Title
Prismatic Performances: Queer South African Identity and the Deconstruction of the Rainbow Nation

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4s06p6t5

Author
Sizemore-Barber, April

Publication Date
2013

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
Prismatic Performances: Queer South African Identity and the Deconstruction of the Rainbow Nation

by

April Sizemore-Barber

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies and the Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Catherine Cole, Chair
Professor Paola Bacchetta
Professor Brandi Catanese
Professor Gillian Hart

Fall 2013
April Sizemore-Barber
Prismatic Performances:
Queer South African Identity and the Deconstruction of the Rainbow Nation
Copyright 2013
Abstract

Prismatic Performances: Queer South African Identity and the Deconstruction of the Rainbow Nation

by

April Sizemore-Barber

Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies
Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality
University of California, Berkeley

Professor Catherine Cole, Chair

At a time of increasing legislative homophobia on the African continent, South Africa stands out for its intentional inclusion of sexual orientation into its constitution, making gays and lesbians central to its self-conception as a united, Rainbow Nation. Yet the metaphor of the Rainbow Nation is increasingly used to paper over corruption and inequality and to stifle dissent. This dissertation uses the paradoxical position of gays and lesbians within contemporary South African society—protected legally and yet the victims of continuing violence and homophobia—as an entry point for understanding contradictory enactments of post-apartheid citizenship and belonging. I argue that queer bodies in national space take on a prismatic function, breaking this meta-narrative into its composite parts and creating space to view discontinuities and gaps. Drawing on diverse methodologies, I examine the “queering” of varied public spaces through drag performance, everyday embodiments, photography, choreography, and television soap opera fandom. In each prismatic performance, normative conceptions of space, culture, and tradition are reconfigured and refracted to reveal the constructedness of “being South African.” Situated at the intersection of performance, sexuality, and Africana studies, this dissertation makes an intervention in disciplinary gaps in each field, arguing that local expressions of queer identity provide a window into the ambiguities of the post colony and into the critical potential of performativity in debates on national identity more generally.

Following an introductory chapter that frames the dissertation’s animating questions through a number of recent clashes at Johannesburg’s annual Gay Pride parade, I trace the emergence of racialized drag performance during the transition to democracy (roughly 1989-2001). Satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys and performance artist Steven Cohen both used gender subversion to pose whiteness as a queer sort of Africanness, exploring the temporal and spatial dimensions of political transformation and its discontents. The second chapter turns from theatrical performance towards the far more provisional performances of queer South Africans living in hostile environments. Drawing on nine months of in-depth interviews and participant-observation with members of the Johannesburg-based black lesbian Chosen FEW soccer team, I argue that, unlike recent theorizing around an impossible queer utopia, the everyday provides the opportunity for subjunctive engagements with futurity: performances that act “as-if” constitutional rights are respected. This subjunctive orientation, performed through exaggerated
and flexible personas, brings an integrated, localized expression of “self” to disparate, contradictory affiliations.

Chapter three examines a particular aesthetic of displacement developed by black lesbian photographer Zanele Muholi and choreographer Mamela Nyamza to represent sexual violence against black lesbians (popularly termed “corrective rape”) without retraumatizing its victims or trivializing its effects. By displacing the audience’s focus off the hyper-visible black lesbian body and onto its complicity in witnessing her violation, these artists are able to, through very different media, highlight the mechanisms through which this body is made visible. My final chapter expands these questions of audience deliberation to the most public enactment of South African queerness to date: a romance on the popular Johannesburg-based soap opera Generations between two black South African men. Arguing that television spans numerous viewing communities, I turn to the relatively new virtual spaces (particularly the fansite Gensblog) to observe overlapping viewing experiences and identifications. By analyzing the development and disintegration of one online fan “family” over the course of several years, I trace changing attitudes over time, across virtual and geographic spaces. Without positing the Internet as a placeless Utopia (though perhaps, suggesting a heterotopia), this final chapter argues for virtual reception as a multi-sited performance space, where change can be enacted through a durational, participatory process.
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction:</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: A Queer Transition: Pieter-Dirk Uys, Steven Cohen and the (im)Possibility of White Transformation in Early Post-Apartheid South Africa</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Living in the As-if: Johannesburg’s Chosen FEW Soccer Team and the Subjunctive Performance of “African” Lesbian Identity</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: In-Hyper-Visibility: Aesthetic Displacement and “Corrective” Rape in the Work of Photographer Zanele Muholi and Choreographer Mamela Nyamza</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Prismatic Reception: <em>Generations</em>, Public Deliberation and Cyber-Africanness</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1: Interviews</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2: Gensblog Posts</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

My deepest and most sincere thanks go to:

My brilliant committee: Paola Bacchetta, Brandi Catanese, Gillian Hart, and especially Catherine Cole, whose scholarship and mentorship has provided a model for seeking out humanity in academic rigor.

My cohort: Scott Wallin, Brandon Woolf, and my queer brother in arms, Marc Boucai.

My Berkeley Performance Studies family: those that came before me—particularly Michelle Baron who introduced me to the discipline under vastly different circumstances; those who will soon follow—especially Caitlin Marshall, Ashley Ferro-Murray, Ivan Ramos.

The many people in South Africa who generously shared their time, energy, and stories with me over the course of the past seven years. To Matshidiso Mofokeng, Pinky Zulu, Dikeledi Sibanda, Tumi Mkhuma, Bakhambile Skhosana, Thuli Ncube, and Phindi Malaza (among many others) at Forum for Empowerment of Women; to Anthony Manion, Gabriel Khan, John Marnell, Skye Martin, and Noma Pakade who gave me a base at Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA). To Liz Gunner, Zethu Matebeni, Catherine Burns, and Pumla Gqola for their support and generosity when I was a visiting researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Artists and scholars who have taken the time to talk with me about their work, including: Mark Fleishman, Sibu Gcilitshana, Janice Honeyman, Mwenya Kabwe, Liza Key, Anton Kruger, Zanele Muholi, Mamela Nyamza, Jay Pather, Malcolm Purkey, Andrew Putter, and Pieter-Dirk Uys.

Members of Khulumani Support Group, whose art and passion to “speak out” for victims and survivors of apartheid-era violence inspired me to take this journey in the first place. To Marje Jobson, the late Ida Hlatshwayo (Gogo) and, especially, NomaRussia Bonase and her family: A Luta Continua!

Jillian Gardner, Myrtle Adams-Gardner and their daughter Carnia, Makhono Mabolo, Joana Wright, Emily Craven, Natasha Vally, Tish White, and Giles Barrow for making sprawling Johannesburg a place where I could feel at home; to Talia Meer, Alex Muller, and Sylvia Wirtjies, who made beautiful Cape Town a place where I would never forget to feel mildly uncomfortable. To Jacob Tobia and Alok Vaid-Menon, radical queer American scholars with whom I shared a very memorable few months in 2012, full of discussions about privilege, poetry, academia, and activism.

Finally, I thank my family—Roy Barber, Elese Sizemore, and Gary Raymond—for their love and support during these past seven years and throughout my life. I could not do the work I do today without my father’s deep conviction about theatre as a tool through which a new world can be shaped, my mother’s brilliance and endless empathy, and Buppy’s quiet strength and cutting wit. Nevermore has the phrase, umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu—a person is a person through other people—seemed more apt. I am who I am today because of you.
Introduction

In October 2012 the South African city of Johannesburg celebrated its twenty-third annual Gay and Lesbian Pride parade. On a sunny Saturday afternoon, 20,000 people of all races, genders, and sexual orientations from the greater Gauteng Province converged to watch the parade weave through the high walled streets and pass by the banks and shopping malls of the wealthy suburb of Rosebank. The route ended at a party at a specially constructed “community village” in the nearby lush Zoo Lake Park, where local NGOs set up information booths alongside vendors selling pride wear and exchanging cash for special “Pink Rands” that could be used to purchase food and drink. This scene was miles apart, both geographically and conceptually, from the city’s first parade, held in 1990. Then, a gathering of about 400 activists, some wearing paper bags over their heads to protect their identities, braved the rain to walk through the still-divided streets of the inner city. Nelson Mandela had been released from prison six months prior, and the apartheid regime was crumbling. The parade’s organizers—an interracial mix from the primarily white GASA (Gay Association South Africa) and primarily black GLOW (Gays and Lesbians of the Witwatersrand)—hoped to use the momentum of the radical changes sweeping the country to carve a place for LGBTI citizens in the New South Africa.

In 1996 the work of these early activists was codified into law, as sexual orientation became a protected category in Section Nine of the Constitution (also known as the Equality Clause). Following the new government’s public statements of support and subsequent legalization of same-sex adoption and marriage, Johannesburg Pride’s numbers swelled to tens of thousands. After an errant bottle thrown from a downtown high rise in 2006 injured a woman on the Forum for Empowerment of Women (FEW)’s float, the parade relocated from the inner city to Rosebank. Registered as a not-for-profit organization in 2007, Joburg Pride 2012, according to its organizers, was to be the largest celebration yet, incorporating workshops and a film festival into a week’s worth of programming.

If Johannesburg Pride and its numerous events created a space of maximum visibility for South Africa’s LGBTI population then the parade, a carefully curated presentation of African Homosexuality to a number of audiences, was its central act. In a continent where same-sex identity and attraction is largely criminalized, South Africa’s legal acceptance of its queer citizens place it as the “Pride of Africa” (to quote the subtitle of Joburg Pride’s website). For Joburg Pride 2012, the organizers—in response to a movement headed by the Congress of Traditional Leaders (Contralesa) to remove references to “sexual orientation” in the Constitution—decided that the theme should be Protecting our Rights. Their website explained that in the face of such challenges, “South Africa’s LGBTI community should stand together as one, protecting and supporting the Constitution and its protection of fundamental human rights,” with the proviso that “Joburg Pride will – as always – offer a frisky mix of fun, flair and finesse, rounding out its important messaging.”

1 The Rand (ZAR) is the South African currency. The Pink Rand is a popular term within South African Gay and Lesbian tourist boards, used, in part, to justify the Gay and Lesbian community (presumed to be double income, no children) as an affluent participant in the economy.
2 Sexual orientation is only one of a long list of social categories constitutionally protected against discrimination, including: race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, color, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth
As drag queens, queer families, and floats advertising gay clubs made their way down busy thoroughfare of Jan Smuts Avenue, however, Johannesburg Pride became the scene of a protest that was decidedly off-message. In a coordinated action, around twenty, primarily young and black women wearing purple t-shirts broke through the sidelines to unfurl banners that read “No Cause for Celebration” and “Dying for Justice.” With the help of life-sized, straw-stuffed mannequins, the protestors staged a “die-in” across the road, effectively halting the parade in its tracks. The women were members of the One-in-Nine campaign. Initially founded in 2006 as a feminist response to then-Deputy President Jacob Zuma’s rape trial, the organization now advocates for and draws attention to the victims and survivors of gender-based violence. This particular protest action called for a minute of silence to commemorate those LGBT South Africans—particularly black lesbians—who had lost their lives to violence in the previous year. The members passed out leaflets naming the dead and explaining that the action was to draw attention to the “de-politicisation of most prides [that] 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 characterize many prides in South Africa, as they characterize most other spaces for the LGBT community.”

The reaction was immediate. As marchers picked their way over the prone bodies, some looked uncomfortable; others, however, were aggressive, snapping rainbow flags in the faces of those holding the signs, flashing middle fingers, kicking at the bodies and telling the protestors to “go back to your lokshins! (townships).” As the One-in-Nine members held their position and the parade’s floats began to back up, irate Pride board members arrived at the scene, at certain points physically trying to remove the women. The parade marshals finally forced them to retreat by

---

5 The name “One in Nine” reflects the statistic that only one of every nine South African women raped reports her crime to the police. The actual rate of assault is estimated to be far higher.
driving motorcycles into the banners. The women were eventually moved to the side of the road and the parade continued on to the party site, back on track.7

This dissertation uses the paradoxical position of gays and lesbians within contemporary South African society—protected legally and yet the victims of continuing violence, racism, and homophobia—as an entry point for understanding contradictory enactments of post-apartheid citizenship and belonging. Following its first democratic election in 1994, South Africa popularly rebranded itself as the Rainbow Nation, a country united in its diversity. Yet the metaphor of the Rainbow Nation is increasingly used by those within the new government to paper over corruption and inequality and to stifle dissent. I argue that moments such as One-in-Nine’s performative intervention into the “economic apartheid” of the Pride parade take on what I term a prismatic function. By breaking nationalist meta-narratives into their composite parts, queer performances create space to view discontinuities and gaps, both within the context of the post-apartheid nation state and within the queer movement itself. Drawing on performance analysis and ethnography, I examine the “queering” of varied public spaces through drag performance, everyday embodiments, photography, choreography, television soap opera, and the Internet. In each prismatic performance, normative conceptions of space, culture, and gender are reconfigured and refracted to reveal the constructedness of “being South African.”

Contemporary cultural theorists have commented how South Africa, as a geographical and cultural construction, has spent the past twenty years in a crisis of representation. Literary theorist Leon de Kock has conceived of South Africa’s imagined community as “a seam that can be undone only at the cost of its existence. Its very nature, its secret life, inheres in the paradox of the seam.”8 For Ashraf Jamal, the seam’s undoing is written into the “constitutive fracture” of a transition that was “coopted by capital and nationalist rhetoric, evident in glib phrases like “simunye” (we are one) and the ‘rainbow nation’”9 I am intrigued by both of these metaphors, as each seems to suggest that any attempt to classify “South Africa,” will undo itself, as the Rainbow was always a mirage, always fractured, always multifaceted and contradictory. This dissertation uses performance to as a mode of pressing the seam and entering the fracture.

The metaphor of the prism is a useful to engage Jamal’s conception of post-apartheid South Africa’s negotiated settlement10 as fractured in its constitution: a watered-down, non-revolution, subject to superficial change rather than material transformation. This dissertation asks: if post-apartheid society is already fractured, how do queer performances draw attention to the fracture, animate it, and evoke an emotional and critical response from their audiences? What if unquestioned emotional responses and attachments, particularly to post-apartheid nationalisms,  

7 The effects and affects of the protest circulated far beyond its initial performance. By the end of the day, One-in-Nine had released the footage as a heavily-edited Youtube video, featuring voice-over selections of the press release intercut with the most violent interactions between the marchers and the protesters. Over 100 Youtube commenters weighed in on the effectiveness of One-in-Nine’s tactics, the politics of Pride’s board of directors, and the essence of Pride itself. Marchers who had encountered the protest took to the Internet to give alternate accounts of what had happened and to attempt to explain the extreme negative reaction many had towards a cause that everybody could agree should be a priority for any LGBT movement in the country.


10 Despite a strong push for radical restructuring and redistribution of wealth from certain sectors of the anti-apartheid movement, the settlement reached between the ANC and the National Party at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA,1991-93) included the provision that South Africa would open its markets and that power would, at least initially, be shared in a bipartisan coalition. Though these negotiations made possible the first democratic elections, many critics consider them a dangerous compromise to the achievement of any sort of radical equality or economic transformation for the majority of South Africa’s citizens.
were channeled, much like the light entering the prism, to project and differentiate their constitutive parts?

As a scholar of theatre and performance studies, I am particularly interested in the ways performance—in both its theatrical and everyday enactments—highlights the contingent nature of identity categories and the ways in which meaning gets construed through audience interpretation and participation. My analysis explores South African queerness beyond its textual, scripted elements; I view queer performances as part of a larger event, incorporating audience interpretation alongside embodied action to draw attention to the larger socio-political world that the performance both inhabits and creates. This methodology opens up new ways of viewing the inter-articulation of race, gender, and, particularly, national identities. If Nelson Mandela’s Rainbow Nation metaphor captured the country’s utopic, non-racial aspirations, subsequent ANC governments have embraced competing, overlapping, and often-conflicting nationalisms. Thabo Mbeki positioned South Africa as a leader of a continent-wide African Renaissance (a “renaissance” that coincided with the ANC government’s abandonment of its socialist principles to embrace neoliberal IMF Structural Adjustment policies). Current president Jacob Zuma, whose election was in part a response to popular frustration with Mbeki’s perceived elitism and cronyism, ran his highly performative campaign as a return to “African tradition.” He has strategically framed his polygamy as proving him to be a virile, masculine leader—a true African patriarch—equally at home in decorative skins and furs as he is in three piece suits in his palatial mansion at his ancestral homeland of Nkandla.

Geographer Gillian Hart has commented that rather than dismissing these nationalisms, and national identities in general, the challenge for scholars of post-apartheid South Africa instead is to “grasp their popular appeal, and work towards critical understandings that can help to denaturalize increasingly dangerous articulations of nationalism.”11 Hart argues that a relational conception of the production of space traced across time, following Lefebvre, denaturalizes any concept of “South Africanness” as being proper to certain bodies. This dissertation draws on the work of critical cultural geographers to seriously consider the relational and the contingent as key to the construction of national narratives, and poses that queerness has played a role—either as protagonist or antagonist—to a variety of imagined post-apartheid South Africans.

This dissertation moves among these scales—the national, the local, the intimate—to explore how the performing body mediates and critiques popular post-apartheid meta-narratives. The first half of the manuscript looks at two very different spaces of queer enactment, focusing on how performance, with its liveness and singularity (and, paradoxically, its reiteratability) creates the opportunity for revision and rescription of national narratives. The first chapter analyzes the drag performances of satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys and performance artist Steven Cohen, refracting the temporal and spatial dimensions of political transformation and its discontents. The second chapter turns from theatrical performance towards the far more provisional everyday performances of queer South Africans living in hostile environments. With so much homophobia directed towards queer South Africans based on the presumption of a static African culture, this chapter interrogates how one group of black lesbian soccer players (the Johannesburg-based Chosen FEW) draws on a number of cultural repertoires to craft performances that act “as-if” constitutional rights are respected. Both of these chapters address the desire to preview/anticipate a future that is truly post apartheid, while acknowledging that the present requires situated, tactical engagements with circumstances outside of their control.

Where the first two chapters are primarily concerned with embodied performance, the final two take audience reception as their focus. Though attention has been given, in both activism and scholarship, to South African queer visibility, very little of this literature has looked at reception. How are queer bodies seen, taken in, and reacted to by their audience(s)? Chapter three examines a particular aesthetic of displacement developed by black lesbian photographer Zanele Muholi and choreographer Mamela Nyamza to represent sexual violence against black lesbians (popularly termed “corrective rape”). Without retraumatizing its victims or trivializing its effects, this aesthetic instead turns the audience’s focus inward on its own desire to witness the violated black lesbian body. My final chapter, an ethnography of a soap opera fandom website, queries how affect—the associative, ontological, and emotional—enters into the interactions between queer South Africans in their interpretive communities. By focusing on the reception of the most public enactment of South African queerness to date (on Generations soap opera, between two black men) I trace the ways in which television spans numerous viewing communities, resulting in changing attitudes over time, across virtual and geographic locations. Without positing the Internet as a placeless utopia (though perhaps, suggesting a heterotopia), this final chapter argues for virtual reception as a multi-sited performance space, where change can be enacted through a durational, participatory process.

I chose these sites not because they are exhaustive, but because they provide a rich cross-section of how queer performances weave and unravel the fabric of the post-apartheid physical and imaginary landscape. Following an introductory chapter that traces performances emerging in the years immediately following the 1994 transition, my analysis is situated in Johannesburg during Jacob Zuma’s Presidency (2009-2014). This time period saw—and continues to see—numerous instances of political and popular unrest, including explosive performances of ethnic-nationalism in waves of xenophobic violence and increased neo-liberal pressure resulting in violent shut downs of popular protest. It has also seen the death of Nelson Mandela, a figure who, more than any other, embodied South Africa’s desire for a peaceful, non-racial, rainbow country.

Zuma’s presidency provides a particularly apt framing, as his rise resulted, in part from his performance of Zulu masculinity at his 2006 rape trial. Not incidentally, the woman he was accused of raping was a queer feminist and HIV activist. I chose Johannesburg for its symbolic role in the South African imaginary, as well as its material history as the center for South Africa’s wealth (and its disparities). Its shifting, often-transitory populations and its repurposed material infrastructure make the city and its surrounds a stage for contestation and refashioning.

My sites are chosen to give a sense of the texture of this time-space, and the ways in which queer performances/cultures are not discrete but are, in fact, overlapping and co-articulating. In July 2013, for instance, I walked over Nelson Mandela Bridge—connecting the inner-city neighborhoods of Braamfontein and Newtown—with Chosen FEW soccer player Manika (subject of chapter two). There, in 2001, Steven Cohen had staged his iconic Chandelier (subject of chapter one) in a squatter camp that was then violently cleared by a security company in a “ballet of violence,” to make way for the bridge’s rainbow-lit spires. Manika had previously posed for Zanele Muholi’s Faces and Phases photography project (subject of chapter three) and had been an extra on the SABC 1 drama Society, which—next to Johannesburg-based soap opera

---

Generations (subject of chapter four)—is one of the few shows to feature queer characters. Manika is not a celebrity (except, perhaps, in her own mind), but a woman involved with Johannesburg’s queer cultural life, where queer activism, media, and sociality create a dense fabric of support. Queer worlds are small, and public queer stages smaller. She was also one of the One-in-Nine protesters attacked by white gay men at the 2012 Joburg Pride parade. These overlaps, which create the texture of queer worlds, would be lost if I took a more traditional, disciplinary route (only considering theatrical performance, everyday performance, or popular culture, for instance). Instead, I am able to draw attention to how each site serves as a meeting point of a number of different narratives, histories, and affects, providing different way of seeing the time-space that is Post-Apartheid South Africa.

Queer South Africa

This dissertation argues for performance studies—with its focus on embodiment, bridging different ways of knowing, and reception—as a valuable methodological intervention into current discussions of South African queerness. The body of critical literature on same-sex attraction/queer identity in South Africa has increased exponentially in the past decade, as scholars in disciplines as wide-ranging as geography, anthropology, literary, gender, and post-colonial studies have been drawn to the paradox of de jure equality and de facto marginalization of LGBT people in relation to the post-apartheid state. The interdisciplinarity of this scholarship has created a discursive space where diverse perspectives are in dialogue on the evolution of the invented categories of “African” and “Homosexual” across time, space, discourse, and culture. In what follows, I trace the main tendencies within post-apartheid scholarship on South African queer identity, highlight important texts, and articulate my contribution to the continuing dialogue.

One prominent strand of this scholarship has attempted to redress the erasure of indigenous same-sex experience and to understand homophobia as an institutional inheritance from the colonial and apartheid regimes. Colonial policy on same-sex behavior developed alongside other sex-related laws (such as sodomy laws) and scientific and religious justifications for the subjugation of colonized peoples. Scholars writing against the popular belief that “homosexuality is unAfrican” have drawn attention to the historical construction of such terms. Marc Epprecht, for example, argues in his book Hungochani (2004) that homophobia, rather than homosexuality, was the true colonial import. Through archival and ethnographic research, Epprecht locates indigenous African same-sex sexualities (such as the titular chiShona term) that were separate from and often resistant to western definitions of homosexuality. Cultural theorist Neville Hoad provides a similarly resistant reading in his analysis of the Bugandan “bisexual king” Mwanga, who, between 1885 and 1887, famously killed the male Christian converts who refused to sleep with him. Though the dead have since been claimed as martyrs, canonized by Pope Paul IV, and celebrated with a Ugandan national holiday, Hoad argues that in the context of

14 The inter-articulation of race, gender, sexuality, and empire has been received in-depth attention in Siobhan Somerville’s Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) and Ann Stoler’s Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
16 Neville Hoad, African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
the relationship between missionary interests and colonial powers the king’s expression of same-sex desire could in fact be viewed as an anti-imperialist act. Both Hoad and Epprecht point out how the historical entwinement of empire and sexuality challenge the tendency within western queer scholarship to view certain practices within a limited, unitary framework (as “homosexuality,” for instance). Each of these authors writes on multiple countries, suggesting commonalities across the artificial geopolitical boundaries of the continent decided upon in the 1884 Berlin Conference.

Semiotic contingency and site-specific meaning are also central concerns of ethnographies written by anthropologists and geographers on queer post-apartheid spaces. Space has become an increasingly crucial analytic for understanding the construction of post-colonial/post-apartheid queer identities, in part because the racial, economic, and spatial divisions within post-apartheid society continue to replicate older historical geographies. Geographer Andrew Tucker’s *Queer Visibilities* (2009), an ethnography of Cape Town’s racially divided gay male communities, highlights the differential ways that space, community, and culture interact with each other, both upholding and remapping older divisions. Similarly, anthropologist Graeme Reid demonstrates in *How to be a Real Gay* (2013) his ethnography of black gay male hairdressers (“gents” and “ladies”) in the small-town community of Ermalo, Mpumalanga, that queer acceptance frequently depends on individuals adhering to heteronormative, localized gender roles.

The specificity with which they document and analyze particular community formations provides a rich, ethical approach to knowledge-production. Yet the strengths of the ethnographic monograph—its site-specificity, its closeness—also can be seen as its weakness; the attention to the materiality of everyday experience is not always in dialogue with the larger cultural context. By placing close ethnographic engagement alongside cultural production, I highlight the ways in which everyday life is created alongside and through the consumption of popular media.

Gender has increasingly become a site of analysis, as feminist scholars have critiqued the overwhelming androcentrism of most existent scholarship on same-sex sexuality in South Africa. Henriette Gunkel’s *Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* (2010) provides a transnational feminist reading on how apartheid-era technologies of homophobic sociality (the army and the family) have been retranslated for the post-apartheid moment, through violence enacted on the lesbian body. Amanda Lock Swarr, in *Sex in Transition: Remaking Gender and Race in South Africa* (2012), looks at transgender or, in Swarr’s preferred term, “gender liminal” South Africans. Swarr argues that the apartheid state was underpinned by a complex interarticulated system of race, gender, and biological sex that became visible and evolved in the face of political transition.

By focusing on the way gender and sex are intimately twined with race, these works ensure that queerness cannot be perceived through only one register. In this particularly gay male-focused canon, Gunkel and Swarr draw attention to the subtle erasure of lesbian and transgender/intersex experience and make explicit the ways that queer experience is differentially gendered. Swarr’s work on the word *stabane* (literally: hermaphrodite) in lesbian Soweto is a fascinating example of how gender norms get enacted and revised through performance.

Though the interdisciplinarity of this body of scholarship allows for fruitful discussions across a variety of locations and registers, its breadth leaves aporias and its differing

---

17 Tucker, *Queer Visibilities*.
vocabularies create moments of ideological tension. This dissertation argues that some of the central tensions within this discourse can be bridged—or at least productively mined—through attention to the performing body and its varied audiences. One of the most contentious methodological debates surrounds the application of western-based theory in non-western contexts, which almost all scholars discussed here acknowledge as a site of ambivalence. “Queer Theory,” in particular, has become a sticking point for certain scholars as a stand-in for all that is disembodied and imported. Marc Epprecht’s Heterosexual Africa? (2008) includes an extended, impassioned argument against the continued use of “queer theory” in general and the word “queer” in particular in discussions of African sexualities. Arguing that “queer” is part of a long history of improper importation of western theory and scholarship onto African contexts, Epprecht accuses any theorization of African same-sex sexuality not gained through significant time spent in Africa working with African collaborators as being inherently flawed: “The gap between queer theory as stated and queer theory as practiced, in short, deeply compromises the project.”

This dissertation posits that the space between theory and practice—symbolic discourse and material embodiment—put forth by Epprecht as a failure, can also be seen as a productive space of charged potentiality: when queer theory is put into dialogue with queer practice(s), queer practices themselves become the locus of new queer theories. Where queer bodies put their rights into action—literally, their bodies on the line, in the case of the One-in-Nine protesters—they engage and make visible the norms governing post-apartheid space. That is, they put theory into practice. Though Epprecht’s point about the imperfect application of western theoretical paradigms is well taken, consigning “Theory” (conceptual thought) to the west and, implicitly, “Practice” (embodied action) to Africans poses the danger of reinvoking enlightenment binaries. This division actually creates a gap that does not need to exist and ignores the ways that “queer theory” is itself a flexible conceptual tool, used to deconstruct and critique structures of knowledge and power. As William Spurlin—whose Imperialism Within the Margins (2006), a theoretically-dense critique of existing historiographic scholarship, was the target of much of Epprecht’s ire—has pointed out, attention to African queerness-as-queerness reveals the heterosexist bias of post-colonial studies and the western bias of academic queer theory.

Indeed, though “queer” may not have been taken up as broadly as a self-descriptor in South African contexts as it has in the west, it has been taken up strategically by a number of activist organizations and African scholars. Ugandan feminist scholar Sylvia Tamale, editor of the impressively broad, African-authored African Sexualities: A Reader (2011) argues that, many theories deriving from the west can be a useful starting point for revision and reimaginaion. Tamale locates Michel Foucault’s work on power relations, Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, and Gayle Rubin’s conception of sexual hierarchy as being particularly relevant to the study of African sexualities. Rather than view the relationship between theory and practice as an insurmountable gap, Tamale views it as a “circuitous, undulating process.” Here methodology itself, far from being static, can be “a political process, a ‘space’ in which complex issues of context, voice, ethics, and ideological depth are played out…It is part and parcel of

theory-building and transformative change.”24 The Reader also, notably, includes poetry and fiction alongside more traditionally academic work, challenging the hierarchies within the “academic anthology” as well as adding space for creative engagement and dialogue amongst the texts.

This triangulation between method-theory-transformation is a far more useful way of articulating the relation between lived experience and its conceptualization than the tired binary between “theory” and “practice,” and echoes performance theorist Dwight Conquergood’s argument for performance as a mode of joining different ways of knowing. In his discipline-defining manifesto “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” Conquergood draws upon Michel de Certeau’s aphorism “what the map cuts up, the story cuts across,” as a parable for how performance mediates between often-opposed domains of knowledge, revealing them to be interrelated and co-constitutive: “this promiscuous traffic between different ways of knowing carries the most radical promise of performance studies research. Performance studies struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice.”25 While South African queerness has been theorized across a number of disciplinary and methodological positions, very few have focused on meanings given to the queer South African body in space and none have concentrated as to how this body mediates between the discursive understanding of imagined categories (such as “homosexual” and “African”), the material enactment of those bodies, and their reception within varied interpretive communities. Indeed, this is one of the most valuable contributions of performance studies as a methodology: the ability to bridge different ways of knowing and to view knowledge and culture as contingent, “undulating processes.”

Throughout this dissertation, I frequently move between engaging academic theory, analyzing embodied practice, and documenting theory-in-practice, using the last to illuminate the first two and to make an intervention into studies of South African queerness and queerness more generally. My analysis of the Chosen FEW, a soccer team-activist organization for black lesbians in and around Johannesburg, for instance, explicitly addresses the gaps between differing expectations of “Africanness” in their varied communities. Rather than drawing exclusively on the work of queer and performance theorists to analyze the players’ lived experiences, I analyze their self-understandings and languages as innovative ways of doing theory, and pose their particular subjunctive relation towards futurity as an African intervention into recent theory on queer utopias.

My methodology, attentive to both theatrical and everyday enactments of queerness, also provides a valuable intervention into a body of scholarship that has been overwhelmingly text-focused, and participates in a larger process of rethinking knowledge production in post-apartheid South Africa. The question of “the archive” has loomed large amongst scholars of African queerness, who have struggled to fill gaps and alternate readings of colonial/apartheid-era records or create new archives through close-up ethnographies. This reckoning with archival history is not limited, as might be expected, to those experiences considered taboo. A significant strand of post-1994 South African cultural studies scholarship has been dedicated to revisiting and reinterpreting both older colonial/apartheid archives and creating new forms of knowledge-production that better express the complexities of the post-apartheid moment—with a particular focus on the palimpsestual, the affective, and the practiced. One major attempt, aptly titled

24 Ibid, 29.
Refiguring the Archive (2002), edited by Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, and anthropologist Graeme Reid (author of How to be a Real Gay, discussed above), was a book form of a 1998 conference at the University of Witwatersrand. This conference staged a number of seminars (from scholars such as Jacques Derrida and Achille Mbembe) alongside an archive-themed art exhibition Holdings, and performances of the play After Nines, developed out of the archival holdings of Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (then, the Gay and Lesbian Archives, GALA).

The Johannesburg-based GALA is an important interlocutor for this project and model for the sort of theory-practice work that can animate and transcend the archival impulse. Over the course of several research trips I became a regular in their office. I attended numerous talks and book launches and borrowed from their lending library. I spent late nights discussing queer politics with director Anthony Manion and archivist Gabriel Khan. I was asked on occasion to lead discussion groups on relationships and queerness in the media for students from local universities, and once ran an Augusto Boal Theatre of the Oppressed workshop on stereotypes. In each interaction with the organization, I was impressed with how seamlessly they translated between documents of the past and the needs of the present, acknowledging that the two are intimately related. What might have been a purely archival project has moved beyond their original imperative to collect and store queer pasts towards disseminating information and providing support for marginalized communities. In their focus on the embodied and affective, GALA’s work accesses something closer to what performance theorist Diana Taylor has called the repertoire: a mode of knowledge that depends on the transfer of memory through embodiment, action, and repetition over time.27

Just as GALA’s mandate (and their titular “A”) has evolved from Archives to Action, I would argue, so must scholarship on queer South Africa evolve away from a purely textual approach. To some degree, this is already happening. Gunkel frames her otherwise textual book with a discussion of Aftermath, an image from lesbian photographer Zanele Muholi, with the argument that Muholi’s images allow for (following Mbembe) an “archive of the present.”28 Muholi is also central to one of the concluding chapters of Breanna Munro’s otherwise text-based analysis of queer South African literature and letters, South Africa and the Dream of Love yet to Come (2012).29 That these authors draw on Muholi’s images suggests that they are using the representational and non-literary as means to escape the linearity of the archive and the text. Notably, both authors turn to representational mediums when wanting to discuss temporality, the “now” of post-apartheid South Africa, and its possible futures. Muholi’s work is extremely evocative in this way (indeed, her photography, alongside Mamela Nyamza’s choreography, is the subject of my third chapter). Yet in gesturing to Muholi’s work, Gunkel and Munro stop short of investigating other representational media such as performance and dance, or popular culture such as television and the internet. Where photography is a useful step away from the text towards alternative ways of seeing, analysis of performance (broadly defined) provides insight into alternate ways of doing. Because so much of how queerness is interpreted depends on the interaction of these (queer) bodies (in post-apartheid South African time-space) with various

---

26 Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, and Graeme Reid, eds. Refiguring the Archive (Cape Town: David Philips Press, 2002).
28 Gunkel, Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa, 140.
audiences, a study that focuses on embodied enactment and embodied reception provides a point of departure from this body of literature.

Of this recent scholarship, Neville Hoad has come the closest to articulating the value of the sort of performative encounter that I’m outlining. In African Intimacies Hoad structures his arguments through close readings of what he terms flashpoints: moments where “longstanding discursive forces that have organized representations of race, sex, sovereignty, and imperialism become visible as they struggle to accommodate themselves to a changing world.” Hoad analyzes a diverse number of provocative moments—such as human rights language and the constitutional equality clause, a meeting of African Anglican Bishops at the 1998 Lambeth conference, and Thabo Mbeki’s controversial statements on HIV—to untangle the complex and varied meanings of “homosexuality” as it interfaces with “Africa.” Much like Tamale, Hoad forgoes the colonizing imperative of linear Time by envisioning his archive as fluid and “on the move.” His lens works through “imbricated geneology of categories of race and homosexuality,” and is “a kaleidoscope as much as it is a camera, telescope, or microscope.”

Yet, while Hoad provides a cogent analysis of these moments as they have played out in print and in the media, his dependence on textual analysis limits close attention to any embodied element of these flashpoints. In a context where so much of the history of same sex intimacies has not been recorded, is not lingual, and is located in the intersection of the everyday and the spectacular, his archive remains at the level of the discursive. Indeed, Hoad acknowledges the limitations of his methods as part of a larger difficulty to think outside of the terms in which the debate is framed. He concludes a chapter tracing the South African LGBT movement’s entanglement with Human Rights discourse with a provocation that “we may have to look through and beyond rights talk for an archive that better contains the embodied, affective, and political experience of race, sex, sexuality, and freedom in Southern Africa.”

**Conceptualizing Prismatic Performances**

This dissertation gamely takes up Hoad’s challenge, while acknowledging his caveat that, in all attempts to render into discourse these complexities of the embodied and affective experiences, one’s “failure is assured.” I take as my starting place Hoad’s evocative description of his “fragmented archive” as providing a kaleidoscopic analytical lens. The kaleidoscope—a reflective device whose glass reality is colored through a rather random process of mix-and-match—is an apt metaphor for interdisciplinary methodologies. Yet it is also a rather two-dimensional conceptualization and does not take into account how affect is channeled and mobilized within varied audiences. I propose that an analysis attentive to embodiment and reception of these discursive moments would move away from Hoad’s kaleidoscopic lens (a way of seeing/analyzing) and towards prismatic practices (a way feeling/doing). I gesture towards this sort of theory-in-motion by not only acknowledging my methodological framework as being multi-sited and deconstructive, but by also suggesting that queer South African performances and their audiences are themselves connected by multifaceted, often-invisible lines of exchange and affect. These affective bonds allow for often-unexpected moments of attachment and disavowal. Location—geographical, political, and proximal—is crucial to understanding the

30 Hoad, African Intimacies, xix.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid, 89.
affective investments that certain bodies have with certain spaces, and how identities are crafted within and through movement on overlapping lines.

Here, my thinking is influenced by cultural theorist Sara Ahmed’s masterful analysis of the concept of “orientation” in her book *Queer Phenomenology*, which argues that certain bodies are oriented towards certain spaces (and others not) through a series of repetitive, naturalized movements. Drawing on the work of critical cultural geographers such as Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey, Ahmed contends that Space is never neutral, but is created by the interplay of the bodies that engage it and the shifting perceptions and viewpoints that make certain possibilities/spaces visible. She posits that “spatial orientations (relations of proximity and distance) are shaped by other social orientations, such as gender and class, that affect what comes into view, but also are not simply given, as they are effects of the repetition of actions over time.”33 Ahmed’s concept of space as not given but produced through relational and affective means is extremely useful for understanding queer performances within the context of the post-apartheid nation state, and, for my purposes, creates space for an understanding of queer embodiment that takes into account its multidimensional and affective elements.

In her argument that bodies in space are always already conditioned to expect certain performances in certain spaces, Ahmed intriguingly figures phenomenology—the structures of perception—through a series of geometric terms. Bodies are oriented, through performative repetition, to follow lines (of inheritance, towards particular objects); the trajectory of these lines is dependent on particular points of view (which depend what objects they are oriented towards). When alternate lines and points of view are made visible, “social conflict can often be experienced as being ‘out of time’ and ‘out of place’ with others.”34 These lines, made visible through social conflict, fracture the norms and narratives governing space and ideology. They result in strong emotional reactions, “creating distance through the registering of proximity as a threat. Emotions involve such affective forms of disorientation.”35 These lines possibility, of fracture and intersection so integral to post-apartheid South African time-space are, I will argue, linked and animated by emotion through the performing body and audiences.

In my evocation of the prism—a three-dimensional geode that refracts and deconstructs light into its composite parts—I play on both South Africa’s meta-narrative as the Rainbow Nation, united in its diversity, as well as the rainbow as the global symbol for gay rights and visibility. However, it is a concept that I use advisedly and critically, acknowledging the limitations of visual metaphors standing in for social processes. Similar criticism has been leveled by theorists such as Jasbir Puar and Elizabeth Grotz, at the metaphor of the intersection, a concept that, while crucial to feminist and queer of color theorizations of identity as multi-sited, tends to flatten the particular emotional investments that individuals have in these identities, and the ways in which these identities are embodied and relational.36

Rather than argue that these queer performances are prismatic merely because they make the ambiguities and contradictions of the post-apartheid era visible, I argue that queer performances make these contradictions *palpable*—that is, able to be felt, experienced, and acted upon. Where the geode that deconstructs light into its many-hued parts might create a flattened conception of a

---

34 Ibid 13.
rainbow (nation), the performance, as a prism, reflects and refracts the emotional investments that its audiences project into it. What is revealed is not a clearly defined spectrum, but often messy and ambiguous, forcing the audience member to see and process their own most deeply held beliefs and desires anew.

With this three-dimensional, affectively charged conception of space in mind, I return momentarily to the One-in-Nine protest, to demonstrate what a prismatic reading of this action might reveal about queerness and contemporary South African identities. What might an analysis of a queer embodied repertoire—one inspired by Tamale’s concept of method-theory-transformation—look like? What does the does this triangulation of performance choreography (its “lines”), audience (its “points of view”), and context (space and time) reveal about the constitution and fracture of post-apartheid identity?

The One-in-Nine Campaign intervention’s success or failure rested upon the ability of the black lesbian body to be (mis)recognized by structures of power. When YouTube commenters weighed in on One-in-Nine’s intervention, they recognized the incongruence of these bodies and saw this performance as out of line with the spatio-temporal norms that governed the space. Thus, YouTube commenter nbkcq28’s use of the colloquial phrase “there is a time and a place for everything!” can be echoed by fellow commenter Samantha de Lange’s assertion of ownership over the pride route, “I was there I passed you YOU were out of place.” That these viewers felt the need to comment and add their voice to the increasingly contentious discursive space produced by the protest—and that this “time and place” extended far beyond its initial action—demonstrates the way space is not only material, but also imagined. The performance event extends far beyond the initial action.

One-in-Nine’s performative intervention into the mass-produced spectacle of Johannesburg Pride—where the Gay Community is seen as and encouraged to be “together as one”—disrupts a particular, neoliberal presumption of what Gay South Africa is supposed to look like and which bodies count. By placing the (stand-in) bodies of dead lesbians at the feet of the LGBT community’s most public performance, One-in-Nine symbolically called those marching and those watching to account for their position in relation to “South Africa’s LGBTI community” referenced in Pride’s promotional materials. Though the pride committee responded by labeling the interference a regrettable “safety hazard” that had “escalated into a racial furore on the day and subsequently in social media, attempting to divide the LGBTI community across racial lines,” the One-in-Nine Campaign’s protest and its subsequent re-presentations in social media were arguably making visible “racial lines” that already existed.

