture upon my life").

To conclude, in this section I have presented how participants' sexual subjectivities are shaped in ways that are complex, contradictory and contingent. Their talk reveals the multiple dynamics at play when women take up, and take on, a lesbian identification in the context of dominant stigmatisations, repudiations and exclusions. Consequently, being lesbian is an interpellatory mode that participants simultaneously deploy and desist. The processes of lesbian subjectivation discussed also reflect how becoming lesbian installs particular forms of knowing both homosexuality (a sexuality that is to declare its truth) and heterosexuality as undeclared (Sedgwick, 2008). There are social demands for lesbians to show and speak of themselves in particular ways, and as the basis for social recognition and acceptance. In this regard, coming out and coming in to queer communities are significant to lesbian subject formation. Lesbian subjectivation is marked by its sexual otherness, which participants navigate with some incongruity, reflective of how identifications are constructed through ambivalences (Hall, 1997a). Some participants

strongly identify as lesbians and resignify the term into an affirmative category of being.

How a lesbian's gender and sexuality is defined and performed is shaped by heteronormative modalities of gendered doing and being. As a consequence of this, participants are required to negotiate the visibility of their sexual identities in relation to heteronormative prescripts which they navigate in multiple and contradictory ways. As found in other research with South African lesbians (Gibson and McCleod, 2012), sexual identities involve constant discursive negotiation. These identities are fashioned in relation to dominant discourses of exclusion and essentialism. Participants are subjected to the stigmatising interpellation of being lesbian, which appears as external to the subject but also takes on "a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity" (Butler, 1997c, p.3). Subjection surfaces the unstableness of the category of 'lesbian' together with its incoherences, discontinuities and constitutive exclusions. Resistances to the exclusionary effects of stigmatising narratives are evidenced in participants' negotiations of the terms of being lesbian. Through strategies that reframe a repudiated sexual identity, participants reconfigure their place within normative sexual and gender orders. In some senses, 'the lesbian' is a floating signifier (Smith, 1998)<sup>202</sup> that is open to diverse ascriptions of meaning. Whilst normative meanings are negative and abjecting, participants' generate agentic identificatory possibilities. The reclamation of lesbian as a self-descriptor is a form of resistance through which subjects affirm their identities, rather than it being a source of their denouncement.

Participants also negotiate their sexualities in concert with other social categories, specifically gender, race and class. This reveals how identities are configured and confounded in and through the multiple social positions women occupy. The relationship of race and class to sexuality is a prominent feature of participants' talk about their experiences of being lesbian. However, noting that discourse is permeated by silences (Foucault, 1998), it is evident that white participants tend *not* to explicitly articulate their identities in terms of race and class positionalities. This is a finding that confirms other local studies (e.g. Gibson and Macleod, 2012). It also demonstrates how whiteness operates as an "absence of colour" (Ware and Back, 2002, p. 2). The superiorisation of certain race

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<sup>202</sup> Here Smith (1998) draws on Laclau and Mouffe's notion of a 'floating signifier', which doesn't have an inherent meaning; rather, it draws its meaning from historical context (p. 50).

and class statuses also illustrates the exclusionary dynamics within lesbian identificatory processes.

The construction of queerness as acceptable to 'white and Western culture' and unacceptable to 'African culture', accords with Sigamoney and Epprecht's (2013) findings that "[t]ransgression of the heteronorm, and by extension of a rule of Africanness, [is] associated with whites and the West" (p. 84). The signification of sexuality through cultural discourses is indicative of how sexual subjectivities are produced within hegemonic cultural domains.

Having provided a broad sweep of some of the ways in which lesbian subjectivities are formed through participants' talk, I now move more pointedly to the matter of violence. Departing from an understanding that lesbian subjectivation is significantly shaped by stigmatisation and repudiation, the section that follows hones in on how violence against lesbians is discursively constituted in participants' talk.

## **5.2 Part 2 – Talking violence: Who and why?**

This section discusses how participants construct violence against lesbians: who and what are its causes, who are its targets, and how do participants situate themselves, and others, in and through these conceptions? In answer to these questions, I present a number of discourse themes and investigate their implications for how gender, sexuality, race, class and age are discursively constituted in and through the talk about violence against lesbians.

### **5.2.1 Violence as gender discipline and punishment**

Gender power relations, both systemic and interpersonal, are a dominant trope through which violence against lesbians is made sense of. The relationship of lesbian subject formation to violence, women's gendered vulnerability and subordination to men, and lesbian sexual and gender transgression, are key themes through which the cause and targets of violence are articulated. These themes coalesce around a notion that violence is a form of gender discipline and punishment, the various dimensions of which I now turn to.



### **5.2.1.1 “Something tragic happened to you”: The injurious origin of an identity**

Whether reproduced or resisted, the notion that lesbian identity is related to a prior experience of violence is a significant aspect of how violence against lesbians, as a form of gender discipline and punishment, is dominantly constructed. In the interchange below, participants describe how violence, specifically sexual violence, is central to how lesbians are dominantly represented. They challenge the notion that being lesbian is, by definition, hinged to a formative experience of injury.

*Bontle: And I feel like being a lesbian in my view is somebody, as everybody said, who is attracted to the same sex - to a woman. And in my case I am always classed in that box that, you know, you've been hurt, you've been raped, you had a bad father [...]*

*Mandy: I like the fact that you touched on people having this perception that if you're lesbian, you've been raped or beaten.*

*Bontle: Or you're going through a phase.*

*Mandy: They have to assume something tragic happened to you.*

*Annetta: The situation is also that males ask me, 'Were you raped or molested when you were a child?' I said, 'Listen, I wasn't.' I was one of the fortunate daughters of ladies who didn't go through this. It was my choice to be like this. (FG5)*

Rape and molestation are signifiers of sexual injury that mark a failed gender accomplishment, as cause for lesbian sexual deviance. Annetta reflects on how lesbian sexual identity is presumed to constitute a prior sexual violation (“Were you raped or molested?”). The question fulfils an interpellating function in that it calls the lesbian to state and confirm her injurious origins. It works as an “injurious interpellation” by which the subject is formed through her [presumed] injury (Butler, 1997c, p. 104–105). The injury of the lesbian maps onto wider representations of violence against women that dominantly construct them as victim (Bartky, 1990). The notion that “something tragic happened to you” legitimises the lesbian’s sexual transgression by ascribing a failure of gender to her (Butler, 1993). The effect of this is to normalise the injurability of the lesbian as a subject who is “always already”<sup>203</sup> raped or injured, in some form or another. In

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<sup>203</sup> “Always already” is a Derridian term that points to the inscriptions produced by the text (Lather, 1991, p. 119).

stressing the assumption (“They have to assume”) that characterises such injurious interpellations, Mandy resists the presumption of lesbian violation. Annetta (above) and S’bu (below) account for their *not* having been violated by considering it “fortunate” and “lucky”, respectively. In so doing, they reproduce the normalising discourse of lesbian injury by defining their own experiences (the absence of injury) as exceptions to the norm. Both Dimpho and Thando’s questioning of whether S’bu has experienced violence, also performs an injurious interpellation to which S’bu is called to answer.

*Dimpho: But it has never occurred?*

*Thando: Have you ever been threatened?*

*S’bu: No, no, I’ve never. I am one of the lucky people. I’ve never had a hate crime or something like that. It’s just people I know, and I go to meetings like this, so I know. And I’m like, ‘What, really?’ (FG4)*

The discourse of injurious origin constitutes the lesbian as naturally ‘damaged’ through which her sexual and gender failure is then legitimated. These representations place injury as a determinant of lesbian identification. Consequently, the lesbian is constructed as an identity rooted in injury (Brown, 1995), which circumscribes the terms of her social existence. Whilst participants both identify and dis-identify with this discourse, its reproduction reasserts prior violation as a foundational myth of lesbian subjection.

#### **5.2.1.2 “With me, it’s double the trouble”: Subverting the rule of men**

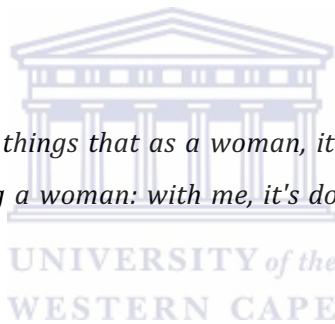
For many participants violence against lesbians is the product of unequal gender relations in which men hold power over women and exert discipline and control over their bodies and lives. In this context, and because of her sexual and gender transgression, the lesbian represents a threat to the rule of men.

*Fundiswa: And I also think a lot of crime that is happening to women, like Bonggi says, it’s to make sure power stays there. Because they feel like women who speak out, women who stand up for themselves, are threatening what is there already, which is working fine for them. So now here we come. We’re calling ourselves lesbians. We’re calling ourselves activists. Now*

*we're trying to threaten whatever is their system that has been working for years. They even say that, 'It's been there. It's law. It's been there for years! Why would you think now you are going to come and change it?'* (FG1)

In much of the participants' talk, violence against women in general, and lesbians in particular, is described as a product of men's practices to access, punish, discipline and control women. The systemic nature of men's power over women is elaborated in the extract above with reference to "their [men's] system that has been working for years" which the lesbian threatens. Fundiswa refers to this form of masculinity as the "system" and the "law", thus referencing its ruling and hegemonic character (Connell, 1987) through which hetero-patriarchal dominance is asserted. These articulations gesture to how patriarchy operates as a symbolic order in which men's rule over women is installed, defended and sustained.

*Nhlanhla: There are certain things that as a woman, it's a taboo for you to do those things. And again it's not only being a woman: with me, it's double the trouble because now I am a woman and a lesbian.* (FG3)



Again, with reference to the symbolic order of the rule of men, Nhlanhla describes how lesbians subvert dominant gender arrangements by virtue of their being both women and lesbians, which renders them "double the trouble". Here the sexual and gender transgressions of the lesbian produce a compound effect that constitutes her as a (double) troubler of hetero-patriarchal norms. "Trouble" signifies a threat to the prevailing norms of gender and sexuality.

For some participants, their sexual identity is, in itself, a resistance to the naturalisation of men's violence against women. Andiswa puts it thus, "as lesbians, to us that's not ok".

*Andiswa: It's because they [straight women] think that men, men are in control. So they – being abused by a man, it's normal. You don't have to fight it because you are a woman. So whatever a man does to you, it's ok. And as lesbians, to us that's not ok. We voice our issues out,*

*and the straight women, they are scared that, 'No I can't say that'. Because some of them, they are getting raped even though they are married. (FG1)*

*Annetta: In my work situation, I see it every day. I'm working with a lot of males. We are a few females there. But, the other females just accept it, it's fine for them, they don't do anything about it. They won't do it with me, because I will tell them straight, 'What are you saying?' But the other people, the other females, they just go on, it's normal for them. (FG5)*

Both Andiswa and Annetta reference how violence against women is normalised through a common-sense consensus of their gendered vulnerability and compliance (Hollander, 2001; Gavey, 2004). They position the lesbian as a resistor of this normativity. Annetta constructs the lesbian as a defiant figure who denaturalises female submission to violence. In this formulation, she describes heterosexual women, in comparison to lesbians, as more compliant to men's patriarchal dominance. In doing so, she essentialises heterosexual women as docile and lesbians as defiant in the face of men's 'inevitable' violence. This draws on wider discourses of dominant hetero-femininity as naturally vulnerable and compliant (Bartky, 1990; Hollway, 1984; Schippers, 2007), a position that the lesbian is perceived to flout.

### **5.2.1.3 "Making boys kill them": Blaming (young) lesbians**

In participants' talk, young lesbians are foregrounded as disproportionately susceptible to violence due to their public subversion of gender and sexual norms.

*Dineo (30): But at some point, Melanie, even if there's an older lesbian – I'm staying in Khatlehong and there's older lesbians – older lesbians will tell you, they won't mix with [name], they are smoking. That is why this hate crime is happening to them, because they are exposing themselves to the community. And them, they stay in the house and do all things. They chill, they don't go out, and that's what I am trying to say.*

*Kekeletso (26): Ja, and probably the younger ones are more of feminists than the older ones*

*Dineo: Ja, they like toyi-toying and them they are not...*

*Kekeletso: Expressing themselves and, you know, they still, they want to be accepted by the community and the older ones are just like...*

*Dineo: Because I know there's this society, the lesbian society that they started in Thokoza. They will tell you those lesbian women, they are old, they will tell you they won't mix with these young lesbians because these ones are the ones that are making boys kill them. (FG3)*

In the exchange above, participants engage with and trouble how older lesbians blame younger lesbians for the violence they face. Dineo describes the narratives of older lesbians' as accusatory in that they condemn younger lesbians for "exposing" and "expressing" themselves. These accusations, deployed through discourses of age, depict young lesbians as publicly flaunting their sexuality and as engaging in political activities ("toyi-toying"). Both these descriptions provide justifications for "why this hate crime is happening to them". The signifier "feminist", which Kekeletso ascribes to younger lesbians, inscribes them as politicised identity positions. In the discourse that is associated with older lesbians, the practices of younger lesbians are blamed for the violence their behaviour 'attracts' and thus for "making boys kill them". Here queer youth is associated with unruliness, the public subversion of gender and sexual norms, and increased politicisation. These are the grounds on which young lesbians are blamed for the violence they encounter, a position that both Kekeletso and Dineo dis-identify with.

*Andiswa: I'm not talking in that sense, because Bonggi said that [name] said 'Why are you going out at night? Why are you drinking? You are calling the hate crimes on yourself,' because she doesn't understand young lesbians, that, for me, going to [name of a locale] I have to do that because I'm young. I want to be there. And she stays at home because she's old and all that. She doesn't understand me. (FG1)*

In a similar register, Andiswa speaks about how lesbian youth are inscribed as culpable for violence. In "calling the hate crimes on [her]self" the young lesbian is positioned as making herself vulnerable to violence, and, consequently, as guilty for its occurrence. Andiswa expresses her resistance to the disciplinary effects of this blaming discourse. She mobilises her youth identity ("being young") to counter the attribution of blame, thus resignifying the young lesbian by affirming counter representations of youth as desiring to be in public places ("I have to do that because I'm young"). Again, and relative to the older lesbian, the

young lesbian embodies a highly visible, and therefore risky, sexual and political identity. As further illustrative of the discourse of blaming of young lesbians, Fundisa describes how culpability is deployed by activists to impose regulations on the behaviour of lesbians (“as if now we are supposed to”).

*Fundiswa: And also people like [name]. [Name] cannot say to people that, 'You are also creators of hate crime.' She's busy fighting hate crime but she's a lesbian herself and she's telling people herself, 'You create hate crime, why are you walking at night, why are you smoking, why are you drinking?' As if now we are supposed to... (FG1)*

Mandy mobilises a discourse of blame to constitute women (and, by inference, black people) as naturally vulnerable to violence. This is the basis on which she asserts that these subjects should assume precautionary and self-protective measures against violence.

*Mandy (37): The general feel that I also have about this is it comes down to categories and, whether you put it as lesbian or racial, it's the same categories. It's like in certain spheres you know you just can't. You know if you're going into a deep Afrik[aans]...you know it's tension. Whether it's sexual or racial, it all boils down to basically the same thing. And as a woman, it's more challenging because you need to conduct yourself in a specific way. You cannot go place yourself now in the situation, coming to town at midnight and not expect to be brutally attacked or raped. Come on, we're women! Or people in general, because South Africa is a very violent place. You can't go to certain places and just think... (FG5)*

Mandy assigns women the task of self-protection drawing on a discourse that normalises violence against women. Here the responsibility for preventing violence is displaced onto the feminised ‘victim’. These strategies of self-protection and their political implications are further discussed in Section 7.2.3. Similarly, Jane, below, attributes the blame for violence to Sophie’s conduct by inferring that its political character legitimately attracts a violent response.

*Sophie (24): No, but all I'm saying is that, I've been threatened many times to be raped and to be beaten up for being gay. And, if I got beaten up or raped, I would like someone to protest*

*Jane (38): But, what is the context of that? Were you standing outside the House of Parliament, petitioning? Were you on Forum? Were you just being you? Oh right, because I mean if you're standing in front of a group of anti-gay people saying I'm a lesbian, then I can imagine... (FG2)*

Lesbians who transgress norms of femininity and who are politically active and publicly visible (features all strongly associated with younger lesbians), are blamed for the violence or threats of violence they encounter. The discourse of blame mobilised in these configurations reiterates women's vulnerability to violence as an expectation of their gender (Hollander, 2001; Lamb, 1996; Stanko, 1990).

#### **5.2.1.4 "Cause for them to lash out": Men as perpetrators/victims, lesbians as taking up/on masculinity**

Men, through practices of gender power, are viewed as the perpetrators of violence against lesbians. Men's violence is attributed to the threat, insecurity and/or powerlessness that lesbians provoke by their disruption of hetero-patriarchal arrangements and the place of masculinity within it.

*Thando: There's a lot of the male identity that comes into it. Men: I don't know, like do we raise our brothers, sons whatever, to be those kind of people where, 'You're the man. Go and get the girl' without understanding what, 'No,' means? Without understanding that if she's saying no it doesn't necessarily have to mean that you're not good enough, that there is something wrong with you. She's just saying no for whatever reasons. Take it and walk away [...] So if we wanna deal with violence against lesbians, maybe we have to unpack why are men so insecure in their masculinity to the point where they will feel like, 'I need to kill you or rape you because you're taking my girl.' (FG4)*

*Puleng: Yeah, I could say that men, specifically, are being rejected in a way. So they are lashing out, and they are lashing out to poor...*

*Mohau: Who's being rejected?*

*Puleng: The men, they are being rejected. Their issues are not being addressed. The only focus in government is children and women.*

*Dineo: But men are the ones who are doing that.*

*Kekeletso: Men do have power, yes they do have power, but then they don't have power. Like the men in my location who are sitting in a corner, they don't have jobs, they don't have any life, you know, they are sitting there at the corners and they target women and children because they are not being helped in a way. That's another cause for them to lash out. (FG3)*

In the extracts above, the insecurity, rejection and disempowerment of men are presented as the primary causes for their violence against lesbians. Thando's reference to men's inability to "understand what 'no' means" and to feeling "insecure", draw on a psychologising discourse that roots men's violence in their minds and feelings. This psychologisation reduces social power arrangements to individual proclivities (Wilbraham, 1997). At the same time, Thando's reference to men's entitlement to rape, situate men's behaviour within the systemic operations of hegemonic masculinity, constituted through the naturalisation of rape as an expression of male power (Peterson, 2000). Kekeletso further troubles the relationship of men to power, describing it as contradictory in that men "do have power, but then they don't have power". In asserting this point, she positions black men (signified by "the men in my location") as structurally "in a corner" where they are neglected ("not being helped"). She positions this structural neglect as a reason for men's violence, in reaction to their economic marginalisation and disempowered.

*Taryn: I think that for a lot of people – those taxi drivers, or those people that, those corrective rapists, those people – they – it's fear that motivates them. (FG2)*

As illustrated above and through linguistic signifiers such as "township men" and "those taxi drivers", it is black men in particular who are identified as perpetrators of violence. This accords with the literature in which black masculinity is constructed as naturally violent (Posel, 2005), mapping onto colonial constructs of the black male body as a threat and as associated with "outlawed spaces" such as townships (Mbembe, 2005, p. 40).

Contesting discourses emerge around whether men are to be considered perpetrators and/or victims of violence.



*Taryn: For me one of the most salient things that was said today was – it's about – we should be – those NGOs [non-governmental organisations] are insufficiently targeting boys and men. It's a generalisation – men are perpetrators of violence and they are perpetrators of violence against those they consider weaker than themselves, whether it's another man, a child, a woman. And I think, as you said, we've got all these NGOs that are protecting women, and, you know, all of them doing good work and doing good jobs, but I think that it's about the cause not the symptom. I'm saying, change the reasons it's happening.*

*Jane: Work with the boys.*

*Soraya: Ja, I think we also overlook violence against men.*

*Taryn: Well, absolutely.*

*Soraya: Men are also being raped. Look at the gay couple that was left on the M5 [highway]. That was a few years ago, maybe two, three years ago? Hijacked, left naked.*

*Taryn: The actor, Brett Goldin?*

*Soraya: Yes. At Kromboom Road. (FG2)*

Taryn positions men as perpetrators based on hierarchies of strength in which men are violent toward those they perceive as weak. She draws on a discourse of men as neglected in her statement that NGOs are “protecting women” and not attending to the “cause” of violence (i.e. men). Soraya elaborates the men as neglected discourse by invoking the well-publicised killing of two gay, white men. Her statement that violence against men is “overlook[ed]”<sup>204</sup> sets up a false equivalence between violence against men and violence against women. Another contradiction within the discourse of men as perpetrators is reflected in Sindi’s statement below, in which she describes the men in her community as “like my brothers”. She links this relationship with men to her not having experienced violence (“those things”).

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<sup>204</sup> The discourse of men as neglected, or “overlooked”, has been mobilised more widely in anti-feminist ways that seek to re-centre men in reaction to women’s leadership and authority in the gender-based violence sector. One example of this is President Zuma’s address at the launch of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign, titled ‘Count me in’, where he stated the following: “We are focusing our message on men as well not because South African men are abusive. It is because excluding men from participating actively in this campaign has been a serious shortcoming. Men also have solutions to offer in fighting violence against women and children. All of us have a role to play” (South African Government News Agency, 2014, Campaign reaches out to men and boys, para. 3). I would argue that this ‘men as neglected’ discourse, as it operates here, functions to elide men’s violence against women and to re-assert their leadership in the gender order. This formulation is a backlash against feminist gains that have effectively challenged men’s power through women’s activism and campaigning. As a reactionary discourse, its effect is to position men as ‘counted out’ (read: left out, neglected, excluded) so as to reinstall their authority, leadership and social status on patriarchal terms.

*Sindi: I don't experience those things in my community.*

*Melanie: Tell me, what do you experience?*

*Sindi: I don't experience them.*

*Andiswa: Sindi has guy friends. He<sup>205</sup> grows up with them. He went to primary school with them. He went to high school with them. So he's like, one of them. So they understand her. They even defend her sometimes, to people that don't understand her sexuality. So I think that's why she has a different experience.*

*Melanie: What do you think?*

*Sindi: Really they are like my brothers. Everyone staying in my community, we are like sisters and brothers. So it's very rare for me to get pointed at. I don't get those kinds of allegations, I don't. (FG1)*

In Andiswa's re-presentation of Sindi's statement she characterises her as masculine ("sort of like one of them"). At a representational level this constructs Sindi in close relation to men, as "one of them", and is a justification for why she is protected from the violence of men. Positioning Sindi as "being like a man" works to rationalise why she has not experienced men's violence. The community Sindi talks about is an urban township in the greater Cape Town area. As is discussed in Section 5.2.2.2, townships are foregrounded as the spacial areas most often associated with violence against lesbians. Sindi's experience contradicts this narrative, which might account for Andiswa's intervention to offer a justification for why Sindi has not experienced violence in a community with which it is normatively associated. Moreover, Sindi's own masculinity is seen to protect her from men's violence. Contrary to this, another participant describes how being associated with masculinity poses a direct threat to men. Below, Mandy describes how she intimidates men because of her sexual attractiveness to women.

*Mandy: I think with men it's mostly about ego. It's a struggle because I have even had a situation where a guy had an ego thing going with me because women in the working*

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<sup>205</sup> Andiswa's interchangeable use of both 'he' and 'she' to refer to Sindi might be due to English being her second language. In isiXhosa, her first language, there are no gendered pronouns. Alternatively, the use of the two pronouns might communicate something about how Andiswa views Sindi's gender identity.

*environment would somehow be attracted to me – my cologne or whatever – and he would feel intimidated and he would start acting up in the strangest ways and trying to compete. At one stage, I said, 'Do you know what? You're competing with yourself because me and you are on two different levels totally. I can never compete on your level, and I don't want to even try so you are making yourself tired so just stop this nonsense.'* (FG5)

Mandy's gendered scripting of how she invites women's sexual interest, positions her as naturally desirable to "women in the working environment". She describes this 'natural attraction' as posing a threat to men. By performing masculinity through the gendered discourse of sexual attraction, Mandy makes a claim on the masculine subject position. In doing so, she becomes an object of desire for women, and, as per norms of dominant masculinity, a threat to competing men.

In this section, I have presented how participants configure violence as a consequence of lesbians' non-normative gender and sexual identities. The cause of violence is situated within wider knowledges of hetero-patriarchal power relations and its associated disciplining of women in general, and lesbians in particular. This accords with the literature in which lesbian sexual and gender transgression, particularly the subversion of feminine gender presentation, are constructed as causes for violence (Mkhize et al., 2010; Muholi, 2004; Nel and Judge, 2008; Reid and Dirsuweit, 2002; Swarr, 2012). An articulation of violence as an expression of men's gender power is pervasive in participants' talk about why and how violence manifests. This also signals how the violent repudiation of lesbians is entangled in both sexuality and gender (Butler, 1990, 1993; Mason, 2002) and, in turn, how violence itself is both gendered and sexualised (Mehta, 1999). In their talk participants make the link between homophobia-related violence and heterosexual norms, one that Sanger (2011) argues is often elided in dominant representations of violence against lesbians. The discursive working of violence, as part of the technology of the gender orthodoxy, also reflects Mason's (2002, p. 63) contention that violence articulates the lesbian as a "disordered gender". In many of the accounts given, femininity is normatively associated with fear and vulnerability, and masculinity with violence and danger, thus reinstating this gendered coding (Hollander, 2001; Mehta, 1999). Lesbians' gendered vulnerability to violence is also expressed through blaming discourses that assert the need

for them to take up precautionary measures in responding to men, who are ‘naturally’ dangerous to them. The more publicly visible, transgressive, and politicised the lesbian is, the more susceptible to violence she is considered to be. This subversive orientation is strongly associated with younger lesbians. As in other studies (e.g. Mason, 2002; Ussher and Mooney-Somers, 2000), lesbian desire is constituted as a danger around which sexual subjectivities are to be navigated.

Men are understood both as perpetrators and victims in the discourse of violence. By disavowing men as the object of sexual desire, and by contravening the codes of normative femininity, the lesbian *takes on* masculinity. By having another woman be the object of her desire, and through adopting gender practices normatively associated with men, the lesbian *takes up* masculinity. This imbrication of lesbian identity with masculinity, weaves through participants sense-making of violence and its gendered causes and consequence. The discussions on violence amongst the participants also reflects what Mason (2002) found, namely how “violence may function to remind us that lesbian sexuality breaches the norms of the sexual and gendered life but, in doing so, it betrays the permeability of the very boundaries and categories that maintain this view of life” (p. 65).

### **5.2.2 Blackwashing violence: Black danger/classy white safety**

Intersections of race and class feature strongly in how participants make meaning of the cause and character of violence. For a number of coloured and white participants, violence is associated with black people, constituted as such through various cultural, economic, social and spatial significations. I now discuss how, through a number of sub-themes, participants racialise violence through a discourse of blackwashing. I also expose the effects of this discourse on how participants variously dis/identify with the spaces and embodied subjectivities in which the presence of violence is installed.

### 5.2.2.1 “We don’t have it”: Blackening homophobia

*Carmel (coloured): You can correct me if I'm wrong. Even now, recently, every now and then when you read the papers, girls were killed.*

*Ilze (white): Especially in the black community.*

*Mandy (coloured): Yes.*

*Ilze: The black community, they are very very much into violence.*

*Carmel: The majority, well not all of them.*

*Mandy (coloured): Ja, the majority. Most hate crimes are from black – it's very rare that you will get it in a white, or coloured, or Indian base. It's always black. And most issues or challenges are within the black society because of cultural diversities within themselves, because they themselves have issues which causes all these problems. (FG5)*

In this interchange between coloured and white participants, “the black community” is causally linked with violence. The *doing* of violence and those to whom it is *done* are constructed through a discourse of race. Ilze’s utterance that “the black community, they are very very much into violence” attempts to fix violence to black subjectivities. By placing the source of violence in blackness itself – “because they themselves have issues which causes all these problems” – she advances a racist essentialism that situates whiteness outside of violence. This racialised constitution of the lesbian who is the target of violence, exposes how racism itself is complicit in the reification of racial difference (Gilroy, 2001). The coloured participants concur with this raced construction of violence through a concurrent display of racial distancing. Similarly, in the exchange below, the black lesbian as the presumed target of violence is configured as a racially and spatially-distanced Other.

