Making Place, Making Home: Lesbian Queer World-Making in Cape Town

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Abstract: *Two dominant, contrasting, narratives characterise public discourse on queer sexualities in Cape Town. On the one hand, the city is touted as the gay capital of South Africa. This, however, is troubled by a binary framing of white zones of safety and black zones of danger (Melanie JUDGE, 2018), which simultaneously brings the 'the black lesbian' into view through the lens of discrimination, violence and death. This article explores lesbian, queer and gay women's narratives of their everyday lives in Cape Town. Their counter narratives reveal how they 'make' Cape Town home in relation to racialized and classed heteronormativities. These grey the racialised binary of territorial safety and danger, and produce modes of lesbian constructions of home, notably the modes of embedded lesbianism, homonormativity and borderlands. These reveal lesbian queer life worlds which are ephemeral, contingent and fractured, making known hybrid, contrasting and competing narratives of the city.*
Key Words: *Lesbian; Cape Town; Queer World-Making; Counter-Narratives; Belonging*

Construindo espaços de pertencimento: lésbicas queer na Cidade do Cabo
Resumo: *Duas narrativas dominantes e contrastantes passaram a caracterizar o discurso público sobre sexualidades queer na Cidade do Cabo. A Cidade do Cabo é considerada a capital gay da África do Sul. Simultaneamente, um enquadramento binário de zonas brancas de segurança e zonas negras de perigo (Melanie JUDGE, 2018) mostra 'a lésbica negra' através das lentes da discriminação, violência e morte. Este artigo explora as narrativas das vidas cotidianas de mulheres lésbicas, queer e gay na Cidade do Cabo. Com base em 23 entrevistas semi-estruturadas em profundidade e dois grupos focais, as contra-narrativas das participantes revelam como elas 'fazem' da Cidade do Cabo sua casa em relação a heteronormatividades racializadas marcadas por determinantes de classe. Suas produções de lar simbólico são lidas pelos modos do lesbianismo incorporado, da homonormatividade e de zonas fronteiriças (enraizadas). Os mundos de vida lésbico queer são efêmeros, contingentes e fraturados, tornando conhecidas narrativas híbridas, contrastantes e concorrentes da cidade.*
Palavras-chave: *lésbica; Cidade do Cabo; construção do mundo queer; contra-narrativas; pertencimento.*

Introduction

Cape Town has often been represented as the gay capital of South Africa, the home to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexed (LGBTI) communities of the country and even the African continent (Glenn ELDER, 2004; Bradley RINK, 2013; Andrew TUCKER, 2009; Gustav VISSER, 2003; 2010). Because the city has historically been seen as sexually liberal (Dhinnaraj CHETTY, 1994; Mark GEVISSER; Edwin CAMERON, 2004; William LEAP, 2005), this notion has been strengthened and actively promoted since the advent of the democratic dispensation in 1994 (LEAP, 2005; TUCKER, 2009). The marketing of Cape Town in this light builds on the sexual and gender based rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the 'new' South African 1996 constitution (Laura MOUTINHO *et al.*, 2010). Touted as the 'rainbow nation', the new South Africa's marketing was based on a "rainbow nationalism" (Brenna MUNRO, 2012) in which, Munro argues, LGBTI rights became a sign of the democratic values of the new nation - a symbol of South Africa's democratic modernity.

However, simultaneously, another dominant discourse in relation to Cape Town (mirrored in other towns and cities in South Africa) foregrounds the racialised spatiality of vulnerabilities to lesbophobic stigma, discrimination and violence. This foregrounds how the ability to safely enact one's lesbian desire is experienced unevenly across Cape Town. Commonly held imaginaries depict the more affluent, historically white designated areas as being more tolerant and accepting of sexual and gender diversity. On the other hand, the less resourced, historically designated coloured and black townships and informal settlements on the Cape Flats have become synonymous in the public imaginary with hate crimes, violence and heterosexist discrimination (Floretta BOONZAIER; Maia ZWAY, 2015; Nadia SANGER; Lesley CLOWES, 2006; Zetoile IMMA, 2017; Nadia SANGER, 2013; Andrew MARTIN *et al.*, 2009; Zethu MATEBENI, 2014). These hate crimes, violence and discrimination are seen to be the material consequence of the beliefs that homosexuality is unAfrican, unnatural and against religion (Busangokwakhe DLAMINI, 2006; Henriette GUNKEL, 2010; Zethu MATEBENI, 2017; SANGER; CLOWES, 2006). This produces what Judge (2015, 2018) refers to as white zones of safety and black zones of danger, which has the effect, she argues, of 'blackening' homophobia.

These dominant discourses influence and inform how lesbians live their lives. However, there is a stark disparity between the popular representation of Cape Town as the gay capital/'home' to LGBTI communities and the complexities revealed in the representations and experiences of lesbians' daily lives in Cape Town. Similarly, a sole focus on zones of black danger/white safety and on the attendant foregrounding of (black) lesbian violation and oppression negates and invisibilises black lesbians' agency, their experiences of love and desire, and the existence of solidarity and acceptance within their communities (BOONZAIER; ZWAY, 2015; Susan HOLLAND-MUTER, 2013; 2018; Julie MOREAU, 2013). This lens also occludes the ways in which racialised patriarchal normativities are regulated and navigated in historically 'white' spaces and places.