The performance was an intentional deconstruction of the meta-narrative of both a unitary LGBTI community and the affect of “Pride” that had been sutured to this narrative in a South African context. The current reality, the banner argued, is “no cause for celebration,” but rather for mobilization against the structures that undergird a larger “economic apartheid” that values certain (white, upper-class, male) bodies more than (black, poor, lesbian/trans) others. The success of this intervention depended upon their bodies’ perceived incongruity in a particular space (Rosebank vs the lokshins,) at a particular affect-inflected time (that of “Pride”) and required an audience that understood the rules of decorum that governed and shaped the contours of the post-apartheid South African public.

Those rules, once breached through the Campaign’s intervention—which literally stopped an enactment of the narrative of gay progress in South Africa—opened up a multi-dimensional critique that simultaneously made visible the careful regulation of “public” space in South Africa and made co-performers of the unwitting marchers. The reactions of these co-performers toward the barricade of black lesbians are far more revealing and individualized than the event’s call for “oneness” in the “gay community” would suggest. Captured on film and posted on the Internet, they became performances in their own right, both attached to and separate from the original intervention. The YouTube commenter’s response to the protestors, their co-performers, and the pride event itself demonstrate another level of mediation and co-performance, particularly in the popularity of the claim that the women, with their ambiguously-worded signage, “looked like homophobes.” In this circumstance, the underlying presumption of what a South African homophobe “looks like,” is clearly racialized.

The blackness of the lesbian protestors’ skin is associated in the minds of those responding with the blackness of the presumptively anti-gay majority, against whose “traditional leaders” Joburg Pride’s seven person, all-white board crafted its theme of “Unity.” That the black lesbian protestors could not be seen as lesbians suggests a deeply-engrained binary that aligns the cosmopolitan, racially-unmarked (but presumably white) celebrant as both the subject and object of Africa’s Pride; its antithesis, the uniformly homophobic, unambiguously black South Africans therefore implicitly become, in the minds of these cosmopolitan queers, Africa’s Shame.

Yet even as the choreography of the performance—the basic structure of interruption, education, and, ideally, incorporation (through the minute of silence)—remains stable, the particularities of audience, location, and context completely shift the meaning, and therefore the overall character of the performance event. Indeed, the One-in-Nine Campaign had already performed a similar die-in several months earlier at a Women’s Day march held by the ANC Women’s League. The march was meant to follow in the footsteps of the iconic 1956 Federation of South African Women’s march to Pretoria’s Union Buildings to protest the apartheid passbook laws. The ANC Women’s League’s reenactment of the original march was itself a performative process akin to what theorist Joseph Roach calls surrogation: a reenactment meant to shore up identity through affective nostalgia, that often unwittingly draws attention to the differences between the original and its re-performance. The ANC Women’s League that supported Jacob Zuma during his rape charges and subsequent corruption scandals is far removed from the original march’s rallying cry of “wathint’ abafazi, wathint’ imbokodo. Uze kufa!” (“You strike a woman, you strike a rock. You will die!”). One-in-Nine, Forum for Empowerment of Women, and other feminist and lesbian organizations have critiqued the Women’s League for selling out women to patriarchy, jostling for power within the ruling party. Indeed, clashes between feminist activists and Women’s League members supporting Zuma during his trial were central to One-in-Nine’s founding as a radical and feminist alternative to existing women’s organizations, which they viewed as accommodationist and complicit with heteropatriarchy.

When One-in-Nine interrupted the big, televised march they were, as One-in-Nine and FEW board member Emily Craven expressed to me, expecting to be arrested or at least ejected from the parade route, considering the current ANC’s ambivalent relationship to homosexuality. Yet the Gauteng Province Premier Nomvula Mokonyane, who was presiding over the march, took One-in-Nine’s petition and calmed the crowd, giving them their minute of silence before

---

encouraging them to join the parade. That this protest went relatively smoothly and the intervention at Pride the following month became a site of conflict is not due to the piece’s “choreography,” but rather its context and audience’s response. The ANC Women’s League’s response is quite telling, particularly within the larger context of the ANC’s failure to deliver on promised services and successes with managing popular affect. By inviting the members of the One-in-Nine Campaign to join the ANC Women’s League’s march, she gives them—and, through their participation, queer women’s experience—a symbolic role in the larger body of the ANC (and black queer women a space in the primarily-black League). Yet this inclusion, much like the inclusion of the Equality Clause in the constitution, can also be seen as largely symbolic, a motion to keep rowdy elements “in line.” The Premier was not called upon to make a statement promising anything to One-in-Nine (or to queer South Africans more generally). Silence, though effective as a protesting tool, can also be coopted by the mainstream. Arguably, One-in-Nine was actually protesting the ANC’s continued silence on the continued rape and murder of black lesbians. In ostensibly achieving their goal, they also inadvertently participated in the ANC government’s lip service to gay rights, without requiring them to sacrifice anything or make any commitments. Thus, the seemingly-successful protest (which received limited media coverage) was far less successful in the long term than the interrupted Pride protest.

Methods and Structure

My analysis of South African queer performance—in its focus on the interrelation between differing performing bodies, public spaces, post-apartheid narratives, and interpretive audiences—has, by necessity, drawn on a number of different archives and repertoires, each requiring their own site-specific method. I conducted this research over the course of four 2-3 month visits to South Africa between 2008 and 2013, and nine months of fieldwork in Johannesburg between 2010 and 2011. I cull my analysis from a number of sources, drawing connections across media and between performances as enacted on-stage, in the gallery, and on the street. My methodological approach falls under the purview of performance/discourse analysis and ethnography.

In chapters focused on theatrical performance and visual cultures (particularly Chapter One’s analysis of trans-apartheid drag performance and Chapter Three’s discussion of aesthetic displacement and spectatorship), I draw upon performance footage, photography, production and exhibition reviews, artist statements, and memoir as primary archives. Conversely, in Chapter Two’s analysis of the everyday performances of the Chosen FEW soccer team, where the words and self-knowledge of its players were central to my analysis, I primarily drew on participant observation and interviews with individual team members. In my final chapter, my focus on online communities allowed me to employ overlapping methods of analysis, to demonstrate the

---

41The ANC has, throughout its nearly 20 years in power, been accused of failing to deliver on their campaign promises and providing basic human services (such as running water, electricity, and sanitation) to its constituencies. This perceived failure has led to an increasing number of popular protest movements—such as the Abahlali “shack dwellers” movement, People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) anti-crime organization, and continuous strikes across all sectors—which have been either ignored or repressed by the government. The ANC still remains relatively unchallenged, in part because they are still seen as the revolutionary liberation party and in part because the country is still so racially divided that there is suspicion that parties such as the Democratic Alliance, which has significant holds in the Western Cape, are really just the old Afrikaans National Party in new, blue t-shirts. The ANC, particularly as led by Jacob Zuma and (former) ANC Youth League President Julius Malema, is skilled in harnessing both nostalgia and paranoia to stay in power.
community’s multiple spatialities and affective investments, including: archival research (with the website as archive), discourse analysis (viewing comments and blog posts as text), and performance ethnography (viewing the comments and blog posts as calculated performances). This methodology allowed me to track reception through a number of different registers, opening up multiple ways of seeing.

I seek to bridge the work of feminist, queer, and performance scholars working on space, time, and embodiment in the western academy with the rich debates continuing in gender and cultural studies within a relatively insular South African academy (whose members are, with a few notable exceptions, speaking to each other and not to an international audience). I am conscious of my position as a non-South African writing about South Africa from the global north and acknowledge that this position is always in danger of replicating a colonial hierarchy of knowledge, where—to paraphrase Stuart Hall—“the west” defines the experience of “the rest.” In a conscious attempt to bridge this discursive gap between the South African and Euro-American academies, my dissertation draws on the work of scholars from both locations. I am particularly indebted to the work of four of South African scholars Elizabeth Gunner, Pumla Gqola, Carolyn Hamilton, Deborah Posel, and Melissa Steyn. In facilitating dialogue between South African and transnational scholarship, I make draw attention to connections between the two that otherwise might go unmarked, to the enrichment of both.

In what follows, I outline the contours of my argument and provide an overall map of the dissertation:

Chapter One explores white drag performance during the moment of political transition between white minority rule to a non-racial democracy. Satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys and performance artist Steven Cohen each used drag to reflect and refract the affective excess and ontological insecurity of the first decade of the New South Africa. Both artists attempted to transform South African whiteness into a queer sort of “Africanness,” embracing an aesthetic of simultaneity and critique that hinted towards a revision of racial, gendered, and cultural signs. Yet these transformations were always only fleeting and conditional on transformation being enacted on material as well as symbolic platforms. Though the imperfect transition inevitably foreclosed the efficacy of these transformational gestures, their failures, as much as their successes, highlighted the complexities of performing the racialized body.

Chapter Two shifts focus to the contemporary moment and analyzes the everyday performances of members of the Chosen FEW, an all-black lesbian soccer team. In a space where black queer bodies are popularly framed as inherently “unAfrican,” culture becomes the ground on which queer individuals can intervene. By performing identities that draw on numerous—global gay, youth, and “traditional”—cultures, members of the Chosen FEW make and remake culture in their interactions with their surroundings. In order to maintain these performances in hostile environments, however, the players take on personas that serve both a protective and projective function. By utilizing the subjunctive framework of acting “as-if” (as-if their constitutional rights are protected), the players are able to latch onto what José Muñoz has termed queer’s “insistence on the potentiality or concrete possibility of another world.” Yet, unlike a queer utopia, everyday performances in increasingly hostile environments are, of necessity, pragmatic, maintained through a series of what I’m calling subjunctive performatives.

Chapter Three addresses the politics of representation surrounding the phenomenon of the so-called “Corrective” or “Curative” rape of black township lesbians. As this violent act—men targeting lesbians for rape to “correct” them “back” to heterosexuality—has received increasing
exposure in the media, so have black lesbian artists increasingly struggled to represent this very real experience of sexual trauma in a way neither trivializes the experiences nor retraumatizes survivors of sexual assault. This chapter analyzes the representational tactics used by photographer Zanele Muholi and choreographer Mamela Nyamza, arguing that with subjects already marked either invisible (unAfrican) or hypervisible (in their assault) both Muholi and Nyamza develop what I’m calling an aesthetic of displacement: a mode of performance that displaces the focus off the violated bodies and onto the spectator’s own complex desire to view the violation.

The final chapter analyzes the varied, intersecting mediascapes that inform the perspectives of daily lives of the majority of South Africans. Through a close analysis of the reception of a gay storyline on the popular multi-lingual soap opera Generations on its most popular online fansite Gensblog, I trace the deliberations and revisions of “Africanness” in real time. Without reifying the internet as a radically open space, I argue that the experience of online fandom is itself prismatic: overlapping, unstable identities and points of identification/negotiation are enacted through a number of simultaneous spaces of reception and deliberation: the home space, where the show is watched; the aspirational, classed space of Generation’s Johannesburg; and the “global” space of Gensblog.

I conclude with an analysis of the 2013 Johannesburg People’s Pride. This pride celebration, organized by radical queer and anti-racist activists in the gap left by the complete implosion of Joburg Pride following One-in-Nine’s intervention, retraces the route of the original pride parade in the inner-city, embracing a number of overlapping, seemingly contradictory affects. These queer enactments, breaking the spatial norms of the inner-city, not only make those norms visible, but, with their presents reshape its possible futures. Prismatic performances, in fracturing of spatial and temporal norms, refract in ways that are not always predictable, and extend outward to create new lines and audiences.
During the period immediately following the 1994 first democratic elections—with the country still poised on the brink of a factional bloodbath—if one happened to turn on the South African pay television channel M-Net, one would have been witness to a television program where the country’s new leaders were profiled. Far from being your average news program, the television show, called Evita’s Funigalore featured a graying Afrikaans matron spending time with the newly elected leaders at home and in some of their favorite pursuits. The host, Evita Bezuidenhout, formerly the wife of a high-ranking apartheid official and more recently, the ambassador to a Bantustan homeland, gamely took the audience on a journey that included: trout fishing with new ANC Secretary Cyril Ramaphosa; yoga with Jay Naidoo, the minister in charge of the Reconstruction Development Program; a safari adventure with the New National Party’s Rolf Meyer (then-Minister of Constitutional Development); and roller skating with Pan African Congress member Patricia de Lille, newly appointed chairperson of a parliamentary committee. The final coup de grâce was her interview with new president Nelson Mandela who, upon meeting her, kissed her and declared “Evita, ah, my dear, you look so beautiful!”

As she interviewed each politician, flirting throughout and asking questions both hard-hitting and personal, Evita Bezuidenhout created a space for those who had been formerly classified as “terrorists” by the old regime to articulate their views for the new South Africa. By the end of each episode, the viewers had been given a more well-rounded perspective on the candidates and had seen a human, even silly side to a former enemy. The M-net audience—a pay-channel, with, at that time, a primarily white clientele—would have been familiar with Mevrou Bezuidenhout, who had been featured in several television programs and had been the subject of several books throughout the 1980s. The popularity of Funigalore ensured it a two-season run and the continued relevance of Evita Bezuidenhout for the post-apartheid era.

One crucial, yet oddly unspoken aspect of the popularity of Funigalore and Evita’s other incursions into the public sphere, is that she is neither real nor a woman. Evita Bezuidenhout is the alter-ego of playwright/satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys, a gay, white, Jewish South African performer who has been crossing both political and gender lines for much of his 50-year career. If it seems unusual that a South African audience—then, as now, a highly Christian nation—would embrace a television show hosted by a man in drag, this was only the latest chapter in a sprawling multi-platform narrative that spanned stage, page, screen, and television. The Evita character, whom Uys invented in an early 1980s newspaper column as a vehicle for satire against the apartheid state, had by the mid-90s become one of the most vocal advocates for democracy and the possibility of an inclusive nation. Five years later, in the run-up to the second presidential election, Uys-as-Evita would embark on a get-out-the-vote indaba that would take her from white Afrikaans town halls to black African townships. In his memoir, Elections and Erections, Uys commented on the incongruity that Evita—an invented, satirical character—received an official parliamentary sendoff from those who

42 Pieter-Dirk Uys, Between the Devil and the Deep: A Memoir of Acting and Reacting (Cape Town: Zebra, 2005), 159.
were shaping the realities of post-apartheid life: “Here I was in Parliament, by invitation, and in drag! Mrs. Bezuidenhout was dressed in her newly discovered ethnic finery, an explosion of bold oranges, browns, and yellow… the nation watched in amazement as Tannie [Auntie] Evita commanded the attention of those who ruled, managing to dissolve them into hysterics.”

Simultaneously, though on a much smaller scale, another gay, white, Jewish man harnessed the 1999 election as a platform for drag performance. Steven Cohen, a performance artist known for his shocking guerilla interventions, arrived at his local voting station—in a primarily black neighborhood—wearing dramatic whiteface makeup, a short, black onesie corset, a crown of feathers, a Star of David glued to his crown, and boots with meter-long gembok horns for stilettos. Unable to walk in his “heels,” Cohen crawled on all fours, pulling himself along the pavement, much to the bemusement of those waiting in line with him. As his partner Elu filmed his progress, Cohen smiled, answered questions when asked, and hauled himself into the ballot box.

Cohen had previously made several public interventions—“Faggot,” “Ugly Girl,” “Dog,” and “Jew”—which took fantastical drag characters and whimsical dance performances into post-apartheid arenas of display: art galleries, shopping malls, zoos, and taxi ranks. His work focuses on the body’s limitations, often performing gymnastic feats in ten-inch heels, with trussed testicles and a variety of butt plugs. The shocked faces of those he catches unawares in his filmed interventions suggests that Cohen’s work is alien in whatever landscape he comes across. Yet the reactions he elicits from his audiences—shock, disgust, anger, amusement—indicates that his work touches something unspoken and taboo about post-apartheid bodies and the values given to them. One of his most well-known works, Chandelier—which has him wading through a squatter camp as it is being dismantled by the infamously brutal Red Ant security guards and interacting with the displaced residents wearing a crystal chandelier as a tutu—touches upon some of the most uncomfortable realities and juxtapositions of post-apartheid life.

This chapter argues that at this crucial moment of transition and transformation (roughly from Nelson Mandela’s 1989 release from prison to the turn of the millennium) drag and gender transgression became a mode of performance through which South Africa’s violent histories and potential futures could be bridged and explored by gay white artists in the public sphere. Beyond merely serving to satirize or demonize whiteness, Uys and Cohen’s performance work engaged the expectations of white masculinity—and whiteness in general—to probe the limits of belonging and “Africanness” in the newly post-apartheid era. This was especially crucial in a context of political transition, where transformation has been so central to national ideology: the

---

44 Pieter-Dirk Uys, Elections and Erections: a Memoir of Fear and Fun (Cape Town: Zebra, 2003), 70.
transformation from a society bounded by race into a constitutional democracy and the transformation a violent past into the basis of a peaceful and honest future.

The early 1990s, when Cohen began his performance career and Uys fully developed his Evita character, was a time of high epistemological anxiety and spatial indeterminacy. Author Nadine Gordimer has reflected on this time in late-apartheid South Africa as being an interregnum, a period “typified by the unadmitted fear of being without structures. The interregnum is not only between two social orders but between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined.”  

That two white gay performers used drag to facilitate and comment upon the democratic ritual and the role of whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa—and that, in Uys’ case these performances were extremely popular across color lines—suggests a particular critical frisson associated with the queer, cross-dressing body that performance theorist Marjorie Garber’s has termed “crisis of categories.” Yet the concept of “crisis” is not entirely adequate to capture the affective dramaturgy of the South African interregnum and early post-apartheid era, a period that saw unprecedented acts of brutality between political parties, incomprehensible performances of forgiveness (popularly expressed as a “miracle transition”), and a painful reckoning with the past in the soundtrack of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

For all of the anxiety, the interregnum and, particularly, the earliest years of the democracy were also a time of celebration and of intense creativity and openness, both in cultural output and in governmental legislation. It was during this time that the LGBT-inclusive Equality Clause was included in the interim Constitution, and South Africans—so long separated into their tribal, ethnic, racial categories—were encouraged to re-envision the meaning of an integrated South African identity, “united in its diversity.” Public enactments of “South Africanness” were frequently performative, and often rested on the symbolic, forgiving power of black struggle stalwarts such as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu to bridge the cultural differences and foster reconciliation. Images of Tutu’s purple-robed dignity when presiding over the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings and Mandela’s triumphant hoisting of the Rugby World Cup wearing the jersey of the formerly segregated Springbok team came to define the earliest years of the democracy. That which had once been forbidden was thrown into juxtaposition with that which had once ruled, in a tentative unity.

These public performances were just the most visible examples of what theatre scholar Loren Kruger has termed South Africa’s “theatrical nationhood,” public enactments that embraced this sort of mixing in the transition to democracy. Encouraged to “follows scripts that call on the actors to take on roles not quite their own,” Kruger notes that moments such as Mandela’s 1994 inauguration allowed everyday citizens to blur individual bodily boundaries into new, collective identities, an ecstatic becoming-South-African. This layering of identities at that moment of political transition—such as Kruger’s example of a dancing black woman declaring ‘I am black. I am white. I am coloured. I am Indian” took their meaning because they were in fact re-performances of previous repertoires, revised to rehearse new national aesthetics. At this moment of symbolic transition, the old overlapped with the new, not only temporally, but spatially. Old signs were resignified and reappropriated and future national identities were auditioned. In this

46 Marjorie Garber, Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety (New York: Routledge, 1997).
context, Uys and Cohen’s performances capture and mediate these affects through an embrace of drag’s ontological excess and simultaneity. By performing gender transgression in the context of political of transition, with an eye towards larger societal transformation, they open up the possibility of numerous “draggings” in the context of whiteness in South Africa.

White identity in South Africa has often been fraught with anxiety in relation to larger South African identity, particularly around what a truly African whiteness should look like and whether such an identity is even possible. As Melissa Steyn documents in her ethnography of South African post-apartheid whiteness, white South Africans took a number of reactionary and contradictory positions at the end of apartheid, ranging from racist defensiveness to enthusiastic embrace of Africanness. At the heart of each response was a deep anxiety about what would be lost in the new dispensation and also profound ambivalence about their role as beneficiaries of a racist regime. Faced with ontological insecurity, white South Africans were dealing with a particularly complex sense of loss and guilt. Cohen and Uys each used drag’s fractal nature to engage these emotions in their audiences, as well as to highlight whiteness’ continued material and symbolic violences into the post-apartheid era. Though their emergence into the public sphere may have been due, in part, to the unusual time of rupture and unprecedented freedom in which they worked, their longevity and continued relevance in South Africa as performers suggest that they are not merely catalysts of a much larger identity crisis but that, beyond being a mirror, their performances use drag to create something new.

Following Judith Butler’s famous précis on gender performativity, which argues that the drag performer makes visible the iterative construction of gender identity as a “copy without an original,” I argue that drag performance is an inherently prismatic form, a reflection of a refraction of a reflection, able to warp and shape the self-perceptions of those who gaze into the drag queen’s funhouse mirror. Any interpretation of Uys and Cohen’s performances depend on a triangulated system of viewer identification (or disidentification), performance location, and the physical presence of their performing white bodies. Perhaps, most importantly, the efficacy of the performance depended on the moment in which it occurred.

Increasingly, theoretical work on queer identity—particularly within a non-white, non-gender normative context—has focused on the ways in which queer bodies reconfigure the temporal and linear expectations of history and modernity. Judith (Jack) Halberstam has argued that queer—and, particularly, transgendered—subjects undermine the temporality of familial reproduction (what Anne McClintock, writing in a difference context about colonial South Africa, has called “nation time”) by creating an alternative “queer time and place.” Elizabeth Freeman’s theorization of temporal drag—around performances of seemingly anachronistic lesbian styles—argues that certain performances slow down (drag) the progress narrative by inserting alternative

48 Black consciousness activist and writer Steve Biko’s scathing apartheid-era critique of white liberal “non-racialism” is still applicable to a post-apartheid context: “they vacillate between the two worlds, verbalizing all the complaints of the blacks beautifully while skillfully extracting what suits them from the exclusive pool of white privileges.” (“Black Souls, White Skins?” in I Write What I Like (Oxford: Heinnemann, 1978), 21). These white attempts to transform the country, Biko argues, are only superficial—so much hot air—with no deeper self-reflection and sacrifice of privilege. The ventriloquism of black concerns was built in to the government’s strategy of allowing (limited and white) critique, within the confines of the apartheid state. The white liberals therefore would, unknowingly, be colluding with the very system of apartheid that they were trying to change.


51 Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, Sexuality in the Imperial Conquest (New York: Routledge, 1995).
temporalities into the present. Rather than dwelling unproductively in the past, these dragged temporalities negotiate the present (and alter the future), by engaging the past. Several scholars of South African queer identity have referenced the efficacy of drag performance during the period of transition, but none have explored how that drag itself tries to participate in the temporal process underlying so many of the early-post-apartheid metaphors of rainbows and renaissances: transformation.

Discourses around transformation—and what such acts this would entail—were ubiquitous in the earliest post-apartheid years. Afrikaans journalist and poet Anjie Krog reflects in her book *A Change of Tongue* what it might require for South Africans (and white South Africans in particular) to truly transform, rather than merely, and superficially, change. She turns to the dictionary to find the definition of transformation, and—amongst several competing etymologies—notes:

The word consists of two parts: the prefix “trans” which is the Latin for across, the other side (as in Transkei, Transvaal); and “form” which means to give structure to, to create, to bring forth. In its deepest structure, then, the word ‘transformation’ means: to form the other side, to start creating where you are going. But ‘trans’ also appears in words like transfigure, transfer, transcendent, transaction, transgress, transience. And it is embedded in the Dutch *hemeltrans*, where it means ‘firmament.’ One could say that in order to create the other side, one has to remake the firmament—no mere change of structure or exterior but of the guiding essence.

One aspect that Krog’s exploration of transformation does not explicitly address is the temporality of *trans*, the liminality of its duration, the indeterminacy of the period of being and becoming, of crossing and crystallization. During this period of transformation—and continuing into the first few decades of The New South Africa—both Uys and Cohen challenged and troubled the borders of identity and crossed physical spaces that had previously been (and often implicitly remained) segregated and divided, giving structure and shape to the anxieties and possibilities. Future constitutional court chief justice Albie Sachs began his influential 1991 in-house paper on culture to the ANC, *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom*, “We all know where South Africa is, but we do not yet know what it is.”

This promissory *yet*, suspended between a past not to be forgotten and a future to be discovered, echoed all attempts to categorize the particular period of transition in the years that followed, each definition shaping the contours of the country-in-becoming: a new South Africa.

Yet drag is not in and of itself a liberatory practice. Whiteness, even as it critiques itself through gender inversion, still carries the history of its materiality. Uys and Cohen’s performances are rooted in the specificity and historicity of the white body in Africa. This chapter looks at their performances during the first decade of democracy, when very few representations of queer identity were publically accessible onstage or off. They target the very issues of privilege at stake in the relation of the white self to the black majority, and the constant struggle of finding shared ground or creating something new. In spaces where white masculinity

---

52 See, for instance, Swarr, *Sex in Transition*.
had historically dictated the boundaries of the nation on the basis of supposed European superiority, both Uys and Cohen used gender transgression—and the supposed unAfricanness of queerness—to perform whiteness as a queer sort of Africanness, open to transformation. Yet even as Uys and Cohen’s performances are rooted in the specificity and historicity of the white body in Africa, they are still subject to slippage. As the euphoria of the early days of liberation wore off, and the post-apartheid period extended outward with the promised societal transformation not forthcoming, both performers evolved in new and, in Cohen’s case, problematic directions. As I argue in my conclusion, sometimes the failure of white African transformation can be as illuminating as its successes.

Tangoing in Front of a Firing Squad: The Pas de Deux Satire of Pieter Dirk Uys and/as Evita Bezuidenhout

Evita Bezuidenhout was born out of necessity. Following the 1976 riots in Soweto, the apartheid censors had cracked down on all media reportage of the violence and resistance increasingly erupting throughout the country. In 1978, Uys had been asked to write a weekly column for the Sunday Express and couldn’t come up with anything to write about that didn’t seem trivial or wouldn’t be immediately banned. He decided to take on a persona of an insider’s gossip column in order to escape attention and to place the triviality of her comments in juxtaposition with the violent reality that crept under the surface of her society life. The woman who would be Evita Bezuidenhout made a first appearance in 1978 as a nameless wife of a National Party Member of Parliament, writing a gossip column about the political scandals and rumors that she had picked up. Everyone knew about increasing police brutality and state surveillance, but no one talked about it. Evita became the mouthpiece for this information to be widely disseminated, hidden behind ostensibly inoffensive gossip and humor. In his book Between the Devil and the Deep: a Memoir of Acting and Reacting Uys writes that, “whenever there was a stench emanating from the temples on the Boer Olympus, she would be at a party in Pretoria, and overheard to say what no one would mention.” She became so popular among the readers that she earned the nickname “The Evita of Pretoria.” Her popularity tipped Uys off to the fact there was something potent: “she obviously pressed many buttons and it seemed everybody thought they knew who she was.”

He introduced her into his one-man-review in 1981.

Uys had long had a history of evading the censors and using their attempts to silence him as an opportunity for staging farce, rather than his earliest, more serious plays. Though the censors assumed that by ignoring his satirical works he would fade to obscurity, they had in fact inspired Uys to discover a new, easily produced genre of performance, in which he could explore more deeply the Evita persona: the one-man cabaret. Over the next decade, through a number of performances, Uys spun out the Bezuidenhout family mythology.

In 1989, the year in which Nelson Mandela was finally released from prison, Uys published Evita’s definitive biography, A Part Hate, A Part Love. In it he retells—and undermines—the story of apartheid’s official history in the guise of little Evangelie Poggenpoel, born in 1935. Thrust into the spotlight in the 1970s, as her National Party MP husband suffered several nervous breakdowns, Evita stepped forward and used her steely charm to insinuate herself into politics. She immediately allied herself with the government’s new Bantustan policy, which relocated the

55 Uys, Between the Devil and the Deep, 142.
56 Ibid.
entire black population into small supposedly-independent “homelands.” By becoming South African ambassador to the fictitious Independent Black Homeland Bapetikosweti, Evita participated in the completion of the apartheid dream: a South Africa devoid of blacks. However, surrounded by the world of intense poverty that she had been able to avoid, the cracks begin to form around the edges. Her mansion, the aptly titled Blanche-Noir, sits on the dividing line between South Africa and Bapetikosweti, suggesting the increasingly absurd division between South Africa’s people. By effectively undermining—queering, in the original sense of the word—the taken for granted, government approved history of apartheid, Uys utilizes Evita as a sort of Zelig figure, inserting her into all of the inconvenient parts of history that white South Africa had not been completely able to overwrite.

Up until this point in both the narrative and Uys’ repertoire Evita has been—much like the protagonist in the Handspring Puppet Company’s post-apartheid adaptation of Jarry’s Ubu Roi, Ubu and the Truth Commission—able to claim that “these things, they were done by those above me; those below me; those beside me;”\(^57\) that is, a willing, if unwitting participant in the government’s policies. However, by the end of the 1980s, the division becomes unmanageable and marks a moment of personal crisis. Her daughter announces that she will marry Leroy Makoeloeli, the son of her black gardener-cum-Bapetosweti president Pompies—legal in Bapetosweti, but still against the Immorality Act in South Africa. Evita cannot justify her prejudices against her daughter’s happiness. Her house, like the apartheid during the 1980s, becomes a self-inflicted prison without hope for escape. Surrounded by portraits of apartheid’s heroes, the friends she helped stay in power, Evita suffers a nervous breakdown.

This moment of crisis—of indeterminacy between an impossible past and an inconceivable future—is a reckoning for Evita and an opportunity to reconceptualize the character for Uys. Uys’ recount of Evita’s breakdown in the “found” pages of her diary could very well have been the anxieties felt by many of her compatriot whites during that time:

I have the shivers like someone is not walking over my grave, but putting up his tent on it and driving wooden tent pegs through my heart. Am I a vampire? Are we all vampires, white vampires that love the cross but hate the truth? Apartheid. I’m sure it can’t have all been a mistake. Was it a mistake Hedrik Verwoerd? Did you play the biggest trick on us and get away with it? Can’t be can’t be can’t be...

Friday 22 July
I’m sorry I’m not white. Damn it, I’m working hard to stay white and no one is going to take that away from me! It’s some time later...I think...God I’m so tired...I read this diary...something is wrong with me...I think I must be going mad...I am sick...Help me...am I mad? \(^58\)

Evita’s conception of herself as a vampire—living off of the blood of the land and its people—as well as her desperation to “stay white” by maintaining the innocence of deception and privilege have placed her at a crossroads. Unable to go back to the way things were and, aware suddenly of the sickness and insanity normalized under apartheid, she must either, as FW de Klerk phrased it, adapt or die. (Or, as Uys phrased it in his first one-man show, Adapt or Dye).

\(^58\) Pieter-Dirk Uys, A Part Hate, A Part Love (Johannesburg: Radix, 1990), 507-514.
Evita’s crisis is triggered by the undeniable fact that her granddaughter was going to be Coloured (mixed race), and that her daughter and son-in-law were, nevertheless, happy. The choice she had was an extremely personal and intimate one: either reject the only ideology she had ever known or reject her only grandchild. Though she had most likely heard other reasons to doubt apartheid, it was only when confronted with its most intimate and personal effects that she could finally overcome her fear.

Importantly, Evita’s dilemma was one that many of her white audiences were struggling with during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Like Evita, they didn’t know how to be white without the framing context of apartheid. If they rejected apartheid, they could not be white. Yet they were realizing that their whiteness was parasitic rather than generative. It was not liveness but death itself—the death of the dream that had raised and nourished them, turned poisonous. That Uys here includes the image of the grave is striking in terms of loss experienced by many whites, both Afrikaner and English, at the point where regime change was certain and necessary, but their own position tenuous. This loss was material, ideological, and profound. Much of Uys’ performance in Evita’s biography addresses these losses by undermining the very mythologies through which apartheid was maintained, leading the readers towards the climax of her eventual crisis.

Yet, though Evita’s antics were often ridiculous, her sense of profound psychological stress is treated seriously, in part because they mirrored Uys’ own crisis of whiteness: as a teenager he had accidentally had sex with a Coloured man when (purposefully) sunbathing in a notorious cruising spot in Cape Town. The experience was “so gentle, soft, and personal,” so deeply human that he had to open his eyes, and what he saw terrified him. Yet despite breaking several apartheid laws, the intimacy of his furtive encounters brought him back to the cove, meeting more Coloured boys and discovering commonalities. He “started feeling less white, and more real,” realizing “if being human meant finding your own way and following your inner instinct, then being naked on that beach with confidence may have been the first step to being naked in the world with commitment! Stripped of all the deceit and disguise that comes with fear.”

Uys’ philosophy, both in life and performance, is that to be African is to not be White or Black (or Coloured), but rather to be human. Being human requires a radical humility that doesn’t hide behind so-called colorblind non-racialism, but demands an engagement with the psychic and material remnants of a colonial, racist society. As Richard Dyer has noted, whiteness’ unexamined claim to universality is imbricated in power dynamics: “There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity.” Author Njabulo Ndebele has centered the body as both the site of violation and, conversely, the site of reintegration and the development of a culture of rootedness. Ndebele argues that only by repudiating “global sanctity of the white body” can white South Africans claim an African identity: “Putting itself at risk, it will have to declare that it is home now, sharing in the vulnerability of other compatriot bodies. South African whiteness will declare that its dignity is inseparable from the dignity of black bodies.” Through this process, Ndebele argues, white South Africans can truly earn cultural citizenship. Ndebele outlines a new

---

59 Uys, Elections and Erections, 19.
60 Ibid., 20
vision of the white body, one that crosses the boundaries long-considered sacred; purity, the basis for apartheid, must give way to instability, to mixing and to transformation.

The tension between Evita’s sincerity and Uys’ satire—and between Uys’ philosophy of being “naked with confidence,” stripped of disguise, and his performance’s use of disguise as a method of critique creates a productive paradox. Rather than a dangerous humanism—with the authority to claim universality—Uys’ work is tempered by the opposition of the naked human body and the deceipts and histories it clothes itself in. The ability to be “fully human” has to be earned, and layers of cultural baggage must first be acknowledged before they are stripped away. Uys’ satire demonstrates white baggage for what it is—armor, dividing lines, barred windows and electric fences of fear and privilege—and demonstrates, in the person of Evita, its potential for change, adaptation, and transformation. His ability to slip between characters in his one man cabarets also reveals the performative function of identity by extending the boundaries of race, gender, class, and location to a definition of South Africanness more akin to then-new Rainbow Nation metaphor, popularized by Desmond Tutu.

His cabarets throughout the early and mid-1990s were primarily directed at white audiences and towards dragging these audiences—quite literally—through the fear and ambivalence of the interregnum and into post-apartheid era. Though his cabaret shows included Evita, she usually only arrived to begin the second act and never stayed long. Though Evita would always be the draw, these shows—with three to five minute skits—provided a larger commentary on the many of faces of whiteness in South Africa, with each skit a different facet of painful histories and possible futures. If the apartheid government had stifled dissent and put forth a unified white community, Uys’ skits modeled diversity that had always been within whiteness. His 1992 performance at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town, for instance, presented a number of archetypes of whiteness. Beginning his show with a Bergie (homeless person, usually white) mocking his audience’s downgrade in lifestyle and fear of hijacking, (before gleefully exiting the theatre to steal their cars), Uys continued to run the gamut of white characters, from two well meaning okes (dudes) trying to mate their pigs, to an Afrikaans girl—who—realizing she’s too white to be Miss South Africa—decides to run for an international Miss Scarlett O’Hara contest.

Though he throws in a Winnie Mandela and Mangosuthu Buthelezi impersonation, his main focus is on his white figures and, particularly, white men. In between over-the-top performances of these black public figures, is the evening’s most strikingly serious skit (standing out all the more for its framing). While at a Madonna concert, a torturer runs into a man he had tortured and makes pleasantries, increasingly taunting the man with their shared history and his own position enjoying the fruits of the new South Africa, scot free. On the recorded video, the previously gregarious audience’s laughter becomes increasingly nervous, as the interaction between the two white men reflects the reality of a post-conflict society. Who might you be sitting next to? What must be forgotten in the name of reconciliation?

In portraying so many different types of whiteness, Uys directly addresses his audience from within by deconstructing the persistent concept of a unitary whiteness (against which Others were defined) to explore whiteness’ many shades and ethnicities, encompassing a variety of class, language, and political positions. This sort of ethnic drag, following Katrin Seig, both “exposes and disavows traumatic holes in the social fabric, and facilitates both historical denial and collective mourning.” Indeed, though most of Uys’ interregnum satires attempted to draw unity

---

from fractured histories, they were very much rooted in mourning the losses experienced in apartheid, both of shared humanity and of past privilege. Yet these performances refuse to dwell in the lost time but use humor to move their audiences through the loss and to a hopeful vision of the future. Following her epiphany, Evita decided to evolve with the times, becoming over the next several, tense years, a public face for white change and adaptation. Out of a job when Bapethikosweti was reincorporated into South Africa’s mainland, she became a caterer for the meetings between the ANC in exile and the members of the apartheid government. These interactions with those former “terrorists” inspired the premise of Funigalore and Uys’ goal of engaging a white audience on its fear. In her very public blundering Evita was able to model a way forward and a new mode of being white. Beyond humanizing those who had been labeled “enemy” by the apartheid government, her approach to living in a democratic South Africa modeled a pathway for whites to rehumanize the enemy—the fear and racism—in themselves.

Uys also used Evita to change the meaning of post-apartheid whiteness for non-whites. Evita’s sincere desire to participate in the new post-apartheid government’s project of nation building took her (and him) off the more traditional, theatrical venues, and into more public and populist spheres, previously “no go zones.” The success of Funigalore led to a number of other television appearances and made her face familiar to a variety of audiences. In her 1999 voting indaba (gathering) Uys took Evita to a number of public venues, and spoke out about the importance of public engagement in democracy. Uys’ presence in townships—spaces where the majority of white South Africans rarely, if ever go—was cause enough for disruption. His presence in those historically divided spaces as Evita created a liminal zone where the space between reality—the day-to-day experiential negotiations of power in post-apartheid South Africa—and performance was blurred, creating a productive zone where his audiences were encouraged to play along, to laugh at their (previous) oppressors, and were given leave to imagine new ways of engaging with democracy and making it their own. People who would otherwise never listen to either Pieter as a well-meaning satirist or Evita as a “real” recovering-Afrikaner Nationalist matron, were—judging by his large and enthusiastic township audiences—willing to listen because the built-in critique of satire provides a space for them to do so.

Of course, in order for Uys performances to be effective, the audience needs to be “in on the joke,” able to recognize the man underneath the woman. When s/he is (mis)recognized, s/he seems to represent all that was bad about the old regime: patronizing whites bossing blacks around. Uys recounts one such instance from an indaba in Mamalodi Township:

I notice a black woman in the middle block listening to Evita’s chat with a frown. She is not impressed by this loud Afrikaans woman being so racist, so superior and so warmly received by other black people. What is wrong here? She obviously doesn’t know the secret! Eventually her companion laughingly whispers in her ear. Evita’s critic dissolves into chuckles and becomes a fan. Once they know that this woman is actually a man, Evita can say anything!65

Yet once the premise of his performance as Evita is understood—and the tone set—Uys works hard to ensure that “the women recognize the woman and the men forget the man.”66

---

65 Uys, Elections and Erections, 86.
66 Pieter-Dirk Uys, interview with the author, Darling, South Africa, August 3, 2008.
Judith Butler has commented on the difference between the transvestite-on-the-stage and the transvestite-on-the-bus, noting that the former impels laughter and enjoyment and the latter, rage and, potentially, violence for its disruption of accepted boundaries. Uys’ incursions with Evita in the public sphere arguably challenge the strict divisions between the stage and the street, and, in the process, queer and transform the signifying power of whiteness. Where the reality of Uys’ white male body in previously black space is a threat, as Evita he injects the theatrical elements of drag into incursions into real-life spaces. The lines between performance and life are less clearly drawn, and the “play” links the everyday to the “imaginary character of the act.” Evita’s ability to transgress numerous post-apartheid spaces both challenges and soothes presumptions about the performance of whiteness and gender, requiring of her audiences a suspension of belief, a leap of faith, and a willingness to play and laugh at one’s self and one’s Others. Here, Uys uses Evita as a catalyst for a national identity that could be called carnivalesque, carving out a space of play and subversion.

It is fitting, then, that Uys frequently refers to Evita as his clown, noting that Evita resonated with audiences because of her familiarity as well as her outlandishness: “Playing an Afrikaans lady is an immensely satisfying theatrical trick because she works as a clown. In the old days when the world was normal, the clown had to have purple hair and a green nose. And the world is now totally crazy, so the clown has to be totally real. What is happening is not original, it is absurd.” With “Reality [as] her purple hair and Familiarity [as] her large red nose,” Evita takes on the traditional role of the jester-as-truth teller who, much as Shakespeare’s fool, was allowed to take on the holy cows and king with relative impunity. Clowns have historically operated in the realm of the satirical, over-playing the social hierarchies, only to reveal their absurdity. Evita’s gender performance—her immaculately coiffed hair and make-up and Uys’ total commitment to making her real, both on-stage and in public spaces—is part of this critique, creating a vivid, real person with a history whose supposed gentility and believability only underscores the banality of apartheid’s evil.

During apartheid, Uys played Evita as the ultimate insider, operating within and against the theatre industry in which he produced his revues. Evita’s post-apartheid incursions into the public sphere are more complex, as she is critiquing the government from an ostensibly disempowered, minority position. Yet she also operates with a certain amount of authority: as a reformed insider from the previous regime she has the perspective to make uncomfortable parallels between the old regime’s tactics and the new regime’s avoidance, particularly around issues of HIV/AIDS and censorship.

In a post-apartheid space, Uys’ white face serves as the clown’s whiteface; Evita, as a character, wears no mask. She reveals the best intentions and the worst ignorance of all white South Africans. Her desire to change, to participate in the system, is utterly sincere and this

---

68 Ibid.
69 By momentarily reversing the hierarchies that structure society and embracing a sort of ludic chaos, Bakhtin argues that the carnivalesque presents its participants with a “unique sense of time and space [that] causes individuals to feel they are a part of the collectivity, at which point they cease to be themselves. It is at this point that, through costume and mask, an individual exchanges bodies and is renewed. At the same time there arises a heightened awareness of one’s sensual, material, bodily unity and community.” Mikael Bakhtin, Rabalais and his World (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986/1968), 255.
71 Uys, A Part Hate, A Part Love, 35.
sincerity, the desire to be the *gogo* (grandmother) of the nation, places her as an unlikely guardian of (im)morality. She is a relic from the past, reinvented, but with a survivor’s memory. She has the authority (both of her “past” and her invented nature) to make uncomfortable comparisons, in a way that very few people (white or black, real or fictitious) are able to do. By playing this role, Evita Bezuidenhout—fictional character or not—models a whiteness that is rooted in its complicity in South Africa’s past and, therefore, even more engaged in its present.

