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Gender Questions



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Editorial note

Jessica Murray and Elbie van den Berg

Editors

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From being a marginalised field of study, gender has become part of the mainstream of academic interest and endeavour. Gender studies academics are delighted with this shift in the status of our discipline, and the establishment of *Gender Questions* – a new journal in the field of gender studies – is a visible sign of the prominence that gender has acquired. We are delighted to welcome you to this first issue, which showcases the theoretical sophistication and scholarly rigour that we will infuse into all subsequent volumes of the journal.

At the same time, the diversity of articles in this issue testifies to the wide range of interests that are encompassed by gender studies. The articles are not, in the main, concerned with the ‘big questions’ of gender theory and how we understand the relationship between gender and identity. They are, rather, scholarly engagements with particular instances of culture, society and relationships in which gender is a key aspect.

There is a definite emphasis on the way gender is performed and enacted within the field of digital and popular culture, as, for example, in Tisha Dejmancee’s article on ‘Bodies of technology’ and in Maria Martinez Lirola’s article on ‘Exploring virtual interaction’. Likewise, Jennifer L. Epley deals with the representation of the Indonesian *waria* on YouTube. These three articles demonstrate that gender studies are alive and well in the digital age, and that, despite the much-vaunted anonymity of cyberspace, gender has a role to play in the construction of virtual identities.

Other articles demonstrate equally effectively that gender studies have, thankfully, moved away from a consideration of ‘grand narratives’ to a concern with the micro-narratives of the personal and the local. At the same time, there is a synchronous emphasis on gender as boundary transgression, on the porousness of borders and the subversion of received wisdom concerning social and personal roles. Thus Kendall Petersen’s article on *Lola und Bildikid* explores boundary-crossing gender identities in Turkish-German film; Mzikazi Nduna and Rachel Jewkes examine the role of narrative discourse in the construction of gender and sexual identity in black women in the Eastern Cape. Aderemi Suleiman Ajala and Olarinmoye Adeyinka Wulemat are also concerned with the lived realities of resistance to patriarchy, as practised in Nigeria. Helen Namondo Linonge-Fontebo and Armela Xhaho, no less, explore the ways in which queer studies, and queer identities, can be used to challenge received categories for acceptable identities.

In this issue the five book reviews focus on publications dealing with qualitative research methodologies on sexualities and gender; gay identities in small-town South Africa; queer sexuality and the struggle for freedom; communication, gender and culture; and a Gayle Rubin reader respectively. *Gender Questions* is committed to publishing cutting-edge scholarship across the broad reach of gender studies, and to the establishment of gender equality in society more generally. We invite you to enjoy reading this first issue as much as we have enjoyed compiling it.

Articles

Bodies of technology: Performative flesh, pleasure and subversion in cyberspace

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Abstract

This article contextualises the body in cyberspace, using the specific examples of the performative body and the social networking site Facebook. Technology is established as a process which continually unfolds and illuminates new understandings of subjectivity, unfurling in parallel with the performative body – and gendered identities – that Judith Butler articulates. Here, the author conducts a close analysis of the technological affordances of Facebook as a site that fosters the construction of a phantasmic, performative subject that Butler describes. This argument relies on an understanding of technology and the body as having their meaning dynamically constituted through mutual interconnection – an understanding of interface that is taken from the theoretical work of Donna Haraway and Vicki Kirby. The purpose of seeking out the performative body in cyberspace is to explore the possibility of technologically-derived, subversive bodies. This is done by examining the emergence of pleasure in human engagement with technology. This pleasure suggests that subjects are enticed by the creative possibilities which technology offers, as it leads to regenerations that, under the right conditions, yield subversive bodies.

Keywords: body, corporeal subversion, cyberspace, dualism, Facebook, gender, performativity

Introduction

Cyberspace provides a new forum for exploring embodied subjectivity, and in turn addressing the problematic dualisms and restrictive social practices that produce heteronormative gender identities. While not supporting the position that cyberspace is utopian, it can nevertheless be acknowledged that digital technologies – particularly those that encourage the creation and continual recreation of anchored, online identities – offer a new visibility of the self that can be informative, inspiring and confronting.

First, the dualisms that are inherent in locating the body in cyberspace are discussed, building on the foundations of key theorists of the human/technology interface: Donna Haraway and Vicki Kirby. While there is a much longer lineage of philosophers and digital humanists who have explored the human relationship with technology – notably Walter Benjamin (1936) who was the first to comment on human–machine inter-reliance – it is appropriate to focus on Haraway and Kirby due to the overt feminist project guiding their work and their exploration of the interface as a site of potential. Kirby's concept of 'mutual constitutiveness' (1997) is used to elucidate an understanding

of the online body, through close analysis of the way Judith Butler's notion of the performative body is illuminated on Facebook. This exploration of the online body leads to an understanding, in the Butlerian sense, of the construction of gendered identities and their relationship to embodiment.

Ultimately, locating performativity on Facebook speaks to the Heideggerian 'unconcealing' capacity of technology (1977), as new understandings of subjectivity arise from human interactions with the machines and processes that structure quotidian life. Specifically, the argument can be made that while the discourse guiding Butler's performativity purposefully disguises its effect on the flesh,¹ aspects of the construction of the social body are physically visible when digitally inscribed on a Facebook wall. This new visibility is deemed a factor in the potential subversion of gendered identities, which remains a perhaps underexplored footnote to Butler's articulation of performativity. While it is not claimed that technology necessarily yields subversive bodies, this technological illumination of gendered identities, and the pleasures of engaging with such technologies, can facilitate an agentive understanding and the emergence of subversive identities.

The multiple interfaces of subject and screen

A contemporary feminist understanding of the human-machine interaction commences with the work of Donna Haraway (1991, p. 151), who envisions the postmodern human subject as a cyborg: 'By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs.' The cyborg is 'oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence' (1991, p. 151), all irrevocably ambiguous qualities that encourage the transgression of boundaries and the subversion of categories of identity. The technological relation to embodiment is explicitly referred to by Haraway (1991, p. 180): 'The machine is not an it to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment', and this contamination of categories across the interface of nature and technology is envisioned as a mutual, 'disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling' (1991, p. 152). This allows the cyborg to be considered a technological body, in and of itself, an 'ether, quintessence' (1991, p. 153) in which the ethereal lightness of microelectronics allows it to be actually inhaled as organic matter.

This understanding of cyborg subjectivity can be extrapolated to a theory of embodiment in the online era by considering the broader framework of dualism, and the violence, hierarchies, oppression and divisions with which they have traditionally been attended. Kirby (1997) seeks to rewrite binary oppositions as terms that are implicated in a relationship of differential value, wherein meaning is ascribed not through positive associations but through the incorporation of negative lack within a sign. Taking gender as an example, differential value casts femininity as simply that which is not masculine, and vice versa. At first glance, this definition suspiciously reappropriates the hierarchies of binary opposition, within which woman has long been conceived in terms of lack or as an empty reflection of masculinity. The key difference, however, is that with differential value, oppositions are inextricably contained within each other in a joint and reciprocal enterprise. The boundary captures both dichotomous elements simultaneously, and Kirby suggests that while each side of the opposition remains distinguishable from the other, it is their continual,

multiple connections which dynamically constitute their properties at any given point in time. This relationship emphasises ‘the differential *within* unity, a copulating enmeshment that is never not pregnant in the delirium of becoming other’ (Kirby 1997, p. 144).

Using this formulation, on the one hand, new technologies are seen as mere vessels for recycling issues of identity and subjectivity, which have always been present and precede the technology of Facebook, the Internet or computers. Kirby (1997, p. 140) traces back concerns regarding subjectivity to at least the technology of writing: ‘Cybernauts regard the letter as dead because it seems inert. But, the inherent instability of textuality, the involvements of identity and the life of the letter, have become the very stuff of contemporary intellectual inquiry.’ On the other hand, new technologies by definition reveal new objects, processes, routines and facilities, which create new subjectivities through human interaction.

Kirby (1997, p. 144) regards these contradictory representations of old and new within technology as endemic to the dualist logic of linear time, ‘a logic that fetishizes differences as something extraneous and detachable ... [where t]idy borders delimit time from space, origins from ends, causes from effects, then from now, and one from two’. *Linear time* distinguishes past and present within discrete, measured units of seconds, minutes and years. According to Kristeva (1993), linear time is also anathema to the cyclical and recursive motion of ‘women’s time’. Aside from the violent divisions that the false boundaries of linear time perpetuate, they provide an awkward and inadequate fit for the dynamic and unfolding operations of technology.

Kirby draws on Derrida’s (1974) speech/writing distinction, from *Of grammatology*, in which he argues for the need to understand time as iterative. Iterative time might be understood as replacing a perpetual ‘folding out’ with a past, present and future that are intrinsically integrated in a continual folding over. As a process, then, iterativity still encompasses perpetual motion but without set direction or determination; it dredges up history and future to irrevocably confuse them within a murky understanding of the present. This dynamic en/(un)folding yields generativity, a process that describes the interfacing of the body and technology in iterative temporality to produce infinite permutations and combinations of online embodiment.

Realising the performative body on Facebook

Embodiment has always had an intimate relationship to inquiries of human subjectivity. Descartes ([1641] 1960), for example, highlighted the significance of the body to subjectivity by expressing it in terms of irrelevance. This understanding of the irrelevant body has left indelible traces on the progression of philosophies of subjectivity which, in the 20th century, Elizabeth Grosz (1995, p. 82) explains as ‘largely motivated by an attempt to devise an ethics and politics adequate for non-dualist accounts of subjectivity’.

What is interesting is the realisation of embodiment in cyberspace. In line with theorists who have refuted the early, dominant discourses that posited virtual reality as a utopian realm for the disembodied (Marwick 2005; O’Brien 1999), the argument is made here for a recontextualisation of the body as uniquely temporally and spatially realised through cyberspace, computers and social networking sites, due to the way technology illuminates the construction of gendered performances

through the compulsory maintenance work required to achieve online embodiment, and engages the individual in pleasurable and creative resignifications of self.

Judith Butler's (1990) articulation of performativity is an appropriate theory for guiding these discussions of the technologically situated body. Although performativity is commonly conceived of as a theory on the limits and structures of gender identity, rather than a theory of the body, one of Butler's ultimate revelations is that sex and gender, identity and flesh are one and the same, as she situates the performative body at the collapse of a falsely imposed sex/gender separation. There is utility in exploring her ideas on the body within a technological context, as the illuminating capacity of social networking technology elucidates key features of performativity which are not readily visible within the cloaked operations of discourse that Butler describes.

Butler's articulation of the performative body in *Gender trouble* begins at the binary chasm which emanates from Simone de Beauvoir's (1949, p. 267) argument that 'one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one'. As the body is culturally posited at the origin as static and self-evident matter, it assumes an authoritative facticity that prevents its interrogation. Butler's aim is to discredit a number of assumptions which flow from this statement: that the binary sex of bodies is self-evident; that binary gender oppositions are causally linked to biological anatomy; that sex and gender are separable; and that the subject has agency in accepting, rejecting or reconstructing a cultural gender identity.

In response, performativity uncovers the body as a 'reality effect' that is produced through a series of stylised, repeated performative acts which congeal to produce the illusions of sexual truth and stable gender. Ultimately, Butler argues that sex and gender are synonymous, but are perceived as separable through a discourse which simulates a separation between surface and depth and then erases all traces of its formative input. Finally, in order for these illusions to take hold, performative acts must be continually repeated. It is within these repetitions that stable gender is realised and the subject comes into being, as Butler argues that there is no pre-performative agency.

Butler also investigates the operation of discourse in shaping and maintaining binary gender identities. She surmises that the hegemonic discourse which produces these rigid binary gender roles is one which is invested in perpetuating the heterosexual matrix, where compulsory heterosexuality reduces bodies to their sexual reproductive function. The prohibitions of this heterosexual matrix are enforced through fear and punishment, as the non-conforming subject is rendered discursively unintelligible. However, despite the fixed limits of the discursive system, she uncovers possibilities for subversion within the performative process itself. Although Butler deviates from Foucault on the existence of pre-discursive substance, she still finds value in his ideas on the generativity of the law, which suggest that the judicial system necessarily produces the very abject subjects and unintelligible identities it is said to prohibit. This presupposes the existence of inherently non-conforming bodies. Consequently, the potential for subversion occurs within the reiteration of performative acts, as Butler suggests that each repetition opens up gaps of dissonance and slippage in which it becomes possible to subvert and shift gender roles.

These main points from Butler's theory of performativity will be used to organise an analysis of the performative body as it appears on the social networking site Facebook. Social networking sites

(SNSs) can broadly be described as online websites which construct or represent social relations, and facilitate the maintenance of these relations through a variety of multimodal channels. Given the wide deviations in the usage and functionality of different social networking platforms, this analysis focuses specifically on Facebook as, with 845 million active monthly users at the end of 2011 (Facebook 2011), it is not only the most widely used service, but one of the most dominant sites in the contemporary cyberspace environment. Given the huge user base of the site – spanning different languages, nationalities, ethnicities and ages – it is not within the scope of this article to offer a definitive and singular understanding of the ways in which the site is used. However, it is possible to look to the technological affordances that have been developed as a guide to the intended and popular usages of the site.

The Facebook profile is anchored through the publication of descriptive information ‘such as age, location, interests, and an “about me” section’ (boyd and Ellison 2007) which allows friends to verify the identity of the individual online. In addition, users typically fashion their profiles to represent their personality and interests. This branding occurs both as a conscious effort by the user – who is responsible for uploading profile pictures; writing status updates; uploading photo albums; becoming a fan of groups; downloading applications and engaging in quizzes and games; and revealing personal interests – as well as by the site, that controls the overall visual display of the profile body. After the creation of a Facebook profile, the individual situates it within an online network of friends. The creation of a network of Facebook friends generates an automatic newsfeed, which is the default homepage.

Engaging with the social networking site involves interacting with friends through a variety of modes and means of communication: ‘[M]ost interaction on Facebook is built on and facilitated by small exchanges of information, challenges, photos etc. between friends’ (Dalsgaard 2008, p. 9). There are multiple avenues for textual communication, such as writing on a friend’s wall; private messaging; instant messaging; or commenting – in addition to non-textual exchanges that may take place, such as liking a post or photo; tagging a friend in a photo or video; and playing interactive games.

The dynamic, unfolding qualities of performativity and technology align to illustrate Butler’s understanding of the iteratively constructed body and to argue for the existence of an online body – rather than mere identity or persona – in cyberspace. However, not only is the illuminating capacity of technology able to illustrate the superficial facticity of flesh, but it also exposes the hidden discursive inputs that, Butler argues, are not readily apparent or visible in the subject’s appearance.

Performativity documents a metaphysics of substance where natural bodies, pre-discursive flesh and the pre-formed subject are simply discursive illusions. Butler (1990, p. 142) argues that there is never a pre-formed subject nor a ‘doer behind the deed’, but that the illusion of a stable, material subject serves to prevent the interrogation of discourse by positing a false sense of agency within the individual.

Accordingly, cyberspace – often wrongly defined as a lack of physicality (Kirby 1997) – appears as an ideal realm in which to investigate this phantasmatic flesh. Online profiles are assumed to be virtual, therefore Butler’s point that stable matter is only realised through superficial, external

actions can be illustrated by reading Facebook as a body which only takes form through reiterative updating. Dividuality is a reference to anthropologist Marilyn Strathern's (1988) understanding of a subjectivity which explicitly incorporates others and objectifies external relations within the composition of self. The dividual construction of the Facebook profile exemplifies the point that the body is not constituted as a static and isolated materiality, but is always and only formed through continuous exchanges within a system of meaning.

Once the individual's profile is created it becomes a hyperlink, meaning it is networked, indexed and searchable within the online Facebook community. This is central to Facebook's premise as a social networking website:

The Facebook-person is presented relationally, in that a profile without connections to friends would make no sense since that is the whole point of the social networking site ... Facebook persons are thus not presented as bounded individuals, but rather as unbounded dividuals. (Dalsgaard 2008, p. 9)

As a dividual, intersubjective self, the Facebook profile is dependent on the actions of others to give it form, as these exchanges literally become incorporated as the body of the profile. Like the performative body, the Facebook profile is a phantasm that is entirely constituted by a limited range of defined actions permitted by the website.