*Ilze (white): Actually I take my hat off to the black community, they are much more...*

*Mandy (coloured): Relaxed and out.*

*Ilze (white): And out, but they are more discriminated against.*

*Bontle (black): And in more danger.*

*Mandy: Yes!*

*Ilze: And they've shown it.*

*Melanie: Are you saying there's a link between...*

*Ilze: Ja, there's a link between – they are openly gay so they are more victimised.*

*Mandy: Yes, it's true. We agree with that.*

*Carmel (coloured): Yes. (FG5)*

In the exchange above, the “black community” is associated with danger, in relation to which black lesbians who are “openly gay” are more likely to face discrimination. The notion of blackness as “danger” draws on the *swart gevaar* (black peril) discourse which, during apartheid, became a “watchword that obscured the legitimate demands of blacks for basic rights as citizens” (van der Westhuizen, 2007, p. 123). Through an othering register (the use of “they”), the speakers associate black lesbians with a public sexuality in danger. This also reflects how representations of otherness are shaped through the racial marking of difference (Hall, 1997b). Moreover, an articulation of black people as “more X or Y”, signifies blackness as excess<sup>206</sup> (Ritskes, 2015). The ways in which coloured participants reiterate the discourse of blackening homophobia points to Fanon’s (2008) contention that whiteness, as a superiorised mode of being and doing, is also taken up by black people. Later in the same focus group, white and coloured participants again distance themselves from homosexual repudiation, which is constructed as a signifying practice of blackness. As such, violence is discursively lodged in “those places” named “townships”.

*Annetta (white): This things is existing in certain communities.*

*Mandy (coloured): Yes, like we said.*

*Annetta: For instance where I'm living it's not there. But I think when you live in the township or there in Kaapse vlakte there's gangs that don't tolerate this thing. So this thing is where certain communities is facing this challenge: the lesbians who are living there. Like where I'm staying, I don't have it. Where you're staying [gestures to Ilze], we don't have it.*

*Mandy: We also don't have it.*

*Carmel (coloured): We don't.*

*Mandy: We don't.*

*Annetta: Like you said, in the townships, here at the rural areas, Khayelitsha, those places, Nyanga, it's there.*

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<sup>206</sup> Drawing on Alex Weheliye, Ritskes (2015, para. 2) describes blackness as “fleshy excess. It spills over and protrudes; it cannot be contained. It is always escaping. It is always already too much”.

*Mandy: Ja, they do have those things. (FG5)*

In the extract above, the repeated assertion of, “We don’t [have it],” functions as a performative utterance through which participants collectively distance themselves from the racialised bodies and places they associate with violence. Through the reiteration of, “We don’t”, the speakers share a position *outside* the cause, occurrence and experience of violence. The effect of this is to erase their own knowledges and experiences of violence that takes place in spaces, and on bodies, other than those marked by the blackwashing discourse. Participants position themselves outside of violence through asserting their distinctiveness, constituted through “a host of “not-me’s” (Butler, 2010, p. 141). Through these distancing strategies, the coloured women deracialise themselves, by identifying as *not* black and thus in alignment to whiteness as a dominant cultural mode. This signals what Fanon described as the act of “the inferior race den[ying] itself as a different race” (in Fanon and Haddour, 2006, p.25).

Linking violence against lesbians to blackness and thereby disarticulating it from whiteness is a central strand of the blackening homophobia discourse. This in turn produces a set of racialising terms in which violence – both its cause and consequence – is understood. Through a racialisation of space, whiteness is figured as a safety zone and blackness as a site of danger. Blackening homophobia relies on a form of “racialised knowledge of the Other” (Hall, 1997c, p. 339) in which the black lesbian emerges as a dominant figure. It also demonstrates the co-constructed and relational nature of whiteness and blackness (Gilroy, 2001) through which the former is situated as exterior to violence and the latter as its motif. Naming blackness as violent is indicative of how the naming of the Other can operate as a form of racialised power (Goldberg, 2000). This characterisation of violence against lesbians as a problem of blackness draws on colonial tropes in which, as Fanon (2008) argues, black culture is devalued and blackness hierarchised. The blackening homophobia discourse is further particularised through its co-articulation with class and gender, to which I now turn.

### 5.2.2.2 “Protecting her name”: Racing space and femininity

Representations of black danger are elaborated through constructions of whiteness and middle-classness as embodied states of safety. For Bongi, all lesbians experience “hate crime”; however, violence against a middle-class lesbian goes unreported because she is “protecting her name”.

*Bongi (working class, black): But at least we all say one thing – and we should know that hate crime happens to all of us. No matter when and how, but it happens to all of us. Because people who stays in town, they don't even report these cases. They are afraid to go because the person is protecting her name. (FG1)*

*Thando (middle class, black/African): In our country most of the women that are on the news for being correctively raped and beaten, happen to be women of colour. Maybe we haven't heard of any white women who've been through that situation. I'm sure there are, maybe I just don't know about them. But I think it's unsafe if you stay maybe in more...in the townships or rural areas, as opposed to if you live in more...if you are richer or white or whatever. I don't know, I haven't read the statistics, I'm just thinking. (FG4)*

In Bongi's statement, the middle-class female body (indexing whiteness) is one that commands protection, thus mapping onto wider discourses of white femininity as respectable and socially valued (Deliovsky, 2010) and thus deserving of protection. Thando similarly remarks that violence against white lesbians isn't “heard of” suggesting its concealment from the public gaze. She contrasts women who are “richer or white” with those in “townships or rural areas”, as spaces marked by their absence of safety. This dialectic of black/white and township/town lesbians, with their attendant race and class differentiations, position the latter positions as safe, protected and unseen. In contrast to this, Kekeletso, below, complexifies the notion of the white life as safe and protected from violence.

*Kekeletso (unemployed, black): For me, I feel like compared to white community - for example we had Joburg Pride. We went to march in Rosebank where people are hiding behind their big windows not even interested. Nobody will see that you're lesbians. And it's safe. I get drunk, I*



*know I can take a taxi, then I go back home. But going to Soweto, we march, you know, for a big community, where you're visible as a lesbian – even for those who didn't know you, that you're lesbian, you get exposed so that's the challenge – security, number one. When you come to the white community, their issues I feel like they're very private. I am very more exposed. We have next door neighbours who know more about your issues. Then in the white community – who have these big walls, you know – nobody knows whether you are dead or alive. (FG3)*

In describing white, middle-class lesbians as those “hiding behind their big windows”, Kekeletso points to how whiteness operates invisibly (Brah, 2000). In doing so she contrasts the white lesbian to the visible and public dimension of black lesbian subjectivity and its lack of safety. Whiteness is associated with suburban privacy as the spatial domain of security. Contrary to the “big walls” that hide the white lesbian, the black lesbian is “exposed”, representing a life subjected to a public gaze. Rosebank and Soweto represent the contrasting spatialities through which white and black lesbian subjectivities are co-articulated. In describing those “hiding behind their big windows” as “not even interested”, Kekeletso draws on the failures of recognition of the Other associated with race and class superiorities. By disrupting the notion of suburban whiteness as residing outside of violence and death, Kekeletso constructs white life (domesticated and private) as the place where “nobody knows whether you are dead or alive”. Here she points to the unseen and unspoken (perhaps unspeakable) violences facing white lesbians and within suburban spaces. The talk of Bonggi, Thando and Kekeletso above illustrates how spatial and material conditions are modes through which the gender, race and class coordinates of violence are articulated. Likewise, for Dineo, below, living in an under-resourced area where “securities” and “cameras” don’t exist produces vulnerability to violence.

*Dineo (working class, black): However, us as black lesbians, we are more vulnerable because we are not privileged enough to be having securities at my place, that's where I'll be safe and all of that. (FG3)*

In a similar vein, Fundiswa constructs the vulnerability of black lesbians in comparison to affluent areas, as places associated with security and safety.

*Fundiswa (unemployed, other): Just to add. I also think the safety, also. Because here in town you can walk around the street and you can still be safe. And there are cameras, like, almost every street has a camera. And if you go to Khayelitsha there's, uhm, the last time I spoke to that person...who's this person, the guy in charge of safety in the township? There were four cameras.*

*Ntsiki (black, unemployed): For the whole Khayelitsha. (FG1)*

In the extract below however, contestations emerge as to whether the suburbs are indeed less violent than the townships.

*Lulama (unemployed, African): And in that matter I would rather go and stay in the suburb area, not in the township, Khayelitsha, oh my God.*

*Fundiswa (unemployed, other): The thing is, we need to go back home at some point. And when we get home, you're going home with your wife. They can't acknowledge that you are married. They don't. They refuse to do that. That person will be your friend until death.*

*Melanie (middle-class, white): And do you think it's different in the suburbs?*

*Lulama: Ja, I think so. Because it's different what we face in the townships than in the suburbs. So, it would be better. And it depends in your family. If the family accepts you as you are, then it will be fine.*

*Sindi (unemployed, black): People are doing bad things in the suburbs. No one cares about what does that mean [...]*

*Bongi (working class, black): I stand to differ, ne. I stayed in suburbs you go to a doctor, using my medical aid and putting my partner in. And the doctor will always want to know, 'Is she? Is she?', you know. So even in the suburbs there are still people, but because they know, ok it's a doctor and they have to treat you, but they are not comfortable [...]*

*Mandisa (unemployed, black): Lesbians who stay in town they never experience how we live in the township, the way we are killed. The way we are being killed in townships when these men do something to a woman who is lesbian. (F1)*

In the exchange, the women contest the extent to which race and class locations shape the prospect of violence. Lulama negatively contrasts the township to the suburbs. Fundiswa reinforces this by expressing that lesbian relationships aren't acknowledged in the

townships. The difference between townships and suburbs is further elaborated in Mandisa's assertion that lesbians in town don't experience "the way we are being killed in townships". In contrast to these stark distinctions between townships/suburbs, and their dis/connections to violence, Sindi and Bongi unsettle the idea that the suburbs are free of discrimination. Sindi's assertion that "no one cares" about what happens in the suburbs, points to how black lesbians residing in townships are centred in dominant representations of violence against lesbians.<sup>207</sup>

In sum, articulations of gender and class are intersected with race in the construction of 'black danger' and 'classy white safety', a formulation that underpin the discourse of blackening homophobia. This produces a cartography of danger and safety in which gendered, raced and classed spatialities are discursively navigated. Notions of 'black as poor', and 'rich as white' represent a dominant schema through which participants talk about vulnerability to, and protection from, violence. Class in particular mediates the extent to which women are seen to fear violence, mapping onto patriarchal discourse (Mehta, 1999; Stanko, 1990) and constructing space as either dangerous or safe (Pain, 1997). In participants' talk, whiteness is a marker of classed success and propertied status (Carolissen et al., 2012). As a consequence, higher-class status is seen to protect women from violence. The intersecting dynamics of class and sexual subjectivity in participants talk reasserts Taylor's notion that that to separate "material" (class) and "queer" (sexuality) dimensions of lesbian identity constitutes an erasure (2009, p. 190). Participants mobilise race and class markers to indicate perceived vulnerability to violence. Subsequently, black lesbians in townships are described as more vulnerable than white lesbians residing in suburbs. The suburbs are depicted as safe(r) zones that buffer violence and signify greater freedom. Consequently, the white, respectable female body demarcates the domain of the private: as an autonomous, non-communal sphere of imagined peace and harmony in suburbs that are sealed off from violence. In juxtaposition to this, black

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<sup>207</sup> This centring is further evidenced by the fact that none of media and official texts considered for selection in this study focus on violence against white lesbians. Apart from the national qualitative studies undertaken in 2003–2004 (Polders and Wells, 2004; Rich, 2006; Wells, 2005), to my knowledge, no subsequent research provides either statistics or substantive anecdotal evidence of violence against white lesbians. This is not to say that such violence doesn't exist, but rather that it is conspicuously absent in the public and scholarly discourse on violence against lesbians. Drawing attention to this absence is not to discount the reality that black lesbians are disproportionately impacted by violence, which I and others have consistently argued (Holland-Muter, 2012; Nel and Judge, 2008; Mkhize et al., 2010).

lesbians living in the townships are associated with an inferiorised class that is in proximity to danger and violence. Here the central figure of violence is the vocal, subversive and politicised lesbian who is both young and black.<sup>208</sup>

Talk of violence is coded in the terms “suburbs” and “townships” as linguistic clues for race. This accords with Posel’s (2005) identification of racialising ‘clues’ within discourses of sexual violence in South Africa. The centrality of “the township” in the discursive configuration of violence draws on apartheid conceptions of township spatiality as normatively associated with violence. The apartheid township was, by design, and as Perreira (2015) argues, aimed to constitute black lives as violent and unliveable.<sup>209</sup>

### **5.2.2.3 “We were also part of the struggle<sup>210</sup>”: Apartheid dis/locations**

Violence against lesbians is understood as the consequence of a disjuncture between rights (as codified in law and the Constitution) and reality (as lived experience). This disjuncture is spoken about in relation to the legacy of apartheid and the failures of legal and constitutional protections to materialise in the vast majority of queer lives. Kekeletso links the structural violence of apartheid to present-day violence. She describes how prejudice is a displacement of rage, as a consequence of a continued absence of political recognition and material redistribution.

*Kekeletso: Ok, I feel in a way that apartheid -- number one -- if I can say apartheid has affected so many people, right? After 1994, we were - the leaders of the new government made promises to the people for employment, housing, stuff like that. So those promises were never kept, so now the way people are angry they are targeting the vulnerable groups, from women to children to LGBTI people, because they are seeking answers in a different way. So now people are ... they keeping on voting and promises aren't kept but nothing is happening, nothing is happening, so we feel like we need to use some sort of a weapon to make the government pay attention. Kind of like, burn the buildings to be recognised. We picket, we throw away the dustbins to be recognised, because promises, even now, are still not kept. Here*

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<sup>208</sup> The political dimensions of this figure are discussed in more detail in Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2.

<sup>209</sup> Perreira (2015) puts it as follows: “Townships were never meant for you to have longevity of life and enjoy your wellness [...] Townships were designed to frustrate you, to breed anger and to breed violence. And so the extension of apartheid into our democracy is very prevalent.”

<sup>210</sup> The ‘struggle’ is a colloquial term for the political resistance against apartheid.

*comes these LGBTI people, where are they from? Forgetting that also our leaders were part of that, LGBTI were, but those days we didn't have a chance to say, 'Everybody, I'm lesbian,' because we were affected by apartheid, now we're fighting apartheid so we don't have time for you to tell us about sexuality. But today they forget that we were also part of the struggle, we also voted in 1994. Here comes the foreigners, the foreigners are coming, they are taking away our jobs. It started with xenophobia, you know, we are just targeting vulnerable groups. (FG3)*

By explaining the violence that “target[s] vulnerable groups” as an effect of the impoverishment and deprivation of apartheid, Kekelesto aligns queer political aspirations with the struggle against apartheid. In alluding to how sexual oppression was subordinated in that struggle (“We don’t have time for you to tell us about sexuality”), she establishes an equivalence between sexual and racial oppressions. She also draws attention to how these oppressions are disarticulated in popular political discourse. In a historicising move, and drawing on a struggle discourse<sup>211</sup>, Kekelesto is able to relate present-day violence to the violence of the past. The effect of this is to legitimise political demands for redistribution in the context of apartheid legacies, and to link violence to failures of socio-economic redistribution.

Another historicising lens through which violence against lesbians is articulated relates to South Africa’s transition to democracy. Below participants describe violence in terms of a lack of materialisation of constitutional protections, particularly in townships.

*Lulama (African): I think even though the South African Constitution is legal for homosexuality but in the township it is not easy because we are living in fear. You can't go with your partners holding hands because people will throw words to you and say some stuff. So we are living in fear everyday so I see no changes.*

*Andiswa (black): The changes that we see are on paper. But in reality there is no change at all. (FG1)*

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<sup>211</sup> For more on how the struggle discourse is politically deployed, see Section 7.1.3.

In the extract above the “changes” brought about by law (“on paper”) are not experienced “in reality”. By contrast, in the exchange below, Fundiswa describes the positive effects of democratic change on lesbians in the context of violence.

*Fundiswa (other): No, I just wanted to say, there is a slight change, if I can put it like that. Because we used to walk really scared around our streets. You wouldn't really risk walking around seven at night or risk walking alone before. So I think there is a slight change, because now, yes the Constitution is there. Even the police now, when you are describing a hate crime then they will see that this is a hate crime and this is what needs to be done. So when you go to the police station, they jump up. Even now we can also have awareness groups in our communities. Before, even the community leaders would just throw things at you. (FG1)*

For Fundiswa, the discourse of hate crime, enabled by the transition to democracy, facilitates state responsiveness to violence. Similarly, Bonggi below describes how democracy enables young lesbians to “stand firm and say I am a lesbian”.

*Bonggi (black): Ja, I also think there is a slight change, because things are different. Now at least a 12 year old can stand firm and say I am a lesbian. But before that didn't happen and. I think schools, they accept females wearing trousers and stuff, but before that couldn't happen: you'd have to wear long uniform. I remember when I was still young my uniform, it was very long. Because they couldn't allow a female wearing like a short skirt or, you know, a trouser. As Andiswa has stated, our Constitution in South Africa is really beautiful but we cannot practise it. It's there but it's hard for us to practise it. Maybe if you living in a suburb area, I'm not sure, you're able to practise what is in the constitution. But then again going to Khayelitsha and things are going to be different. (FG1)*

Bonggi draws out the contradiction between the possibilities for change that the Constitution signifies, and how these have not been put into action. She views lesbians’ race and space locations as key determinants of whether one is “able to practise what is in the Constitution”. Here, once again, the disproportionate vulnerability of black lesbians to violence is referenced, as reflected in the wider literature (Hames, 2011; Mkhize et al., 2010; POWA, 2010). The continuities of apartheid violence and oppression crisscross black

participants' understanding of violence against lesbians and the historical conditions of its making. The relationship between violence (and its links to the apartheid past) and freedom from violence (and its links to present-day democracy and law) are traversed from the vantage points of participants' own race, class and geographic locations. Notable here is how the participants above, namely Bonggi, Fundiswa, Lulama and Andiswa, all speak in a register that foregrounds the experiences of black lesbians. At the same time, the terms they use to describe their own racial identifications vary. This might reflect what Hall (2000) describes as the "powerful mobilising identity of the Black experience" (p. 152), that at the same time signals the complexities bound up with assuming a black positionality. By way of example, in defining herself as 'other', Fundiswa refuses the terms of an essential black subjectivity.

The themes to emerge in this section are suggestive of how othering colonial and apartheid discourses, and their post-colonial reactivations, continue to play out in the gendered and raced subjectivities of lesbians and their experiences and perceptions of violence. Participants speak about race, culture and class – and how these impact on susceptibility to violence – in ways that express material and ideological differentiations in proximities to violence. In some instances racialising re-inscriptions take hold, constructing blackness as naturally violent and homophobic, and whiteness as the embodiment of safety and classed comfort. The notion that white-dominated spaces are more 'liberal' and accepting, and black spaces are dangerous, is similarly evidenced in Gibson and Macleod's study on South African lesbians (2012). Participants' spatialisation of violence – through signifiers of township and suburb – are reflective of how space itself is simultaneously heterosexualised, gendered, raced and classed (Oswin, 2008). Some participants resist the idea that whiteness and middle-classness are outside the frame of violence. Others, in historicising violence, link violence against lesbians to the continuities of apartheid inequalities and their structural impacts.

I have also illustrated how the focus groups were sites in which power was discursively deployed and race, gender, age and class identities performed. Most notably, racial and class privileges are asserted to situate white middle-class subjects outside violence and its associated identities and locations. Linked to this are strategies of othering, operating through racialising and culturalist discourses that provide explanatory

frameworks for violence. These discourses situate violence in black spaces and black subjectivities, reflecting the endurance of apartheid's racialising tropes. The notion of blackness as associated with danger maps onto apartheid's *swart gevaar* discourse in which the "imaginary bogey" is invoked to induce white fear and black subordination in the social order (Biko, 1978, p. 89). The 'white safety, black danger' trope produces a set of dualisms through which homophobia-related violence is discursively charted. The white lesbian, an embodiment of respectability, is emblematic of privacy, protection and safety. In contrast, the black lesbian body is marked as a public body occupying a danger zone in which violence is naturalised. There is an attachment to racial repertoires as a source of meaning-making about violence and about participants' proximity, or distance, to it. In this way violence marks those who are like us and those who are not, charting the gender, race and class delineations of queer life in South Africa. Difference, as a constituted form of relationality, is thus starkly revealed in participants' talk about violence against lesbians.

This chapter explored modes of lesbian subjectivation, how lesbian identities are constituted in and through the discourse of violence, and how participants make meaning of violence against lesbians, as well as how they construct themselves and others in and through it. Part 1 exposed a range of discursive practices through which lesbian subjection is constituted. It was also shown how participants' sexual subjectivities are shaped by knowledge-power arrangements and in ideological, historical and material contexts. In Part 2, I demonstrated how violence against lesbians operates as a discursive domain in which raced, classed, aged and gendered identities are formulated and reformulated. Participants' articulations of violence and identity are generated in and through localised and contingent discourses that both *do* and *undo* hegemonic power relations. I now turn to the institutional texts to examine how they configure and confound the causes and characters of homophobia-related violence.



## CHAPTER 6

### WHO DUNNIT & WHY? CONSTITUTING THE CHARACTERS AND CAUSE OF VIOLENCE

Through a number of discourse themes this chapter explores the ‘who dunnit and why?’ of violence against lesbians and what the answers to these questions might communicate about gender, race, class and sexual subjectivities and power arrangements in contemporary South Africa. The bulk of the chapter works with the data from the media and official texts (i.e. the institutional texts).<sup>212</sup> I deal with these data sets concurrently as both emanate from institutions representing ‘authorities’ that are dominant shapers of public discourse on violence against lesbians. In the last section (6.9), I return to the focus groups to explore how participants make sense of the mainstream media’s depictions of violence. I do this in order to deepen and enrich my analysis of the institutional texts by interrogating how participants speak with and against media discourses about lesbian subjectivities and their encounter with violence.

#### 6.1 Producing the ‘fact’ and spectacle of violence and lesbians

Across the media texts a normalised spectacle of the violated black lesbian emerges writ large. This finds form in gendered and sexualised representations of a lesbian Other through impositions of a heteronormative gaze and its corrective effects. Also, a textual ‘body of evidence’ of violence is generated through dehumanising performatives. I now discuss these themes and how they configure both the fact and spectacle of lesbians and violence.

##### 6.1.1 Sexing the crime, correcting the queer

A feature of the media texts is the sexualisation of the queer subject in and through the descriptions of violence. In the extract that follows, the ‘facts’ concerning the nature of the violence against Noxolo Nogwaza are described such that ‘corrective rape’ is pivotal to

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<sup>212</sup> The abbreviations used to delineate these data sets are MT (media texts) and OT (official texts), respectively.

establishing the link between the violence and her sexuality. In this respect, 'corrective rape' is installed as a privileged signifier of violence against black lesbians.

*On Easter morning 2011, Nogwaza was found dead due to stoning and stabbing in an alley behind a grocery store. Friends believed she had been targeted because of her sexual orientation, making her a victim of so-called corrective rape. (MT, 27)*

It is Nogwaza's "so-called corrective rape" that defines her as a "victim", and it is through the term that the connection between the "targeted" violence and her "sexual orientation" is installed. Unlike her murder, the rape of Nogwaza is not explicitly named as a feature of the attack against her. Instead, her rape is represented as a *consequence* of being "targeted because of her sexual orientation", rendering her a "victim of so-called corrective rape". This formulation assumes that the murder of a lesbian because of her sexual orientation is necessarily constitutive of her rape. Similarly, the article's headline, 'No progress in corrective rape' probe' foregrounds rape as the primary form of violence against Nogwaza, thus minimising murder in describing the focus of the "probe". Establishing rape as a centrally defining feature of violence against lesbians generates the notion that lesbians who face violence are necessarily raped, thus foregrounding the sexual dimension of violence. Later in the same article, "corrective rape" is again mobilised to establish a chain of equivalence amongst three queer subjects.

*Simelane, a Banyana Banyana player, was murdered in 2008; Nkosi was killed in 2009; and Dlomo, who is rarely mentioned in connection with 'corrective rape', was a gay man murdered in 2004. Nogwaza's murder sparked international online petitions against 'corrective rape' and drew worldwide attention. (MT27)*

Here rape and murder are key markers of queer violation, and establish a constituting relationality between sexuality and violence. By describing Dlomo, "a gay man murdered in 2004" as "rarely mentioned in connection with corrective rape", the statement infers his rape in a questioning tone. "Nogwaza's murder" is directly associated with "international online petitions against corrective rape", a non sequitur unless her death is presumed to

have included her rape. These conflation between rape and murder articulate the black queer body as at once raped and murdered, murdered and raped. In this way, queer sexual violation and queer death co-articulate.

*'Corrective rape' killers not given sufficient terms [headline] (MT31)*

*Women and men either known or perceived to be lesbian or gay are targeted for brutal murder or 'corrective rape' with victim selection based in either real or perceived identity. (OT5)*

*To elaborate on this let me hasten to mention the case of Noxolo Nogwaza a lesbian activist who was killed after what has become known as 'corrective rape', a practice by men who rape women who are lesbians to supposedly make them straight and cure them from their sexual orientation. (OT7)*

*Her case has highlighted the plight of many lesbians in the townships who are raped to 'correct' their sexuality, or are murdered as an act of hate and prejudice. (MT36)*

As in the examples above, the reiteration of "corrective rape" across the media and official texts institutes the idea of a separate class of rape for lesbians. This fixing of 'corrective rape' to 'the lesbian' obscures the fact that all rapes can be read as disciplining acts, and therefore as performing a corrective function within the hetero-patriarchal policing of gender and sexuality. In describing the lesbian as "correctively raped", heterosexual sex is performatively inserted into how violence against lesbians is explicated. The discourse of 'corrective rape' enacts a discursive correction of the lesbian's sexuality in that it redefines her within the terms of heterosexual sex. The effect of this is to (hetero)sexualise lesbians by reinstating them as sexually accessible to men in discourse. Despite its frequent appearance in quotation marks, the term 'corrective rape' is not specifically problematised in any of the texts. Therefore, the quotations work to amplify the term and its performative

function,<sup>213</sup> which brings into being the spurious notion that lesbian sexuality *can* be corrected through sexual violence.

Another way in which the queer subject is discursively sexualised is expressed in a news report on the murder of Thapelo Makutle, a transgender woman.

*Legbo<sup>214</sup> director Shaine Griqua also criticised attempts to hide the nature of the killing. 'The family is devastated. We saw that his genitals and tongue were sliced off while his<sup>215</sup> throat was cut. His genitalia were severed and inserted into his mouth' [...] Earlier this year a young lesbian was murdered in Magojaneng village. She was mutilated and her genitalia were cut out. A bottle was inserted in her private parts. (MT25)*

Makutle's murder is detailed in a highly sexualising register. The description of her genitalia sexualises both the moment and effect of her death, as well as serving to relate her murder to that of an unnamed "young lesbian". The link between the two murders sets up an association between sex and death. This is elaborated through graphic descriptions of the mutilation of genitals in each murder. The repetition of the word "inserted" signals how the queer body is literally entered in the moment of violence. In the discourse, queer subjects can be violently accessed in the very places (sexual organs) that are presumed sexually unavailable within the terms of the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990).<sup>216</sup> The description of the removal of genitals re-enacts the violent erasure of the problematic sexuality, re-inscribing it in a discourse of heterosexual sex. I refer here to how "the bottle" signals the phallic reclamation of the lesbian body through violence. Likewise, the severed penis inserted into the mouth represents the violent hetero-feminisation of the 'failed masculinity' that Makutle embodies as gender non-conforming. The effect of this is to correctively reassign both bodies to the terms of the hetero-patriarchal symbolic order. These sexualising articulations of the violence done to queers perform the very corrections

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<sup>213</sup> Here I draw on van Dijk's (2000, p. 45) argument that the use of quotation marks can be interpreted as taking distance from a term; however, in the absence of evidence to indicate actual distancing from meaning or implication, the quotations should be read, instead, as effectively marking the term.

<sup>214</sup> Legbo refers to the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Organisation of the Northern Cape.

<sup>215</sup> Whilst I note that the texts use a male pronoun for Makutle, to my knowledge she identified as female, and so, in acknowledgement of that, I have elected to use the pronouns 'she' and 'her'.

<sup>216</sup> Within the "heterosexual matrix" sex, gender and desire are ordered so as to fix the relationship between these constitutive elements of the matrix's logic, a logic that queer sexuality disorders.

they describe. This accords with other findings in which media narratives work to heterosexualise lesbians (Jackson and Gilbertson, 2009).