Despite his primary clown being a woman, Uys’ relationship with drag and camp is a somewhat contentious one. In a 1997 interview with *The Drama Review*, Uys responded to the interviewer, who wondered why any sane politician would agree to appear publically with a man in drag by saying: “because it’s not a man in drag. Believe me, if I was a man in drag they wouldn’t do it. And if my job was to be a man in drag, I wouldn’t have asked them.” Yet, while Uys is generally wary of Evita being mistaken—and dismissed—as a mere drag queen, he admits that the spectacle of the queen allows him a smokescreen when the satire cuts too close to the bone: “the Evita character was the very specific security blanket or bulletproof vest that I had. Because every time I was really in trouble, I’d get her on the front page of a newspaper wearing some funny hat and looking like an idiot, and everyone would go “Oh Christ, the drag queen’s at it again. Let’s move on. It’s not worth punishing.”

He is similarly unimpressed with being pinned down as a “gay performer,” and frequently diffuses the tension of his audience’s (unspoken) questions of his sexuality with the glib comment “yes, I am a homosexual on Monday and Wednesday. On Tuesday and Thursday I am heterosexual. On Friday I am bisexual. On Saturday I do it myself and on Sunday I rest.” When I met with Uys in a café near his home in the Western Cape town of Darling, and asked him what role his queerness plays in his work, he responded fervently, as if he had been asked this question one too many times:

> As far as gay is concerned, it’s a job description. I’m middle aged, I’ve got no hair, I’m overweight, I love Sophia Loren and cats and I’m gay and now let’s move on. I do not wave a flag. For me gay rights and human rights are the same thing, not something specific. Noel Coward always said, “Don’t make too much noise and frighten the horses. Do whatever you want to do, but don’t frighten the horses.” And I believe it: don’t frighten the horses. Don’t confront people with children and make them frightened by being the boogeyman by saying, “I’m going to take your child’s trousers off and suck his penis!” No! I would be the first person to say, “fuck off, you don’t say that sort of thing.”

Though this perspective could be critiqued from a radical queer position as being assimilationist—prioritizing straight comfort over queer self-expression—Uys has never claimed to be a radical queer activist. His priority as a white, middle aged, gay (Sophia-Loren-loving) man has always been in subsuming those identity positions under the larger category of shared humanity. He sees fear as anathema to change, to bridge building, and to transcending the categories that continue to divide South African society.

---

73 Ibid., 65.
74 Uys, interview.
75 Ibid.
Both Evita Bezuidenhout and Pieter-Dirk Uys inhabit a number of social spaces in the New South Africa: Afrikaner, Jewish, Queer, Male, Female. She, the darling of the national party now with three black grandchildren, who have the appropriately hybridized names of Winnie-Jeanne, Nelson-Ignatius, and Latoya-Ossewania Makoeloeli. He the Queer-Boer-Jew, who makes a career of inhabiting others’ subjectivities. By holding South Africa’s varied identities and histories close to—and against—his skin, Uys uses performance to bridge the continued divisions and to create a new national identity and a new model of whiteness. As Uys puts on his Evita “clown,” he encourages his audiences to revel in the absurdity of their everyday surroundings, to actively participate in the continuing transformations, and to strip themselves bare of the fear that prevents them from encountering each other as “fully human.”

Same Ape, Different Drag? Steven Cohen’s Melancholic Body

If Pieter-Dirk Uys bases his drag work on “not scaring the horses” with unnecessarily confrontational approaches, Steven Cohen would be more likely to take as his performance motto “fuck the horses!” In fact, Cohen carried a banner in the 1996 Johannesburg Pride march, wearing his trademark fetish heels: "GIVE US YOUR CHILDREN - WHAT WE CAN'T FUCK WE EAT.” This sign’s playful take on heterosexual fears about the outcome of queer visibility and pride may have contributed to a PR nightmare for a pride committee much more interested in assimilation than confrontation, but is typical of Cohen’s message: You think we are monstrous? We will be fabulous monstrosities and claim the marginal role you give us, as a tactical space to show you your own fears. By breaking his white, queer body down to its innermost parts and most primal desires—its need to fuck, eat, and defecate—Cohen uses guerrilla tactics to expose both the hypocrisies of contemporary white society and the stratified spaces of contemporary South Africa, confronting the margins of belonging and acceptance.

Cohen shares a number of background similarities with Uys: both were born in middle-class/upper-middle class white families, close to urban centers; both were raised by Jewish parents who benefited from the apartheid’s state’s complete acceptance of Jewish identity into the privileges of white South Africa (though Uys was half-Jewish, with a mother who fled Nazi Germany and concealed her Jewish identity throughout her life)\(^76\); both suffered loss and alienation in their childhood (Uys’ mother committed suicide and Cohen’s mother was an absentee alcoholic); both discovered that they were attracted to men at an early age.

Yet, importantly, they are separated by a generation and very different life experiences. Much of Cohen’s art and performance are based in his experience of forced conscription in the South African military during the 1980s war with Angola, where he was put in a mental ward for refusing to hold a gun. His artistic output emerged in the earliest years of democracy, where censorship was a dirty word and South African artists were encouraged to push the limits that had previously structured society. His work became increasingly sexually explicit in the early 1990s, to the point where it was rejected from a gay and lesbian art show. A bout of glandular

---

76 Both Uys and Cohen’s identities as Jews raised within the context of white minority rule deserve closer attention. South Africa, unique within world history, enthusiastically accepted the Jews and granted them full privileges of whiteness. Indeed, from its earliest days at a haven for Lithuanian immigrants escaping pogroms, Jews have benefited directly within a mineral industry whose success was largely dependent on exploitation of cheap black labor. Thus, Jews took an ambivalent role in relation to race and national identity. Legally enfranchised, they were often vulnerable to anti-Semitism (particularly after the Holocaust) and had a particular investment in relation to the state. Some, like Gordimer, became leading activists in the anti-apartheid movement; others continued to identify with the ideology of white supremacy.
fever refocused Cohen on his own body, and shifted his work from strictly visual art to the what he calls living art: “I’d seen my skin go yellow and my piss go black…I knew my body was a powerful medium—I couldn’t wait to get well and work with it.”

Where identity has always been important to Uys’ satirical performances, it has, notably not been a personal one. For Uys, the body was a vehicle, a medium for the message which needed to be forgotten in order to be effective; only in his post-apartheid performances did he begin to perform the character of “Pieter.” Steven Cohen’s living art is pointedly and explicitly focused on the limitations of his individual body. From the mid-to-late 1990s, he used pop-folk singer Jewel’s song Pieces of You as a starting point for the development of four different personas.

Yet even though he takes on the characters of Ugly Girl, Faggot, Jew, and his cross-species character Dog, the drag is never complete and always highlights the specificity of his “queer-jew-white” body under his costumes, simultaneously owning and exaggerating the stereotypes that he performs.

Unlike Uys’ performances of Evita, which depend on the audience’s ability to “forget the man” and play along, Cohen’s drag is always excessive, drawing attention to the incompleteness and inadequacy of performance. He stretches the boundaries of drag and, moreover, binary thinking itself. Morwenna Bosch has noted that his performance “is subversively extreme in the sense that he does not merely ‘act out’ female/feminine, but performs a distinctly queer/ed drag act. He is a strange creature and yet he is human, he is a woman but he is also a man—the binary structures that construct gendered subjectivity are threatened and rendered semiotically collapsible.”

Cohen’s penis, for instance, rather than being tucked away as it is by most drag queens interested in female authenticity, is usually highlighted in the performance by being either trussed or decorated. He often uses animal prosthetics—usually hooves and horns—to perform a sort of a sort of cross-species blurring, giving the image of a sort of physically unstable, uncategorizable monstrosity. Indeed, Cohen has referred to his performance art as being a sort of “Monster Drag.”

Cohen uses the citationality of camp to over-perform identities and to highlight the ways in which these identities are already bracketed in the larger society. Each of his embodiments—Ugly Girl with her overplayed femininity and bloody thighs; Jew with its gas mask, crutches, and animalalistic touches, Faggot with his roller skates and flaming dildo, shooting out sparks—animates the worst fears and stereotypes attached to each identity. His over-the-top ornamentation serves as the quotation marks to draw attention to the ways in which his individual body and its many identities are (pre)determined. Though not as explicitly stated, his performances also comment and perform whiteness and South Africanness by making strange and visible the socially fractured post-apartheid body and the spaces it inhabits. They open up questions of the “strangeness” of the South African body and its very construction.

---

78 Sample lyrics: “You say she's an ugly girl, does it make you want to kill her?...“You say he's a faggot, does it make you want to hurt him?...“You say he's a Jew, does it mean that he's tight?”
80 Susan Sontag has commented that this bracketing is one of the central properties of a camp aesthetic: “Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a “lamp”; not a woman, but a "woman." To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role.” (“Notes on Camp” Against Interpretation and Other Essays (New York: Picador, 2001), 208).
The “explicitness” of the body is central to the mission of performance art, a medium that emerged out of the 1960s American avant-garde movement that found expressions in South Africa post-apartheid (with Cohen being one of the first and most famous practitioners). Performance theorist Rebecca Schneider has commented that the body in performance art becomes a space for staging—making explicit—its construction, arguing that, as “a mass of orifices and appendages, details and tactile surfaces the explicit body in representation is foremost a site of social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, and sexuality, all of which bear ghosts of historical meaning, marking and delineating social hierarchies of privilege and disprivilege.”


Scholarship on Cohen has generally focused either on his performance of “Jewishness” or on his use of “abjection” to challenge the presumably stable borders between life/art, male/female, white/black, self/other, etc. However, scant focus has been given to the ways in which Cohen’s public performances—and their critical efficacy—are dependent on his interaction with his audience(s). I would argue that Cohen’s art is, crucially, about what Dwight Conquergood has called co-performance and that his performance(s) of his “whiteness,” “queerness,” and “Jewishness” are dependent on interactive juxtapositions with their supposed opposites, across a South African landscape.

When he performs in either a gallery or a theatre, Cohen’s particular brand of performance-art troubles the line between each medium, never fitting comfortably in either. Beyond breaking the rules and conventions of the gallery space, his excessively queer(ed) body’s presence amongst the (primarily female) nudes questions which bodies are artful and which obscene. Similarly, his performance of *Taste*, as part of an art therapy program at the University of Witwatersrand where Cohen was encouraged to “deal with [his] shit,” had him consume a liquid from his anus to the song “L’Chaim” (“To Life!”) from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. The enactment challenged the legacy of Jewish performance in the theatre, and forced his audience (many of whom walked out in disgust) to question which rituals are appropriate for public consumption. Simultaneously, his early guerilla interventions intruded on the privatized spaces of the supposedly open New South Africa, demonstrating that tolerance to difference only went so far. Cohen’s intervention as bloody-thighed Ugly Girl in *Virgin Penetrated* at Johannesburg’s Killarney Mall’s bridal show, for example, reveals the extent to which these “multicultural” spaces—supposedly free, transparent and public—are in fact policed by raced, classed, gendered norms. Even one with the financial and racial privilege to purchase a ticket to
the fashion show is not able to participate if their fashion critiques—as Cohen’s did, quite literally—the very lifeblood of consumer capitalism.

Yet the most crucial difference between Uys and Cohen’s dragging of whiteness post-apartheid comes in their attitude to the loss of whiteness’ privileges and the means necessary for whites to renounce its “global sanctity.” Where Uys’ work is invested in the process of turning white mourning into productive participation in a nonracial democracy, (“becoming less white and more real”86), Cohen’s work dwells in the realm of the melancholic and the more oblique: the bodily architecture of whiteness. If mourning is a process through which individuals grieve and eventually accept and integrate a loss, in melancholia the loss is not always clear and is often involves the transference of feelings towards the loved object onto the self. Indeed, Cohen’s provocative interventions’ fixation on the consumption and public debasement of his (white) self echo Freud’s conception of melancholy as a theatrical internalization of the lost love object into the ego to the point that it becomes “cannibalistic.”87

Though Cohen’s use of his body, its fluids, and orifices have provided him with a certain iconoclastic reputation, his body’s intervention in spaces where—by virtue of its whiteness—it “should not go,” provides some of his most explicitly political critiques of South African culture and its divisions. The juxtaposition of his white body in black “African” spaces—such as the urban streets, taxi ranks, and squatter camps—highlights both its vulnerability and its authority, by revealing it at its least in control, least at home and where it is most strange. By highlighting the strangeness of the white body, and breaking it down to the fragmented identity positions, Cohen’s interventions into public spaces make hyper-visible the legacy of whiteness and comment on the distance between both individual and social bodies. The intrusion of his art in situations with people going about their daily lives enlists them as both audience and co-performers. During these encounters, he highlights his body’s strangeness—its abjection—but also its privileged place in South Africa’s history and its accustomed distance from the majority of South African citizens. Crucially, by taking his living art outside of the spaces where it is intelligible as such, Cohen’s interventions draw attention to the role and relevance of art in a stratified society.

This critique is most clear in his famous and controversial intervention Chandelier, in 2002. Cohen arrived at a squatter camp near Newtown, Johannesburg wearing a heavy corset chandelier, its lights powered by battery. This intervention was different from many of Cohen’s previous interactions in that the rules of the space were less clear-cut and Cohen himself was less active/interactive than he had been previously (in part because of the difficulty of his costume). Cohen’s Chandelier is less about instigating and interacting than it is about making space and witnessing. Though initially a study in juxtaposition between the reality of life in Johannesburg and the dreams of gems and riches promised in its Zulu name Ègoli (place of gold), Chandelier quickly spun out of Cohen’s control when the Red Ant demolition squad began destroying the makeshift homes of those around him, in order to clear way for the rainbow-lit spires of the future Nelson Mandela Bridge. Cohen—his chandelier tinkling as he stepped around piles of rubbish and over the rusted train rails—became a prism for the recently displaced who, unable to interact with the men tearing their houses apart, started using Cohen as a stage onto which to project their emotions.

The final document—a 16 minute film edited from several hours of footage—captures moments of brutality, tenderness, empathy, and grief. In the video, Cohen’s face remains placid

86 Uys, Elections and Erections, 20.
as he walks amongst the makeshift community. Men and women gather around to stare. Cohen does not outwardly react to the people around him, despite their efforts to engage. More aestheticized than his other performances and personas, his Chandelier is reminiscent of an art deco tableau vivant. His silent presence in a site of chaos, a specter of detached glittering beauty in the midst of squalor, creates an image that he admits is “half beautifully imagined, half horribly real.”

Cohen’s beautiful abjection encourages a number of reactions from those around him. One woman—her face caked white with clay meant to deflect the day’s heat—croons that he is an angel. A swaying man in a red hat approaches him with a knobkerrie—a traditional stick-fighting weapon—and yells at Cohen to “Hamba!” (Go!). Direct physical confrontation is diverted by an older woman.

Cohen is increasingly surrounded by gogos (grandmothers) in doek headscarves, who circle protectively around him. In one of the few moments of reciprocated interaction, one elderly woman offers him her hand to shake in the traditional African way. He then kisses her hand, and she kisses his in return.

One older, obviously drunk man in a construction worker’s outfit and stocking cap delights in Cohen’s appearance, laughing and giving Cohen an odd parody of a lap dance. Cohen seems unsure how to respond to this aggressive sexuality. The man leaves and returns with a copy of Hustler, and delightedly shows Cohen images of naked white women with their legs spread. Relating Cohen’s artful nakedness to images of pornography, he takes Cohen’s hand and, in an unlikely dance, happily poses for Cohen’s cameraman with his addition to the art.

The soundtrack becomes increasingly chaotic, as the shouts of the Red Ants as their crowbars ring out across the emptying lot, clashing with the tinkling of Cohen’s crystal and the rhythmic clapping of bystanders. At one point, someone sings the national

---

Fig. 3. Steven Cohen and Co-Performer, Chandelier (2002).
Image courtesy of Michael Stevenson Gallery.
(http://www.stevenson.info/artists/cohen.html)

---

anthem Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrika. Cohen continues to strike dramatic poses. As the sun begins to set, the Red Ants finish their demolition. The trash begins to pile up and Cohen’s legs begin to give out under the weight of his costume, his heels catching on trash and detritus. The chandelier lights up, providing artificial illumination through the smoke of cooking fires. The displaced people have by and large dispersed. Striking a few more poses, Cohen leaves the former squatter camp and calls it a night.

Shortly after its initial performance, Cohen reflected upon the staging of the piece:

Our rough footage record is a strange visual; a white man in high heels wearing an illuminated chandelier tutu and improvising movement amidst a community of black squatters who’s [sic] shacks are being destroyed by the city council workers, in their own ballet of violence is very South African.

It was hard for me to set myself up as, in part, a privileged white luxuriating among the despair of our lowest class citizens - Nero fiddling while Rome burns.

I felt displaced (hectic in heels and strange place to be near-naked) - and in a sort-of unreal and slow-motion-type-paralysis I am more used to experiencing in my nightmares than on a Thursday afternoon in the real world.89

Chandelier was a turning point in Cohen’s work. Previously, he had interrogated the social norms that structure public space, with his body as the abject other. In Chandelier, he was forced to acknowledge and embody the ways in which his white, queer, Jewish body will always be privileged and carry the wealth of its history. As he wanders through the wreckage of the New South Africa, he bears witness to the passing of a dream. In his chalk-whitened body and its crystal glamour, he momentarily takes on the co-performer role of a drama much larger than one of his making.

Yet, amongst the violence and displacement of this history, his body is also detached from those who he walked among. For each moment that he made a connection—the hand-kiss, the playful co-performance with the drunken man—he was unable or unwilling to cross the line towards a shared humanity. Though he was witnessing the destruction of people’s lives, his white body was also the cause of it. Cohen was aware of the numerous, contradictory meanings of his performance, as well as his shifting positions as perpetrator and victim, depending on the framing:

My body language, in the context of the chandelier work, had a radical range of meanings. In the footage, if I lift my arms commandingly, I appear to be directing the destruction. If I raise my eyes and palms to God, it is as if I am also suffering, when I kneel in the dirt, it reads as a prayer for peace on earth.90

Unlike Pieter-Dirk Uys’ incursions as Evita into township spaces during her election indaba—which were about crossing bridges and developing shared humanity—Steven Cohen’s white queer body, powdered and hairless with a star of David prominently displayed on his forehead, is

89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
a thing of monstrous beauty, of multiplicity of meanings, of ontological excess. It’s a performance that cracks open any surety about whiteness and about humanness.

Interestingly, *Chandelier*—perhaps Cohen’s most explicitly South African piece of work—was also the performance that first got him international recognition and led to his relocation to France. Images of Cohen’s aestheticized whiteness contrasted with the deprivation of a black squatter camp provided a striking addition to his portfolio, and he was asked to collaborate on a piece with France’s avant garde Ballet Atlantique. Thereafter, he relocated to Lille and has participated in numerous exhibitions all over the world. His most recent work has focused on his Jewishness in a European context, with public interventions at the square in the old Jewish quarter of Vienna, where he scrubbed the cobblestones with a giant toothbrush, before being arrested. His performance piece *Golgotha*—made in reaction to his brother’s suicide—saw him walking on high heels made from human skulls in a three-piece suit through a variety of places with a history of violence and loss (such as Ground Zero in Manhattan). These few public interventions aside, he has primarily found popularity within the global art circuit, performing at both Biennials and dance festivals worldwide. He has since performed *Chandelier* over 15 times since his initial intervention in Newtown.

These performances have taken place within the framework of the stage, decontextualized from their original South African context, and are usually followed by a screening of the 2002 footage. The flatness of the screen, capturing a space that no longer exists, coupled with the presence of his performing body on stage with its crystals, has an unsettling effect on its audiences, perhaps because it places the audience in the uncomfortable position of participant-voyeur; their bodies-in-theatre are momentarily transported through the proxy of Cohen’s refractive chandelier, to the squatter space. Cohen’s performance is prismatic in that its meanings are colored by the audience’s interpretation and the temporal and geographical distance from its original enactment. What might have initially been read as primarily a critique of whiteness in 2002 might now, following a decade of increased police brutality and privatization, be interpreted as a critique of post-apartheid leadership. Cohen, rather than being the focal piece, becomes an accessory (in both senses of the word) to mass displacement. Viewed in hindsight, the Red Ants, unaware or unconcerned with Cohen’s high art intervention and going about their job in the background, suddenly become the performance’s protagonists, previewing even worse abuses to come.

The year prior to *Chandelier* and his subsequent immigration to France, Cohen staged a piece that received far less attention, but serves as an interesting companion performance. If *Chandelier* highlighted the remoteness of South African whiteness from everyday black experience, *Limping Towards the African Renaissance* demonstrated the brutal intimacy that always undergirded apartheid, and rehearsed an exchange of power that could be both painful and productive. Working with the then-81-year-old Swazi woman who had been his nanny and de facto mother, Nomsa Dlamini, Cohen performed a delicate transitional duet between one century and the next. In this piece, staged New Years Eve on Dlamini’s rural homestead in Swaziland, Cohen wore a lace glove, a corset, and a French wig, a bondage mask with a black dildo protruding at the mouth, and a prosthetic leg that made it impossible for him to stand. As a gramophone played music from a 1950s *kwela* band and, as bemused locals looked on, Dlamini led Cohen along the rural lanes on a leash, balancing a globe on her head and carrying torch in her arms. Here, Cohen’s white body is literally dragged into the new century, adorned in the signifiers of a white colonial African past. As they progress, Cohen’s body is increasingly made vulnerable, picking up mud and dirt, following behind Dlamini as she makes her way forward.
into the future. This “walk” is physically painful—both Dlamini and Cohen were burned by the coals from her flare—but allowed progress towards some common purpose and unknown space. Cohen, in a submissive position, was willing to follow where she would lead. If South Africa’s Twentieth Century had been one of separation and debasement of the black body, Cohen and Dlamini’s trans-millennial drag previewed whiteness humbled and yet committed to racial progress, rooted in the South African earth.

Conclusion

In the earliest years South Africa’s democracy, Pieter-Dirk Uys and Steven Cohen’s performances crossed space and media to comment on the boundaries of the newly coined Rainbow Nation and to question what white (South) African citizenship might mean. Performing during an interregnum, a time of possibility and openness where laws and identities were being reconstituted, Cohen and Uys—in vastly different ways—used drag performance to circumvent and playfully engage a variety of publics to rethink the possible role of whiteness and masculinity in a now-supposedly non-racial South Africa.

Uys’ performances function as a bridge across the divides of the past to form the future of the “other side,” (to return to Krog’s definition of transformation): a new South Africa. Uys’ comedy has a two-pronged approach in regards to race and drag. His work with Evita uses costume and suspension of belief to simultaneously satirize and humanize whiteness in the public sphere. His AIDS education program—where he visits schools and portrays a variety of characters with basic costume changes to promote dialogue on HIV—conversely, uses the very provisional nature of costuming to undermine essentialism and bridge racial difference. In both of these interventions, Uys’ performances argue that—rather than being innately different beings as apartheid would have had it—race and gender are superficial categories, divisions created and maintained by fear. By acknowledging the roots of the fear, Uys used Evita as a (often hilarious) model of what a different, more African whiteness could look like.

Cohen’s performance art, alternately, resists any easy claims to shared humanity, and rather focuses on the body in its strangeness and inherent unknowability: queer, abject, bestial. Cohen’s interventions dramatize the stereotypes that are attached to his body. By breaking the stereotypes down to the level of the body and highlighting that body’s most abject parts—genitalia, body fluids—Cohen deconstructs his humanity and into something both more essential and unassimilatable. Cohen’s performances drag the white body into its deepest degradations, its hidden parts (and hidden histories) in order to build it up again with Krog’s radically remade firmament. This sort of transformation of whiteness must occur, Cohen’s post-apartheid interventions suggest, not only at the level of the economic, the political, and the cultural, but also through the intimacy and vulnerability of the embodied self.

This vulnerability of the (in)human body should, however, never lose sight of the security and historicity of the white body in public space. These interventions were subject to the particular context and time in which they were staged. Despite the insecurity of the transition, the 1990s in South Africa was generally a time of optimism. The painful reckoning with the past undertaken by those involved with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was thought to be worth the creation of a new way of being, a society transformed. Despite increasing awareness of inadequacies of freedom and the new government, many believed that the country was close to reaching its full potential, where, to quote Albie Sachs, “each cultural tributary contributes toward and increases the majesty of the river of South African-ness… the grand-children of
white immigrants can join in the toyi-toyi—even if slightly out of step—recite the poems of Wally Serote, just as the grandchildren of Dinizulu can read with pride the writings of Olive Schreiner. This moment of complete unity was never quite realized, however. In 1999, as Nelson Mandela stepped down after one term to enjoy a well-deserved rest, Thabo Mbeki’s government would see an increased engagement with the global capital and the AIDS denialism that would forever taint his legacy.

Ever the bridge-builder, Uys responded to the challenges of the second and third post-apartheid decades (and almost half a century of playing Evita) by parceling out his energies in numerous directions and through numerous different media. Though he still tours internationally and locally and welcomes guests and tourists to Evita se Peron, his theatre in the small town of Darling, for cabarets every weekend, his work has in some ways evolved away from drag and Evita. He has, for instance, started adapting Shakespearian plays into South African contexts, with titles such as Macbeki and The Merry Wives of Zuma. Significantly, his most important post-apartheid project has not required the full-on Evita treatment: Since 2000, he has taken HIV education shows free of charge to schools throughout the country, reaching over 1.5 million school children through live performance. Though he takes the familiar characters out of his bag of tricks, he does so using the barest of props: lipstick, a wig, a scarf. Mostly, he performs as himself, dressed simply in an actor’s blacks, with a small black beanie. Using his (white) body as a base for building a wide variety of characters, he is also able to speak from the first person of Pieter.

Cohen’s work, on the other hand, has evolved away from its South African material, both topically and geographically. Though he maintains a South African agent and performs annually at the Johannesburg Dance Umbrella, Cohen’s current location in Europe—and the ways in which he has been taken up to represent the South African experience in global art festivals—perhaps challenges the earlier critical efficacy of his body-as-radical-outsider. Indeed, though his Jewishness and queerness remain signifiers of difference, his white body renders them “universal,” signifying differently, but as equally “relevant” to the art circles in the global north as in South Africa. His performing body can pass as non-African, or use Africanness as adornment: a parenthetical rather than as a defining feature, as it would be to a black African artist abroad.

I end this chapter with a discussion of The Cradle of Humankind, a 2012 piece Cohen performed in South Africa, reuniting with Dlamini to explore legacies of colonialism on the black and white body. This “problem” performance—which received mixed reviews—is as much a telling dramatization of contemporary racial issues in South African performance as his successes. Even as it serves as a tool of critique and subversion, dragging whiteness can just as effectively shut down critique by suggesting that the performing body is post-racial. For The Cradle of Humankind, his return to the South African festival scene at the 2012 National Festival of the Arts in Grahamstown, Cohen attempted to transplant a work that had given him success in Europe to his home country. The piece is an hour-long collaboration with now-92 year-old Swazi Nomsa Dlamini. In interviews, Cohen stated that the piece “started with an immense desire to let

---

Nomsa express herself" and that, due to her age, “I think we’re near the end of what we can do together. It’s delicate, it’s unsustainable. And that has value.”

It was, however, only partially successful. The Cradle of Humankind—which explored issues of origin and colonialism through the interaction between Cohen’s mostly-naked white moon-child alien and Dlamini’s loinclothed original woman—attempted and, at some moments, attained a queer sort of intimacy and shared origin (his work, in her). However, the piece demonstrated a lack of awareness of the politics of its display, and seemed out of touch with the shifting power balances and meaning of bodies in contemporary South Africa. Where Cohen’s previous, gratuitous display of his own body allowed for an audience to work through their internalized prejudices, his use of Dlamini—who, blinking at the footlights and moving with painful slowness around the stage, seemed fragile and disoriented—functioned more as a prop than as a collaborator. Though he said he meant the piece to provoke, Cohen literalizes her oppression by fastening two lion paws—linked by iron chains—to her wrists, and then juxtaposes her large, nearly naked body with outsized footage of his asshole seemingly singing the old Afrikaans national anthem, Die Stem. He then screens footage of a chimpanzee attacking and eating a baby monkey and performs a ritualistic dance with a strapped-on taxidermied baboon.

The final interaction between the two—she with horns and a glowing tutu, he with a prosthetic wart hog rear and a glowing corset, whispering and discovering a world together—is touching and intimate. However, the purposeful resemblance of her elderly, fleshy body to that of Saarjie Baartman’s and its frequent juxtaposition to monkeys and apes made audience members at the opening performance (which I attended) deeply uncomfortable, and not in the way that Cohen had hoped. Dlamini’s seeming lack of agency in allowing herself to be led by Cohen—flipping the dynamics of their earlier collaboration—only highlighted the power imbalance and replicated stereotypes rather than undermine them. That this dynamic should be reversed within a decade suggests that though white Africanness and humility can be earned and given, it can just as easily be taken away and fall back all too easily into colonial tropes.

Cohen’s public comments on the piece suggest that’s he’s embracing a broad, uncritical humanism: “We are all black, we all come from Africa… White people are just mutant black people… the same ape in different drag.” His association of race with interspecies drag is striking, but only serves to highlight the ways in which the material history of bodies can be erased by rhetoric of sameness. Despite their personal history and the love they clearly share for one another, in this production it is Dlamini’s body that becomes the stage onto which the audience is invited to project their pre-existing notions about the black, female, elderly, primitive South African body. Cohen—his body white and, for once, unadorned—becomes the facilitator to this mass objectification, without acknowledging that the objectification/abjectification of her body is very different from that of his.

Perhaps this, then, is the limit of white queer drag performance’s ability to shape the meanings of itself and its own Africanness: when it orchestrates other, non-white South African

---


94 Ib
bodies in its performance without paying heed to the power dynamics inscribed on these bodies. As Edward Said and others have commented, whiteness is dependent on its racial Others in order to give it definition. When Steven Cohen performs with Nomsa Dlamini, the juxtaposition of his body with hers both claims his Africanness—a literal place in the origin story, with both Nomsa and Africa as his cradle—and reiterates his whiteness, and the white body’s power to command, to speak, to craft the narrative, even in a new South Africa.

---

96 In an interview arts festival website Grid_Lab, Cohen was specifically clear that he understood the role he was playing/the drama he was reenacting, and—typically—played up the role his critics would cast him in: “She is my Saarjie Baartman and I brought her to France, and I’m completely culpable…I take credit for being guilty. I’m proud to be guilty of making a 90-year-old woman walk naked for money.” When later asked whether Dlamini was aware of all of the racial meanings at play in the piece, Cohen stated: “Absolutely. She doesn’t have the language to explain her comprehension but we see in her eyes her complicitness.” Grid Lab @Extra 11, “Interview with Steven Cohen.”
Chapter Two: Living in the As-if: Johannesburg’s Chosen FEW Soccer Team and the Subjunctive Performance of “African” Lesbian Identity

No Lesbians in Vosloorus

I first met members of the Chosen FEW lesbian soccer team at an early-morning protest in October 2010. Preceding One-in-Nine’s intervention in the Joburg Pride parade by two years, twelve lesbians had been arrested and harassed in their homes during a Pride-related house party in the Johannesburg-area township of Vosloorus. The police officers had barged into the party, maced all of the guests, and dragged them to the local police station, all while shouting homophobic slurs, threatening them with a knife, and questioning the gender of the women involved. The officers did this while stating, categorically, that there were “no lesbians in Vosloorus.”

Gathered in the dusty parking lot of the police station, alighting from the ubiquitous koombi mini-bus taxis, local lesbians seemed prepared to counter the officers’ assertion. They wore purple t-shirts garnered from the One-in-Nine campaign, covered in slogans: “Stop the War on Women’s Bodies” “Sexual Violence = Silence” and simply: “Lesbian.” They were young, black and from Vosloorus and other townships in the Ekhureleni Municipality. Some had been at the party and some had heard about the arrests from friends. I watched as they began to dance in a circle, clapping and singing in unison to the bemusement of police officers that had come out to watch.

One of those leading the chant—a powerfully built woman with multiple piercings, skinny jeans, a bleached frohawk fade (the height of township style)—introduced herself to me as Manika and mentioned that she represented the NGO Forum for Empowerment of Women (FEW) and the Chosen FEW Soccer team at the protest. If it seems initially odd that soccer players would double as political activists, their role as visible, out lesbians within their communities (and linked to each other by the social support of FEW, an NGO dedicated to promoting the rights of black lesbians) positions intersecting identity formations—“African” and “Lesbian”—in the spotlight, rather than being subsumed, ignored, or dismissed as an aberration. The Chosen FEW was founded in 2003 as part of an outreach initiative by FEW with the goal of educating a generation of young black lesbians on their rights and empowering them through sport. The team members are drawn from the numerous townships surrounding Johannesburg. Notably, in the nine months I spent working, hanging out, and protesting with the Chosen FEW, I was only aware of their participating in two soccer matches. The focus of the players—and the organization—(at least during my time there) was far more on political activism and combating violence, homophobia, and racism as experienced in the everyday.

Though the soccer itself is a shared interest, defining characteristic, and organizing principle for the team, it is their association with Forum for Empowerment of Women that places the players of the Chosen FEW in the unique position as visible, vocal, and self-aware representatives of black lesbians in South Africa; simultaneously, due to their participation in larger global gay events (their attendance at the 2008 London International Lesbian and Gay Football League and at the 2010 International Gay Games in Cologne) they have taken a very
public role in representing the face of South African gayness to the world. Indeed, in the run up to 2010 World Cup, the BBC, ESPN, the New York Times, and The Guardian each produced a “human interest story” around the team, focusing on their survival against the odds and using their stories as metaphors for South Africa’s struggles as a post-colonial state and “developing nation.”

Since its founding by activist Donna Smith and photographer Zanele Muholi, FEW has expanded its reach from support to political engagement, specifically drawing attention to several longstanding murder cases of black lesbians. The Leadership Training Program—which brings together young feminist activists from four provinces and teaches them how to build their own NGOs—has been key to providing the members of the Chosen FEW with the language to contextualize their daily struggles in a larger framework. This language often reflects the influence of western feminist organizing, such as “patriarchy” and “feminism.”

Yet they also frequently employed more culturally flexible terms with potential for resignification. Manika, for instance, commented to me: We live in a patriarchal society, we’re fighting for equality, but at the end of the day, it won’t work because we are oppressed by ikultcha.97 ikultcha—Zulu-ized slang for culture—is the nebulous ground on which queer Africanness continues to be negotiated. A March 2011 debate at the South African Broadcasting Corporation in Johannesburg, (in collaboration with BBC World News and with the unfortunate title “Is Homosexuality UnAfrican?”) provides a useful staging of personal emotional attachment that actors hold to the stability of each of these terms (both “Homosexuality” and “African”), as well as their perceived oppositionality. These are not abstract terms, but lived realities with high stakes. For example, at one point, Mandla Tshabalala, a member of the United Christian Democratic Party, aligned his—presumably heterosexual—self against a presumably non-African, homosexual, non-reproductive, Other:

> I am a African. We believe in being remembered for eternity, so the only way to that is through reproduction. How do I do that with another man and claim that I am an African? It can't be done...The only way for my surname to continue, you see, for my surname to continue is through reproduction. I'm a African.”98

To be African, here, is to be aligned with heterosexual reproducitvity; it also is implicitly aligned with blackness. When confronted with non-heterosexual South African identity (and, implicitly, black identity), the discourse becomes increasingly gendered, with “African” standing for tradition, continuity, reproduction, and culture, often tied into the role of the church. The boundaries of the imagined nation are created, policed, and—crucially—reproduced through the shifting meanings of “African,” where homosexuality is associated with all that is un/African (amnesia, wickedness, with no futurity). If—as Anne McClintock and Nira Yuval-Davis have persuasively argued—the nation is always gendered and figured through its iconic representations of women, lesbians are, in this affective economy, figured as non-reproductive, failed performances of Africanness.99

Black gays and lesbians deal daily with the cultural paradox at the heart of South Africa’s

---

97 “Manika,” interview with the author, April 14, 2011, Vosloorus, Gauteng, South Africa. Township street slang for “culture.”
99 Nira Yuval-Davies, Gender and Nation (London: Sage, 1997) and McClintock, Imperial Leather.
democracy. Their everyday lives are marked with a choice: they can remain quiet about their sexual attraction (known in local parlance as “after nines”—straight until after nine). Or, despite danger, they can choose to live openly and “as if”—as if the constitution were enforced, as if they were recognized as full citizens. It is this projected orientation, I will argue, that allows the members of the Chosen FEW—as out lesbians and as quasi-public figures—to rehearse a possible, yet unattained future. These performances of an out, subjunctive black lesbian South African identity are not without very real stakes and consequences. The everyday—so often conceived of as the repetitive, the unremarkable, the banal—is, according to these women, constantly defined by their otherness and their vulnerability. As their presences disrupt the everyday lives of their communities, so does their everyday experience become spectacularized, as multiple raced and gendered narratives are projected onto their bodies.

Whereas Pieter-Dirk Uys and Steven Cohen’s interventions into township space were effective because they were performances—the very strangeness of their whiteness and cross-dressing marking them as different from the everyday life of the communities they performed in—the everyday performance of the Chosen FEW players come with far higher stakes. Their often-gender-queering self-presentations place them in potentially-dangerous situations; following Judith Butler’s differentiation, discussed in the previous chapter, between the “transvestite on the stage” and the “transvestite on the bus,” (a useful shorthand for the difference between theatrical performance and non-normative gender performativity) the out lesbians I talked to were fully aware of the way their identities could compel fear, rage, and even violence.

In order to survive, maintain, and restore senses of self, the members of the Chosen FEW develop personae that perform a double motion of projection and protection. This projected orientation of a future self (what I’m calling the “As If”\(^{100}\)) makes the present bearable. It also requires them to create new narratives that protect their “true selves” from public consumption. These narratives can result in stylized and hybridized, exaggerated personas that allow them legibility in their communities or new family structures that undermine the sense of any one traditional culture. These performances, and the space created by the relationships they build everyday, allow them to claim complex subjectivities and undermine dominant dichotomies, such as African/Lesbian, Tradition/Modernity. These narratives draw on traditional, gay, and youth cultures; their performances undo any conception of culture as a never-changing entity.

The presentation of the self in the everyday, as Erving Goffman has persuasively and famously argued, is not random, but often a series of mediated performances calculated to give off a certain effect of authenticity.\(^{101}\) Goffman’s metaphor of viewing “impression management” in terms of “frontstage/backstage” is especially apt in regards to members of the Chosen FEW, who are under numerous forms of surveillance in their communities. They are required to perform (and, indeed, to represent): “Lesbian,” “Black,” “Soccer player,” “South African” “Zulu/Xhosa/Ndebele/etc,” among any number of more personal, relational roles (daughter, neighbor, etc). The public character of their self-presentation renders all of their everyday performances of identity in Capitals, cited in quotation marks as both individual and

\(^{100}\) This term intentionally plays on one of the underpinning concepts of Western dramatic realism, Constantin Stanislavski’s so-called “Magic if.” Here, a performer can create the emotional life of the character through a creative and empathetic engagement with the given circumstances of the situation: “If acts as a lever to lift us out of the world of actuality into the realm of the imagination,” An Actor Prepares, (New York: Routledge, 1989/1936), 46. I argue that by living as if, black lesbians are able to think outside of their lived reality into an imagined space where their constitutional rights are enacted.

representative: the Black-Lesbian-From-the-Township (Who-Plays-Soccer). Because of this pressure to perform, many of them use style and take on complicated, outgoing personas to project a front of confidence and strength, of optimism and agency. As I will argue, these personas become both modes of modeling an out, fearless lesbian township identity (as if safety were not an issue) and of protecting a more vulnerable “self” (from the reality that it is). Through a stylized performance of self—cultural performances culled from numerous sources—they negotiate the everyday world of their communities and, through their performances, claim a space for black South African lesbians.

Ann Pellegrini has proposed an engagement with what she calls “a democratic politics of ‘as-if,’” that is, how the “ways in which we act…generate a subjunctive universe.” Arguing that “the ways in which we act to produce the ‘could be’ and ‘not yet,’” could be politically productive, Pellegrini wonders if a workable “practice of democratic moral engagement”—a depolarization of seemingly oppositional terms (in her work, religion and secularity)—could come from a process thinking and living in subjunctive terms, rather than current realities. Though Pellegrini is purposefully vague as to what this sort of politics would look like, I would argue that the enactment of a “subjunctive universe” is and has been a necessary everyday performance for minorities living visibly in hostile environments. Within a paradoxical situation such as South Africa’s, where democratic citizenship does not result in access to cultural citizenship and many black South African lesbians are forced to choose between facing violent opposition or self-censorship in order to justify their “Africanness” to their communities, living subjunctively is the only way in which they will be able to put their constitutional rights into practice.

Much scholarship produced in the past decade on queer temporalities (queer pasts, queer futurity, queer utopia), has argued that in order to opt out of hegemonic conceptions of “reproductive time,” gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people have forged their own, non-linear temporalities and geographies. This scholarship has opened a field of new, complex ways of analyzing the uneven terrain of identity affiliation in a time where LGBT citizens are increasingly folded into the narratives of nation (what Jasbir Puar calls homonationalism). From Lee Edelman’s embrace of a queer non-futurity that disrupts the figural identity of “The Child,” so central to the construction and reproduction of society, to Jose Muñoz’ invocation of queer identities as figured towards spatio-temporal utopias, scholars have sought to conceptualize the symbolic work that “queer” does. These theorists argue it is vitally important to consider the ways in which queer can operate as an analytical tool, which, in Muñoz’ words, “is not simply a being but a doing for and towards the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility of another world.”