However, Facebook also reveals the insecurities arising from the subject's realisation that their existence is not grounded by a stable and self-evident materiality. Members of an online community are caught in a perpetual existential crisis as, without a visible audience, they cannot determine whether posts have been read and ignored, or missed entirely. This leads to the unique quality of online interaction where an individual requires regular validation, regardless of whether that response is positive or negative. As Stern (2008, p. 111) explains in the context of teen blogs:

Lack of feedback is especially disheartening to those who put considerable effort into the appearance of the personal home page or the language of the blog. The feeling that one has been heard, that one matters in a greater context, is impeded when authors receive no or little response.

Through the important and reciprocal micro-exchanges on Facebook, the individual's online identity is continually verified and interpellated by others and by the website. As individuals tag photos, write on the wall and respond to status updates, they literally compose and reiterate their online bodies. In opposition to the concept of flesh, whose stable materiality is presupposed, the profile is a representation of the performative body, whose presence sublimates without ongoing resignification. That is, a Facebook profile that is not maintained loses its visibility in the currency of the newsfeed and becomes a signal of an unreliable means of communication with the individual, which amounts to irrelevance in the digital world.

Butler (1990) emphasises the importance of repetition in enforcing the surface–depth illusion. Not only does repetition allow performative acts to congeal to produce the appearance of stable materiality, but as there is no 'doer-behind-the-deed' this perpetual motion is required to bring the gendered subject into existence: '[T]he action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established, and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation' (1990, p. 178).

Performative repetition allows subjects to understand their bodies as natural and material, whereas such surface spectres of performance are – according to Butler – all that exist.

Consequently, Facebook's design is set up to maximise responses to posts and actions, and facilitate dialogue across its different layers of multimedia. Each comment, photo, post and status update has a textbox in which any networked friend can write a response. Moreover, it is the quantity of responses, rather than quality, which appears to be encouraged by Facebook. Although Facebook does not limit text responses to a set character limit like Twitter, text boxes are small and long posts become abridged when added to the individual's profile or the community newsfeed. In February 2009, Facebook added a further way to improve the quantity of responses with its 'like it' feature (Pearlman 2009). This feature allows users to click an icon which records a small 'thumbs up' against a post, allowing a user to record a response with the most minimal of physical actions. This repetition of action – which allows the individual to construct the profile as a phantasmic, online representation of self – mimics the construction of phantasmic 'flesh' that Butler describes.

Despite these resignifications that give the online body its form, however, Facebook does not replicate the assumption of stability attributed to the material body. Instead, the dividual constitution of profiles exposes bodies that are subject to unexpected change through the comments and actions of others in the network: 'Young people revisit their own web productions, not only to see how they might update them, but also to see what has happened to them in terms of "hits" or response messages and so on' (Weber and Mitchell 2008, p. 27). The online body is not moderated, and it is not possible for the user to access their profile continuously, thus necessarily leading to conditions where the publicly visible body at times evolves without the owner's awareness. This quality violates the assumption of stable materiality that discourse propagates.

The dividual construction of the online body also leads back to Butler's discussion of the performative subject's lack of agency outside of its performative reiterations. There is a sense of ownership of one's Facebook profile, a remnant of the myopic view that the screen reinforces hierarchical distinctions of humans over machines. It can, however, be seen that the online body acts quite independently in many respects. Not only is the profile constructed through the actions of others in ways that are not moderated or immediately visible to its creator, but the online body is subject to technical alterations through authoritative action taken by the website's programmers. The form of the online body evolves and is re-shaped by changes to the layout and format of the interface, which occur regularly. These changes are often undertaken to improve user functionality as well as the business viability of the site. Once changes to layout have occurred, the look of the old bodies is irrecoverable, which has previously caused much consternation to users and makes for continual tension between users and the site's programmers:

Some user-created groups on Facebook make it clear just how unhappy and frustrated users are with the new design. According to [Facebook group] Vote on the New Facebook Layout, more than 1.3 million people have voted, and only 80,400 support the new design. And so far, another user-generated group, Petition Against the 'New Facebook', has more than 1.7 million members. (Gaudin 2009)

In addition, although the site is not moderated, content is subject to removal at the discretion of the site's owners and their changing terms and conditions (Facebook 2010). Consequently, it can

be seen that online bodies have an autonomous presence which falls outside the scope of control of their owners.

The subject's false sense of agency is a discursive illusion that is replicated online through the interpellation of the Facebook profile. Butler employs Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation to explain the way subjects are built and bound by performative acts. Butler considers performative acts to encompass a wide range of socially ritualised linguistic, gestural and symbolic deeds, but does place particular emphasis on the role of language in performative constructions. Interpellation therefore highlights the importance of naming to the constitution of the self, not only in terms of what or how a subject is named, but where power is invested by those who are given the privilege of naming.

At first glance, the naming of a Facebook profile seems to be a simple act of self-interpellation, as the creator brings into being their online representation. However, further investigation makes clear that in fact this interpellation is severely limited by the purpose and functionality of social networking technology. Given that the profile becomes meaningless without a network of anchored relations, identity verification is paramount to this medium. If a profile is not immediately recognisable by name, then a friend request is less likely to be accepted by known friends, and it also removes the utility of Facebook as a searchable index. Within these limitations, then, it appears that the individual has little choice but to anchor his/her profile informationally, which often involves the straightforward replication of the creator's name in an act of culturally enforced interpellation.

In fact, the reach of Facebook appears to extend to denying the individual's agency over whether to connect with the site at all. As a global communication phenomenon which has embedded itself in the fabric of quotidian life, refusing to engage with the site leaves the individual at risk of being excluded from activities, information and communication that increasingly span the false distinctions of offline and online worlds – even conscientious objectors of the site cannot guarantee that photos of and references to them are not posted online by others. Butler argues that inciting a fear of social exclusion is one of the main discursive tactics for regulating the individual, as subjects that do not adopt established gender identities are exiled from the realm of discursive intelligibility. This same symbolic threat appears to govern the individual's engagement with pervasive social networking technology. Facebook therefore replicates the false agency presumed by the discursive subject, but simultaneously exposes its construction as a reality effect.

Butler (1990, p. 145) uses the term 'reality effect' to explain how the illusions of stability of the body and the authority of sex are legitimated solely through a veiled discursive undertaking that erases the traces of its own input: "[S]ex" is the reality-effect of a violent process that is concealed by that very effect. All that appears is "sex", and so "sex" is perceived to be the totality of what is, uncaused, but only because the cause is nowhere to be seen.' Although the experience which results from these effects is real, to the extent that it is lived as social fact by the subject, the lack of visibility of their discursive origins impedes the potential for their reappropriation and subversion. Butler suggests that it is crucial to acknowledge that reality effect do not emanate from within us as independent agents, or from an impartial, omniscient universe, but are calculatingly designed by a discourse with heterosexual investments.

Failing to concede the artificial construction of reality effects provides a major obstacle to subversion, thus it becomes important to evaluate the potential of cyberspace to illuminate discursive illusions. In contrast to the obfuscating tendencies of performative discourse, cyberspace is set up as a cognisant artificial reality. It does not, however, automatically provide a solution to exposing covert discourse, as its juxtaposition to the material lends it the character of a false barrier that confirms the ‘reality’ of real life against the virtuality of cyberspace (Žižek 2006), thereby replicating the illusion of binary division. This can be seen through Facebook’s requirement that ‘being’ entails anchoring information from a real-life persona to an online profile.

Facebook is considered to be an anchored form of online communication which stresses identity verification amongst users with an offline relationship. Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008, p. 1818) suggest that the most important identifying information includes ‘a person’s legal name, residential location, and institutional affiliations’. Information anchoring is visible in the mandatory forms which a Facebook user is required to complete, to realise their profile. This process reveals information such as name, sex, relationship status, educational and job networks, geographical location and birth date. In this manner, a user realises an anchored online body that – in its appearance as a collection of pictures, words and information stored in cyberspace – does not threaten the superiority or origins of the material body.

It is this regenerative capacity of the performative subject realised on Facebook that leads to an interest in the subversive potential of online bodies. The following section draws on this understanding of the online body as irrevocably intertwined with and mutually constituting the physical, discursive body, to discuss Butler’s notion of identity subversion in the context of new technologies.

Subversion and the human pleasures of technology

The question of subversion is a difficult one that, in some ways, is not satisfactorily addressed by Butler. Butler (1990, p. 8) is concerned with subversion, although she concedes that it is severely constrained by the impossibility of escaping the all-consuming effects of discourse:

Obviously the political task is not to refuse representational politics – as if we could. The juridical structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power; hence, there is no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices.

She does, however, find the promise of subversion emanating from within the operations of discourse, alluding to Foucault’s (1979) notion of a juridical system which necessarily generates the prohibitions it regulates. The power of the law (that both produces and prohibits) requires a necessary writing of what is deemed taboo into existence; accordingly, the abject and unintelligible identities which the law forbids are always necessarily produced by the framework of discourse. This confirms that not only is subversion possible, but its presence is guaranteed within the confines of performativity.

Butler uses the examples of drag and cross-dressing to illustrate the potential subversion of gender. These practices overtly reveal the constructed nature of gender and purposefully reconstruct it in perverse ways: ‘In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender

itself – as well as its contingency’ (Butler 1990, p. 175). Gender parody is defined as making explicit the potential for misalignment between gender and sex, and destroying notions of any natural bond between them. While Butler names subversion as embedded in the process of performativity, the argument can be made that pleasure is also inherent in the process, as repetition yields gaps of dissonance that allow the subject to regenerate him/herself creatively. Also, it can be seen that gaps of dissonance provide the only possibility for agency in the discursive framework that dictates that ‘power can be neither withdrawn nor refused, but only redeployed’ (1990, p. 158).

Given that performative iterations are occurring continuously in the creation and maintenance of social subjects, it appears unusual that only one act of subversion can be identified which, furthermore, is heavily qualified, as not all acts of cross-dressing constitute subversions of heterosexuality. Clearly, a major hindrance to subversive potential occurs as the discourse which creates and pervades bodies, and then purposefully erases the traces of its performative constructions, creates a diminished capacity for subjects to subsequently identify this process and understand its potential for satirical treatment. While Butler (1990) provides arguments that detail the connection between subversion and the performative process, technology and pleasure must be used to explore the connection between subversion and the performative subject.

Subversion, on the one hand, resists fixed definition, as its generativity renders it as unstable as the bodies and technologies that morph in the unfolding flux of dynamic time, space and meaning. While subversion cannot be reduced to an act, it is crucially distinguished in scale from mere creative regenerations of self. While regeneration allows the subject to adapt and change its form, it maintains an appearance that is discursively sanctioned. Regenerations of self do not challenge hegemonic discursive roles. On the other hand, subversion involves a shocking recreation of self in a way that mocks the supposed authority of discourse and exposes the fundamental misalignment of sex and gender, surface and depth. Although they emerge from the same folds of performativity, the majority of regenerations are not subversive. Thus, while regeneration is easily undertaken within the reality effects and false agency discursively offered to the subject, subversion is not so readily attainable. Technology is, however, considered to be a medium that can potentially facilitate subversion in three ways: by providing the structure or context for subversive identities; by rupturing the process of performative reiteration and allowing gaps of dissonance to emerge; and by making explicit the role of discourse in processes of construction and challenging the tacit acceptance of reality effects as natural, authoritative fact. These three hypotheses will now be explored in turn.

Butler’s (1990, p. 54) conclusion from generative law is that practices which are regulated by taboo do not cease to exist, but merely become powerfully and perversely eroticised through their prohibition: ‘That the prohibition exists in no way suggests that it works. Rather, its existence appears to suggest that desires, actions, indeed, pervasive social practices of incest are generated precisely in virtue of the eroticization of that taboo.’

This presupposes the existence of subversion and attaches pleasure to it as definition. Claudia Springer (1996, p. 55) relates this directly to the technological eroticisation of taboo:

Ambivalence toward the body has traditionally been played out most explicitly in texts labeled pornographic, where the construction of desire often depends on an element of aversion. That which

has been prohibited by censorship, for example, frequently becomes highly desirable.

Due to its very prohibition, what is denied automatically becomes sexually desirable. In the problematic of technology, what is prohibited appears to be the transgression of boundaries between humans and machines, as well as deviation from the sexual reproductive function of bodies as designated by discourse. Both these prohibitions are addressed in the practice of cybersex.

Sherry Turkle (1995, p. 21) also broaches the topic of online sex, noting that her respondents were particularly surprised at how intense the experience of cybersex could be: 'Many people who engage in netsex say that they are constantly surprised by how emotionally and physically powerful it can be. They insist that it demonstrates the truth of the adage that ninety percent of sex takes place in the mind.' Springer (1996, p. 58) describes the thrill of cybersex in terms of liberating disembodiment, where 'it becomes possible to express fantasies involving all kinds of personal transformations. Gender becomes fluid: men can interact as women or vice versa, and desire can be unleashed into the electronic realm from the comfortable safety of an anonymous identity.'

Turkle and Springer hypothesise that it is the anonymity of the screen and the fluidity it supposedly facilitates which allow for this new thrilling sexual pleasure, as new technological features actively allow the subject to pursue new ways of living and experiencing the self. Moreover, it appears to be an exploration of the limits of the body and its pleasures – if the body is discursively seen as a mere reproductive vessel, then technology provides the means for experimenting with forms of sexual expression that are divorced from reproduction. Superficially, then, technology provides the substance and form of a body that is subversive because it is not limited to a reproductive function.

It is, however, questionable whether cybersex can really be considered subversive. While online personas are often an expression of regenerated selves, there appears to be a stubborn replication of the same oppressive and rigidly discursive roles that appear materially. That is, although cybersex seems to offer a new way of performing sex, it still replicates the notion that flesh is relegated to sex. Moreover, while individuals might experiment with the experience of having sex within bodies of different genders, Springer (1996, p. 36) argues that the structures within which gender-bending takes place often reveal an insistent adherence to hegemonic binary gender roles, hierarchies and stereotypes: 'Characters can choose to become male or female, but they still function within a patriarchal system that elevates men's interests above women's.'

Bringing this discussion back to an analysis of Facebook, the online profile falls short of being considered subversive as it is most commonly viewed as a false barrier against which material existence is confirmed, acting as a virtual body that reinforces the authenticity of the flesh. While Facebook illuminates different expressions of subjectivity, these new forms merely recreate rather than subvert the limits of the flesh. Facebook's conventionality does not challenge notions of sex or gender, nor the patriarchal system in which these categories flourish – which is not a surprising finding, given that it is a technology modelled on the replication of material anchors. While technology can potentially provide the forum for expressing subversive subjects, in reality this rarely occurs, as composing a technological body does not automatically guarantee subversion.

The second avenue to explore is the use of technology to create a rupture in the usually seamless, automatic and unquestioned process of performativity. Performative processes are engaged with on an involuntary, instinctive manner by the discursive subject, where ‘the reiterative practice of locutionary acts produces material meanings and effects which assume the status of the commonplace’ (Kirby 2006, p. 43). Typically, the consistency of performative acts congeals and reduces the capacity for iterative disjunction, from which subversion emanates, to be located. However, technology disturbs the surface of stable performative materiality. It changes the set routines and repetitions of daily life, and creates new gadgets and modes of communicating, working and playing. Evidence of technological disruption most commonly manifests as fear, as discourse battles to wield regulatory power over emergent technologies and possibilities. Facebook, for example, has been linked by the media to rape and murder (Smith 2010), syphilis (Moses 2010) and breaches of privacy (Timson 2010).

Despite the incessant unfolding of technology, subversion is still considered to be a rare occurrence. The disparity between the level of technological rupture and the level of discursive subversion suggests that the two are not directly correlated. Disrupting the automation of performativity is only considered to be useful if the subject’s inability to locate the gaps of dissonance, disguised within the folds of iteration and cloaked by discourse, are the sole obstacle to subversion.