In the face of these contrasting dominant narratives and representations of Cape Town, this article will ask: how do lesbians make place/make home for themselves in Cape Town? Drawing on my doctoral study (HOLLAND-MUTER, 2018), it will explore lesbian counter narratives to this binary racialised framing of lesbian safety and danger. These counter narratives will do the work of greying the binaried black zones of danger/white zones of safety and will detach 'blackness' from a ready association to murderer/rapist and murdered/raped, and 'whiteness' from tolerant/solidarity and safety/life. Instead, the lens will shift to an exploration of how lesbians speak of their everyday navigations of (racialised and classed) norms and regulations surrounding the body, and how they construct their sense of belonging and lesbian place in Cape Town. Their counter narratives will reveal their different strategies of making home, of queer world-making. The article will explore how they assume their lesbian subjectivity in relation to their sense of place within and in relation to their communities. In so doing, it will also examine their constructions of Cape Town as home through a number of modes, namely the modes of embedded lesbianism, homonormativity and borderlands. These are, unsurprisingly, raced and classed processes. The discussion will highlight how lesbians (re)claim their place in their communities, and construct a sense of ephemeral and contingent belonging.[1]

My doctoral study (HOLLAND-MUTER, 2018) interrogated the different modes and meanings of queer world-making (Lauren BERLANT; Michael WARNER, 1998) of lesbians in Cape Town. It did this by exploring the different ways in which self-identified queer, lesbian or gay women[2] from a range of raced and class positionalities, navigated the normativities present in everyday/night spaces in Cape Town. Participants were asked to draw a representation of their 'worlds', the spaces and places which they inhabited or navigated in their everyday lives in Cape Town. An interactive discussion between participant and researcher then ensued, providing the opportunity for clarifications, depth and exploration of key themes and issues.

These in-depth semi structured interviews were conducted with 23 self-identified lesbian, gay women and queer people, ranging from 23 to 63 years. They were racially diverse, mostly South African, were middle, lower middle class and working class, and subscribed to a range of religious affiliations. They lived in historically designated black and coloured townships and ghettoes situated

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[2] The call to take part in the study invited the participation of women (which I would now write as womxn) who were involved in sexual/emotional relationships with other women. It did not specify that one had to self-identify or call oneself a lesbian. Some trans and cisgendered women did not self-identify as lesbian, but rather as queer. Others preferred to call themselves gay women. Some did call themselves lesbian. For this reason, I have used all the self-proclaimed labels used by the participants.

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on the Cape Flats,[3] and historically white designated southern or northern suburbs of Cape Town.[4] Two focus groups with black African lesbians living in a range of townships in Cape Town was also conducted with participants ranging from 18 to 36 years.

The study entailed looking for and interrogating lesbian participants' counter narratives (Michael BAMBERG; Molly ANDREWS, 2004), the "stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives" (Molly ANDREWS, 2004, p. 2). These counter narratives were conceptualised as modes of queer world-making (QWM). A concept coined by Berlant and Warner(1998), queer world-making is taken up and used here to refer to the varying ways in which the participants in the study resist and (re)shape hegemonic identities, discourses and practices, revealing "a mode of being in the world that is also inventing the world" (José Esteban MUÑOZ, 1999, p. 121). Thus, a life world is constructed alongside, in relation to, at times complicit with, at times transgressive to a project of normalisation (Michel FOUCAULT, 1978).

I do not, however, uncritically adopt Berlant and Warner's conceptualistion of QWM, which foregrounded challenges to heteronormativity and its project of normalisation. Rather, in order to address the "blind spots" (MUÑOZ, 1999, p. 10) produced by their sole application of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, I adopt an intersectional (Kimberlé CRENSHAW, 1991; Patricia HILL COLLINS; Sirma BILGE, 2016; Leslie MCCALL, 2005) reading of queer theory. This reworked concept of QWM ultimately incorporates an analysis of the lesbian participants' navigations of a "wide field of normalisation" (WARNER, 1993, p. xxvi). Notably, this considers QWM in terms of how sexuality and its 'normalisation' project weaves with other axes of difference, such as gender, race, class status, motherhood status and generational position as the participants navigate social institutions in their everyday lives.

I will first examine lesbians' counter narratives to the dominant notions of racialised zones of safety and danger. This will be followed by a focus on lesbians' individual navigations of everyday space in Cape Town, analysing how they construct their sense of place and home.

Shades of Grey: Blurring the black zones of danger/white zones of safety

It is common cause that *all* lesbians face some degree of stigma, discrimination and violence due to their transgressing hegemonic gender and sexuality norms. However, the degree of their vulnerability to discrimination and violence differs on the basis of race, class, gender performance, age and location, amongst other factors. Mirroring the literature to a large extent, the lesbian narratives within this study confirm that black, butch presenting, poorer, township dwelling lesbians were at greater risk of experiencing stigma, discrimination and violence based on gender and sexuality. This is due to the compound effect of misogynoir[5] (Moya BAILEY, 2010, 2013) and patriarchal heteronormativities (Scott LONG *et al.*, 2003; Nonhlanhla MKHIZE *et al.*, 2010; Eileen RICH, 2006).