---

106 Muñoz, Cruising Utopia, 1.
While I draw implicitly on the radical potential of this sort of “doing towards” in my analysis of the Chosen FEW, this chapter also troubles the languages and geographies in which this world is theorized, and argues that these theories should and must be grounded in their particular cultural contexts. The vast majority of the work on queer temporalities and national identities has been written under the purview of literary, film, or cultural studies within the American and European academies, primarily about Western cultural production. This chapter explores the generative potential of ethnography-as-radical-research, which—as modeled by performance theorists such as Dwight Conquergood and Soyini Madison—places the body as the epistemological center of knowledge-in-context. Whereas Edelman, for instance, might critique a subjunctive perspective as embracing a dangerous “future continually deferred by time itself, constrained to pursue the dream of a day when today and tomorrow are one,” his choice to privilege the Lacanian Symbolic over the material conditions of that temporality leaves no space to evaluate alternative enactments (particularly outside of his western framework).

My reading highlights the particular stakes involved in performing “as-if” in the South African everyday—which the players I interviewed expressed matter-of-factly in terms of life and death—and the investment that this particular group of black South African lesbians place in the possibility of performative citizenship, even when their constitutional rights fail to be enacted or respected in the public sphere. My analysis is therefore interested in what self-sustaining narratives are created when, with stakes this high, black South African lesbians choose to live “as-if” publicly and expressively. What do these narratives tell us about the role performance can play in recrafting the possible, on insisting on the “concrete possibility of another world,” a world that is always almost (and always never) here? What role does the intimate spectacle of the everyday play in crafting alternative cultures that allow for complex, intersectional and multi-affiliated subject positions?

In order to delve into the particularities of everyday performances, I structure my argument through a close reading of the lives and self-stylings of three Chosen FEW players, supplemented with the experiences/thoughts of other members. My research draws on nine months of participant-observation (September 2010-May 2011), in-depth interviews conducted with six Chosen FEW players—most in their homes—and attendance at two games, three parties, three pride celebrations, and four protests.

I make no claims that these experiences are “representative” of black South African lesbians; in many ways, they are distinctly unrepresentative. However, in a circumstance where queer black identities are targeted for eradication and a geopolitical situation where ethnic, gender, racial, and class lines are thickly drawn and often violently policed, the mobility and gusto with which the players of the Chosen FEW approach their identities allows them to reconfigure the trappings of ikultcha. The fluidity of ikultcha, as expressed through their individual and collective enactments, operates as a prism through an ideal future can coexist with a turbulent present. Further, their desire to live as if allows us to theorize beyond both queerness and performance as mere utopic endeavors. By participating in the creation of a “subjunctive universe,” the Chosen FEW’s repeated, politicized enactments of self, beyond merely gesturing to a different mode of being, call these new modes of being into practice.

A Note on Methodology

This chapter, more than any other in this dissertation, strives to create a new archive that represents the embodied experiences and performances of those belonging to what the Human Subject IRBs dryly categorize as a “vulnerable population.” It is therefore critical, both methodologically and ethically, that my lens be turned inward and the nuts and bolts of this ethnography be made transparent. I first contacted Forum for Empowerment of Women in 2009, having heard they had a theatre group that might be of interest to me as a South African performance scholar. Though this group turned out to be defunct, I was told about the Chosen FEW and was intrigued by their work and by the centrality of sports to South African performances of nationhood more generally. When I returned to conduct dissertation research from 2010 to 2011, I found the organization to be struggling and the team to be in a period of decline. Though they had recently participated in the Gay Games, their insistence that they were an explicitly black lesbian soccer team had led to charges of discrimination (against, presumably non-black, non-lesbians), limiting their participation in Johannesburg’s team leagues. Despite having few formalized opportunities to perform as a team, the team identity remained very important to the players, and they met frequently for organizational training, as well as political and social gatherings. During my time as a researcher, the players shared their stories openly and often generously invited me into their houses to meet their families. My whiteness and Americanness made me both a source of amusement (when they put on kwai to music to command that the “umlungu ujiva!” 109) and social cache in communities that did not prize out lesbian identities.

Just as the individual Chosen FEW members adjusted their self-presentations and narratives for me as their particular (white, queer-identified, American) audience, my use of their words creates a particular “performance” narrative in order to intervene into disciplinary debates in both performance and queer studies. Yet as an inclusion in a dissertation that contains more traditional forms of discourse and performance analysis, this ethnography hews close to the “messiness” of life-as-theory and unevenness of overlapping identity positions.

Style, Swagga, and the performance of self

Ekasi [in the Township], for you to get a girl, you need to have swagga. That’s the thing. Swagga. You know, something with style. When you pass girls they’re like (sighs) “Ayoba!” At the end of the day, for you to get a girl now, lesbian swagga.

“Manika” 111

109 Zulu slang: roughly, “Dance, Whitey!”
110 Slang: Excellent!
111 “Manika,” interview.

The Chosen FEW present a challenge to the researcher in terms of pseudonyms. From one perspective, they are public figures and have been given extensive coverage in the international media, who use their full names (see: Guardian, New York Times, etc). Their images and names are easily accessible to those with internet access. However, as out lesbians in communities where this is highly stigmatized identity, they fall under the category of vulnerable populations. Yet, they are experts in self-promotion and often refer to themselves, proudly, as local celebrities. Moreover, as visible out lesbians, their decision to reveal their names and faces to me (and others) is an explicitly political one. In order to respond to the tensions of the quasi-public nature of their identities—as well as gesture to the importance of naming and being named—I have decided to refer to the team members by their
Manika is a difficult character to pin down in a few lines of text. Her self-confidence is overwhelming. After I meet her at the protest, she quickly becomes my main contact within the Chosen FEW. She walks me through her neighborhood in Vosloorus and is greeted by neighbors, friends, and the young men hanging out on corners who she had played soccer with when she was younger. When interviewed about the activist work FEW does, she speaks in jargon, throwing out words such as patriarchy, feminism, capitalism, and hegemony to describe her position in the world. When off the record, she uses more colloquial language to soliloquize about her girlfriends and previous conquests. She often keeps her eyes on the horizon when she talks, almost as if she’s talking to herself, repeating the aspects of her life that constitute her identity. Soccer. Style. Family. Girls. This—the stuff of everyday life—contrasts with moments of spectacular, politicized protest discussed above, where the bodies of gays and lesbians use the communal aspects of song and toyi-toyi dance to present a united front. Manika is a distinct individual, who uses style—adornment and carriage—to produce a certain effect on those surrounding her. Her performance of self in the everyday—at turns charismatic, articulate, contradictory, and flashy—evokes and demands a response from those with whom she interacts.

Her persona is sexually-charged, embracing a different kind of female identity than that usually seen in township women by drawing on various forms of masculine and feminine cultural signifiers. Early on she commented to me “I think like a man, act like a lady,” an “acting-like” that propels her exaggerated swagga. Manika is no lady, at least not in the terms in which “ladyhood” is generally understood in her context. Yet she demands recognition that she is female, a “lesbian woman,” acting as a different kind of lady, while suggesting that she thinks like a man. Notably, one charge often leveled at township lesbians is that they act as if they are men. Manika’s insistence that she acts like a lady (but a different kind of lady), driven by a masculine mind, unsettles and attracts those around her; her appropriation of so-called “male” desire and its enactments—which she insists on enacting through her female body—undoes the presumptions of both the men and women she comes across. This “undoing” reveals just how closely gender identity is enmeshed with sexed bodies, and the ways both are related to performances of a raced African identity.

The first time we met, I felt the full force of her charm: she asked me for my number and later texted me a message loaded with innuendo, telling me that she really wanted to get to know nicknames, given to them from a variety of sources and often more important to their senses of self than their given names. By doing this, I hope to preserve the privacy of the individuals while still respecting their personalities, experiences, and performances.

112 Chosen FEW members often choose to use the phrase “Lesbian Woman” as opposed to simply “Lesbian” when speaking about their political stances. I found this interesting and somewhat redundant, until I met with Phindi Malaza, the programs coordinator at FEW, whose constant use of the phrase as a noun describing same-sex attracted women (with “lesbian” being more often an adjective) and their engagements with their communities, made it clear to me that this is a political point, a way of emphasizing that lesbians are women and are connected to the larger struggles for women’s equality. This affiliation allows lesbian issues to be taken up by the women’s movement, as well as strategically positions FEW as a partner for civil society organizations focused on gender issues.

113 Manika’s destabilization of “everyday” township norms echoes Judith Halberstam’s contention that female masculinity denaturalizes “heroic,” normative masculinities and critiques the ideologies that support them, as well as Marjorie Garber’s work on the cross-dresser as the catalyst for a larger societal “category crisis.” I would argue that the visibility of gays and lesbians within black South African communities has become a flashpoint for larger discussions about the meaning of blackness, and becomes shorthand for larger discussions on the role of (racial, ethnic, national) difference in post-apartheid society. See, Halberstam, Female Masculinity (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) and Garber, Vested Interests.
me. Though I eventually fell into the role that she termed her “inja yami,”\footnote{Zulu Slang: literally, my dog. My homie. My friend.} she never failed to mention that she had dated a European woman she had met at the gay games in Germany, and that she didn’t want to be tied down to a racial or sexual type. Similarly, she rejected the gendered paradigm of butch/femme (“amabutchie/amafemme”), preferring to identify herself as a dyke. This sexual and racial fluidity, she would later explain to me, is an integral part of her “lesbian swagga,” a mode of confident self-presentation that draws on a number of styles and performances to attract women and deflect homophobic insults.

Manika connects her swagga to a larger trend within youth culture, which she sees as providing space for a more expansive, more inclusive sort of township identity: “But now these men wear skinny jeans, these women wear men’s clothes. There have unisex clothes now. In olden days, if you were a man you would wear a man’s clothes. And a woman wears women’s clothes. But nowadays things are changing.”\footnote{“Manika,” interview.} Indeed, walking behind Manika and her straight, self-identified “metrosexual” male best friend as we go to pick up beer at the local Vosloorus spaza, it is difficult to tell them apart: he wears tight black pants and a fuchsia dress shirt; she wears a puffy black jacket and purple skinny jeans, slightly baggy to show off matching purple briefs.

Her association of her “swagga” style with a “dyke” identity (as opposed to butch-femme model, popular with many township lesbians) suggests an engagement with and a troubling of the distinction between transnational expressions of queerness and local, site-specific understandings of sexuality. As part of a larger queer mediascape, members of the Chosen FEW fashion identities that are responsive but not reducible to the reach of global gay cultures and medias. Unlike many lesbians (indeed, many people) within their township communities, they have travelled internationally through participating in the International Gay Games and interact with South African activists from a number of different racial, cultural, and class backgrounds through their work with FEW.

For members of the Chosen FEW—who, unlike other lesbians from similar backgrounds, don’t have the luxury or desire to slip under the radar—the everyday performance of self becomes both a projection of an ideal self (an accepted lesbian South Africa identity) and a public persona that can be put on to shield that self from violation/negation. A “true” self can simultaneously be evoked and safeguarded, through a double move of projection and protection. Manika, for example, is aware of the ways her identity functions a public performance, calibrated to project a certain, controllable image. Even her nickname Manika—which, when spoken, intentionally sounds like “Ma Nigga”—is about style and “swagga,” rather than a true essence. It has become a symbol on which she has built her persona:

\begin{quote}
“Manika” has a history… “Manika” has made me to have so many friends, number one. This ‘Manika’ name made me to be famous, I don’t know why… This ‘Manika’ made me to have so maaaany girlfriends!”… “This “Manika” name, it was given by people who saw something in me that I didn’t see.”\footnote{Ibid.}
\end{quote}

The persona—to which Manika attributes a life of its own—results from a conscientious mixing of the stylized global hip hop culture (for example, the African American vernacular: “what-up my nigga?”) with localized South African meanings. She notes that “here in South Africa, when
you say ‘Nika-nika’¹¹⁷ [sounds like Nigga-Nigga], when they call you Nika-nika…Nika-nika is like: ‘I give—you give.’ If you give me respect, I give you respect back, you see?” In township communities, the term “manigga” (as in “what-up, Manigga?”) is a popular way for youth to claim affiliation to transnational hip hop culture, and has a similar resonance to other slang street affiliations, such as ma dawg (“inha yam’”), ma china, or ma gent. The term is so banal that Manika’s mother often calls her daughter home for dinner by standing at the gate and bellowing “Ma-Niiiiiggaa!”¹¹⁸

Beyond both of its local and transnational meanings, “this Manika name” has deeper, culture-specific resonances. In many parts of South African, the process of naming has a number of important cultural meanings, often linked to oral performance and praise poetry (izibongo or lithoko). Though most famously crafted for great chiefs—such as Shaka or Moshoeshoe—many clan names within South Africa’s main ethnic/tribal groupings have long histories of izibongo attached to them, linking modern identity with a larger tribal cosmology of chiefs and warriors.

This tradition is not merely sentiment. During apartheid—when black identities were reduced to dompas (passbook), a Christianized name, and a number—naming became a tactical necessity for locating the self in a larger context than the present. The importance of naming is reflected in a number of ways: some children are given the name of a deceased relative; others’ names have direct correlation to the circumstances of their birth or to a personal characteristic (for example, a popular Zulu girls name, Thandeka directly translates to “The one who is loved”).

When Manika speaks about “this Manika name,” her naming story takes on the aura of myth, as if she has been possessed a name that has chosen her, something out of control. Just as many cultures attribute meaning (and often a change of name) to a particular ritual, such as puberty or sexual maturity, Manika was given her name at a particularly formative time—when she was first discovering her attraction to women—by a group of lesbians at her school (those who “saw something in me I didn’t see”). Though she soon realized that this name (and the naming of her desire as “lesbian”) would label her as different from other girls in Vosloorus, there came a certain amount of relief at knowing that she was part of a potential community of women already within her own community. The process of her transformation into Manika accompanied her larger sense of place in the world, and was imbued with a sort of lesbian communitas.¹¹⁹

This lesbian communitas, resulting from the everyday rituals of belonging and education, transforms the Chosen FEW into something more than a soccer club, or even an activist organization. The soccer team becomes space of support and self-awareness for its members and their friends. When I interviewed them, several players pinpointed their connection with Forum for Empowerment of Women as giving them definition, both as activists and as people. Though they may have felt as if they never did what was expected of them during their childhood and youth, there seems to have been a certain amount of flexibility within their communities: words such as tomboy were used. As they began to realize that they were not interested in the expected heterosexual partnerships, they found themselves without language to express their particular embodied desire (the word most associated with homosexuality is “isitabane” which means

¹¹⁷ Zulu: Nika—to give.
¹¹⁸ It is important to note that “Nigga,” the racial epithet that has often been reclaimed in African American hip hop cultures, does not have the same affective punch in South African youth cultures as it does in America. Indeed, the equivalent Afrikaans word Kaffir (“The ‘K’ word”) has yet to be re-appropriated by those it denigrates in any large degree.
hermaphrodite and is generally an insult). Many spoke of finding a “true self,” that their communities would prefer they hide. According to K.K.—a player from Chiawelo, Soweto—playing on other girls’ teams in the township, “you have to hide your lesbianity. And I wasn’t free, man. Like now, I’m free. [Because of] Chosen FEW, I know how to take off clothes. You don’t have to hide. We are free. You are a lesbian, especially, as I am around lesbians.”

K.K.’s focus on freedom and Manika’s fixation on style and “swagga” in relation to the self are part of a larger trend within the “Born Frees,” the generation born around or after the freeing of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the negotiated settlement that led to the first democratic election in 1994. In the almost 20 years since the end of apartheid, South Africa has developed a vibrant youth culture that fashions itself through a process of cultural bricolage: sampling and remixing itself from a number of local and global sources. Sarah Nuttall, in her analysis of post-apartheid youth-oriented magazines and shopping malls, has noted that the generation of post-apartheid black youth—despite being overwhelmingly poor—have crafted a new, individualized identity through a process of “cultural accessorization.” Style (often synonymous with consumption) has become a tactic for youth to claim autonomy from both their parents’ generation and from a past that so often ties them to an identity of victimhood. Nuttall quotes one such perspective of what she calls The Y Generation: “We understand where we come from, but I am not interested in politics and about what happened in the ’80s because I wasn't there. And even if I was, I live for the future.” This performance of contemporary self challenges a static reading of blackness, producing instead a flexible view of identity, rooted in a very post-apartheid ideology of diversity and the free market.

For lesbians, this focus on futurity and cultural elasticity challenges the version of African culture that is often cited as a proof against the possibility of gay African identity. Through “cultural accessorization” young queer South Africans are able to play with personas freely, trying on identities and picking and choosing their affiliations, including choosing when to be out about their sexualities. Importantly, this model of cultural accessorization taps into another post-apartheid trend of conspicuous consumption, where—in order to assert a right to citizenship—formerly disenfranchised people literally buy into the nation. For the members of the Chosen FEW, this pressure to develop a style that is both recognizable and individual is complicated by the simultaneous allure of so-called “global gay” styles. Most of the players have the piercings (labrets, eyebrows, ear cartilage), tattoos (interlocking women symbols), and accessories (such as studded belts, thumb rings, rainbow bracelets) that telegraph “lesbian” or “dyke” transnationally to those “in the know.” They frequently attend the once-monthly lesbian party Open Closet in Johannesburg’s historically gay suburb of Melville, and gather in large groups to attend events such as annual Johannesburg Pride celebration.

K.K.’s earlier metaphor about her lesbian identity allowing her to take off clothes stands in productive tension with Manika’s contention that “when you wear something, it demonstrates the kind of person you are,” and captures what I’ve called the double move of projection and protection at work in the performance of black South African lesbian subjectivity. When same-sex attracted women are interpolated into a community, under the label of lesbian, they feel safe to imagine a space where they can visibly exist and thrive. However, in beginning to live this life, to claim ownership of the spaces (rather than slipping under the radar), they perform

---

120 For an in-depth reading of the cultural politics of the “isistabane” label, see Amanda Swarr, Sex in Transition.
overproduced identities for the public sphere—lesbian swagga—clothed behind a gender-queering confidence and cutting-edge style. Though this style puts them at risk for not “passing,” it also keeps them from being vulnerable and allows them to maintain a self that is relatively untouched by whatever prejudice is thrown their way. Strength against adversity is a highly respected quality, and much like Ma(Nigga/Nika)’s name, respect begets status within one’s community. The Chosen FEW’s celebrity—with its members traveling internationally to the Gay Games, guest starring on TV shows, and occasionally receiving local press—also allows community members to respect their fame, if not their life choices.

Choice, “Culture of Democracy,” and the Closet

So, some [people], they’re good and some they...go with the flow, like: “It’s okay, you can do whatever you want to do with your life, we can’t choose for you.” Others, they just stereotype: “You need a man, who can take you over and control you, you should be somebody’s wife.” And those stereotype people, they attack me playing soccer. “How can a woman play soccer? They need to be in the kitchen, cooking, have children whatawhata.” And I ask them “Who told those women to be like that? They chose for themselves. I didn’t like that. That’s why I don’t do that. That’s why I chose to play soccer.”

Khambi

For our interview, Khambi sits me down on the single bed that takes up most of the space in her zozo, a one room tin “shack” adjacent to the family’s main, cinderblock house in Katlehong, a sprawling township neighboring Vosloorus. Her extremely pregnant cousin interrupts us at one point to tell us she is going into labor. Khambi rolls her eyes. It turns out to be a false alarm. She is helping her cousin through the pregnancy, accompanying her to her sonograms, and is planning to raise the baby along with her girlfriend and her cousin (“I am the baby-mommy-daddy,” she jokes).

From the start of her interview, Khambi demonstrated a keen awareness of playing to a number of different audiences, outside of our individual interaction. When I asked Khambi to tell me about herself, she asked if I wanted the short version or the long version. When I replied I wanted to hear whatever she wanted to tell me, she paused before stating clearly (and, pointedly, to the unknown audience on the other side of my microphone):

My name is [Khambi]. I live in Joburg, in Katlehong side. And I am an activist. And I am a soccer player. And I am a human rights defender. So I play for a soccer team called Chosen FEW, it’s a lesbian team based in Braamfontein.

Despite having spent time socializing with me “off the record” for several months at that point, Khambi approached this interview with an almost-mechanical precision, enumerating her identity affiliations to as she would with a stranger and highlighted those aspects that would be most intelligible to me, as a (white American) outsider: Her geographical location, from a general locatable point (“Joburg”) to a specific community (a township, Kathlehong side); Her political position (activist) is linked to her passion (soccer), which is facilitated by the Chosen FEW. This “introduction” had the pat, rehearsed tone of a sound-bite and was markedly different in tone and diction to when Khambi was telling me about her love life, where she tended to

123 “Khambi,” interview with the author, January 12, 2011, Katlehong, Gauteng, South Africa.
124 Ibid.
speak in half-finished sentences—punctuated by laughter and Zulu phrases—and, as often is the case with someone speaking in a second (third? fourth?) language, switched verb tenses frequently. The members of the Chosen FEW receive extensive media training as part of their induction into LGBT activism, and play an active role in advertising the Forum for Empowerment of Women both at home and abroad. Khambi and other members of the Chosen FEW are acutely aware of their role as representative black South African lesbians, playing to a variety of local, national, and transnational audiences. They are continuously called upon to perform and translate, so that one aspect of their identities (such as “lesbianness”) will be recognizable in the frame of another (such as “blackness” or South Africanness”).

To this end, throughout our hour-and-a-half long interview, Khambi strikingly outlined her self-image through the rhetoric of “choice,” both as a personal quality and as a constitutional right. Though Khambi’s performance of self is more muted than Manika’s—on the day I interview her, she is dressed in a simple black t-shirt and a pair of mesh soccer shorts—she is equally aware of the importance of crafting her own sense of style, especially when it relates to others’ perceptions of her:

I feel like wearing shorts, I wear shorts. When I feel like I can wear skirts, today I wear skirts. Tomorrow I wake up I feel like wearing trousers, shorts. And when you see me walking with a tie look like a butch lesbian. Tomorrow you see me wearing a dress, like “woo!” So I consider myself as a dyke. Cause I can dress butch, I can dress femme. So I’m in the middle of the two.125

Khambi’s performance of self privileges her own comfort and takes pleasure in confounding others’ expectations. When community members come at her with a particular vision of what she should be as a woman, as she relates in this section’s epigraph, she, tellingly, turns the question back on the asker, reframing it in terms of choice. Playing ignorant to those who questioned her right to play soccer and her difference from other women, she gives them a deceptively simple answer: “Who told those women to be like that? They chose for themselves. I didn’t like that. That’s why I don’t do that. That’s why I chose to play soccer.” Though, as a self-proclaimed feminist and activist, she might have argued (and, indeed, did argue at other points of the interview) that the women who cook and clean often do so under duress from the expectations of a larger culture rather than their own choice, she frames the situation as if the women chose to be like that. They did, she didn’t: end of story. If her homophobic community—“those stereotype people”—argue with her logic, they are forced to acknowledge that women have a very limited choice of roles in patriarchal culture, and if they did have a choice (which they, in theory, do), they might choose differently. Through her response to her critics, Khambi undermines the assumed “naturalness” of female behavior and subtly calls attention to the paradoxical relationship between women’s constitutional rights and their realities.

Khambi’s insistence on her right to choose her own self-representation relates to the larger role that the soccer team plays as ambassadors for the Forum for Empowerment of Women. Beyond being an adroit word play on the name of its host organization, the team’s positioning of its players as the “Chosen FEW” (with its emphasis on the act of choosing and being the subject of choice) resonates on a number of registers. The name performs a transformation of lesbian identity from one of shame and invisibility (a few

125 Ibid.
bad apples, nothing worth remarking upon) into a forceful, positive presence. The players are not accidents; they were chosen. The specifics (By whom? and for what?) are open to interpretation.

Choice—especially in relation to transnational queer identity—is an ambiguous, slippery concept. The rhetoric of “choice,” as transnational feminist scholar Inderpal Grewal has noted, is often used to co-opt potentially radical social movements and complex identity formations into the neoliberal frameworks where “freedom” is measured in the freedom to consume.126 Certainly, post-apartheid South Africa’s GEAR (Growth, Employment, and Redistribution) policies have aligned the country with free market principles, without acknowledging that these ostensibly “free” market principles end up circumscribing the options available for the majority, who have limited choices available to them. Choice thus becomes entangled with questions of access: to bodily safety, to larger queer communities, and to the legal rights promised by the constitution.

Notably, despite Khambi’s assertion of the importance of choice in a democracy, much queer organizing—including for the inclusion of “sexual orientation” in the South African 1996 constitution’s equality clause—has argued against a framework that sexual-identity-as-choice. Rather, LGBT organizing has tactically framed sexuality as predetermined, arguing for sexual identity as deserving of the same protection offered to other minoritarian groups, alongside ethnicity and disability. As noted previously, in South Africa, this protection fails in its everyday enactment, often because those with normative sexual identities believe that the women are “choosing” to behave in a certain “unnatural” (and unAfrican) way, behavior that deserves punishment and discipline.

Moreover, the rhetoric of choice coupled with the rhetoric of tradition and traditional law has been used to justify violence against queer South Africans. This is especially manifest in the phenomenon of so-called “corrective” or “curative” rape (a phenomenon I will address more fully in the next chapter). Though the threat of sexual violence is an ever-present reality for those I interviewed, the popularity of these terms is problematic; by naming the act from the perspective of the male perpetrator, the terminology suggests that rape might correct a “chosen” orientation (“you just need the right man,”) and that semen as being able to cure the implied illness/evilness of lesbianism.

Within this hostile environment, the members of the Chosen FEW have developed nuanced relationships to their communities, especially around the issue of representation and their own relationship to the closet paradigm within a black South African context. As Marc Epprecht, following Foucault, has argued, the construction of Africa (and Africans) as heterosexual, depends not upon the erasure of same-sex activity, but the disavowal of same-sex identity as a Western construct, a connection that persists in the argument that homosexuality is a “colonial import” or a “white thing.”127 Notably, where some of the players I interviewed had harrowing “coming out” stories, others did not have a moment where they actively announced their sexual orientation to their parents. It was just understood, and when a girlfriend was brought home the parents treated her as such. Their gendered “difference” had been apparent and, to varying degrees, accepted throughout their lives.

Some of the players who were quick to identify themselves as “lesbians” in the public sphere (and for numerous publics) chose not to actually “come out” in their private lives. As Manika says: “For me I can say, ne, I never came out of the closet and say, ”hey the world, check,

127 Epprecht, Heterosexual Africa?
I'm lesbian." Here Manika acknowledges the reach of the western notion of “the closet,” and its inadequacy in non-western contexts. This critique, central to queer post-colonial scholarship, suggests that the performative gesture of “coming out,” is not always appropriate, nor does it reflect specific, culturally-intelligible performances. By embodying their difference—refusing to wear skirts, to do “girl things,” and by binding their breasts—Chosen FEW members performed an identity that was simultaneously oppositional and comprehensible to the norms of their communities, without overly emphasizing these performances as “lesbian.” Perhaps most significantly, they were able to remain safe and connected to people whose support was important to them. By choosing when to put on and take off the “Lesbian” label, Chosen FEW members are able to gain access and acceptance in spaces where these terms would alienate.

For Khambi, moments of choosing to withhold and publicize her sexual identity inextricably linked to South Africa’s post-apartheid culture of human rights, simultaneously personal and political. She recounted one such occasion when she was at her “very, very! homophobic” church, and was accosted by a woman who kept asking her whether she was a lesbian. The pastor intervened and apologized, notably by telling her: “It’s your choice.”

And after church I came and found my mom—and my mom, she’s a religious person—so I tell her and she said “Okay.” And trust me, I wish I didn’t tell her. Because when she met my pastor—Y’oh! Y’oh!—it was very hard for my pastor to answer most of the questions she was asking. She said “Okay, what do you want to know? Yeah, my child is a lesbian. And I’m very proud of that. And if you have a problem…I will take her straight there to [unintelligable]. I can’t just dump my child because of you guys from the church who seem like you don’t want her anymore!” And my pastor said “I didn’t say we don’t like her anymore. I didn’t. We didn’t chase her out.” So I decided after not to go to church. And he asked me one day and I said “No, I’m not ready yet. I’ll come the day I’m ready. I’ll come to church.” And so before we went to Germany, I went to church. And there’s a time whereby you go in front and you tell your story, like what have you achieved this year. And how did you manage that. I went in front and said “I’d like to thank my God for everything that He’s done for me. Decided to give me life, to reach the stage that I am. And I’d like to thank God again for giving me the opportunity of play soccer for the Chosen FEW to go to Germany.” Trust me, the whole church was like “Yee!”

Here, Khambi—with the support of her mother—made the decision when to continue to return to her church on her own terms. Where she had previously not spoken out about her sexuality (“I didn’t answer, [the woman’s repeated questions] I just kept quiet."

128 “Manika,” interview.
129 “Khambi,” interview.
130 Ibid.
this acceptance (the appreciative “Yee!”) is motivated by envy and admiration for her travels, rather than her value as a human being (accepting her in spite of/ignoring her presumed lesbian identity), Khambi’s experience highlights the importance of the success narrative to communities where so few children have access to the country’s wealth and promises of equal opportunity. It also suggests the extent to which Chosen FEW members are the exception to the rule in terms of both mobility and acceptance within their communities.

Goal keeper Thully had a similar experience of receiving unexpected acceptance from her religious community when she and other members of the Chosen FEW had a small part guest starring as themselves on the popular local television drama Society:

In the Church, when they saw me, one of the pastors said: “I saw one of the children here in church on TV, and I am so proud of that!” Even when I told them I was going Germany [for the Gay Games] they said, “You know what? You make your family proud and you make yourself proud and you make your baby proud, and also, you make South Africa proud.”

Here, intriguingly, the lesbian is allowed to be celebrated for the success that her queer-oriented endeavors has brought her, and even brings (South) African pride with her actions. In this case, perhaps just for this moment, the success narrative—a local girl making good and representing her community and country—takes precedence over the fact that her fame comes from her visibility as an out lesbian. Tellingly, her pastors and congregation did not mention that she was on television for playing a lesbian (though, of course, everyone who had seen the episode knew this); the silence surrounding her queer identity allowed for her to claim success in relation to a familial, reproductive community: her success reflected on her family, her baby girl, and—finally—her country. Mentions of her lesbian team, or her lover were notably absent. Yet the Chosen FEW members’ fame and the resulting (qualified) acceptance can provide a certain amount of safety, or at least a buffer, to spaces that are often unsafe. This is not the case for the majority of lesbians. Choice, therefore, depends as much on individual circumstances as it does on individual desire.

Narrative Slippages and The Reproduction (Revision?) of Cultural Norms

“If you are straight, you must be straight, if you are bisexual, be bisexual. It’s homo, it’s hetero, it’s bio. You are a queen, queen of the lesbians, but you are dating men? Hell no. Hell no.”

-K.K.

Even as members of the Chosen FEW are able to draw upon individual style and communal affiliation to reproduce and promote themselves by challenging gender norms, they also take on positions that seem paradoxical and counter their well-rehearsed feminist stances. Lila Abu-Lughod and Saba Mahmood, both working in Egypt, have written against the tendency of some feminist scholars and academics to fall prey to the “romance of resistance,” choosing to view their subject’s actions as either inherently subversive or—if “problematic”—as operating under a false consciousness (the parameters of which are determined by the supposed universality of

131 “Thully,” interview.
132 “K.K.” interview.
western feminist thought). Throughout my time with them, I noticed slippages between the expressed (and often rehearsed) views of the Chosen FEW as Model-African-Lesbian-Feminists and the offhanded biases and viewpoints that would come out in less official settings. Rather than ignoring or excusing these slippages, I want to probe the gap between the “ideal self” and the “actual self” as entryway into the workings of self-sustaining narrative. As they “accessorize” with different cultural values, the women I interviewed are trying on coping mechanisms in an environment where they are required to integrate wildly divergent expectations of them into coherent senses of self. The gap or contradiction between these values often remains troubling; other times, it can be bridged in inventive ways.

As I chatted with the players about what exactly the word “Lesbian” meant to them in a South African cultural context, their examples often upheld the gender norms of their communities. This was particularly true when the perceived gender identity did not coincide with expected sexual orientation. Though the majority of Chosen FEW members I talked to were perfectly comfortable with (if not downright enthusiastic) about dating “straight girls” there was not as much leniency about “Lesbians” or otherwise queer-identified women who dated men. K.K. spoke disapprovingly of a girl she knew who identified as (or was perceived to be) a butch lesbian, but who sometimes slept with men:

She was butchie like a man. But now, she had a baby. She had a baby. Because of what? Maybe she is telling herself at night, she’s a lady. Morning, emini (noon), afternoon, she’s butchie. She is a man now. Which is not right…Cause I’m like: Oh my God. If you are straight, you must be straight, if you are bisexual, be bisexual. It’s homo, it’s hetero, it’s bio. You are a queen, queen of the lesbians, but you are dating men. Hell no. Hell no.

Despite expressing respect for women of diverse sexual identities, K.K. has difficulty accepting these identities when they do not match up to gender performances she expects of them, as is the case with the butch woman (“queen of the lesbians”) who sleeps with men. Her most-likely unintended slip/erasure of bisexual identity (claiming “it’s homo, it’s hetero, it’s bio” [sic]) suggests the hold that biological gender has on understanding of sex-appropriate object choice. Where she might accept a feminine bisexual woman dating both men and women, a butch woman who sleeps with men is performing a false-consciousness by “telling herself at night she’s a lady…she’s a man now.” Her language and evident disgust with this coupling (it “is not right!”) unintentionally mirrors the heterosexism of those who argue that women (of any gender expression) should not sleep together. Perhaps K.K.—self-identified as butch—is sensitive about having her gender identity undermined by the men who dismiss lesbian sexuality, assuming that butch lesbians want to be men and need to have their “femaleness” shown to them (a popular excuse for “corrective rape”). An otherwise “butchie” lesbian’s willingness to sleep with men might give credence to the popular belief that visible, gender non-normative lesbians can be turned straight.

---

135 “K.K.” interview.
FEW’s concentration on “Lesbian Women” perhaps explains the absence of transgender-identified players. That Chosen FEW members were so relieved to find they were still women suggests a continued stigma towards transgender and intersex bodies in black lesbian cultures. This erasure, in large part, may result from different grids of intelligibility through which gender is understood in the Western LGBTQ movement and localized South African queer experiences. Though able to wield popular categories of sexual identity (ie: Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay) and gender performativity (ie: Butch, Femme, Dyke, etc), there is still difficulty amongst black lesbians with whom I talked in squaring biological sex with the experience of gender. This biological determinism—if you have a vagina, you are a woman—may make it difficult for trans identities to emerge, at least as such.

Transgender activism is nascent in South Africa. Tumi, one of the more butch of the Chosen FEW members, admitted that she had only met one transman, who was white. Moreover, her own lesbian identity developed in concert with her experiences at FEW and in opposition to many people’s assumptions of her gender presentation. She admits: “When I came to FEW they thought I was a transgendered.” FEW’s focus on empowering black lesbian women may have a particular, if unintended, effect on the ways in which its constituency’s identities are formed. Under different circumstances, Tumi might have identified in a different way. Surrounded by a team of proud lesbians, with a variety of gender expressions, she states:

I know who I am truly, because of Chosen FEW. They helped me to accept myself, to let me know I am a woman. Because I used to call myself a boy, I used to bind my boobs to hide them…Today I am proud to say I am a woman. Before I was not comfortable to be called a woman. No. I would get angry, be aggressive. Today, when somebody says “indoda” (man), I say “No man, I aint got no balls under my pants! I got balls under my bra, so don’t call me a man!”

These contradictions suggest that even those as politically savvy as the members of the Chosen FEW have internalized biases that emerge around issues of representation and that their political training as feminists does not immediately undo the socialization they received in a patriarchal society. Lesbians, as much as anyone else, can hold unquestioned assumptions about gender roles, or find some behavior or power imbalances acceptable in a female-female pairing that they would find reprehensible in a heterosexual one. One member I casually chatted with, for example, told me that she had recently broken up with her girlfriend, who she perceived as having flirted with a man. The drunken fight that followed this confrontation resulted in a physical scuffle with the girlfriend receiving a “blue eye” and the Chosen FEW member having scratches down her neck. Though domestic abuse exists in all sections of society, this account throws into relief how violence against women is present between even in those whose primary political goal is to stop it and empower women to escape it. Though the player felt guilty, she was annoyed that her now ex-girlfriend was taking so long to forgive her. Despite having previously mentioned the importance of “breaking the chain of violence” in heterosexual relationships, she seemed never to doubt that she would be taken back.

There are times, however, that the disjunction between the expectations of the categories “lesbian” and “woman” allow for a self-focused reinscription of both, in a way that highlights,
embodies, or even embraces the more “problematic” aspects of each. Thully’s story is one that can—and has—been interpreted a number of ways, for a number of different agendas. A *New York Times* video made in the run up to the 2010 World Cup, for example, depicts Thully walking mournfully through her township while talking about her rape and suicide attempts, as well as how she sometimes wishes she were dead.138

When we met in 2011, in the lobby of the Market Theatre, famed for fostering radical protest and anti-apartheid performance, I was curious as to how open Thully would be about the trauma she had experienced. Thully is unapologetically butch, wearing men’s trousers and a heavy sweater over a collared shirt the day we met. Then 31, Thully is one of the older members of the Chosen FEW. She is a player I would see when I attended games or protests, but not at the more raucous post-game parties. She doesn’t drink and admits to being a bit of a homebody. She’s quieter than the other team members, but smiles frequently, revealing a gap between her front teeth.

Though the interview initially started out light, Thully quickly became serious about her past and the way FEW has encouraged her to speak out about her trauma: “I just started feeling free and talking and...I started to be free and be open about my past. Like I can talk to anyone and tell, like ‘No, I’m one of those lesbians who survived rape.’ I was raped because I was a lesbian.”139 She went on to explain how her rape at age 17 had undone her sense of her self in the world, her place in her community, and led to a deep depression. She became pregnant and then miscarried. She then fixated on having another child and becoming a mother. After being unable to afford adoption and in-vitro fertilization, she slept with a male friend, an experience that reopened the trauma of the first assault. She reflects on this period as a time where, “I was not living my life. It was like having a pain inside...There’s something inside eating me. If I can have a baby, maybe I will be free in my life.” When discussing how she gave birth to a daughter from this encounter, her face lights up: “I thought, you see, sometimes if you believe in God, things can happen the way you wish! Then I started to be happy. And I’m not afraid to say that I’m a lesbian mom and I love my babygirl!”140

I initially found something troubling about this admission, given the ways in which so much of the rhetoric surrounding acceptable arenas of African womanhood has been framed in these very reproductive terms. Equally unsettling to me were the ways in which Thully’s narrative could be read as arguing that that her “corrective” rape opened up a consuming desire to have a child: to, in essence, be a “normal” woman. In this interpretation, Thully’s narrative of redemption-through-childbirth (ending in religious ecstasy) seems to be reproducing a number of dominant narratives in her community.

Yet her narration of this story allows her to process her trauma within a context that reproduces and revises both categories “lesbian” and “mother.” In order to live a life meaningful to her, Thully was able to reenact the result of her violation (an unborn child—associated by her with failure) and take control of the circumstances, so that it was rescripted with new, positive personal meaning (survival, lesbian motherhood). The baby, then, is symbolically reborn as key to her personal narrative: not in spite of her lesbian identity, but because of it. However, in order to live as a lesbian, she often uses the baby as a way to connect to her culture and especially, her

---

139 “Thully,” interview.
140 Ibid.
family. Thully recounts her younger brother’s acceptance of her lesbian identity as dependent on her ability to “never change and never forget about her baby.”

Though superficially Thully’s story echoes that of K.K.’s much-maligned “Queen of the Lesbians,” her engagement with both her lesbian sexuality and motherhood as not being mutually exclusive reveals one person’s attempt to deal with an untenable situation. In a patriarchal society that puts a high social priority on the family structure, she refuses to be defined by or against her reproductive capacities. For Thully, the opportunity to have a child affirmed her identity as a lesbian and as part of her community/ies. Once again, naming becomes a subtle act of translation and self-transformation. Usually shortened to the more feminine Thulie, the change in spelling—though not in pronunciation—provides a playful and subtle challenge to the gendering of her name. Thulie is a name that is often heard. Thully is unique: undetectable to the casual listener, but solidly present in its queerness (in the original sense of the word). Her “butchness” is not sacrificed for her role as mother; in fact, it draws attention to the strength that is required to raise a child alone in her circumstances, and the variety of roles that mothers play, outside of a reproductive context.

Despite popular opinion that lesbians are reproductive dead-ends, many members of the Chosen FEW plan to have children and do not see their lesbian identity as precluding their roles as mothers, or vice versa. Their situations demonstrate the falsity in the construct of the “African family” as stable entity. Still affected by the forced removals and migrant labor during apartheid, black South African families bear the brunt of the HIV epidemic, endemic poverty, and a high rate of domestic abuse. The desire for stability, to be “remembered for eternity,” romanticizes an imagined pre-colonial pastoral African identity with fixed roles, an identity that is supremely affective, rooted in African belonging. By rehearsing alternatives, members of the Chosen FEW, along with other lesbians in their community, revise and redefine the preexisting models of parenting to fit their needs and priorities.

**Queering ikultcha and Cultural Heroes; or, Manika on the Mountain.**

*Culture… I can say, culture is human made. I can do my own culture. It was human made. It was made by those forefathers, the ancestors. So I can make my own culture, if I want to. If I do have a family with my partner, and then we adopt children, I can make my own culture, and we will just follow that culture. […] there are some things that are going to be added, more and more and more and more.*

*Skaaps, Captain: Chosen FEW*[^41]

Skaaps is not one to mince words. In our brief interview—a quick cigarette break on the fire escape outside FEW’s offices in Johannesburg’s inner city before she had to rush home to help her mother prepare for their Good Friday meal[^42]—Skaaps outlined the construction of ikultcha.

[^41]: “Skaaps,” interview with author, April 21, 2011, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa.

[^42]: Religion is an ambivalent topic for all of the women I interviewed. All of them were raised in practicing Christian households and most had struggled with relatives using religion as justification for (at least initially) rejecting them. The majority of interviewees listed religion alongside traditional culture as largest source of homophobia in their communities. Yet church frequently factored into their narratives as spaces of conditional acceptance and communal support. Thully was the most actively engaged in organized religion (wearing skirts on Sundays, in spite of her generally butch attire); all of them, however, expressed some belief in God, often preferring to craft meaningful personal relationships with God, outside of an institution that they viewed as virulently homophobic. Christianity in South Africa is often practiced alongside or heavily influenced by indigenous spiritual traditions.
in opposition to homosexuality before decimating that logic and proposing an answer to work in conjunction with what she sees as culture’s fluid character.