Finally, the strength of engaging technology for subversion is deemed to lie in unconcealing the artificial construction of these oppressions in a tangible way. Technology is linked to flesh as they share a similar generative construction process – as technology unfolds in the ‘unconcealing’ manner described by Heidegger and flesh is constructed (phantasmically) as described by Butler. However, unlike the position of the flesh that is naturalised by discourse, technology has the advantage of always being suspiciously regarded as constructed due to its categorisation as inorganic. By aligning these two concepts, and viewing technology as a transitional object, the manipulation of overtly artificial technology can lead to the subject gaining a metaphorical awareness of his/her own constructed nature.

Again, though, this argument is incomplete. While technology has the potential to re-illuminate the artificial construction of bodies, it does not necessarily guarantee an illumination of alternative, subversive possibilities for reconstruction. Rather, these three theories all reveal ways in which technology contributes to performative subversion, but neither in itself, nor together, encapsulates the full significance of technology to the process of subversion. The realisation of subversion rests on an essential, additional component: the agency of the technologically constituted subject.

Generativity: The creative potential of online bodies

Part of the thrill of cyberspace lies in its capacity to regenerate the performative subject, where pleasures emerge from creative engagement with technology. Emergent pleasures are linked to generativity as they are not stable replications of predetermined value, but are changeable, dynamic and surprising. In addition, the process of repetition is innately pleasurable for the subject. Returning to Butler’s discussion of performativity, repetition is the mechanism through which gaps of dissonance emerge. The contention here is that these gaps are pleasurable, as they provide

the only possibility for the subject to realise his/her limited agency and creatively regenerate him/herself. Facebook exemplifies this pleasure of regeneration. The individual's compulsion to constantly update his/her profile and elicit feedback is a repetition of actions that resignify the body. This compulsion is driven by the pleasure of changing the form and limits of the online body, revealing the regenerative potential of performativity.

Although regeneration and subversion are not synonymous, as they differ in the degree to which they transform the subject and challenge discourse, they both stem from these pleasurable ruptures in performativity. Therefore, the argument is that the subject's discursively innocuous pleasure in creative reconstruction suggests an underlying pleasure in subversion.

The valuable input of technology to the subject is important here in distinguishing between the agency that reproduces and the agency that subverts. False agency is offered by discourse and is freely available; it is utilised by the regenerating subject who publishes him/herself as a disembodied identity on a social networking site, or creates an anonymous identity in the guise of the opposite sex, while stylistically replicating its gender stereotypes. It is, however, suggested that true agency is realised when the subject exploits his/her technological constitution to locate subversive gaps and expressly contest all that appears as normal, stable or given within lived experience.

The reciprocity of subjects and technology reveals that technology in isolation cannot bring about subversion. Cyberspatial selves are not necessarily subversive, and in fact usually only achieve the status of mere regenerations, capriciously engaged in by the performative subject. These creative experimentations, while not directly challenging to discursive constructions, are still useful as in their pleasurable allure they draw the subject towards the dissonant gaps and behaviours that – under the right alignment of technology, pleasure and agency – bloom as subversion. Subversion does not erupt from cataclysmic events or technologies, but emerges much less spectacularly through incremental twists and turns. What is guaranteed by the mutual enfolding of processes of technologies, bodies and pleasure, then, is the quiet joy of and commitment to generativity that hopes and promises change.

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Note

- 1 The concept of flesh elaborated in this article draws on the theoretical foundations of Merleau-Ponty's *The phenomenology of perception* (1945), although it is only referenced through the more contemporary work of Butler and Kirby.

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The construction of gender through discourse on the social network Badoo: Exploring virtual interaction

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Abstract

Nowadays many meetings and conversations take place through social networks. Badoo.com is one of the best known, with more than 102 million users in 2010. This article concentrates on communication through the chat in Badoo between 150 men and the author. The study analyses the main linguistic characteristics in the conversations (orthography, use of capital letters, emoticons and strategies of courtesy and discourtesy) in order to observe how gender is constructed in interaction. The analysis shows that the conversations have characteristics of oral discourse. Moreover, the author prepared five questions as a survey in order to observe what men expected from Badoo, what their values and hobbies were, if they would like to marry and the characteristics they value in women. The analysis of the survey results shows how the participants in the virtual interactions investigated here, negotiate their gender identities.

Keywords: chat, cyberpragmatics, discourse analysis, gender, Internet, virtual interaction

Introduction

Discourse is language in use, in other words, language joined to context. For this reason, critical discourse analysis (CDA) pays attention to authentic texts as examples of meaningful expressions in a determined social context – in Woods’ words (2007, p. x):

Discourse is, at the very least, language plus context – by which I mean the context that we bring with us when we use language; the context that includes our experience, assumptions and expectations; the context we change (and which is itself changed) in our relationships with others, as we both construct and negotiate our way through the social practices of the world we live in.

The different discourses that take place in our society are framed by interpersonal relationships between the participants in interaction. In those interactions speakers can use all the different options available in the system of language, and choose vocabulary and grammatical structures by taking into consideration their communicative end.

Language expresses meanings and it is also a tool to express meanings. Studies on discourse highlight the relationships between language and society (Alexander 2008; Blackledge 2009; Fairclough 1995; Farr 2010; Llamas and Watt 2010; O’Grady 2010; Renkema 2009; Teubert 2010). Following the principles of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and critical discourse analysis (CDA), the potential of the system of language will be explored as it manifests in the

social network Badoo. The purpose of this study is to observe the main linguistic characteristics in the conversations analysed: orthography, the use of capital letters and emoticons, and strategies of courtesy and discourtesy.

The theoretical frameworks previously mentioned see language as a social practice. They employ analytical methods of discourse in order to observe the role language has in maintaining and legitimising social relations (Van Leeuwen 2009, p. 277). In this way, it is observed that the social function of language is not just to communicate information, but that language is also a resource used to negotiate social activities (Cameron *et al.* 1992, p. 78). In this sense, gender is also developed in discourse, i.e., masculine or feminine behaviour is socially constructed (West *et al.* 1997, p. 119). Following on from what has been noted regarding language–context relations, language is therefore understood not only as a linguistic system but also a social system, such that when studying language an attempt is made to examine the different social phenomena in which it is framed (Blommaert 2010, p. 3; Kress 2010, p. 240). The approach employed here is also social, because the different persons who intervene in the linguistic exchanges have social histories framed in a determined culture, as Thompson and Muntigl (2008, p. 127) make clear:

The most obvious application [of SFL] is in achieving a better understanding of how language functions in establishing and maintaining social and personal relationships and, beyond that, the broader cultural norms of behaviour. It is important to stress that Systemic Functional Linguistics does not see language use as simply reflecting those norms: language has a central role in constructing them.

Choosing a functional approach to language shifts the focus onto the end speakers have in mind within communicative situations, such as the interactions between women and men in the online social network site Badoo, under scrutiny in this study. In consequence, the context in which the different interactions take place is essential in order to understand meaning.

This article is organised in the following way: first it offers a literature review which pays attention to research on language and gender, virtual communication and Badoo; the next section focuses on the methodology and the main steps followed in the research process. Finally, attention is paid to the main results obtained from the survey and the discussion, after which some conclusions are offered.

Literature review: Gender and interaction on Badoo

Every day, people participate in different social encounters in which there is communicative interchange (directly or indirectly) with other human beings. Verbal and non-verbal factors are present in each meeting, and it is evident that gender influences the extent to which those factors vary.

Research on language and gender has shown that there are differences in the way women and men speak (Cameron and Kulick 2003; Coates 2007; Holmes 1994; Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003; Jule 2008; Martín Rojo and Gómez Esteban 2007; Mullany 2007). These studies show that women are cooperative facilitators who care about their words; on the other hand, men tend to speak longer and interrupt more than women (Cameron 1997, 1998; Goddard and Patterson 2005; Holmes 1994; Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert and Leap 2000; Tannen 1990).

Gender is a social construction of people's behaviour, which also covers their linguistic behaviour, in Jule's words (2008, p. 6): 'Gender performances are not universal, but gender as a social construct is a universal factor influencing the way people live their lives and understood each other.'

Gender is constantly performed and has to be reaffirmed in determined situations, depending on cultural rules which are defined socially and historically, in such a way that masculinity and femininity are constructed (Butler 2004, p. 1; Cameron 1997, p. 49). Gender is reflected in verbal interactions in such a way that there is a relationship between language and identity, as essential elements of human experience (Llamas and Watt 2010, p. 1).

We live in a globalised society in which interpersonal relationships have changed considerably. Many meetings, friendships and conversations now take place or are maintained via the Internet (Espinar Ruiz and González Río 2008, 2009; Rubio Liniers 2003). Previous studies make clear that there are differences in the ways of interpreting gender and discourse in physical or virtual interactions, because when communicating online it is possible to remain anonymous as an individual, or to pose as someone else (Senft 2008; Turkle 2011).

Over the past few years, the main advances in the use of the Internet have occurred in respect of social networks, wikis (the best-known being Wikipedia), personal media (*Me Media*, cf. Garfield 2006), culture or participative web (Jenkins *et al.* 2006), Web 2.0 (cf. O'Reilly 2005, 2007), social software and even C Generation (C from 'contents' and 'creativity', cf. Bruns 2006) and user-generated content, among others. Yus (2001) created the term 'cyberpragmatics' to apply the theory of pragmatics to discourse found on the Internet. Cyberpragmatics concentrates on analysing the main characteristics of the communication people use on the Internet, so as to juxtapose the main differences with face-to-face communication. In this way, language and context are analysed together.

Herring (in press), who has studied the characteristics of online discourse over the past 17 years, refers to computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) as an approach to analysing computer-mediated communication (CMC); it focuses on language and language use online, to determine the properties of digital communication media. The author also researched the main differences between women and men's online discourse (Herring, in press, p. 10): 'Gender differences in discourse style were documented in public online discussion forums and chat rooms throughout the 1990s that showed males to be more assertive, insulting, sarcastic, and profane and females to be more accommodating, supportive, affectionate, and upbeat.' The communication that takes place on the Internet modifies the public representation of people's identity, and as such presents a challenge for the study of human communication (Belson 1994; Vidal Jiménez 2000). For that reason, this article will focus on conversations that take place in chatrooms on the social network site Badoo. The chat, as Yus (2001, p. 139) points out,

[...] es una nueva forma de comunicación, un híbrido entre la estabilidad y la formalidad de la letra impresa, por un lado, y la cualidad efímera e informal del habla. [... a new way of communication, it is a mixture between the stability and the formality of the printed letter, on the one hand, and the ephemeral and informal property of speech] (translation by the author).

Badoo.com, one of the more popular social networks, with its headquarters in London, was created by a group of young Russian and British experts in computer science in 2006. Their main aim was to establish a social network forum that breaches social frontiers. The chief objectives, for users, are to get to know people with similar interests or to find a partner. It allows contact with people who live near (the page can be searched accordingly) or far away. Badoo allows users to chat, to show photographs and videos, to create a profile to share interests and hobbies, to state what they are looking for in life and who they are. Moreover, as happens in all social networks, it allows users to interact with other users by commenting on their profiles or inviting and accepting them as friends.

Navigating in Badoo is easy: it uses Javascripts and the structure of the site is very clear, making use of icons and buttons to guide browsers in a highly attractive way. In 2010, Badoo had a total of 102 million users in more than 180 countries (it is available in 22 languages). Badoo functions as a hybrid between closed social networks such as Facebook and the more open dating websites such as Match.com (Yus 2011).

Two types of virtual communities are usually identified: synchronic, as happens in the chatroom where participants are connected to the Internet simultaneously; and asynchronic, as happens in newsgroups, which keep a record of all the different interactions and therefore create a complex, common framework (Yus 2001, p. 57).

Interaction on Badoo is normally synchronic, although it can also be asynchronic because people can leave written messages in the chatroom for people who are not connected at the same time or send an introductory message saying that they would like to meet someone whose profile they found interesting.

An analysis of the way men talk to women on the social network site Badoo reveals how spontaneous interactions are produced. It is interesting to observe the structure of the language used to exchange meaning in a virtual environment: men usually start the conversation in these virtual exchanges, which reflects the traditional way of establishing relationships. According to Simón Rodríguez (2008, p. 8):

Las antiguas formas sexistas y machistas de relación y de organización social ya no son válidas, pero permanecen en la sombra o a la luz del día e impiden avances hacia la equidad, producen desencuentros y apartan a las mujeres y a los hombres de vidas más saludables. [The old forms of sexism and manliness and of social organisation are not valid any more, but they are kept in the shadow or in the light and they avoid advances towards equality, they produce misunderstandings and they put women and men apart from more healthy lives] (translation by the author).

This idea aligns with the fact that men have more power and their voices are better represented than those of women in Western and oriental societies (Kiesling 1997; Martínez Lirola 2010).

Methodology and main steps in the research

Participants and context: Research design

This study comprised 400 conversations between five women and 150 men with profiles on Badoo. These men wrote to the respective women in order to get to know them, invite them out on a date, they proposed sex, etc. The conversations took place between October and December 2010.

The context in which these conversations took place is obviously virtual, because it is via the chatroom that users who are registered on Badoo have access to other users/subscribers. As Yus (2001, p. 79) makes clear:

La conversación virtual por Internet, conocida coloquialmente como chat (tomado del término inglés, charlar), es una conversación oral en un soporte escrito, una nueva forma de comunicación con sus propios códigos de funcionamiento. [The virtual conversation via the Internet, colloquially known as 'chat' (taken from the English), is an oral conversation with written support – a new form of communication with its own codes] (translation by the author).

Profiles

The analysis shows that the majority of people registered on Badoo (70 %) use their first name, which can be real or not, instead of a nickname, which is the most common way of appearing on the Internet, as Yus (2010, p. 59) points out:

El apodo (*nickname o nick*) es una forma más de representación de la persona en Internet. En variedades de comunicación sincrónica como el *chat*, estos alias son muy comunes (a menudo un requisito) y de inmediato surge el interrogante de qué relación puede haber entre la persona real que existe tras el apodo, y las connotaciones contextuales que aporta la elección de un determinado apodo ... [The nickname (Nick) is another way of representing people on the Internet. In varieties of synchronic communication, such as the chat, these alias are very common (sometimes they are a requirement and immediately we wonder about the relationship between the real person that exists behind the nickname, and the contextual connotations that provide the choice of a determined nickname ...] (translation by the author).

The fact that people can use a nickname or pseudonym on the Internet shows how easy it is to modify their identity and personality on the web, or to construct alternative, specifically online, identities. This can be problematic when the boundaries between their virtual and their real lives are crossed.

The men who interacted specifically with the author were between 30 and 45 years of age, and their jobs varied: auditor, mechanic, electrician, waiter, builder, pharmacist. Of them, 74 per cent did not have a university degree. Their level of education varied, and this was evident in the way they wrote. The photographs the men posted on their profiles were also heterogeneous – some posted pictures with their friends at the beach or hiking, while others appeared shirtless or in a bathing costume which revealed a great deal of their body.

Results and discussion

This section concentrates on the main linguistic characteristics observed in the conversations that form part of the corpus of examples. The author decided to prepare questions as part of a survey to be taken from all men who interacted with her. The questions are the following:

1. What do you look for in Badoo? Of the respondents, 50 per cent pointed out that they wanted to find a partner, 30 per cent wanted friendship and 20 per cent said ‘whatever comes’ (to talk, to spend time, to share, etc.).
2. What do you value in a woman? Here, 75 per cent expected women to be loving, romantic and faithful, which shows the representation of certain gender stereotypes; 30 per cent attached importance to women being independent, having a sense of humour or hobbies.
3. What are your values? Of the respondents, 40 per cent asked for clarification, because they did not know what was meant by ‘values’. The answers were diverse: to be honest, not to lie, to have a sense of humour.
4. What are your hobbies? Here, 77 per cent responded that their main hobbies were doing sports such as running, swimming or playing football; 23 per cent said going out with friends, going out for dinner or going to the cinema.
5. Do you want to get married? Of the respondents, 73 per cent said yes, 20 per cent said no and seven per cent were unsure – it depended on whether their partner wanted to or not. It is surprising that so many men want to get married and it is suspicious that so many gave a positive answer – possibly because they think this is the answer a woman would expect.