Bella, a black, self-identified femme lesbian from the Eastern Cape lives in the house that she owns in Khayelitsha, a black township on the Cape Flats, with her partner, three children and sister. Her perceptions of what it is like to live as a black lesbian in Khayelitsha are illustrative of how townships are generally perceived as being heteronormative, unsafe, unwelcome spaces for black lesbians [and gender non-conforming women]:

[3] The Cape Flats are constituted by the areas East of the Northern and Southern suburbs of Cape Town and are made up of townships and shantytowns (some are Nyanga, Langa, Khayelitcha, Gugulethu) historically created and designated for the black African population, and ghettoes for the coloured population (some are Mitchell's Plain, Bishop Lavis, Lavender Hill). Lying on the outskirts of Cape Town, ranging from 15 to 30 kilometers from the city centre, it is a flat, sandy, treeless stretch of land. From the 1950s, most black and coloured people were forcibly removed from the inner city and southern/northern suburbs after they were declared 'white only' . It is also the area in which most of migrant labour was housed (http://www.sahistory.org.za/places/cape-flats). People live in small, overcrowded houses or shacks in the townships, and also large blocks of apartment buildings in the formerly designated coloured ghettoes. The Cape Flats are overcrowded, under-resourced and under-serviced by the state. They are high density areas, with high levels of crime, gangs and violence.

[4] The 'southern suburbs' extend southward from the city centre and along the eastern side of the mountains towards Muizenberg: neighbourhoods include Woodstock, Salt Rock, Observatory, Rondebosch, Newlands and Claremont. During Apartheid, these were designated white residential areas. Woodstock, Salt River and Observatory are more racially mixed suburbs. Observatory houses students and a relatively large artistic, bohemian, alternative crowd. Rondebosch also houses many students, and is the site of the University of Cape Town, a previously designated white institution of higher learning. The southern suburbs are served by a railway line which runs from the city centre to Simon's Town, south of Muizenberg. These are predominantly English speaking neighbourhoods. North of the Flats are the northern (and historically white designated) suburbs – Bellville, Goodwood, Durbanville. These were predominantly Afrikaans speaking communities. These areas have changed their racial and class composition over time, and are no longer whites only (LEAP, 2005: 239 - 240).

[5] Moya Bailey coined 'misogynoir' in a blog, *the Crunk Feminist Collective* while discussing misogyny toward black women in hip hop music. She notes the term is a "word I made up to describe the particular brand of hatred directed at black women in American visual & popular culture" (BAILEY, 2010). She then theorises and writes about it in an academic journal in Bailey, 2013. The exact application of the term is unpacked by Trudy, in her blog *Gradient Lair* where she notes: "Misogynoiris **not** about non-Black women of colour or White women, period. Misogyny impacts women. Racialized misogyny impacts women of colour. Misogynoir impacts Black women because of misogyny and dehumanization through anti-Blackness" (TRUDY, 2014: blog paragraph 2).

*Khayelitsha and the other townships […] need to do something to bring the crowd back because honestly, around where I stay there isn't one space where we would, ja, where we can for example hold your partner's hand, kiss if you want to without people looking at you funny. […] And of course places like Dez, which you know is a gay friendly space, and people go there and be who they are. But there are places where you can't even show up dressed in your favourite 'boyfriend jeans', as Woolworths calls it, you know. And so you feel much more comfortable **out** of the area than...well, I am basically. I'm much more comfortable being on this side of the railway line (pointing to the southern suburbs), where I can hold my woman, she holds me, you know, and hug and, well, sometimes hugging at the taxi rank is not such a big deal because people hug. But, there will always be that one critical eye that 'Oh! that hug was a little bit longer'. Like 'why do **you** care, I wasn't hugging you? '(defiant tone). … But so...ja. Lapa, this side of the line...mhmm there*

Bella notes that she does not feel safe as a lesbian 'around where I stay', listing a series of places organised in a hierarchy of danger or safety. Activities are described, enactments of gender and sexuality - such as holding her lesbian partner's hand, hugging or kissing each other, dressing in 'boyfriend jeans', socialising in a lesbian friendly tavern - in relation to where they are possible to enact (or not). She ranks these from the most dangerous located around where she stays to 'this side of the railway line' (the historically designated white southern suburbs), where she feels 'comfortable' i.e. safe to enact her lesbian sexuality. She employs the term 'comfortable' to name her experience of located safety, a word which Les Moran and Beverley Skeggs *et al.* (2004) argue speaks to both a *feeling* of being at home, relaxed, without threat or danger, as well as *being* at home. 'Around where she stays' does not only refer to around her home, but to the actual area where she stays and others like it, Khayelitsha and other townships, residential areas historically designated for black people. Her perspective re-inscribes a dominant narrative, the binary framing of black zones of danger/white zones of safety (JUDGE, 2015, 2018). This binary framing ultimately 'blackens homophobia' (JUDGE, 2015, 2018), and therefore, remaining within this frame, whitens tolerance. Bella's mode of unbelonging, of feeling like a body out of place (Sarah AHMED, 2000), is achieved through acts of surveillance and regulation by other community members. These acts of regulation and surveillance include 'people looking at you funny', 'that one critical eye', to acts of physical enforcement and regulation which are merely alluded to in their severity. However, the empirical evidence tells us these include beatings, rape and death (Louise POLDERS; Helen WELLS, 2004; RICH, 2006; Juan NEL; Melanie JUDGE, 2008).

However, Bella develops a simultaneous counter narrative to this binary framing of racialised spatialized safety/danger for lesbians in Cape Town. Her counter narrative speaks to lesbian resistance and transgression, the uneven enforcement of heteronormativities, as well as displays of community acceptance of, and solidarity with, LGBTI communities within townships. Resistance and lesbian transgression are materialised in the form of a popular lesbian friendly tavern, Dez, located in another township, Gugulethu. Bella also speaks of the uneven enforcement of heteronormativities when she refers to the varying levels of acceptance of transgression of patriarchal heteronormativities within different areas in townships. Importantly, Bella's counter narrative is also revealed in how she herself 'speaks back' to her critics in her imagined confrontation between herself and that one 'critical eye'. Later in her interview, Bella speaks of the demonstrations of support, acceptance and community solidarity she has received from her neighbours and her children's teacher, in spite of, and at times because of her lesbian sexuality.