She suggests that culture is something that is a “doing towards” a future, rather than something rooted in a timeless past. Her assertion that “I can make my own culture” is deceptive in its simplicity. Manika’s use of the Zulu-ized term ikultcha—in between the Zulu term “isigo” and the English “culture”—enacts a similarly flexible “doing.” Performance enables queer South Africans to turn ikultcha to their advantage. Through their tactical embodiment and critique of ikultcha in the everyday they produce, reproduce, and remix the aspects of cultures that best represent themselves as complex individuals, rooted in a variety of communities. Those who have been able to wield and queer ikultcha to their liking do so, in part, by claiming their roles in a longer lineage. In recent years, a number of lesbian traditional healers, or sangomas, have come out and been accepted by their communities by arguing that their sexuality is part of their gift from amadlozi (the ancestors).

Perhaps, then, the most effective challenge of the dictum that homosexuality is unAfrican comes not from resistant performances but in the ways in which “traditional” culture and its attendant performances are seriously (and publicly) taken up by black South African lesbians. They redefine the terms of the self as conduit to both the past and the future. This final section focuses on a close reading of Manika’s account of her spiritual journey, which incorporates an expansive lesbian self that is rooted equally as deeply in African cosmology as it is in a future-oriented, fashion-conscious youth culture. The act of recounting the self through narrative suggests possible alternatives for self-reproduction.

It is important to contextualize the place of the story in the larger interview, and of my time spent with members of the Chosen FEW. Though Manika was the Chosen FEW member I had spent the most with during my fieldwork, I did not officially interview her until my final month in South Africa. April 2011 was particularly difficult time for Johannesburg’s LGBT community. The previous week, Manika’s friend (and Khambi’s ex-girlfriend) Thulie had been found raped and murdered. Manika, members of the Chosen FEW, and other Johannesburg lesbians I talked to were shattered and increasingly afraid about the consequences of being out in the community. Thulie’s death was then followed by the death of Noxolo, the organizer for Kwa-Thema pride. These events seemed to pierce through the shield of Manika’s everyday: “It killed me that while busy I’m with my girlfriend, while I’m busy getting drunk, while I’m busy sleeping comfortably, Thuli’s busy crying and screaming for help. That help’s not coming to her…What kills me is when other people went to the funeral they were insulted about their sexuality.”

At the end of an hour-long interview—where she talked without pause—Manika became reflective about a number of violent and fantastical dreams she recently had, and confessed that she was planning to make a pilgrimage to the mountains of Lesotho to find her ancestral roots:

---

143 Linguistically, ikultcha falls under the category of Class Four Zulu prefixes: words that have been adapted (or Zulu-ized) from English or Afrikaans. By adding the prefix “i” to a word where the Zulu word is either non-existent or inadequate (for example, i-cellphone) language is manipulated to provide a broader, more fluid range of meanings. When Manigga says they are oppressed by ikultcha, she is referring to the larger, ambiguous forces that are used to deny gays and lesbians. Yet ikultcha, as Skaaps points out, is a concept that is fluid and, in its linguistic flexibility, can be made and remade.

144 Note: Not Thully, the Chosen FEW player of the similar name.

145 “Manika,” interview.
For me, certain things have affected me. I need to know who I am and what I am. I need to get in touch with my ancestors. I need to know my roots. Because, me having these weird dreams—sometimes they say if you have these weird dreams, it’s a message. Sometimes they say your forefathers are angry at you, or that someone, that person, needs to get in touch with you. So for me, I need to know who I am and how get in touch with my forefathers who passed away centuries ago. I’m a Masotho person, a Sotho speaker, I’m from Mafokeng, which is Bafoka a royal family, uyabon’ (you see)? So I need to get in touch with my roots at the end of the day, I need to go to Maseru.146 This is my destination in my journey.

Things are hard for me because I’m still living in a dark shadow, I feel like I still have bad luck. I need to know where to- because if I don’t get the river water, I will always have bad luck in whatever I do. So I need a light, because when I see my journey, I see nothing back. I’m going forward, but I’m going back into the earth. You know, I need to see the light. Because the dreams, sometimes they’re becoming a reality. My grandmother once told me—she was a traditional healer—maybe this is a message that I need to go to Tlokwe…You never know, until I find out about my roots.

I look to know the history of Bafokeng, amaphoka.147 So if I don’t know about those people, at the end of the day, nothing is going to happen. So I need to do this journey on my own. I need to do this journey on my own to find out certain things I never knew…I think there’s still anger and I need to find peace. So what I need, I need to get uhlapha148, I need to bathe with the river water, to take away this anger. For me, I want to see the meaning of signs of these dreams that I am having. Why is this happening to me? Why every time sometimes happens, it becomes reality? Maybe roots here, maybe they are showing me the way. Maybe I’m using a wrong road, and there’s a certain road I need to use. Because if you don’t believe in your ancestors, things, they never go your way.149

This rather fantastic monologue, following as it did on lengthy discussions of style and the politics in contemporary feminism, performs a notable shift in register and makes a claim to ownership on the very ground on which lesbian and gay South Africans are supposed to have no access: the stability and continuity of a timeless, rooted “Africanness.” When Mandla Tshabalala spoke out against homosexuality in the BBC debate, he spoke on the authority of an African identity predicated in a belief in “being remembered for eternity,” a continuity that he argues can only be gained through reproduction. Yet Manika’s dreams have interpolated her into a larger cosmology—rooted in the eternal nature of amadlozi, the ancestors—outside of her control. Her words and images—spoken with glazed eyes, as if to herself, gathering rhythm and purpose—deserve closer analysis.

146 Largest city in Lesotho.
147 Sotho: dew, the totem for the Bafokeng “clan name” (“diboko”); Manika’s family totem.
148 Sotho: traditional Lesotho blankets.
149 “Manika,” interview.
She begins by calling on an authority larger than her own—communal knowledge (the unspecified “they”)—to comment on the ancestors’ use of dreams to get messages across to the modern world. Her repetition of the phrase “sometimes they say,” builds authority to justify her belief that she can only understand herself (and “needs” to understand herself) by making contact with her forefathers (an interesting, uncritical gendering of her ancestors). Though some might write her off as a township lesbian—an aberration or an anomaly—she situates herself as a product of a heritage rooted in time and space, part of a larger cosmology: a Basotho, a Sotho speaker, her surname associating her with Bafokeng, “a royal family.” She sees herself as interpolated into this lineage through the narrative of a journey, whose metaphors draw on both the mythological and the biblical: she struggles with living in the shadow and needing a light, “I’m going forward, but I’m going back into the earth. You know, I need to see the light.” She seeks redemption by bathing in the river water.

Beyond the elevated subject matter, the structure and cadence of her speech departs from the patterns of everyday speech and descends into one of the most enduring forms of African oral performance: storytelling. As Manika narrates her journey, she exits the temporal context of her township life—where she sits hunched on her bed, talking to me, and occasionally swigging from a beer—in search of an unknown quantity called peace. She is only able to move forward by going back (to her roots, to the river). Through the process of “storying” herself, she takes on the role of protagonist in a familiar tale. Folklorist Harold Scheub has noted that a common theme within Southern African oral performance, the “implicit dilemma” created by the supposed conflict between the tradition and freedom, often finds its expression in tales that take as their subject a “cultural hero,” where “these two themes merge in the character of a single person, struggling between loyalties to his [sic] traditional society and the vision of a new, unfettered community.”

Through her enunciation of conflicted self in her tale, Manika’s places herself squarely in this struggle. She draws on the familiar framework to assert her desire to find a road that will be right for her, balancing the tension that she feels between her multiple identity affiliations, her imagined community, and the freedom she hopes to find—paradoxically—in tradition. She wants to transgress the national, bodily, cultural boundaries of her life in the township, to strip down, and be vulnerable to the immaterial forces that guide her life. If violent enactments of “tradition” and ikulcha put her at risk on a daily basis (causing her to wear her projected persona, “this Manika name,” like a shield) she chooses to immerse her naked, lesbian body at the very source of its creation. If the lives of the South African lesbians are bisected by the contradictory lines of tradition and freedom, in Manika’s tale, she is the cultural hero—a prism of sorts—that brings the two together in hopes of finally finding peace, figured in an epic journey from the darkness of the earth into the light.

Rather than letting these murders frighten them back into the closet (perhaps in Manika’s metaphor, “back in the earth”), members of the Chosen FEW continue to publically perform their queer selves in the face of violent opposition: “If they [the community] are not fighting back, we will do that…We can fight back. We’re like soldiers.” The fighting comes not from guns and knives, but from increased visibility in their communities, through education and, importantly, self-promotion. The members of the Chosen FEW that I interviewed seem to take pleasure in being representative lesbians, and to singing their own praises. In circumstances where they are

---

151 “Manika,” interview.
ignored, it is up to the warriors on the Chosen FEW to assert their presence and to celebrate themselves and each other. They, in essence, story themselves to be their own Cultural Heroes.

To this end, their performances of self reflect the prevalence of what Liz Gunner has termed “popular praise poetry” in Zulu culture, suggesting the continuing importance of oral performance in capturing and celebrating the individual in the context of a larger lineage. Despite their original role as praise poetry to kings and great warriors, izibongo (praise poems)—and the Sotho lithoko—are also composed to celebrate the everyday triumphs of people going about their lives, articulating social identity. According to Gunner, “Izibongo are an expressive form through which people can mediate diverse and sometimes conflicting parts of their experience and their identities…They can provide a medium through which the individual mediates difficult, painful as well as exhilarating events and shows them to his or her community through performance.”

Though Manika would most likely not acknowledge the connection between her turn of phrase and traditional praise poetry, the mode through which she celebrates herself and her teammates in the everyday touches upon the social role that izibongo continue to play in mediating complex identity positions. After having revealed a certain amount of vulnerability in her reflections on her relationship with her ancestors, for example, Manika finishes her interview with characteristic swagga, enumerating her characteristics in a style that is part personal ad, part hip-hop flow, part praise poem, and part playful self-reflexivity of the persona that she slips on and off as the situation requires:

Manika is funny, talkative crazy, (laughs)...in a normal way, not in an abnormal way.
Manika is an open-minded person.
Manika is a go-getter.
Manika is a person who likes people, number one: from different cultures, beliefs, cultures, opinions, and whatever.
   But at the end of the day,
Manika doesn’t get angry.
   She’s always hyper.
If she gets angry, she gets angry for two seconds and she gets happy again, that’s one thing.
Manika...she is loved by people, she’s admired by people for being who she is.
   And at the end of the day,
Manika has millions of fans.  
   (Laughs)

Manika’s praise song evokes culture of the self that is made as well as inherited; is collective, as well as personal. In her style, her focus on a self with multiple points of affiliation, and her belief in the sacred power of myth, Manika’s prose suggests a genre of self-expression that

153 My decision to structure Manika’s song-of-the-self as it is here is to capture something of the rhythms of her elevated speech. I am indebted to E. Patrick Johnson’s representation of his grandmother’s speech in his book Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity (Durham: Duke, 2003) for providing a model.
Audre Lorde has termed *biomythography*. It is an explicitly queer, female, and African-diasporic way of storying the self, which has been defined as a mode of expression that “simultaneously invokes, interrogates, and celebrates the mythic (and/or imaginative) possibilities encoded within acts of representation, providing always a polysemous cast to the ‘historicity’ of events being represented. Myth, dream, and history assume equal footing.”

When Manika recounts her relationship to her ancestors, narrates her dreams and fears, and then slips into a praise song, she unsettles and remixes each genre and takes on numerous roles in her own story. She is hero; she is celebrity; she is pilgrim. Most importantly, she has taken control of her own story. She is practicing her own culture.

![Fig. 4. Chosen FEW players sharing a moment during practice (with permission, Lauren Barkume)](image)

**Conclusion: Towards a Subjunctive Cultural Citizenship.**

In a context where “African” identity and belonging is filtered through a lens that is already aligned with “tradition” and reproductive futurity, members of the Chosen FEW engage their numerous identity positions through *ikultcha*, a prism of their own making. Sara Ahmed has written on the contours of what she calls a queer phenomenology, an alternative conception of orientation—being oriented in the world—that is based on relational rather than heterosexual “line of inheritance.” Arguing that, rather than sinking into the “comfort” of inhabiting spaces that were shaped to your contours, the (raced) queer body’s very “discomfort” creates a space that is active and productive of new, queer geneologies: “A queer geneology would take the very ‘affects’ of mixing or coming into contact with things that reside on different lines, as opening up new kinds of connection.”

By crossing these various lines of inheritance, the “queer,” body denies neither of its lines, but forges a new orientation. By drawing on deep rooted traditions and

---


personal cosmologies, the personas and rituals of the everyday present (protection), and the promissory power of constitutional enactment, the players forge new orientations and inhabit a multiplicity of locations and temporalities, projected through their enactments of self. These selves are singular as team, pluralized as individuals.

Performatively speaking, when Manika admits that she never came out to the world, it is because she acted “as if” she didn’t have to. In situations where Coming Out, as such, would be rejected (are therefore infelicitous, and unsuccessful speech acts in Austin’s terms158), this action allows space for rehearsed identities, for performatives that can’t fail because they exist in the realm of the “could be” and “not yet.” Yet these performances create a new model of culture as an accumulation of “more and more and more”159 ways of being a South African. The orientation of what I’m calling subjunctive performatives is promissory, and yet it is this promise that sustains all political activism: the belief that—to borrow a phrase from an anti-apartheid protest song—“freedom is coming tomorrow.”

The members of the Chosen FEW provide an articulation of a black lesbian South African identity that asserts its presence and, even as it protects itself, is actively oriented in a “doing towards the future.” This futurity differs from those queer utopias explored in Muñoz’ work, as well as Jill Dolan’s conception of the utopian performative, where the performance space allows for a collective, affective experience of potentiality.160 Utopias, performative or otherwise, can only ever be fleetingly staged and are ultimately unattainable or unsustainable, as Dolan has acknowledged; the moment of utopia in performance does not and cannot translate into direct social action outside of its space shared emotional communion. One cannot live in utopia. The sustained, everyday nature of what I’m calling the subjunctive performative, however—projecting the as if, protecting the not quite — is responsive to cultural context, is individually crafted, and stakes a claim to the future in the present tense. By enacting the as if—which, according to Pellegrini, is both "the becoming in time, the becoming of time”—the players of the Chosen FEW assert their claim to ikultcha and to an inclusive cultural citizenship.

South African cultural theorist Ashraf Jamal has reflected that this subjunctive orientation as, following John Noyes, a sort of “critical optimism…a reluctant articulation of utopia” that highlights the possible while still critiquing the material circumstances that constrain the present. This perspective creates an escape from “pathological dualism of despair and hope that defines a country still caught in absolute contrasts.”161 By taking the utopian imperative of performance outside the space of the theatre and enacting its potentiality in everyday life, the members of the Chosen FEW—through their repetitive engagement with the “world of the now”—are able to change the borders of culture and citizenship, in ways that are gradual but noticeable. As Khambi explains, “Mostly, like, in my team, we’re all accepted in our families. So we’re twenty in our team: we can just combine that twenty people and their families and how will we get that percentage [100 percent acceptance]?…My friend and her friend and their families…you understand? So it counts to a South African.”162

159 “Skaaps,” interview.
161 Jamal, Predicaments of Culture, 37.
162 “Khambi,” interview.
Chapter Three: In-Hyper-Visibility: Aesthetic Displacement and “Corrective” Rape in the Work of Photographer Zanele Muholi and Choreographer Mamela Nyamza

The 2012 dance-theatre piece *I Stand Corrected* begins with a burst of violence: presented to the audience without context, on a darkened stage, choreographer Mamela Nyamza spends the first five minutes of the play almost entirely engulfed in duet with a trashcan. Her feet and occasionally her hands emerge to swipe ineffectively at the air or pound into the ground, her breath accentuated by the metallic chamber. In what could be called an extended death dance, her features are obscured, as her body is wracked by the violence of an attack. By the time the audience meets her character Zodwa—when she reemerges, reanimated for a flashback of sorts in the next scene—she is already dead. In striking juxtaposition, the dance evokes sexual violence in a way that is both explicit (a body with breath, sweat, sinew on display, pushed to its limits) and anonymous (a body only visible in its violation and annihilation).

The entwinement of black South African lesbian visibility and violability can be seen on a number of stages. The attention that international news outlets have given to the Chosen FEW’s narratives of violation and victimization, for instance, has framed them as either exemplary individual survivors or as representative faces of statistics. This dichotomy is at its most evident in the representations of those women who have been victims of so-called “corrective rape.” International media coverage often shapes the ways in which South Africans are understood and craft identities locally, as well as shape the contours of the International. As I argued in the previous chapter, The Chosen FEW’s ability to harness and embody the narrative of “representative lesbian” in which the media would cast them allows them access to both political and global sport forums. The members enthusiastically participate in their mediatisation, proudly taking foreign journalists and academics into their homes and opening their lives to outside inspection.

In return, however, the players are rarely in control of what is done with these images, placing them in a paradoxical position: empowered and supported financially from donors and international LGBT organizations, they do not have access to the larger framings and meanings attached to their performances once the journalists leave. No matter what sort of media training the members receive, those who write, shape, and reproduce these stories have their own narratives and agendas they project on the raw stories and footage gathered (myself included). Their bodies are often pluralized to stand in for innumerable other South African lesbians who struggle to live visible, meaningful lives in homophobic environments.

This chapter interrogates how these questions of representation, visibility, and violence are addressed in artistic media, for both international and local audiences. I analyze photographer Zanele Muholi’s images of black lesbians alongside Nyamza’s choreography (particularly 2012/13’s *I Stand Corrected*, crafted in collaboration with British-Nigerian playwright/actor Mojisola Adebayo) as examples of tactical engagements with the politics of representing violence against black lesbian bodies. Trained in ballet, Nyamza’s work frequently challenges the ways that the African woman’s body is perceived and corrected by the expectations of both Western and African traditions. Beyond staging work in Cape Town and Johannesburg, Nyamza is a frequent performer on London and Parisian stages, as well as an active participant in African performance festivals such as the annual Netherlands Afrovibes and in international dance festivals such as Performatica. Muholi’s images of South African lesbians in their everyday environments counter the simultaneous invisibility and hyper-visibility of black lesbian existence,
and have become one of the most frequently exhibited examples of South African art worldwide. Half of the top ten results of a Google image search for the term “Black South African Lesbian” are Muholi photographs. The range of websites hosting these images—from activist watchdog orgs to international news sources (such as the New York Times and the Guardian) to queer art blogs—suggests Muholi’s influence on public discourse as providing an easily accessible visual archive for a complex cultural phenomenon.

This chapter analyzes Muholi and Nyamza’s aesthetic representations of sexual violence against black lesbians to pose the following questions: if “Corrective Rape” can already be understood as an act that paradoxically makes lesbians hyper-visible (through the often-public shaming of lesbian bodies) and invisible through the repeated denial of their existence (“No Lesbians in Vosloorus!”) what sort of work comes from its re-presentation through artistic media? Can sexual violence be “seen” in a way that neither reproduces the spectacle of its symbolism nor denies the material impact that violation has on the bodies and lives of those who experience it? How is “corrective rape” performed, and how are these performances circulated locally, nationally, and transnationally? In the context of my own project, what violence can theorizing rape do? What sort of violences does not-theorizing it enact?

South Africa is largely understood to have one of the world’s highest incidences of sexual violence outside of a war zone. Rape narratives in the public sphere have had the effect of making them simultaneously spectacular and banal. They emerge in headlines screaming the most egregious cases from lampposts, such as “AIDS PASTOR RAPED ME”163 or “MUM AND GOGO (granny) ROBBED, GANG RAPED, AND KILLED! 164” Yet, in part because of these spectacular instances, the numerous violations that occur on a daily basis are normalized to the point of forming the fabric of the South African every day. Deborah Posel has convincingly argued that only the most spectacular cases, such as the rape of infants, invoke outrage.165 These cases are less about the particularities of individual violations or even in the interest of larger dialogues on violence and gender, Posel suggests, but rather become flashpoints for anxiety about the state of the post-apartheid nation. Much of the popular coverage of “corrective rape” takes a similar pattern, its hypervisibility effectively erasing the daily assaults suffered by non-exceptional cases and further normalizing rape culture.

In a context where rape is so normalized as to become invisible/unremarkable, the rape of lesbians is a particularly vivid enactment of the ways in which the nation is policed through the regulation of gender norms and against Otherness. Helen Moffett notes that discourses of rape in South Africa are always already overdetermined by race (particularly the false presumption that only black men are rapists). Moffett argues for a new analysis that interrogates the ways in which rape is reflective of South Africa’s history of constituting the Nation against its perceived Others. In this reading, contemporary efforts to consolidate national power through gender violence are, in part, an inheritance from the apartheid government’s use of violence against the racial Other to underpin the nationalist project:

After all, the ‘Other’ has historically been seen as powerful, subversive, potentially unstable, needing to be policed (even if this meant torture, detentions and murder) not only ‘for their own good’, but also for the ‘greater good’ of society. This kind of hierarchical thinking (and anxiety about how to keep certain groups stable and bounded within socially prescribed and limited domains) does not disappear simply as the result of a democratic election¹⁶⁶

... 

When women visibly demonstrate a degree of autonomy or self-worth that men find unacceptable, they are perceived as sufficiently subversive and threatening as to compel men to ‘discipline’ them through sexual violence. What is more, if rape is believed to be deserved – if a woman is simply being ‘corrected’, or ‘taught a lesson’— it is somehow not considered to be a criminal activity.¹⁶⁷

Thus, in a space where rape is normalized, certain women are framed as being more deserving, or “rapeable” than others; rapists are not only not prosecuted, but also become icons of masculinity and protectors of Africanness. Current President Jacob Zuma was famously acquitted in 2006 of the rape of his friend’s daughter, in part through his defense team’s argument that she had “asked for it” by sleeping in a kanga, a traditional, sarong-like garment. “Khwesi,” as his accuser was known, was publically excoriated for her HIV positive status, which marked her as a loose woman, and for daring to accuse her elder, the extremely popular Zuma. In what Shireen Hassim has called “public theatre,” outside the courthouse, effigies of Khwesi were burned to chants of “kill the bitch,” and “Zuma Rape me!” from his supporters.¹⁶⁸ Following the trial, Khwezi fled the country and Zuma was elected president of the ANC in 2009 on a platform that emphasized his Zulu masculinity, virility, and a return to “African values.” Significantly, Khwezi’s bisexuality was little remarked upon, by either the media or in public discourse during the trial. When it was brought up in court, it was used—alongside her HIV status and previous rapes—to prove her an unreliable witness. Her sexuality was made simultaneously both invisible (i.e.: not discussed) and hyper-visible as part of what made her deserving of rape. Zuma’s very public acquittal and subsequent ascent to the Presidency seemed to many to further entrench the gap between a constitution that protected bodily dignity of its citizens and an “African” culture that policed its legitimacy on and through gendered—and, particularly, black—bodies.

The violent suturing of blackness with heterosexuality enacted through everyday policing has had the effect of rendering black lesbians invisible to the general population. This erasure has only gained traction through the repetition of their inherent “unAfricanness,” disbarring them from both nation and culture, in a context where “Africanness” is historically understood to mean “blackness.” In her book, Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality and Blackness, Nicole Fleetwood discusses a number of moments where American black artists, performers, and photographers engage with the already over-determined visual field, noting that hypervisible blackness in public culture results from the overrepresentation of certain images while

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 138.
“simultaneously announc[ing] the continual invisibility of blacks as ethnical and enfleshed subjects in various realms of polity, economies, and discourse.”

Because most of the critical work that has been done on the intersections of blackness, visibility, and queerness has been written within the context of black studies in the United States—with its particular emphasis on slavery as the foundational trauma—my exploration of visible “blackness” and its performances searches for a location that is both broader and more localized than the work emanating out of the American context. In a contemporary South African setting, without minimizing the continuing legacies of colonialism and apartheid, discourses of citizenship (particularly around the visibility and intelligibility of queer Africanness) take place in a context where “blackness” constitutes the racial makeup of the majority. Claims of belonging in the post-apartheid state have been often rooted in claims to and hierarchies of victimhood. Within this context, the increased visibility of queer black identities (as opposed to practices) in the public sphere, following their protection in the 1996 Constitution, have been seen as a post-apartheid phenomenon linked to the influx of transnational/western ideas. As such, claims to redress on the terms of a violated queer subjecthood seem less urgent than, delinked from, and even dangerous to normatively sexed and raced versions of “Africanness.”

Much as I argued in the previous chapter that the every day is shaped by a number of self-conscious performances, so is violence itself a performative force of power, shaping the contours and possibilities of these daily performances. In the introduction to their 2008 edited collection *Violence Performed*, Patrick Anderson and Jisha Menon describe violence as both performance and performative. As a phenomenon that binds its spectators, perpetrators, and victims in a relationship of horror and perverse delight, violence’s performative thrust depends upon both the viewer’s discomfort and their inability to look away. Yet violence is also an affective, embodied reality that crosses between physical, psychic, and social geographies. Representations of violence, as Anderson and Menon argue, do not merely describe but performatively produce power relations.

Notably, *Violence Performed* does not engage with questions of sexual violence. This absence is part a larger hesitancy to theorize the intersection of the material/symbolic elements of rape, making it what feminist theorist Carine Mardorossian has termed the academy’s “undertheorized and apparently untheorizable issue.” Despite increasing visibility in a number of spectacular protests and performances—such as those surrounding the 2012 gang rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi, India, and playwright Eve Ensler’s international “Action,” One Billion Rising—rape has not been critically examined in Performance Studies. Perhaps rape’s very inutterability makes theory inadequate to represent rape. Any attempt to render the brutality of these exertions of power into language or re-presentation is to somehow risk explaining and rationalizing it.

This chapter argues that, in a visual field where the affects attached to sexual violence are already over determined, South African artists strive to intervene/disrupt the process of “seeing,” by developing an aesthetic that displaces both the viewers’ expectations and the subject’s role as abject other. By refracting the audience’s focus away from violated black bodies and onto their own desire and process of looking, this aesthetic of displacement challenges scopic regimes that have structured “proper” performances of race and gender since the colonial era. In so doing,

---

170 Footnote on Colored Identity.
these artists preview a critical mode of seeing that avoids the “compassion fatigue” that results from repeated exposure to violence, either of the act itself or in mediated forms. In a context where rape is so prevalent that a 2009 study by the Medical Research Council reported nearly 1-in-4 South African men admitting to non-consensual sex with a woman in their lifetime, the silence around and normalization of sexual assault is striking.

Performance theorist Diana Taylor, writing about the Argentinian Dirty War, has named this particular mode of (not) seeing “Percepticide,” a sort of learned blindness: “Seeing [violence] without the possibility of admitting that one is seeing … turns the violence on oneself. Percepticide blinds, maims, kills through the senses.” When one is able to live without acknowledging the suffering around them, Taylor argues, one disconnects from the humanity of others and forestalls any possibility, or even desire for action. By making these daily traumas strange—by gesturing to them obliquely, or displacing them onto symbolic objects—Muholi and Nyamza’s representations of sexual violence prick at the everyday of the viewers, gaining their attention and activating their desire to see. This desire is then turned against the viewers, who not only see the violence itself but their own relationship to it, anew.

Zanele Muholi: in/hyper/visibility

Photographer Zanele Muholi’s images of black lesbians have arguably been the most visible face of queer South Africa, both within the country and abroad. One of the original founders of Forum for Empowerment of Women (FEW), Muholi, has since become a full time “visual activist,” documenting and displaying images of black lesbian lives in a context where these lives were denied presence. Beyond documenting protests and LGBT celebrations, Muholi has carved a career photographing the multiplicities of lesbian subjecthood. Acknowledging the dangers of documenting violence when “many of [my subjects] had been violated; I did not want the camera to be a further violation,” Muholi’s work balances the dynamic of producing images as an insider for a potentially hostile audience.

Perhaps paradoxically, considering her averred goal of representing those who have very little representative power, Muholi herself has become a popular, highly visible figure in the post-apartheid cultural landscape. Her renown within the local and global art world is in part the result of an event that highlighted the symbolic erasure done to black lesbian bodies under the auspices of the nation state. In 2010, Lulu Xingwana, then-Minister of Arts and Culture, attended the Innovative Women exhibition at Constitution Hill, where Muholi had several photographs on display. Upon seeing Muholi’s work, featuring images of nude female couples intertwined, Xingwana walked out of the exhibition without giving her prepared speech. When questioned on her dramatic exit, she cited Muholi’s images as a motivating factor, stating: "Our mandate is to promote social cohesion and nation building. I left the exhibition because it expressed the very opposite of this…It was immoral, offensive and going against nation-building.” That Xingwana framed her personal response (that the images were “immoral” and “offensive”) in the

---

larger framework of “The Nation” and its make-up, is indicative of both the disruptive role that lesbians play in the post-apartheid nation, and the nation’s dependency on heterosexual reproductivity, despite the Constitution’s mandate.

Xingwana, significantly, tried to fit her response to the images within known realms through which lesbians have been depicted and denied: the pornographic and the stereotypical. She later commented, “to my mind, these were not works of arts but crude misrepresentations of women (both black and white) masquerading as artworks rather than engaged in questioning or interrogating—which I believe is what art is about. Those particular works of art stereotyped black women.”

That the same few images manage to simultaneously misrepresent (as in go against appropriate presentations) and stereotype (draw on popular preconceived notions) black women assumes an essentialized black South African female body and identity, a “norm” that these images deviate from and pervert. The figure of the lesbian is once again simultaneously invisible (non-existent) or hyper-visible (threatening the boundaries of “Africanness”), often evoked as a threat to the purity of the nation or as an aberration needing correction.

Muholi’s work plays upon the tension between these tropes, and reveals their complementarity. By countering the spectacular “threat” of lesbianism to the nation with banal, indeed, domestic everyday images (such as women bathing, dressing, walking), she counters Xingwana’s claims that her images were masquerading as art, and, indeed, that lesbians are somehow masquerading as “real” black women. The publicity that Muholi received from Xingwana’s attempts to censor her has had the unintended effect of giving her access a broader, international stage onto which to display the ordinariness of black lesbianism (simultaneously making this “ordinary” spectacularly visible). Since Xingwana’s comments, Muholi’s work has been displayed in venues throughout the United States and Europe. She has won many awards, most recently the 2013 Freedom of Expression Index award, given by the London-based Index on Censorship. She has noted to me that this international visibility has not resulted in any increased funding from local South African sources, and that she is still primarily dependent on funding from global arts organizations.

Muholi’s goal in her visual activism is to demonstrate the variety of black lesbian subjectivity, making visible without making spectacular. About her portrait series Faces and Phases, she has commented,

Individuals in this series of photographs hold different positions and play many different roles within the black lesbian community: a soccer player, actress, scholar, cultural activist, lawyer, dancer, filmmaker, human rights/gender activist. However, each time we are represented by outsiders, we are merely seen as victims of rape and homophobia. Our lives are always sensationalized, rarely understood.

Muholi’s belief that black queer subjectivities cannot be understood—and should not be represented—by outsiders has manifested itself in a mission to document the lives and diversity of the South African black lesbian community beyond the basic narratives of visibility or trauma.


177 Muholi, “Faces and Phases Artist Statement.”
Yet Muholi’s work does explicitly address the reality of a lesbian body that is by in large defined through its vulnerability. Her two main bodies of work—*Only Half the Picture* (2004) and her portrait series *Faces and Phases* (continuing)—dramatize the dichotomy between the invisible and the hyper-visible. Each of these interrelated concepts suggests but does not quite capture any sort of whole lesbian experience. Rather, the images capture disjointed wounds and well-rehearsed personas, each suggesting vulnerability of lesbian experience without subjecting the individual to the violence of the curious viewer’s gaze.

*Only Half the Picture*, Muholi’s first solo Exhibition, debuted at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2004. Its title referenced both the literal and the metaphorical meanings attached to the lesbian body and its boundaries. Formally, each image captures a bisected version of a black lesbian involved in her daily identity performance, leaving the rest up to the viewer’s imagination, unsettling their expectations and desire for a fully captured image. *ID Crisis*, for instance, depicts a woman from top of track pants to mid-forehead, with both her and the viewer’s focus on her breasts, which she is in the process of binding. *Bra*, focuses on a woman’s torso, from navel to chin. Though her bra-covered breasts mark her as clearly female, her chest is also covered in wiry dark hairs, those things that are not “supposed to” be there, undoing the easy binary of sex and gender. These two images both undo the idea that lesbians (necessarily) want to be men, while upholding a space for female masculinity and self-expression outside of the viewer’s frame of reference. The woman posing for *Bra* is, intentionally, not static, her hands in motion, either gesticulating or clapping, suggesting agency and change. Much like the exhibition’s title, Muholi’s partitioned depiction of lesbian bodies and experiences suggest that any stable conceptions of black lesbian identities are, indeed, only half the picture.

Another subsection of Muholi’s images within *Only Half the Picture* deal with the remnants of the trauma and, particularly, homophobic hate crimes. *Hate Crime Survivor I* focuses on a woman’s hands as cross in her lap, hospital bracelets hanging from thin wrists. The protective positioning of the hands—with one curving slightly open, vaginally, or like a wound —suggests that the retraumatization that often occurs when lesbian rape victims go to hospitals to report their rape. *Status Unknown* frames a close up of a bare breast, with a band-aid crossing the nipple, simultaneously suggesting the violence of objectification, the stultifying effect of censorship, and the supposed failed reproductivity of lesbians. Muholi also photographs her own menstrual blood (on the ground, on sanitary napkins) in several images, both celebrating essential “femaleness” of lesbian women, as well as suggesting the sexual violence that results from men wanting to prove this femaleness. She would, in 2011, host an entire exhibit of paintings created with her menstrual blood stains (*Isilumo siyaluma (Period Pains)*)) crafted into complex, often beautiful shapes, resembling snowflakes or rose petals. The pieces’ titles—*Rape* and *Murder*—however, belie the initial aesthetic appeal, just as the artistic medium (blood), simultaneously
suggests and rejects a reading that would paint lesbians in terms of their vulnerability, as snowflakes and rosebuds in need of protection.

By dealing with the most visible remnants of assault while maintaining the anonymity of her subjects, Muholi runs the risk of generalizing the embodied experience of individuals into a symbolic black lesbian body. Yet she recognizes that the responses to this body are already overdetermined. Indeed, the gallery book’s responses to Only Half the Picture suggest that the viewers already implicitly understand the women’s bodies as national bodies, Muholi’s images as presenting a threatening alternative to the presumed heterosexuality/gender normativity of the South African body politic. The images become, according to one outraged viewer, “no longer a question of art and beauty but of discrimination—the nation cries.”

These responses emanate, to a large degree, from the history of colonial and ethnographic photography that has refused subjectivity to its objects, a history of which Muholi is all too aware: “[in] the early images of Sarah Baartman, black bodies and science, all those things, I think there was this kind of ‘spectacling,’ of exploring, of adventuring in Africa from a Western perspective.” The objectification and literal dissection of African—and particularly female African—bodies has been well documented and continues to haunt representational politics. Andrew Van der Vlies has noted that Muholi’s photographs evoke the past of colonial photography, even as they suggest the possibility of queer, post-colonial futurity: “[Muholi’s photography] highlights three interrelated issues – the way photography makes possible the apprehension of the divided structure of the present, how photographs can serve as evidence of and to mourning, and the idea of queer futurity, which is connected both to issues of visibility and affiliation.”

If her Only Half the Picture series questions the hyper-invisibility of lesbian identity through segmentation and disjunction, Muholi’s ongoing series Faces and Phases depicts black lesbian identity in-hypervisibility, face-on. In an ongoing series of over two hundred portraits, Muholi

---

Sarah (or Saarjie) Baartman, the so-called Venus Hottentot was widely displayed in medical and public exhibitions throughout Europe in the early 19th Century. Known for her “large buttocks,” her body was dissected following her death in 1815, and was returned to a state burial in South Africa in 2002. She remains an important cultural touchstone for many South African and Diasporic artists.
documents the individual black lesbians with whom she has interacted as she moved from being the director of FEW to a full time artist. Each subject is photographed from a medium-to-close distance, from the waist or shoulders, and always with the face as a focal point. The subject looks directly at the lens, usually unsmiling, returning the gaze of the viewer. Each image is titled with the subject’s full name and the date and location the photograph was taken.

Kylie Thomas has noted that these images, in their simplicity and directness, perform a corrective to singular, stereotyped notions of lesbian identity: the black-lesbian-from-the-township. Noting the portrait’s historical connection to mourning and loss as a sort of passing, Thomas argues that Muholi’s subjects pass through a number of life phases. Tumi, from the Chosen FEW is, for instance, photographed more than once, years apart, reflecting changes in body and style; her direct, confrontational gaze however, remains a consistent challenge to the viewer that might pass her by, either in the streets or in the gallery.

Yet, because Muholi acknowledges in her book’s introduction those included in the series who have since passed away, the collection—in many ways a celebration of out lesbian presence—becomes shadowed with the specter of (past and future) violence just outside of frame. “Positioning the portraits of the dead among those still living implies solidarity with the dead,” Thomas argues, “frame[s] black lesbians as:

A community that traverses the boundary between life and death. The rhetorical force of this pairing of the living and the dead powerfully refuses the dehumanization of black lesbians that led to the deaths of the women memorialized here. This positioning which insists on the relation between the living and the dead also means that we necessarily read each portrait in the series as haunted by the possibility of violence, rape and murder.181

Fig. 7-9 Faces and Phases, Zanele Muholi. Left to Right, Ayanda Magoloza, Kwanele South, Katlehong, Johannesburg, 2012. Vuyo Mkonwana, Site B, Oliver Tambo Hall, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, 2011. Vuyelwa Makubetse, KwaThema Community Hall, Springs, Johannesburg, 2011. All photos by silver gelatin print. Courtesy of Stevenson Gallery)182

181 Thomas, “Zanele Muholi’s Intimate Archive,” 434.
Even as they are “placed,” in their communities (with a clearly labeled temporality and identity), by positioning them on the verge or in recovery from violence, Muholi’s subjects are in another way supremely displaced, serving as a medium between the living (viewers) and dead, as well as between the viewer and what could be called a particularly hyper(in)visible subculture. In her decision to title each piece in terms of its “who, when, and where,” Muholi straddles the line between art, ethnography, and photo-journalism, unsettling the genre and audiences with the realization that though Penny Fish might have been alive and defiant in Vredhoek, Cape Town, in 2008 there is no guarantee that this is still the case.

Yet even as these images try to present a more nuanced view of black South African lesbian identity, the images themselves achieve a strange sort of uniformity, privileging a particular butch stoicism. The 2010 published collection of images features page after page of primarily butch women (including Manika, Tumi, Khambi, and Thully from the Chosen FEW) staring intensely at the camera, their expressions ranging from a glower to a smolder. In her choice of subject, Muholi runs the risk of reinforcing the pre-existing image of the stoic, butch lesbian. The images are posed to capture personas rather than individual identities.

This particular depiction of black lesbian “hardness” seems to be intentional on the part of both Muholi and her subjects. I observed a Muholi photo-shoot of several members of the Chosen FEW outside of their (then) offices at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg in December 2010. Their initially playful attitude when Muholi was setting up the shots—smiling and joking with each other, pulling funny faces—underwent a noticeable shift when it was time for the picture to be taken. As Muholi began to take pictures, her subjects stiffened and stared almost expressionless at the camera, eyes squinted, mouths turned down. They looked, by turns, serious, angry, upset, inscrutable. The overall attitude seemed to be: you don’t want to mess with me. Once the pictures had been taken, however, they invariably broke out into wide, easy smiles, called to their friends—who had been good naturedly teasing them—and shuffled out of the limelight to watch the next person “put on face.”

Muholi’s camera gave these particular black lesbians (and the subjects of her larger portrait project) the opportunity to see themselves as they would like to be seen; in doing so, they all embodied a similar type, an ideal. Their bodies seemed to hold tension, in the knowledge that they were committing something for posterity. Photographs are not new to these women, the majority of whom have Facebook accounts and camera phones. Yet cell phone snapshots hold a different weight than images captured on high-tech camera equipment. Where snapshots are meant to record and celebrate the day-to-day experiences identity performances, their experience posing for Zanele Muholi, however, seemed imbued with the awareness that they were creating Art, and participating in a political project. Given the opportunity to represent themselves to a larger, unknown Public, the subjects of Faces and Phases (both butch and femme) present themselves as they would like to be seen: strong, proud, serious lesbians, in-hypervisibility.

Much of the extant scholarship on Muholi has looked at how her photographs have provided a different, normalizing way of seeing black lesbian identity. None have given attention to the contexts of these images-in-space and the ways in which they are part of a larger viewing experience. Yet Muholi’s exhibitions increasingly use the gallery space as a stage to explore questions of (co)presence, absence, and emotion: that is, questions central to performance. Though Muholi’s work had previously avoided explicitly referencing Corrective Rape, her 2012

---

183 For indeed, she is not. Fish is one of four women who Muholi mentions in the introduction to the book version of Faces and Phases as having died prior to its publication.
The exhibition *Mo(u)rning*, at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, directly and performatively addressed the losses suffered by the South African lesbian communities. The exhibition immediately followed the targeted theft of several hard drives from Muholi’s apartment, resulting in the loss of her most recent photographs, as well as years of images, some of which had never been printed. This personal loss resulted in a performative meditation on making absence visible and the psychic toll of constant mourning on a small community. Rather than merely displaying her images in the gallery, the gallery itself became the staging of violation and its shattering impact on the bodies and communities it affects. As visitors to the gallery pass through the space, they move through the interstices of the politics of representation, as Muholi places visibility and hyper(in)visibility itself on display.

The entrance greets gallery visitors with the most visible (and crude) coverage that violence against lesbians has received within South African media: the tabloid advertisements that scream news headlines from lampposts throughout the nation. The visitor is presented with a series of five giant, beaded reproductions of the few times sexual violence against lesbians received any exposure. From the *New Age*: “Another ‘Lesbian’ Raped and Murdered.” From the *Daily Voice*: “Lesbian Killed in Bush of Evil.” By aestheticizing these attention-grabbers in bright African beadwork, Muholi critiques the *in-hypervisibility* of these particular types of sexual assaults, while highlighting the general *hyper-invisibility* of lesbian identity when not directly under threat. By using the beadwork so important to Nguni cultures, she roots both lesbian existence and homophobic violence in the purview of “Africanness,” while simultaneously critiquing the tabloid culture that makes an in-depth analysis of the root causes impossible. The title of this series—*Every Bead of My Art*—plays on the embodied experience of loss (felt with every beat of the heart), as well as the African artist’s responsibility to represent the world around her with every bead of her art.