General characteristics of interactions on Badoo

Following Yus (2001, p. 80), the main characteristics observed in the conversations recorded on Badoo are the following: interaction takes place in text form; personal information can be manipulated; people can interact yet be in different geographical areas; communication can be synchronic or asynchronic; the messages can only be read by the two people involved in a conversation, although it is possible to write general comments expressing an opinion on each profile on the web page; people can participate in different interactions, i.e., they can chat with a different person at the same time without the other being aware of it; the users do not know each other; and it is compulsory to post a picture in a personal profile before chatting on Badoo.

The conversations that take place on Badoo show characteristics of oral discourse in that their style is informal, since it is necessary to send the messages quickly (as in a conversation) and to read them quickly, and it is also important to establish interpersonal connections quickly and effectively. For this reason, those interacting on Badoo write what they would like to say at that particular moment. Consequently, there are frequently orthographic errors due to speed typing, as well as incomplete sentences (Mayans 2002). As Yus (2010, p. 185) points out:

Las teclas del ordenador ofrecen al usuario una cierta gama de posibilidades para connotar su texto con una sensación de oralidad y para compensar la falta de cualidades vocales del texto escrito (Reid, 1994: 31–32; Ruedenberg et al., 1994). Jaffe et al. (1995) etiquetan esta gama como emotextos, un término de amplio espectro que incluiría las variaciones intencionadas en la ortografía (ej., dialecto visual), el uso estratégico de las mayúsculas, las sustituciones léxicas (pistas metalingüísticas de connotación paraverbal, por ejemplo escribir ‘hmmm’, los marcadores gramaticales (por ejemplo, el uso reiterado de exclamaciones), y las composiciones icónicas- emoticonos). Todo vale para comunicar la sensación de que el texto posee las cualidades de un enunciado oral. [The computer’s keys offer the user a variety of possibilities to connote her/his text with a sense of orality and to compensate for the lack of vocal qualities of the written text (...). Jaffe et al. (1995) label this range as emotexts, a wide term that includes the intended varieties in orthography (e.g. visual dialect), the strategic use of capital letters, lexical substitutions (metalinguistic clues or paraverbal connotations, for example writing ‘hmmm’, the grammatical markers (e.g., the reiterated use of exclamations), and the iconic compositions-emoticons. Everything is valid to communicate the sensation that the text has the qualities of an oral enunciation] (translation by the author).

It is relevant here to refer briefly to the variable tenor in the SFL theory of context, which refers to the relationship between the different participants in a communicative situation: for example, formal/informal or hierarchic relationships accompanying the use of different types of language. It is expected that users are familiar with a specific register (or discursive mode [Halliday 1978]) in such chats, which are characterised by informality and demands a relationship between the participants (‘tenor’ [see Halliday 1978]). The relationship in this study is based on equality, because in general no participant has more power than another – a characteristic of everyday informal interactions between friends or those aspiring to develop friendships.

Linguistic characteristics

The following section concentrates on the main linguistic characteristics observed in the conversations recorded on Badoo.

Emoticons

Danet (1996) and Yus (2001, 2010, 2011) identify the main strategies used in virtual communication, while Byron and Baldridge (2007) and Byron (2008) point out the connotative use of capital letters and emoticons as strategies to communicate feelings and emotions in e-mails. These strategies are also present in this corpus of conversations, as is evident in the examples below.

Many men use the emoticon :-) at the beginning of the conversation to show that they are happy to establish contact, and to break the ice. That is why emoticons are commonly found once they have started the interaction by saying: ‘Hello, how are you?’ or ‘Hi, would you like to chat with me?’ Often, when a man proposes a date and the woman declines, men use the emoticon that shows self-pity, i.e., :-(. In this regard, Yus (2010, p. 188) notes the following on the use of emoticons:

Una de las formas más comunes de suplir la ausencia del canal virtual en los chats es el uso de *textos*

icónicos denominados *emoticonos* (del inglés *emoticon*, tomado de *emotive* y *icon*), también llamado *smilie* (del inglés *smiley*) por algunos usuarios (Quinion, 1996). Se trata de combinaciones de signos de puntuación simples cuya unión (y una vez que el lector haya girado la vista 90 grados hacia la izquierda) parece formar diferentes expresiones de la cara y otros signos icónicos más sofisticados (sonrisa =:-) enfado =:-(etc). [One of the most common ways of replacing the absence of the virtual channel in chats is the use of iconic texts called emoticons (taken from emotive and icon), also called *smilie* (from English *smiley*) by some users (Quinion, 1996). They are the combination of simple punctuation signs whose union (once the reader has rotated her/his eyes 90° towards the left) seems to create different expressions of the face and other iconic signs which are more sophisticated (smile = :-) annoyance = :-(etc.)] (translation by the author).

Capital letters are not often used in the conversations analysed (only in 20%) and they are mainly used to check whether the person being chatted to is still on Badoo. Examples include:

ARE YOU THERE? (¿ESTÁS AHÍ?)

ARE YOU STILL CONNECTED? (¿SIGUES CONECTADA?)

HI, ARE YOU STILL READING ME? (HOLA, ¿ME SIGUES LEYENDO?).¹

Orthography

One of the main characteristics observed in the conversations analysed here, is the way in which orthography differs from the standard, in order to adhere to two main characteristics: to be colloquial and prosodic.

- **Colloquial:** reducing words due to the way they are pronounced in oral conversations. None of the conversations analysed show the use of *tildes* (the written accent in Spanish). This characteristic occurred in 92 per cent of the conversations analysed. Examples include:

ola ola, en lugar de hola; q tal? En lugar de qué tal?; voy a a hacer dxt (en lugar de deporte), es por si te apetcia charlar ... [Hi, hi how are you, I am going to play sports, would you like to chat ...].

The letter k is commonly found instead of *que* for reasons of linguistic economy:

me parece estupendo aprovecha tu ke puedes, ke trabajas por las mañanicas mas a gusto ke un san luis; pues en un principio k me llame la atencion su exterior, no k sea especialmente wapa sino k le vea algo diferente y luego su personalidad; de todo hay en la viña del señor chikilla; pero no hace falta entrar aki para darse cuenta. [That is great, take advantage of it because you can, since you work only in the morning. Firstly I like the physical appearance of a woman, although she is not really beautiful I look for something different, and then here personality; we are all sorts little girl, but it is not necessary to be in Badoo to be aware of that.]

- **Prosodic:** prosodic patterns of voice are suggested through the use of capital letters, the repetition of certain letters or the use of punctuation such as exclamation marks. This type of orthography appears in 95 per cent of the examples analysed:

– Multiple punctuation marks: *a ver si te animas más!!!!* [cheer up!!!], *qué te gusta hacer???* [what do you like doing????]. Punctuation is characterised by the use of the final question mark or exclamation marks, as is the case in English. The question mark or exclamation mark that should appear at the beginning therefore disappears.

– Excentric orthography: *Trabajaarrrrrrrr; ke hace una tia tan intelectual y preparada como tu...en un sitio como esteeeeeeeee; hay tantas opcionessss; holaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa holaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa; dios mio de mi vidaaaaaaaaa hay alguna tarde ke descansessssss; yo de mayor kiero ser como tuuuuuuuu; a valeeee con trankilidaddddddd, eoeeoeoeoeoeo.* [Workingggggggg, what is a girl as intellectual and well prepared as you doing in a place like thissssss; there are so many optionssssss; hiiiiiii; oh my God, is there any afternoon in which you are free; when I grow up I want to be like youuuu; Ok slowlyyyyyy, eoeeoeoeoeoeo].

– Capital letters: ANGRY

– Written smile: *jajaja!!!* [hahaha in English]; *jajaja; jajajaja siiii tienes razonnnnnnn; ajajajaa; upssss; ajajjaa* [hahaha you are rightttt].

– Descriptions of actions: *I am waiting for your reply*

– Emoticons: :-) (happy) and :-((sad) are commonly found, occurring in 36 per cent of the conversations in this corpus.

– Unusual space between letters: *¿EST AS?, ¿C O M O D I C E S?* [ARE YOU THERE?, WHAT DO YOU SAY?]

– Interjections: *uins por poco; ainsss... ya no estás, ainssssss, ainssssssssssss, Ums* [Uins almost, ainsss you are not there ainssssss, ainssssssssssss, Ums].

There are spelling mistakes in some examples. For instance, there (*ahí*) and there (*hay*) are confused in the following example: *estás hay?* [are you there?]. Moreover, it is common for the first letter of one word to be linked to the last letter of the preceding word, when people type fast: *no los abia* (*en lugar de no lo sabía*) [I did not know], *o tev as?* (*en lugar de te vas?*) [are you leaving?]. When question marks or exclamation marks are used, only the final punctuation mark appears, never the first.

As regards morphology, a few examples of clippings, acronyms and abbreviations are found in the corpus. It is very common to abbreviate the word *también* [too, also] by using *tb*, and *fin de semana* with *finde* [weekend]: *bueno disfruta tu tb del finde* [well enjoy your weekend as well].

Strategies of courtesy and discourtesy

The term *chatiquette* (from chat and etiquette), whose translation would be ‘cyber manners’ is used in many manuals to refer to the rules of courtesy specific of chats (see Jonsson 1998; chapter 3 and concrete rules in Grossman 2000). As Yus (2010, p. 275) notes:

La cortesía es una estrategia típicamente humana destinada a favorecer las relaciones entre los semejantes y mitigar la imposición de determinadas acciones a otras personas. A pesar de este atributo universal, la cortesía se expresa de forma diferente en cada cultura. [Courtesy is a typically human strategy used to favour relationships and mitigate the imposition of certain actions to other people. Although it is a universal attribute, courtesy is expressed in different ways in each culture] (translation by the author).

There are different expressions of courtesy in the conversations analysed: ‘*Si me lo permites quisiera presentarme*’, ‘*Te apetece hablar conmigo?*’ [If I may, I would like to introduce myself; do you feel like talking to me?]. Moreover, another way of being polite towards a woman is to use positive adjectives:

‘*Hola princesa*’, ‘*hola bellísima*’, ‘*hola preciosa*’, ‘*hola poliglota guapa*’, ‘*hola guapa*’, ‘*Hola niña guapa*’ [Hi princess, hi beautiful, hi precious, hello beautiful polyglot, hello beautiful, hello beautiful girl].

‘*Hola, me encantaría conocerte, eres bellísima y muy sensual*’ [Hi I would love to meet you, you are very beautiful and sensual].

‘*Hola, que sonrisa tan bella y que guapa sales en la foto, felicidades y besos*’ [Hello, what a beautiful smile, you look very beautiful in the photograph, congratulations and kisses].

‘*HOLA CORAZON, RECUERDA QUE TU PUEDES SER UNA PERSONA PARA EL MUNDO, PERO PARA UNA PERSONA TU PUEDES SER EL MUNDO, SEGURAMENTE LOS SIENIFICOS NO SABEN TODAVIA QUE TU ERES UNA DE LAS MARABILLAS DEL MUNDO SI TE DESCUBREN IRAN POR TI ERES MUY HERMOSA*’. [Hello, sweetheart, remember that you can be a person to the world but you can be the world to one person. I am sure scientists do not know yet that you are one of the wonders of the world, if they discover you they will go for you, you are very beautiful].

‘*BUENOS DIAS, SI ME LO PERMITES QUERIA MANDARTE UN SALUDO Y DESEARTE TENGAS UN DIA GENIAL...*’ [Good morning, if you allow me, I would like to send greetings and wish you a good day].

Courtesy is related to the maxim of approbation (Leech 1983), because it consists of minimising criticism towards others while maximising praise, as is evident in the preceding examples. Moreover, another way of being polite is to use superlatives (*bellísima*, *guapísima*) [very beautiful, very good looking], diminutives (*besitos*, *un besito*, *un besazo*) [little kisses, a little kiss, a big

kiss] or adjectives preceded by the focusing adverb *muy* [very] (*muy guapa, muy interesante*) [very beautiful, very interesting].

Certain rude expressions are, however, also used. Yus (2010, p. 284) notes:

La grosería, por otro lado, es una desviación de aquello que se entiende como cortés en un contexto social, es de enfrentamiento inherente y perjudicial para el equilibrio social. [Coarseness, on the one hand, is a deviation from what is understood as politeness in a social context, it is inherently confrontational and prejudicial in terms of social balance] (translation by the author).

Rude expressions include *joer* [fuck you] and *o mierda* [shit], which appear mainly when people continue chatting and one individual discovers that the other is not connected.

The only two rude or forward expressions that appear in the conversations analysed are: '*te he preguntado si has pensado en quedar para que peguemos un buen polvo*'. [I asked if you would like to meet to fuck] and '*voulez vous coche avec moi ce soir*' [would you like to sleep with me tonight?]. The author was invited to participate in a threesome:

hola somos una pareja y buscamos una chica para trio o pareja no tenemos experiencia queremos conocer alguien e ir poco a poco si te interesa este es nuestro email XXX@hotmail.com pedimos discreción y buena presencia y ante todo buen rollo si no te interesa perdona por haberte molestado. [Hi, we are a couple and we are looking for a girl to create a trio or couple. We do not have experience, we want to know somebody and go slowly. If you are interested, this is our e-mail XXX@hotmail.com.² We ask you to be discreet and good looking and to radiate positive energy. If you are not interested, sorry for bothering you] (translation by the author).

Conclusion

It is impossible to adequately analyse language if it is separated from the social context in which it is used and interpreted. To analyse the language used on Badoo it is necessary to pay attention to the characteristics of oral discourse, as they appear in the messages in chats reflected here. The author's analysis of the answers to her survey show that the participants in the virtual interactions, under analysis here, negotiated their gender identities.

The profiles of the men who interacted with the author are varied. However, in their interactions on Badoo, many characteristics common to oral communication could be noted, along with the innovative use of language (multiple punctuation, eccentric orthography, emoticons, etc.). Although the respondents provided written answers, these reflected what they would say if the person they were chatting to, were in front of them. Clearly, the written medium is being used to realise a mode of discourse that resembles the spoken word (Halliday 1978).

Users understand masculinity and femininity in different ways (as well as the models of communicative behaviour as they pertain to the different sexes) in face-to-face or virtual communication. For example, the analysis shows that men take the initiative to interact on Badoo, thus existing gender stereotypes are reinforced (they expect women to be receptive rather than active, sweet and loving rather than challenging or aggressive, etc.).

Some of the main disadvantages of Badoo include the following: the published photographs are not verified/moderated and may therefore be fraudulent or near nudity may be an issue; the majority of contacts stem from people's physical appearance, which is why some are more provocative; children/teenagers have access to this social site on which flirting occurs; the site has not been updated recently; it is not as handy for chatting as MSN is; Badoo does not allow users to block contacts. On the other hand, some of the main advantages include the following: it is easy to access Badoo because anyone can register without invitation; registration is free and deregistering is simple; it is an easy way to get to know people; it allows the user to chat with other people; registered Badoo users have a profile which allows them to personalise those details they wish to post.

This article allowed the author to investigate a new way of meeting people and establishing social relations in a virtual environment. Not meeting face to face makes Badoo perfect for starting a friendship or a love relationship, as far as many people are concerned. It allows users to chat freely – or, at least, more freely than would otherwise be possible – and to approach people in a natural way, just as they would through an informal conversation in a physical environment. As the examples presented here show, through discourse analysis of language in relation to its social context, one can learn more about social interactions in the contemporary online world, as constructed through language, and in comparison to other more tradition forms and media of communication.

Notes

1. Spanish examples appear as in the original virtual interactions, that is why certain words are spelled incorrectly.
2. The original e-mail address has been substituted by XXX.

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The make-up and performances of Turkish-German homosexuality: A reading of Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola und Bilidikid* (1999)

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Abstract

In 1999, *Lola und Bilidikid* emerged as the creative product of Turkish-born director, Kutluğ Ataman, and provided a rare example and highly nuanced exploration of homosexuality in a Turkish-German context. This article explores the film's representation of a group of characters marginalised not only on the level of their cultural background, but also on the level of sexual identity. Through a close analysis of the film, various demonstrations of and responses to homosexuality as a sub-culture within a patriarchal, migrant (and therefore already marginalised) group will also be explored, including particularly the notions of drag and performance. These responses will be analysed from the perspective of the protagonists, who are themselves not only both gay and of Turkish origin, but also demonstrate almost fundamentally conflicting approaches to homosexuality. This is particularly evident in the varying degrees to which they either accept or reject their own homosexuality. The article will also explore the consequences of the acceptance and rejection of their respective homosexualities and the extent to which this informs the construction and/or perpetuation of a particular performance of masculinity.