In sum, sex is foregrounded in the depiction of queer death through a (hetero)sexualising discourse and its corrective effects. This enmeshment between violence and sex reflects the wider literature in which queer subjectivity is normatively associated with sex and/or death (Matebeni, 2014; Ussher and Mooney-Somers, 2000) and constituted as a dangerous desire (Mason, 2002). This sex/death connection also signals the discursive preoccupations with the sexual excesses of queers. These excesses are amplified by the sensationalisation of queer death. The effect of this, as Donham (2006) describes of the excesses of violence, is an “ambivalence of both attraction and repulsion” through which the gaze at violence performs a “staring at suffering” (p. 24–26).

### **6.1.2 Evidencing the black lesbian’s ‘dead end’**

Violence and black queer subjectivities are co-constituted across the texts. Two modes through which this is established are, firstly, the stitching together of a ‘body of evidence’ of queer violation over time and in particular contexts, and secondly through reiterations that fix black queer life to a ‘dead end’. A number of specific incidents of violence are repeated across the institutional texts. These concern the murders of four black lesbians namely, Phumeza Nkolonzi, Zoliswa Nkonyana, Nonstikelelo Tyatyeka and Noxolo Nogwaza. The repeated retelling of the details of their deaths functions to signpost other incidents of violence against black lesbians, thereby establishing continuity in a story of black queer death.

*Free Gender chairwoman Funeka Soldaat said members of the group had known Phumeza casually after meeting her at the funeral of Nontsikelelo Tyatyeka, the lesbian whose body was found hidden in a wheelie bin at her neighbour’s home in Mau Mau last year. (MT24)*

*Nkolonzi lived a few houses from where the decomposing body of Nontsikelelo Tyatyeka – also a lesbian – was found in a wheelie bin in September after she had been missing for about a year. (MT21)*

The two extracts above concern the murder of Nkolonzi. Her murder is discursively stitched to that of Tyatyeka's, who, in dehumanising and reductive terms, is described as "the lesbian whose body was found hidden in a wheelie bin". Nkolonzi's murder is brought into representation through its association with Tyatyeka's death. Both deaths provide 'bodies of evidence' for the murderous continuities of lesbian violation. The repeated referencing back to other queer deaths in media reports that cover new incidents of violence, provide stability in a story in which black queers are normatively associated with violence. This is further elaborated in two media texts that detail violence in the form of a timeline. One timeline lists the murders of five black lesbians chronologically under the tagline 'Some attacks against the lesbian community' (MT16). By understating murders as "attacks", the deaths are minimised. Simultaneously, the timeline hypervisibilises violence and its queer targets. As a metaphorical corpus of knowledge, these lists support a coherent narrative of the precarity of the black lesbian life. Whilst, importantly, media timelines draw public attention to the particular violence black lesbians face, they also constrain how these lives and deaths come to be known. As spectacle, they construct a totalising picture of lesbian subjectivity in violent contexts. Timelines of violence are not usually featured in media reports on violence against women or men in general. As such, they construct violence against black lesbians as exceptional. The effect of this is to decontextualise homophobia-related violence, thus obscuring how it intersects with normalised violence (Das, 2008), objective violence (Žižek, 2009), and violence against women more broadly (Gunkel, 2013; Mason, 2002). This gestures to how, as Davis (2014) describes, the treatment of some forms of violence as exceptional is about "being shocked at what we know already exists, and how this makes the ordinary exceptional and marks our complicity in that which is ordinary".

In further exploring how the black lesbian life is encircled in death, and the dehumanising effects thereof, I now turn to an article headlined 'Police release lesbian's remains' (MT37). The article details the murder of Tyatyeka, describing the circumstances of her "remains" and her mother's response to receiving them ("my child, just bones lying there"). By representing Tyatyeka solely as "remains" and "bones", the text articulates the unviability of the black lesbian. Described only in terms of her lifeless body parts, Tyatyeka is reduced to that which remains of her. This performs a symbolic dismembering of black

female embodiment. Drawing on colonial tropes that sexualise and racially inferiorise black women (McClintock, 1995; Scully, 1995), the black lesbian is inscribed here through a dehumanising narrative that constructs her raced sexuality as a deadly domain.

Across the texts, incidents of violence are repeatedly described as “brutal” and “vicious”. One official text (OT5) draws on this discourse of brutalisation in its exaggerated repetition of the following words and phrases: “Brutal murders”; “vicious violent attacks”; “increasing brutality”; “pervasive horrific and senseless violence”; “brutal manifestations”; “brutally murdered”; “such brutality”. As an expression of shock and horror, these utterances perform a collective reassurance of a shared disdain for the violence they describe. However, they also perform a re-enactment of the very brutalisation that discursively signatures the black lesbian’s ‘dead end’. This is not to suggest that the details of violence against lesbians should be silenced or censored, but rather to call attention to the diffused operations of explicit, sensationalist and highly graphic retellings, and their dehumanising and brutalising reproductions. To view these descriptions as productive reenactments within a wider discourse field of gendered, sexualised and raced violability, is to bring their normalising effects into view.

The discourse theme discussed in this section draws black lesbians into a circuit of death and dehumanisation through the spectacle of their sexualised otherness and its violent end. The fixation on the minutiae of the death done to the lesbian generates a blinding hypervisibilisation of the female black body, working to conceal its raced and gendered terms. This media spectacle produces a naturalised account of violence against black lesbians as enmeshed in sex and death. It draws on “racist legacies that fixate on the sexuality of black women” as objects for voyeuristic consumption (Lewis, 2005, p. 11). The black lesbian emerges as a ‘natural’ target for brutal violence and inevitable rape and death. This situating of the lesbian in and through her vivid and imaginable end, reiterates the raced, gendered and sexual dimensions of homophobia-related violence. In the texts, the black lesbian is brought into representation at the moment of her violation, circumscribing how she comes to be dominantly seen and known. This accords with broader critiques of media sensationalism in relation to homophobic violence and how it constrains black queer subjectivities (Ekine and Abbas, 2013; Hames, 2011; Mwikya, 2013; Ndashe, 2013).

## 6.2 Queer danger and causality

Constituted as a dangerous sexuality that gives rise to violence, the conduct of queers is offered as an explanation for why they are attacked. This is seen in accounts of violence in which the victim's<sup>217</sup> location, demeanour and/or actions are foregrounded. In a number of media texts that detail the circumstances surrounding the murder of several gay men<sup>218</sup>, significant attention is given to the actions and/or whereabouts of the men at the time of their respective killings.

*In each of the cases it appeared the men had **met their killers either online or through cellphone chat rooms**. The murderer or murderers would be **invited into their victim's home**, killing their host and fleeing the scene. It had not been confirmed yesterday whether Senekal had used any online dating service in the past". [my emphasis] (MT35)*

*The murderer or murderers would then be **invited into their victim's home**, killing their host, then fleeing the scene. [my emphasis] (MT30)*

*In seven of the eight cases on which The Star reported, robbery has been ruled out as a motive. There were no signs of forced entry. Could this mean that the killer or killers were **invited in by the victims?** [...] His online dating profile indicated that **he had logged on the night before his death**. [my emphasis] (MT29)*

*Another gay man was found bound and suffocated in his home at the weekend **after he allowed his killer, or killers, into his apartment**. This follows similar deaths in Joburg and Pretoria during the past two years, when seven gay men were found murdered in their homes with no signs of forced entry and **little taken from each crime scene**. [my emphasis] (MT30)*

Repeated phrases such as “almost nothing was stolen”, “little was taken from the scene” and “few valuables were taken”, displace burglary as the motive for murder. The reference

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<sup>217</sup> I recognise the problems and limitations of the term ‘victim’, more specifically how it undermines a notion of the subject as agentic. I do, however, use the term to reference persons who did not survive the violence against them.

<sup>218</sup> See Section 4.4.1 for an explanation of why a small number of articles about violence against gay men are included in the data set.



to “murdered in their homes” underscores the domestic location of the violence. When this is read alongside the repeated reference to the killer/s having been “invited” in by the victim, a story is set up that places ‘gay conduct’ centrally to the scene of the crime. Consequently, gay sexual invitation and gay death are placed in close proximity in the discourse of violence, such that the conduct of the sexually solicitous gay man proffers an explanation for his death. This discourse of queer danger and causality also relate to violence against lesbians. As with the gay man, the lesbian’s behaviour and/or location preceding the violence is brought squarely into view in a number of texts.

*Nontsikelelo Tyatyeka, 21, a lesbian, was murdered in September last year **for refusing to have sex with a man.** But it was only in September this year that her remains were found – near her own house. [my emphasis](MT36)*

*Nkonyana, 19, was assaulted and beaten to death by a group of young men **outside a tavern** in Khayelitsha E-section on February 4, 2006, **after leaving a shebeen.** [my emphasis](MT33)*

***‘An argument ensued between them,** whereby one of the women was fatally stabbed and another one slightly wounded,’ Filander said [...] Luleki Sizwe, an organisation that supports lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, said Sihle Sikoji was stabbed because of her sexual orientation. “It is a hate crime [...] The men approached them and said they act like boys. **When Sihle said they were not boys** but lesbians she was attacked and stabbed with a mini-spear,” founder Ndumie Funda said. [my emphasis] (MT4)*

In the extracts above, a repeated association between the lesbian’s conduct and the circumstances of her attack is established as central to the account. Consequently, the violence against her is constructed in association with her perilous sexuality. This aligns with other research that finds lesbians to be normatively associated with a dangerous sexuality (Ussher and Mooney-Somers, 2000). The extract below is from a media timeline that lists six “violent attacks on the gay community”.

*Kuruman: June 9, transgender 23-year-old Thapelo Makutle of North West is severely mutilated **after an argument** about his sexuality [...]*

*Khayelitsha: February 2006: Zoliswa Nkonyana is stabbed, clubbed and beaten to death by a group of men **for allegedly living openly** as a lesbian [...]*

*Nyanga: June 10, 2011, Nxolo Nkosana is stabbed four times in the back and neck while **walking home with her partner**. [my emphases] (MT22)*

Each incident is itemised in order of place, date, name of queer subject and short description of the violence. The highlighted text concerns what the victim/survivor was doing when the violence occurred. This sets up an association between queer behaviour and the violence that confronts it, providing a dominant formula for how incidents are recounted in the media texts. Although the discourse of queer danger and causality does not directly attribute blame for violence to the gay or lesbian person, it does intersect with victim-blaming narratives. These narratives relate to violence against women more generally and position them (particularly women who thwart rules of hetero-patriarchal femininity) as 'bringing the violence onto themselves' (Gavey, 2004; Lamb, 1996).

In sum, constituting queerness as dangerous, and therefore in danger, provides an explanatory framework for homophobia-related violence. The link between queer conduct and violence is more definitively articulated in accounts of gay men and transwomen. This may be ascribed, in part, to the fact that gay men are more dominantly associated with sexual licentiousness. The gay man invites sex with men whilst the lesbian refuses it. It is through these invitations and refusals (marking sexual and gender failures) that both figures are implicated in the violence they encounter. Queerness is a prelude to violence such that placing the conduct of queers squarely at the scene of the crime, renders queer danger and culpability a definitional frame for homophobia-related violence.

### **6.3 Queer fear: White “haven”, black “harassment”**

Across the media texts, lesbians are frequently described as living in states of perpetual fear in contexts dominated by violence, depicted as both imminent and inevitable.

*'We are now so scared that we are considering carrying weapons so we can defend ourselves.'[...] 'It's getting worse. Homophobic attacks against lesbians are becoming a norm especially in Nyanga and Khayelitsha.'* (MT23)

*'Lesbians and transgender men live in constant fear of harassment as well as physical and sexual violence,' the watchdog group said in a report released yesterday. The report, 'We'll Show You You're a Woman', was based on interviews with 121 lesbians, bisexual women and transgender men in townships.* (MT42)

*Lesbians in some Cape Town townships live in such fear of attack by people who reject their sexual orientation that a group who went to a lesbian's memorial service yesterday were too afraid to enter Nyanga without an escort. 'We had to go and fetch them. We had to call some and tell them to avoid a few spots. They were really scared of going into the area,' Free Gender founder Funeka Soldaat...* (MT21)

*City lesbians live in fear* [headline] (MT21)

Through 'rhetorical repetition' (van Dijk, 1988), the word "fear" is mobilised across the texts to convey that certain lesbian lives are governed by fear. Constructing lesbians, both individually and collectively, as embodying a state of constant dread (to the exclusion of other modes of being), asserts fear as a constituting element of lesbian subjectivity. Queer fear is constructed in discourse in ways that are simultaneously gendered, raced and classed, which I will now detail.

In one media article titled "The Big Story: Gays, lesbians targeted – "like walking in a war zone"" the metaphor of war is invoked to communicate the predominance of violence and lesbians as all-fearful.

*Lesbians in Nyanga are living in fear after a 19-year-old was stabbed to death in Samora Machel in what they believe was a hate crime [...] 'We are now scared to walk around the township. You can feel the tension in the air around here and in Nyanga. Phumeza's murder has shown that we are not safe even in our homes? It's like we are walking around in a war zone, we don't know what's going to happen next,' said 29-year-old Ndwane. Two years ago,*

*Ndwane was attacked and beaten until she collapsed and lost consciousness while walking with a group of friends in Green Point. (MT23)*

This 'war zone' is associated with Nyanga, an urban township established during apartheid to which people classified as 'black' were forcibly moved. Ndwane's fear – represented as collectivised ("we are not safe") – is linked to the township as the place where lesbians are "scared to walk around". The text then goes on to describe how Ndwane was attacked in Green Point, an affluent, historically white suburb. However, unlike Nyanga, Green Point is disarticulated from fear. The normalisation of the township as the place that queers fear, intersects with other discourses that racialise homophobia (see in Section 5.2.2). This racialisation of fear is reproduced across the texts. The extracts below are further examples of how townships are constructed as dangerous spaces that instil fear of violence.

*Six young lesbians from Gugulethu fear for their lives after they were attacked and beaten. None of the women wanted to be identified for fear of further victimisation. (MT10)*

*Soldaat said lesbians in some Cape Town townships were living in fear of being attacked by people who rejected their sexual orientation. (MT18)*

*'Many were uneasy about coming to this area because people in Nyanga seem to be intolerant of lesbians,' she said. (MT21)*

*'It's getting worse. Homophobic attacks against lesbians are becoming a norm especially in Nyanga and Khayelitsha.' (MT23)*

As illustrated above, the representation of queer fear as endemic to townships is juxtaposed with historically white suburbs, as locations where queers are not fearful. This antithetical positioning of townships and suburbs, as raced and classed spatialities, define queer danger and safety, respectively. For more discussion on this spacialisation of danger and safety as expressed in the focus groups, see Section 5.2.2.2. For further discussion on how race is linguistically signified across the institutional texts, see Appendix 9.

*'Lesbians and transgender men live in constant fear of harassment as well as physical and sexual violence,' the watchdog group said in a report released yesterday. The report, 'We'll Show You You're a Woman', was based on interviews with 121 lesbians, bisexual women and transgender men in townships. Their lives contrast with those of urban, wealthy, often white gay South Africans who have turned parts of some cities into liberal havens. Gay pride parades are held annually in Joburg and Cape Town, which reaches out to gay tourists from around the world. (MT42)*

In the extract above, the dichotomies of fear/celebration and local/international construct a gay, rich, white subject position as celebratory and international. This is contrasted to a black, poor, queer identity as local and fearful. The “havens” of wealth and whiteness, and the “harassment” of the townships set up raced and classed binarisms through which queer identity differences are articulated. Here race and class are co-configured in the production of these oppositional figures, namely the rich white suburban gay and the poor black township gay. Queer vulnerability to violence is narrated through these positionalities, with the former embodying safety and freedom, and the latter its opposite. The white urbane international gay is a constitutive element of gay universalism (Warner, 1999) in which the modern gay subject is symbol of norms and values that valorise and reify Western cultural hegemonies (Butler, 2010). By contrast, the lives of townshi' queers reference dominant post-apartheid narratives in which the 'poor, black gay or lesbian' (Oswin, 2007) has come to represent the material inequalities and political fractures in queer communities.

I now turn to a counter-discourse that reworks the queer fear construct. In the text below, black lesbians are described as visibly claiming public space. Here visibility and violence are drawn together in that the former signifies lesbian defiance and the latter its consequence.

*Funeka Soldaat, chairperson of Free Gender, said lesbians had faced violence in townships since 2005, and noted an increase in young lesbians 'starting to claim the space'. There are many lesbians in Khayelitsha. We make sure they are visible in numbers when we deal with these issues in public. Lesbians face verbal abuse daily. People tell them they think they are men. They make a lot of accusations against them. (MT39)*

In this statement, lesbian visibility is expressed as an agentic political act in which the “claim” on public “space” is made. This is a resignification of queer fear in that the lesbian, even in the midst of violence, is represented as *claiming* rather than *cowering* from public space.

Drawing attention to the predominant depiction of black lesbians as living in fear is not to suggest that such fear doesn't exist. Neither is it to argue that the threat or prospect of violence is unreal or inconsequential to how lesbians live. Rather my focus is to interrogate the effect of the discourse of queer fear on circumscribing the domain of lesbian liveability. How are the hegemonies that regulate queer bodies reinforced by the overwhelming depictions of lesbians in terrorising subordination to violence? What of lesbian subjectivity is foreclosed if it is only every imagined as subjected to fear? Representing lesbians as perpetually fearful, and as living exclusively in a state of fright, homogenises their experiences of, and responses to, violence and its impact. The magnification of fear erases the nuanced and sometimes contradictory realities of how lesbians exist. It also silences how they navigate violent terrains in ways that are simultaneously full of fear and fearless. In this sense queer fear elaborates the figuration of violence as spectacle. Through the predominance of queer fear in discourse, alternative modes of lesbian liveability, in which subjectivities are not wholly ascribed to fear, are largely concealed. Notwithstanding the psychological, symbolic and material effects of violence, other scholars also contend that not all lesbians live in constant fear, nor are their lives solely defined by it (Hames, 2011; Sanger, 2013). The discourse of queer fear constrains more agentic articulations of subjecthood. It also reinstates the gendered vulnerability of lesbians, as women, by drawing on a discourse of gender fear (Mehta, 1999) and feminine vulnerability to violence (Hollander, 2001). As a consequence, inscribing the lesbian in fear discursively repositions her inside the terms of normative femininity, in which women are rendered fearful as a dominant narrative of female gendering (Gavey; 2004; Pain, 1997; Valentine, 1989). Moreover, the amplified and unquestioned representation of fear obscures the wider workings of power that render violence against lesbians both possible and probable.

## 6.4 (Dis)placing men

A pervasive theme across the texts is the attribution of the cause of violence to the behaviours of hateful and intolerant men who, as a result of being threatened by lesbians, act violently against them. A naturalised antagonism between men, as defenders of normative gender relations, and lesbians as gender transgressors, is thus established.

*Man kicks down door to kill lesbian in her home* [headline] (MT24)

*'Men feel threatened because they say lesbians take their girls away. We don't do that.'* (MT39)

*Nozuko Ndwane (not her real name) from Khayelitsha said some men felt threatened by them and thought they could change them. 'They think we want to take over their clothes and girlfriends. We are not trying to be them? We will never be men; we are girls,' said Ndwane.* (MT23)

*'Most men hate us around here; they say we are trying to take their girlfriends.'* (MT6)

*This has been evidenced through many incidents of murder, rape and acts of assault that have been directed towards the LGBTI people especially because their sexuality has been perceived as a threat to traditional male authority.* (OT7)

In the extracts above, violence is described as the result of a masculinised defense of a gender order in which women are required to assume a particular role – one that the lesbian subverts. Consequently, the lesbian imposes a threat to men's gender status and power, thus provoking their violent response. This discourse of men as perpetrators constitutes male subjects as both gendered and raced. With regard to the latter, male perpetrators are racially defined as "homophobic men in townships". They are also depicted as a homogenous collective through descriptors such as "typically in gangs", "four thugs", "tormentors", "a mob of men" and "a group of men". The racialisation of black men who are violent towards lesbians draws on wider discourses of black masculinity in crisis (Posel, 2005) and on the racist sexualisation of black men that constructs them as

physically and sexually dangerous (Shefer and Ratele, 2011). These representations draw on colonial tropes in which the black male was figured as a threat to be confined to the urban townships (Mbembe, 2005).

A news report about the murder trial of Zoliswa Nkonyana opens with the following description:

*The four men found guilty of murdering Zoliswa Nkonyana winked and blew kisses to women seated in the court where their sentencing hearings unfolded yesterday. (MT40)*

In the actions of winking and blowing kisses to “women seated in the court”, the guilty men come into representation through a display<sup>219</sup> of hetero-masculine desire that is attributed to them, collectively. Couched in a heteronormative script, the men’s active performance of sexual agency serves to discursively re-assert their heterosexuality. This sexing up of the men in the text is another example of the sexualising dynamics of the discourse of violence against lesbians as previously discussed. The article, headlined ‘Pleas for mercy in Nkonyana case: the court is not there to take revenge’, describes the court proceedings during which the convicted men pleaded in mitigation of sentence. In an implicit reference to the actual murder of Nkonyana, the displacement of “pleas” works to reposition the men as the victims: the ones who are now having to plead “for mercy” before the court. Similarly, in another article headlined ‘Set me free so I can become a police officer’ (MT38), a male perpetrator “told the Khayelitsha Magistrate’s Court yesterday he wants to get out of jail so that he can become a police officer”. Again, through displacement, the perpetrator is repositioned as a victim (i.e. as unfree). Both the aforementioned headlines<sup>220</sup> draw on a discourse of male victimhood.<sup>221</sup> The mobilisation of terms such as “set free” and “innocence” instate the men as those whose freedom/innocence is curtailed by “jail sentence” and “conviction”.

The lesbian abrogates her assigned feminine role as the object of hetero-masculine desire. This, alongside her daring to assert her own masculinity, situates her as a target for

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<sup>219</sup> Having been in the courtroom that day, I recall seeing only two of the four accused making such gestures, and these were directed at specific women seated in the public gallery.

<sup>220</sup> I note that newspaper headlines employ hyperbole and rhetoric in order to draw readers’ attention (van Dijk, 1988), and, in doing so, frequently rely on provocative language.

<sup>221</sup> For more on men as victims, see footnote 204 above.



male violence. In the male as perpetrator discourse, men are defenders of hetero-masculine privilege and power. They embody a threatened, violent and collectivised black masculinity. Through conflicting meanings produced in discourse, men are placed and displaced as perpetrators of violence against lesbians. The configuration of men's power as either in excess (as perpetrator) or lacking (as victim) has a gendering effect that legitimises men's 'natural' violence against lesbians (i.e. they are violent because they are men, as opposed to, they are men because they are violent).

## 6.5 Hate and the hated

Across the media and official texts, violence against lesbians is largely characterised as being motivated by "hate" and "intolerance". Hate as cause is predominantly expressed in a discourse of hate crime, as illustrated in the extracts below.

*'The attack on Sihle once again highlights the scourge of hate crimes against lesbian women – and LGBT people more broadly – that continues to ravage our communities, leaving devastated families in their wake,' Zille said. (MT4)*

*Luleki Sizwe, an organisation that supports lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, said Sihle Sikoji was stabbed because of her sexual orientation. 'It is a hate crime [...]' (MT5)*

*Lesbians in Nyanga are living in fear after a 19-year-old was stabbed to death in Samora Machel in what they believe was a hate crime. (MT6)*

*Heinrich Boell Foundation (HBF) and the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre (TLAC) in partnership with Free Gender are to reveal a mural that is to advocate for the eradication of hate crimes against lesbians. (OT1)*

*We condemn hate crimes, including so-called 'corrective rape' in the strongest terms. (OT11)*

In elaborating the hate crime discourse the extracts below link hate as cause to "race, nationality, gender or sexual orientation"; "racism and homophobia"; and to particular

“social group[s]”. Each of these causal descriptions indexes a marked identity: black people for “race” and “racism”; foreign nationals for “nationality”; women for “gender”; and LGBTIQ people for “sexual orientation” and “homophobia”.

*In hate crimes, the perpetrator selected his or her victim for some discriminatory reason such as race, nationality, gender or sexual orientation [...] [T]he Hate Crimes Working Group, in partnership with other civic organisations, had identified 450 hate crimes in five provinces since 2005. These were KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, the Western Cape, Limpopo and Eastern Cape. The crimes consisted of 150 lesbian gay bisexual transgender intersex cases, 150 foreign national cases and 150 other cases. (MT10)*

*Hate crimes are therefore not just about hatred on the basis of factors such as racism, homophobia etc but also about the deliberate selection of a victim based on the perpetrator’s idea of the victim because of the social group the perpetrator believes the victim belongs to. (OT5)*

The discourse of hate crime is constituted by two key figures: the *hater* as the perpetrator of violence and the *hated* as its victim. Whilst the hated are constructed through their group association or identification, those doing the hating are not identified as such. The hated are signified by their marked identities of race, nationality, gender and sexuality whilst the haters are defined by dispositions of “hate” and “intolerance” and not by identity-based categorisations. The result is that the discourse of hate amplifies the identities of those to whom violence is done, constituting them as an over-determined group of hated Others (lesbians, foreigners, blacks etc.). The effect of this is to reinforce the identity-based affiliations of the hated, and to consign them to the status of victims and “vulnerable groups”.<sup>222</sup> The discourse of hate is a dominant modality for speaking about and acting against homophobia-related violence more broadly. This is apparent in practices

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<sup>222</sup> See footnote 238 for more on how vulnerable groups are represented in government policy.

that centre on addressing hate crimes, including law reform, specialised government services and public advocacy initiatives.<sup>223</sup>

In offering an explanation for violence discourses of hate operate to, as Rosga (2001) argues, reduce the complex relations of inequality that produce violence to an individualised state. In the texts, it is individual acts, driven by hateful “sentiments” and “beliefs” that are the primary motivators of violence. This is not to say that acts of violence are devoid of psychological content<sup>224</sup>, but rather that the discourse of hate crime disarticulates violence (and its psychic dimensions) from social and historical contexts. This individuated and socially dislocated view of cause, elides the histories, structures and conditions by which certain groups come to be hated and others come to use violence to enable and sustain their power.

## 6.6 The violence of (multiple) oppression

There are dissenting discourses that, in contradiction to the previously discussed identity-based and individualised explications of violence, conceive of its cause in relation to systemic conditions of inequality. These conditions include the ways in which vulnerability to violence connects with gender, race and class discriminations and exclusions both within queer communities and more broadly.

*We are aware that faith and religion are often considered part of the problem, perpetuating patriarchy and oppression on the grounds of sexual orientation, as it holds on to specific interpretations of holy texts. (MT17)*

*A quarter century later and nearly two decades into the new South Africa, the oppression that Bev and Simon named, remains just as present in the lives of black lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people. (OT10)*

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<sup>223</sup> These include, amongst others, the following: a proposed policy framework on combatting hate crimes, hate speech and discrimination; the 777 Campaign to End Hate lead by LGBTI organisations; and the establishment of a national hate crime working group. For more on this, see Breen and Nel (2014).

<sup>224</sup> Here I refer in particular to the psychodynamic dimensions of violence that are central to how oppressions operates.

In the extracts above violence against queers is understood as a function of the oppressive operations of “religion” and “patriarchy”, and of apartheid continuities that are “just as present in the lives” of black queers. This situates the cause of violence within wider historical power configurations and their exclusionary implications.

*Today at Joburg Gay Parade about twenty black lesbians and gender non-conforming feminists from the 1 in 9 campaign were assaulted and intimidated by Joburg Pride organising committee members and their marshals. The campaign disrupted the march to demand one minute of silence to remember those members of the LGBT community who have been murdered because of their sexual orientation and gender expression. Campaign members were distributing leaflets to explain why they were there. Instead of engaging with us, Pride organisers assaulted us, threatened to drive their cars and trucks over us, called us names and told us we had no right to be at the parade. As lesbians and gender non-conforming people we had every right to be there and to claim the space and assert our demands as anyone else attending the parade. (OT10)*

In the text above “black lesbians and gender non-conforming feminists” are juxtaposed with “Pride organisers”. In describing the assault and intimidation of the former by the latter, the text disrupts dominant constructs of violence against queers by resituating that violence as *interior* to queer communities. The people who are assaulted and attacked are identified through racial, sexual, gender and political markers that distinguish them (as “black lesbians and gender non-conforming feminists”) from their attackers. These markers work to locate violence *within* the raced, gendered and political differences that characterise queer communities. By linking violence to the exclusionary practices and politics of Pride organisers, the text unsettles the idea that violence against queers is only ever caused by forces *outside* of queer contexts. The effect of this is to render visible the raced, classed, gendered and political fractures that shape differentiated queer identifications and their implications in violence. The discourse of multiple oppression<sup>225</sup> crafts the cause and character of violence against queers in relationship to a series of intersecting discriminations.