These reproductions are surrounded with evocative photos from sites where lesbian bodies had been found and restaged images of crime scenes (a body under a tarp, covered in leaves, legs bound). By contrasting the hypervisible sexuality and the absent bodies with statistics of numerous murders committed against LGBT people in past decade, posted alongside them on the wall, Muholi suggests a profound incommensurability between the “facts,” their public representation, and their material loss.

The Gallery’s central space is dedicated to displaying recent images from the continuing *Faces and Phases* project. Yet this particular exhibition makes explicit the absences and the presence of violence in ways that were only suggested in the images themselves, through a series of intentional gaps in the rows of portraits. On the facing wall, a number of quotes written in marker by many different hands transcribe testimony of those who have experienced Corrective Rape. On either side of this wall, Muholi has included two listening stations where gallery visitors can listen to these testimonies in full (notably, not spoken by the actual victims). These multi-media, fragmented representations violence capture the profound disorientation of experienced-trauma. By displacing this experience onto so many tellers, Muholi also suggests how pervasive violence and its echoes are in black lesbian space, as well as how an atmosphere of diffuse homophobia makes any centralized approach to its eradication near impossible.

In one small room, off to the side, Muholi has recreated a township space of mourning, evoking the community ritual where the family of the dead sit wrapped in blankets, their mattresses rolled up, receiving guests and mourning. The television is in a central place, as it would be in the living room, and plays footage of Noxolo Nogwaza’s 2011 funeral on a loop, including the presence of many lesbians supporting the family in their communities. By creating
this “set,” Muholi invites her gallery audiences (primarily urban, often white) into the African ritual of mourning and performs the real effects that these deaths have on families and communities in which they occur. By bringing the voices of Noxolo’s family into the “home,” Muholi roots black lesbians into a larger communal life, demonstrating the raw pain of familial loss (in the mother’s wailing in the footage) and the rituals through which (even lesbian) the dead are honored and remembered. The white visitor to the gallery space is called to account for her own body in relation to the space in which she rarely, if ever, would go. By reproducing the domestic “African” space in the gallery, Muholi draws upon histories of in situ museum display, subtly implicating her these audience’s neo-colonial gaze, and their desire to see the scene of the crime. Why, she might ask, do these audience’s flock to see black experience when it is on display in a gallery, when so much of the continued inequalities of contemporary South Africa are contingent on those with privilege not seeing the experiences of the majority.

In another room, Muholi screens a documentary contextualizing her work, Difficult Love, where gallery viewers learn about Muholi’s process and philosophy. Alongside the back of this screening room is a small television screen (only visible to those exiting the room, having watched the documentary), broadcasting footage of two black women having sex. This depiction, once again filmed to highlight disjointed body parts—the intimacy of the act, rather than its participants—is by far the most explicit of Muholi’s works. Where Xingwala was horrified by what was suggested by Muholi’s images, this video confronts the unsuspecting viewer with the crux of lesbian identity: sexual desire. Whereas still photography allows a certain amount of reflective distance between the viewer and the representation, film confronts and depicts something far more immediate. By utilizing the element of surprise, Muholi forces the gallery visitors to experience their first responses to two black women in the process of pleasuring each other, and the emotions/desires that raises, as well as the knowledge that these bodies are vulnerable because of these desires being enacted.

If the “Percepticide” that allows sexual violence to pass unnoticed is dependent on blindness—the ability to see (and hear and speak) no evil—then Muholi’s gallery engages the senses one-by-one, simultaneously placing and displacing audiences in a variety of encounters with black lesbian South Africans. One final side room places the viewing process itself on display: a small curtained-off area holds a screen with a video projection of hundreds of bodies.

---


Fig. 10. Listening Stations and Testimony, Mo(u)rning. Courtesy of the artist and Michael Stevenson Gallery http://www.stevenson.info/artists/muholi.html
eyes, (presumably Muholi’s subjects) staring back at the viewer, occasionally blinking. This room, unlike the other side rooms, is completely silent and stages the encounter of the gaze, between the viewer and the subject. This exchange of looking between the looker and the looked at, provides the illusion of intimacy, of contact between Muholi’s subjects and her audiences. Yet, the longer the spectator stares at these eyes, the more she is confronted with the realization that any sense of intimacy is, in fact, a projection of the viewer’s own desires. Muholi uses the space of the gallery, to stage encounters that highlight both the distance and proximity between the spectator and the black lesbians they have come to see.

Fig. 11. EyeMe, Zanele Muholi, 2012, HD Blue Ray video. Courtesy of the Artist and Michael Stevenson Gallery http://www.stevenson.info/artists/muholi.html

Mamela Nyamza: Choreographing displacement and the intimate geographies of violation

Mamela Nyamza’s choreography explores the space between Western and African cultural forms, particularly the ways in which they can be used by and against black female bodies. Her early dance pieces explore the ways in which costuming, particularly the ways in which particular clothes, be they ballet tutus or “traditional” African garb, shape the sort of movements the body can make and the work that it can do. Initially trained in ballet at the Zama Dance School in the Cape Town township of Gugulethu, Nyamza received a one-year fellowship to the Alvin Ailey Conservatory in New York. There, she trained with black female dancers and was able to come to terms with her own body in relation to the dance forms that she had always seen as “white.” She also discovered her attraction to women. Her mother’s violent rape and murder, however, called her back to South Africa, where she reunited with her high school boyfriend and, falling pregnant, married him.

As she tried to live up to the cultural expectations placed on a Xhosa mother and wife, Nyamza was haunted by her own mother’s death and felt increasingly detached from the role she was expected to play. Distanced from the work she wanted to complete and the life she wanted to live, Nyamza divorced her husband and committed to developing her choreographic repertoire away from the European and Afro-American interpretations of her early training. She first
received acclaim within South Africa for her autobiographical piece *Hatch*. Together, with its restaging, *Hatched*—which featured her son Mandla drawing in coloring books in the middle of her performance—charted her struggle to balance her experiences and identities as a lesbian, a Xhosa, a dancer, and a mother. The piece announced her as an emerging talent and earned her the 2011 Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance.

*I Stand Corrected* was not her first piece to focus on sexual violence and the paradox of lesbian (in)visibility. Her 2009 piece *Shift* explored the topic through the metaphor of sport—a trenchant commentary on how the sporting field can be a space of tentative acceptance for lesbian bodies, while also putting these bodies at risk in co-optation of what is seen as a masculine realm. Indeed, she created the piece in part as a response to the death of Eudy Simelane, a player on the national women’s soccer team Banyana Banyana who was stabbed to death in 2008. In *Shift*, Nyamza begins her dance behind a scrim, with her sneaker-clad ankles the only part of her body visible to the audience. If her initial refusal to reveal herself to audience frustrates their desires to see her perform, the dance, once the screen rises, shifts to the other extreme. Nyamza, wearing silver pumps, encourages the audience to pelt her with 27 tennis balls (27 being the number of times Simelane was stabbed). What the audience initially took as a playful invitation, becomes suddenly sinister. Nymaza as she twists in slow motion, as if under the weight of blows, finally curling into herself protectively.

This aggressive assault, the lesbian made visible through hyperviolence of participatory spectatorship, lies, her performance suggests, on the other side of her initial invisibility as a lesbian. The resulting performance was, according to reviews, acutely unsettling. Performance critic Robyn Sassen commented that, even in Nyamza’s “friendly” and “bold” enticement of the audience into what seems to initially be a playful game, “[t]here’s an understated sense of danger in all of this and a child-like playfulness which sidestep definition, bringing complicity to the fray and a…sense of objectifying the body of the dancer.” Indeed, the final moments are extremely unsettling because she doesn’t deliver on the audience’s expectations: “The work’s final gesture leaves the audience feeling self-consciously awkward and unnecessary as the performer installs herself, in a foetal position behind the grouped crowd. You turn, you stare at her for a long time, waiting for her to do something, before you mutely shuffle off, maybe feeling cheated. Maybe pondering why you feel cheated.”

By foiling her audience’s desire for closure, the piece forces them to ponder the roots of this underlying expectation that the violated black lesbian body will somehow raise itself out of its trauma to “do something” that would ease their own feelings of complicity. The black lesbian body, when visible, is always expected to perform to its paying audiences.

*I Stand Corrected*, staged the following year, fulfills this audience desire for a lesbian resurrection, but are once again denied the satisfaction of a single chronological narrative. Described rather glibly in promotional materials as an “eerie murder mystery where a queer wedding might have been,” the story of *I Stand Corrected* is straightforward enough: Alone at their Cape Town wedding, English-African Charlie (Adebayo) thinks she has been stood up by her female South African fiancé Zodwa (Nyamza). As her annoyance and embarrassment turn into anxiety and fear, scenes of Charlie’s panicked attempts get the police to take her partner’s disappearance seriously are intercut with intimate moments from their relationship. Finally, it is revealed that Zodwa had been targeted for her sexuality and raped and murdered in her township.

---

home the night before their wedding. The performance ends with Charlie speaking at the funeral and attempting to make sense of the loss.

Yet as a piece of theatre, *I Stand Corrected* avoids the tropes of linear storytelling that would make the piece a didactic critique of homophobia. The different generic aspects each performer brings to the collaboration—Adebayo’s training as an actor/playwright, Nyamza’s experience as a choreographer—suggests the differences between the two characters’ world viewpoints. Despite their attempts to unite, (perhaps most explicitly in their wedding) their efforts are continuously foiled. Rather than staging this incommensurability as a failure of their relationship (as the archetypal “star-crossed lovers”), Nyamza and Adebayo suggest the factors that keep the lovers apart are far more structural.

*I Stand Corrected* is an unsettled piece of theatre, crafted to move in the in-between space and time, of colony and colonizer, lover and beloved, life and death. Though the forward-thrust of the action takes place in contemporary Cape Town, its parts move back through time, the stories of its two main characters intertwining with the complex global legacies of colonialism and homophobia. Like Mpho’s stages of *Mo(u)rning*, the piece highlights the fragmentation of trauma, its shattering of time and place, and the ways in which violence is simultaneously shocking and quotidian, both incomprehensible and inevitable.

From its beginning moments, the central violent act of *I Stand Corrected* is both evoked and evaded, through the piece’s sparse, symbolic objects and disjoined times and spaces. As the audience files in, with programs welcoming them to the wedding of Zodwa Ndlovu and Charlotte Browning. The stage is segmented into parts of the symbolic regime of womanhood: Upstage, a long white wedding dress hangs, seemingly suspended by several helium balloons. Downstage, two plastic trash bags sit by a metallic rubbish bin. The program’s description of the play as a “supernatural love story” leaves audience members unprepared for the Nyamza’s intense, five-minute rubbish bin dance, described in the opening of this chapter. This scene of violence is suggestive, in that it fully reveals neither the perpetrator nor the victim. The

---

audience’s experience of her trauma is fragmented; her performance is strangely silent, aside from the breath projected from within the trashcan, echoing, and the staccato stamp of her feet.

Out of time and place, Nyamza’s duet with the trashcan is brutal and seems to go on longer than it actually does. Where other post-apartheid depictions of theatricalized sexual violence (most explicitly, the mimed rape that begins Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom’s *Relativity: Township Stories*[^187^]) dwell on the spectacle of the brutalized woman’s body, opting to where every inch of the victim is on display, Nyamza’s body’s death dance with the trashcan becomes a reckoning of person and thing, the “thingification” that happens when a body is dehumanized. Rather than turn Zodwa’s rape and murder into a hyper-visible, hyper-real spectacle—as Muholi does in her photographic restaging of hate-crimes—Nyamza withholds the literal enactment of the rape, while accentuating its affects through her increasingly strenuous engagement with the trashcan. Through her gasps, the tensing and untensing of her muscles, and the sweat pouring down her body, Nyamza’s dance calls the audience to make an empathetic leap for a body pushed to its extremes: to witness a violence that is not exposed, but experienced. At this point in the piece, Zodwa has not been introduced and no context has been given for the action. Yet Nyamza draws on the audience’s familiarity of her body, or “the black lesbian body,” in the process of being violated, and extends their moment of recognition (with its voyeristic pleasures) into sympathetic pain.

The abruptness of this primary scene disrupts any pretense of a linear narrative (the promised “murder mystery”). Indeed, the scene immediately following her “death,” Nyamza emerges from the trashcan, digging through the trashbags to find a radio that, when tuned to a *kwaieto* station, resurrects her. Nyamza’s body—eyes empty, zombie-like—launches into the jerky jive steps of township movement and style, situating her “place,” while still being temporally diffuse. This invisible death and sonic-induced resurrection occur before the narrative of the “play” proper has begun. Once resurrected, Nyamza crosses center with the trashcan and pulls down her pants, sinks down, as if on a toilet, reading her horoscope like small child sounding out words: “There's something delightfully feminine about Ms. Virgo, even when she's wearing tomboy clothes and having a bad hair day...” She sounds out the words. "She just can't help being gorg-e-ous.” The juxtaposition of this scene with the trashcan dance, is both jarring and appropriate, suggesting the earlier “corrections” done to the non-traditionally-feminine body.

As Zodwa flips the pages of the magazine, Charlie finally enters the picture, crossing around her partner—still flipping pages on the toilet—and carrying a bouquet. For an extended moment the two exist in overlapping times and spaces, without connecting. As Zodwa finally sinks into the trashcan, and out of sight, Charlie breaks the fourth wall, apologizing to the audience for her partner’s lateness, cracking jokes about African time and finger food. The audience, having played an uncomfortable dual role as witness/voeyeur to Zodwa’s (symbolic) rape and bathroom time, is momentary placed, cast into the role of the friends and family of the brides and guests at the wedding. The moments of “wedding humor,” place the piece, at least momentarily, into a familiar genre. Yet the madcap wedding humor jars against the reality of Zodwa’s situation, setting up the basic unequal dynamic between a mixed-race British cricket

[^187^]: Grootboom’s focus on violence and sexuality has earned him the title “the Tarantino of the Townships” and made him something of an *enfant terrible* of post-apartheid theatre. His work has been critiqued for glorifying violence, particularly violence against women. The opening to *Relativity*—the rape of a woman perceived to be promiscuous—is an extremely graphic depiction of sexual violence (with a conveniently absent perpetrator); the victim eventually expihixiates, strangled on her own thong. Nyamza’s trashcan dance, rather than revealing her body, obscures the act of violence. The audience members are disoriented and, rather than looking away in horror, crane their necks to see more.
coach and her black South African partner. It is an imbalance that will, eventually, be revealed to have deadly consequences.

Throughout *I Stand Corrected*, Zodwa and Charlie inhabit different temporalities and spatialities, suggesting the divisions even amongst two superficially similar “queer black” women, as well as the uneven power dynamics between international couples and first/third world “queer” concerns. The piece’s critique of the colonial histories of exploitation and prejudice is most explicit in Charlie’s visit to the police to report Zodwa missing. At this point it is unclear whether she is back at the wedding venue (or even who “we,” the audience are in this context), delivering a monologue that is both a scathing critique of Southern African homophobia (with its selective versions of what is “natural”), before turning the rant inward to her own history, as the adopted “coloured” daughter of white missionary parents who grew up in England always feeling different. Now, in the police office, baiting the African man with her anger, she has “never felt so white.”

Significantly, the vast majority of “storytelling,” at least in its traditional sense, falls on Adebayo’s shoulders. It is Charlie who engages the audience during the “wedding that wasn’t” that frames the moment of the play’s “present;” who takes the lead on investigating her fiancé’s disappearance; who translates their relationship to the audience through anecdotes. If Nyamza’s Zodwa is the spectre of sexual violence, shadowing the main narrative, then Adebayo’s Charlie is the piece’s medium, conjuring Zodwa across the time and distance for the audience. Charlie is by far the more richly drawn character, revealed to the audience through long, self-reflexive monologues, expressing feelings of ambiguity around her position as a British woman of color living in Africa.

Zodwa herself remains unknowable and opaque, speaking rarely. Indeed, her longest section of text comes late in the piece, where she disrupts Charlie’s spoken narrative with another evocation of her rape and murder, displaced on a symbolic object. Zodwa stands on the trashcan holding a wedding balloon, onto which she inscribes her attacker’s face with a pen, as she describes his features: “Big eyes. A sharp mouth. A gold tooth in the middle.” She speaks to him in both Xhosa and English, pointing out how any talk of tradition was perverted by the violence of the act, imploring him: “Is this what you wanted? Did you pay the bride price? Was I worth it?” Her final line turns the rhetoric of religion and judgment against her attacker: “What god has put together, no man can put asunder. You cannot divorce yourself from this. There will be consequences.” The balloon pops and the scene ends. Though the scene is a powerful enactment of the confrontation that Zodwa did/could have had with her attacker, the symbolism of the balloon and the pen is far less clear than the earlier dance with the trashcan. The words seem somewhat stilted, almost an imagined confrontation rather than an actual event. Is this Charlie’s envisioned version of Zodwa’s last moments? Once again, the out-of-time-and-placeness of this scene renders Zodwa’s experience of trauma opaque and unspecific.

That the performance does not seem particularly unbalanced is a testament to Nyamza’s expressivity and her physical presence as a counterpoint to Charlie’s monologues. While this is in part the obvious division of labor in a dance-theatre collaboration, the displacement of narrative voice onto the British character and embodied trauma onto the South African replicates the problematic framing of corrective rape in transnational discourse: the black lesbian is silent/silenced and the (in this case, mixed-race) western perspective is privileged. This disparity is further highlighted by the differentiated temporalities in which the characters live—if Charlie is taking the audience with her in the present to discover the answer to the mystery of her disappearing fiancé, Zodwa exists in a temporality that is both past (flashbacks to the rape) and
future (the audience knows that Charlie will find out the murder). Zodwa as an atemporal figure—a ghost, a memory—is in danger of replicating a romanticized “timelessness” with which Africa has been represented and exploited from the colonial era onward.

I would argue, however, that this staging draws attention to the subtle ways in which the stage is always over-determined in the intimate geographies of colonialism; Charlie and Zodwa are kept apart because of the continuing legacies of apartheid and Church-sponsored homophobia. *I Stand Corrected* was commissioned in 2012 by the British Counsel and has had its longest run thus far at London’s Oval Playhouse, where it received rave reviews and six nominations for the Off West End Theatre Awards, including Best New Play. It has also run at Artscape Theatre in Cape Town (where I observed the final dress rehearsal) and the Soweto Theatre, where pay-what-you-can tickets were sold to those in the community. Its audiences are, then, themselves geographically displaced; much like the characters and artists, the space of witnessing crafted by varying points of identification and disidentification.

Part of the animating tension of the play comes from the staging that keeps the two in different temporalities, even as they share the same performing space. The audience straddles this dislocation uncomfortably, their knowledge of Zodwa’s death and that the two will not be reunited overlaying their desire to see the union that cannot be. The moments when the tension is relieved—and the lovers are able to connect in a moment of temporal and spatial overlap and touch and really see each other—are structured to be some of the most emotionally powerful of the piece. The first instance comes in a flashback midway through the piece, following Charlie’s visit to the police station, to the moment when Zodwa and Charlie met, when Charlie coached Zodwa’s cricket team. Zodwa teases her, playing a game of hide and go seek, called *Ndi-se Ndi-se*—“Can I come? Not yet!” As they play, crawling on each other’s bodies, this innocent game takes on sexual undertones and becomes increasingly erotic and urgent, Charlie supports Zodwa’s legs over her shoulders and Zodwa drapes over her back, her head visible from between Charlie’s legs. This moment of shared ecstasy and joy only makes the return to Charlie’s reality more abrupt and painful.

The second instance the two share space-time occurs in the penultimate scene of the play. Charlie enters, dragging her suitcase, trailing deflated balloons behind. She has registered the loss, has given up hope. Zodwa mirrors her, unseen and spectral, unpacking the suitcase and taking out perfume, spraying it like breadcrumbs for Charlie to follow. In a dance that painfully mirrors the “Ndi-se” hide-and-seek from earlier, Charlie catches the scent and follows it, searching for Zodwa. For a brief moment, they see each other and are in the same plane. Zodwa offers Charlie her hand and they laugh, relieved that they are together. Charlie pulls Zodwa into a kiss—one of the few times they touch each other in the piece—and they both embrace in joy of
the reunion. However, Zodwa slowly pulls away, unable to stay but loathe to let go. It becomes clear that this moment of intimacy was never to be realized. This is the moment where the loss becomes real. As Charlie collapses to the ground sobbing, Zodwa unpacks the suitcase and lies lifelessly upon it.

The final scene mirrors the queer wedding—that wasn’t with the queer funeral that was. This, the third and final representation of the rape/murder, is narrated by Charlie to the audience. However, unlike the comic realism of the wedding scene, the funeral displaces the narration of the brutal details—the facts—onto both performers. Though Charlie begins telling the audience how it happened, it turns out to be a pre-recorded voiceover. She stops speaking for a moment, as the details continue, before Nyamza (not Zodwa) takes over as Charlie-at-the-funeral, miming Adebayo’s flat, emotionless voiceover. The recording continues, overlapping, as Charlie tries to make sense of the loss:

CHARLIE: I remember there was a great storm that night. As if the heavens were raging.
   I imagine the winds sweeping through the bars of Robin Island prisons cells
   where once great black men in the fight for freedom dwelt...

CHARLIE VOICE OVER: (mimed by Nyamza): _His hands around her
   throat...as she lay dying he invaded her body and put out his cigarette on her
   clitoris._

CHARLIE: I couldn't sleep for fear and excitement. I wanted to jump to the taxi and go to
   her, because I know that heavy rain on corrugated iron is so loud and I was
   sure she wouldn't be able to sleep either. But we had agreed to spend the night
   before our wedding apart. As is the tradition.

   CVO: _...Set fire to her feet..._

CHARLIE: So I slept soundly under the white crisp sheets of my sea point hotel bed and
   covered my ears with a soft pillow.

   ...Why? Why are so many men in this country doing this? Something must have
   sparked that match, something much have fanned this flame, something must
   have started this fire. There must have been phosphorus. English owned
   phosphorus.

   This moment, the piece’s most explicit account of sexual violation, further breaks down the
   lines between the world of the play and its varied audiences, as Nyamza (no longer Zodwa and
   not-quite Charlie) takes over the telling of the assault to the funeral audience, and Adebayo (also
   not-quite Charlie) breaks the fourth wall to pose some of the piece’s most difficult questions
   directly to the audience. Outside of the framework of the narrative, momentarily, the audience—
   and particularly, British audiences—are asked to account for how they have benefited from
   colonialism and apartheid (as symbolized by Charlie’s missionary adopted parents’ investment in
   phosphorus), as well as how they see these crimes as separate from their own lives.

   Despite this direct address/accusation, the piece ends on a hopeful note. Charlie is left to
eulogize Zodwa, whom she describes as being the home she hadn’t known she had been seeking when she had come to South Africa. Drawing on the idea of ancestral wives—the often-forgotten tradition of African women taking an ancestor as a symbolic bride—Charlie claims Zodwa as her eternal partner, on a different, spiritual plane. Joined together, for a final time, the two lovers toss the bouquet into the audience, as the soundtrack blares the popular Zulu protest song (frequently employed by black South African lesbian activists): *Siyaya noba kubi*. Even though it’s bad, we still come.

This evocation of diasporic queer futurity linked to African queer pasts provides an alternate ending to a narrative whose roles seem at times to be seems over-determined by History. *I Stand Corrected* unsettles these roles and narratives by existing in the in-between of space and time, of colony and colonizer, lover and beloved, life and death. Though the forward-thrust of the action takes place in contemporary Cape Town, its parts move back through time, the stories of its two main characters intertwining with the complex global legacies of colonialism and homophobia. Without reenacting the rape itself, the piece honors the lived experiences of those who have been victims of this sort of sexual violence by highlighting the fragmentation of trauma, its shattering of time and place, and the ways in which violence is simultaneously shocking and quotidian, both incomprehensible and inevitable.

**Conclusion**

![Miss Lesbian 1 by Zanele Muholi, 2009.](http://www.stevenson.info/artists/muholi.html)

*M. Muholi’s photography and Nyamza’s choreography present the black-lesbian in and between the context where she is most visible in the public sphere: the scene of her violation. Yet, by*
staging the performative-encounter between the viewer and the victim, these artists do more than just depict this violation; they actively turn the gaze of the viewer inward by engaging and evading the very tropes through which this body was constructed. Rather than directly depict the acts of sexual violence, Muholi and Nyamza tactically engage the frameworks of representation itself, through a tactic I have called an aesthetic of displacement. In tactically making visible the structures of seeing/avoiding that allow rape to be normalized, each artist addresses the violence experienced by many black South African lesbians in a way that avoids the material representation of sexual trauma.

Despite their differing media and divergent careers, Muholi and Nyamza have collaborated on several occasions. Muholi took the production photographs when I Stand Corrected performed at the Soweto theatre and promoted the show heavily on her website Inkanyiso. Perhaps more significantly, Muholi also provided an image for the play’s poster art. The poster image Miss Lesbian I (above), a rare Muholi self-portrait, is appropriately suggestive and evasive of the play’s topic. In it, Muholi stands posed like a model, hands on hips, wearing a Wonder-Woman leotard. A silver tiara sits in her hair. She stares off to the side of the camera, her eyes heavily made up in turquoise, her expression inscrutable. She stands in silver four inch heels in the center of what seems to be a stage, the floor scuffed with paint. A white sash hangs across her chest, like a beauty queen’s, hailing her as Black Lesbian.

To an unsuspecting viewer encountering the poster, the image invites a number of provocations: is the Black Lesbian a super-hero? A Barbie doll? An icon? Alongside the bold, red font advertising the title—the image becomes even more opaque. Who is the “I” center stage? Who is the unnamed “corrector?” What is broken in this relation? Who is the subject and who is the object? Who is looking? What is the relationship between the image of the Black Lesbian and the “correction” suggested by the performance title? The image’s opacity begs the question: why choose to promote the production with this image and not an image of, say, Nyamza and Adebayo during their ndi-se ndi-se game, or of Nyamza in the midst of her rubbish-bin death dance?

Yet the poster reflects the overlapping, central preoccupations of each artist: the contradictory pressures of being a “representative lesbian,” both invisible and hyper-visible. When the viewer is able to see the “Black Lesbian” central to I Stand Corrected and Muholi’s photography, it is only through the lens of her correction/violation. Zodwa, ostensibly the “I” in I Stand Corrected, is the antithesis of the high femme Miss Lesbian or even the “delightfully feminine Ms. Virgo” mocked in the toilet scene. The contradiction immediately apparent between Muholi’s overproduced and hypervisible Miss Black Lesbian and Nyamza’s anonymous, dying lesbian-in-trashcan that opens the play, suggests the over-determined nature of any representations of black South African lesbians, particularly around discourses of violence and violation.

By focusing on the paradoxical interrelation of invisibility and hypervisibility crucial to the impossible action of “corrective rape,” both are able to craft work that, in the words of feminist cultural critic Pulma Gqola, writing about Muholi, is “less about making Black lesbians visible than it is about engaging with the regimes that have used these women’s hypervisibility as a way to violate them.”188 Each artist uses tactics that displace the viewer’s focus onto the limited scopic regimes that make black lesbians in(hyper)visible. By evoking the concept of displacement, I play on its many valances and connotations, particularly around the politics of

---

witnessing in space. In psychoanalytic theory, displacement acts as a defense mechanism where the affects associated with a particular object deemed to be unacceptable are projected onto another object. By focusing on the violated black lesbian body not in terms of the act of its violation, but rather onto its aftermath or symbolic objects—be it Muholi’s wall of testimony or Nyamza’s rubbish bin—their audiences are able to see and experience violence differently.

If sexual violence is normalized and made invisible on the one hand, its taboo nature also teases and incites the viewer to look. With its history of public performances of bearing witness—perhaps most explicitly enacted in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—it might be argued that South African perceptions of Corrective Rape come from a desire to acknowledge lesbian presence and “make visible” the hidden pasts. Yet the focus on the particular sexuality of the victims as well as defining the act from the perception of the perpetrators blurs the line between voyeur and witness, and often sets up a false dichotomy between the rape of lesbians (as hate crimes) and everyday “normal rape.” The displaced aesthetic I argue that artists such as Muholi and Nyamza use to mitigate violence’s perverse draw, perpetually defers its enactment, making viewers uncomfortably aware of their own desire to see violence performed; In Sassen’s words, “pondering why you feel cheated.” In a Brechtian sense, the displacement of violence makes strange the drive to see violence enacted; by preventing its audiences from ever seeing the violence, it turns their gaze to their own (frustrated) desire to see, critically engaging their own complicity as (would be) voyeurs of traumatic acts. By making the viewer aware of their own optical desires—suspended uncomfortably between titillated voyeurism and compassionate witnessing—they can never fully escape their implication (and inaction) in the act.

Finally, an Aesthetic of Displacement is also innately a post-colonial, unsettled aesthetic connected to the subaltern, multiply situated body in transnational space. As discussed previously, many black South African lesbians move between identities, translating their articulated identities to their varied communities as feels necessary. By drawing attention to the displacement of black lesbian identity, these artists rehearse places where this motion of translation is momentarily suspended and identity is allowed to be. This aesthetic also acknowledges the ways in which representations are never fully “placed,” but are out of the control of those who create them.

Indeed, displacement also has its dangers. Muholi’s images, particularly, circulate easily and—far from the specificity given the individual performances of self—tend to stand in for the unitary violated black lesbian that she’s working against. Though circulation on the Internet has won her acclaim as an artist and publicized the severity of sexual violence against South African lesbians, she is never fully in control of how her images—so easily cut and pasted out of context—have been used. Muholi, in response, has harnessed her popularity to set up a blog called *Inkanyiso,* where individual black lesbian bloggers (authors, artists, and community activists) make daily posts, documenting their lives and the complexity of their experiences. The Internet, in this context, becomes a space of safety and collective knowledge production, where disembodiment and anonymity allows for paradoxical emplacement in a variety of online communities. The prismatic, discursive space created by these online South African interpretive communities is the subject of my final chapter.

---

189 *Inkanyiso.org*
Chapter Four: Prismatic Reception: *Generations*, Public Deliberation, and African Internet Heterotopias

When Jason Kissed Senzo

On September 1, 2009, over five million South Africans watched the South African Broadcasting Corporation’s primetime television show *Generations*, the longest running soap opera currently on the air. The serialized “soapie” tells of the schemes, relationships, grudges, and aspirations of the members of two competing advertising conglomerates in Johannesburg. Viewers tune in nightly to see a mix of personal and political intrigue. That evening, regular *Generations* viewers unknowingly tuned in to see something that had never been screened before on the soapie: two black men kissing. After circling each other for several weeks, Jason Malinga (Zolisa Xaluva) and Senzo Zondo (Thami Mngqolo) finally found themselves alone. Senzo has recently reunited with his father Sibusiso Dhlomo after a lifetime of estrangement. Jason has just returned from years spent working in New York to take up a position at Sibusiso’s firm, but is being courted by the rival agency run by Sibusiso’s sworn enemy, the devious Kenneth Mashaba. The two argue about business, drawing closer to each other. Finally Jason reaches out and grabs Senzo by the neck, almost as if to throttle him—and surprises him with a kiss. Senzo freezes before reaching out and burying his hand in Jason’s dreadlocks, pulling him closer. In the two seconds between Jason’s initiation of the kiss and the soaring synth of *Generation*’s theme song heralding the blackout and the credits, something shifted in the South African cultural landscape. Radio talk shows—the soundtrack to the daily minibus taxi commutes of the majority of South Africans—were overwhelmed by viewers calling in, expressing disgust, shock, and excitement at the storyline. *Generations*, never one to shy away from controversial topics, had crossed a line, it was said. How could a man kiss another man? And more importantly, how would the proud, uber-masculine Sibusiso (also known as Ngamla, or “man with authority”) react to finding out his son was isistabane?!? *Generation*’s ratings, already by far the most popular television show in the country, shot up during this period. The Jason-Senzo storyline continued to build over the following months, culminating in Sibusiso’s discovery of the two in bed together and attacking them in a rage with a sjambok.  

With Jason in the hospital and Senzo repudiating his father, Ngamla spirals out of control, turning to drink and alienating those around him. Forced to reckon with Senzo’s sexuality, Sibusiso must confront his own prejudices or risk losing his son.

Gay characters were not unheard of on South African television and, indeed, had been on other South African soap operas. Why, then, did this storyline cause more popular outrage than that of, say, Stone, the abused rent boy on *Rhythm City* who briefly had an affair with a “confused” friend, Thula in 2008 before both returned to dating girls? Or the regular character of genial and effeminate white man Paul on *Isidingo*, who had to deal with homophobia from his (mixed race) roommates when he came out? Perhaps these characters were always earmarked as “Other,” as non-African forms of masculinity, damaged by trauma or already unAfrican (ie: white). Jason and Senzo were not marginalized characters, but successful black businessmen, competitive players in the Johannesburg media scene. They were not introduced for the purpose of making a one-note point about sexuality, but were each central in the soap’s ever-shifting

---

190 The sjambok (a rubber whip, usually between three and five feet long) would have a number of connotations for *Generations* viewers. Originally used to herd cattle in the rural areas and then adopted by the apartheid police to beat protestors into submission, it is a weapon that carries the heft of tradition and violent discipline.
genealogies. The discovery of Senzo’s sexuality threatened the familial peace that had finally been restored at the heart of the show.

In 2008, around the time Senzo was first introduced as a promising young man with a mysterious past, a Johannesburg blogger named Thabo initiated Generations’ first online fansite: www.gensblog.co.za. As Thabo daily posted his thoughts about the show, the blog, which initially had few regular commenters, began to grow exponentially as Generations’ viewers stumbled across the site in search of a space to engage with the storylines. Despite being an unofficial fansite with no direct link to the show or the SABC, Gensblog became a bustling hub of discussion and debate, clocking over 1,000 comments daily by the time the Jason and Senzo kissed. Its members almost all self-identified with the emergent black middle class: office workers, college students, or professionals, whose relationship to the soap opera is tied into complex relationships with black, (South) African modernities.

This chapter analyzes Gensblog as a space where the controversial romance of Jason and Senzo was rejected, debated, and eventually accepted (with reservations) as part of the master narrative of South Africa’s most popular “soapie.” As an unregulated space of debate—outside of official mediated public spheres—in a society highly stratified by race and class, the internet provides an increasingly accessible opportunity for those South Africans disconnected by geography, but united in common interests and aspirations, to debate the parameters of belonging and success in contemporary South Africa. I am not primarily interested in the content of the “Gay Storyline” on Generations, which in some ways is quite traditional: prodigal son returns, is embraced, falls in love with the wrong person, is rejected by his family, carves out his own identity, and is eventually reincorporated to the house of the father. Rather, I take the Jason/Senzo romance as an example of what media scholar John Fiske terms a “media event,” and Gensblog as a space through which this event was processed. Much like Neville Hoad’s South-African-specific conception of flashpoints (discussed in the introduction), Fiske’s Media Events are occurrences where larger, underlying discourses are articulated in the public’s consciousness through dramatization, such as a television storyline. Fiske likens culture to a river of discourses, where currents of meaning—particularly around race, gender, and sexuality—swirl into each other and “bubble up” at particular moments.

Media events are sites of maximum visibility and maximum turbulence. […] They are useful to the cultural analyst because their turbulence brings so much to the surface, even if it can be glimpsed only momentarily. The discursive currents and countercurrents swirling around these sites are accessible material for the analyst to work upon: from them s/he must theorize the flows of the inaccessible and invisible currents of meaning that lie deep below the surface, and that will never be available for empirical study. Their invisible movements and workings must be theorized from the visible, because this inaccessible level typically carries the most significant connections between the points of visibility.191

It is these “points of visibility”—and their interrelation with the inaccessible and invisible currents of meaning—that I am interested in probing, particularly in regards to affect and the shifting strands of discourse around popular perceptions of black homosexuality within South

Africa. If both Generations and Gensblog are nodal points where these debates are made visible, their viewers and participants are linked into numerous networks that, though never fully accessible to a researcher, hint at larger cultural changes and places of transformation and negotiation.

The Internet is an ephemeral space, where participants are encouraged to engage in “real-time,” to jot out quick responses, and to act on the immediacy of their emotions and first impressions. A website might then seem to be an odd location to seek out deliberation and gain entrance into those “invisible currents of meaning” outside of the media events themselves. Yet these sites are also spaces of community and geo-temporal simultaneity, of engagement and boredom, of repetition and revision, and of play. Though the internet has been long hailed a space of placelessness, the sidebars that track live-traffic feed, links to other virtual spaces such as Twitter and Facebook, and advertisements reminding the users of their bodily needs and desires, compel the viewer to recognize their presence as both grounded and virtual. By clicking on the blog to post their comments, they enter a space where they are able to play with identity, even as they assert geographic, linguistic, and ethnic fixedness in relation to the imaginary world of Generations and the rhythms of their own situated lives.

The Internet, as a site of both “reality” and “non-reality” facilitates the creation of a new space—or overlapping spaces. In this way, sites such as GensBlog operate as what Michel Foucault has termed a heterotopia, simultaneously creating “a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned… [even as it] create[s] a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled.”

These sites, as ephemeral as they may be, leave traces of affects and communities, and are particularly revealing exactly because they were never meant to be seen, were written off-the-cuff, and are responsive and reactive. Yet these individual posts accumulate over time and become sites of continuous debate and change. Though they might strive to be “perfect, meticulous, and…well arranged,” (which is to say, utopic), they are animated by players with numerous agendas and shot through with affect. As these heterotopic spaces become shattered or undone, the shards of these crises make visible the often-vexed attachments viewers have to stable concepts of “African” families, cultures, and traditions. A close reading of an internet archive reveals not only the shockwaves caused by these “media events” or “flashpoints,” but emphasizes the ways in which they are interpreted, internalized, and changed through creative spectatorial engagement.

This chapter argues that virtual traces left by the “invisible currents of meaning” on Gensblog provide an alternate, reception-focused mode of understanding the influence of television and popular culture on post-apartheid publics. South African cultural scholar Caroline Hamilton has argued that space for public deliberation on critical issues has been severely circumscribed by the ANC government’s control of virtually all spaces of public discourse (where to question the ANC is to be branded an elitist, and intellectuals are framed as inherently UnAfrican). The SABC’s relationship with government is possibly the most vivid example of this trend, and Hamilton further cites the “blacklisting” of certain commentators seen as being anti-ANC and the recent suggestion of a “media tribunal,” pushed to parliament by ANC ministers, where

---

192 The democratic potential of “cyberspace” have been famously—and perhaps overly enthusiastically—espoused by Howard Reingold in Virtual Communities: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier (Boston: MIT Press, 1993) and critiqued by Douglass E. Cowan in “Online U-Topia: Cyberspace and the Mythology of Placelessness” (Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 44, no. 3 (2005)), among others.

journalists can be fined and imprisoned for comments that are deemed inflammatory. Hamilton’s observation was shared by many others I talked to working in media. When I interviewed Pulane Boesak—then a producer at Generations and previously a program manager for SABC1—she mentioned a number of troubling interventions she had witnessed where the ANC government had dictated the schedule and content of the public broadcaster.

Gensblog, as a website under international media conglomerate MediaCom, is outside of ANC’s control, yet is very much shaped by the neoliberal ethos shaping media in post-apartheid period, and is reflective of the embrace of the free market that coincided with the end of apartheid. Indeed, though the response to the gay characters on Generations created unprecedented dialogue around issues of black South African queerness in the public sphere, Generations has, since its premiere in January 1994, reflected the lives and struggles of post-apartheid South Africans. While the original iteration attempted to model the “Rainbow Nation” diversity of the multi-racial, newly post-apartheid South Africa, over its run Generations has taken an approach more akin to the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) model: the majority of its non-black, non-Nguni -speaking characters were gradually written off the show. The denizens of Generations’ Johannesburg today are almost entirely black, upper-middle class or wealthy, and engaged in various forms of media and cultural production. Johannesburg, within the world of Generations, is portrayed as the ultimate cosmopolitan city, populated by coffee bars, parties, and relationship drama. Its viewers are by-in-large black, and lower to middle class income. It is the space of fantasy, of aspiration, and—up until now—black heterosexual escapism.

Though those outraged by the storyline claimed that Generations was inserting something into black South African public life that had not previously been there, homosexuality, and, particularly, anti-gay sentiment had previously been widely discussed in a number of black publics. The 2006 legalization of same-sex marriage resulted in debate within both informal settings and in public spaces such as church pulpits and in a series of provincial-wide hearings held by the National House of Traditional Healers. Yet, as Graeme Reid has argued, these spaces were primarily intended for the majority to publically vocalize their disapproval of the bill—and to reassert the

195 Nguni is a linguistic family comprised of the Zulu, Xhosa, and Sotho languages.
primacy of tradition and Christianity to African life—rather than to genuinely engage the issues at the heart of the debate. Similarly, the pro-gay marriage lobby was less concerned with engaging the public on the issue than it was in protecting the constitutionally-enshrined rights of sexual minorities.\footnote{196}{Gr. Reid, “The Canary of the Constitution: Same-Sex Equality in the Public Sphere,” Social Dynamics 36, no. 1 (2010).}

The paucity of engagement with the fears and assumptions underlying the arguments—both pro and con—resulted in a hardening of position of each side and increased mutual antagonism. Gay South Africans felt victimized by their communities, often compelled to break their family ties; straight South Africans felt victimized by a constitution that did not represent their beliefs and traditions. On one side, those who were pro-gay argued that the amendment situated the country as part of a transnational movement, a sign of progress and modernity against the backwardness of tradition. Those who took a “traditionalist” standpoint, saw queerness as attached to the larger evils of post-apartheid society, evidence of the corrupting influence of the west and the need to return to an imagined traditional Africa. Neither side fully acknowledged the complexity of affiliation and history, nor engaged in the parsing what a black, gay South African identity really looked like. As this dissertation has argued, few representations of queerness were available to the public. Though same-sex behavior was tolerated to a certain extent in black communities, it often came with the understanding that it would be under the surface, hidden.