Keywords: drag, gender roles, homosexual masculinity, homosexuality, honour, patriarchy, shame, trauma

Introduction

This article was extracted from a chapter of the author's doctoral thesis Petersen (2012), which was centred on an examination of the representations of Turkish-German masculinity in literature and film. The thesis itself was entitled 'Cultural constructions of Turkish-German masculinities in a selection of contemporary literature and film'. At the time of selecting the principal works for the research, *Lola und Bilidikid* provided one of the only examples of a representation of Turkish-German homosexual masculinity. While this is no longer the case, the work remains significant not only because it interrogates notions of male homosexual identity in the Turkish-German community, but also because it does so through an exploration of the stereotypes associated with male homosexual identity and homosexual narratives. While migrant communities are marginalised on the level of ethnic, cultural and national identity, this article explores the dynamics and consequences of an additional level of marginalisation *within* an already marginalised group. Through a close analysis of the film, with particular attention paid to the interaction of the narrative strands represented by

the protagonists, the author will highlight some of the problems associated with being gay and Turkish in Germany.

Kutluğ Ataman was born in Istanbul in 1961. He studied film in Los Angeles and at the Sorbonne, and has established himself today as an accomplished filmmaker and contemporary artist. The film, *Lola und Bilidikid*, was released in 1999 (released in the US as *Lola and Bili the Kid*), and stars, amongst others, Baki Davrak, as the 17-year-old Murat, whom the viewers meet at the onset of his 'coming-out' in Berlin. Murat has two brothers, but was raised to believe he had only one, namely his older brother, Osman (Hasan Ali Mete). Osman, as the first-born son, assumed the role of the head of the household following the death of their father, and the two men, Murat and Osman, live with their mother in an apartment in Kreuzberg, Berlin. The third brother (though not in chronological order) is introduced to the viewer (and the other characters) only by the name of Lola, and is played by Gandi Mukli. Lola was rejected by his family and thrown out of the familial home when he revealed his homosexuality to them, and Murat was conceived in an attempt to literally replace one son with another. Osman, too (unbeknownst to every other member of his family except Lola), is gay, and fundamentally incapable of reconciling the expectations of his culture with his sexuality, as tragically transpires.

Lola performs as part of a drag dance troupe by the name of *Die Gastarbeiterinnen* (The Female Guest-Workers) and his partner Bili (Erdal Yıldız) is a hustler. While Bili is unable to come to terms with his homosexuality and is intent on leaving Berlin and heading back to Turkey to lead a 'normal' life with Lola as his wife, Lola is perfectly content wearing a wig and make-up for the rest of his life. One such wig is delivered by Murat, upon uncovering his family's secret. While Murat appears eager and curious to explore his sexuality and sexual identity, Osman is presented as the polar-opposite character construct. He offers a demonstration of masculinity which is crude, abrupt and aggressive, in contrast to that of Murat, who is gentle, soft-natured and shy. In addition, Osman is eager to make a man out of his younger brother and demonstrates this by suggesting that they visit a strip show or solicit sex from a prostitute. His apparent need to deliver this *hyper*-male image suggests that Osman overcompensates for what he perceives as a lack or deficiency in his own masculinity. This becomes clearer much later in the film when Osman's (own and repressed) homosexuality is revealed.

As mentioned, Lola performs in drag, along with Scheherazade (Celal Perk) and Kalipso (Mesut Özdemir), as part of a troupe calling themselves *Die Gastarbeiterinnen*. Lola's name refers to a character portrayed by Marlene Dietrich, named Lola Lola, in Josef von Sternberg's film, *The Blue Angel* (1930). According to Barbara Mennel (2004, pp. 297–298), Lola Lola refers to 'a character who connotes feminine seduction and spectacle and the impossibility of a bourgeois life'.¹ Bili, on the other hand, is named after one of the – male – icons of American Western Cinema, 'Billy the Kid', an individual 'whose biography is elusive and contested, the material of myths and legends'.²

Lola, who claims not to have any problems wearing a wig for the rest of his life, defends Germany's tolerance towards homosexuality: 'Nobody cares what we do with each other.' Bili, on the other hand, claims that his family finds their relationship problematic, and that he feels embarrassed when with his friends. He attempts to provide Lola with insight into his concept of 'normality' by sharing his vision or intentions for their collective future. Bili suggests that they

move back to Turkey and settle down at the coast, where they – specifically Bili – will open up a bar. Lola would, logically (according to Bili), undergo a sex-change operation in order for them to then live as a ‘normal’ couple. According to Bili’s plan, this operation would be financed by Lola’s inheritance.

As a ‘normal’ (that is, heterosexual) couple, Bili and Lola would be married. According to Bili, it would not be possible for them to continue living together, as two men ‘like these German fags’, so that they should live together as husband and wife. As husband and wife they would then comply with all expected (conventional) gender roles; by day Bili would work at the bar while Lola stays home, running the household (while never being the head of the household). Bili would come home to Lola who would be waiting for him, having spent the day baking, cooking and being, essentially, a home-bound wife. Interestingly, it is Bili who appears to invest more time thinking about this (his) domestic utopia. Bili further attempts to market the idea of marriage to Lola, by claiming that as a married couple (with specific reference to Lola as Bili’s wife) Lola would then be the envy of everyone. Importantly, of course, this dream takes place in Turkey, and strongly contradicts the image Lola projects when he is with Bili (on the streets of Berlin, particularly in the suburb of Kreuzberg), which is often an image of embarrassment and awkwardness. Justifying his need for (and potential preoccupation with) family on the basis of his gender, Bili claims that he thinks about and wants a family, because he is a man and wishes to conform to the patriarchal norm. According to Bili, Lola is not a man, and therefore is not capable of (rational) thought.³ Following the death of his father, Lola became entitled to a portion of the inheritance. This money would then be used to finance Lola’s sex-change operation. Lola remains silent while Bili speaks, but his silence, however, does not signify assent. Bili and Lola then set off for the apartment of Lola’s estranged family, in order to claim this inheritance. It is at the apartment that Lola first meets Murat, and though his intention was initially to confront his family (particularly Osman) about his inheritance, his encounter with Murat inspires him to get to know his younger brother. This then leads to Murat visiting Lola one night (it also turns out to be Lola’s birthday) at the club after his performance.

Unfortunately, violence and trauma mark the tragic end of Lola and Bilidikid. Lola’s body is found floating in the river the morning after his birthday. Bili suspects that the young (German) men in Murat’s school class are responsible because they have had several run-ins in the past, and devises a plan to exact revenge – the plan involves Murat disguising himself as Lola, wearing the same ill-fated red wig, and luring the young men into a deserted factory. In the end Bili violently castrates Rudy, one of the young men, and kills another young man named Hendryk, before being killed himself. During this time Murat and Walter (the last of the three young men in the group) hide in another part of the building. Walter admits that he regrets his actions, and while Murat initially suspects this has to do with Lola’s death, he ultimately realises that the young men were indeed not responsible for Lola’s death at all. Murat is led to suspect that Osman was in fact responsible for Lola’s death. He is able to confirm this suspicion when he returns home still wearing the wig and costume he wore the night before. At home, he confronts Osman not only about Lola’s murder, but also about his own homosexuality. Osman has now been disgraced. At this point the mother enters the kitchen, having overheard the entire confrontation. When Osman tries to approach her she

slaps him and storms out of the apartment, with Murat following her. In a final dramatic cinematic gesture, her headscarf blows off her head. She does not stop and continues walking while Murat picks up the headscarf as the closing credits appear on screen.

According to Barbara Mennel (2004, p. 291), despite the fact that the film had been lauded for its identification and portrayal of a 'Turkish-German gay identity', it received limited academic response and criticism beyond an exploration of the concept of performativity and its relation to drag. The film opened the Panorama Section of the 49th International Berlin Film Festival in 1999, and won the prestigious Teddy Award for gay and lesbian films.⁴ This does not, however, mean that *Lola und Bilidikid* could or should be viewed as a distinctly *gay* film. Although homosexuality is certainly one of the themes explored within the work, the film also explores various aspects, degrees, implications and consequences of marginalisation; namely marginalisation experienced by being a Turk in Germany, as well as the marginalisation and alienation experienced by being part of a sub-culture *within* a marginalised group, for example, being a homosexual Turk. Mennel (2004, p. 289) suggests that

Lola, Bilidikid, Iskender, Murat, Shehrazade and Kalipso are not marginal because they are gay, but because their ethnic and economic marginality positions them in a gay subculture defined by violence, poverty, prostitution and cross-dressing.

The characters in the film (principally the Turkish characters) are marginalised firstly on the level of their ethnicity as Turks in Germany, and secondly on an economic level in terms of their portrayal as impoverished (drag) artists and hustlers. Mennel initiates her argument in a discussion of the city of Berlin as a scene or location which enables an anonymous interaction of people, bodies and desires. Berlin, in this manner, as a decontextualised location, facilitates 'pleasure in camp as a form of resistance without losing sight of the material conditions from which marginalised minority subjects create camp in the first place' (Mennel 2004, p. 287).⁵ Due not only to its size and the anonymity it offers, but also its peculiar history, Berlin becomes invested with unlimited potential. Berlin is identified as the location of the film through the symbolic, but detached image of the *Siegestsäule* (Victory Column) in the opening sequence of the film. Mennel (2004, p. 295) suggests that the *Siegestsäule* is decontextualised as a signifier of Berlin through the darkness that surrounds it in the opening shot, and posits:

It is in the shadow of that symbol that the different spaces, through which the characters move, are mapped out. Thus, the film claims that the subculture emerges from Berlin, while it shows the characters' displacement and alienation from the official signifiers of Berlin.

Interestingly, Bili's image mirrors the traditional and iconic image of James Dean. Similarly shrouded in mystery, Dean's cinematic roles echoed the idea of the outlaw figure. The idea of the outlaw figure is, by extension, particularly relevant when considered as a figure which queers masculinity; a figure which *is* queer. The conscious misspelling of the name is, according to Mennel, meant to address the gap between the reception and internalisation of the legendary American Western figure within the Turkish-German community. Historical accounts of Billy the Kid are centred on Billy in his capacity as a figure which 'embodies opposition to the expansion of law, and

thus the nation of the United States', as well as his interaction with his 'all-male posse' (Mennel 2004, p. 298), and do not include any references to his relationships with or to women. While the film employs the narrative strand of conflict and individual resistance and opposition to a larger and imposing system or structure, it does so by translating the idea of conflict into one of (or centred on) sexuality and sexual identity. Citing Claudia Breger, Mennel (2004, p. 298) then suggests that Bili's masculinity 'rearticulates his marginality by mirroring it in the outlaw figure', effectively queering masculinity.

Furthermore, just like James Dean, Bili would tragically die a young man. Bili is a hustler and, like Murat's brother, Osman, is presented as something of a *hyper*-male character, perched, as we encounter him in one of the opening scenes of the film, at the end of the bar, dressed in a pair of dark jeans, a white t-shirt and a leather jacket – an image which strongly echoes that of the famous James Dean. What is interesting to note, is that it is precisely the combination of these factors – his position at the end of the bar, his wardrobe, and his attempts at demonstrating solely the macho side of his character – which collectively draw attention to him. Within the context of the club the men, like Lola and the members of his troupe, disguised in wigs, make-up and costumes, effectively appear more 'normal' than Bili, whose idea of 'normal' is an essentially heteronormative ideal based on the nuances of an image generated by a screen star – ironically, of course, the screen star in question was also homosexual. Likewise, the members of the audience appear to belong to, or rather to fit into, the context of the club. Bili ultimately, despite (or perhaps because of) his attempts to project a sense of 'normality' akin to heterosexuality, is, and remains, the outsider. Citing Claudia Breger's analysis of the film, Mennel posits that Bili, through the combination of factors such as his wardrobe and body language, delivers a masculinity which is not only a masquerade or performance, but also fundamentally a defence mechanism:

Bilidikid's machismo is a masquerade, which serves as defence against stereotypes of non-masculinity, a strategy of the creation of status and power from the threatening 'nothing' coded as feminine. *Lola and Billy the Kid* accentuates not only the performativity but also the theatricality of his hypermasculinity. (Breger in Mennel 2004, p. 298)⁶

In this manner, Bili seeks to defend himself against masculinities which are coded as feminine and inferior; paradoxically, masculinities with which he should theoretically be able to identify on the basis of his sexual orientation, but which he actively rejects due to the influence of his Turkish culture. This is also, however, intentional, to a degree. In a posed, studied and almost rehearsed manner, Bili seems to *want* to project the image of the angry young man, a type of latter-day James Dean. The body language suggests that Bili, cool, casual and aloof, is ready to leave at will. Interestingly, though, it is clear that he belongs there by default as it were, through his relationship with Lola, although he places himself deliberately on the periphery. Ultimately, then, the calculated nature of Bili's appearance at the club remains nothing more than an act, just as costumed and rehearsed as Lola's performance on stage. Furthermore, this calculated and rehearsed act echoes the performance carried out by Lola's brother, Osman, who also goes to great lengths to project a very particular image of masculinity.

Bili's inability to identify and accept himself as a homosexual man is rooted in the influence of his Turkish culture. This assertion is supported in an ethnographic study conducted by Hermann Tertilt (1996) in the early 1990s of a group of young German men of mostly Turkish origin, living in Frankfurt, and collectively forming the gang, the Turkish Power Boys. At this juncture it is, of course, important to note that although Tertilt's study is rooted in the extra-literary domain of day-to-day Turkish–German interaction, as opposed to the filmic world portrayed in *Lola und Bilidikid*, there are, nevertheless, insights that shed light on aspects of the film referring or alluding to the world outside the story. These insights can be utilised to explain attitudes to masculinity studied by Tertilt and appearing as part of the world view of the film's characters, such as Bili, for example. During the time spent with the members of the group, Tertilt (1996, p. 107) established that what is regarded and defined as homosexuality in a German context is, in the Turkish context, classified according to the role played or assumed during sexual intercourse. A homosexual man in this case refers specifically to the submissive or passive sexual partner in the relationship – essentially, therefore, the one who is penetrated.

This echoes and ultimately confirms Mimi Schippers' (2007) assertion that masculinity, within the masculine/feminine binary, could effectively be reduced to penetration and dominance in an attempt to define and understand gender hierarchy. In her attempt to define the concept of hierarchy, Schippers (Segal in Schippers 2007, p. 90) associates it with the concept of domination:

...symbolic constructions of heterosexual sex still reduce it to penetrating and being penetrated and that relation is consistently constructed as one of intrusion, 'taking', dominating.

In this manner, dominance and submission become key features of the relationship between the sex categories of male and female, and by extension between masculinity and femininity, which is then supported by the assumption of masculine authority and physical strength and female compliance and physical weakness (Schippers 2007, p. 90). Thus physical strength and weakness as well as authority and compliance become central defining features categorising the relationship between masculinity and femininity, and ultimately between various categories or demonstrations of masculinity.

Bili uses the fact that he is the active or dominant sexual partner in the relationship to substantiate not only the claims that he makes against Lola (that Lola is not a man), but also his wishes for a normal (i.e., heterosexual) life; a life which he wishes to lead in Turkey with Lola as a woman. As the dominant partner in the relationship, Bili's involvement in a homosexual relationship does not in any way affect his position as a 'real' man. Bili remains a man *because* he is the dominant partner. The passive partner, however, according to Tertilt, is often subjected to public abuse. As this is a position associated with weakness, this partner is therefore considered insufficiently masculine or manly (Schiffauer in Tertilt 1996, p. 198).⁷ The passive homosexual is metaphorically castrated and forced into the role of the woman. Therefore, just as Bili simply does not see or regard himself as gay, he sees or regards Lola, although biologically a man, as a woman, *because* Lola is the passive partner in the relationship. Bili feels justified in his pursuit of a heterosexual relationship with Lola, which would require Lola undergoing sex-change surgery because he has already been metaphorically castrated.