Similarly, Sandiswa, a black butch lesbian who lives in Khayelitsha, speaks of the support and acceptance that she has received within her area.

The neighbours, […] the guys opposite my house, they're okay. They're all accepting, actually. […] I haven't had any incidents where people are being discriminative you know.

At the same time, a range of counter narratives also troubled the dominant framing of safety being attached to 'white zones'. A number of black and coloured participants argued that the visible presence of lesbian and gay people within public spaces in particular black townships, along with an (uneven) integration and acceptance within these communities, has contributed to their feelings of belonging, and of safety and security. This LGBTI visibility in townships and their integration within their communities informed their affective mapping of safety in Cape Town. Sandiswa, a young black lesbian, speaks to her perceptions of inhabiting Gugulethu:

So for like […] a year and a half you know, I stayed in Gugulethu, that's a nice area. That's a nice area. Yes there's a lot of lesbians and gay people, even in the street. […] So ja, it was actually nice and we could walk anytime. Obviously for crime and other things you can't you know, but...it's a relaxed area. It's a relaxed area […] So it's quite uhm, lesbian friendly I would say (small laugh).

Similarly, Ntombi, a young butch lesbian from Philippi, highlights the visible gay and lesbian presence where she lives. She attributes their acceptance within the area to living side by side with their neighbours, of a familiarity built up over the years.

And in Philippi, the reason it's not too hectic it's because a lot of people they have come out. You'll find a lot of gay people, a lot of lesbian people living in the community. And because of that, people change their perception because it is someone I know, it is someone I've grown up with [...] so once they have that link with a person who is gay or lesbian, they then understand.

Both Sandiswa and Ntombi draw a direct connection between LGBTI public visibility and their sense of feeling less at risk of lesbophobic violence, discrimination and stigma within an area. Sandiswa employs a register of public visuality when she emphasizes lesbian and gay people's public occupation of (black) space. It is this visible presence of lesbians and gays that gives her a greater sense of freedom of movement and safety in the neighbourhood. Her use of the affective term "relaxed", indicates the lowering of her guard and decreased need to self-manage. Ntombi echoes these sentiments, locating her sense of safety in the large number of known LGBTI people within her community. Ntombi argues these positive perceptions of lesbians and their relationships are the outcome of living side by side on a daily basis over a number of years, producing a sense of familiarity and ease, of a heterosexual knowledge of lesbian life. Ntombi reasons that the large number of openly performing LGBTI people speaks to a network of affective relationships between LGBTI people, their family and community members.

Taken together, this "evidence" of familiarity and ease of LGBTI people co-existing with heterosexual within their communities works to normalise LGBTI people's existence and presence. This works to construct gays and lesbians as "inside" both the township and the community living there. These findings reflect the public and visible gay presence within black townships discussed in Leap (2005), when he outlines gay presence in both public and private spaces - homes, shebeens/ taverns, trains and other forms of public transportation. This counter narrative challenges ideas such as those posited by Elaine Salo *et al.* (2010), who argue that the acceptance and safety of lesbian and gay people in black and coloured townships are dependent on their "invisibility" and marginal status.

Power is at the centre of spatial negotiations, marking some bodies and practices as *home* and others as *out of place* (AHMED, 2006). Similarly, Moran and Skeggs *et al.* (2004) argue that a politics of recognition, of being "seen", is always a matter of location. Visibility invokes regimes of placement, of being in and out of place (both materially and metaphorically). In this way, visibility is always spatialised and dialogic, between what should be seen/unseen or visible/invisible, and what should/should not occupy space. Both Sandiswa and Ntombi's narratives speak to these regimes of placement and constructions of home. In this way, occupying public (black) space and living amongst their communities in large numbers moves beyond a register of just being "seen" by lesbians and other community members, but also speaks to *how* being lesbian is "seen", understood and recognised. Both Sandiswa and Ntombi make the claim that this visible presence of LGBTI individuals and communities leads to a "knowledge" of LGBTI existence, which leads to the lesbian body occupying township space as home, where it becomes commonplace, ordinary, of relative insignificance. These enactments of queer world-making by black LGBTI people within black township spaces speak to a queering of heteronormative (black) space. This visibility and representation of lesbians being 'at home' in townships contribute to (temporarily) decentering heteronormativity, minimising the gap between legal equality and the lived experiences of lesbians, and in this way contributes to LGBTI belonging.

On the other hand, the hegemonic framing of white safety and tolerance was also troubled when a number of participants produced counter narratives of danger and enforcement of heterosexuality in historically designated white spaces. Denise, a white lower middle class lesbian from Kraaifontein in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, shares her experience of verbal abuse in a pub:

*[...] me and Mary was at a pub and this guy [...] he had so much hatred against lesbians. And [...] you could see it in his eyes that this is someone that if he gets you alone he'll bloody well make sure he fucks it out of you or something like that. [...] He was like een van daai **boere** manne, **plaas** boere, wat uhm, **rugby** kyk en drink en vieslik raak vuil, barl met sy mond⁶ [...] Because that time me and Mary was like so into each other. And you could see, like this is a guy who just, get out of his way because he...he doesn't take something like this lightly. [...] insulting us. He was 'so hulle pussy naaiers'. 'Kom ek gaan jou wys', jy weet. Praat hy met vriende⁷, and you can...you can **feel** the shivers running down your spine.*