When I wondered why this might be so, in a discussion with a number of primarily black, gay college students at a forum held at Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA), one student, Nkululeko, commented that

Today, at home, now—I’m not home—we’re burying my grandfather. My grandfather was gay. But it was a kind of implied gay, because he never came out to anyone and said “oh yeah, I’m gay.” But we’d see him with the boyfriends—or the boys that he came with—we thought, well maybe he’s gay[…]But for me, it felt so confusing. Because as a gay man… I’ll probably just die like him. I won’t come out. And people will just see me coming home with boyfriends. But it’s confusing, to find that they’re so…they kind of accept it, but they don’t accept it. They’re between borders. I love you because you’re mine, but I don’t want to accept what you’re doing. And I’m scared like it might just happen like that, I’m going to die like my grandfather and not come out.\footnote{197}{“Nkululeko,” in group discussion with author, April 2, 2011 at the GALA offices, Johannesburg, South Africa. All names given for GALA forum participants are pseudonyms. Their words are used with their permission.}

The rhetoric of “acceptance…but not” is a common theme with students who come to GALA, and complicates any easy dichotomy between the “anti” and “pro” positions on South African queerness. There are many who are, as in Nkululeko’s family, “between borders.” The sense of simultaneous belonging and repudiation felt by so many gay black South Africans (“you’re mine, but I don’t want to accept…”) suggests a fear of the “other” in one’s self, warring with an abiding love for that “other,” even in its differences. That the traditional Nguni philosophy of ubuntu locates one’s selfhood in the other, only complicates the cosmology of the (South) African self. It is easier to look the other way, to accept grandfather and not comment on the boyfriends, so long as he performs his role as patriarch (roles that are always gendered).
Representations of queerness don’t allow for this sort of avoidance, especially in television, one of the most popular and public media available. Though some of the students at the GALA forum took issue with the accuracy of televised queer relationships, most of them acknowledged that these are the only “out” queer people that their families know, allowing for the beginnings of conversations around their own sexuality.

In this atmosphere of a rapidly decreasing spaces for open, critical debate, Hamilton wonders whether true public deliberation—which she defines as being related to dialogue and engagement—exists not in the regulated public spheres (or even in “counter-publics,” such as Non-Governmental Organizations), but in what she refers to as “capillaries of public deliberation”: unofficial spaces where issues pertinent to the public are taken up and given serious weight. These spaces can be fleeting—a conversation between two passengers in a taxi—or extended—she mentions the arts as a key site for “irreverence, iconoclasm, subversion, experiments of cultural hybridity, often in very edgy ways, sometimes reactionary, sometimes progressive.”\(^\text{198}\) Whereas official publics are often mediated by limited scopes of possible action, and dictated by so-called rationality, capillaries of public deliberation—though often guided by their own structures—allow for affective and subjective interactions between interested parties, acknowledging personal and historical investment in the issues put forth. This chapter takes up Hamilton’s call to enter one such capillary to gain access to the larger workings of discourse around South African queerness and its audiences.

In order to be able to analyze a discrete time period during the life of Gensblog, I read back-posts and comments from all of the posts made on Genblog between the blog’s debut on March 4, 2008 and June 9, 2010. By choosing these dates, I was able to accurately chart the evolution of the community from its inception (2008) through the introduction of the gay storyline (2009) and its denouement (2010). Determining an endpoint for a blog and a television show that continue without end in sight was difficult; I decided to use the World Cup—a monumental event in the country’s history that disrupted regular television broadcasts for a month—as a stopping point. This is, of course, a superficial limit: the Jason/Senzo storyline continues and will most likely carry on long after this dissertation has been filed. However, with a “data set” comprised of 775 blog posts and 114,791 comments, my analysis provides a snapshot of the formation of a consciously cosmopolitan African community and the subsequent testing of its boundaries when confronted with African homosexuality.\(^\text{199}\)

By tracing the strictures and evolutions of one community towards African homosexuality—through the lenses of the storyline and the internet—I suggest that in the context of the aspirational world of the “soapie,” queer characters signify a modern, Afropolitan identity that is simultaneously desirable and threatening. The larger structures of soaps—through the daily ritual of watching a never ending story as well as logging on and co-creating their own cyber dramas—allows communities to mirror and shape national visions of success and aspiration.


\(^{199}\) Beyond reading the blog posts and comments, I additionally searched for the terms “gay,” “homosexual,” “stabane,” and “moffie” in every post, to determine the scope of language being used to describe queer characters and acts. However, the most valuable information was imbedded in close readings of the evolution of individual conversations and perspectives on the “gay storyline.” This method produced the most nuanced analyses of how Gensblog community members perceived themselves in relation to the television show, the blog (with its generative “family” metaphor), “Africanness” and “South Africanness,” and, especially, homosexuality in relation to all of the above.
Television, Intimate Publics, and South African Digital Communities

Considering their popularity, daily serial soap operas and their reception(s) have received relatively little attention in studies of South African television. Most scholarly work takes as its focus the role of “edutainment”—didactic programming in the SABC’s public education mandate—in primetime dramas, especially around issues of HIV, domestic violence, and crime.⁰⁰⁰ One notable exception to this trend is Soul City, an edutainment drama—often labeled a soap opera—that set the bar for multi-front, multi-media edutainment campaigns. Yet the television show is only one project in a number of social and behavioral change programs run by the Soul City Institute. Each season investigates one particular “hot topic” over the course of 13 episodes, supplemented with comic books and radio campaigns. Though Loren Kruger, in her article on the first few seasons, explicitly reads the series as a soap opera—albeit one that “combines soap opera’s cliff-hanger dramaturgy, sudden revelations, and sentimental portrait of long-suffering survivors pitted against unrepentant villains with scenerios of personal and social dramas that focus on social health issues,”⁰²⁰—I would argue that, though it uses a number of melodramatic tropes, its links to NGOs and its explicit “edutainment” mandate make Soul City a different sort of beast. Indeed, despite her acknowledgement that Soap Operas are excellent, if unlikely, sites for understanding nation building, Kruger focuses her analysis—and the value of this sort of analysis—in its hybridization of and distance from the soap opera form, allowing for a Brechtian critique that resists soap opera’s affective power.

Similarly, a later essay “Critique by Stealth: Aspiration, Consumption and Class and Post Apartheid Television Drama,”⁰² which looks at two drama series Gaz’lâm and The LAB, Kruger adroitly critiques the neoliberal paradoxes dictating the SABC’s programming as the “public” broadcaster. Yet, in her essay Generations becomes a sort of straw man for depicting empty aspiration, without the potential for critique, referenced in opposition to the ways in which the other drama’s depictions hold inherent (and, once again, Brechtian) critique, “by stealth.” This, to me, seems a problematic viewpoint that underestimates the dialogical potential available in the affective response, and dismisses the many varying ways that viewers take up the soap opera genre.

Generations’ popularity in South Africa is in large part due to the emotional investment its viewers have in it, an investment which often means they will “stick it out” through storylines that might morally offend or challenge them. Rather than Brechtian detachment, the viewer’s emotional attachment to the show facilitates an ever-evolving engagement with the material, allowing for change and intimacy, aided by the affective and aspirational nature of the soap opera genre. The online context of the Gensblog allows for fluidity of identity-play; “fandom” provides its users the flexibility of identification and built-in emotional investment in the storylines.

In her 2008 book The Female Complaint: the Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture, Lauren Berlant puts forth a theory of “intimate publics,” communities of

---

⁰⁰⁰ The SABC 1 crime drama Yizo Yizo has a particularly rich body of scholarship around it: see, for instance, Clive Barnett (“Yizo Yizo: Citizenship, Commodification and Popular Culture in South Africa,” Media, Culture, and Society 26, no. 2 (2004)) and Muff Andersson (Intertextuality, Violence, and Memory in Yizo Yizo: Youth TV Drama (Johannesburg: UNISA Press, 2010)).


viewers who, as they engage with a particular genre (such as “the woman’s novel”), invest in the creation of national affective community—a sort of patriotism-through-common-feeling, inevitably tied into market interests. Membership into an intimate public is predicated on the assumption that:

consumers of its particular stuff already share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience… So if, from a theoretical standpoint, an intimate public is a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general, what’s salient for its consumers is that it is a place of recognition and reflection. In an intimate public sphere, emotional contact, of a sort, is made.203

When the members of Gensblog watch Jason and Senzo kiss, the resulting crisis of signs throws the assumption of shared “emotional knowledge” of the intimate public of Gensblog into an upheaval. The carefully constructed (and implicitly heterosexual) familial relationship between the bloggers is thrown into disarray. The amount of emotional energy expelled in repudiating the storyline is only equal to—and, perhaps, adds to—the passionate attachment with which the viewers hold the material and, through the show and the blog, to other viewers. Indeed, even as the blog seems to implode upon itself, the members continue to tune in and the storyline and forge—through their shared disgust—connect to a larger sense of South African belonging, a feeling of togetherness that is heightened by the melodrama and emotionality of the plot and the lushness of the surroundings. As the initial shock of seeing two men kissing on their soapie fades, they learn to adapt to watching and, through their watching, participate in a world with gay black South African men in it.

While American import soap operas are also popular in South Africa, they don’t generate as much debate—or as much criticism—as the local soapis. And, according to Generations’ producer Boesaak, because it is the longest running soapie in the country, expectations for Generations above and beyond the expectations of the genre. This, she told me, is because “Generations, to be honest, has redefined the definition of a soap in South Africa…People expect things of this show that they don’t expect from Scandals, Rhythm City, 7 de Laan, Isidingo.”204 And I think that makes it hard. It makes it hard to tell the good, relevant stories, while still being what they expect from a soap, while still giving them issues of national importance.”205

These coexisting, sometimes contradictory, expectations result in a fandom that is deeply loyal, even in its criticism. Though the online community is only a part of this larger fan base, it is a particularly fruitful and visible one, with links to other spaces. Hamilton’s conception of “capillaries of deliberation” is an apt metaphor for the online space itself, as a channel of negotiation for the fans and the numerous spaces they inhabit, both generally and vis-à-vis the “gay storyline.” If there are obvious tensions between the “real world” of the viewers lives and the “imaginary world” of the soap opera, the internet allows for a dialectical space that is neither wholly real nor imaginary, but deeply and materially influenced by both.

204 Other prime time South African soap operas (the first two on Etv, the other two on SABC 2 and SABC 3 respectively).
205 Pulane Boesak, interview with author, May 4, 2011, SABC Studios, Johannesburg, South Africa.
Much of the current discourse on the internet in Africa is focused on the subject of the “digital divide,”—noting that less than one percent of Africans have access to broadband internet—and is often framed as a problem to be solved. These numbers do not take into account the popularity of cell phone technology or the ubiquitous Internet cafes available in almost all urban areas. Access to the Internet—and the transnational mediascape it holds—opens up space for auditioning new identities and affiliations, as well as spaces where intractable beliefs take hold and are affirmed.

My decision to focus on an online community was made in part out of necessity: Tracing the numerous meanings attached to gay characters’ appearances in South African soap operas—and, moreover, the importance of soap operas in the construction of senses of South African national identity—is methodologically tricky; short of conducting an extended reception ethnography, it is impossible to even make broad claims about the effects the show has on its public(s). However, beyond being merely a trackable repository for audience reception, Gensblog provides insight into the overlapping ways that people make meaning out of an increasingly mediated world. In this, I follow new media scholars Nancy Baym and Annette Markham’s claim that the internet is “implicated in at least four major transformations of our epoch: media convergence, mediated identities, redefinitions of social boundaries, and the transcendence of geographical boundaries.”

Notably, one of the most public responses to the Jason-Senzo kiss came in the form of a facebook feud. Within hours of the kiss three black South African men set up a facebook group entitled, “We will stop watching Generations if Jason and Senzo Continue Kissing.” Within three days, this group had counted over 20,000 members, who debated the merits of the gay storyline, with many expressing repulsion and anger. According to the Sunday World, the group was “one of the fastest growing groups Facebook South Africa has ever recorded.” As is often the case, within a few days, a group emerged to challenge the first. “We will stop watching Generations if Jason and Senzo STOP Kissing” quickly provided a counterpoint to the original, eventually topping it in numbers. Gay and lesbian South Africans testified to the value of their life experiences and straight allies and Generation’s fans argued for the necessity that the show not censor the reality of South African lives.

---

206 I have watched Generations in a number of different situations and have observed the intense, personal engagement its viewers have with the characters and the storylines. Most houses, no matter how poor, have a television in place of pride in the living room, surrounded by a sofa set and a low table. Dinner is often eaten in front of the television set. Children, parents, grandparents, friends and neighbors who don’t have a television set of their own drop by to watch. This experience of media consumption is generally a communal one, and one that communally shapes perceptions of contemporary South African identity and culture, as well as bringing to the fore issues that have otherwise divided the country. A sampling of spaces I have observed people watching Generations: I watched with a widowed Gogo (granny) in Zola, Soweto who kept insisting “Generations needs to end! It has gone on far too long!” I ate with a community activist and her family in her living room “shebeen” (off-license bar) in Thokoza, with neighbors who come to drink, smoke, snort snuff, and provide a running commentary; I nightly sat with a my “host family” in Mqgqonqo, in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal, as part of a Fulbright language program, who, despite being able to afford DSTV satellite service, tuned in to SABC 1 every evening at 8 over dinner. I later watch the “omnibus” reruns of the previous week’s episodes on Saturday morning with the family’s closeted gay son, who prefers the Fashion Channel to soapies and models himself after Victoria “Posh” Beckham (“she’s fierce!”).  
The speed at which these arguments gained traction, the accessibility of the platform, and the interactive nature of online debate (and “flame wars”) is a testament to the increasingly prominent role new media plays in crafting the post-apartheid public sphere. Though the majority of South Africans do not own personal computers, internet access has become increasingly widespread, thanks to mobile 4G technology, the proliferation of phone-based chat devices (such as mx-it), and the relative affordability of community-based internet cafes. Facebook has, as elsewhere in the world, become the premiere social networking site in South Africa. However, Facebook is primarily a site focused on the calculated performance of an identified self. The official Generations Facebook group—moderated by those paid by the SABC—is primarily a platform for individuals to speak truth to power: to vent and give feedback to the producers of the show itself, rather than engage each other on the material. Despite having many posters, Facebook groups allow for limited interaction.

The virtual space created through Gensblog touches on all of these transformations cited by Baym and Markham, influencing the ways in which its members experience the show itself, understand their own situated identities in relation to other fans within the country and the continent, and—most importantly for understanding the ways in which queer identities are interrogated in terms of “Africanness”—define and redefine the terms of belonging. Though almost all of the posters are black and share the aspirational, urban desires that drive Generation’s characters, they deal with the gay storyline in a number of different ways. Through the numerous voices and opinions expressed as they debate, insult, and tease each other over the course of several years, they build a network of surprising depth, that evades the otherwise overdetermined spaces available for public discourse.

**Heterosexual Heterotopias: building Gensblog’s serialized cyber family**

When logging onto the GensBlog (www.gensblog.co.za), the viewer is confronted with a layout that reflects the urban, sophisticated aesthetic of Johannesburg’s Generations: a sky blue masthead, with charcoal colored text boxes on a slate-gray background, with sliding blue bolded teaser headlines over white text highlighting the most recent posts. Under these “teasers,” headshots of the cast rotate, their familiar faces greeting the viewer. The men (Ajax! Sibusiso! Kenneth! Sam! Senzo! Khapehla!) all wear snazzy jackets, ties, or vests. The women (Karabo! Queen! Khetiwe! Dineo! Sharon!) all wear off the shoulder dresses, hair styled into soft, flowing curls, topped with hats or bows; their bare shoulders tease the viewer with ample skin, the images cut off before the dress material begins. These images pop out or change direction, depending on where the viewer places his or her cursor. The primary text of the homepage begins under these images: bolded gray headlines for daily blog posts announce the day’s topic against a white “page.” To the right of this text, scrolling down, are boxes with links to the most recent posts, the latest poll (“Who is more evil, Noluntu or Khetiwe?”), a link to site’s facebook page, a twitter feed, and a box that registers the live traffic, pulling the viewer out of the illusion of anonymity and situating her in a (literal) worldwide community of posters, lurkers, and fans (I am, for example, “A Visitor from Washington, DC, USA, 10 minutes ago”).

---

209 This experience of Gensblog is, of course, time-specific, as I will analyze further in my conclusion.

210 During my time conducting primary research for this chapter (January-April 2012), I wrote down the locations listed on the scrolling Live Traffic Feed. Though this is by no means a thorough account and was collected randomly (ie: just when I happened to log on), it provides useful cross-section of those who participate—either through actively posting or silently “lurking”—in the life of the board. Interestingly, only about half of those who
Gen’s Blog was set up by a blogger named Thabo in May 2008. Within its first 18 months—by the time that the Senzo-Jason storyline officially began—the board had morphed into multi-use space, with three blog posts every day on particular topics that could spawn sprawling discussion in the “Comments” section on the soap opera itself, the actors’ personal lives, and, increasingly, the personal lives of those who “blogged” regularly. A blog post could receive upwards of 700 comments, often from fewer than ten regular commenters, who from 8 AM to 4:30 pm, would daily engage in discussions, tease each other, and gossip. Unlike many television message boards—where users come to comment on the show and then leave—the Gen Blog became more like a chat room, where people spoke to each other in real-time.

Though moderated by Thabo, an employee of the site host Rand Media Co, the main content of the blog is created through the daily interactions of the commenters. The blog is maintained through an ethos of identification and ownership, both of the soap and the virtual discussion space. The website’s subtitle—“OUR SOAPIE”—reflects this, as does the frequent references made in the comments claiming ownership. The interactions between the “bloggers” (as they call themselves) create the fabric of an intimately imagined community, intimacy built not only on shared knowledge of a soap opera, but in the discourse and relationships between the members as well as the rituals and norms established. Like so many norms, the boundaries of this particular community are thrown into relief when confronted with taboo—in this case, Jason and Senzo’s kiss.

The men and women who populate the board are all part of the distinctly post-apartheid category of the black middle class. Almost all blog from work, and often joke about using the company’s time. While not necessarily representative of the average Generations watcher, this self-selected socio-economic group in some ways reflects SABC 1’s target audience, a segment of the population that is euphemistically referred to as the “Now Generation” in the broadcaster’s advertising terminology. Producer Boesek defines this audience as rating 1-8 on the network’s LSM (Living Standard Measure) scale,211 and sardonically refers to SABC1’s viewership to me as being “your young, your hip. Very much into celebrity, very shallow. Basically 16-24. Very ambitious, but basically more materialistic ambition than anything else.” Most members on the Gens Board would likely be identified as LSM 8, judging from frequent mentions of cellphones, television, DVD players, and other household appliances. Though few own their own personal computer, their Internet access at work and computer literacy place them in the minority of South Africans. For context, as of 2005, almost two-thirds of adult South Africans were classified LSM 1-5. LSM 9-10 were primarily white (74%) and LSM 1-5 were almost entirely black (95%).212
Members of Gensblog, are therefore members of the most desirable demographic for advertisers interested in marketing to young, upwardly mobile black South Africans.

These users put a high value on material acquisition and have sacrificed many much in order to access the centers of commerce where high paying jobs are available. Many of the people on the board have moved away from their home communities for employment or marriage, and feel disoriented in their new communities. User ChingChang, for example, uses the blog to feel less lonely: “i dont need a man right now maybe next year im okay,,,,,,,,[,] blogging is what keeps me going without thinking of going home 2 b lonely.”

Despite being employed at white-collar jobs—ostensibly a success, in a country with around 25% unemployment—each post is littered with complaints of boredom, and demands for entertainment during their work hours.

Though their means are nowhere near that of those who they follow on the screen, their jobs and lives have, in many cases, taken them outside of their home communities and into situations where they have access to a variety of mediascapes. They occasionally discuss returning “home” to rural or otherwise “disconnected” areas to be with their families during long weekends or Christmas holidays. Those who post regularly on the board are employed—with access to PCs at their place of employment and phones with internet capability—interested in popular culture and the life portrayed on the soaps, and a fixation with all things modern (and a distain for people who they see as madala, or old-fashioned). “High-value” brands or locations are often dropped into the conversations (lunch at Nandos, or from Woolies (Woolworths)); weekends spent at the shopping mall in Sandton (in Johannesburg) or at the Victoria and Albert Waterfront (in Cape Town).

Most of the South African bloggers live in and around South Africa’s three largest metropolitan areas—Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban. Though they are in large a part of the growing post-apartheid black middle class, they are, in many ways, in limbo: born in townships and rural areas, they have yet to relocate to the affluent suburbs; though they may work at offices and banks in places like MidRand in Gauteng, or in Cape Town’s business district, they still live in townships like Soweto, Alexander, and Mamlodi in Gauteng or Gugulethu and Langa in the Cape. Though some have cars, most take taxis to work. When they blog about their lives, many complain that they feel isolated and uninspired.

One unusual aspect of this particular community—made possible by the transnational reach of what Henry Jenkins has called convergence culture—is its number of pan-African participants. Beyond being the most popular television show in South Africa, Generations is also broadcast, via satellite, in real time throughout the continent. Several of the regular commenters are from outside of South Africa’s borders, logging in from Swaziland, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria. Beyond demonstrating South African media’s hegemony on the continent, the message board becomes a place where new definitions of Africanness can be tried out and exchanged. Zimbabwean poster Shawanda summarizes the feelings of many when she exclaims “I am loving this blog more and more. There is such a diverse group of nationalities. I actually thought almost everyone on the blog is South African – now i am realising there is us Zimbos, Batswana, Nigerians. Ah- Generations is a true African Soap.”

continue to build an environment of cultural exchange, both of the soap itself and the board it inspired. Nigerian Olivia jokes that watching Generations is like taking a correspondence course in Xhosa, and learns to say some rudimentary phrases, to the delight of the board.

Language and its uses become especially important as signifying belonging to the board. Ntshantsha, who is living abroad and taking care of her sister’s child in Ireland (“this cold hell!”) is unable to watch Generations from abroad and is dependent on the blog posts and comments to keep up with the storylines and feel a larger connection to South African culture: “I’m crying I just love you, especially when you say something in my language.”216 Most members make a concerted effort to keep the board in English, presumed to be understood by all speakers of South Africa’s 11 official languages as well as those logging in from other countries abroad. This occasionally leads to skirmishes about who gets to determine the languages spoken, with accusations of self-loathing bandied about. Generally, the board comments are a mixture of English, with a smattering of words from South Africa’s other official languages (especially Tswana, Zulu, Xhosa, and—to a lesser degree—Afrikaans) as well as slang (Tsotsitaal). Yet the English used, with its text-speak abbreviations and ellipses (the bloggers often use commas […], as opposed to the more standard […]]) creates a snappy, slangy rhetoric that mimics the tone of dialogue.

These users’ participation on the blog—linked with their passion for Generations and media in general—allows them to expand and perform versions of themselves that are rooted in the reality of their everyday experiences (complaining about over-attentive bosses or the rolling blackouts that plagued South Africa in 2009, for instance) as well as the playful flexibility germane to online communities. As the regulars began to build relationships with each other in the six months preceding the introduction of the “Gay Storyline,” their daily interactions began to take on the tone of the melodramatic serial they discussed, complete with micro-dramas and familial disputes. Indeed, following early jokes that they were the children to the proud papa Thabo, the family metaphor took on a real traction as each member was given a specific role to play.

Gensblog—as a venue for conversation about both “real” and “virtual” worlds and through accretion of members and the soap opera’s unfolding storylines—is a dynamic and high-stakes intimate public. The extended roll-out of the serialized storylines—where, as the saying goes, nothing ever happens—coupled with a group of regular viewers inclined towards self-dramatization with time on their hands, facilitated the creation of an intimate public that is an extension of the soapie world it centers upon. Troubling the question of reality on the soap opera (which is simultaneously lauded for being escapist and criticized for not being “real enough”), the message board becomes a space of discursive play and for the imagining of a particular Afropolitan identity and community. If a heterotopia functions as a mirror to the self, it does so through play and displacement: “it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.” 217

The interplay between reality and unreality allows for slippery identities, as it is unclear whether the posters are ever “really” who they say they are. However, the opacity of the online self—as “real” in its space as the embodied subject is in its own—allows for interactions that

both potentially transcend and uphold the norms of the particular culture. My analysis evokes the board’s primary “characters,” piecing together their public identities using their online names and basic information they dropped over the months and years they used the board. However, I also want to suggest that, as much as they were office workers, mothers, husbands—dealing with life’s mundanity, paperwork, and reheated lunches—*Generations* gave them permission to invent themselves, instigate any number of micro-dramas, and build genuine relationships with people they most likely wouldn’t have otherwise come across. Between the hours of 8 am and 5 pm (starting and quitting time) they are the stars of their own dramas.

Over time, users logging onto Gensblog formed what they called “the family,” mirroring the familial dramas that structure typify soap opera as a genre. Within *Generations*, this generic requirement often spun out into the dizzying family trees of the Mashabas and the Dholos, and their various illegitimate children. On Gensblog, this kinship structure started off as a general metaphor, (for example, an early user commented: “I really appreciate guys, each and everyone of us is getting this blog moving and I love it. We are family guys and this is a family discussion……..keep up the good work.”), before taking up a more specific structure. When one of the most popular commenters, Dee (“Mama Dee”) did not log onto the blog one day, Olivia (her “daughter,” and “twinny” to ChingChang) comforted those who were worried by assuring them that “she is working so hard to provide for the growing family since she is our mum,… and i guess she is doing over-time today,…..hope she will be here soon,,,,,,,,,lol” By the equating of Dee’s off-line employment with her on-line role as mother to the “GensBlog family,” Olivia is able to excuse Dee’s absence, while affirming her importance to their cohesion. Throughout her time on the board, Olivia is one of the users most dedicated to the family metaphor, frequently expressing joy at having found a community that allowed her to share—not only her thoughts on *Generations*, but on other topics as well. At another point she enthuses: “I am glad the family is growing uncontrollable,and ideas are flowing from cousin to sister…to aunt…to…..brother etc. I really love airing my views and in turn getting other people’s opinions on a certain subject.”

However, gaining access to the familial space of Gensblog does not come easily. There are certain codes of conduct to be followed, ways of gaining cultural capital to truly earn membership to the family. At a minimum, those who want to be family members must consistently participate in the daily life of the blog, commenting on either the narratives of the soap or the (often unrelated) discussions and banter between the members. As the blog moved away from its initial designation as a discussion board for the soap opera (and Thabo gave up on telling the participants to keep their comments on topic), so did the patience of the members wane for those who de-lurked only to never to return. Where each new member was once warmly welcomed to the family, in July 2009 Olivia decreed: “now we will welcome the other people as visitors,,,,,,,,they are not part of the family,,,,,,,,,if they were they wouldn’t have left us………they are visitors,,,,,,,,,that’s all.”

Beyond frequency of posting, as the board gained an increasing number of regular commenters, hierarchies began to be upheld and maintained, often dependent on the perceived wit and knowledge of the commenter. In her intensive study of the r.a.t.s. soap opera listserv, Nancy Bayin comments on the modes of discourse valued in the creation of a community of practice, through which “the social dimensions take over from the textual ones and an audience becomes a community.”

She isolates a variety of genres of online soap opera “talk” that facilitate community, including: sharing knowledge on a soap opera’s pasts; humor, especially that which demonstrates awareness of the soap opera’s own failings; and criticism that allows for creative engagement and rescripting of the perceived weaknesses. These discourses, mixed in with the daily gripes and the rituals of greeting and leave-taking, allow for the development of individual performed identities of the participants, of interpersonal relationships, and, perhaps most importantly, of a sense of play.

The early phase of Gensblog (from mid-2008 to mid-2009) saw its members feeling each other out and bonding over criticizing the show and emphasizing their intelligence as regular viewers. Posters often expressed the belief that they, the viewers, could write better storylines, asserting their authority as long-time viewers over those who have been hired to write but apparently do not really “know” the characters. This fan knowledge often is brought to bear on continuity issues, as well as questions about the soapie’s obligation to represent life as it “really is.” If the viewers perceive the soapie as having failed in its duty, they have no compunction in placing blame, and calling upon Generation’s creator and executive producer Mfundi Vudla by name to chastise him.

The question of the role of reality in soaps—and the role of soap-like melodrama in reality—has always been a part of soap audience’s viewing experience. As Robert Allen and others have pointed out, soap opera fans have often been popularly portrayed as being cut off from reality, unable to differentiate between the world they see on screen and the world off it. Indeed, as stories of soap opera villains being accosted on the street by rabid fans attest, not everybody understands that the modes of production that create the soapie. However, Gensblog members often play with reality/ies, inserting themselves into the storylines with glee. Olivia, for instance, had a running joke with people on the board that she was in love with Jason and had changed her name to O.J. Malinga (Olivia Jason Malinga) in anticipation of their nuptials. These playful discussions of “the real” would be harnessed into far more serious debates on gender roles and the moral and pedagogical requirements for soaps to represent the “real world” during the fallout of the Jason-Senzo kiss.

As Gensblog members began to know and enjoy each other on a daily basis, they also began to disclose information about their off-line lives, including gender, location, jobs, and family lives. In the first year of Gensblog’s existence, there are numerous examples of the board becoming a support system when its members were distressed. They provided, for instance, a positive feedback loop for ChingChang after she had gone on a disastrous second date with a man she had really liked that ended with him abandoning her in downtown Johannesburg when she wouldn’t sleep with him. Similarly, Dee asked and received advice when debating whether to date a co-worker who had a history of dating women in her department. Even Tbos, the blog’s resident agent provocateur, received sympathy when he expressed anguish that his wife was unwilling to forgive him after an affair. In some ways, these situations were familiar to those


explored on Generations—betrayal, inter-office romance, infidelity—and definitely held a desirable appeal for those rushing to give advice.

These confessions, often expressed in ALL CAPS, gave the blog members the moral authority to weigh in and actively affect the course of these mini-dramas in a way that they could never any of the soap operas. The enthusiasm with which they approached giving feedback suggests the lasting hold of “talk show culture” within South African media, perhaps most visible in the Daily Sun’s agony aunt “Sis Dolly” column, locally produced shows such as Talk with Noleen and Speak Out!, and SABC’s repeated reruns of Oprah. Yet, beyond the thrill of private lives aired in a public forum, the board member’s comments demonstrated a deepening connection between the members and the formation of the community as a safe, nonjudgmental social space.

This is not to say that the Family Members extended that attitude towards the show or towards the social world it depicted. Beyond their criticisms and nitpicks about the storylines (and not a post went by without at least one commenter complaining that the show was “boorrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
Thus civility is maintained, dissent is silenced, and the blog continues to build, its self-image as a family and safe, friendly space intact.

These small moments of tension, where outside prejudices and positions threaten to the ways in which the posters perceive their multiple “selves,” made clear the norms structuring the blog. The explosive reaction that the board would have to the gay storyline demonstrate the borders of tolerance in the virtual, real, and imagined spaces overlapping within GensBlog, proving it to be an implicitly gendered and heterosexual heterotopia.

The Kiss and the Fallout

Contrary to protestations that Senzo and Jason’s kiss came out of nowhere, board members had been speculating about Senzo’s sexuality for months, ever since his initial storyline establishing his paternity had wrapped up. Soap opera’s serial structure dictates that when one storyline ends, another opens up. Romance was the obvious next step for Senzo who, being young, cute, and wronged, was almost universally popular with the board. In May, four months before the kiss, Babyt’s comments suggest both admiration for Senzo as an ideal modern man and anxiety about his continued singlehood: “Senzo is very principled ,we nid mo of that in real life.guys nowadays r just full of gabbage.but soon we nid to see his other romantic side soon..how he kissses,chaffs a lady & even how he hold up a relationship.”

The anxiety underlying this “nid” [sic] to see Senzo in a heterosexual pairing continued to build as he was pursued by a number of Generations’ eligible women. The board debated the merits of each pairing and found them wanting. He seemed to flirt with older business woman Karabo, currently on a break with her partner Paul, but nothing came of it. They agree that scheming Dineo would eat him alive (Thulie: “ as it will be Senzo’s first love, i think he deserve someone nice and young…is he a virgin?…lol” When it looks like the show might set him with Sharon—who she sees as “A MAN AMONG MEN” Shawanda expresses the general indecision of the board: “Guys this Senzo and Gladys [another female character] wont work – but Senzo & Shaz wont be cool as well – it will seem like poor Shaz is just an extra in the soap who is meant to be rotated ammong the men in the soap. Hayi – thats not right at all!!! Senzo should be gay – that would give an interesting twist to his relationship with Sibusiso.” Olivia’s response demonstrates both her characteristic desire to not offend and her discomfort with the storyline: “Guys understand me well I didnt say that i hate gays, i dont have a problem with them nway, but thats my opinion I wouldnt love to watch gay scenes in our soapie.Seriously I dont have any hard feelings dear people.”

This debate continued unabated for the build up to Jason’s introduction on the soap opera on August 1, 2009, with the general arguments against a gay Senzo being: he is shy, he is troubled.


231 Shawanda, Ibid.

232 Olivia, Ibid.
by his past, he is slow (in comparison to “fast” Sharon), he is a gentleman, he cares about his friends too much to date their exes, and he is too caught up in lingering family drama. Extra-textually, most of the commenters don’t think Senzo is gay because they are not comfortable with it (like Olivia, they “wouldn’t love to watch gay scenes”), and because it changes their relationship to the character (Maqz: “when i first saw zenso i was so crazy about him, i loved the guy so much, now i hv realized that he is gay and he is no longer cute to me”). During this period (roughly May-July 2009) Senzo’s heterosexuality becomes for the women on the board the embodiment of a possible alternative, modern masculinity: “i think we really need more people who are like Senzo in this world, so honest and who have real love i realtime like this boy BIG UP SENZO!” (Nanunu). With so much invested in Senzo and his (heterosexual) romantic life, his homosexuality was not just a soap opera twist—it was the death of a particular dream.

That this storyline evolved over such a long period of time demonstrates the slow burn of soap opera and the painful pleasures of seriality. From his introduction to the soap opera, Senzo was a character shrouded in mystery without a clear origin and agenda. The viewers—especially those on the GensBlog boards—were encouraged to participate in the “fact-finding mission,” alongside the characters on screen, speculating on the “truth” and hypothesizing the twists and turns of the stories. Though the real-time nature of the soapie allows for a sense of time as being coterminous with the watching viewers, they are also aware of the larger, mechanisms through which the soap is produced, and familiar narrative patterns. The audience understands when the story being told is a romance and when it is not. During this period, Senzo interacted with a number of available women, and yet did not follow the usual script (hence the confusion about his love life, expressed by many above).

The bloggers created and debated possible counter-narratives, each trying to fit him into a particular (familiar) storyline, such as the untried youth (eventually maturing to manhood and heterosexual subjecthood) or the perfect, too-good-to-be-true romantic lead. Yet Senzo evaded these roles and, as it became increasingly clear that he was not interested in any of the women on the show, the gay hypothesis seemed increasingly likely. With this realization—gradual but undeniable—came ambivalent pleasures: joy at having “decoded” the truth ahead of time, discomfort with this truth will bring, and anticipation for the emotional fallout on the characters with whom the viewer had a longstanding relationship. Anticipation is built into the structure of the soap opera, from the level of narrative arc to the length of the scenes and placement of the camera. As Louise Spence has noted, some of soap operas’ greatest pleasure builds “between the time we realize what story this is (and thus, what will happen) and the time when it does happen.” If Senzo’s interactions with women did not fit into the normative expectations of the romance storyline, his initial interactions with Jason definitely did. Their first meeting in a bar is suggestive and flirty, causing the bloggers to immediately speculate on the possibility of the romance.

Despite this audience having predicted the events and their fall out months in advance, Jason and Senzo’s narrative was by no means appealing to the board members, who looked for any

other explanation for Senzo’s behavior. The narrative was structured in such a way to build anticipation, teasing the viewers into a frenzy: is he or isn’t he? Will they or won’t they? Linda, an advertising executive, is brought in as a potential (failed) love interest for Senzo, who seems to go back and forth about his interest in her. Even once Jason has been introduced—beginning the inevitable build up to “The Kiss,”— the writers keep open the possibility of a Senzo and Linda hook up. Senzo imagines himself kissing Linda at one point, before rejecting her real-life advances by telling her things are “complicated.” On the Friday before the kiss was screened, the regulars acknowledge the inevitability of the storyline, with user Mbalee commenting “I see a huge chemistry btwn Senzo and Jason…it’s quite obvious,” and Maqz resignedly agreeing: “eish i dont want that spark but its there.”

If the spark of their flirty interactions discomfited the board, Jason and Senzo’s actual kiss triggered a chain reaction of explosive vitriol, and marked a change from the board’s expressed desire for tolerance and familial unity. In the days following the kiss, the majority of regular bloggers expressed their displeasure in no uncertain terms, blaming the storyline for changing their viewing experience of the show. Tbos: “I cant continue t watch men kissing it is sooo not on and I have to feel enbarassed in front of my wife and kids.”

Thulie and Maqz express their desire to toyi-toyi to the SABC station in protest of the storyline. Despite having followed the show for years, several bloggers expressed untempered hate for the show—Olivia: “[I] am beginning to hate the soapie;” Maqz: “i hate generations;” and, much like those who joined the anti-Jason/Senzo Facebook group, vowed to stop watching the show if the storyline continued. When some bloggers tried to reason with those most loudly opposed, the nay-sayers refused to engage in any real debate: Thulie—“unfortunately guyz i can pretend as if i like it….sorry….sorry….i rather stop watching gen;” Praise—“oh my God what a shame, i will stop watching Generation if they want to strat this thing of GAY I hate it;” and BlackBeauty—“i dnt thnk i wl b able 2 watch Gen if m gona c the gay couple,,”

The response seems to stem from shared, deeply held (though rarely expressed) assumptions of the board members about African culture and Christian morality. Thulie states this bluntly, saying “guyz to be honest gay thing is not for Africans,” while Olivia asserts that “gays are not part of our African culture,,,.its American…….” Nosiphiwo B. expresses the complex anxieties around the interplay South African religions, cultures, and families, tied into the communal practice of viewing of soap operas:

236 This expression, an obvious riffing on the facebook relationship status option, became a catchphrase on the board in reference to Senzo’s sexuality and larger role on the soap opera, carrying several valences, dependent on the context of its use
238 Maqz, Ibid.
240 Olivia, Ibid.
241 Maqz, Ibid.
242 Thulie, Ibid
244 Black Beauty, Ibid.
246 Olivia, Ibid.

108
By adding gays and lesbians in my, our soap you are distroying the stats of soap, because Generations is a soap that is watched by families even in churches you will find leadership passing a positive comment about it. Guys we love the soap please do’nt kill our appeite on it by things that are not neccessary not because we are saying there are no gay/lesbian but we are crying and praying that God heal them holistically and if we clap uor hand on this Senzo and Jason story especially on Generations the whole South Africa will be lost i know because i even get angry when the preacher does’nt stop and it’s nearly 8h00. We often lough when fathers are teasing thier daughters about Senzo promising the to get him for them, guys we were giving uSenzo the everything award please rewright Senzo’s line please please we love him.

Here, in what is perhaps a typo, Nosiphiwo B tellingly claims ownership of the soap, both individually and collectively (“my,our soap”), and aligns the gay storyline with the symbolic destruction of the church, the family, and “the whole South Africa.” Her desperation to stop the gay storyline is specifically related to her (and her community’s) feelings about Senzo (“we were giving him the everything award”), and the love that they held/hold for his character. Once again, black queer presence places the “family” in a previously un navigated zone “between [the] borders” of love and rejection, of self and other.

Amongst the overall tide of anger and outrage expressed on the board, several of the regular members expressed tentative support for the storyline, arguing that the soap opera was merely reflecting the reality on the ground. Dee, for example, argues that “Mfundi is not promoting anything he is just facing reality and a soapei is not only about promoting it is about educating.” And Thando: “Thulie dear, i cant realy say its interestin 2c men kissin bt wen facing reality my darlin its happenin.Lets 4get abt interestin&focus on wats happenin on dis planet.”

Winston, a new voice on the blog, tries to contextualize viewer response in terms of larger structures of oppression:

> I don’t understand black people. *Uyazi [you know], I really don’t. For so many years, they fought against Apartheid, and opression, didn’t understand how white people could hate them for being black. Something that they couldn’t help. But black South Africans are xenophobic, and homophobic. They hate things they don’t understand. Whether you like it or not, gay people exist, whether white, black, purple blue. Kanti, people mustn’t come and say it’s not part of the “African” culture. Whites, coloureds, blacks, gays, we are all african because we all live in Africa. If you think it’s not happening, it’s happening out there. How about we try to start understanding, and stop hating. That’s what this country needs. Come on people, please, let’s applaud Mfundi and Generations for trying to show a real gay story. PLEASE…

---


Winston’s comments appeal to a geographical rather than cultural conception of Africanness, and tries to engage the board’s previously espoused Pan-Africanism. Tbos’ response to Winston, however, is deceptively simple, pointed, and polite: “Winston are you gay, my friend?” This question is posed to almost everybody who does not outright condemn the storyline, with the purpose of intimidating and invalidating their opinion. Thulie piggybacks on Tbos’ question, effectively shaming Winston and setting the tone for the discourse: “Morning Winston even if we all afrikaans but we different….and no offense this gay thing its not even created by God…its demonic wheather u like it or not…and we cant stand it when mfundi is promoting demones….nooooooooooooooo Winston […] are u also gay winston? that is not acceptable wheather u like it or not…”

Dee—the board’s “Mama”—increasingly became one of the few regulars with the power to question the homophobia expressed by some family members. She urges “Tbos stop it right there about questioning if winston is gay or not he is just telling the facts” and “thulie stop it please we need to accept people for who they are and who they choose to became people like Caster did not chose to be look like man and the whole world is judging the poor girl for her looks.” Presumably the difference lies in the question of choice, which Tbos seems to locate in the reproductive imperative: “all these gays do have semen to produce kids mos,,I am not going to do it for them they must make babies for themselves and stop being cowards choice choice „,what choise is this,,, pls don’t.”

Choice plays a large role in the construction of acceptable African modernities. Members of the board—with their fixation on the new and the modern—pick and choose which aspects of African modernities are desirable and which are degenerative. Ironically, for a discussion taking place on an online forum, a number of posters comment on the corrupting forces of technology. Winnie laments the accessibility of global mediascapes for changing mores: “The times has changed, our world has been exposed to this technology thing. we c what is happening in other areas of this earth so this generation is so fast.” Olivia, chatting from her job as an auditor in a shipping company in Nigeria, agrees, saying “technology„happening but its the fruits of the evil

251 Tbos, Ibid.
253 Dee, Ibid.
spirit.” Yet the following day, Maqz berates the character of Dineo for being backwards: “dineo is not thinking like a modern lady,,eish she only thinks stupid.”