Bili's macho image is encouraged and supported by his heterosexual friends who believe that homosexual Turks – or specifically Turks like Lola – give the rest a bad reputation. Bili is unable to acknowledge Lola as his partner when he finds himself with other, heterosexual Turks. He does, however, revert to referring to Lola as his wife when he is with the rest of the *Gastarbeiterinnen*. This addresses the assertion made by Stephen Murray (1997, p. 24) regarding the behaviour and interaction of men in Islamic countries. Whereas Murray indicates that apparent intimacy can be observed in the interaction of men (including, for example, the sight of two men walking down the road holding hands), Tertilt (1996, p. 194) demonstrates that it is indeed commonplace to observe similar acts of intimacy between Turkish youths in Germany.⁸

Through his observations Tertilt was able to establish that Turkish men, youth and boys interact intimately all the time. This behaviour is, however, never considered homosexual in light of the fact that the Turkish youth in this case regard and understand masculinity and homosexuality in a manner which is different from that of their German counterparts. In Turkish culture (and, broadly speaking, in Mediterranean culture for example), it is a common occurrence to observe men engaging in friendly, almost intimate, behaviour. In public men are observed hugging and kissing each other. In fact, in Turkish culture, men, among friends, greet each other with a kiss on both cheeks. This, of course, differs somewhat from the image one encounters in so-called Western cultures, such as German culture, for example. Marked by Anglo frigidity, the sight of two men engaging in an act as innocuous as holding hands would lead one to automatically assume that the men are in a homosexual relationship. This is due to what Tertilt (1996, p. 194) identifies as the Western definition of homosexuality, which almost fundamentally revolves around intimate bodily contact.

Bili's inability to acknowledge Lola in front of his heterosexual friends is, then, the result of a curious combination of factors. First, Bili does not think of himself as gay at all, because he is the dominant partner in the relationship and, according to the logic demonstrated in Tertilt's observations, still a man. Second, it could be inferred that Bili practises this logic, as it were, in his life as a hustler. Bili never allows himself to be penetrated, thereby maintaining a dominant role in his encounters and relationships. He remains a 'man' in the heterosexual sense of the term, despite having engaged in a homosexual encounter. Indeed, he encourages this ethic in Murat, who resorts to hustling after running away from his family. Bili encourages Murat to take and maintain the active role in his sexual encounters, particularly when he learns that Murat is gay. To illustrate his point to Murat, Bili associates the active and passive roles assumed during homosexual encounters with being a 'man' and being a 'hole' respectively. A 'man' is the active and dominant partner, while the passive and submissive partner is essentially reduced to a 'hole', i.e., a receptacle for penetration.

Bili is embarrassed and does not want to be associated with Lola in public because this would make him (Bili) less of a man. However, an important distinction has to be made here; a distinction which is located primarily in cultural difference. If Lola and Bili were simply to leave the Turkish ghetto, they would be able to lead a 'perfectly normal' homosexual life together in Germany. The problem, however, is that although Lola, perfectly happy to wear a wig for the rest of his life, would essentially be more amenable to this idea, it is Bili, who identifies himself principally as Turkish,

who would object to this. This is, of course, because Bili consciously tries to reject not only what he considers as the label of homosexuality, but also the implications of the sexual orientation itself, within both Turkish and German culture.

Bili is simply incapable of reconciling his love for another man with the expectations determined and enforced by his patriarchal and heteronormative culture. He seems convinced that Lola's sex-change operation would somehow afford him the opportunity to indulge his dreams and wishes for a 'normal' heterosexual life and family, while simultaneously allowing him to continue loving and being with Lola. Lola, as the passive partner in the relationship, is, for all intents and purposes, already a woman, and the sex-change operation would simply bring about closure in this regard. Lola, on the other hand, is attracted to the idea of getting to know Murat as his brother, providing an extension of the idea of family. Though he does not appear to agree entirely with Bili's ideas or wishes regarding marriage and family (particularly insofar as they require him to undergo reconstructive surgery), befriending and getting to know Murat provides a more realistic and feasible approach to the concept of 'family'.

Bili is not only convinced of the validity of his plans for their (his and Lola's) future, but he also expresses his intention to resort to violence in order to realise these plans, threatening to castrate Lola, should he be unwilling to go through with the operation. Mennel (2004, p. 300) suggests that

[t]he expressed violence is an extension of Bilidikid's masculinity, which he repeatedly asserts throughout the film. Bilidikid threatens to match the roles that they have signified with their names – seductive femininity and hypermasculinity – through biology in which Lola would not only be a biological woman but would also experience the wound and mutilation of becoming a woman at the hands of his lover. Bilidikid projects a role of sacrificial femininity onto Lola and a violently sadistic role for himself as constitutive of their ideal relationship.

This could be taken even further to address Bili's propensity for overcompensation within the context of his expressed intentions of having Lola undergo a sex-change operation. It could therefore be argued that Bili not only seeks to project a violently sadistic role for himself, but, moreover, that he wants to subject Lola to the physical trauma of removing his manhood, in order to compensate for his (Bili's) perceived loss of manhood brought about by his homosexuality. In short, Bili wants Lola to cease being a man (biologically), because loving a man makes him (Bili) feel like less of a man. This is supported by Roy Jerome's (2001, p. 7) assertion:

Paradoxically, however, the experience of trauma destroys the potential for building a mature erotic relationship. Trauma extinguishes any real opportunity for mature erotic contact and replaces it with an axis of power relations – characterized by a rigid, extreme polarity – around which interactions turn. Sexualisation becomes a means of keeping the self alive while also providing an agency for controlling the Other – an Other who might remind the subject of his traumatisedness, his lack of manliness.

Lola appears to be aware of the impossibility of Bili's plans and dreams for their future. On the night of his (Lola's) birthday he narrates their story, including Bili's version of the ending, in the manner of a fairy tale:

Lola: Once upon a time there was a man called Lola and a man named Bilidikid. In the beginning they were very happy. They were crazy in love. But because Bili was such a macho guy, soon he did not want to live as a gay man among gay men.

Bilikidid: Shut up!

Lola: So he asked Lola to have his dick cut off and to become a woman and to live like everybody else.

Bilikidid: Shut up, I said.

Lola: Lola did it because she loved him. There she stood with her apron and cleaned the apartment every day and baked cookies. But one day, Bili did not come home. Lola was waiting, the whole night. And the night after that, and the night after that. But Bilidikid did not come. And she was waiting, like the heroine in a romance novel. She was waiting and starting to hate him. But Bilidikid did not come back. Why do you think Bilidikid left Lola? Because the woman whom he had married was not the man who he fell in love with.⁹

It would seem, then, that Bili's predicament could be viewed in light of the concept of familiarity. That with which he is able to identify and to which he relates, is culturally, ideologically and geographically located in Turkey, not in Germany. He remains seemingly unwilling to even attempt to adjust to life in Germany, and clings to what is only the idealised image he has of what life could be like in Turkey. Bilidikid, in this manner, contradicts what has been identified as a common trait identified within migrant communities, namely that of ambivalence:

Ambivalence towards the past and the present: as to whether things were better 'then' or 'now'. Ambivalence towards the future: whether to retain a 'myth of return' or to design a new project without further expected movement built in. Ambivalence towards the 'host' society: feelings of respect, dislike or uncertainty. (Benmayor 1994, p. 3)

In Berlin, Bili has the option and indeed the freedom of openly living an alternative lifestyle, of acknowledging his homosexuality and acknowledging Lola as his partner, and living a life free of judgement in the German community. However, although he may physically be located in Germany and have at his disposal the tolerance and acceptance of his lifestyle choices and sexuality, his mind is still very much in Turkey; entrenched in a fundamentally heteronormative and patriarchal mindset, and a cultural ideology and philosophy which strongly condemn alternative lifestyle practices. Bili's naïveté stems from the fact that he is convinced that returning to Turkey, and having Lola undergo the sex-change surgery, would afford him the luxury and benefits of cultural and ethnic identification and solidarity on the one hand, as well as the romantic and intimate benefits of spending the rest of his life with the woman who makes his heterosexual ideal or fantasy complete (and who happens to be the man with whom he had initially fallen in love). Bili then overcompensates for the fundamental flaw in his plan by resorting not only to a charade of hypermasculinity, but also, finally, to violence.

Similarly, Osman overcompensates for his homosexuality through his crass, violent and vulgar behaviour. Also prone to violence and aggression, he is responsible for Lola's death. Even though he is forced to confront his homosexuality in the end, it is unlikely that he would be able to pursue this aspect of his life since he has simply not been conditioned for it, nor would he allow himself

such a weakness. Like Bili, his perceptions of (his) masculinity are motivated and encouraged by his close association with his (Turkish) cultural background. Specifically, this background which has made him the (perhaps unwilling) head of the household makes him react so violently to what he considers to be a challenge to conventional masculinity. The head of the household simply cannot be gay. Subsequently, it is also his violence which facilitates Bilidikid's violence. Mennel (2004, p. 306) suggests that

[a]s an effect of the narrative, which reveals Osman's violence and guilt, the neo-Nazi's are turned into victims of a misunderstanding and consequently into victims of Bilidikid's violence. Thus, Osman's violence ultimately breeds Bilidikid's violence.

Bili's violence *does* occur as a result of Osman's violence, and both by extension address the concept of honour. Citing Schiffauer, Tertilt (1996, p. 198) suggests that the gender(ed) division amongst young Turks in Germany, particularly the manner in which they view and define their own and other masculinities, is connected to the gendered division of roles in Turkey, which is based on the concept of honour. Within this dynamic men are expected to be perpetually ready to defend not only their honour but also that of their family. The violence perpetrated by Osman and Bili addresses not only the concept of honour, but more importantly the corresponding concept of shame. Osman killed Lola because Lola had threatened to destroy the stability of the lie he had created for himself and for his family. In short, Osman killed Lola not because Lola was gay, but because he was gay, and Lola's intentions of establishing a relationship with Murat threatened to expose this, and to expose him. Osman, like Bili, was ashamed.

After the death of the father Osman became the head of the household, as per the demands of his (Turkish) culture on his gender. As mentioned, the head of a Turkish household cannot be gay because he is a man, and men are not gay. Osman is, for this reason, completely incapable of reconciling his sexuality with the demands placed on his gender and sexuality by his culture. Therefore, in an attempt to compensate for this inability, Osman repeatedly rapes Lola (after Lola had come out to his family, after which he was forced to leave their home), and in a way, inverts the logic which sees him as the powerful male head of the household, and uses it to address, demonstrate and satisfy his sexual, physical and cultural dominance. By raping Lola, Osman satisfies his need for having sex with a man, and by virtue of his dominant position he remains a man and the head of the household. In addition, by raping Lola, Osman then addresses the jealousy and envy he feels towards Lola, who is able to accept his sexuality in a way which he, Osman, cannot. Lola is effectively left emasculated through the rape, and in this case the rape becomes a symbolic act of castration. Finally, Osman's rape of Lola also serves as an act of incest, which is considered taboo across all cultures. Osman then not only seeks to hide his deviant sexuality by killing Lola, but also to conceal the transgression of the taboo. Osman had been under the impression that Lola's expulsion from the family home would be sufficient to maintain the secret. Lola's unexpected return to the family home, however, threatened to expose Osman and his secret.

The physical act of castration is, at its crudest level, a violent and emasculating operation. Bili had threatened to castrate Lola, and after Lola's death, he then castrates one of the men he suspects is the killer, by effectively taking his manhood. The reason for this is that Lola's death robbed

Bili of *his* own manhood. Bili fell in love with a man, and because this man was an effeminate homosexual, Bili was ashamed of him and their relationship. While Bili regarded Lola as a woman, the truth is that Lola was one of the last vestiges of stability and authenticity for Bili's perception of his own masculinity. The extent to which he was clearly incapable of reconciling himself to loving a man (because a public association with an effeminate man would be regarded as an affront to, and indictment of, his own masculinity) was subsequently demonstrated not only in his wish for Lola to have a sex-change operation, but especially in his threat to castrate Lola himself if he (Lola) was unwilling to go through with the operation. Bili's manhood and perception of his masculinity were ultimately lived vicariously, as it were, through Lola. Therefore, with Lola dead, Bili felt emasculated and attempted to compensate for the loss of his own masculinity by killing the young men he held responsible for Lola's death, and specifically by castrating Rudi.

As a film, *Lola und Bilidikid* confronts conventional ideas of heterosexuality and homosexuality by deliberately employing and parodying various stereotypes associated with each category. This is evident, for example, in the hyper-femininity demonstrated by the members of *Die Gastarbeiterinnen* on the one hand, and the hyper-masculinity demonstrated by the characters of Bili and Osman on the other hand. Westernised notions of homosexuality, for example, that rely 'on the idea of liberated individuals' (Mennel 2004, p. 290) are collapsed through the use of characters who effectively represent different approaches and responses to not only homosexuality in general, but particularly their own homosexuality. The personal struggle with male-male sexual desire is exemplified and ultimately embodied in the figures of Bili, Murat and Osman, to varying degrees, and this may also be a testament to a generational dynamic at work. While Murat, as part of a younger generation born and raised in Germany within a Turkish migrant background, is less influenced by his Turkish cultural roots and evidently more accepting of his homosexuality, Bili and Osman, representing an older generation, remain shackled to the influences and control of their Turkish patriarchal history. They are, as a consequence, fundamentally unable to accept their homosexuality and actively reject displays of homosexuality, as well as the acceptance of homosexuality in other members of their community. Bili ultimately seeks a heterosexual love – and by association, heterosexuality – which will be affected by the loss of his homosexuality. The loss of his homosexuality would, in turn, be symbolised by Lola's castration. This loss of homosexual attachments, according to Judith Butler (1995, p. 26), is necessary for the development and cultivation of heterosexuality. This active rejection of their own homosexuality, as well as the homosexuality of others, ultimately translates into acts of violence. In other words, these acts of violence are generated by the conscious repudiation of their own homosexual desires – a repudiation of their own femininity. Furthermore, in their attempts to address or come to terms with their sexualities and their sexual desires, in a manner opposing a traditional Western perspective, it could certainly be said that the characters should not be seen as subjects or creations of Western desire, but rather as 'subjects of their desire for each other' (Mennel 2004, p. 291).

Notes

- 1 Mennel describes the character Lola Lola as one which evaded a concrete definition of sexual

identity due to her portrayal of roles which addressed multiple desires.

- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Interestingly, this sentiment is, for example, echoed in Islamic Sharia law which dictates essentially that women have no voice or credibility, particularly in relation to men. Women are considered fundamentally inferior to men and consequently have fewer rights and responsibilities. Due to their inferiority, women are also considered irrational and in need of male protection. Their weakness also serves as a justification for abuse and punishment. Since Sharia law makes no allowance for the equality of the sexes, a woman is considered to count as half a man in a court of law and concerning matters of inheritance. See Women's Rights and the Sharia [online].
- 4 <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/177472/Lola-and-Bilidikid/overview> [Accessed 30 June 2010].
- 5 Mennel suggests that some of the sites featured in the film 'signify gayness' – these sites include the Siegessäule, which has become a symbol of the gay movement in Berlin (the main gay newspaper/magazine in Berlin is called the *Siegessäule*), and the Tiergarten, which is a popular gay cruising location in the city. In addition, other sites featured in the city address the significance of the city, its history and its importance in the film. A principal example of this is the Olympic Stadium (*Olympiastadion*) which is located in the west of Berlin and is the stadium Hitler built for the 1936 Olympic Games.
- 6 See Breger, C., 2001.
- 7 See Schiffauer, W., 1990.
- 8 Tertilt observes that when greeting, young men embrace and kiss each other. Furthermore, when they meet to listen to music, for example, it was and is perfectly normal to observe young men lying in each other's arms, to see a man stroking the hair of another young man, or simply for them to hold hands while listening to music.
- 9 This English translation of the scene is located in Mennel, B. 2004, p. 301.