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<sup>225</sup> This references the intersecting oppressions of homophobia, racism, heteropatriarchy and capitalism that function as a set of interlocking dominations (hooks, 2000a) to which queers are differentially subjected. All these dominations are sustained by violence of one form or another.

## 6.7 The violation of law and rights

Violence against lesbians is a symbolic barometer for the extent to which the Constitution (and its rights and principles, as enshrined in law) is seen to have materialised in post-apartheid South Africa. The “Constitution” and “rights” signify the promise of a new democracy and its non-violent and egalitarian aspirations.

*‘We must all stand against and seek to eradicate all hate crimes **because they are violations of the constitutional rights to life, to dignity and to freedom.***’ [my emphasis] (MT4)

*There are many more cases of daily harassment, rape and other forms of sexual violence, discrimination **which render the promises of equality and enjoyment of the right to bodily integrity and security of the person as contained in the country’s constitution meaningless.*** [my emphasis] (OT9)

*‘The rights to life and dignity are the most important of all human rights, and the source of all other personal rights in Chapter Three. By committing ourselves to a society founded on the recognition of human rights we are required to value these two rights above all others.’ Nel said, ‘Gender based violence **and hate crimes are a direct assault on both the right to life and human dignity** and all of us have a duty to combat them.’* [my emphasis] (OT11)

In the extracts above, homophobia-related violence symbolises the abrogation of the Constitution and its assertion of “life”, “equality”, “human dignity”, “bodily integrity”, “security” and “freedom”. Violence is rendered synonymous with material and symbolic violations of the Constitution and represents the disruption of the social order as defined by law. Within this reasoning violence against queers signals the failed materialisation of both law and rights. Consequently, the queer subject is the embodiment of “the right to have rights”.<sup>226</sup> By way of example of this, in the extract below lesbian sexuality is described as the practice of “the right of living” that is thwarted by “hatred and intolerance”.

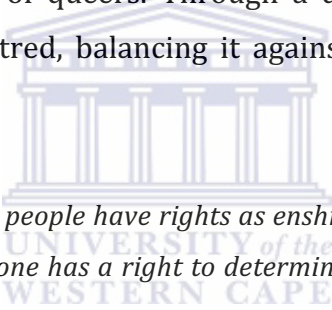
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<sup>226</sup> I draw here on Arendt’s conception of citizenship as “the right to have rights” (1989, p. 295).

*The 19 year old was killed near her home by a group of men who could not tolerate her living openly as a lesbian. In a ground-breaking ruling, magistrate Wathen found that Zoliswa Nkonyana was murdered as a direct result of her sexual preference: 'The deceased practised the right of living as a lesbian, which was her choice, but the accused did not agree to her choice'. (MT33)*

*The motive of this type of murder is understood to be driven by hatred and intolerance of difference centred around their perceived sexual orientation and gender. (OT5)*

The lesbian is conferred the right to “practise” a sexuality which others seek to deny her. In this sense sexuality, figured as a “right” and a “choice”, is juxtaposed with “hatred and intolerance of difference”. This logic constructs violence as the act of testing and contesting the limits of the legal inclusion of queers. Through a discourse of tolerance, limits are exerted on the expression of hatred, balancing it against individualised “beliefs and life choices”.



*Just like everyone else, LGBTI people have rights as enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution, and no one has a right to determine their existence on earth by brutally slaying them. (OT2)*

The extract above further demonstrates how LGBTI life is coded in a rights discourse. Drawing on a trope of sameness (queers are “like everybody else”) the right to queer life is negatively asserted (“no one has a right to determine their existence on earth by brutally slaying them”). In other words, the right to *not* have one’s existence determined by one’s death (“slaying”), renders the prospect for queer life contingent on the forestalling of death.

In sum, the viability and vulnerability of lesbian life is affirmed by law and refuted by violence. The lesbian is conferred rights in a modern democratic order, and both her life and death represent this right to have rights, which violence disrupts. Her status as a legitimate claimant of rights is however contingent upon her continual and reiterative subjection to law (Brown, 1995). This subjection is mediated through a rights discourse that, as Bauman (2001) argues, demands the perpetual reestablishment of difference. As a

subject of law, the lesbian's social survival is hinged to the continual re-articulation of her otherness: the very otherness that comes to characterise her demise.

## 6.8 Inside law, outside culture

As argued above, queer recognition is dominantly constituted through the bestowal of rights and status as defined in law. This legal standing is constructed in diametrical opposition to particular cultural practices. The lesbian thus embodies the contradiction between law and the values and norms of culture, and this in turn is cause for the violence against her.

*Same-sex marriage is legal in SA and the country has among the most liberal laws on sexual orientation in Africa. But cultural attitudes don't always match the law. (MT42)*

*As if that were not heavy-handed enough, Contralesa<sup>227</sup> made it clear that "traditional culture" does not include the rights of lesbians and gays - or, for that matter, the equal rights of women. (MT11)*

*At a time when violence against LGBTI continues and the struggle to realise equality rights for all is arduous and ongoing, even proposing that these rights<sup>228</sup> be up for debate is frankly obscene. Section 31<sup>229</sup> of our Constitution clearly states that the right to enjoy culture and practise religion may not be exercised in a manner that is inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights. It is precisely for such instances that this limitation on cultural and religious rights was drafted. (OT4)*

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<sup>227</sup> Contralesa refers to the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa, an organisation of traditional leaders and authorities that seeks to advance and assert the powers of traditional leadership, which is a highly contested cultural domain.

<sup>228</sup> Referring to "the right to freedom from unfair discrimination and violence across differences based on race, sex, gender and sexual orientation" (OT4).

<sup>229</sup> Section 31 (1) of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) affirms cultural rights in stating that "persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community, to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language; and to form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society." However, Section 31 (2) applies the following limitation to the exercise of cultural rights: "The rights in subsection (1) may not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights." In this sense, cultural rights and practices may not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with other provision of the Bill of Rights. This renders cultural rights subject to the Constitution's foundational principles of non-discrimination, equality and dignity.

In the extracts above, law and culture are positioned antithetically. The “equality rights” of a modern democratic state are juxtaposed with “cultural and religious” rights. Here “traditional culture” is situated outside of modern law and the equality it is presumed to embed. This constructed binary between law and culture works to justify the disjuncture between the affirmation of the rights of LGBTI people (in law) and the denial of those rights (in culture). Positioning culture (marked as ‘African’ and unequal) and law (indexed as Western, white and equal) as oppositional generates an account of African culture as already devoid of equality and rights. By extension, the power of law is asserted to impose “limitations” upon a racially inferiorised culture. This logic authorises the dominant positioning of LGBTI people as contrary to ‘African culture’ and ‘Africanness’ itself (Ekine, 2013; Kaoma, 2009; Sigamoney and Epprecht, 2013). It also produces an essentialising ‘truth’ of African culture as homogeneous and internally uncontested (Epprecht, 2008; Tamale, 2011). This points to a racialising and essentialising conception of Africa culture as, by definition, opposed to human rights, and configures the African queer as outside culture. Making this argument does not suggest that cultural practices which undermine human rights are to be left legally unchallenged. Rather, I wish to attend to how, in discourse, ruling cultures escape scrutiny when it comes to the attribution of “homophobia” and its violent manifestations. Non-Western cultures in particular are inferiorised by these moves, whilst Western cultural supremacy is reasserted. Through positioning queers outside African culture, the superior status of Western modernity and its governing laws are lauded, and its cultural dominance remains undisputed. This elides how the West’s ‘global gay’, pitted against African gayness, operates as a symbol of Western modernity’s cultural, economic and political interests (Massad, 2013; Puar, 2007).<sup>230</sup>

*Triangle Project calls on Contralesa and the NHTL<sup>231</sup> to look more deeply into the history of same-sex relationships in African culture; and to acknowledge the colonial roots of homophobia in Africa [...] [R]esearch on homosexuality in Africa shows that it is homophobia, rather than homosexuality, that is the real western colonial import. Contralesa’s brand of*

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<sup>230</sup> An example of this is ‘pinkwashing’, a term used to describe the Israeli government’s strategy to conceal the oppression of Palestinians by promoting Israeli gay life as a sign of that country’s modernity and progress.

<sup>231</sup> NHTL refers to the National House of Traditional Leaders, a statutory body of traditional leadership.



*African culture is one that seeks to maintain a patriarchal and heterosexist gender order, which subordinates women and LGBTI people. (OT4)*

The extract above mobilises “colonialism” to signal a shared experience of oppression. The text asserts that it is “homophobia, rather than homosexuality, that is the real western colonial import”, thereby inverting the dominant trope of homosexuality as Western. This counter discourse claims homosexuality as African whilst denouncing homophobia as a Western imposition. Contrary to culturalist discourses that situate queers outside of Africanness, this text positions queers inside such cultural registers. The reference to “Contralesa’s brand of African culture” works to constitute culture as both heterogeneous and internally contestable.

Locating queer subjects as counter to African culture relies on a truth of certain cultures as devoid of rights and therefore as antithetical to law, modernity, and social progress. This aligns with mainstream representations of African culture as antagonistic to women’s equality and human rights (Tamale, 2007); as inferiorised and primitive (Goldberg, 2000); and as a threat to modernity’s progress of which gay rights is a key indicator (Bracke, 2012; Butler, 2010). The sexuality of the black lesbian represents the effect of a right (codified in modern law) and resides outside the terms of what is understood as ‘African culture’, which, as Tamale (2007) argues, is “largely a product of constructions and (re)interpretations by former colonial authorities in collaboration with African male patriarchs” (p. 153).

The discourses of culture work to Other African culture (Shefer, 2002), and draw on regimes of representation rooted in colonial racialism (Eisenstein, 2004; Gandhi, 1998; Mama, 1997). Moreover, in the texts one sees how race-based assertions are cased in culturalist terms. This typifies what Solomos and Back (1996, p. 208) refer to as “cultural racism” which reworks racism around a trope of cultural difference. I have also shown how dissenting discourses resignify queerness as African, and thus part of African cultural contestations. Such resignifications demonstrate what Butler describes to be an assertion of queer identity functioning as a “valuable cultural contest” (cited in Butler, Aronowitz,

Laclau, Scott, Mouffe and West, 1992, p. 108).<sup>232</sup> Significantly, as others have argued, queer subjectivity is both produced and excluded within culture (Namaste, 1994). The implications of the cultural origins of homosexuality – a sexual category that is formative of Western modernity’s construction of sexuality (Weeks, 2003; Faderman, 2001) – are largely silenced in discourse. The absence of this does little to expand the terms on which queer freedom from violence might be advanced as a *cultural*<sup>233</sup> claim rather than solely a legal one.

In the section that follows, I return to the focus groups in order to explore how participants make sense of dominant media representations of violence against lesbians. I do this to expose how lesbian-identified women resist certain knowledges of violence and their material-discursive effects.

## 6.9 “Besides being killed”: Speaking back to the spectacle

In each focus group discussion, I invited participants to share their views on the mainstream media’s representation of violence against lesbians, and to discuss their implications for how lesbian identities are known and seen.<sup>234</sup> Participants share a discomfort with media coverage they describe as sensationalist and based on one-dimensional and narrow depictions of lesbian life in the context of violence. Media frames that reduce lesbian subjectivity to victimhood, sexuality and violence, are seen to restrict how queer lives and experiences are understood. In the conversation below, Dineo and Kekeletso remark on how the lesbian assumes a larger than life form in the media, and that her identity is reduced to a spectacle of sexual and gender otherness.

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<sup>232</sup> Butler contends that, “[i]n the face of prospective silencing or erasing of race, gender and sexual-minority identities by reactionary political identities, it is important to be able to articulate them, and to insist in these identities as sites of valuable cultural contest” (cited in Butler, Aronowitz, Laclau, Scott, Mouffe and West, 1992, p. 108). I wish to suggest that queer identities, as constituted in and through cultures, do not operate outside of cultural formations; rather, they are integral to them, serving as sites for identity formulation and reformulation through cultural contest.

<sup>233</sup> See footnote 45 for the definition of ‘culture’ that I draw upon.

<sup>234</sup> To this end, I presented participants with a number of media texts from the data set and posed the following statement and question: “There has been quite a bit of media reporting on instances of violence against lesbians. What do you think about how the media reports on these issues?”

*Dineo: If a lesbian has done something wrong, maybe she robbed a shebeen, 'Yay, yay, yay,' it's something big and everyone will be like, 'These lesbians, why?', you know. Cos of the way they wrote those articles: 'A lesbian stole a chicken'. Why can't they say, 'A woman'?*

*Kekeletso: The media can be biased sometimes because the way they portray our lesbian life they think the hate crime revolves our lives, you know, there are not other things that we do as lesbians - only just looking at negative things, that's the problem when it comes to media.*

*Dineo: And media is powerful. They can play a role in educating or addressing the issues of gender-based violence against lesbians and gay people and all of that. They can play that role within this but them, the way they put their stories – I think for me the problem is the language that they use as well.*

*Kekeletso: If there is a story about a lesbian, yo, the alphabet will be big, yo, like lesbian! (FG3)*

Both participants are resistant to the amplified representation of lesbian sexual identity (“something big” and “the alphabet will be big”). These constructions reference the panoptic function of the discourse of violence (Mason, 2002) wherein, through the gaze of the spectacle, the lesbian is brought into stigmatising recognition. Kekeletso pushes back against the notion that violence is a central and defining feature of being lesbian in saying that “they [the media] think the hate crime revolves our lives”.

*Nhlanhla: Because at the end of the day we are all women, so I don't understand the separation. Cos, if Dineo is lesbian and I'm straight, and then I get killed and I have a bottle stuck in my private parts, it's not going to be written as though TL was killed, a woman was killed and this and that happened. But as soon as it happens to Dineo as a lesbian woman, it's going to be written in bold: lesbian, bottle, and what not. (FG3)*

Nhlanhla points to how the spectacle of the lesbian erases her gender whilst magnifying (“written in bold”) the brutality of the violence and the sexuality of its target. Along a similar trajectory, in the exchange below, Bonggi, Andiswa and Fundiswa challenge how the media dehumanises lesbians through magnifications and elisions.

*Bonggi: The language they are using is the language that makes things worse. Because, for example, they keep on writing that 'city lesbians', or 'lesbians', stuff like that. As Fundiswa*

*mentioned earlier, it's always, 'A man kicked the door because she was coming from the shebeen', stuff like that. It's like lesbians are people who don't care about themselves, they would walk at night, and then maybe she was raped at night and drunk, or she was standing in a corner with some guys, stuff like that. Then, they don't see lesbians as women. You know. They don't see lesbians as people who have human rights. So if you are a lesbian, maybe to some people you are an alien, you are someone who has no identity. [...]*

*Andiswa: Also by stating 'a lesbian' I think that they are grouping us to this society that we are out of this society and we have our own. So they are sort of, like, separating us – 'these people, they are not...' – as if these people don't have families, these people don't have brothers and sisters.*

*Bongi: Or it's a disease that we have. We are treated like a disease. We are not treated like human beings.*

*Fundiswa: And, since when do people get identified by their sexuality? Because, there's a lot of me in me. (FG1)*

The stigmatising and spectacularising media representations that participants challenge here, draw on the lesbian as 'lack' discourse (see Section 5.1.3) and on blaming narratives (see Sections 5.2.1.3 and 6.2). By asserting "there is a lot of me in me" Fundiswa contests the media's objectification of lesbians. She does this by denouncing the singularisation of identity, affirming its multiplicity instead, as she does not want to be reduced to sexual identity alone.

Below, Dineo and Mohau talk about how violence is normalised in the media with totalising effects ("it's forever brutal murders"). They resist these circumscribed notions of lesbian lives, expressing how these disallow a broadening of the terms of queer representation.

*Dineo: Yes, we are being violated as lesbian women, but I'm tired of seeing us being killed. In every movie we are being killed. There is more to us that we can write about. They can write about me working at [name of organisation], influencing change in my community, rather than saying those things. Because at some point I feel that such things also perpetrate the violence. Cos people are illiterate out there, they will see on TV and like, 'Ok, tomorrow, me and my friends we need to plan this.' (FG3)*

*Mohau: It is always something negative. Whoever has been brutally killed, this one, this one, you'll never see maybe marriages, as much as our rights are in the constitution that lesbian women can get married. So in most cases you'll find brutal murder, it's forever brutal murders. It's as if us lesbians never have lives besides being killed, besides people discriminating us, besides people hating us. (FG3)*

For Mohau, the media's exclusive and perpetual re-representation of violence, to the exclusion of other aspects of lesbian subjectivity, narrows how they come to be seen and known. The effect of this, as she vividly explains, is to inscribe the lesbian solely in terms of her injurability (i.e. only as someone who is killed, discriminated and hated). Similarly, Dineo is fatigued by the media's treatment of violence against lesbian ("I'm tired of seeing us being killed"). Her articulations push back against what Gunkel (2013) refers to as the discursive violence of representations of lesbian violation. Likewise, in the exchange below, participants speak of how the media's emphasis on violence reinstalls fear and trauma.

*Dimpho: I would say that it's instilling even more fear. Ja, cos I remember when I came out to my mom, I don't even think she had a problem with me coming out and saying I'm a lesbian. The only concern she had was like, 'My girl, are you gonna be safe, girl?' That's the biggest fear. And the media's just pushing it. They're creating that there is that fear out there. They're like, 'Yo guys, you have to be afraid, you come out now and you're gonna have to be afraid.'*

*Thando: I don't know how journalism works or, I haven't read many of these articles, but I know maybe they are supposed to report it more objectively. Like maybe, not throughout the whole article, but like maybe just one line to show that this is absolutely horrible, that this is something society should be aware. I mean like yes, we wanna know the facts, we wanna know that it's happened, but just to show that, you know, society should be moving towards being more accepting, more loving. I just feel like, as you're reading you are being traumatised. (FG5)*

Here the mobilisation of the queer fear discourse is seen to negatively impact the very subjectivities it indexes. Also, the traumatising that the media texts perform, and that Dimpho and Thando talk about, exposes the material and ideological effects of how

violence against black lesbians is reported on. Hames (2011, p. 89) describes this as a process by which “we see how the spectacles are being created. All of us become re-traumatised.”

*Dineo: And at the end of the story – there's nothing happening about ending the story. There isn't an outcome that maybe this guy is being arrested or there's justice or the community is involved. There's no ending that maybe a women from the neighbourhood would come and rescue or say something like, 'Stop hate crime, stop gender based violence against lesbian women.'* (FG3)

*Ntsiki: But the thing is now that you get this sensationalism from the media, and people think it's something cool to kill a lesbian.* (FG1)

Both Ntsiki and Dineo elaborate how the media's discursive reproduction of violence enables its continued probability. They also describe how reiterations of particular stories of violence produce 'endings' (i.e. meanings) that exclude other possible endings. These erasures in media discourse inhibit alternative subject positions in response to violence, such as those that “come and rescue” or “say something like, ‘Stop hate crime’”. In this sense less deterministic ways of knowing violence, and acting against it, are foreclosed within dominant media discourse.

In conclusion, the discourse themes presented in this chapter generate multiple and contesting meanings about the violence through which lesbian identities have come to be recognised. Black lesbians are configured as the primary targets for violence whilst converging narratives of whiteness and middle-classness render violence as exterior to the subjects that inhabit these positions. Largely staged around the black female victim and the black male perpetrator, the prospects for violence are articulated through highly sexualised, racialised and gendered registers. Men are the primary perpetrators of violence, motivated by the gender threat that the lesbian embodies. This gendering of violence works to naturalise the antagonism between a defended masculinity and a transgressive femininity. This is further reinforced by racialised constructions of black men as violent and black women as victims, signalling contemporary reworkings of apartheid and colonial tropes.

Media texts in particular cast black queer bodies into a circuit of injury, fear and culpability. This accords with Mason's (2002) finding that violence marks queer bodies as vulnerable victims in danger of violence. In the post-colonial context, this signifies a contemporary manifestation of how "[b]lack women's bodies have been made the bearers of the marks of sexual violence" in ways that keep historical power relations of race and gender in place (Baderoon, 2014, p. 88).

A logic of queer danger and fear is established through the spectacle of the dehumanised black body, whose perpetual and inevitable injury is discursively reiterated to the exclusion of other modes of queer subjectivity. At the scene of violence and its sexualised representation, the queer is inscribed in discourses of sex and death. The "voyeuristic, ethno-pornographic obsession" that characterised much of the colonial depictions of African sexuality (Tamale, 2011, p. 28), seeps into the sexual and racial imagery of violence against lesbians conjured in the texts. Discursive re-enactments of the brutalisation and dehumanisation of black bodies animate this spectacle. Discursive investments in the hyper-visibility of a particularised form of black and queer suffering, keeps the gaze in one place, thus deflecting attention away from the contextual continuities in which homophobia-related violence is fashioned.

The discursively scripted 'inevitability' of violence central to discourses of queer vulnerability and fear, ensnare lesbian life in the grip of death. Through the discourse of fear, gendered vulnerability is re-inscribed to the lesbian, primarily in the trope of 'corrective rape'. The chapter has also illustrates how the texts produce what Morrissey (2013) describes as a perpetuation of the normalisation of black lesbian victimhood.

Violence and queer subjectivity is also constituted through juridical discourses that seek to bring its explanation under control, through for example the concept of hate crime: a commanding explanatory framework for violence in which individual beliefs and sentiments are foregrounded as causal.

The discourse themes discussed in this chapter also show how queers are dominantly represented as outside of culture, marked as African. This confirms Livermon's (2012) assertion that the white queer is symbolic of the human rights discourse that signals South Africa as 'LGBT-friendly', whilst at the same time situating the black queer body outside African culture and tradition. Discourses that produce a false antagonism

between law and culture, thus situating queers inside the former and outside the latter, serve to over-determine African culture. This denies what Sigamoney and Epprecht (2013, p. 84) contend are diverging modes of acceptance and engagement with homosexuality in African contexts.

Attending to the spectacularised, sexualised and racialised constitution of the black lesbian in discourse is not to argue against media reporting on homophobia-related violence. Neither is it to suggest that paying particular attention to black lesbians' experiences, rendered disproportionately vulnerable to violence, is to be dissuaded. Rather, I have sought to surface the circumscriptive and reproductive capacities of discourse in the construction of lesbian violability, and the constraints this places on how lesbian life and its viability is seen and known. The effect of installing the queer life as, by definition, injured and thus injurable, precludes the queer subject from anything other than her suffering (Butler, 2010). I recognise that the media is a discursive surface on which culture and identity essentialisms are reinstalled (Wasserman and Jacobs, 2003), and where racism, along with other prejudiced ideologies, are reproduced (Duncan, 2003; van Dijk, 2000). It is therefore unsurprising that media discourse is characterised by highly raced, gendered and sexualised accounts of violence. It is also somewhat predictable that media coverage of LGBTI people relies on heterosexist and patriarchal ideologies (Jackson with Gilbertson, 2009; Lewis, 2007; Morison and Reddy, 2013). In addition to these features, the present analysis suggests a similarity with how violence was reported on during apartheid, tending to be "event-oriented, dramatic and personalised" and assigning racial explanations to violence (Taylor and Shaw, 1998). It also suggests post-colonial continuations of a historical co-articulation of violence and blackness which accords with apartheid media representation of township violence that worked to "whi[p] up long-standing white racist fears of the black mob" (Posel, 1990, p. 155). These historical dimensions of how violence is discursively represented also intersect with the tendency to naturalise inequality and denude its structural bases (Duncan, 2003). In speaking back to dominant media frames, participants mobilise counter-discourses that refuse the sexualising, brutalising and reductionist depictions of lesbian subjectivity and the violence it encounters. In a reversal of the subject-object position that render lesbians as subjected to violence, participants take the position of speaking subjects who resist the dominating effects of hegemonic



power arrangements. In doing so, they contest essentialisms and assert alternative ways to know lesbians amidst the conditions and consequences of violence. In their denouncement of how the media flattens identity, participants assert the various and contingent powers that circulate in and through queer subjectivity.

The chapter's focus on the contending truths of 'who dunnit and why' segues into the question of 'what is to be done' to counter violence against lesbians. More specifically, what possibilities for action against violence are made available in discourse? It is to this question that I now turn.



## CHAPTER 7

### WHAT'S TO BE DONE? FRAMES FOR ACTING AGAINST VIOLENCE

This chapter explores the political action against violence made possible in discourse. What do the media texts, official texts, and participants' talk make seen and known about 'what is to be done'<sup>235</sup> to counter violence against lesbians? Through a number of discursive frames, I present the subject positions and actions authorised in discourse, by whom and to what end. I also focus in particular on how queer political agency is constituted in and through these frames. Part 1 focuses on the possibilities for action made available by the institutional texts (i.e. media and official texts), whilst Part 2 draws on the focus group discussions to reveal the strategies and subject positions that are asserted or denounced in regard to how violence can conceivably be tackled by lesbians themselves.

#### 7.1 Part 1 – Centring law/order, individuated responsibility and political struggle

Three modalities for action against homophobia-related violence are brought into view in the media and official texts, namely through law and order, personal responsibility, and political struggle. I present each of these frames for action, and discuss where and how they reinforce and undermine one another.

##### 7.1.1 A logic of law and order

The response to violence most promoted in the texts is expounded by a rationality of 'law and order'<sup>236</sup>. Central to this is the idea that hate crime law is a primary means to punish and prevent violence against lesbians. Legal-judicial actions are affirmed as the means to address violence and thereby restore the social order it temporarily disrupts. The logic of

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<sup>235</sup> With acknowledgement to Vladimir Lenin, whose question, "What is to be done?" concerns the means by which "the enemy" is to be confronted (Lenin, 1902, p. 63).

<sup>236</sup> Here I draw on Moran's (2004) notion of a 'law and order politics' which he attributes to the gay and lesbian movement's focus on law reform (particularly the call for hate crimes legislation), characterised by an emphasis on retribution and revenge. Moran argues that this politics further promotes and institutionalises hate.

law and order is expounded through three discourses, namely 'law as teacher and state as protector', justice in death, and educating ignorance, each of which I now detail.

#### **7.1.1.1 Law as teacher/state as protector**

As illustrated in Chapter 6, violence against lesbians is principally characterised as a hate crime. This is elaborated through appeals directed at the state to act against violence by instituting hate crime legislation. Across the texts, the promulgation and enforcement of hate crime law emerges as a central strategy for how violence against lesbians is to be combatted, as illustrated in the excerpts below.

*South Africa needs special legislation for all forms of hate crimes, a conference on crime in Sandton heard yesterday. 'It would be helpful to have hate crime legislation because it would focus the police's minds when investigating, prosecutors when prosecuting, and judges when passing sentences,' said Kerry Williams, a partner at law firm Webber Wentzel. (MT10)*

*The Justice Department is developing a policy and possibly legislation to deal with hate crimes. Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities Lulu Xingwana said yesterday that following a spate of homophobic violence, including so-called 'corrective rape' and murder of lesbians, the two departments were leading a campaign to fight these crimes. (MT3)*

*We need a legislative amendment to criminalise 'corrective rape' as a hate crime. (MT11)*

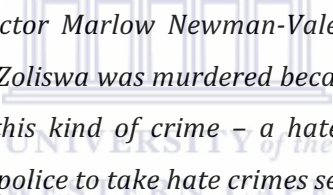
*Mbuyiselo Botha, spokesman for Sonke Gender Justice Network, said gay and lesbian murders were societal issues. 'Attacks on gays and lesbians are a shame on us South Africans, who pride ourselves in having the best constitution in the world,' he said, calling on the government to expedite the Hate Crime Bill and make it law in the country. (MT19)*

*While we continue to advocate for hate crime legislation there is a broader role for us to play as human rights defenders and social activists across all sectors of civil society. (OT5)*

*The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development established a task force to address the issue of hate crime against the LGBTI people. This task team is comprised of*

*representatives from the gay community, police, judiciary, government and the Department of Social Development. It has been tasked with the responsibility to change current legislation which does not classify rape as a hate crime. (OT7)*

In the hate crime discourse, the identification, classification and punishment of violence through legislative and judicial means operate to renders violence socially recognisable. Here law functions as a regulatory apparatus (Foucault, 2004) that, in bringing homophobia-related violence into view, confirms its existence and particularity. Consequently, its classification as a hate crime provides justification and legitimisation for a range of actions against it. The appeal for such law-driven actions are directed at the state, more particularly the criminal justice system. The hate crime discourse affirms law, constructing it as a powerful teacher that conveys a social message and lesson through which violence can be opposed.