While all of this is being debated, for the first time a number of gay posters come to comment on the board, answering the question: “are you gay?” with a definitive yes, and giving the bloggers feedback from a gay perspective. Zizi, for example, identifies himself as someone who works at the SABC in content development and answers Thando’s timid queury on his sexuality by responding: “Now Thando dear, why would that offend me? there really is no need to tip toe around gay people. That is just a term to define someone of a different sexual preference, it’s not derogatory.” In response to Tbos’ warning him of the coming judgment, Zizi retorts “Yes T Bos, that’s if I believe in that sanctimonious babble, are you sure you going to heaven yourself? I know that God loves me no matter what these so-called “christians” say, my struggles and successes bear testimony to that fact.”

Duane also comments on the presence of gays in their communities, saying “Gay people do exist.i’m a rugby player myself and who would have thought that a rugby player can be gay?black nogal [moreover]!” Duane and Zizi then get into a side-conversation on the merits of dating “straight men.” Banda—one who had sporadically commented on the blog in the past, chimed in with: I have been waiting for this scene to happen and now that it has happened!!! It gives me a reason to watch the soapie every night!!! Thank you for accomodating the minority like us and our interests!!! looking forward to the wedding of Jason and Senzo!"

The “regulars” are taken aback by the influx of so many new posters, and seem confused as how to address them. The following “side conversation” registers the queer, chaotic displacement of those who normally adhered to a strict hierarchy and rituals.

Mazow: Shooo the members r growing here,,,,, Thulie: the family is increasing ….wow! Tbos: But where does this family come from I think its a gay family here,,,, Tshili: i was also confused 2day mazow,the family is growing big. Mazow: I agree with u TBos why now out of a suddern,,,,,gay family,,,, Lindi: family is growing problem is they don’t introduce themselves so how can we welcome you guys sorry […] Why are ppl commenting like this today there is no order here where madam Speaker sort this out please Dee am not used to this mess Kiki: Hayibo Duane a lot of gayz in the gen family I can’t blive this.
Much as the Jason and Senzo kiss made explicit the presence of queer desire in their favorite soapie, the regular commenters of Gens Blog are also forced to confront the gay presence in their family. This was not the first time that queer sexuality had been introduced to the blog. Even before the Senzo/Jason storyline, sexuality was occasionally referenced, to mixed reactions. In one instance, SeanD, a regular poster from the earliest days on the board, unexpectedly came out and even expressed interest in someone on the board: “Hey people, nothing has changed…im still SeanD..the thing is u all knew i was female, yes, but i actually do prefer women you know…and one of you here has actually interested me quite a lot…i thought about her a lot while i was away….but dont be afraid.”  

Some people were taken aback—Maqz expressed gender confusion: “we hav been with SeanD for this long and she told us she is a she ,,now she has changed.” Some were accepting—Mbalee commented: “That’s cool SeanD, i see we are diverse here at the blog.” Overall, the general response was to move on—“oh guys stop it now about this shim thing does it matter heh,,,,,,,,” (Mazow)—and to ignore that it happened.

However, I noticed that SeanD was subsequently (and subtly) frozen out of the inner circle of the blog. When bloggers “enter the room” (log onto a post), they generally call out the names of their favorite family members. When family members do not log on for a period of time, their names are invoked and their whereabouts questioned. Each member has their own dramatic “storyline,” which is commonly referenced by all members; SeanD’s had been that she was in love with Vin (an occasional participant). “SeanD-and-Vin” were one of the boards imagined couples (“ChingChang and Tbos” are another—all men on the board become hot commodities). Once SeanD admitted that she preferred women, “SeanD-and-Vin” were no more. SeanD was no longer hailed on the blog, and shortly thereafter stopped logging on altogether. Vin, interestingly, came out of the woodwork in the backlash of the kiss, and was one of the few arguing in support of the storyline, pointing out the hypocrisy of traditional, patriarchal heterosexuality.

Vin’s questioning of the norm was not appreciated by the family members. The previous day, Vin’s support of the gay storyline had called his loyalty to the board—already tenuous as he was seen as a troublemaker—into question. Shone: “Eish Vin my live, you know too much wena man… I thought we were team are you what? Stop it!!! Are you sure you are one of us??” Shone’s turn of phrase is important here. Vin’s membership in the family was clearly linked to his assumed affiliation to a homophobic norm. How could Vin be “one of us” if he does not follow the family line? Though the family prided itself on its tolerance and diversity, the Jason-Senzo storyline created a line in the sand, both for viewers of the show and within the imagined community that had been carefully built up around it.

Even “Mama Dee” is not immune to accusations of disloyalty, leading to the largest schism in Gen Blog’s year-and-a-half existence. Both she and Tbos—as two of the board’s most prolific posters—had recently been promoted to moderator status, in charge of writing the daily “recap” and “teaser” posts. Dee, who had become increasingly upset with the direction of the “kiss” conversation, posted an informative, motivational list entitled: What is a Gay or Lesbian (homosexual) Person or a Bisexual Person? This post served to redirect the anger from the

265 Maqz, Ibid.
266 Mbalee, Ibid.
267 Mazow, Ibid.
269 Dee, “What is a Gay or Lesbian (Homosexual) or Bi-Sexual Person?” Gensblog (blog), September 2, 2009, http://www.gensblog.co.za/2009/09/02/what-is-a-gay-or-lesbian-homosexual-person-or-a-bi-sexual-person.
soap opera and the storyline towards the perceived traitor in their midst. Dee’s post provided them with an opportunity to air their views on homosexuality freely, to mock its rhetoric, and to circle the wagons by making explicit what was once implicit about the family (what Berlant refers to as he presumption of a “share[d] worldview and emotional knowledge”)

Olivia asserts that “Gayness is a sickness INDEED it is a confusion in the brain and it needs prayers coz there is no cure it is just like being mad.” 270 Tbos agrees that “gays relationship are mostly about sex and nothing more,” 271 adding that as a deacon in his church he has an obligation to “tell others to quit being GAY my friend „,I mean do you know why this topic today and now at this point in time „,that is because God is talking to you and me and all of us : so go and warn others the clock is ticking and I am not joking now.” 272 Tbos’ abrupt change in tone suggests the ingrained psycho-social-religious rhetoric that is drawn upon to forestall any further debate. He emphasizes the import of this rhetoric as separate from the daily banter of the blog: he is not joking. Similarly, Olivia refuses to be teased about her crush on Jason, saying that “the Jason thing was not real hey,,,,but what am saying today is on a high note,,am serious with what am saying today.” 273 The “gay storyline,” it seems, had allowed reality to penetrate the play space created both the familial pleasures of both the soapie and Gens Blog.

Finally, after Dee expresses support for the comments written by pro-gay blogger Gee, she becomes the target of a family turning in on itself—she becomes suspect, the Other. Thulie: “Dee are u real straight”? 274 And Tbos: “Dee is just coming out of the closet guys and she is launching it on the blog,,I must say you’ve got style Dee.” 275 Dee’s generally open attitude towards sexuality once made her a hit on the blog. The previous week, she had joked that she loved Sibusiso’s wife Ntombi so much that “I want to try lesbian […] I want to date Ntombi Khumalo[…]I want someone with big backseat like Ntombi.” 276 In that context—of play, of trying on the fantasy—Dee’s sexual openness was part of per persona, part of her joke. Then, Olivia delights in Dee’s subversive humor: “am still laughing,,,you guys are so naughty hey,,,Dee you wanna try lesbian.” 277 At an earlier point, she had hinted that she was bisexual (saying “I am both” in the “shim discussion” 278) but, tellingly, it had been ignored, folded into the family closet never to be mentioned again. Now, however, Dee’s identity is suspect. Ndina—who had interacted with Dee daily and warmly for over a month—suddenly wonders whether Gee was Dee’s alter-ego: “Dee & Gee (same huh) Bet its one person.” 279 When Maqz teased Tbos, he shifted the blame to Dee by wondering “Maqz why arte you attacking me now coz it’s dee thats gay not meee.” 280

For her part, Dee doesn’t back down and throws her allegiance in with the Gens Blog’s “gay family,” at the risk of alienating the rest of the board. She comments: “Gee I am not scared of

---

270 Olivia, Ibid.
271 Tbos, Ibid.
272 Ibid.
273 Olivia, Ibid.
274 Thulie, Ibid.
275 Tbos, Ibid.
277 Ibid.
280 Tbos, Ibid.
them we fight every day.”281 This phrase is intriguingly vague in its referents. Though the “them” is clearly “the family,” the “we” can refer to either the family (and its tendency to in-fight), or extend out to include Gee—and, by proxy, the larger “gay family,” having to “fight every day.” When questioned about her sexual identity—a veiled threat in the context of the anti-gay sentiment on the board—Mama Dee takes a clear stance: “I am everything.”282

The day following the kiss, the board decided that in order to preserve the family, they would no longer discuss “this gay thing.” This became easier than usual, as, after having shocked the country with the kiss, the writers then kept Jason and Senzo apart for the next month and a half. Senzo went off to Cape Town to process and Jason started a brief romance with Linda—in part to make Senzo jealous. Within a week, the slow burn of “will-they-won’t-they?” had the bloggers once again expressing interest in the storyline, despite their expressed distaste for it. Partially, this interest comes from sympathy with Senzo’s plight, as potentially rejected lover and son (Thulie: “eish Senzo is real confuse [.... ]. I think he real love Jason....”283 and ChingChang: “Eish i almost cried yesterday when Senzo was trying to explain to daddy eish poor guy.”284). Partially, Jason’s bisexuality (“double adapter”) provided a more recognizable pattern of same-sex desire (the masculine man who still desires women, or at least can play that role). As the storyline continued, the board members took to feminizing Senzo—jokingly calling him “the princess”—which allowed him to become more intelligible/relatable to them. Even Maqz, one of the most adamantly anti-gay of the posters following the kiss, recognizes Senzo as a potential heir to gripping family drama: “i think this senzo guy is going to have a complicated life in gens like karabo,„,[the main female character]”285 Later, she actually roots for him to reach some self-acceptance just to move the story along: “Senzo should just accept who he is as he is getting in my nevs.”286 Primarily, though, the anticipation inherent in the oft-repeated phrase “wait and see”—especially in relation to Senzo’s coming out to his uber-masculine father—propelled the continued interest of the family members.

Though their interest in the soapie continued unabated, the intimate public of the board—the family—had been destabilized. Divisions that had previously been muted and hastily smoothed over, became more apparent. Dee became increasingly scapegoated, as ChingChang used her fall from favor to jockey for a better position. Always insecure and jealous, ChingChang became incensed when Dee jokingly insinuated that ChingChang was dating Tbos. While this sort of micro-drama was not unusual for Dee’s trickster role on the board, ChingChang took offense (perhaps because it was a tad too near the truth), and used Dee’s waning popularity to stage a day-long “boycott” of the board with Maqz and Olivia’s support. From this point onward, the atmosphere on the board changed. Despite Tbos’ attempts to moderate by calling a “family meeting,” animosity between certain members overwhelmed the previous rituals of civility. It seems that once the heterosexual heterotopia had been breached, all bets were off. Within two

281 Dee, Ibid.
282 Ibid.
284 ChingChang, Ibid.
285 Maqz, Ibid.
weeks, of the gay storyline the family was in peril: As Thulie fretfully put it, “I think this blog is falling apart.”

The hostility of Gensblog’s response towards the Jason and Senzo storyline may seem bizarre from those who considered themselves urbane and tolerant, and who had predicted the storyline months in advance. Yet I would argue that it was less the presence of homosexuality (and homosexuals) in Generations—fodder for speculation and gossip—than it was the visibility of it. The kiss momentarily destroyed the assumed worldview that had structured the community as a unified audience, drawing out the most deeply held beliefs about homosexuality and African identity. These responses are both collectively shared and intensely and personally affective. Had the storyline been handled differently—Jason and Senzo had talked about their feelings, say, rather than making the subtext explicit with the kiss—the viewer response might have been different and more muted. Phobs’ comment (in all caps) suggests that the storyline might have been more palatable to audiences had it been handled differently: “THE HOMOSEXUAL SCENE IN GENERAL WAS NOT NECESSARY FOR THE AUDIENCE. IF SENSO WOULD HAVE EXPRESSED HIMSELF TO ONE OF HIS FRIENDS OR HIS FATHER ABOUT HIS IDENTITY THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN ACCEPTABLE.” According to this poster, it wasn’t so much the (homosexual) identity that was unacceptable to the audience, as it was the enactment of it—“the scene.” The kiss.

The intensity of the reactions expressed around the kiss—particularly disgust and fear—suggest the affective stakes and particularly graphic meanings “stuck” (in Sara Ahmed’s phrasing) to male same-sex intimacy. For some viewers the kiss cuts into deeply rooted senses of masculinity. Tbos, especially, seems to dwell in the scatological details of gay sex, released in the act of two men (briefly) touching lips: “my dick likes those [vagina] lips if you get me and not the sh..t ass euww.” Many family members, such as Lindi, similarly make the associative move from viewing Jason and Senzo’s kiss to “GAY IS DIRTY ,SICK AND IMAGINE ASS HOLE FULL OF KAK CAN’T IMAGINE AM VOMITING.” The rhetoric of sickness—as well as body fluids—permeates the board’s initial discussion of the kiss alongside a parallel discussion of homosexuality-as-sickness. The fear of contagion also found expression in the belief that the show was promoting homosexuality.

Sibusiso’s trajectory—from putting his son’s partner in the hospital with a concussion, to accepting them both into his business and his family—dramatized the immediate, visceral response of many of the viewers and, perhaps, subtly allowed them some distance from which to view and critique their initial reaction. Producer Boesak remarked that this was intentional, using the viewers daily identification with the characters to move them to a more accepting place, vocalizing the viewers’ thought process thus:

‘Ngamla hit his son, and I would have done the same thing, but shoo, look how far he’s come, he’s now accepted his son, isn’t that wonderful?’ Without knowing, they’ve gone through that whole journey with Ngamla. They were also mortified

---

290 Ibid.
and disgusted and grossed out, and they would have fetched the sjambuck too. And when he came around, they came around with him. Amazingly enough.”

“We are all Gay Today”: Deliberation and Change

If the viewers eventually came around with Ngamla, it was through a process of identification and the creation of new affective meaning. It might seem difficult to parse out the “deliberation”—that is, actual engagement—in the emotional outpour of anger and hate in the initial reaction to the storyline. And yet, I would argue that the way this intimate public was set up—to privilege affect and the “familial” bonds—allowed for an extended, evolving dialogue alongside the unfolding storyline of the “soapie.” In a country deeply divided on issues of race, class, nationality, sexuality, and gender, there are few spaces where people can speak across these lines, without talking at cross purposes. Though often painful, the dialogue opened on Gensblog mediated between the images reflected onscreen and the ways in which each commenter approached these issues in real life. This was not only true of the Jason-Senzo storyline, but also of a concurrent storyline where young professional Khetiwe is repeatedly abused by her boyfriend Dumisane. Though this plot brought out painful, personal stories from both abused and abusers on the board (and caused several members to briefly leave Gensblog), it also laid the ground for a passionate and unusually frank debate about gender roles, the definition of abuse—how emotional and physical abuse differed—and what was necessary to make modern marriages work. The high emotional stakes—intensified by the identification with the characters on the soapie—upped the incentive to find a workable solution. Because of board members support and the dialogue that resulted from watching the Dumisane/Khetiwe storyline, for instance, Stacy—Zimbabwean poster in an abusive marriage—decided to leave her husband.

Acceptance of the gay storyline (and African same-sex attraction) did not come quickly on Gensblog and, indeed, was part of a larger shift in the board’s tone and membership. In the six month’s following the initial kiss, the blog underwent a number of changes. Of those who threatened to abandon the show (and the blog), Olivia stopped posting; BlackBeauty and Thulie continued. ChingChang moved to the Eastern Cape to return to school and did not have consistent Internet access. Dee continued to post, but less frequently, as she was retrenched from her job (perhaps for her constant internet use?) and then became sick and had to work from home, where she had no computer. New bloggers joined the family. Meanwhile, Jason and Senzo’s relationship unfolded slowly, often in the background to other, heterosexual couples. The discussion about their relationship became increasingly about how their characters affected the plot, rather than a fixation on its homosexual nature.

However, it was Tbos—who remained the blog’s most vocal champion and provocateur—whose beliefs underwent the most visible restructuring, in part due to several frank discussions that he had with Zizi. Zizi, the black gay man who worked at the SABC, returned to the board periodically, and his presence provided Tbos with an opportunity to pose question that he otherwise would never have gotten answers to. Though these questions were often predictably graphic and focused on the scatagorical (e.g.: “isn’t a gay relationship mainly about sex?” and “Another thing that I am interested in finding out is what do you feel in the ass I mean is it nice „or what?”) they also gestured to a basic desire to understand what it means for Zizi to be a black gay man, and fellow human being. As Tbos haltingly explained, “you are a human

291 Boesak, interview.
being „gay or not but do you understand how weired this is„„ its just out of the ordinary.”293 When Zizi comments that he had decided to live his life as “a homosexual man, who doesn’t understand why he is different, but has taken a conscious decision to embrace himself as also a human being who needs to love and be loved despite what mainstream society says,”294 Tbos—who had previously stated that God had warned him to tell gays to “stop being gay” or else—encouraged Zizi to “keep coming to the blog hey „ppl can learn a lot through you and maybe 1 day you can also learn a lot about ppl.”295 As Zizi makes his goodbyes, Tbos is practically effusive: “sorry zizi but you are the most inspiring gay person on the blogg we love you,,thats why when you come we feel the need to talk gay well even the heading says „heita [hey there!] to gays so we were all gay today,,,,,,,,with that its adios from moa!”296

The statement “we are all gay today,” is striking on a number of levels. It suggests a shared humanity, an empathetic leap that embraces a more inclusive vision of the self (and the familial community on the board). However, it is also a time-bound acceptance, an instance where future tolerance is not ensured. Indeed, if Senzo and Jason (and Zizi) created a model for visible black African homosexuality, it is one that is relatively non-threatening and gender-normative. It is a conditional acceptance. When Thulie asks if Zizi “walks with ur hands up, and do those funny talks,”297 Tbos reflects that “yah thulie they exaggerate I think they are the ones that make ppl freak out about gays,, they should keep it real like Senzo and Jason they look ok.”298 In order to have “good gays,” there must be “bad gays,” to blame for and naturalize homophobia.

Yet, though Tbos’ distaste for effeminate gays is in itself problematic (as is the general “pass” from criticism Jason gets on the blog for being bisexual or “still a real man”), his acceptance of Jason and Senzo, as well as his distancing himself from those who “freak out about gays” is a marked change from his earlier visceral response, and demonstrates his willingness to reposition himself as accepting and not judging. As he later tells Zizi: “dont judge yourself its not your duty,,keep doing right and let God decide zizi.”299 This attitude allows for a comparative view of homosexuality as being equivalent to other types of differences, and a way of escaping thought patterns that associate queerness as particularly untraditional and therefore unAfrican. Tbos muses, in a discussion about tradition and nature: “hey Dee ,,you and zizi were talking about Senzo and Jason,, and I was just thinking,, neh,, some things are traditional some are natural,,, like circumcision ,,it is traditional to have your pipis skin cut off but its not unnatural to leave the skin on.”300

This isn’t to say that board members suddenly were able to get past their hang-ups around homosexuality. For every accepting comment he made, Tbos would come back with another comment that questioned the morality of homosexuality, or was casually homophobic in his use of the words stabane and moffie. Eventually, Zizi stopped coming to the board, perhaps tiring of having to defend his sexual identity to people who never really seemed able to fully accept him.

---

293 Ibid.
294 Zizi, Ibid.
295 Tbos, Ibid.
296 Ibid.
297 Thulie, Ibid.
298 Tbos, Ibid.
299 Tbos, “Ajax is also gay?” Gensblog (blog), January 5, 2010, www.gensblog.co.za/2010/01/05/ajax-is-also-gay.
300 It is common for Xhosa South African men to go through a process of initiation in “bush schools” when they reach puberty, where they are then circumcised by an elder. Circumcision is closely linked with manhood in these contexts. Tbos, “Tradition Sucks!” Gensblog (blog), January 7, 2010, www.gensblog.co.za/2010/01/07/tradition-sucks.
Yet Zizi’s influence—and his comments from an African gay perspective—continued to be felt whenever gay issues were brought up. Palm86, a 24 year old Xhosa man working in Cape Town who joined the blog around in the wake of Sibusiso’s sjambok attack, would frequently make comments such as “I am very homophobic, just like Dlomo!” Upon hearing this, Tbos wondered “where is Zizi anyways he should come here and defend gay community… he does that so well that guy, I miss him lots, but dont tell him.” When Palm86 suggests that violence towards gays, both Thulie and Tbos—initially two of the most virulently anti-gay posters on the board—protest:

**Tbos:** thats drastic […] We have gay pipol here and ,, we cant promote hate speech or can we?Ziziiiiiiiiiii

...

**Thulie:** “oh no Palma86.”

As two of the most prominent male bloggers, Tbos and Palm86 frequently got into sparring matches, which often ended in them insulting each others penis size. Tbos viewed Palm86 as a cocky upstart, and increasingly distanced himself from Palm86’s homophobic taunts. Sensing Palm86’s discomfort with homosexuality, Tbos took to flirting with Palm86 to get a reaction out of him: “Palm I was persuing your pictures on FB and saw how good looking you were thats why I opted on being gay,, so what do you say? huh? huh…. huh?It will be our little secret,” “304 Tbos’ decision to position himself as a secret gay—however facetiously—is significant for a number of reasons. It demonstrates the ways in which homosexuality had been incorporated into the repertoire of “the family’s” identity play, and explicitly so; not only are grandfathers allowed to have (invisible) boyfriends, but now there are spaces for openly gay cousins and come-ons. Tbos’ flirting also converts Palm86’s sexual anxiety into a laughing matter, rendering his homophobia ridiculous.

Gensblog is a space where serious issues are mulled over, debated, mocked, and—to a degree—resolved. The discussions instinctively operate within a framework that works towards resolution, mimicking the deep emotional desire for a storyline to have a “happy ending.” Though Tbos and the others may never be pro-gay, their experience with *Generations* and the blog provide a shift in perspective to one that is far more dialogic and nuanced than their initial response to the kiss. Each subsequent kiss shared between Jason and Senzo (notably, there were not many), resulted in fewer and fewer comments.

**Conclusion:**

As one of the most visible and popular shows in South Africa to have included black gay men, *Generations* is also one of the most-shared cultural reference points amongst a large portion of the population. Jason and Senzo’s relationship threw the issue of queer black African identity out of the pulpits and into the living rooms of millions of South Africans. Viewers of *Generations* continue to tune in to SABC 1 at 8 PM, Monday through Friday, as they have for

---

302 Tbos, Ibid.
303 Thulie, Ibid.
over 18 years, driven by a desire to identify with successful black characters. Though the initial impact of same-sex intimacy within *Generations* shook the viewing public to its core, the daily pleasures of watching and then discussing with friends and family (both on and off-line), made the affective bonds between the viewers and their soapie that much stronger. Without quite being aware of it, they had incorporated Jason and Senzo into their daily life, and—through anticipatory narrative that teases catharsis and closure—started rooting for their reincorporation into the *Generations* family. Gensblog is a record of some of the reactions and traces of a moment where an intimate public were shaken, when the implicit rules guiding the overlapping media spaces were changed, and people were struggling to shift alongside rather than abandon one of the cultural yardsticks against which they measured their identity.

Importantly, *Generations* provided a framework for popular understandings of black queer South African identity. For producer Boesak, this shift was most apparent when her friend, a law professor at the University of Witwatersrand, mentioned that she was able to engage her students on issues around sexuality by using Jason and Senzo as a reference point towards understanding and accepting legislation that had been previously passed: “Now, when they discuss [the legalization of gay marriage] they discuss the fact that *Generations* has made it acceptable in society. So, even though the Case Law had been passed, what made it acceptable in society was that they saw it every night on *Generations*.”305 Though homosexuality’s “acceptability” in larger South African society is debatable, Jason and Senzo created a familiar reference point. Indeed, when referring to gays following the kiss, Gensblog members tended to refer to it as “this Jason and Senzo thing,” a shorthand that became more affectionate and less accusatory as time passed.

Perhaps more significantly, Jason and Senzo provide a model for young gay men who otherwise would have only heard about black queerness obliquely, through “after-nine” relatives or stereotyped rent boys on television. For Sbu, a university student who attended the GALA discussion session, Jason and Senzo’s romance is so important because “it’s normal. They have a home together, they live together, they get along with each other—from the last time I saw—they aren’t cheating. Because being a gay person now and trying to navigate the relationship business, you know… it’s treacherous, it’s horrible. People cheat and lie to you. But with them, they’re adults, they’ve reached the level that I hope to reach as well.” If *Generations*’ original mandate showed that black people can be successful, then the Jason and Senzo storyline demonstrated that black men can be successful and love each other as well. As the storylines became less focused on their sexuality and more on the backstabbing, high powered business world, Jason and Senzo have been treated like normal soap opera protagonists—flawed, occasionally duplicitous, but generally honest and committed to each other.

Yet normalcy is a double-edged sword. On June 8, 2012— as Jason and Senzo were feeling the tension of a brief break up and a tentative reconciliation—another black gay man, Thapelo Makuthle, was found nearly decapitated in the Northern Cape town of Kuruman. Makuthle, a volunteer for the Northern Cape organization LEGBO, had identified as both gay and transgender, had a drag persona named Miss Bling, and had recently been crowned Miss Kuruman in a local pageant. Despite a shared race and sexual orientation, Thapelo Makuthle was the polar opposite of Jason and Senzo—feminine presenting, low income, living in a small town abutting the Kalahari Desert.

If Jason and Senzo had made black queerness more acceptable (or at least more public) in South Africa, it is still a very homonormative performance. By normalizing an elite, well-
connected, masculine performing couple, Generations runs the risk of setting up a good gay/bad gay dichotomy, which only further entrenches pre-existing gendered and classed divisions within South African society. This attitude can be seen on the boards, even as its members come around to more “liberal” points of view. Thulie—who was one of those most horrified by the initial kiss—eventually comes around to the belief that agrees that gays can be acceptable “if they can keep it real like Senzo and Jason.”

The internet, as a “disembodied” space, allows for fluidity of identity performance, but it also occludes difference and encourages surveillance. Zizi was an “acceptable gay” on Gensblog because, in part, the board members did not have to deal with the materiality of his black queer body and its desires. Those reading at home could picture themselves speaking to a Jason or a Senzo, or whatever version of a gay man that was least offensive to them. At the level of language and wordplay, Zizi was able to claim normality, and even superiority. Yet even he wondered whether he would be accepted if he were more effeminate: “Maybe if I was too much of [uchoma] [girlfriend] they[…] wouldn’t stand me.”

Ultimately, soap operas and websites, much like performance, are always in motion, exceeding any attempts to document, summarize, or assign stable meaning. Over the course of writing and revising this chapter, I was shocked to find one day that Gensblog had mysteriously disappeared: when typing its URL into the address bar in October 2013 to check my citations, I was confronted with a blank page. Though I was eventually able to access the addresses of individual cached posts by typing in quotations and dates pulled during my initial research, I was unable to access the blog comments when I clicked on the link. The traces have disappeared. Viewed in terms of their material existence—their accessibility—these conversations, processes of deliberation on which I spent so many months of my own life deliberating, might as well never have happened at all.

Yet in this disappearance, I am reminded of Peggy Phelan’s definition of performance as a process that “honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward.” Gensblog, as a time/space in which a small group of people shared an experience and created relationships that were profoundly important, is in itself a performance, a prismatic engagement of actors across the “time/space” of a real and imagined South Africa. In their study of “data archeology” and surveillance in social networks, Jason Nolan and Michelle Levesque observe that when looking for ones “self” on the internet, one encounters “a fragmentary collage, ever shifting and evolving, where information is lost, found, dredged up, occluded; an ‘endless displacement’ of who we are that is both of questionable authenticity and beyond our control. But that does not make it useless to the gravedigger.”

Writing on performance plays a sort of revivifying, restorative role, adding yet another dimension and iteration to the event; the author becomes linked to the object and, through the act of writing, becomes part of the collage, enters the prism. Gensblog—initially a fragmented archive, now an invisible repertoire—provided its participants a space of reception and imagination, where deeply-held beliefs could be both playfully challenged and seriously deliberated. It may not have left a “visible trace”—outside of, perhaps, this dissertation—but, as

Fiske notes, it is the inaccessible and invisible “currents of meaning…[that] carry the most significant connections between the points of visibility.”\textsuperscript{309}

\textsuperscript{309} Fiske, Media Matters, 7.
Conclusion

This dissertation has analyzed a number of queer performances that work within and against dominant post-apartheid nationalisms. Throughout, I posed the question of how queer performances could animate a socially fractured society, and how audiences might adapt their particular affective attachments—particularly to racialized concepts of Africanness—in relation to queer bodies in their midst. Where most scholars of South African sexualities have focused on either textual/symbolic or material/ethnographic archives, I have sought to illustrate how an analysis attentive to embodiment and relationality reveals and makes palpable the contractions structuring post-apartheid life. These performances occurred on different stages and scales and revealed the ways in which the norms governing these spaces could be challenged, dis-oriented, and re-oriented through alternate ways of seeing, being, and feeling South African.

Despite my use of an optical metaphor, these performances’ prismatic function resists the visible and discourses of “visibility” that can often hinder both academic criticism and political activism. Zanele Muholi and Mamela Nyaucza, for instance, use the black lesbian’s paradoxical relationship with visibility and violatability to draw attention to the audiences’ desire to see her victimhood performed. By avoiding a direct visual representation of rape, they gesture towards its experiential affects and the ways in which everyday violence both dehumanizes and objectifies. The members of the Chosen FEW, who choose to harness the rhetoric of queer visibility, do so through over-performed, citational performances (“swagga”) in order to protect those parts of themselves that are vulnerable. The deliberation that happened on Gensblog was able to develop, in part, because the bodies of the participants were invisible to each other; the disembodied space of Gensblog allowed for a different kind of performative relationality, where identities were created through daily interaction in virtual space.

The duration of each of these performances—be they an hour-long cabaret, the length of an exhibition, a few years of daily visits to a website, or over a course of a lifetime—draws attention to both the spatial and temporal dimensions of the word “stage.” Pieter-Dirk Uys and Steven Cohen each used the immediate post-apartheid moment to stage dramatically different versions of whiteness on a variety of stages; yet, as their performances were never accompanied by any meaningful economic transformation (and, unbeknownst to them, coincided with the early stages of South Africa’s neoliberal policies), the alternative versions white Africanness previewed were never to be fully realized. Indeed, the few decades of the post-apartheid era could be said to show a similar pattern: acts, such as voting, that were once imbued with the possibility of enacting radical change and transformation, lose their meaning through repetition without any sort of different outcome. The lesbian community members organizing the march against abuse by the Vosloorus police (where I met Manika in 2010) had, in order to get their permit, been required to petition the same local police whose brutality they were protesting.

Even as queerness has the potential to dislodge calcified narratives, it can, as was so aptly apparent in Joburg Pride 2012, also be easily co-opted into those narratives. None of the performances discussed in this dissertation operate outside of capital or the dominant frameworks of a racist, sexist, homophobic society. Stereotypes can be carelessly reiterated, as Cohen’s display of Nomusa Dhlamini in the nude demonstrates. New images, such as Muholi’s overwhelmingly butch Faces and Phases series, can create new limits for representation. Even when space seems to be made for queer Africans, as it was on Gensblog, it is still governed and disciplined by ever-more-rigid gender norms.
I complete this dissertation in the immediate wake of an event that will most likely shape the contours of the post-apartheid era for years to come. On December 5, 2013 Nelson Mandela died, following a protracted illness, at the age of 95. Though he had not been actively involved in politics for over a decade, Mandela’s death heralds, for many, the end of an era: yet another transition from a known past to an unknown future. In this context it seems appropriate to return to Albie Sachs’ comments, made on the cusp of democracy: “[w]e all know where South Africa is, but we do not yet know what it is.” South Africa without Nelson Mandela as its lodestar and reference point is arguably a nation disoriented and dislocated from its founding myths.

Rather than attempt to theorize South Africa’s identity in the post-Mandela era, I want to circle back to the moment where this dissertation began, an alternate—albeit much smaller— example of how a disorienting and deconstructive act can have a number of reorienting effects. Though the One-in-Nine Campaign’s interruption of the 2012 Joburg Pride march had no other stated goal than to draw attention to the “economic apartheid” of certain LGBT spaces in South Africa, the attention it drew and the affects it generated had long-lasting results. Within months, the entire corporate entity of Joburg Pride imploded under the weight of bad publicity and infighting resulting from the fallout of the protest. In April 2013 the Pride board resigned en masse, citing heightened security costs in Rosebank following the parade’s interruption as making the event financially unsustainable. With this resignation, Joburg Pride was—without funding and leadership less than six months before the next year’s event—effectively cancelled.

Blame was leveled at both the board and at the One-in-Nine protesters; subsequent meetings between various stakeholders to launch a new Pride were fraught with anger and accusations. In a move telling of the country’s continued balkanization, Pride finally fractured into a number of prides, each with its own location and community-specific agenda. Soweto and Ekhuruleni prides, sponsored by FEW and the Coalition for African Lesbians (CAL) respectively, continued to put forward an explicitly political agenda, addressing the needs of communities where being visibly queer is often seen as a provocation for violence.

Another group of community and corporate stakeholders, responding for calls to make Pride more accessible, planned a Pride celebration similar in structure to the old one, but taking place in Mary Fitzgerald Square in the city proper. Billed as taking Pride “back to our roots,” the interracial 2013 Joburg Pride committee targeted Newtown, a relatively gentrified area near the city center, as a space that is both public and privatized. It was near enough to the Bree Taxi rank to allow easy access for people coming from the townships, but also easily containable by security should things not go according to plan.

Yet this event, too, came into conflict: the chairwoman running the event was allegedly attacked on three separate occasions by assailants specifically telling her to cancel Newtown Pride. Just days before the September 24th event was supposed to take place, the Pride Committee announced that it had decided to postpone the celebration for a month which, for security reasons, would now take place in Sandton. If Hillbrow is one of the most populous areas on the continent, Sandton, the suburb where Johannesburg Stock Exchange has relocated following the white flight from the inner city, has the continent’s highest concentration of Dollar Millionaires per capita. Though “Sandton Pride,” as it was dubbed in the media, maintained its theme of “back to our roots,” the explicit “rooting” of LGBT Pride in the streets of Sandton made clear that very little had changed since 2012 Joburg Pride. Indeed, the move to Sandton resulted in Pride being further from the city center than ever before: where Rosebank was eight kilometers from Johannesburg’s city center (and minibus taxi hubs), Sandton is 28 kilometers away.
Finally, a group of queer organizers and activists calling themselves the People’s Pride—many from the One-in-Nine campaign and FEW—organized a march to take place in Hillbrow, the site of the original Johannesburg Pride March, to re-envision a relationship between queer South Africans and their communities and to connect these struggles. Hillbrow, in 1990, was a rare interracial neighborhood known for its vibrant gay nightlife. Home to multiple bars and even a gay church, it was one of the few “safe” spaces for queer South Africans to be publically out. Following the transition to democracy, however, Johannesburg’s inner city—once the center of apartheid’s economic infrastructure—had seen huge population shifts, as its white inhabitants moved to the suburbs. Immigrants from the rest of the continent took advantage of the constitution’s promise that South Africa “belongs to all who live in it” and migrated both legally and extra-legally to the newly vacated high-rises of the inner-city. Now the most densely populated mile in the southern hemisphere, Hillbrow has become a spatial boogeyman of the New South Africa, synonymous with crime and urban blight, a space seen as being “unsafe” for gays (and, indeed, for anyone who could afford to live elsewhere).

By returning to the site of the original parade, the organizers encouraged the marchers to performatively (re)imagine a future that is a continuation of a larger struggle for a free and equal South Africa, built explicitly on feminist and anti-racist politics. Hillbrow had undergone dramatic changes in the intervening 23 years, making clear that the battles for human dignity and recognition that had motivated the original protest were still being fought, albeit on a different ground. As their manifesto states: “we call for a pride that is a microcosm of the society we wish to live in and not a mirror of the divided one that we currently live in. We wish Pride to be a space that all can access, where all can be free, and where every voice is important.” (emphasis mine). On October 5, 2013 about 500 people of all races and genders gathered at Constitution Hill, the “home” of the Constitution before marching into Hillbrow. As marchers made their way through the streets, dancing in outrageous drag, riding their bicycles under rainbow flags, and bringing out their best swagga, they did so under the watch of thousands of residents above. It was the largest audience that the parade had had for years.

Despite the complete collapse of the corporate entity that was Johannesburg Pride, One-in-Nine’s performance at the 2012 Pride was generative rather than destructive. It created space for an unusually public discussion on the nature of pride itself and how the struggle against homophobic oppression aligns or departs from the struggle against other systems of oppression. Through this realignment—to, once again, return to Sara Ahmed’s conception of the line of possibility—new lines and repertoires were created through old fractures. Where the “unity” narrative, so important at the earliest enactments of Pride (and the earliest years of the democracy) had become oppressive, 2013’s multiple prides reflect the very real divisions governing South African society. Yet, as the Johannesburg People’s Pride’s manifesto makes clear, these divisions, now made explicit, don’t have to serve as a mirror. Rather, they multiply possibilities and craft new alignments. Performance, beyond making visible the gaps between the ideal and the reality, plays a crucial role in rehearsing new possibilities for action.

The People’s Pride march involved a number of different types of performances. The parade began with a skit performed by activists from FEW, and was then led through the streets by a

310 Graeme Reid has written a compelling ethnography of Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church, a vibrant gay church in the 1990s, located in Hillbrow above a popular gay bar (Above the Skyline: Reverend Tsietsi Thandekiso and the Founding of an African Gay Church (Johannesburg: UNISA Press, 2010)).

raped black “Lady Justice,” her robed bloodied at its hem. She was escorted by several women (one of them Manika), wearing purple shirts proudly labeling them “Stabane” and “Feminist” and carrying paper maché ball and chains, labeled “Racism” and “Poverty.” This street theatre was backed by the soundtrack of the marchers’ chants and repurposed protest songs; homemade signs fluttered in the spring breeze: “Queer Marches, Not Gay Parades!” “We Don’t Need Your Permission!” Volunteer parade marshals wore bright shirts in solid primary colors with the printed phrase “I March Because…” suggesting that, like individual parts of the rainbow, the march was made up of many different individuals and stories. Once again, following Conquergood’s evocation of De Certeau as a parable for performance: “what the map cuts up, the story cuts across.” The People’s Pride’s manifesto, in reimagining what cartographies count as queer, interpolates many different types of bodies into its ranks “queer and non-queer, workers and unemployed people, black and non-black, disabled and able-bodied activists, feminists, conscious and interested people,” to recreate a sense of Pride “where we can all be free and every voice is important.”

This endeavor might seem to be utopic, but what is performance if not a space for imagining an elsewhere? As I have argued throughout this dissertation it is the hints of the utopic, evoked through subjunctive performance, that make the everyday livable. The march, rooted in a shared queer South African experience but with equally important lines extending outward into a variety of communities, becomes an occasion where joy and pain co-exist. This was nowhere more visible than the final two blocks of the march where the road alongside the Joburg Theatre, leading back to Constitution Court was lined by black lesbians carrying “flags”—pieces of cardboard attached to sticks—bearing the names and sometimes images of those had been who had been murdered for their sexual orientation. As the marchers descended on the final stretch, they encountered signs asking for their silence as they walked through the “guard of honor.” The solemnity, in contrast to the otherwise boisterous march, encouraged the marchers to contemplate those who were not able to be there and to remember their own losses. By staging this last stretch of the march as a memorial, the organizers created a liminal space, where the present is made thick with the ghosts of other marchers and past movements. Through this engagement with overlapping histories and current spatial realities, the marchers were able to reorient the horizon of possibility for South African queer identities and rescript the vocabularies of struggle to more inclusive enactments.

312 Ibid.
Fig. 16. People’s Pride, marching through Hillbrow. Image Courtesy of MambaOnline.com

Bibliography


------------------


Nuttall, Sarah. “Stylizing the Self: The Y Generation in Rosebank, Johannesburg.” Public
Culture 16, no. 3 (2004): 430-452.


---------------


------------------ The Great Comedy Trek, VHS (Johannesburg: Nu Metro Home Entertainment, 2007).


------------------ Appendix One: Interviews
Chosen FEW:


“K.K.” interview with author, November 27, 2010, in Soweto, Gauteng, South Africa

“Manika,” interview with author, April 14, 2011, Vosloorus, Gauteng, South Africa.

“Skaaps,” interview with author, April 21, 2011, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa.

“Thully,” interview with the author, April 15, 2011, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

“Tumi,” interview with author, January 12, 2011, Katlehong, Gauteng, South Africa

Other:

Pulane Boesak (producer, Generations) interview with author, May 4, 2011, SABC Studios, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Prof. Natasha Distiller, interview with the author, March 9, 2011, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Prof. Mark Fleishman (director, Magnet Theatre Company) interview with author, March 8, 2011, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa.

Prof. Pumla Gqola, interview with author, April 20, 2011, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Peter Hayes (founder, Heart and Eyes Theatre Collective), interview with author, March 15, 2011, Cape Town, South Africa

Makgano Mamabolo (producer, Society), interview with author, March 20, 2011, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Prof. Jay Pather, interview with author, March 11, 2011, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Pieter-Dirk Uys, interview with author, August 3, 2008, Darling, South Africa

Appendix 2: Gensblog Posts
(by date)


“What is a Gay or Lesbian (Homosexual) or Bi-Sexual Person?” Gensblog (blog), September 2, 2009, http://www.gensblog.co.za/2009/09/02/what-is-a-gay-or-lesbian-homosexual-person-or-a-bi-sexual-person.


“Ajax is also gay?” Gensblog (blog), January 5, 2010, www.gensblog.co.za/2010/01/05/ajax-is-also-gay.