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Case study narrative accounts of gender and sexual orientation in young black women from an Eastern Cape township in South Africa

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Abstract

In South Africa, the experiences of gender non-conforming young women, as a population separate from adults, are understudied. This article explores what distresses young gender non-conforming females from a South African township. The challenges facing such women growing up in a township in the Eastern Cape province in South Africa are discussed and illuminated through case studies of participants' personal accounts. The sample was obtained through snowballing. One-on-one in-depth interviews were held and subjected to domain analysis. Domains discovered were: pressure to conform to a female gender identity to be like a lady; being misunderstood in their communities; and disapproval from peers, family and other members of society. The challenges young, black, gender non-conforming girls faced in growing up were based on familial, personal and social factors. Familial and social environments, such as the school, seemed to have a policing effect. Concerns about being isolated, ousted and alienated from society resulted in perceptions that their homes and schools were unsafe and insecure environments. Education and culturally competent support services are needed to educate families about the importance of offering protective support to adolescents, and for schools to create a comfortable environment for gender non-conforming female learners.

Keywords: Eastern Cape, gender non-conforming females, narrative accounts, South African township

Introduction

In South Africa, the daily lives of female-bodied persons who are seen to be gender non-conforming are interrupted. Gender non-conformity here refers to someone displaying gender traits, through their behaviour, that are not normatively associated with their biological sex; this includes (but is not limited to) lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LBTI) women, gay women and tomboys (Haas *et al.* 2010, Murray 2005; Salo *et al.* 2010; Van Dyk n.d.). In this article the term is used to refer to queer women – in particular those who may self-identify as lesbian or tomboys (Kritzinger and Van Aswegen 1992). In South African township spaces, gender non-conforming women live in fear of being ousted, blackmailed, attacked and murdered (Ndashe 2010; Reddy 2010; Salo

et al. 2010; Sanger 2010; Van Dyk n.d.). The term ‘township’ in South Africa refers to (often underdeveloped) urban living areas created for black migrant labour, usually beyond the town/city limits, where principally black Africans reside. As part of the architecture of the apartheid government, black people in various towns were relocated to the outskirts where many continue to live in different forms of dwelling – from shacks, one to four-roomed brick houses, hostels, or slightly bigger homes which are usually occupied by professionals. In townships, poverty and social problems stem from unemployment and alcohol abuse (see Swartz 2009). Generally, every town/city has one or several townships associated with it (Statistics South Africa: Census 2001, 2004). The existence of anti-homosexual rhetoric, along with repressive religion, culture and tradition continue to legitimise prejudice, harassment, discrimination, violence and the denial of the existence of lesbians in many African countries (Aken’Ova 2010; Epprecht 2010; Mkhize *et al.* 2010; Ndashe 2010; Salo *et al.* 2010; Van Dyk n.d.) and elsewhere (Cohn and Hastings 2010; Haas *et al.* 2010; Pendragon 2010; Robinson 2010). This article is very important coming from South Africa where, unlike in many other African countries, gender non-conformity (including lesbian same-sex conduct) has been decriminalised (Epprecht 2010).

There are a myriad challenges facing gender non-conforming female youths, such as family alienation, inadequate interpersonal relationships, risk of suicide and others (Bedard and Marks 2010; Haas *et al.* 2010; Kritzinger and Van Aswegen 1992; Llera and Katsirebas 2010; Pendragon 2010). A study of 18- to 24-year-olds from Cape Town shows that black urban spaces embody a moral attitude associated with exclusive and deeply entrenched heterosexuality – as a result, black lesbian women in townships trace their paths alone or in alternate places far from their homes, because their lesbian identity limits the spaces they can enter in comfort, security and safety (Cohn and Hastings 2010; Hames 2003; Llera and Katsirebas 2010; Robinson 2010; Salo *et al.* 2010). In rural communities the environment is similarly characterised by patriarchal, conservative, gender roles (Moses and Buchner in Cohn and Hastings 2010). Therefore, gender non-conforming women have difficulty connecting with a supportive reference group from where they live, and their concerns are rendered marginal and at times invisible (Bedard and Marks 2010; Hames 2003; Sanger 2010; Van Dyk in Cohn and Hastings 2010).

The experiences of gender non-conforming young women, as a population separate from adults, continue to be understudied. Only one study of sexual minority status and alternative gender identification in young, black, urban township women was found at the time of writing this report (see Salo *et al.* 2010). Reports of older lesbians, including mothers and grandmothers, may not represent young people’s lives (Kritzinger and Van Aswegen 1992; Van Dyk n.d.). Lesbians receive token attention in research, law, and advocacy and activism against homophobia, as noted by many authors (Hames 2003; Ndashe 2010; Reddy 2010; Sanger 2010). Reasons for this phenomenon vary: there is relatively little research coming from rural provinces; there is a lack of interest amongst researchers; there are complex ethical requirements in researching young, vulnerable participants; and the heteronormative nature of studies of sexuality, sexual and reproductive health exclude alternative sexualities and discourage researchers from focusing on the subject. And though gender is understood as encompassing ‘women’s problems’, violence against lesbians is understood as a problem which lesbians must solve (Hames 2003; Sanger 2010). However,

these reasons should not justify such a continued oversight. This article explores experiences of being gender non-conforming in a township in South Africa. Here, the term 'lesbian' refers to a participant who self-identifies as such, otherwise 'gender non-conforming' is the preferred term throughout the discussion.

Method

The two case studies presented here are extracted from a large, qualitative phenomenological study conducted in 2009. The purpose of the study was to explore sources of distress for young people in an urban community in the Eastern Cape. Forty male and female Xhosa-speaking participants, including the two case studies presented here, were recruited through snowballing from Butterworth, a town with a relatively low socio-economic status. Butterworth, situated between the Kei River and Idutywa, is under the administration of Mnquma Municipality (Jaffer 2008). It is a small town with six townships, four large informal settlements and a number of villages. Few villages near the town, the townships and the informal settlements have access to basic services such as tap water, electricity and sanitation (Jaffer 2008). Religious dualism is common, with people mainly following both Christianity and African traditional beliefs. More details about this study and other findings have been published elsewhere (Nduna 2010; Nduna and Jewkes 2011a and b, 2012a and b). Finding two gender non-conforming volunteers can be regarded as a success, given the difficulty in recruiting for studies on sexual minorities. This is documented in reports (Kritzinger and Van Aswegen 1992; Van Dyk n.d.). The two participants whose case studies are presented here were studying in the same high school at the time of the interview. Studying the sexual identities of young high school youths is important, as this can be a difficult time for questioning¹ female adolescents (Bedard and Marks 2010), and because black, lesbian youth between the ages of 12 and 24 are often overlooked in research (Robinson 2010; Van Dyk n.d.). The researchers felt an ethical responsibility to extract the narratives of these two participants, in order to highlight the experiences of lesbians in this black township through first-hand accounts, so as not to further neglect and marginalise the interests of gender non-conforming women.

Using a phenomenological approach to the study of lives of gender non-conforming women is acceptable (Van Dyk n.d.). The main purpose was to understand what distress is experienced by young, gender non-conforming females in a relatively small black urban township located in a rural province. Participants were asked during in-depth interviews to recall and tell of distressing experiences in their lives; current or past. Conversational-style interviews were used, guided by open-ended questions. The interviewees were articulate and confident, and clearly it was the first time they could share intimate and painful details of their lives with strangers. One reported that the interview allowed her '*to talk ... and lay issues in general ...*' which '*fulfils a feeling that I had always had from time to time ...*'. This mirrors the researchers' conviction that memory or narrative research can be therapeutic and valuable to participants. The names of the respondents have been changed to protect them from victimisation, and for ethical considerations.

The research data were collected in isiXhosa, and recorded using a tape recorder, before being translated and transcribed simultaneously by the same person. Manual analysis was conducted. For this article the authors inductively elicited themes representing the meanings social situations had

for the participants. The authors then drew semantic relationships between the social situations and cultural patterns pertaining to gender non-conforming women, as described in the introduction, and the narratives of the participants. All ethical considerations were taken into account, and the study was approved by the University of the Witwatersrand's ethics committee for research with human subjects.

Findings

The findings, presented in two cases, show that although there were different storylines in the narratives, the social policing of gender norms and sexuality was a common thread.

Case study 1: Thandiwe

Thandiwe (17 years old) came from a family of two children and was in grade 12 at the time. She identified herself as a tomboy and used this term interchangeably with 'lesbian' to express who she felt she was throughout the interview. Thandiwe described herself as a shy person, but at the same time she belonged to a conspicuous crowd at school and she danced in community shows. She was popular and well known among her peers. In many ways she thought she drew attention. She was associated with 'male' sports such as soccer, softball and rugby, and preferred to wear a tracksuit to school. Some of her friends at primary school began copying her 'style' because they admired it. When she spoke about her upbringing she said: *'I was treated like a boy...'* She did not own up to behaving like a boy, but suggested that *'people'* in her neighborhood treated her like one. She explained that she walked, played and behaved like a boy, and that her mother did not have a problem with this. When she was growing up people called her names such as 'Tsotsi', which she seems to have embraced. In South Africa, the word typically refers to a male thug. Thandiwe felt accepted by her mother, with whom she lived for most of her life until the year when we met during her interview. Although she maintained throughout that she was not pressured by her mother, she did admit that she *'tried to change'* but failed to *'learn to be a lady'*. She opined that her mother's only worry was that tomboys become lesbians. She expressed a wish to test the waters and disclose who she really felt she was, but anticipated a harsh response and rejection from her aunt, with whom she lived. She described her plan to leave home when she passed high school, to live her life on her own.

Thandiwe had moved from her home – a township adjacent to the one where her aunt lived – to stay with her aunt who worked as an educator in the same high school she attended (and where the interview was conducted). Thandiwe's aunt was, in actual fact, her cousin's sister, but being much older she insisted on being called thus. The narrative clearly suggested that Thandiwe had tried to change at different times, but failed. She interpreted her aunt's anti-lesbian stance as a call on her to change; to which she said she had tried several times but would always revert back. Her failures were unintentional, unconscious and not deliberate: *'I would realise that I stopped walking properly ...'* (i.e., like a lady). Disapproval stemmed mainly from her aunt, and Thandiwe would be especially cautious in the presence of her little cousin (her aunt's daughter) not to dress or behave like a boy, lest this attracted negative criticism from her aunt.

Thandiwe's identity had implications for her choice of friends, her personal choice in clothes and her lifestyle. Some of her choices were met with disapproval. Thandiwe was unsure how people would react if her tomboyish ways '*turned out to be more than a phase*'. This compelled her to constantly check (self-monitor) her ways, and to ensure that she did not cross the 'dividing' line unwittingly; as her aunt cautioned her to watch out. Thandiwe's aunt once asked: '*Why are you walking like Anne?*' (a character in the popular local television soap opera, *Generations*,² who was known to be a man in real life but acted a woman's role in the soapie). Thandiwe admitted to being very hurt when her aunt likened her to a 'tomboy', although she admitted during the interview to being one. It hurt and distressed her that her aunt said this in a disapproving manner. Thandiwe emphasised that her aunt's insinuations (that she must not be like Anne) '*continued*' and this persistence made her feel insecure. As a result, even though she was sometimes tempted to 'come out', she was deeply concerned and worried about what '*she would say...*' that '*she would not be interested*' or that she would '*do something as she is against lesbian people*'. Thandiwe's worst fear was that her aunt would hate and shun her. For her, the pressure continued when another cousin randomly conversed with her about dating and boys. She felt this was her cousin's way of getting her to speak about her suitors – a conversation that irritated Thandiwe and caused her to subsequently avoid her cousin. Thandiwe was aware that the disapproving social context for other young, gender non-conforming girls was volatile and aggressive, as they were '*scolded*' for '*joining this*' in their homes: the discourse of 'joining' lesbianism and tomboy behaviour was reflected in her mother's worry but also in her peers' behaviour. Her schoolmates copied her tomboyish behavior, as in her narrative she stated that her friends '*envied her*' and started dressing in tracksuits and rolling up one pant leg. They stopped wearing long socks in favour of shorter socks. She explained that they '*joined*' her – having such a following reinforced parents' concerns that their children would copy her behaviour.

Thandiwe admitted she liked to hang out with male friends, but also had a good and close girlfriend whom she described as a tomboy. She was, however, aware of rumours that her friend '*is known to be a lesbian*' and she seemed careful not to verify this rumour, stating that her friend '*was a virgin*'. This did not confirm or deny that she was a lesbian. It was apparent during the interview that Thandiwe was cautious about going public with a lesbian identity. At school, her friend was known to be having sexual relations with other girls. Thandiwe noted that she had not dated before. In her capacity as her cousin and her teacher, Thandiwe's aunt expressed overt disapproval of '*girls who want to be boys*' in the way they walk. Disgusted, she confronted Thandiwe to question her about her friend, saying how a '*girl with breasts who menstruates, wears a bra can think that she is a man*'. Her aunt would rant about her friend's boyish walk. Once she prompted Thandiwe to look at the person she had been talking about, and it turned out to be Thandiwe's friend, who subsequently came to realise she was not liked by the aunt. The situation limited Thandiwe's choice of friends, and impressed on her that her aunt would '*hate*' her if she knew the person she really was. This she safely assumed because her aunt was vocal about things she did not like about her friend, and used strong words such as '*I hate her*'. Thandiwe admitted she was distressed because the venom directed at her best friend sent a strong message to her of her aunt's prejudice towards such girls. She was frustrated by this.

Thandiwe admitted to being uncomfortable about wearing a girl's tunic at school – she preferred a boy's uniform or tracksuit. At her primary school a tracksuit was acceptable, and she wore it all the time, but in high school tracksuits were not allowed for girls.

Thandiwe noted that she preferred being at home and indoors, which made people talk about her in ways that she suggested was gossip. She said some people (boys in particular) questioned her lack of interest in boys. Thandiwe confessed that the boys in her neighbourhood knew about her and her tomboyish behaviour and ganged up against her; they would proposition her on her way to the local shops and ask her out. Thandiwe appeared to be quite aware that the boys' 'moves' on her was planned behaviour on their part. She suggested that they would sit and conspire to send someone to approach her. She felt that *'everybody (boys) knows about me ... and bla bla bla ...'*. One boy in particular would offer to accompany her to the shop – a trap meant to create an opportunity to proposition her.

Case study 2: Babalwa

Babalwa (16 years old) came from a family of four, they all lived with her single mother and she was in grade 12. Throughout the interview Babalwa spoke of herself as a woman loving other women. She spoke about this as a conflict that bothered her, as she sometimes felt she was *'80% lesbian and maybe 20% other'*. However, being a lesbian was an identity she stuck with throughout the interview. Babalwa said she was a virgin. She had dated another girl who was lesbian and tried dating a boy, but it did not work for her. Babalwa's narrative spoke to her feelings that she was going through an identity crisis in *'my personal life'*. As she spoke about this identity crisis she giggled, saying she needed to ascertain *'whether I'm straight or lesbian ... I like girls quite a lot.'* She was fourteen when she kissed her lesbian lover for the first time and felt an affirmation that she was interested in girls. Babalwa seemed to have accepted the fact that she was attracted to women, though she was far less certain whether *'people will accept'* her as such. She suspected that the people around her might not be as open-minded as she thought they were or would like them to be, and that they might be disappointed by who she was, compared to who they would like her to be.

Although Babalwa said she felt comfortable, she harbored a sense that among her family she lived a lie and it bothered her *'that the people that I care about do not know about my situation'*. The motivation behind her living 'in the closet' was that her grandmother would be disappointed to find out, but she hoped that *'maybe they will accept'*. She maintained that she could communicate to them that *'I see myself living with my girl'*. Social norms and expectations of her as a woman, as seen by her family, were what concerned Babalwa, yet this did not frighten her. She stated: *'I am kind of worried of disappointing my grandmother, who will be disappointed to hell'* She recalled the jokes that sometimes went around in her family about fetching good *lobola* for her, and believed they would be disappointed to learn (if she came out) that there would no bride price for her after all. *Lobola* is a traditional southern African custom whereby the man pays the family of his fiancée for her hand in marriage, just like in typical bride wealth societies men pay for 'access right' to their wives and children (Moore 1991). Babalwa described her family as *'ancient ... conservative'* and having *'old minds'*, and felt it would take them some time and lots of questions

before they accepted her choice. She did not believe she would be rejected, or that her mother would have a problem with it. Babalwa had not experienced any threats to her safety. She had friends at school (both boys and girls) and they accepted her, though one of her friends told her that *'she did not like this lesbian thing of mine'*. Despite this, Babalwa still felt accepted by her. Babalwa had spoken to her teacher about being lesbian, which was triggered when she shaved her head. She said when the teacher made a joke insinuating that she was lesbian, she did not deny it and they both laughed – an indication to her that the teacher accepted it.