*Triangle Project deputy director Marlow Newman-Valentine said: 'The magistrate went to great lengths to explain that Zoliswa was murdered because of her sexual orientation. It sends out a **clear message** that this kind of crime – a hate crime – will not be tolerated. The sentence is also a message to police to take hate crimes seriously.'* [my emphasis] (MT33)

*The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) welcomes the sentencing of Zoliswa Nkonyana's killers by Khayelitsha Magistrate Court. This will **serve as a lesson** to those that purport homophobic attitude towards Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgendered and intersexed people (LGBTI) that such [sic] cannot be tolerated in our country.* [my emphasis] (OT2)

*Later, National Prosecuting Authority spokesman Eric Ntabazalila said the sentence sent **a strong message** that hate crimes would not be tolerated.* [my emphasis] (MT33)

*The sentence has however set **an important precedent** in the South African Criminal Justice System by acknowledging hatred and intolerance based on sexual orientation as an aggravating factor.* [my emphasis] (OT3)

In the extracts above, the court sentence confirms the hate crime and the “homophobic attitude” that drives it, and performs their denouncement. Here the lesson and message of law and its juridical mechanisms are reinstated as the moral authorities that drive social order by acting, with force, against that which will “not be tolerated”. This works to legitimate the regulatory hegemony of the law through the exercise of juridical power. In the extract below, the over-reliance on law is troubled by the assertion that legislation is something “we could not wait for”.

*Free Gender had pulled out because of the long delays, its founder, Funeka Soldaat, said, ‘The issue in Khayelitsha was so urgent that we felt that we could not wait for legislation that was going to take years while the attacks continue and people are dying,’ she said. The NGO [nongovernmental organisation] had since formed a relationship with police in the area to ensure the safety of lesbians.’ (MT18)*

The materiality of queer death is mobilised here to signal the limits of law in responding to violence. In the same moment the speaking position invokes a protectionist discourse to demand that state structures (the “police”) “ensure the safety of lesbians”. The state’s role and power to guard queers from violence is thus entreated.

*The Commission will not hesitate to use its legal powers in pursuit of protection and justice for these vulnerable groups. (OT2)*

In the extract above, the Commission<sup>237</sup>, a statutory authority, affirms its law-derived power to protect LGBTI people, designated as a ‘vulnerable group’<sup>238</sup> and therefore legitimate targets for state protection. Here queer vulnerability and the Commission’s exercise of power are co-configured by installing the former as the ‘protector’ and the latter

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<sup>237</sup> “Commission” refers to the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE), an independent constitutional and statutory body tasked with the duty of advancing gender equality and women’s human rights in South Africa.

<sup>238</sup> LGBTI people are designated a vulnerable group status in government policy and this forms the basis of their explicit inclusion in government programmes and strategies to address crime. One example of this is the National Policy Framework for the Management of Sexual Offences in which “LGBTI persons” are designated as a “vulnerable group [...] mainly due to discriminatory societal perceptions that this group practices unacceptable sexual behaviour. The LGBTI persons also suffer as they challenge the societal gender roles” (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2012, p.14). For more on how the vulnerable group status of LGBTI people is featured in government policy, see Nel and Judge (2008).

as the ‘protected’. This relationship between vulnerability and the need for protection works to reinforce the Commission’s authority to protect. As others have argued (Brown, 1995; Butler, 2010) such protectionist discourses reinforce the power of the nation-state whilst concealing its role in the very violence from which queers, and other marginalised groups, seek its protection. In further elaboration of this, in the extract below, the speaker (a government minister) – and by extension the government – is situated outside of the violence described.

*Ladies and gentlemen, the attack on gays and lesbians is an attack on our democracy. An assault on gays and lesbians is an assault on our democratic society. Defending the rights of gays and lesbians is a defence of our democracy. Discrimination against the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex communities (LGBTI) must be fought on all fronts. This is indicative of a pervasive culture of inequality and violence in our society. (OT7)*

*Xingwana agreed violence against lesbians had reached ‘high’ levels in the country. ‘Yes, we think it is high, but I think the government, in particular our department, and the justice and police departments, have been leading a campaign to fight these homophobic crimes,’ Xingwana said. (MT3)*

Drawing on warfare terminology (“defend”, “attack”, “fight”), and through the conjuring of an unnamed enemy, government is situated as the defender of “democratic society”. The effect of this is that government’s rule is constructed as, by definition, democratic, and as exterior to the conditions that create “homophobic crimes”. Such crimes are attributed to the existence of “a pervasive culture of inequality and violence” that is discursively distanced from the state’s own exercise of power and use of violence. The state in turn is installed as the “leading” actor against homophobic crimes. In the previous chapter (see Section 6.5), I discussed how the hate crime discourse generates two dominant subject positions, namely the perpetrator (the hater) and the victim (the hated). The discourse theme under discussion introduces a third position into this victim/perpetrator dyad, namely the state as protector. In this configuration, the state is constituted as the punisher of the hater and the protector of the hated, reflecting how, as Menon (2014) contends, a

protectionist discourse is enabled through the victim/perpetrator paradigm (Menon, 2014). In reiterated appeals to the state to punish and protect, the texts performatively reinstate the state as the leading force against homophobia-related violence. At the same time, both the law and the state's power to wield violence and to injure and oppress (Benjamin, 1978; Reddy, 2011; Rosga, 2001) remain uncontested, and they are re-affirmed as "neutral arbiters of injury rather than as themselves invested with the power to injure" (Brown, 1995, p. 27).

The 'law as teacher and state as protector' discourse relies on the identity-as-injury connection in its construction of queer subjectivity (Brown, 1995). In this regard, the law naturalises the identities that it itself engenders (Butler, 2006). Noting that the state is a dominant organiser of relations of power, I am not suggesting that it be absolved of its obligations (through legal means and otherwise) to act against violence and advance queer freedom. Rather, I wish to draw attention to the constrained conceptualisation of the state as described, and how this serves to obscure the state as structurally implicated in the production and perpetuation of queer vulnerability and violation. Notwithstanding the political and agentic potential of vulnerability, there is also the extent to which protection from vulnerability works as a form of regulation, which I discuss in more detail later.

### **7.1.1.2 Justice in death**

In the media texts, the notion of justice in relation to homophobia-related violence is hinged to tropes of injury and death. In a number of media texts that concern the murder of Zoliswa Nkonyana, there are conflicting meanings as to what constitutes justice, and its relationship to queer life and death. Under the headline 'Justice for slain lesbian', one such text commences as follows:

*The sentencing in the Khayelitsha Regional Court of the four men convicted of stabbing and stoning Zoliswa Nkonyana to death in 2006 brings to an end a very long wait for justice.*  
(MT33)

In congruence with the headline, the article states that the trial of the murder accused is "described as a precedent-setting case by legal experts and hailed as a victory by gender

activists.” However the justice and victory the text proclaims is not articulated by the very speaking positions to which these proclamations are attributed (i.e. ‘gender activists’ and ‘legal experts’). To the contrary, an utterance linked to one such subject position *denies* rather than *declares* that justice was done.

*The Social Justice Coalition said the trial was characterised by ‘consistent failures of the police and the criminal justice system, and has caused untold agony for Nkonyana’s family and friends’. This was a case of ‘justice delayed is justice denied’. (MT33)*

In the same article’s headline (‘Justice for slain lesbian’), justice is assigned to Nkonyana herself. Here the act of justice is constructed as having been granted by the court to the dead lesbian. Such a victim-dependent conception of justice inscribes queer death as its necessary precondition. This entanglement of justice and death accords with how death as a gendered experience is central to the configuration of women’s subjectivities in post-apartheid (DeGelder, 2012).

Another text articulates ambivalence toward this narrow conception of justice as ascribed to death.

*On the question of whether justice has been served, Triangle Project shares the sentiments of Magistrate Whatten who stated that, ‘the court could only attempt to restore a sense of justice’ and that Zoliswa could never be returned to her family. (OT3)*

The limitation of a juridical definition of justice is expressed in the court having provided only “a **sense** of justice” [my emphasis]. In invoking the figure of the living lesbian (she who could “never be returned”), the statement disrupts a conception of justice defined by lesbian death.

As with the ‘law as teacher and state as protector’, the discourse of justice in death installs the state and its juridical apparatus as the custodians of justice. The predication of justice on queer injury, binds the possibility of justice to the presence of that injury. The victim-status of the queer, as a prerequisite for the attainment of justice in the context of violence, naturalises queer identity as necessarily injured (Brown, 1995). This



hitching of justice to death limits an envisaging of justice as residing in the domain of lesbian life (i.e. a conception that might centre lesbian life as livable, rather than killable).

### **7.1.1.3 Educating ignorance**

Another set of actions against violence made imaginable in the texts concern efforts to educate and build awareness about 'sexual orientation' and 'the LGBT community'. Education is seen to address 'ignorance' by increasing 'knowledge and awareness' and, as a consequence, to reduce the prospect of violence by increasing action against it.

*'There is a perception that there is a lack of interest in the cases, in part due to the sexual orientation of the victims. Added to this, the investigating officers may have limited knowledge or awareness of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community and online dating,' said Nel. (MT30)*

*'The ignorance of the wider community shows that it is very important that there is more education around issues of sexual orientation. We want to see change,' said Reid. (MT42)*

In the extract below, education enforces "adherence to human rights", thus bringing social practices in line with the law.

*The ANC [African National Congress] has agreed with LGBTI on the need for continuous education of communities on the adherence to human rights stipulations as contained in our in our Constitution and our Bill of rights that includes respect for gays and lesbians. This can be achieved through deliberate campaigns in our communities [...] A Joint Committee between the ANC and the LGBTI has been established with an intention of designing a campaign of educating our communities about the rights of gays and lesbians as fellow South Africans, whose right need to be respected and protected. (OT8)*

Drawing on the discourse of law as teacher, the statement advances the idea that respect and protection for gays and lesbians, as codified in law, is to be learned through education. Educational efforts produce compliance with human rights "stipulations" that represent the prevailing legal and moral order.

The educating ignorance discourse also associates ignorance with a lack of civilisation. This association is made operative through a civilising discourse<sup>239</sup> that draws on colonial narratives of Western modernity and its cultural dualisms. I will now discuss how this civilising discourse reveals itself in one of the media texts headlined, 'Put a stop to this madness'.

*It is sad indictment that there are still reports such as the one on the front page of this newspaper yesterday of the intolerance of people because of their sexual orientation. This is a terrible blemish on the image of this country. This country is renowned for its bigotry against those perceived to be different – homosexuals, foreigners, the disabled, etc. We are society raised on a toxic diet of prejudice, hatred, ignorance, fanaticism, dogmatism and narrow-mindedness. We do not judge people on the content of their character, as Martin Luther King Jr lamented five decades ago, but on congenital traits over which mere mortals have no control [...] Our story yesterday told of a lesbian that was attacked by guards after being observed kissing her lover goodbye. In many townships around Gauteng, many women have borne the brunt of merciless and savage attacks because of their sexual orientation. The lesbian, gay and bisexual community says such crimes are on the increase. Those guilty of these atrocities must face the wrath of the law. But, ultimately, education and awareness are the only weapons that can put a stop to this anachronistic madness. We live in a democratic, all-embracing 21st century, not an austere, antediluvian age. (MT14).*

Through a trope of nationhood, "intolerance" and "bigotry" are viewed as products of a historical past that produced a "society raised on a toxic diet of prejudice". Against this backdrop violence against queers is attributed to "hatred, ignorance, fanaticism, dogmatism and narrow-mindedness". Those who are its target are "perceived to be different" and, as a consequence of that difference, are targeted for "merciless and savage attacks". Constituting a demarcated set of Others, the targets of violence are described as having "congenital traits over which mere mortals have no control", thus naturalising their

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<sup>239</sup> Civilising discourses have their roots in imperial expansion and conquest. Configured as missions to civilise the 'barbaric natives', these discursive practises were advanced by the missions of the Christian church as a key vehicle through which colonial power was instituted. Both the rule of the gun and the rule of the book (i.e. the Bible) were central strategies. In terms of the latter, Biko (1978) describes the vanguard role of the missionaries as one in which education and knowledge were modes of cultural imposition. In describing these modes and their civilising effects, Biko contends that "their [the missionaries] arrogance and their monopoly on truth, beauty and moral judgement taught them to despise native customs and traditions and to seek to infuse their won values onto these societies" (1978, p. 94).

difference. The text proffers “education and awareness” and the “wrath of the law” as essential actions to address violence and its espoused causes. Both education and law are positioned as the remedies for “madness and savagery” and its imminent threat to democracy and social progress. Education and awareness are branded the “only weapons” in the battle for reason over madness, the latter being the ultimate threat to modernity’s progress (signified by “a democratic, all-embracing 21st century”). Education is constructed as a frontier of freedom against a cultural backwardness, signalled by the return to “an austere, antediluvian age”. In this madness/civilisation duality, being queer is a marker of modernity. The text racialises the “forces” of “merciless and savage attacks” that are seen to threaten the civility of modern democracy. In this regard the “blemish on our country’s image” is directly associated with “the many townships around Gauteng” – conjured as ‘black spots’<sup>240</sup>. It is inferred here that keeping the threat to progress at bay requires staving off a racialised “savagery” and its uncivilised “anachronistic madness”. These configurations of violence, its cause and consequence, work to legitimise the racialised modalities through which the mission to civilise is proclaimed. The reference to savagery also draws on colonial representations of black subjectivity, and black men in particular, as dangerous and sexually savage (Eisenstein, 2004; Posel, 2005). These narratives are dominantly deployed to assert the control and disciplining of black male sexuality through education (Das, 2008), alongside other means.

Violence constitutes the fracturing of the civilising project and its normative ordering of social relations, thus mapping onto global discourses of civilising missions (Biko, 1978; Gandhi, 1998; Said, 1995). Through mobilising law, knowledge and reason, the text performs “[p]utting a stop to this madness”. When read in the context of global politics around homophobia in Africa, such discourses reveal how the “release from the repressive culture” [marked as Africa] is enabled by the “progressive culture of the ‘liberal West’” (Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem, 2008, p. 83).

In sum, the discourses of ‘law as teacher and state as protector’, justice in death, and educating ignorance, all converge around a logic of ‘law and order’. Those vulnerable to violence – which is a disruption of the dominant social order - require the benevolent

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<sup>240</sup> The text’s use of “blemish” in association with “townships” conjures the image of the ‘black spots’ of apartheid which referred to the geographical places where black people remained, within areas designated for whites.

protection of the state. The promotion of legal interventions to criminalise forms of violence constituted as singularly motivated by hate, has the effect of cleaving such violence from its mooring in power relations. In relying on juridical power to address violence, the law and order frame illustrates what Butler (1997a) describes as the collapse of political discourse into juridical discourse. As a means to inculcate law, education functions to instil orderliness into the social chaos of racialised individuals gone violently awry. Educational acts are thus conceived of as stabilising the social sphere on the basis of a consensus model of tolerance and restraint.<sup>241</sup> The work of education is to bring individual proclivities into alignment with legislated norms that, in turn, represent progress - the bulwark to barbarism and its lawless violence. Undergirded by civilising discourses, the law and order logic advances the ideals of Western modernity and its cultural modes. The actions it makes possible are geared to ensuring that modernity's steady and inevitable march to progress prevails.

### **7.1.2 Take responsibility, make choices**

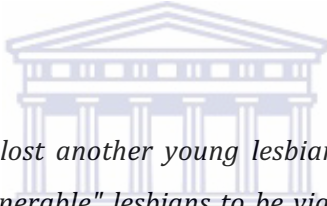
One construct of queer agency envisaged in the texts is that lesbians assume personal responsibility for preventing violence through the adoption of self-protective and precautionary strategies.

*Lesbians living in the townships need to be vigilant at all times about where they socialise and how they portray themselves in their communities, cautioned Ndumie Funda, director and founder of Luleki Sizwe. 'The reality is that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community is not yet free, especially in the townships. Until we know we are safe from homophobic attacks, we need to exercise caution,' said Funda [...] Funda said that although not everyone was homophobic in the townships, some people – especially men – were angered by seeing women being openly affectionate towards each other. She said that she did not mean that gays should not display their love in public, but that to avoid being targeted they should take precautions by avoiding being 'explicitly promiscuous' in public. Funda urged gay people to be more active in their communities without 'forcing their sexuality' on them. (MT9)*

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<sup>241</sup> Here educating ignorance intersects with a discourse of tolerance. The latter legitimates the idea that non-normative sexualities and genders are, by general consensus, intolerable. The violent edges of this general consensus, of which violence is but one manifestation, is mediated through a politics of law and order.

In the extract above the notion of lesbians as ‘naturally’ threatening to men is deployed to legitimise the violence they face. This gendered construction rationalises the notion that lesbians should adopt self-regulatory strategies to prevent violence, for example “by avoiding being ‘explicitly promiscuous’ in public”. The trope of promiscuity links the sexual excesses normatively associated with queerness to the violence that queerness encounters.<sup>242</sup> Here one sees how “sexualised images of race intersect with norms of women’s sexuality, norms that are used to distinguish good women from bad” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1271). This further substantiates why the lesbian is required to deploy feminised social practices so as to ameliorate her devalued gender status and the violence it ‘naturally attracts’. These deployments of feminine gender norms compel the lesbian, as a subordinated femininity, to conform to the constraints of hegemonic femininity (Collins, 2004).



*‘I am deeply hurt. We have lost another young lesbian who had great potential’, she said. Funda urged “young and vulnerable” lesbians to be vigilant while walking in the townships. ‘They need to take care of themselves and not advertise their sexuality to the community as we are still fighting homophobia. Being gay does not mean one has to be irresponsible. We are still under attack, therefore we have to be careful of where we socialise,’ said Funda. (MT6)*

In the text above, the responsibility discourse reinscribes lesbian youth within the normative terms of women’s gendered vulnerability. Disciplining strategies that demand women’s vigilance and invisibility are mobilised to compel the lesbian to take personal responsibility for violence. This discourse of personal responsibility, in which the lesbian must ‘take care of herself’, is a form of what Brown describes as ‘self-care’ - a mode of neo-liberal governmentality.<sup>243</sup> These self-care strategies work alongside the notion that lesbians can and must make choices about how and where to be in the social sphere. Women’s need to keep themselves safe is also underpinned by blaming narratives through which their gender behaviour is implicated in the violence they encounter (Lamb, 1996;

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<sup>242</sup> For more on sexualising representations of queers in the discourse of violence, see Section 6.1.1.

<sup>243</sup> For how self-care strategies are taken up in participants’ talk, see Section 7.2.3.

Valentine, 1989). Assuming personal responsibility is also predicated on the notion that women should make the 'correct' behavioural choices in alignment with feminine regulatory practices. In this sense, feminine respectability requires female bodies, defined by their gendered vulnerability, to adopt actions that conform to normative standards of feminine disposition (Bartky, 1990; Deliovsky, 2010). Consequently, responsibility relies on prescripts of feminine docility and domestication (Bordo, 1993) and seeks to subject lesbians' gender practices to these terms. The emphasis on lesbians having to take personal responsibility and make choices in order to curb violence has a depoliticising effect. It is argued that the discourse of choice advances a "compulsory individuality" (Skeggs, 2005), thereby reducing spheres of action to those taken by individual lesbians who personally adapt their gender behaviour, practices and expressions to circumvent violence. The text below further illustrates how queer sexuality is depoliticised through a discourse of choice that aims to advance queer "acceptance" as a strategy against violence.

*'I am an archer, middle-aged and a lesbian. I am also cranky before my first cup of coffee. None of these aspects define who I am, they are simply part of me. I look forward to the day when this is a non-issue and as relevant as my eye colour or favourite sushi' she said in her official statement. Hultzer<sup>244</sup> said that greater acceptance of differing sexual orientations in sport, could and should filter down to have a positive impact in South African society as a whole.*  
(MT7)

The speaker's desire for sexuality to be a "non-issue" is asserted by creating a false equivalence between sexuality, character traits ("crankiness"), age, middle-classness (signified by a "sushi" food preference) and eye-colour (as a racialising signifier<sup>245</sup>). Middle-classness is positioned as valorised and unmarked ("non-issue") and in mitigation of sexual difference and its associated stigmas. In this depoliticising maneuver, class status trumps sexuality as a more legitimate and desirable state of agentic belonging. Bolstered by notions of liberal individuality, the discourse of choice advances conformity to dominant

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<sup>244</sup> Hultzer is a white professional archer who represented South Africa in the Olympic Games in 2011.

<sup>245</sup> Eye colour is a physiognomic marking with racialising undertones. In the text it references a visual cue that is dominantly used to attribute race. Eye colour was also a signifier of the 'common-sense' racism of apartheid (Nuttall, 2004) in which physical characteristics were used to ascribe race.

class and race standards.

The discourse of 'taking responsibility and making choices' disarticulates social power and context from individual agency and choice (such as choosing a "favourite sushi" or choosing "not to advertise their sexuality"). This demonstrates how sexuality is frequently reduced to matters of individual choice, the social limits of which are often elided (Weeks, 2003). Through taking responsibility and making choices, lesbian political agency is reduced to a set of feminised and individuated acts. These acts to curb violence are discursively dislocated from the material conditions and relations of power in which they are both generated and curtailed.

### **7.1.3 Activists in a struggle continued**

Another mode of political agency constituted in the institutional texts is shaped around the subject position of the activist who represents a political struggle to end violence. As illustrated below, the term "activist" is ascribed to lesbians and "gender groups" that publicly speak and act against violence and its impacts.

*Funda is one of a handful of activists who are at the forefront of raising awareness about corrective rape. (MT9)*

*The team was set up 14 months ago, following demands from activists working to stop the so-called 'corrective' rape of lesbians and a spate of attacks on gays, lesbians and transgender people. (MT13)*

*Soldaat said at a meeting earlier this week that activists had asked police to patrol the area where Nkolonzi lived and to be visible while her family and friends held the service. (MT21)*

*Activists who had campaigned long and hard for Nkonyana's killers to be brought to book, say they may have to do so again in the murder trial of Nyanga lesbian Nontsikelelo Tyatyeka. (MT28)*

The word "activist" signifies the politicisation of an identity, imbuing it with political currency and agency. Through the discourse of activism lesbians are constructed as

agent subjects who drive and lead political resistance (such as “protests” and “marches”) against homophobia-related violence. This produces possibilities for “political speech” through which “certain kinds of subjects [in this case queer subjects] appear as viable actors” (Butler, 2006:xvii), and, therefore, as active participants in a politics of violence. The activist figure is constituted as a social agent that agitates and makes political demands, primarily directed at government and state institutions, as illustrated below.

*We call on all other political parties represented in parliament to immediately put an end to any debate of equality rights based on sexual orientation. (OT4)*

*While we continue to advocate for hate crime legislation there is a broader role for us to play as human rights defenders and social activists across all sectors of civil society. (OT5)*

*Members of the LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) community marched to the provincial ANC offices in Thibault Square yesterday to demand that the ruling party take action to stop the murder of lesbians. (MT20)*

In some texts, activism against violence is located historically by drawing on a struggle discourse that links contemporary black queer experiences to apartheid and its legacies of inequality. This was similarly reflected in participants talk about violence (see Section 5.2.2.3).

*Simon Nkoli<sup>246</sup> spoke after her, ‘I am black and I am gay. I cannot separate the two parts of me into secondary or primary struggles. In South Africa I am oppressed because I am a black man and I am oppressed because I am gay. So when I fight for my freedom I must fight against both oppressions.’<sup>247</sup> A quarter century later and nearly two decades into the new South Africa, the*

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<sup>246</sup> Simon Nkoli was an anti-apartheid activist and a leading black queer in the political resistance to apartheid. He was the founder of Gays and Lesbians of the Witwatersrand (GLOW). See Section 2.5.1 for more on GLOW and early queer organising in South Africa.

<sup>247</sup> Nkoli made a public address at South Africa’s first gay Pride march in 1990 in Johannesburg. The extract here refers to the contents of that address.



*oppression that Bev<sup>248</sup> and Simon named, remains just as present in the lives of black lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people. (OT10)*

In the extract above a struggle discourse is mobilised to establish relationality between the “named” racial and sexual oppressions of apartheid and present day experiences of “black” LGBT people. The assertion that race and sexual oppression are “just as present” in black queer lives articulates the coterminous character of historical and contemporary black queer struggles. By referencing the narratives of two black queers leaders (both strongly associated with anti-apartheid activism), anti-apartheid politics and contemporary queer politics are discursively linked. This also serves to invoke a particular history, and its associated positionalities, in order to reinsert a struggle politics into the queer political imaginary of the present. By historicising queer oppressions the text performs an act of remembering, which Bhabha (1987, p. 123) describes as “a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present”. The remembering of past oppressions and the resistance to them, is mobilised to spur action in the present.

*The difference is, Pride has ceased to be a space for charting new futures, and has, with a few exceptions, been stripped of all political content. The depoliticisation of most Prides has allowed the old racial apartheid to be translated into a new economic apartheid, which is clearly evident in many pride celebrations. Capitalist consumerism and individualistic rights' claims now characterise many Prides in South Africa as they do most other spaces for the LGBTI community. This is not the history that Bev, Simon and others imagined they were making in 1990. They and we never imagined that Pride would become little more than a marketing tool for corporations whose ostensible support of LGBT rights serves to mask their rampant violation of other rights. We never imagined that we would matter only if we constituted the gay market, had double income, no kids, and were flush with the Pink Rand. (OT10)*

The extract above, which appears later in the text previously discussed, counters a depoliticised queer politics by repoliticising its contents. The text links such

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<sup>248</sup> Together with Simon Nkoli (see footnote 246 above), Beverly Palesa Ditsie was a prominent black lesbian and anti-apartheid activist in the late 1980s and 1990s.

depoliticisations to the commercialisation of LGBT identities (signified as a “new economic apartheid”) and its associated “rampant violation of other rights”. Pointing to the conditionality of queer life in the contemporary moment (“We never imagined that we would matter only if”), the text draws non-normative and black subjectivities into political representation. By invoking a political ‘we’, it constructs a counter subject position from which to speak back at homonormalising locations characterised by “consumerism” and “individualistic rights’ claims”. An activist discourse enables agentic resistance to the disciplinary precepts of homonormativity and its raced, classed and gendered inflections, as dominantly represented by mainstream gay politics (Duggan, 2003). Here the text operates as a performative mode of expression that lays claim to public space (Butler, 2009, p. x), through which its constitutive subject positions announce their political opposition to the privatisation and commercialisation of sexual identity politics. This repoliticisation of queer identity in discourse, communicates a desire to destabilise the LGBT single-issue politics of neo-liberalism and its failures to attend to racial and economic exclusions (Bracke, 2012; Tauqir et al., 2011). For a discussion on the political context in which OT10 was produced, and its wider implications for queer politicisations, see Appendix 10.

*It is time for everyone – queer, lesbian, femme, trans, gender resistant, straight, butch, bisexual, gender fluid, black and non-black – to bring back to Pride the spirit of revolution. Not only an LGBT revolution, but a sexual revolution, a workers’ revolution, an anti-capitalist revolution, a revolution of unemployed people, a revolution of people living with HIV and AIDS, a revolution of immigrants, a revolution of sex workers, a revolution of single people, a revolution of students without textbooks, a queer, feminist revolution. (OT10)*

In co-articulating a politics of recognition and of redistribution, the extract above imagines a political revolution constituted by a multiplicity of subjectivities draws together in common resistance. The assemblage of solidarities asserted in the text contests an essentialised LGBTI identity-politics. This is the articulation of an anti-foundationalist politics that, according to Butler (2006), is able to weld together a broad notion of revolution *not* premised on a fixed, singular identity. Through the imaginary of an “ensemble of subject positions” (Mouffe, 1991, p. 80) the text brings economics, sexuality,

queerness and gender into an expansive re-configuration of ‘the political’ as “not only an LGBT revolution”. This invokes what Hall (2000, p. 149) defines as the “imaginary political re-identification” that is foundational to a counter politics. The mobilisation of “non-black” inverts apartheid’s signifying practice of racial classification, in which “non-white” was a dominant marker of racial otherness. By centring “non-black”, whiteness as the normative standard of race is displaced.

As previously discussed, a struggle discourse crafts a political present in which queer sexual politics is resituated within an anti-apartheid imaginary and its contemporary permutations. Another example of this is in the extract below. In the text, the first gay Pride march in South Africa in 1990, provides a bridging narrative to (re)connect past and present politics.

*A few hundred people turned up for Africa's first Gay Pride march in October 1990 [...] And it was endorsed by the ANC PWV<sup>249</sup> regional office, which released a statement after the march, saluting a "historic and courageous step in the long march for gay rights, a fundamental part of the struggle for human rights, a wing of the liberation struggle in South Africa". That was 22 years ago in a different country. It would be another six before the constitution of SA became the first in the world to guarantee gay rights. (MT11)*

In contrast to the historicising effect of the struggle discourse, the text that follows describes the presence of homophobia-related violence in post-apartheid as a “new discrimination”.