Denise's narrative speaks to her experience of feeling threatened by a group of white Afrikaans speaking men in a heterosexual leisure space. The men express their disgust at what they are witnessing – Denise and her partner being publicly affectionate. It is noteworthy that Denise refers to him as a '*plaas boer*' (an Afrikaner farmer), which calls attention to an iconic version of hegemonic white South African masculinity, the patriarchal, traditional, conservative Afrikaans man, whose values are centred around *God, Volk en die Land* (God, Nation and the Land). In this version of

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⁶ He was like one of those farmer men, farmers, who watch rugby, drink and smell terrible, who *barl* with their mouth.
⁷ 'Those pussy fuckers'. 'Come, I will show you', you know. He was talking to his friends like that.

patriarchal heteronormative gender relations, the man is the head of the household, community and nation, women are subservient (heterosexual) mothers in the home and reproducers of Afrikaaner cultural values and community, *volk moeders* (mothers of the Afrikaans nation) (Christi VAN DER WESTHUIZEN, 2013). Erving Goffman (1963) notes that the act of staring alone is an embodiment of power, where subjects who do not comply with the norm become 'objects of fascination', and staring becomes a 'negative sanction', an enactment of the first warning somebody receives of their wrongdoing (GOFFMAN, 1963, p. 86-88). The men in Denise's case through shouting and staring achieve what they set out to do - enforce a patriarchal heteronormativity in the social space, letting Denise and her partner know that they will be sanctioned for breaking the rules and being out of place. Threats of violence, 'Come let us show you' have the desired chilling effect - 'you can feel shivers running down your spine'.

Butch, a self-identified lesbian of colour in her late twenties, shares her experience of heteronormativity while organising an LGBTI awareness campaign run by her student LGBTI organisation, Rainbow UCT, at her historically white university located in the southern suburbs. Since the university is noted for being a liberal institution, Butch's surprise at her fellow students' display of homophobia and racism is testament to the unforeseen cracks in discourses of white zones of tolerance and safety:

> When I was doing Rainbow I actually felt a lot more verbal bias from people because then I would get spoken to […] and it was from that discussion with random campus folk that I would get told things like 'I don't approve' and 'I don't want to do it' […] I'd never heard homophobic talk in my classes before, I've never really heard racist talk either (upward tone). It was only when I became involved in the student activism that I became aware of what people were actually thinking.

Max, a white woman in her early twenties, rents a room in Newlands, an upmarket neighbourhood in the southern suburbs. She is an intern. On being asked about her perceptions of safety in Cape Town and whether she has been able to move around Cape Town without fear, Max responds that she has experienced Cape Town's suburbs and city centre as relatively safe spaces. However, she also provides a note of caution, questioning this relative safety. She notes:

> […] I haven't been subjected to an, like, aggressive commentary or been approached by strangers or anything. […] Maybe once or twice like drunk sport science majors shouted at us in the Engen or whatever but mostly like...I don't think that reflects necessarily the level of acceptance but I think it's just like a fact of living in privileged areas and like also in the centre of the city […] that just means that they are abiding by the social contract of where ever they happen to be, you know. It doesn't mean they […] accept my relationship […] or like same sex relationships.

Her narratives reveals the particular shape that heteronormative regulation takes in 'white spaces'. Max argues that one should not mistake lack of overt physical violence and aggression against LGBTI people in the city centre and suburbs as an indication of acceptance. Rather, she highlights, this is merely a reflection of the 'social contract'. This 'social contract' might mean less of a physical blow but it does not mean lack of social surveillance and regulation, the lack of heteronormativity and homophobia.

Considering these dominant and counter narratives of what figure belongs in what space, this dominant characterisation of black zones of danger/white zones of safety (JUDGE, 2015, 2018), similar to the distinctions of right-left and east-west discussed by Ahmed (2006, p. 4), are not neutral distinctions. Ultimately, the work of the dominant narrative of black zones of danger/white zones of safety creates a symbolic space that configures being lesbian, or queerness more generally, through a hierarchical distinction between an imagined white city centre and black township. Queerness is seen to be located and embedded within the white urban space, and is situated in a symbolic opposition between city and township life (Kath WESTON, 1995, p. 55). Lesbians (and queers more generally) who reside in the township are rendered out of place and 'stuck' in a place they would rather not be (Jack HALBERSTAM, 2003, p. 162).

The counter narratives to this framing, however, surface the agency exercised by black lesbians living in the townships, who on a daily basis make the township home. They provide a glimpse into the multiple ways of performing lesbian subjectivities and queerness, revealing the multi-dimensional facets of living in the township, including how gendered sexuality is performed through the lens of living and loving, rather than only through victimisation and death. The counter narratives of support, solidarity and acceptance of homosexuality shown by and within black communities also challenge the sole association of blackness and black space with persecution, regulation and the imposition of a hegemonic patriarchal heteronormativity. Similarly, their counter narratives reveal the heteronormative regulation and persecution performed within so called white spaces, breaking down the unproblematic sole association of whiteness and white space with safety, tolerance and permissiveness.

Larry Knopp and Michael Brown argue that any mapping of sexualities should not hold hubs or cores as constant sites of liberation in contrast to repressive or heteronormative peripheries. Arguing

against the notion of discrete sites of sexual oppression and sites of greater sexual actualisation, they argue for a 'tacking back and forth" (Larry KNOPP; Michael BROWN, 2003, p. 417) in sexual subjectivities that occurs not only across physical space but also within the sexual subject. In this light, one should not consider Cape Town city centre, suburbs and 'gay village' as constant sites of liberation in contrast to the repressive and heteronormative peripheries of the townships and informal settlements. Rather, one should be exploring when, how and in what ways do places become sites of sexual actualisation or sites of oppression. In addition, one needs to consider that even in places of extreme oppression and repression, there are sites and experiences of resistance. These expressions of black resistance, of 'making place', as well as expressions of white surveillance and regulation, grey Judge's (2015) binary framing of racialised safety and danger.

Queer Place Making in Cape Town: Making home in relation to and within constructions of racialised heterosexuality

Other framings and modes of queer world-making speak to how lesbians in the study navigated every day heteronormativities in Cape Town, revealing how they actively 'make place' for themselves. A range of place making strategies show a variety of safety mechanisms and technologies that lesbians adopted to ensure their safety, as well as to lay claim to their legitimate place within their communities. These strategies illustrate how lesbians construct queer life worlds within and in relation to hegemonic patriarchal heteronormativities, assuming one's lesbian subjectivity in relation to one's community. These processes are racialised and classed, as they are performed within racialised and classed spaces/places.

I will discuss four lesbians' place making strategies in relation to their communities and Cape Town more generally. Sandiswa and Bulelwa are both butch black lower middle class lesbians. As discussed previously, Sandiswa is in her late twenties and lives in Khayelitsha whereas Bulelwa is in her forties and lives in Tambo, both townships on the Cape Flats. Mandy is an older white middle class lesbian who lives in Mouille Point on the upmarket Atlantic Seaboard, and Tamara is a coloured Muslim, in her mid-twenties, living with her parents in Mitchells Plain, a historically designated coloured area.

The narratives of Sandiswa and Bulelwa speak to their strategies of building relationships with their neighbours and community to ensure they are known and are seen as individual personalities, and do not solely inhabit the category lesbian. Their everyday practice sees them actively claiming space/place in their (heteronormative) communities through constructing friendships and doing cultural labour (Xavier LIVERMON, 2012) in order to be seen as legitimate and authentic community members.

Sandiswa has lived in Cape Town for about five years and moves in and out of employment and in and out of formal and informal housing within Gugulethu, Khayelitsha and other areas. Her narrative reveals how she actively constructs Khayelitsha as a safe space for herself, mainly by using her charm and friendliness to build male networks of support and protection from possible danger.

> People **like** me you know. And sometimes I think it's more of the **personality** more than the sexuality thing, honestly. Because the moment you start speaking to people, they tend to look beyond what you bring. You get people that go to a place and then just, you know, **frown** and then automatically people will just judge you. But if you get to a place and you talk and you're friendly with people, then automatically they like you and uhm, because they can see what I am and they know other people around the area that are like me, you know, the...they might feel the need to protect me, okay. Which is, I've never been in any position where I had to be protected (laughing while talking), but they've always shown that thing that 'Okay we're there for you. If anyone messes with you, we're there for you okay'. So ja, and I always guard myself, okay. I don't put myself in positions where you know, it will be too awkward and I will have to be protected.

Sandiswa highlights how her emphasis on being friendly separates her from other lesbians 'who just frown'. Her safety practice rests on establishing a bond of common humanity with the people with whom she engages. She argues that by building relationships people will 'look beyond what you bring'. People will like her in spite of her sexuality and gender performance. Sandiswa builds friendships and networks with male heterosexuals in the tavern opposite her house as well as in other spaces, employing a gender normative strategy of using men for protection. This is not because they are completely altruistic as she mentions that perhaps they see her as providing access to potential sexual relationships with her bisexual and heterosexual girlfriends. In this sense, one could argue that Sandiswa's strategy is also built upon a complicity of masculinities, based on a potential trading in female affection and bodies.

Displaced from her parental home by her siblings after her parent's death, Bulelwa has lived on her own in Tambo Village near Gugulethu for a few years. She is an older butch lesbian in her mid-forties. She employs similar safety techniques to Bella of screening and surveying places and

the people that occupy them; and like Sandiswa has a strategy of building relationships. However, Bulelwa's narrative adds another dimension to her queer 'place-making' strategies in that she emphasises how she consciously 'fixes things':

> [...] It depends where you are [...] I can say that I am comfortable in Tambo, but when I am in Gugulethu there are certain areas that I don't go because they won't only say words, nasty words, they are going to beat you, they are going to rape you, because they say when they see us, they see us as lesbians who want to be men. [...] In my area they are accepting, to go to another area and start a new life, that's hectic, so I love my area so much. Because you can fix things that are there [...]. You've got people who understand who you are, who respect who you are, who see you as a human being. That's my area.

Bulelwa builds relationships within her community and consciously ensures that she is recognised as belonging to the community. These queer world making practices aim to undo the work of prejudice, to speak back to the dehumanising effect of homophobic prejudice and violence. Bulelwa is enacting what Livermon (2012) would term 'cultural labour' in order to achieve a life of greater socio-cultural freedom, to access the promise offered by the Constitution. Similarly to Bella, she uses 'comfort' ('I am comfortable in Tambo') as the register employed to denote a located experience of safety. However, differently to Bella, and similarly to Sandiswa, Bulelwa places this located sense of comfort within the township and community that she lives. Bulelwa's repeated use of 'my area' in her narrative invokes the rhetorical regime of 'property talk' (MORAN, SKEGGS *et al.*, 2004). Property talk highlights possession and belonging, and emphasises her sense of entitlement to this space, to her right to legitimately call her area/township 'home' as an authentic member.