*At least eight people have been killed in recent weeks across the country. The latest assault to be revealed is the attack on a Johannesburg lesbian who was beaten by security guards after kissing her girlfriend goodbye in the city centre last month [...] Many religious and political leaders prefer to pander to the prejudices of some of their followers than to speak out against a form of injustice which should horrify us all. Like the religious leaders of the apartheid era who claimed to find justification for racism in sacred texts, those who fail to stand up against this new discrimination will be remembered for their lack of courage and humanity. (MT13)*

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<sup>249</sup> Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) was renamed Gauteng Province in 1994.

Representing homophobia as a “new discrimination” disconnects it from the race, gender and sexual politics of apartheid. The effect of this is to dehistoricise queer oppression and to disarticulate it from colonialism and apartheid, thus denying how sexuality, gender and race discriminations are mutually constituting.

In conclusion, this section has shown how a politics of law and order provides a dominant frame through which actions against violence are conceived of in discourse. The politics of law and order asserts the development and rule of law, crime and punishment modalities, the state’s exercise of punitive and protective power, and civilising missions that prop up particular cultural values and norms. The authority of the state and the regulatory power of law are appealed to in protectionist discourses that rely on the normalisation of the gendered vulnerability and victim-status of lesbians. These protectionist pursuits operate through two regulatory modes. The first is that the state is to shield women from violence, and the second is that women should assume the responsibility for protecting themselves by complying with normative codes of sexual morality and feminine respectability.

In the institutional texts, lesbian political agency is constructed around two primary figures. The first is the self-managed lesbian subject who takes responsibility and makes choices to secure her own protection from violence. She does this by complying with hegemonic femininity’s disciplining practices. The second figure is the queer activist, marked as a political agent that publicly resists violence. Whilst the former embodies feminine reform and responsibility, the latter represents the politicisation of sexuality as a site of intersecting struggles. Through struggle discourse, the intersected politics of past and present are discursively stitched together. This enables positionalities from which multiple subordinations, particularly for black queers, can be articulated. These political possibilities are positioned as paradoxical to those that converge around a depoliticising and homonormative status quo. The activist discourse also historicises queer contemporary politics by locating it within the enduring manifestations of apartheid. The position of the activist opens up agentic prospects that counter the confinement of lesbian subjectivity to a victim status. It represents a voice of political resistance located at the intersection with other marginalised subjectivities. Such resistance contests the constraints

of dominant gay and lesbians politics or, as Puar (2007) describes it, “[t]he f(r)actioning of homosexuality with white racial, capital, and citizenship privilege [that] cleaves it away from other homosexual racial and class alliances it might otherwise encompass” (p. 128).

## **7.2 Part 2 – Subjects of politics, politics of subjects**

This section focuses on how lesbian political subjectivity is conceived of in the focus groups. I discuss how participants construct a politics of violence against lesbians and how they position themselves in relation to it. I also explore the strategies participants take up and/or desist in crafting the possible terms for countering violence from their multiple identity locations.

### **7.2.1 “Some people can get too political”: Outside the place of politics**

Some participants identify with a public politics that denounces violence against lesbians, whilst others actively distance themselves from the lesbian as a political figure through othering strategies. How participants locate themselves within a politics of violence speaks to wider power arrangements in which they are variously situated.

*Sophie (other): I find that it's the black community that's much more active than say suburbia community.*

*Nadia (coloured): I think they have a bigger passion, more reason to be active.*

*Sophie: Yes, yes, yes.*

*Taryn (white): And the question to this particular group is that they are probably more motivated.*

*Sophie: Yes.*

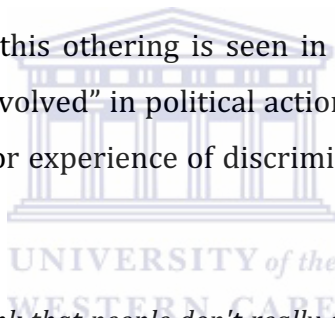
*Taryn: More to gain.*

*Jane (white): And more to lose.*

*Soraya (coloured): And, ja, probably exposed more.*

*Taryn: So as you were saying, if it's your fight you're more prone to fighting it. (FG2)*

In the extract above, Sophie associates political activism with “the black community”. Others elaborate this racialising attribution further, by associating black people with “passion”, “motivation” and increased exposure to violence. Taryn’s assertion that “if it’s your fight you’re more prone to fighting it”, normatively situates “the fight” (as a signifier of political resistance) within black communities. This obscures how communities other than those racialised as black might be violent and, consequently, might be a source for action against it. The zones and embodiments of politics are inscribed as black. This aligns with other discourses previously discussed that synonymise the experience of violence with the lives of black lesbians. The interchange between the participants, none of whom identify as black, generates a consensus position that situates them, collectively, outside of violence and its politics. The speakers are thus able to disavow the subject position of the politically active lesbian through a discourse that exteriorises both violence and the responses it demands. A further example of this othering is seen in the extract below, where Soraya justifies her reluctance to “get involved” in political action against violence by arguing that such involvement requires a prior experience of discrimination,<sup>250</sup> which she indicates not having had.



*Soraya (coloured): I also think that people don't really act when they're not affected directly. You know, I've never experienced being discriminated. Ok, maybe once. It's never touched me, and like, the people I know, it's never touched them, whether it be in a gay situation, or whether it be a racist comment or something. Where it's not touching you directly, people are a bit reluctant to get involved. You know honestly, and I don't want need to generalise or sound really negative, but sometimes I find that some people can get too political about something, like way too much. I mean I was at a friend's birthday party and there was this whole table of lesbians. So we're all joking and stuff and someone said something – I don't know what they said – but then two of them jumped up immediately: 'You know that was discrimination against women' and blah blah blah. And I mean I thought they were going to whip out banners and go march down the street. Bloody hell, time to go. (FG2)*

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<sup>250</sup> See Section 5.2.1.1 for more on how injury shapes lesbian subjectivity.

In order to distance herself from the politicisation of both race and sexuality, Soraya invokes the notion that queer injury is a necessary prerequisite for political identification. She desists identifying with the political lesbian through her expressed disapproval of “some people [that] can get too political about something”. Activism (signified by those who “whip out banners and go march down the street”) is a mode of politics that Soraya takes discursive leave of when she states, “Bloody hell, time to go”. Likewise, Tania below describes the politically active lesbian in othering terms to justify her own dis-identification with that subject position.

*Tania (Latin): That was good, because they – the same people of the person that got killed – got together and marched. So they were empowering themselves, and they were showing the rest of the world that there isn't just one person, there's a whole group of us, and even though we can become targets, we're standing together, so hats off for these girls. (FG2)*

Tania affirms racial “sameness” as the basis for “good” politics. Her reference to “the same people of the person that got killed” conceals the racialisation at work in her statement. The symbolic gesture of taking her hat off positions Tania at a distance from the politicised and racialised Others that “got together and marched”. As a signifying practice, the donning and tipping of the hat indexes whiteness and a superiorised class status. Metaphorically, it conjures the speaker’s race and class locations, from where she commends the Other lesbian and, in the same moment, places herself outside of the violence and the identity and politics it represents.

In the exchange below, participants express ambivalences toward the lesbian that is associated with a public politics. They do so by variously situating themselves in relation to “gay Pride”, as a contested signifier of queer political subjectivity.

*Taryn (white): And, and those big protests that you're talking about, basically, it's like, 'Oh look, it's gay Pride. There they go', and the people watching are literally spectating, they're not learning, they're not experiencing.*

*Jane (white): But I respect where that comes from, I understand that you need to be, you know...*

*Taryn: I am just agreeing with the fact that I think that there is far more power in...*

*Jane: But you are right though, you do stand away, and you can see the straight people eating popcorn.*

*Taryn: You know, when I drive past Parliament and the Palestinian supporters and the Israel supporters are all standing their waving their flags, that's like a spectacle for me. I'm not Palestinian, I'm not Jewish and it's not my political issue. So, whereas if I stopped, got out of my car, and went and spoke to those people, I would be involved.*

*Sophie (other): Can I just say that the gay Pride is not a protest.*

*Taryn: No, no, I know it's not a protest – absolutely – in fact it was a very bad example.*

*Nadia (coloured): I actually felt very offended when I read something about the gay Pride protest, and it's not. I don't think it's...*

*Taryn: No, it's a Pride march.*

*Sophie: No but, all I'm saying is that, I've been threatened, many times, to be raped and to be beaten up for being gay. And, if I got beaten up or raped, I would like someone to protest.*

*Jane: But, what is the context of that? Were you standing outside the House of Parliament, petitioning? Were you on Forum? Were you just being you? Oh right, because I mean if you're standing in front of a group of anti-gay people, saying I'm a lesbian, then I can imagine...*

(FG2)

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By describing gay pride as a spectacle, Taryn and Jane negate a public gay politics that visibilises and accentuates queer difference. For Taryn, the act of speaking to people is preferred to more overt political actions such as flag waving. However, Taryn is challenged by both Sophie and Nadia, who argue that Pride is *not* a political protest. In response to this, Taryn adjusts her own position (“No, no, I know it’s not a protest”). As a counter to Taryn’s distancing from and denouncement of political protest, Sophie positions herself as a potential beneficiary of direct political action against violence (“And, if I got beaten up or raped, I would like someone to protest”). In reacting to this, Jane draws on a blaming discourse (“if you’re standing in front of a group of anti-gay people, saying I’m a lesbian, then I can imagine...”). In doing so, she asserts a causal link between lesbians being political and their encounter with violence as a consequence.

Through normalising the black lesbian as inhabiting a proximity to violence, by virtue of her blackness, and, as a consequence, constituting the necessary source of its



political response, both white and coloured participants distance themselves from violence and its politics. In these strategies, political discourses of sexuality and race converge to produce the racialised Other lesbian as a naturalised embodiment of politics.

### **7.2.2 “We want to be there, where trouble is”: Inside the place of politics**

In the focus groups with black activist participants, race, age and class differentials are considered determinants of whether a lesbian takes up a political identity or not. As previously detailed in Section 5.2.1.3, through a discourse of age, older lesbians are viewed as assigning blame to younger lesbians who they perceive as highly politicised and publicly expressive. Focusing in here on the political dimensions of these age discourses, and as illustrated in the extract below, the young black lesbian, in “exposing” herself to the community, is seen by older lesbians to bring the violence onto herself (“that is why this hate crime is happening to them”).

*Dineo (black, 30): I'm staying in Khatlehong and there are older lesbians. Older lesbians they will tell you they won't mix with [name of a person]. They won't mix with [name] because they are smoking, that this is why hate crime is happening to them, because they are exposing themselves to the community. And them, they stay in the house and do all things. They chill, they don't go out, and that's what I am trying to say.*

*Kekeletso (black, 26): Ja, and probably the younger ones are more of feminists than the older ones*

*Dineo: Ja, they like toyi-toying and them they don't.*

*Kekeletso: Expressing themselves and, you know, they still, they want to be accepted by the community and the older ones are just like... (FG3)*

Both Dineo and Kekeletso portray younger lesbians as politicised in that they assume political identifications (as “feminists”) and practices (“toyi-toying”) with which, according to the speakers, older lesbians dis-identify. Below, Kekeletso elaborates how older lesbians view younger lesbians as a public danger to both themselves and others because of their perceived political associations.

*Kekeletso (black, 26): I feel like the younger lesbians don't know the seriousness of hate crimes and homophobia...Going to the taverns you know that it's not safe, but we continue going there. We never take our life seriously. And when it comes to older lesbians they feel like – 'Stop going to the marches, stop toyi-toying, you're exposing yourself. Now they will see that you're lesbians, with your tshirt, with your messages. Now you become visible to the community and now we're not safe when you're here because already people know that [name] is the activist and feminist and speaking about the issues of lesbians.'* (FG3)

In resisting the position of the 'old lesbian', whose age and class status is viewed as inhibitive of political action, Bongi asserts a desire to be "where trouble is".

*Bongi: We will not act like the old lesbians who decide to stay in their homes, buy houses somewhere where they know the community won't be talking too much. They don't even know the neighbour. So, that's what old lesbians do: they stay away from trouble. But we want to be there, where trouble is, because that's our homes and we have no money to buy houses. Yet I am sure when we're old as well and have money we are gonna go buy houses somewhere.* (FG1)

For Bongi, the older lesbian's class and age positions enable her to remain outside of violence and its politics (i.e. to "stay away from "trouble"). As an embodiment of a propertied domesticity ("who decide to stay in their homes"), the older lesbian keeps her sexuality with the private domain ("won't be talking too much"). Bongi contrasts this domestication to the vulnerability of the younger, poorer lesbian who inhabits the place of "trouble". (See Section 5.2.1.2 for more on the gender and sexual contents of "trouble" in constructing the cause of violence). Bongi appears ambivalent about her own political locatedness inside/outside "trouble". Whilst she dis-identifies with the secure, private and depoliticised older lesbian, she also expresses an aspirant identification with that position and its classed and aged privileges ("when we have houses" and "when we're old"). Similarly, for other participants, occupying a middle-class status works against political activity. For Tania and Nadia below, class mobility produces a comfort that renders political engagement unnecessary.

*Tania: And now, because there's more people, and more supermarkets have started, and things like that, there's little cliques. Because when things are hard, people stick together and they'll fight together, no matter who you are, what colour you are, what gender you are, people will stick together. But the minute things get easier, you start drifting apart, and then you've got cliques, and little bitching going on. And I think that's exactly what happens here. We're comfortable. We accept it. It's fine. (FG2)*

*Nadia: I think the fact that people sit back and not making that move is because we are too comfortable. We have our own, what is like softball practice and things like that. (FG2)*

Both women infer that middle-classness depoliticises identity. This is further expressed by Dineo, below, in contrasting the activist lesbian to the lesbian who retreats to the “suburbs”.

*Dineo: For me to live in, or even to say I want to relocate maybe and move in the suburbs and get away from the community because the community is very violent and abusive towards women in general and stuff ... but still, I am not going to be making any difference because it's like I'm running away from the reality of what is happening around lesbian women and for me, as an agent of change, it scares me, it really scares me. (FG3)*

In taking up a position of political agency (“an agent of change”), Dineo expresses both a fear to be in, and a resistance to leave, the place of violence that demands action. She negotiates this tension by expressing her fears, whilst also affirming her desire to effect change, in that very context i.e. to make a “difference”. The desire to act, through political identification, is likewise expressed by Bonggi and Puleng below.

*Bonggi: I am thinking about what happened to Pumeza. Because she went home, you know her safe space, but then the man, he kicked the door. So, we need to take those things and make it ours. And then I think, we'll also think better. And then by having you in your community, and people now know that are part of [name of activist organisation], obviously there will be that respect because they know you are belonging somewhere if something happens to you... (FG1)*

*Puleng: For me, I could say I am a born feminist. I hate being not being equally with a man. We are all human beings so for me being an activist is more of equality. I want us to be equal. I don't want these patriarchal norms to take charge of my life and stuff. (FG3)*

For Bongi, political organising creates a sense of belonging and respect that works against the prospect of violence, whilst for Puleng, “feminist” and “activist” positionalities enable her to resist patriarchal norms.

In sum, race, class and age discourses are mobilised to either dissuade or affirm participants’ associations with political activism. Political resistance to violence is strongly linked to the figure of the young, black, poor lesbian. In discourse, she embodies both vulnerability to violence and an agentic engagement with it. As in other studies, this suggests that taking up an activist identity serves as a source of perceived power and agency (Ussher and Mooney-Somers, 2000). The assertion of the activist subject position might be thought of as a strategy of reversal<sup>251</sup> (Foucault, 1998) in that it productively reworks the dominant victim-status of the lesbian and the notion of the individuated subject whose agency is reduced to personal acts of resistance.

### **7.2.3 “Don't put yourself in a vulnerable position”: Feminised self-care<sup>252</sup>**

Another modality through which participants express agency against violence finds form in a discourse of feminised self-care. This is also a prominent theme in the institutional texts, as discussed in Section 7.1.2 in regard to disciplinary modes by which women are expected to take responsibility and make choices so as to avoid men’s violence. Technologies of gender that render subjects compliant to feminine disciplines (de Lauretis, 1987) are employed in participants’ talk to assert an agentic selfhood considered viable for female gendered subjects to cope with violence and its implications.

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<sup>251</sup> The principle of reversal refers to the subversion or over-turning of a particular inscription in discourse. Foucault (1998) gave the example of this in how homosexuality, through a reverse discourse, is able “to speak in its own behalf” (p. 101).

<sup>252</sup> Here I draw on and elaborate Brown’s concept of “self-care”, as a mode of neo-liberal governmentality that centres the individual’s capacity and responsibility to provide for their own needs, ambitions and protections (2003, p. 6). Self-care, through its regulatory and depoliticising operations, renders the individual fully responsible for their actions. I add ‘feminised’ to Brown’s formulation so as to emphasise how femininity, in itself a disciplining project (Bartky, 1990), works alongside and through wider technologies of self-care.

*Bontle: I have this conversation with my partner, that there are three options. It's either we can fight with the police and try to make them understand that this is a serious matter, this is a hate crime, and you are discriminated against solely because of who you are and who you love - that's number one. Number two, we can either think, 'Ok, we're stronger than you, we'll have a fight with you. If you try to rape me, I'll try to cut your penis off or bite it off': that's number two. Number three, we can either educate us, as lesbians, that you're not as strong as him and don't think that you are as strong as him because once you get into that mentality that you can challenge him and you can have a fight with him, that's when you put yourself in a very vulnerable position. Don't go to the shebeens at twelve o'clock at night and walk back at home alone...*

*Mandy: Yes, exactly.*

*Bontle: It does not make sense for any woman to do that because for that you're not gonna be raped and killed because you're a lesbian, you're gonna be raped and killed because you're a woman...*

*Ilze: Because you're a woman.*

*Mandy: Yes. (FG4)*



Bontle denounces fighting back as a strategy to stop violence by naturalising men's violence and strength, and women's weakness and vulnerability. She does so to legitimate a position in which lesbians learn and accept their subordinate status as the 'weaker sex' and, accordingly, deploy precautionary measures so as *not* to be "raped and killed".<sup>253</sup> Drawing on the discourse of feminised self-care, Bontle assigns to the lesbian, as a woman, the regulatory and disciplinary practices of hegemonic femininity (Collins, 2004; de Lauretis, 1987). Bontle's statement also has a corrective function in that women's non-conformity to self-care modalities are rendered senseless ("it does not make any sense"), providing justification for the violence against them ("you're gonna be raped and killed"). Likewise, feminine self-regulation is mobilised in the interchange below where Ilze talks about how she aligns her bodily movements and appearances with dominant feminine prescripts as a way to protect herself from homophobia.

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<sup>253</sup> This formulation also draws on a wider discourse of rape in which it "can only be feared, or legally repaired, not fought" (Marcus, 1992, p. 387).

*Ilze: Okay, we've got the laws and they are protecting us. But it doesn't stop victimising, it doesn't stop discrimination at work. It doesn't stop that. At the end of the day, it still goes about how you portray yourself. We are all women. We are not built the same, but we are all women. So if you can try, although I'm big and I've been confused for a man many times in my life as well, I try to stay, although I look butch, I try to stay a bit more, but I like to be a woman. You understand? So I try to be more feminine.*

*Mandy: So before anything you are a woman.*

*Ilze: Yes.*

*Mandy: Exactly, before anything you are a woman.*

*Ilze: So don't – I don't say don't – but try to walk like a woman. I struggle with that but, the straight community, they think if you're a lesbian you're trying to be a man you know. And that's the first thing they say, 'Ah you want to be a man. You wanna be a man'. (FG5)*

Ilze's reassertion of her femininity ("I try to be more feminine") serves to mitigate the stigma of being lesbian and therefore 'unfeminine'. Making herself appear more feminine renders the queerness of Ilze's ("butch") body – a sign of her sexual deviance – less obvious. Here Ilze evidences how, by deploying a socially acceptable feminine demeanour, she actively demonstrates that she is not like a man (Collins, 2004). The discourse of feminised self-care exposes how lesbian visibility and recognisability are navigated so as to diminish vulnerability to sexual othering and its violent manifestations. As Mason (2002) also finds, how lesbians manage the visibility of their bodies is a key dimension in negotiating their safety. The discourse also asserts that certain kinds of bodies, over others, facilitate social acceptability and value in accordance with the disciplinary operations of normative femininity (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993).

In one counter-narrative that displaces the responsibility for ending violence, Dineo contests feminine impositions and their regulatory effects on women.

*Dineo: Us as women, me I'm tired of hearing that society is telling us that we shouldn't wear mini-skirts because we'll get raped. I want the society to tell the boy not to rape. (FG3)*

In asserting that she "want[s] society to tell the boy not to rape" Dineo disrupts the hetero-patriarchal rape narrative in which women are blamed for rape (Gavey, 2004; Lamb, 1996)

whilst men's sexual entitlement remains unfettered. Her statement denounces strategies of feminised self-care and their constraining effects of women's gender expression and practice.

In the discourse of feminised self-care, possibilities for lesbians to act against violence rely on normative gender binaries and the disciplining of femininity. In centring technologies of selfhood (Foucault, 1990) as a means to fend off violence, the discourse reiterates lesbians' gendered vulnerability to, and responsibility for, violence. Here the locus of political agency is firmly fixed in women's individual conduct as a primary resource to diminish violence. This resonates with Mason's (2002) findings that lesbians adopt self-management strategies to negotiate their safety from violence. As a discourse of empowerment, feminised self-care offers agentic possibility. However, it relies on the valorisation of the individual, and obfuscates social context and power and the imperative to challenge these politically. In doing so, it obscures the myriad contextual factors that shape women's actions. As shown, in some instances, participants up-end the depoliticising and gendering effects of feminised self-care modalities. This is reflective of how, as Mehta (1999) finds, women both comply with and resist the gender fear that is central to patriarchal discourses of gender violence and the production of femininity.

#### **7.2.4 "They see a normal person": Homonormative aspirations**

A series of aspirational subject positions within a broader schema of homonormativity are conceived of as strategies to diminish the prospect of violence. In the exchange below, Jane inserts lesbians into a conception of "normality" which she constructs through particular race and class idealisations.

*Jane: I think that sometimes, depending on how one wants people to understand what it means to be a lesbian, and to allow them to consider that it's not okay to attack a lesbian, they need to be able to relate to a lesbian. And when they see normality – a school run, people just doing their shopping – then it almost doesn't give people the excuse to treat human beings differently.*

*Sophie: But how do they see normality if they're in townships?*

*Jane: Well, that's another conversation all together, do you know what I mean? That also has to do with, you know, the social infrastructure here where government allows townships to remain isolated and, you know, broken apart. I don't have an answer for you, you know, I'm not a poor black lesbian in a township, and I can't speak on behalf of them, but what I can say, is that if somebody tries to put lesbians in a box and calls them animals or monsters or crazy, or, you know, crazy feminists, and they see a normal person who has children, a normal person who carries a job, a normal person who looks after their lives, it's very difficult to justify that kind of violence or aggression towards people. (FG2)*

Through a homonormalising discourse, Jane argues that a lesbian's domesticated, parental and consumer statuses are the measures of her as "a normal person". According to Jane, if one inhabits these positions it enables others to "relate", and as a consequence, to "consider that it's not okay to attack a lesbian". The corollary of this is that in embodying and demonstrating these valorised social positions, violence against lesbians is rendered unjustifiable. Sophie challenges Jane by questioning how the "townships" is positioned within this logic, thus revealing the raced and classed features of the 'being normal' narrative that Jane espouses. In response this Jane reconfirms her racialised conception of normalcy by describing townships as "isolated" and "broken apart". At the same time, she distances herself from "the black lesbian" with which those descriptions are associated. The homonormalisations Jane invokes, map onto wider conceptions of whiteness as a universalising and normalising representation of humanity (i.e. of being normal), in relation to which the racialised Other (in this case, the black lesbian) is subordinated (Dotollo, 2014; Fanon, 2001). The effect here is to situate the racialised Other as *contraire* to the desired homonormative state that Jane affirms. Jane constructs whiteness, middle-classness and motherhood as gateway identities for the social inclusion and assimilation of particular lesbian subjectivities as a tactic to diminish violence against those subjects. In the extract below, Jane delineates her own political agency in facing homophobia.

*Jane: I remember recently, an ad[vertising] agency did these ads where you had a glass heart and a bullet shooting towards it and there was one ad that came out, and the idea was that you know this person was shattered after they heard this news. And one such ad came out and it said, 'Dad, I'm gay'. And I thought, fuck you. So I sent an email there and I said, 'Listen to me*



*very carefully', I said, 'I'm a mother of two children.' I didn't say I'm gay, but I said, 'I'm going to ensure that ever single product that you market is going to be boycotted.' And I did step on the toes of the Constitution, and I said 'What the hell are you doing, suggesting that, "Oh, Dad, I have cancer" is the same as, "Oh, Dad I'm gay?"' It was like some PR [public relations], Joburg, all coked-up team thinking 'Let's target the mass market that fears those words and tap into it.' Threatening that company, you know, they eventually apologised. (FG2)*

Jane's actions are grounded in an assertion of her statuses as mother and consumer. She deploys consumerist power ("boycott") to resist social stigma (the "bad news") of gayness. This suggests that Jane considers her class and maternal identifications - and their associated powers and privileges - as more politically enabling than her sexual identity, which, in the event as described, she chose to conceal. Mandy, below, also sets an assimilatory discourse into motion by denouncing queer-only spaces and affirming the integration of queer subjectivities into heteronorms ("normal situations").

*Mandy: Lesbian people or gay people – however you want to title yourself – should learn to be comfortable with themselves as well as in public places. Meaning, we shouldn't limit ourselves to go into strictly lesbian or gay places. We should make ourselves a force to be reckoned with and go into normal situations because that it also another way of moving in dynamically. Educating those people and making them accept us as a norm, if we go to normal places. Why must we go to a lesbian place? (FG5)*

Mandy's downplaying of queer difference is a further elaboration of homonormalisation and its enforcement of gender, race and class dominances (Haritaworn et al., 2008).

Through deploying a series of normatively privileged subject locations and assimilatory tactics, participants assert their agency against homophobia-related prejudice, stigma and violence. They do so here through a discourse of homonormativity that reiterates its attendant race, gender and class ascendancies.

### 7.2.5 “Make them understand”: Educating others

Educating the public, and men in particular, features prominently in participants’ talk on how to tackle violence. In the exchange below education is promoted as a “subtle” and “civilised” response to people’s lack of knowledge and understanding.

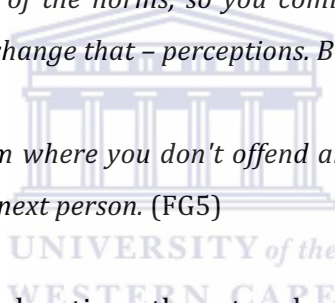
*Mandy: My approach is actually very different. I would listen – it's not my conversation so I don't think I need to entertain it, but if in the conversation – yes, I would leave them to joke, and I would also very sarcastically make a joke and bring it back to where it should be. Because, you must understand, what people do not understand they tend to criticise...*

*Ilze: No for sure, ja.*

*Mandy: And judge. So the only way they really get to know and understand things is if you educate them. So, out there, they are basically children who are blind by society that has filled them with their perceptions of the norms, so you coming into their space is not easy – it's intimidating, so you need to change that – perceptions. But do it in a subtle, civilised...*

*Ilze: Yes, way that you...*

*Mandy: You know, a platform where you don't offend anyone: where someone doesn't offend you and you don't offend the next person. (FG5)*



Mandy draws on a discourse of educating others to advance a politics that doesn’t “offend anyone”. The effect of this is to position educational activities as alternatives to other forms of response that are, by implication, *not* subtle and unoffending. In centring “perceptions”, the discourse draws on individualised and decontextualised explanations for homophobia-related violence. It also situates the queer subject as an obligatory educator (“so **you** need to change that”).<sup>254</sup> Mandy provides an infantilising account of those who “do not understand” and are therefore targets for the “[c]ivilised” (civilising) mission of education. This dovetails with the educating ignorance discourse, as represented in the institutional texts and previously detailed in Section 7.1.1.3. Similarly, the educating others discourse intersects with wider narratives of Western modernity in which the primitive racial Other

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<sup>254</sup> Here the queer is charged with the responsibility to educate others, including the perpetrators of violence against them. An example of this is seen in the finding of a criminal case involving the assault of a young, gay black man in 2007. The court order stipulated that all three of the men convicted of the crime were to attend “the awareness programmes of the LGBT group” (Lewin, Williams and Thomas, 2013, p. 12). The said group had acted as *amicus curiae* in the matter. The court sentence placed the responsibility for educating the perpetrators of homophobia-related violence squarely with LGBT people themselves.

is to be transformed into a knowing subject (Goldberg, 2000), in this case through education.