In different ways, Sandiswa and Bulelwa build relationships to be seen as human beings. This strategy depends on breaking down the sense of estrangement that exists between insider and outsider groups, of being seen as a stranger to their communities (Gail MASON, 2005; AHMED, 2000). Both of their safety practices talk to a 'making place' for their lesbian existence in their homes and communities. In effect, their narratives challenge the trope that being lesbian is unAfrican and can only happen safely in the previously designated white suburbs. They foreground their embeddedness and location within their black communities and neighbourhoods.

From a very different vantage point and social location, in fact from her self-acknowledged position of privilege, Mandy shares how she has never felt discriminated against as a lesbian. Mandy's narrative foregrounds how she refuses to see herself as different to others. She comments that she does not pigeonhole or label herself, nor has she every related to her sexual orientation as political. She frames her life, friendship circles and social networks as 'blurring' the lines, because it is not lesbian only. She does have occasions when she and friends consciously gather as lesbians, going away for the weekend, getting together for a big birthday or a rugby match, for example. However, then she is at pains to share how even if they do gather as women, "half way through the evening in will come a bunch of straight people who have always *jorled* (partied, socialised) with those women, or a bunch of gay guys who tend to hang with us you know". She constantly emphasises the non-identitarian, porous nature of her social circle. She emphasises that people come together to have fun, to eat, to cook, to dance, to go away together, drinking and taking drugs along the way. They live privileged lives, work hard, and play hard.

Mandy calls herself "fanatically moderate", refusing to carry a flag or banner for anything political. Mandy recognises that for her 'it's always been kind of … comfortable. Ja, which is why I've never thought it necessary to label myself'. She goes on later to note that she does not even live a 'lesbian lifestyle'. Her homonormative (Lisa DUGGAN, 2002) manner of assuming her sexuality does not leave her completely oblivious to the heteronormativity and social norms which she has to navigate. She is conscious that she is complying with social expectations to a large extent, but does not experience it as being regulated or surveilled:

> I kind of always see it as nothing (being lesbian) until there's a threat of an incident. And I don't know if I've even known a threat of an incident. I think you're kind of, your instinct reads situations and dictates how you behave without ever consciously doing it. [...] If you walk into a Michelin restaurant you know, as you would **dress** appropriately, you would **behave** appropriately, you wouldn't snog your girlfriend at the table you know, so ja, its' just social **appropriateness** [...]

She completely negates and naturalises power relations which inform social normativities, framing compliance with hegemonic normativities as 'social appropriateness'. Due to the fact that for the most part Mandy benefits from them, she does not recognise their existence. Her queer world making sees her often as complicit with class and raced based norms, as well as heteronormativity. She has depoliticised her sexuality, considering it a private, domestic affair, only recognised 'while I'm in bed'. Mandy frames her relationship with friendship and social networks and with her community as being a 'huge chameleon' - behaving in different ways depending on who she is with and what is expected of her. She notes that she is 'probably overly conscious of being accommodating and being accommodated, so I probably overkill in that department', adding that 'I kind of like to do the

right thing'. In her case, for the most part, 'doing the right thing' speaks to doing white middle class public respectability.

Tamara is in her mid-twenties, a Muslim, leaning towards femme presenting lesbian who lives with her family in Mitchells Plain. She is a student and financially dependent on her family. Her queer world making practices see her performing a public heterosexuality in her home for fear of being ostracised by some of her family and of being financially cut off. This mirrors the practices of other young coloured LGBTI people in Nadia Sanger's (2013) study on coloured youth in Cape Town's urban peripheries. She enacts the chaste, assumed heterosexual, albeit still non-conventional, non-covering Muslim daughter; studious and intelligent, an embodiment of her upwardly mobile class aspirations. Her narrative reveals, however, that once she drives down the N2 towards the city centre, the southern suburbs and the University of Cape Town, her place of study at the time, she enacts and embodies a positively identified lesbian woman, drinking and socialising with a range of people, women and men, lesbian and heterosexual. Here, though, her positioning and framing as a coloured Muslim woman from Mitchells Plain separates her from her white, middle class friends - because of their perceived ignorance of her life at home within a Muslim, lower middle class/ working class household, and their fears which associate Mitchells Plain with gangsterism, drugs and violence. Tamara's narrative suggests her ambivalent relationship to both Mitchells Plain and to the southern suburbs as she does not fit into or feel that she completely belongs in either community. This leaves her feeling like she is living a life of liminality, on the borderlands, betwixt and between her two communities of reference.

She is conflicted by her performing heterosexual within Mitchells Plain. On the one hand she believes there is a level of acceptance for homosexuality in the area. She argues that even though some community members use words that can be perceived as derogatory like 'moffie'[8], this is said more in the spirit of a joke, and forms part of a discourse that positions 'gays as fun'. She notes that the road where she lives is 'really gay' because there are a couple of out butch lesbians who live there, and has not heard any nasty rumours or gossip about them. However, at the same time, Tamara notes that she does not feel completely safe in Mitchells Plain because of the lack of a strong visible presence of lesbians. This absence leads her to ask, 'why are lesbians hiding?' She characterises Mitchell's Plain through the lack of a publicly performing LGBTI community. Tamara maintains they are hiding because there is a danger, and therefore she is in danger. She is also concerned and fears her family's reactions.

Tamara's narrative has a lot to do with her contradictory and ambivalent feelings of belonging. She claims a sense of belonging to her community and her area, noting that she feels a part of Mitchells Plain, enjoys its ways of working and networks of solidarity and caring, and lives with her family and has a history there. But, at the same time, she is very concerned that she will be rejected because of her sexuality, both from her family and from her broader community. Assuming her lesbian sexuality openly within the community, she fears, would lead to her losing the respect and status that she occupies due to being the first one to get a tertiary education. She fears being kicked out of home, losing her family's financial support and love.

> It does (higher tone) (short breathing out) in...in one way ja, I feel like even if I leave (upward tone), it's still a place that feels like where you belong, like everyone looks out for one another, everyone is there to help each other, which I don't see in kind of these more middle class suburbs like Rondebosch, like you never know the neighbours name, so in that sense you do belong like they'll look after you, they'll protect you. But in another way, I don't really feel like I fit in, like what I- or like my identity, to use that word, like my lesbian identity wouldn't fit in there, I don't- I wouldn't feel comfortable, I wouldn't feel safe, in the sense that I don't know what would happen, I don't know how they would react. So ja, umm, but I do belong, but I said I also don't belong in another way so it's- it's confusing.

She does not feel at home and welcome as 'all' of her in Mitchells Plain, due to her lesbian sexuality. However, the sense of being part of a community that looks out for each other, with a shared history and with strong links of solidarity and support are very appealing to her.

When she moves from Mitchells Plain into Rondebosch and the southern suburbs, she feels like the 'coloured' other and is confronted with the whiteness and racism of some of her friends and broader social circle. She parodies a common reaction from some of her white friends to going to Mitchells Plain is 'oh you gonna die and get shot'. Although she is able to perform as lesbian and gender non-conforming among her social networks in the southern suburbs, she has to manage their negative perceptions and stereotypes of Mitchells Plain gangster induced violence. And so here, too, she feels she cannot be 'all' of herself.

This liminality and borderland positionality (Gloria ANZALDÚA, 1987) leaves her in a constant state of mediating worlds, managing identities and tick tacking in her subjectivities and practices. Her queer world making subjectivities, embodied practices and search for belonging reveal the

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[8] Moffie is a term 'coined in the coloured communities of the Western Cape, a South African equivalent of 'queer', 'faggot', or 'flikker'' (CHETTY, 1994, p. 127).

conscious choices that she makes within each space. She understands the normative codes within the different spaces in her life and chooses to negotiate them in ways that contribute to her sense of safety and comfort. In this way, she consciously polices her identity and embodiments to comply with particular codes and norms - both in terms of her sexuality and gender, as well as her race and class.

The queer life worlds discussed here have revealed the variety of ways in which lesbians in the study have navigated Cape Town, with varying degrees of resources (cultural and economic) to make it home, or to experience it as a welcoming space. Although sexuality and how they assume their lesbian subjectivities are important factors in influencing the way in which they 'made place' for themselves as lesbians, their queer world making was also largely influenced by their positionality within the social relations of race, class and age, amongst others.

Conclusions

These everyday navigations of Cape Town and its racialised patriarchal heteronormativites reveal the myriad of ways in which lesbians in the study are engaged in a politics of belonging (Nira YUVAL DAVIS, 2006) in order to make Cape Town home. The dominant narrative which represents Cape Town as sharply distinct black and white spaces, and its binary framing as discriminatory/ liberatory, was troubled in a number of ways, revealing a bleeding between the two 'zones' of ostensible white lesbian freedom and black lesbian oppression.

Counter narratives reveal how black lesbians have adopted a number of safety practices in order to both manage racialised heteronormativities, as well as transgress and resist them. They have created a contingent sense of feeling 'at home' in Cape Town in historically black areas - countering the dominant narrative of 'black homophobia'. The lesbian narratives have also surfaced the tensions of navigating heteronormativities in historically white areas, again troubling the notion of white zones of safety. The affective emotional landscapes of Cape Town revealed in the lesbian narratives within this study materialise the ways in which the sociality of race, class, gender performance, age, amongst other factors, shapes how lesbians construct their individual and collective queer life worlds. The ways in which individuals occupy and access privilege and/or experienced oppression - be it on the basis of race, gender performance, age, employment status, place of residence, able bodiedness or health status - provide 'cultural capital' to mitigate the effects of heteronormativity, and affected the meanings which they ascribed to their experiences.

Making home and feeling at home in Cape Town is also influenced by the participants' social contexts and their agency as social actors as they navigate everyday space from their positionalities of race, class, age and gender performance, amongst other factors. These have been discussed through the modes of 'embedded lesbianism' which rework notions of belonging within black communities, homonormative performances of lesbianism which rework a middle class whiteness (Allan BÉRUBÉ, 2001; Ruth FRANKENBERG, 1993) and finally through a mode of borderlands (ANZALDÚA, 1987) and liminality.

There is no singular notion of lesbian/queer identity, nor is there a 'utopian notion of a lesbian community' (Fiona BUCKLAND, 2002). Queer life worlds are produced within everyday lives, in particular moments and contexts, and are ephemeral and contingent. The wide ranging place making processes of the lesbians reveal the racialised, classed and gendered nature of their queer world making and life worlds. Their narratives reveal contrasting and competing narratives of the city, surfacing how Cape Town is experienced as a hybrid space, a place of multiple contradictions, simultaneously positioned as a site of personal realisation, sexual liberation and diversity, and exclusion, division and oppression.

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