*Soraya: I honestly find – well, maybe just in the groups I am around, or that I see – I find creating awareness more effective than big, out there protest, and activism things. We need to go out there and spread the word. I actually find that just creating awareness, subtly, like in the groups that you're in, whether it be through emails or articles, newspapers, or things that you hand out to read, I actually find that you get more. (FG2)*

As with Mandy above, Soraya sees “creating awareness” as a “subtle” action and thus preferable to more politicised practices and identifications - such as those associated with “protest” and “activism”. Soraya too centres the role of the queer in educating others through “spread[ing] the word”. She asserts a homonormative discourse to advance the idea that queers who depict “normality” reduce prejudice against them. Both Mandy and Soraya align themselves with the educating others discourse and deploy it to denounce and distance themselves from political activists and activism.

Educating others also requires that the lesbian be known and seen by others. The extract below sets up an equivalence between being HIV positive and being lesbian. According to Nhlanhla, both are stigmatised identities that can garner greater social acceptance by declaring themselves, and thus becoming socially recognisable and understood.

*Nhlanhla: That goes back to the issue of understanding as well. I hate...I don't like referring to our issues as being the HIV pandemic but it's basically almost the same struggle. Cos at first if you came out as being HIV, you were killed, as much as we are being killed now. I think as time went on people started to understand it more, and now they're more accepting of it. I think as well with us, if people were to be made aware of the issues we are going through – not only hate crimes or corrective rape, or whatever that we are facing – but make them understand what is a lesbian, what does being a lesbian mean, what are we about, I think people will be more accepting and they will be more understanding. (FG3)*

Here the responsibility is placed on the stigmatised identity (i.e. the lesbian and the person living with HIV) to render herself identifiable and classifiable. Accordingly, her social intelligibility demands an identity disclosure, as the necessary basis for social recognition and acceptance. This discursive formulation draws on a confessional discourse. It is in the confession, according to Foucault (1998), that the truth of the homosexual self is produced and disciplined.

As already discussed, men are identified as the perpetrators of violence against lesbians in discourse, and they are also the primary targets for education within the discourse of educating others. In the exchange below the lesbian-as-educator position is bolstered by a narrative of motherhood through which women's role in "changing men" and having boy children is both idealised and naturalised.

*Taryn: The perpetrators of violence are generally men no matter who it is. Boys that grow up to be violent men were, were - that's how they were raised. That's how they've been taught. That's the currency they've been given to spend. If we become more proactive in changing the men that we are making.*

*Tania: I propose we all have ten children. Ja, we have to have sons, lots of sons.*

*Nadia: Send them out there.*

*Tania: Absolutely.*

*Nadia: Spread the love.*

*Tania: Spread the love. (FG2)*

Here women's procreative function is affirmed as a means through which lesbians can (literally) make men less violent.

In a dissenting move, some participants trouble the idea that education is an effective strategy against violence. In this respect, Lulama and Carmel both express their doubts about the efficacy of educational strategies by highlighting people's resistance to "wanting to know" or to "understand".

*Lulama: People are not educated. But at the same time they don't want to get educated because if they wanted to, I thought hate crime would be better by now because they have been educated most of the time. I think last year, there were many gatherings, discussions, but*

*people will not change their thinking. So I think the education is a lack, because they don't want to know. (FG1)*

*Carmel: But then you get these people that's just one-set minded, their minds are just set on one thing - you are a women, you're suppose to be with a man. So it's difficult sometimes. Everybody understands it differently and you must be in that person's shoes to actually understand what it's actually all about. And it's not always easy to explain to people. They just understand what they want to understand and it depends on the situation as well. I have come across a lot of people that just don't want to understand but I am who I am and that's it. I will explain it to you to a certain extent. If you don't want to understand, it's fine. (FG5)*

Gesturing to how power is exercised between knowing subjects, both women describe how positionalities that resist “chang[ing] their thinking” or their “understand[ing]” expose the limits of education. Further contradictions in the discourse are reflected in the exchange below.

*Andiswa: I don't know how we can make the community understand. We must make them not to accept us, but to understand. But how can we make someone understand who doesn't want to listen?*

*Lulama: How we are going to make them?*

*Fundiswa: Make them listen! Scream until they shut the hell up and listen to you.*

*Velisa: Scream if you can.*

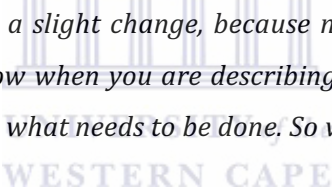
*Andiswa: So as lesbians we have to scream. (FG1)*

In responding to the limits of education that Andiswa expresses (“how can we make someone understand who doesn’t want to listen?”), Fundiswa adopts a confrontational position against those who don’t “want to listen”. She claims agency by positioning herself as angry and resistant (signified by the “scream”), and, in doing so, she takes up a politics that contests the “subtle” and acquiescent actions made available in the discourse of educating others.

Discreet and non-confrontational educational activities work to instantiate a reformist politics, whilst an opposing politics of resistance makes imaginable a more strident and confrontational response to violence by lesbians themselves.

### 7.2.6 “Why should I wait to be raped?”: The limits of law

Law is a knowledge-power regime through which a queer politics of recognition is dominantly articulated.<sup>255</sup> Moreover, law operates as a master frame through which violence against lesbians is recognised and engaged in South Africa. Accordingly, the law operates as a master frame through which to name and respond to homophobia-related violence. This is dominantly represented in the institutional texts (see Section 7.1.1), particularly in the construct of the ‘hate crime’. The extracts below provide some examples of how the law, and the Constitution in particular, is put to use to enable actions against discrimination and violence.



*Fundiswa: So I think there is a slight change, because now, yes the Constitution is there and even the police, now they know when you are describing a hate crime, then they will see that this is a hate crime and this is what needs to be done. So when you go to the police station, they jump up. (FG1)*

*Taryn: And we explained and we said to her, basically, you've got - it's your constitutional right. If they do that, tell them it's unconstitutional. And then, and then when they don't know what that is, take them to the teacher and ask the teacher to explain what the Constitution... (FG2)*

*Jane: And I did step on the toes of the Constitution, and I said 'What the hell are you doing suggesting that 'Oh, Dad, I have cancer' is the same as 'Oh, Dad, I'm gay'? (FG2)*

Rather than further detailing here how legal discourses enable queer politics, I wish to focus on how participants problematise the law as strategy to curb violence. By way of example, Thando points to the limits of constitutional protections by contrasting these to the materiality of being lesbian (“just living”).

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<sup>255</sup> Constitutional protections provide the foundational premise on which rights claims for LGBTI people have been asserted in the post-apartheid period. See Section 2.5.1 for more on this.

*Thando: But then there is that gap from the Constitution and what's happening in society. I mean the Constitution can only help you when you are taking a legal stand. But our lives are not always legal. We are not always trying to be doing something. We are just living. (FG4)*

In stating that “our lives are not always legal” Thando signals how a narrow reading of the queer subject as solely defined in terms of the law is constraining.<sup>256</sup> Her mention of “not always trying to be doing something” is suggestive of how the realisation of legal protection requires some form of *doing* in order to be given effect. In further expounding the limits of the law, S’bu below expresses how the materialisation of constitutional protection is reliant on the presence of discrimination.

*S’bu: So, I can’t really rely on the Constitution, you know? Outside, people might say, ok South Africa has won their battle and therefore what more can you do? But that’s really nothing. I wouldn’t even want the Constitution there - I’d much prefer people to be accepting than there be a regulation that says don’t discriminate lesbians. I mean if they know then why should it be there? It’s redundant. (FG5)*

S’bu indicates that the absence of discrimination would be preferable to a law that seeks to bring about that absence. This references how identity-based discriminations are coded in law, and thus naturalised by it as a contingency for the law to then act against such discriminations. Thandi below also makes the link between law and the requisite presence of queer injury, a theme also evident in the institutional texts (see Section 7.1.1.2).

*Thando: It [the law] helps you when you've already been violated. Like I first have to wait, and then after it happens I'll be like, 'oh, no, I didn't get this job because he found out I'm engaged to my fiancé who is a woman'. So I feel like it's late, it becomes too late. If I need the Constitution to fight for what I want it means I was actually in a situation probably where I was discriminated against, which for me I feel like, wow, why should I wait to be raped or beaten or, you know weird comments said about me, for me to be like, 'Ok, I'll go the teacher*

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<sup>256</sup> This utterance gestures to the historical centrality of law reform in post-apartheid gay and lesbian politics, as a strategy to advance queer rights and justice. See Section 2.5 for more on this.

*and say this thing happened? It does happen, that sense that I can actually get some justice if it's possible. But I want people not to – I don't want to even be in that situation in the first place, where I feel unsafe. (FG4)*

Thando resists the notion that queer injury should be a precondition for gaining agency through law. She talks against the idea that one has to first experience discrimination in order to claim rights, protection and justice. In doing so, she rejects the law's reliance on the presumption of injury as the basis for extending its protection (Brown, 1995). Thando's resistance to these constraints of law intersect with how legal discourse has regulatory effects on gender and sexual performativity (Robson, 2002). Whilst some participants expose the limits of the law, at the same time legal discourses are deployed to resist and desist homophobia-related violence.

In sum, this section has explored the discursive resources participants enjoy to articulate political agency in the face of violence. Divergent forms of agentic possibility are put forward in varied accounts of a politics of violence against lesbians. The place of "trouble" is the place of both violence and its associated politics. It is a place claimed by some, disavowed by others, and dominantly configured around the black, young lesbian as the embodiment of politicised and public resistances to violence. This is a subject position that some refute and other claim. In contrast, the discourse of educating others produces a comparatively docile and more compliant political subjectivity that, for some, is viewed as a more desirable position from which to act. Through multiple othering processes, participants negotiate their political identifications in relation to a lesbian Other. For many black and young participants, this Other lesbians is a depoliticised suburbanite residing in a classed and raced comfort zone that immunises her from violence and its attendant politics. For some white and coloured participants, the politically active lesbian, marked as young and black, represents the domain of violence and the responses it demands. Race, gender, age and class privileges characterise the kinds of actions against violence made imaginable in discourse, in relation to which participants move variously in and out of identification. This illustrates the extent to which participants' own (dis)identifications are embroiled in the social locations in which they are differentially situated, and from where they navigate violence and its impacts.



Participants both reinforce and resist homonormalising discourses in their constructions of ways to combat homophobia-related violence. Some seek to adapt or regulate their gendered behaviour by deploying feminised self-care strategies. By contrast, others assert political positions that resist the normalisation of gender violence and the regulatory practices that constrain their subjectivities.

In conclusion, the discourse themes presented in this chapter articulate the divergent possibilities available to act against homophobia-related violence, in ways that are more, or less, politicising, contextualising and historicising of the violence in question. In both Part 1 and Part 2 women are dominantly positioned as having to take individual responsibility to prevent violence. Consequently, their compliance with normative gender and sexual codes, within a neoliberal logic of self-care, are foregrounded. Here the lesbian achieves feminine respectability by assuming responsibility for violence. These individualistic and politically compliant actions articulate with wider discourses of late capitalism in which subjectivities are “made docile” by individualism (Rancier, 1995, p. 40). However, as Foucault has argued, the cultivation of care for life in the context of a disciplinary society is in itself a form of political response (1990).

Law and the state are positioned as central to addressing violence. Through a discourse of protectionism that relies on the victim/perpetrator dyad, claims are made to the law and state apparatus to uphold the legal and moral (dis)order that violence troubles. The emphasis on legal remedy produces a law and order politics that positions homophobia-related violence as exceptional, drawing on wider framings of violent crime as accelerating, and the consequent need for enhanced punishment strategies (Moran, 2004). Such a perspective effaces the contextual dynamics from which violence is spawned as a symptom of the malaise of current social and political orders. Instead, through modalities of crime and punishment, homophobia-related violence is confined to the realm of hateful acts that require punitive responses. In contrast, activist discourses bring racial and economic inequalities to bear on how violence is to be understood and acted against. Here representations of black queer exclusions spotlight the multiple injustices that are imbricated in homophobia-related violence. The effect of this is to configure the violence that black queers face as constituting a contemporary and historical struggle against intersecting experiences of domination and exclusion. These narratives of struggle produce

politicised subject positions that enable more radical possibilities for the encounter with violence. Across the texts, a discourse of education makes available routes of action that are predominantly underpinned by colonial discourses and their depoliticising force. These work against a politics that engages the wider contexts and conditions which continue to render racially and economically marginalised queers at increased risk of violence.

I now turn to the concluding chapter where I further explore the implications of the analysis and findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 for what might be seen, known and done about queer identities, violence and politics.



## CHAPTER 8

### VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIANS AND THE PARADOX OF (IM)POSSIBILITY

That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility. (Butler, 2004, p. 3)

By way of conclusion, and drawing on the preceding analyses, this chapter critically reflects on the political horizons brought into view by violence against lesbians. What conceivable futures are charted for how one might think about and act against violence? What prospects exist in discourse for dismantling the normative dynamics of identity, power and politics that provide violence with such succour? By way of conclusion, I single out for critical discussion, a number of overarching tropes that crisscross the findings. I explore their implications for the pursuit of queerer forms of justice and freedom in times of violence.

To recap, the study set out to investigate the discourse of violence against lesbians and configurations of identity and politics in (en)countering it in South Africa. I have sought to attend to the relations of power that operate in and through discourse in ways that are constitutive, normalising, regulatory, as well as productive and resistant. I considered the relationship amongst the emerging discourses; the discursive strategies they provide and the interests these advance or foreclose; as well the knowledge-power effects of discourse in context. The themes presented provide pockets of meaning in which truth, power and subjectivities are configured around homophobia-related violence, as well as how these configurations are discursively reproduced, resisted and reworked. I have discussed how certain identity positions and the ways of being and doing these enable, are affirmed and valorised, whilst others are undermined or subordinated in context-bound ways. These positions and the powers in which they are embroiled come to animate how violence against lesbians is (un)known, (un)seen, and (un)spoken. As a site of epistemological struggle, the emerging truth about homophobia-related violence is a contested discursive field. It is characterised by contradictory and competing knowledge claims about the conditions, causes, consequences are 'cures' for violence. These claims reveal the ideologies,

structures, relations and representations of sexual, gender, race and class formations. The question of, and conceivable answer to, violence against lesbians spotlight the operations of the historical and contemporary, local and global, identity planes through which power is forged. Violence against lesbians is neither just about lesbians nor just about violence. It is about the distance and proximity to violence and the queer inclusions and exclusions these mark. It concerns both resistance to and reproduction of apartheid rationalities, as well as democracy's destabilisation of these. It is also about recognition and misrecognition and the contradictory routes these cut through the prospect of queer life in post-apartheid South Africa. Moreover, the emerging politics of violence against lesbians is a pressure point in which strategies of both regulation and revolution, discipline and defiance, take form. These draw into political orbit how identity is being transformed, and how too it is deployed in essentialising ways. The politics of violence against queers is not only a politics of sexuality. It is a point of confluence where sets of political interests and positionalities vie for ascendance at a particular historical moment. Such violence and how it is spoken, exposes the voyeuristic consumption of queers, as well as queer consumption in an increasingly globalised world. Most stridently, though, violence against lesbians exposes the paradoxes of queer subjectivities at the present conjuncture. It is to these paradoxes that I now turn.

## **8.1 Marking queer differentiation**

The discourse of violence against lesbians maps a story of differentiation, both amongst queers themselves and in their relationship to others. These differentiations have race, gender, sexual and class content which, together and apart, generate and maintain particular views of what constitutes queer life on the one hand, and queer death on the other. In some respects, these co-constituting narratives are feverishly reproduced in the discourses analysed. In other respects, they are discursively betrayed through a politics of refusal that, in making its claim on the viability of certain lives, performatively inaugurates that viability. I will now briefly outline these paradoxical constructions of queer livability, and then pose how a politics of refusal might unsettle its logics in productive ways.

Homophobia-related violence establishes a set of social relations within a system of human precarity. Matebeni (2014, p. 188) asserts that “current gay politics in South Africa has resulted in a polarised image” of the white gay/lesbian on the one hand and the black gay/lesbian on the other (Matebeni, 2014, p.188). This image speaks perhaps to the truncation of queer politics as represented by these constituting figures. I would further argue that the politics of violence is a mode through which this polarisation is amplified. At the same time, violence and its representations offer the resources through which the “image” itself is stabilised and destabilised, formed and reformed. As the findings have shown, discourses of homophobia-related violence constitute exclusionary practices that code binaries of gender, race, class and sexuality. In doing so, they codify essentialist notions of queer/straight, white/black and rich/poor dualisms that reactivate apartheid and colonial rationalities. By installing an over-deterministic view of queerness and its politics, these dualisms obscure the contradictions of lesbian subjectivity at the intersection with other identity dimensions. Despite these constraints, the ‘polarised image’ tells one of many truths, namely that the figure of the poor and black queer co-articulates with death, and the white rich queer with life. It is this truth that the image captures, producing a bifurcated political imaginary in which certain lives are closed off from habitability whilst others remain in ascendance. As Das (2007) contends, “[t]he blurring between what is human and what is not human shades into the blurring over what is life and what is not life”(p. 16). I want to suggest that central to the field of meaning in which violence against lesbians circulates, is the question of what constitutes a human life. Can that life be a queer one and, if so, of which kind?

### **8.1.1 Spectacles of suffering**

Discursivities of black subjectivity and suffering threaded through the articulations of violence presented. I argue that the spectacularisation of black lesbians situates these subjectivities outside a dominant conception of livability. The spectacle has become, in one sense, a form of politics. I am referring here to how the image of the always already vilified body of the black queer is mobilised in discourse. The spectacle conveys the idea that it is precisely because the black queer is an unviable life that it suffers. It is also embedded in enduring colonial and post-colonial scripts that sexualise and fetishise the black female

Other. But how does the spectacle of the black queer produce its own invisibility? Hypervisibility in one moment instantiates queer grievability within the post-apartheid nation's narrative. In the same moment, however, particular dimensions of queer subjectivity, and the violence it encounters, are unseen by the glare of the spectacle. This unseenness is partly captured in Guy Debord's (1994) definition of 'spectacle', as a set of social relations mediated by images that are "both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production" (para. 4) and that "serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system" (para. 6). From this perspective, the constitution of the lesbian through the spectacularisation of violence substantiates and sustains dominant social modes that produce her, in the first instance, as a sexual, racial and gendered Other.

The exceptionalism of violence against lesbians, buoyed by the spectacle, legitimises the naturalness of homophobia, heteropatriarchy and gendered vulnerability, whilst dislocating these from the other modes of violent othering (based on gender, class and race) through which they are reiterated. In this way, as Mason argues (2002), the spectacle of homophobia-related violence is a panopticism that ensures the perpetuation of power organised around heterosexualising, racialising and gendering norms. Within these tropes, the black lesbian is discursively configured as a life without value. Precarious. Expendable. Consumed. This dehumanising figuration positions her outside the symbolic notion of personhood, which Butler (2006, 2010) describes as the embodied location of human livability, survivability and social value. This signifies the reduction of the subaltern queer to a "hyperbolic suffering and testimonial, in a way which bolsters the very structures which exclude them, or others like them, from full humanity" (Haritaworn, cited in Tauqir, Petzen, Haritaworn, Ekine, Bracke, Lambie, ... Douglas, 2011, p. 178). Within these terms, the violated lesbian is rendered a knowable subject through a hypervisibilisation that blinds others ways of seeing, being and being seen. As Crenshaw cautions, "[t]he effort to politicise violence against women will do little to address Black and other minority women if their images are retained simply to magnify the problem rather than to humanise their experiences" (1991, p. 1261). Investments in this spectacular visibility keep the attention concentrated in one place such that abjection, through spectrality, is discursively instituted.

An articulation of violence as being *against* lesbians overshadows other forms of 'againstness', thereby concealing how susceptibility to violence comes to be differently constituted within complex social milieus. Violence hinged to a single identity (that of its target) erases how processes of racism, heterosexism and economic exclusion are implicated in its workings. The discursive representation of violence presented, are, as I have argued, largely unmoored from the structural and ideological legacies of colonialism and apartheid and their post-colonial continuities, and how these render queer lives precarious in contemporary times. At the same time, violence as a political field exposes an assemblage of queer visibilities and resistances, thus making room for a fuller and thicker articulation of queer identifications as intersectional, diverse and internally contested.

### **8.1.2 Queer ascendancies**

Violence against lesbians is a discursive surface for cultural dominances and their resistances. Accordingly, it does the work of race, gender, sexuality and class hierarchisation, both for queer subjectivities and in their position within dominant social orders. Here discourse is mobilised to make racial, sexual, class and gendered attributions to subjects. In particular, the discourse of sexuality articulates with a politics of race in homophobia-related violence, as a knowledge regime. In this respect, one of the more strident themes to emerge in the study is the blackwashing homophobia: both its source and its 'solution'. This discourse normalises the queer, black youth as the target of violence and its attendant politics. It hides whiteness and its entanglements in the conditions of violence, whilst exposing black lives to the glare of the public gaze. The black lesbian is marked as a public life, whilst the white lesbian life is concealed in the safety and privacy of suburbia and thus coded as respectable, privileged and prior to violation. Through these racial re-inscriptions, black and white lesbian subjectivities are demarcated in closer or farther proximity, respectively, to the reality of, and response to, violence. The discourse of violence also distinguishes identity locations such that safety is marked as white and middle-class; and danger and violence configured as black and economically marginalised. The absence of a discourse of violence against white lesbians operates alongside assertions of whiteness, and white femininity in particular, as being located outside of violence. The attribution of homophobia-related violence to black lesbians (as victims) and black men (as

perpetrators) reinstates apartheid's racialising narratives. In this way, violence distinguishes those subjects in ascendancy (authorising their raced, gendered and classed positionalities) from those that are subordinated. Violence against lesbians does the work of perpetuating a system of race and class privilege that seeks to hegemonise the very concept of the nation. Such a nation, neoliberal and white in its dominant cultural content, is fortified against a blackness (and its 'poorness') that is anathema to a schema in which whiteness and middle-classness constitute the aspirant cultures of inclusion.

I wish to tentatively suggest that the performance of queer whiteness, as represented in the discourse of blackwashing homophobia, represents a homonationalism of a special type.<sup>257</sup> By this I mean a homonationalism in service of white middle-class privilege that denies the value of black queers within the discursive borders of nation. If homophobia is configured as black, then the black queer is to be saved from Africanness itself. Moreover, the white queer is an anchor for a dominant set of interests in which class and race are co-implicated, and relative to which black queerness is inferiorised. More dominantly, these racialising articulations of homophobia have come to circumscribe the imaginable political horizons of what constitutes 'gay freedom'. Such formulations reinforce hierarchised inequalities that produce a two-tiered queer citizenship: white gays who operate inside the terms of the law, modernity and culture (indexed as white), and black gays who are discursively situated outside these spheres. Here the black queer body signifies a threat to social order (Livermon, 2012), whilst the white queer body constitutes an exemplar of modern liberal democracy in action. Consequently, homosexuality is a marker of modernity to which African culture (as modernity's racialised other) is to be subjected. The discourse of homophobia-related violence reinstalls racial difference through its invocation of apartheid identity categorisations in which whiteness and middle-classness are superiorised and blackness and poverty inferiorised. These entanglements of homosexuality with Western modernity in post-colonial settings also reflect how gayness comes to be conflated with a Western imposition. However, dissenting discourses destabilise this formulation by repositioning queers within culture, thus generating

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<sup>257</sup> This phraseology draws on 'colonialism of a special type', referring to the form of colonialism specific to South Africa. It was coined to describe a colony that is ruled over by people within a single territory such that there is no spatial separation between colonisers (white settlers) and the colonised (black people).



positions from which culture can be claimed and resignified. Importantly, what the emerging lexicon of homophobia-related violence indicates is how the terms of being are coded through both culture and race, as co-constitutive. The ascendancy of middle-classness white culture is configured as a bulwark against a racialised homophobia that is activated through notions of cultural difference. Investments in the blackening of homophobia situate certain subjects outside of violence's problematic. This enables a displacement of the need for political engagement onto black lesbians themselves. Simultaneously, in rendering certain subjects outside of violence, the chasm of racialised divides, and the notion that there are no common queer experiences, are reinforced. Black lesbians emerge as figures of political alterity in relation to which white middle-classness asserts a disavowal of political responsibility. These disavowals and their depoliticising effects strip violence of its political content and social, economic and gendered features.

The analysis has also shown how race and class function to (re)orientate political responses against violence toward the self. Individualising and depoliticising strategies of self-governmentality are taken up by some to 'render right' their sexual and gender deviances through achievements associated with middle-classness and normative femininity. The neo-liberal self-governing subject resists radical politics, opting for a privatised sexuality that legitimises the status quo and its hierarchies of citizenship. This is a politics that, in warding against its own precarity, legitimises a certain kind of life as the good life through its repudiation of another life. It is ascribed to an idealised form of life that is valuable, in that it both encompasses and expends value. This conception of queer life is underwritten by economies of materialism and liberal individualism, and is the local coordinate of the global gay discourse. It is in strategies of neo-liberal self-care that this gay subject's prospect for a valuable life, free of violence, resides. As a politics of depoliticisation, this undoes solidarities that might otherwise be forged across multiple planes of exclusion to stitch together actions against all forms of violent oppression. Instead, it functions to bring and keep certain queers into a normative and universal 'gay' fold. Some of the homonormalising strategies presented show how queer integration into normative cultures is contingent upon the rejection of alternative positions that trouble neoliberal, middle-class values and normative whiteness. A range of discriminatory and exclusionary social practices is thus legitimised through these political discourses. The

ascendancy of neo-liberal individualism situates South Africa as a beacon of modernity in Africa, in part marked by the country's progressive laws and Constitution. Viewed from this angle, the hypervisible, black queer signifies the repressiveness of African culture which reinstates the authorisation of Western cultural standards. The dehumanisation of the black body, as both a source and site of violence, recovers Western modernity's liberal subject as the embodiment of what it is to be fully human.

As LGBTIQ people in South Africa become increasingly codified in law, queer freedom becomes normatively reduced to the exercise of a legal right, and queer justice gets hinged to the naturalised injurability of the queer subject. Violence against lesbians signifies the mismatch between the law (as order and rationality) and the social. This is a terrain in which law and order politics is asserted to extend the remit of the law and the state in disciplining social life and arbitrating its antagonisms. Circuiting around the construct of victim/perpetrator/protector, this law and order politics re-centres legal-judicial actions to restore the social order that violence temporarily suspends.

### **8.1.3 Femininity (un)corrected**

Violence against lesbians fulfils an interpellating function in that it calls the feminine subject into being through gendered fear and injury, as well as in resistance to these. This is reflective of how violence, as a function of the heterosexualisation of desire, and as a material-discursive practice of sexual and gender domination, articulates the lesbian as a failed femininity. The gendering effect of this is to re-feminise the lesbian, as a subordinated femininity, through sexualising tropes of 'corrective rape' and gendered vulnerability. The sexualised registers in which black female bodies are inscribed by violation and death, evidence discursive re-objectification as a condition and consequence of gender and racialised sexuality. 'Corrective rape' offers not just a description of violence, but an explanation for it. It works as a nodal point around which meanings about violence against lesbians are partially fixed. Such meanings generate a truth of rape, as a defining feature of lesbian subjectivity and its 'inevitable' encounter with violence. The term itself turns a discursive trick in that it authorises the correction of the lesbian through rape by naming that rape as corrective. Discourses of queer fear work alongside 'corrective rape',

engineering the gendered naturalisation of both, and thus re-ascribing the terms of (hetero)normative femininity to the lesbian.

The gendered normalisation of violence against lesbians, with its feminised victims and masculinised perpetrators, threads through the narratives of queer violation. The binary conception of lesbians as agency-less victims and men as inevitable perpetrators produce a set of effects. These include representations of men as active, all-powerful, sexual agents, and of lesbians as passive and vulnerable. Such gender and sexual normativities regularise lesbian subjectivities in contradictory ways. In this regard, whilst some of the political framings of violence against lesbians provide liberatory potential, others constitute new forms of regulation, scrutiny and disciplining over the female body and its social practices. Through the intersecting discourses of fear, blame and self-regulation, subjects are recruited to take on the task of preventing violence by (re)aligning themselves with feminine prescripts. Strategies of feminised self-care reiterate women's gendered vulnerability and have a depoliticising effect on subjectivity and practice. The domestication of resistance, through post-feminist discourses of empowerment and choice, reduce political possibilities to women's personal actions and proclivities. Such individualistic tactics work to flatten lesbian identities thus 'unintersecting' them with the contexts and ideologies by which gender and sexual domination are kept in place. These explanatory repertoires reinforce a notion of lesbian-identified women as responsible for avoiding and regulating danger, and erase the social bases of power and violence. Their feminising impacts are also resisted from dissenting subject positions that unsettle regulatory gender categories and speak back to the narrowing of queer possibilities that are advanced by dominant representations of violence against lesbians.

## **8.2 "Trouble the dreams": Refusing marriage and murder**

The clearest conclusion we can arrive at is that the 'other' space that feminism seeks to define will have to be marked by the continual refusal of choice – between tradition and modernity, between universal rights and cultural specificities, between individual uniqueness and community identity, between capitalist

consumerism and demonisation of desire. (Menon, 2005, p. 229)

Homophobia-related violence has come to symbolise the disfiguration of the rainbow nation as a democratic ideal, working spectrally to mark democracy's limits. As a knowledge regime, it functions paradoxically. On the one hand, it presents modalities through which precarity is re-attributed through race, class, sexual and gender othering. On the other, it is a site where such precarity is refused.

Like the new democracy itself, identity-based political organising relies on a promise of unity and solidarity that it ultimately cannot deliver. Some of the disillusionment bound up with marriage equality and its failure to produce substantive changes in the lives of the majority of queers reflect this. As I have previously argued, the process of strategic law reform relied on a coherent and stable gay identity as its political platform. To some extent, this dislodged the post-apartheid queer political subject from the complex web of historical and structural relations from which it had emerged. At the same time, political discourses against violence push up against the law-enabled ascendancy of gay respectability and its commercialising ends. Perhaps this marks the refusal of a particular kind of raced and classed queer livability. Bound up with this are refusals of the closure of queer identity, democratic transition and political possibility itself. These refusals unsettle the bounded subject of identity-based claims that has featured so prominently in post-apartheid political narratives. From this vantage point, homophobia-related violence signals the differentiated freedoms of democracy and brings into view the materiality of difference and its consequence for freedom's subject. Consequently, freedom and its relationship to violence force a confrontation with the history of the present<sup>258</sup>.

Matebeni (2014) argues that queer legal recognition was directed to entrench the race and class privileges of apartheid. This somewhat overly-deterministic reading conceals how recognition in law, although always materially incomplete, creates the conditions of possibility for queer cultural and social contestations, particularly through the politicisation of violence. Homophobia-related violence might in this sense signal a

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<sup>258</sup> I deploy this notion of the historicity of the present in order to underscore apartheid's presence, as both continuity and discontinuity.

turning toward a politics of difference<sup>259</sup> that, in troubling the notion of the unified and singular gay political subject, exposes wider material and discursive fractures in the contemporary body politic. Tavia Nyong'o (2014, para. 14) argues that "we need learn how better to refuse the terms upon which citizenship and the good star of "civility" is offered, always provisionally, to the charmed few". To some degree, equal marriage came to represent an assertion of the normative inclusion of the "charmed few". Yet both the possibilities and impossibilities of marriage have productively pushed to the fore a more radical queer politics in violent times. However, I wish to undo the neatness of this formulation and its potential political entrapments. Marriage and murder, and their material-discursive co-existence in the democratic imaginary, might well signify a normative state in which some queer subjects come to represent a life of marriage and others a life of murder. Yet, is there not a constitutive investment in fixing this truncated view of queer survivability, precisely because it articulates prevailing conditions under which some continue to live and others to die? And, might its perpetual discursive reiteration not serve to establish and sustain these very conditions? A queer political horizon pegged either to murder or to marriage constrains a more expansive political imaginary that emerges from the paradox of queer life - as simultaneously pretty and perilous, loved and loathed, yet always precarious. Such a horizon necessarily contours the fault lines of inclusion/exclusion, belonging/unbelonging and recognition/redistribution, whilst at the same time refusing their term<sup>260</sup> to be ever-determined by apartheid cartographies, and thus 'unrefusing' transformative ways of seeing and being human. As Butler argues, the shared human condition of precariousness offers political possibilities in that "[n]o one escapes the precarious dimension of social life — it is, we might say, our common non-foundation" (cited in Puar, 2012a, p. 170). In de-centring the narratives of "I", and in politicising the conditions of life, this precariousness invites a politics of recognition that humanises the suffering of Others, and ultimately, of oneself.

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<sup>259</sup> I borrow Anna Yeatman's term 'politics of difference' which refers to "a commitment to a universalistic orientation to the positive value of difference within a democratic political process" (1993, p. 89). Nonetheless, the extent to which these differences, that are inserting themselves into queer politics, are viewed as positive (i.e. as politically useful), is a matter of some debate.

<sup>260</sup> I draw on Foucault's political call "not to discover who we are but to refuse what we are" (Foucault, cited in Foucault and Faubion, 2002, p. 336) as a means through which new forms of subjectivity and power are opened up.

Some of the political discourses presented, particularly those that situate queer identity and struggle within wider politics of social and economic justice, gesture to an alternative political imaginary. These include resistances to queer political configurations in which the inclusion of some are coterminous to the exclusion of others. Rooted in precarity, such resistances push up against hetero-patriarchal, racist and capitalist supremacies, and repoliticise suffering and victimhood. Contemporary fractures within queer cultural politics signal productive tensions that work to rupture gay and democratic comfort zones. Strategies that reassert normative gendered and raced power relations are contradicted by queer political refusals.

Queer cultural contestations produce new social antagonisms related to violence and the identities and powers it constitutes. These contestations, taking place both within and outside of queer communities, are exercises of power that are shifting the terrain of knowledge and politics in South Africa. Foucault, in commenting on how 'gay culture' might change the ordering of the social, contends the following:

I mean culture in the large sense, a culture that invents ways of relating, types of existence, types of values, types of exchanges between individuals which are really new and are neither the same as, nor superimposed on, existing cultural forms. If that's possible, then gay culture will be not only a choice of homosexuals for homosexuals – it would create relations that are, at certain points, transferable to heterosexuals. (cited in Foucault and Rabinow, 1991, p. 159–160)

Queer subjectivities and politics not confined to individuated freedoms, abstract universalisms, and the pacifying effects of law, offer restorative possibilities to re-politicise the social field. This reinsertion of political intentionality, which the presence of homophobia-related violence increasingly demands, might reconfigure sexual politics so that to think and act queerly becomes an act of solidarity rather than an assertion of a singularised identity.

Violence against lesbians is now and then, ordinary and exceptional, immediate and deferred. Its discursivity is a changing configuration of social relations, subjectivities and power that has the potential to either bring about transformative change or to obstruct it. Can the relationship between lesbians and violence be made to mean something different to that which has been presented in this study? That 'something different' in the field of

meaning might partly reside in what Hall termed that which is “left unsaid” (Hall, 1997b, p.8). This unsaidness – alive in both the topic of my research and in my account thereof – serves as a reminder that there is “always someone, a constitutive outside, whose very existence the identity of race [or sexuality/gender/class] depends on, and which is absolutely destined to return from its expelled and objected position outside the signifying field, to trouble the dreams of those who are comfortable inside” (Hall, 1997b p. 8).



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## APPENDIX 1: MEDIA TEXTS

*MT = media text*

Number	Source	Headline	Date	Type
MT1	<i>Cape Argus</i>	Gay community in constant danger	7 December 2012	News report
MT2	<i>Cape Argus</i>	Gay community in constant danger	7 December 2012	News report
MT3	<i>Star</i>	Campaign to fight hate crimes	23 November 2012	News report
MT4	<i>Cape Argus</i>	Premier pays visit to family of slain lesbian	19 November 2012	News report
MT5	<i>Cape Times</i>	[Headline missing]	13 November 2012	News report
MT6	<i>Cape Argus</i>	Lesbian speared to death by gang	12 November 2012	News report
MT7	<i>Cape Argus</i>	SASCOC commitment is right on the mark	1 November 2012	News report
MT8	<i>Cape Argus</i>	"I am too scared to go out now"	26 October 2012	News report
MT9	<i>Cape Argus</i>	Gay community "not yet free in SA"	29 October 2012	News report
MT10	<i>Star</i>	Special hate-crime legislation urged	26 October 2012	News report
MT11	<i>Star</i>	Flying the frayed flag for same-sex freedom	4 October 2012	Feature article
MT12	<i>Cape Times</i>	Olympic archer must take a bow for her public stand on sexual orientation	6 August 2012	Opinion article
MT13	<i>Cape Times</i>	Speak out	31 July 2012	Editorial
MT14	<i>Star</i>	Put a stop to this madness	31 July 2012	Editorial
M15	<i>Cape Times</i>	Homophobic	31 July 2012	Letter

<b>Number</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Headline</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Type</b>
		murders		
MT16	<i>Star</i>	These made headlines	30 July 2012	News report
MT17	<i>Cape Argus</i>	Silence on homophobic killings that claimed eight	29 July 2012	News report
MT18	<i>Cape Times</i>	NGOs quit hate crimes task team	27 July 2012	News report
MT19	<i>Star</i>	"67 minutes of shame" as gays protest to demand rights	19 July 2012	News report
MT20	<i>Cape Argus</i>	Stop hate killings, say Mandela Day marchers	19 July 2012	News report
MT21	<i>Cape Times</i>	City lesbians live in fear	6 July 2012	News report
MT22	<i>Cape Argus</i>	Timeline of violence	2 July	News report
MT23	<i>Cape Argus</i>	"Like walking in a war zone"	2 July 2012	News report
MT24	<i>Cape Times</i>	Man kicks down door to kill lesbian in her home	25 June 2012	News report
MT25	<i>Cape Times</i>	Homophobic attacks increasing in Northern Cape	15 June 2012	News report
MT26	<i>Star</i>	Grisly murder over his sexual orientation	14 June 2012	News report
MT27	<i>Star</i>	No progress in 'corrective rape' probe	26 April 2012	News report
MT28	<i>Cape Times</i>	Delays in lesbian murder trial worry activists	29 March 2012	News report
MT29	<i>Star</i>	Striking similarities in spate of gay murders	6 March 2012	News report

<b>Number</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Headline</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Type</b>
MT30	<i>Star</i>	Concern as another gay man is murdered in similar circumstances	28 February 2012	News report
MT31	<i>Star</i>	'Corrective rape' killers not given sufficient terms	8 February 2012	Letter
MT32	<i>Cape Argus</i>	18 years "won't bring daughter back"	2 February 2012	News report
MT33	<i>Cape Times</i>	Justice for slain lesbian	2 February 2012	News report
MT34	<i>Cape Times</i>	Zoliswa Nkonyana	2 February 2012	Editorial
MT35	<i>Star</i>	Gay group wants police action on series of killings	28 January 2012	News report
MT36	<i>Cape Times</i>	Look at the pictures and ask yourself: why women and children?	29 December 2011	News report
MT37	<i>Cape Times</i>	Police release lesbian's remains	21 December 2011	News report
MT38	<i>Cape Times</i>	Set me free so I can become a police officer – murderer	21 December 2011	News report
MT39	<i>Cape Times</i>	Breaking down walls of discrimination	20 December	News report
MT40	<i>Cape Times</i>	Pleas for mercy in Nkonyana case	20 December 2011	News report
MT41	<i>Cape Argus</i>	State is not enforcing gay rights – report	6 December 2011	News report
MT42	<i>Star</i>	Lesbians ostracised by their families	6 December 2011	News report

## APPENDIX 2: OFFICIAL TEXTS

*OT = official text*

Number	Source	Title	Date	Type
OT1	Free Gender – activist organisation	Pledging to eradicate hate crimes against lesbians: Mural reveal at the sentencing of lesbian Zoliswa’s murderers [sic]	Dec 2011	Media statement
OT2	Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) – statutory body	CGE welcomes the sentencing of Zoliswa’s killers	1 February 2012	Media statement
OT3	Triangle Project – activist organisation	Zoliswa Nkonyana murder trial: hate and intolerance cited as aggravating factor in sentencing	1 February 2012	Media statement
OT4	Triangle Project – activist organisation	The right to freedom from unfair discrimination based on sexual orientation is not debatable	10 May 2012	Media statement
OT5	South African National AIDS Council’s women’s sector – state and civil society forum	In response to the increasing attacks on the LGBTI community of South Africa	5 July 2012	Media statement
OT6	Triangle Project and Free Gender – activist organisations	Civil society calls on government to protect LGBTI persons from violence	2 August 2012	Media release

OT7	Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities – government department	Speaking notes for the Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, Ms Lulu Xingwana at the conference on homophobia organised by the Free Gender in conjunction with Triangle Project	August 2012	Speaking notes
OT8	African National Congress (ANC) – ruling political party	ANC meeting with LGBTI	8 August 2012	Media statement
OT9	Coalition of African Lesbians, Forum for the Empowerment of Women and Human Rights Institute of South Africa – activist organisations	Towards a new consciousness of an inclusive society	17 September 2012	Media statement
OT10	One in Nine Campaign – activist organisation	Feminist LGBT activists disrupt Joburg Gay Pride	6 October 2012	Transcription of online video
OT11	Office of the Deputy Minister of Justice – member of the executive	Deputy Minister of Justice condemns hate crimes against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and inter-sex people	6 December 2012	Media statement

### APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Note: Pseudonyms have been used to protect confidentiality.  
FG = Focus group

<b>FG1</b>						
<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Language</b>	
1. Mandisa	28	Black	Unemployed	Lesbian Butch	isiXhosa	
2. Lulama	29	African	Unemployed	Lesbian	isiXhosa	
3. Fundiswa	30	Other	Unemployed	Other – woman	isiXhosa	
4. Andiswa	24	Black	Unemployed	Lesbian	isiXhosa	
5. Ntsiki	26	Black	Unemployed	Lesbian	isiXhosa	
6. Sindi	24	Black	Unemployed	Lesbian – butch	isiXhosa	
7. Bongsi	30	Black	Working class	Lesbian	isiXhosa	
<b>FG2</b>						
<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Language</b>	
8. Soraya	35	Coloured	Working class	Gay	English	
9. Nadia	32	Coloured	Middle class	Lesbian	Afrikaans	
10. Jane	38	White	Middle class	Lesbian	English	
11. Sophie	24	Other	Middle class	Lesbian	Mandarin	
12. Tania	47	Other – Latin	Middle class	Lesbian	English	
13. Taryn	50+ (this is an approximation as age was not disclosed)	White	Upper-middle class	Lesbian, Gay	English	
<b>FG3</b>						
<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race category</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Language</b>	
14. Thandeka	27	Black	Unemployed	Queer	Zulu	
15. Puleng	29	African	Working class	Lesbian	Sotho	

16. Dineo	30	Black	Working class	Lesbian, Queer	Zulu
17. Kekeletso	26	Black	Unemployed	Lesbian	Sotho
18. Mohau	24	Black	Unemployed	Lesbian	Sotho
19. Nhlanhla	24	Black	Working class	Lesbian	Zulu
<b>FG4</b>					
<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race category</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Language</b>
20. Redi	24	Black	Unemployed	Lesbian, Butch	unknown
21. Dimpho	21	African	Working class	Lesbian, Gay, Queer	seTswana
22. Thando	22	Black, African	Middle class	Lesbian, Gay	TshiVenda
23. S'bu	24	Black, African	Unemployed	Lesbian, Queer	isiZulu
<b>FG5</b>					
<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race category</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Language</b>
24. Annetta	40	White	Middle class	Lesbian	Afrikaans
25. Ilze	45	White	Middle class	Lesbian	Afrikaans
26. Bontle	23	Black	Middle class	Lesbian	seTswana
27. Carmel	33	Coloured	Working class	Lesbian	Afrikaans
28. Mandy	37	Coloured	Middle class	Lesbian	English

## APPENDIX 4: CONSENT FORM



### UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES DEPARTMENT

#### **Research consent form: Research on violence and lesbians in South Africa:**

I, .....hereby give my consent to participate in this research project which is an exploratory study looking at violence and lesbians in South Africa.

- I understand that the project is being conducted by Melanie Judge, a doctoral student at the Women's and Gender Studies Department at the University of the Western Cape.
- I have been fully informed of the aims of the project and am participating on a voluntary basis.
- I have not been unduly pressured into participating in this focus group and understand that I am free to leave the group at any stage without any consequences.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research project at any point, even after the focus group is completed.
- I understand that any information will be treated with utmost confidentiality and that my identity will be kept anonymous.
- I understand that my involvement in the research focus group requires that I hold in strict confidence the discussions in, and participants of, the focus group.
- I agree that the data collected could be published in reports or publications.
- I understand that the audio-recordings of the focus group will be transcribed and kept in a locked, secure place where nobody other than the researcher will have access to.

*Signature:* .....

*Date:* .....

*Place:* .....

*Researcher:* .....

Contact details: Melanie Judge (researcher)  
Email: [judgemelanie@gmail.com](mailto:judgemelanie@gmail.com)  
Tel: 083 2712543

Prof. Tamara Shefer (supervisor)  
Women and Gender Studies  
University of the Western Cape  
Tel: 021 9592234  
Email: [tshefer@icon.co.za](mailto:tshefer@icon.co.za)



## APPENDIX 5: INFORMATION SHEET



### **UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES DEPARTMENT**

#### **Information sheet: Research on Violence and lesbians in South Africa**

This research project seeks to explore how violence against lesbians is understood, represented and engaged with in South Africa, more specifically in the media, in politics and by lesbians themselves.

The study hopes to contribute to the advancement of the rights of lesbians, and to strengthening responses to the violence they face.

This study is being conducted by Melanie Judge, a doctoral student at the Women's and Gender Studies Department at the University of the Western Cape. The researcher is supervised by Professor Tamara Shefer.

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary and you should only do so if you fully understand the aims of the research and would willingly like to participate in it.

If you agree to participate in the focus group you will be required to sign a consent form at the beginning of the process that will protect you and inform you of your rights as a research participant. I look forward to your participation if you so decide.

Contact details:           Melanie Judge (researcher)  
Email: [judgemelanie@gmail.com](mailto:judgetmelanie@gmail.com)  
Tel: 083 2712543

Prof. Tamara Shefer (supervisor)  
Women and Gender Studies  
University of the Western Cape  
Tel: 021 9592234  
Email: [tshefer@icon.co.za](mailto:tshefer@icon.co.za)

## APPENDIX 6: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Please introduce yourself by name and tell us how you're feeling today
2. Why do you identify as a lesbian? What does it mean for you to be lesbian?
3. What is it like to be a lesbian in South Africa today?

Prompts:

- Have things changed since 1994? How/why/why not?
  - Are there differences in the experience related to gender/race/class/age?
4. The Constitution enshrines non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. We have laws and policies in place that protect lesbians from discrimination and same-sex couples can also get legally married. What do you think about this?
  5. There is a lot in the public arena and in the media about violence against lesbians. How do you understand this violence and why it is happening?

Prompts:

- Do you think it affects all lesbians in the same way?
  - How does it affect the lives of lesbians?
  - Is this violence similar or different to violence against women more generally?
6. There has been quite a bit of media reporting on instances of violence against lesbians. *[Hand around examples from three newspaper articles]* What do you think about how the media reports on these issues?
  7. You might have heard about activists and civil society organisations acting against violence/discrimination. What do you think about these actions?  
*OR*  
Why did you decide to get involved in activism at [name of organisation]?
  8. How do you think we should respond to the violence we have spoken about today?

Prompts:

- As lesbians – individually and/or collectively?
  - As civil society?
  - As LGBT organisations?
  - As feminist organisations and women's organisations?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

## APPENDIX 7: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS USED

[...]	When material is omitted from the speech or text
[with text]	Author's insertion
...	To indicate when speech/text trails off
-	To indicate when speech shifts from one topic or point to another



## APPENDIX 8: “WE ARE WAITING FOR YOUR OPINION”

In one focus group a lively discussion arose about if, and how, women perpetuate patriarchy. During the conversation I was directly addressed as follows:

*Dineo: Melanie, please help us here as a feminist woman. Cos we really need direction here*

*Melanie: So this is obviously a really important issue – your understandings of patriarchy and how it operates and how we should be talking about it. Sjoe, wow, ok*

*Dineo: Yes Melanie, and your opinion – we are waiting for your opinion? [laughter]*

*Melanie: No, I can't*

*Puleng: Why? We want it!*

*Melanie: I'm happy to have that conversation with you.*

My response revealed the contradictory feelings Dineo's demand, although playfully expressed, had raised for me. From the position of researcher, I did not want to give an “opinion” as I feared it might overly centre me in the discussion by disrupting its flow and influencing the group dynamic by resituating me as a participant. From this vantage point it felt inappropriate to share an opinion, and this is reflected in my rather swift reply, “No, I can't”. In direct contradiction to that feeling, and in my position as a feminist and queer activist, I had wanted to be accountable and answerable to the participants. From that location I had enjoyed Dineo's disruption of the regulatory and performative mode of the focus group that normalises the researcher as the one asking the questions and the participants as the one's answering. I experienced Dineo's reference to my feminist identity as drawing me closer to the participants and into the conversation. This temporarily released me from the constraints of my role as research by inviting me into the encounter, in a register that I experienced as more 'real'. This is expressed in my somewhat ambivalent response, “I'm happy to have that conversation with you”, which also served to defer said conversation as an immediate possibility. The focus group discussion then continued its

course. However, later, at the close of the focus group and after I had formally concluded and thanked the participants, the conversation turned pointedly back to me and my opinion. This time I answered the question.

*Mohau: It could be nice actually if you could come back*

*Melanie: Ja, I'm keen, I'm happy to come back*

*Dineo: Ja, maybe we continue talking about patriarchy – and we need a facilitator*

*Melanie: I'm happy to do it*

*Dineo: But as an old feminist we wanted to...*

*Melanie: Are you calling me old! [laughter]*

*Dineo: Not old! [laughter]*

*Melanie: I can't believe it!*

*Dineo: Your age is old like – you've been there! Just one question, ne, and you'll answer the rest next time, ne?*

*Melanie: Ok*

*Dineo: So, my question is on what Puleng was saying, as a feminist woman what do you think, or how do you see things in the way that Puleng was talking about – the boy child, the man, and why they are behaving like that? Like I really want to understand that before...*

*Melanie: I don't have the answer though. Do you want my opinion?*

*Dineo: Your opinion, not an answer. No, there's no answer. Yes, your opinion.*

*Puleng: Your opinion*

*Melanie: So my simple answer to that is the work – the work, I mean the activist work – happens on different levels, and you've all said that. It happens in the toy-toying, it happens in the petitioning, it happens in the arts, you know. And it also happens – I mean T you were saying, it's kind of sometimes, we don't know ourselves, so the work is also inside. I don't know, you know. Because we do those things, we are also – not the homophobe – but we... I'm just thinking as a white person, the racism is – you know I grew up with that so I have to unlearn the racism. So in a sense women also often don't have options. When they are older they have power because they are not – you know men don't desire older women so much. And sometimes those women really can be terrible to younger women. They can be the ones that say, "the skirt's too short", so of course it's patriarchy, they don't have choices, their choices are defined by patriarchy. Maybe they actually want to leave their husbands and be lesbians, and they don't. And they in a sense are also doing the work of patriarchy. But, I mean having said that, I still think that*

*the returns for men are higher than the costs. The income they get from having power is still higher. And that's why men still wanna be men. They benefit much more than women – I mean I feel that across the board. Men still benefit – of course they can't cry and they can't wear dresses if they want to, but they benefit from the power, in a way that women don't. I don't know, those are just...*

*Dineo: Wena, kiyaleboga [thank you]. Thank you. (FG3)*

Dineo's question had called me to declare myself, thus exposing the fictional notion that I, as the researcher, was somehow outside the content and context of the discussion. The participants' demand of me to speak was a performative disruption that also signalled their recognition of the *presence* of my views – spoken or not. That I chose, in the final instance, to respond to the question by invoking my racial difference, can be interpreted as a confessional declaration of my whiteness to the black participants. Importantly, the exchange exposes the shifting power relations at work in the focus group, and offers a glimpse of how I, and the participants, navigated these dynamics at a particular moment in time. A more robust and detailed analysis of this exchange, and its implications for thinking about the power, positioning and reflexive possibilities within the research encounter, is for another time.

## APPENDIX 9: MORE ON SIGNIFYING RACE

All references to specific incidents of violence in the media and the official texts concern black queers. Discursivities of race and racialisation are dealt with throughout the analysis, however in addition to that, I also identify some key racial signifiers as they appear across the texts, as follows:

- The word “black” appears five times across all the media texts: twice with reference to a report that features “black” in its title<sup>261</sup>; once to describe a “black lesbian organisation”; and twice in opinion articles.
- “White” appears in two articles. In both instances alongside reference to class: “urban, wealthy, white gay South Africans” and “middle-class white gay people” respectively.
- The word “race” appears in two texts. In both instances it is used in an account of the content of law.<sup>262</sup>
- In two official texts black queers are specifically named as disproportionately impacted by violence and oppression. In one of the texts “black lesbian women” are linked to “most brutal manifestation” of violence against women.

Broadly speaking, these trends indicate how the crime of violence against lesbians is constructed with explicit reference to blackness, how whiteness is rarely explicitly named in the texts, and how race and class are co-constituted in the discursive construction of homophobia-related violence.

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<sup>261</sup> The report’s title is ‘We’ll Show You You’re a Woman: Violence and Discrimination Against Black Lesbians and Transgender Men’. In two texts that refer directly to this report, the term “black” is omitted in the description of the report’s focus; rather, “township” is used instead.

<sup>262</sup> One of these texts provides a legal definition of a hate crime, and the other a recitation of the equality clause in the Constitution.

## **APPENDIX 10: PERFORMING LIFE AND DEATH ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM**

The text (OT10) was produced to document a protest that took place at the 2012 Johannesburg Pride March. The protest prompted wide public debate on the gender, race and class inequalities and political fissures within queer communities. It took the form of a die-in by “black lesbians and gender non-conforming feminists”. The protesters laid their bodies and some mannequins on the tarmac in front of the oncoming Pride marchers. They did so to “demand one minute of silence to remember those members of the LGBT community who have been murdered because of their sexual orientation and gender expression”.

The protest constitutes a performative of public mourning. The enactment of death on the road breaks the march of the living. It articulates the expression of a right not yet confirmed, namely the right of certain lives and bodies to be recognised and rendered liveable. The protest was also a political disavowal of the dominant politics of gay Pride, and an exposure of the modes of exclusion this politics has come to represent. In invoking death and its disposal of life, the protesters affirmed their presence. As Butler contends, such a “collective bodily presence might be re-read as ‘we are still here,’ meaning: ‘we have not yet been disposed of.’ Such bodies are precarious and persistent, which is why I think we have always to link precarity with forms of social and political agency where that is possible” (cited in Puar 2012b, p. 168).

Symbolising a ‘clash of the queers’ the lying-down protesters (signifying death) confronted the standing marchers (signifying life). In the public dialogue that followed, the marchers came to represent white, depoliticised and homonormative queers, whilst the protesters signified their constitutive outside. Through the die-in, the protesters performed the dead end of the marchers’ celebratory politics.<sup>263</sup> The protest itself could be read as an interruption of a particular political form, namely that of gay Pride, thus representing an “insurrectionary noise” that breaks silence and recodifies knowledge (Brown, 2005, p. 84). This noise relies on and instantiates a set of dualism constituted as truth of the paradox of queer life in South Africa. An over-determination of those

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<sup>263</sup> One of the banners carried by the protestors stated, “No cause for celebration”.



on each side of the 'clash' works to produce binary positions to which marchers and protesters are respectively assigned: alive/dead, included/excluded, white/black, rich/poor. According to this logic, the performance of death on the road may be scripted as follows: the bodies lying on the road are already dead; the walking marchers can only but trample them; the former are black and violated, the latter white and violating. This scripting offers a clear-cut divide of diametrically opposed politics and personhood. It constructs a line in the tar upon which the raced, gendered and classed realities that are the basis of the protesters claims can be performatively reenacted. In the performance, all those marching toward the protesters *became* the included and powerful. Correspondingly, all those on the tarmac *became* the excluded and powerless. That the marchers are non-homogenous, comprising both those in solidarity with, and those against the insurrection, troubles this picture. Yet, as a political moment, the clash provides a crude and enduring exposure of the paradoxes that chart the course of queer life and queer death in South Africa. It is the knowledge of these paradoxes that renders the clash recognisable within the commanding logics as described.