Babalwa seemed to have a sense that her society was *'quite open'* to the idea that some people were lesbian. She spoke of her desire to have a child, because she *'loved children and do not know how to deal with that'* because *'a girl makes me extraordinary happy'*. She did not seem to face prejudice, judgement or threats in any way, which allowed her the opportunity to rather focus on her personal identity and feelings. She wanted to *'be completely aware of who I am and what I want [so that] I can move on and move forward, with no blinkers and move to one direction'*. Although Babalwa felt her society was open-minded and that she was not *'scared of coming out'*, she did expect that, if some people were told she was a lesbian, they *'would give me an advice that they will give me words of perfection'* (i.e., tell her it was wrong). Because of this she did not look forward to broaching the discussion with friends and family. This, according to her, was because people *'do not expect a beautiful girl to be dating girls'* – they think it is a *'waste'*. It would seem that her social circle was less judgemental and less punitive than Thandiwe's. In her interview she expressed a *'need to know 100% clearly where I stand in my life'*, and spoke a lot about *'this lesbian thing of mine'*, which gave the interviewer a sense that she and her reference group had accepted that she was lesbian.

Discussion

This study reports subjective descriptions of sources of distress for young, gender non-conforming women from the small rural town of Butterworth. Among various sources of distress discussed in this study, and reported elsewhere (Nduna and Jewkes 2011a and b, 2012a and b), the two selected case studies bring these findings to the fore, so as not to marginalise the narrative of gender of non-conforming females, and to create a platform for prioritising these discussions – particularly in predominantly heterosexual societies. The case studies exposed differences as well as points of convergence. The participants grew up in the same township and went to local schools, but had different perceptions about whether or not it was acceptable to be lesbian. For example, Thandiwe communicated a sense of insecurity and was overly concerned about the social environment, negative responses and bigotry expressed towards lesbians, whereas Babalwa communicated a personal concern about finding her true identity. Thandiwe worried about the gaze of the other, and was tense during the interview. This sense of not being accepted, where it exists, could arguably inhibit the self-actualisation of young women. Babalwa spoke more about herself, her personal conflict and her inner struggle in terms of identity – an observation reported in previous studies of lesbian experiences (Cohn and Hastings 2010). Babalwa had a sense of social acceptance among her peers; she felt people in her society were open. This finding suggests that changes in legal

frameworks may have a positive impact in terms of shifting certain societal attitudes but, as in other contexts, liberal values and respect for sexual orientation are not upheld by all (Bedard and Marks 2010; Hames 2003). Living without the stigma of illegality makes a world of difference as Ndashe (2010) argues, and this is evident in Babalwa's narrative where stigmatisation operates as a mechanism of social control. Nonetheless, both participants faced some sort of heterosexual gaze from their community. What they also had in common was the way they presented themselves: both had a preference for men's clothing; an interest in 'traditionally' male sports such as football; and were disinterested in boys at school. Claiming one's sense of being and identity through self-styling has become an identity marker in contemporary South Africa – a theme prevalent in the narratives of many young people in the post-apartheid order, and shared by gender non-conforming females in Pretoria townships (Van Dyk n.d.).

Pressure to conform to a gender identity and role

In this study, family was presented as important. A sense of belonging is valued by young people and this is a two-way process: young people feel accepted by their family and the family in return expresses a sense of *ownership* of the child. Extended families are the norm here, and the extended family's views are taken very seriously by young people who may sometimes hold back how they feel in order to appease their families (Nduna and Jewkes 2011a and b). For both participants it was the extended family members they were worried about. The aunt's constant negative valuing of the girl's friend strengthened Thandiwe's belief that her gender non-conforming identity was not acceptable at home, and this was a source of her distress. The tendency to speak with prejudice about others is widely reported in research and does worry lesbians when they consider disclosure (Kritzing and Van Aswegen 1992). Observing prejudice and other negative attitudes within the family and amongst close significant others may make lesbians feel unsafe and rejected, and rejection becomes a powerful stressor and risk factor for suicide in young gender-non confirming individuals (Haas *et al.* 2010). Vasu Reddy (2010) argues that there is a more complex set of social relations affecting identity formation in young lesbians, and these case studies confirm this. At the centre of young lesbians' lives, as evidenced here, are notions of what is traditionally acceptable (e.g., *lobola*) and constructions and conceptions of the traditional gender roles of marriage and child-rearing (Kritzing and Van Aswegen 1992). The pressure to conform to cultural norms is evident outside the African traditional setting, as well as in the developed world (Cohn and Hastings 2010; Haas *et al.* 2010; Pendragon 2010). Family and significant others may fail to understand non-heterosexual women, which may aggravate their distress (Bedard and Marks 2010; Cohn and Hastings 2010; Diamond *et al.* 2011; Llera and Katsirebas 2010; Pendragon 2010; Robinson 2010; Van Dyk n.d.). As Sanger (2010) points out, there is a possibility that a woman who transgresses social and cultural norms can be accused of being a lesbian, as is evident in Thandiwe's narrative referring to her friend. However, this may have negative repercussions in the form of a paralysing effect on the expression of a woman's sexuality (Robinson 2010; Sanger 2010). The choice of clothing as a means of self-identification is reported by young lesbians in the US and in a South African study (Bedard and Marks 2010; Van Dyk n.d.) and is evident in both case studies here. Thandiwe's attempts at changing her tomboyish garb, it would seem, were motivated by her

conscience, i.e., not wanting to be a *bad* role model for her young cousin. This, it seems, was a sign that she took the blame for modelling wrong behaviour in the house, by dressing the way she likes.

Concerns about prejudiced family members should be taken seriously, as these relations may be characterised by financial dependence; economic dependence on its own creates vulnerability. Where biological parents are unable to provide for their children this may compromise them and expose them to extended yet resourced family members who may not feel sympathetic towards them (Nduna and Jewkes 2011a and b, 2012b). It appears to be more difficult for extended family to accept gender non-conforming behaviour when the child is *not* their own (biologically speaking), whereas biological parents seem less likely to persecute their own child and may, in time, come to accept the child (Kritzinger and Van Aswegen 1992). This raises a question about the protective role of living with a biological parent and resonates with evidence that biological mothers may be more accepting (Kritzinger and Van Aswegen 1992). Both participants pretended to conform to expectations of who they should be, and such pretense aimed at managing stigma by concealing one's true identity is reported in other studies (Kritzinger and Van Aswegen 1992). The difference here was that Babalwa was motivated by her caring and her sense of responsibility to protect the family, while Thandiwe was motivated by a sense of insecurity.

Both participants were mindful of others' responses to them if they came out. This was reflected in previous South African studies, where participants felt unable to confront the challenge of disclosure and opted to protect self and others (Kritzinger and Van Aswegen 1992; Van Dyk n.d.). The homophobic rhetoric, backed up with religion and custodianship over culture, contains high potential for backlash, vigilantism and extortion, as described in previous studies (Diamond *et al.* 2011; Epprecht 2010). Here, silence and staying 'in the closet' are strategies used for self-protection against attack or disapproval from conservative family members, despite the wish to reveal everything. This is congruent with young people with other identity questions using silence as a calculated strategy to protect self and loved ones (Nduna and Jewkes 2011a and b). In black lower-class communities, young girls tend to make a calculated decision about a time and place for disclosure, and may decide to postpone such disclosure until they are able to handle it.

It is true that young people in this setting greatly appreciate and respect their parents and families, to the extent where they would not want to go against family values and aspirations. This is true not only as regards sexuality but also other personal identity questions, where children could (and should) be questioning and expressing themselves (Nduna and Jewkes, 2011a and b, Nduna and Sikweyiya, under review). This expected unquestioning respect fosters silence in families, and such children would rather wait until they are adults to explore identity questions. The same strategy was clearly considered by the participants in these case studies. This begs the question whether gender non-conforming girls are safe in their homes. Negative reactions to gender non-conforming identity have implications; they create superficial relations as well as self-modified and censored interaction in the home. For instance, Thandiwe retreated into her own space (her bedroom), and spent most of her time there. Home is the first social apparatus that introduces gender non-conforming children to censorship, followed by the school and other milieus. Perhaps the strategies of silence, denial and deferment should be supported, as these have been shown to be employed by lesbians (Kritzinger and Van Aswegen 1992; Llera and Katsirebas 2010; Robinson

2010). However, this needs to be balanced with a need for interventions, as non-disclosure-related stress may manifest (Diamond *et al.* 2011). The plan to live an authentic life after completing high school and leaving home reflects the notion that young (in particular black) lesbians ‘get out before they come out’ due to prejudice experienced in the home (Hames 2003; Pendragon 2010,). This explains why gender non-conforming girls leave their (small) home towns to look for freedom away from family and a culture that pathologises their identity. Paradoxically, an exodus of lesbians and other gender non-conforming females inadvertently creates the impression that homosexuality is rare in the countryside (Murray 2005), thus feeding into the stereotype that queer identities are un-African. However, given that attacks against lesbians in bigger townships are rife, one might argue that leaving their home towns does not provide the sought-after safety.

Thandiwe’s narrative shows the constant struggle for recognition, the fear of being ousted and the fear of potential violence, which mirrors the findings of a San Diego, California study (Pendragon 2010). Here, tendencies of insecurity were observed which give credence to the argument that decriminalisation does not remove the persistent threat of homophobia in South African societies (Ndashe 2010, Reddy 2010). Fear of being ousted is a reality in this country, because as argued by Ndashe (2010), the rights of sexual minorities cannot be won in parliament and in the courts only. However, decriminalisation is critical and important in reinforcing citizenship (Reddy 2010): in Babalwa’s case, she has confidence in the fact that she lives in an open society free from discrimination. Being exposed to negative messages about lesbians and other gender non-comforting practices presents an unsafe environment, particularly for Thandiwe. It seems that this is a familiar situation which is also common in other settings (Pendragon 2010).

Are gender non-confirming girls safe at school and among boys?

As noted by Haas *et al.* (2010), schools are key in young people’s lives, because the school environment plays an important defining role in the lives of adolescent lesbians and can sometimes be a source of societal homophobia which may cause distress (Bedard and Marks 2010, Diamond *et al.* 2011). The school setting may inhibit young people’s sense of identity and expression, or marginalise difference. Sometimes school regulations and public policies create inequities or fail to protect lesbians against sexual-orientation-based discrimination. For instance, school uniform regulations seemed to foster a culture of intolerance of difference. Neither participant liked wearing dresses, which is similar to the preferences of other gender non-conforming girls (Van Dyk n.d.). The participants went to the same school. Low-income area-based schools, it would seem, tend to be stricter in controlling the gender and sexual identities of learners. It appears that parents do not mind their children wearing pants and tracksuits to school, but a refusal by school authorities to allow girls to wear tracksuits may reproduce disguised homophobia and can potentially feed intolerance. Further to such institutionalised practices is the possibility of an individual teacher in the school being prejudiced. This should not be taken lightly, as being expelled from school for wearing trousers is a possibility and has been reported in a study of lesbian identities in Pretoria townships (Van Dyk n.d.).

The safety (or lack thereof) of gender non-conforming youths is paramount. In townships it is possible to spot women who are not interested in males (Van Dyk n.d.), but of course males

respond differently to lesbians. In her narrative Thandiwe described boys approaching her as a group, before one offers to walk her to the shops – walking girls to shops is a sexual script commonly used to proposition girls in this community. But the group element may mean that they are scared of her or do not want to be individually accountable for their actions, should they be caught, hence their organised approach to her as a ‘lesbian’. Their behaviour could be interpreted as aimed at ‘correcting’ her, under the guise of culturally sanctioning her disinterest in the opposite sex. Boys’ display of hatred towards gender non-conforming girls has been reported (Van Dyk n.d.). This is a dangerous sign of harassment and violence towards gender non-conforming girls. The public sexual harassment of lesbian girls by men is reported in a study from Detroit (Robinson 2010). In Thandiwe’s case, the boys acting as a group do not want to be identified, and this breeds an environment of group crime – a *modus operandi* common in hate crimes against black lesbians in townships. Boys’ group behaviour speaks to social attitudes that are organised and to the mob nature of violence against lesbian-identified women. When boys know of a woman as a ‘lesbian’ and nevertheless play dating games with her it speaks to elementary practices of corrective behaviour. This is critical, as young men are invariably the perpetrators of hate crimes against lesbians in black townships. Reddy (2010) argues that this is the case as the bodies of young women generate incredible meanings around what is acceptable and what is not. In a way, when boys proposition a lesbian this communicates a ‘corrective measure’ towards her and her behavior, and should be viewed as a first step in boys’ engagement with homophobic attitudes. Lesbian women themselves seem helpless in their acceptance that ‘boys won’t care if you are gay or not’ (Van Dyk n.d.). Mob behaviour is more prevalent in bigger townships than in smaller, rural environments where everybody knows everybody else, and it becomes easier to identify the alleged perpetrator of a crime..

Study strengths and limitations

These case studies are reflective of the lives of gender non-conforming girls from a particular township. Although they may not represent the totality of experiences, much of the information offers useful insights. There were no male participants with narratives of gender non-conforming identities. These findings speak to the context of lower-class townships, and there may well be differences in the experiences of young, white, middle-class gender non-conforming females in South African suburbs. As Reddy (2010; Salo *et al.* 2010) points out, structural factors of class, race, ethnicity, generation, networks, resources and opportunities have relevance for how people claim their citizenship in the townships, and these aspects may impact the findings. In these communities, it would seem, gender non-conforming girls are assumed to be lesbian and this may bring stigma and disapproval of them and may impact their daily lives. Research and anecdotal evidence from LGBT organisations in South Africa show that many LGBT youths leave school early because of marginalisation.

A limitation often found in narrative studies is that memory is social – it can be caught up in context and time. When a person is in a new context at a different time, he or she may remember differently or recreate their memory. The strength of these narratives is that they are situated in the now, both in terms of time and place. The participants were narrating current experiences,

rather than distant memories. Hence unreliability due to recall bias should not be a concern in these findings. Of course there may have been some suppression of certain aspects of memory – especially the most distressing memories – as many people employ this as a protective mechanism. What is reported here is what participants felt they could speak about.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study sought to contribute to our understanding of the challenges faced by youth with gender non-confirming identities in a South African township. The two narratives show the diversity of experiences in this community. Such diversity suggests that there may be something intriguing taking place in this setting, and therefore future studies should extend the sample.

The findings present the family and school environments as critical in the lives of young gender non-confirming women. The authors suggest, as scholars such as Reddy (2010), Ndeshe (2010), Salo *et al.* (2010) and others have done, that extensive work is needed to contribute to the security of gender non-confirming women – and black lesbians in particular – in South African townships. Education on gender that counters strong religious messages against gender non-confirming identities should be strengthened. Education needs to focus on increasing public understanding of the gender continuum and its variations. There is a need to strengthen families and to educate them about the importance of offering children protective support during adolescence. Perhaps, to assist schools, the South African Department of Basic Education should clearly communicate that it is not departmental policy to refuse girls permission to wear tracksuits to school. This will create a comfortable environment for gender non-confirming female learners who prefer to wear a uniform of tracksuits or pants. Right now this regulation is at the discretion of the school, and more conservative institutions will probably not be flexible when it comes to the uniform.

There is a need for continued studies of gender non-confirming girls, so as to strengthen culturally competent support services. It seems from this study that there are boys at school who are friends to these girls: what is needed is an understanding of the type of males who reject tomboys and gender-non conforming girls, and what can be done to influence them and change their attitudes. A study of different boys' reactions to gender non-confirming girls is necessary with a view to understanding the conditions that enable some to be accepting while others are not, and give in to hatred and hate crimes against lesbians. Mob killing behaviour needs to be prevented, therefore evaluation studies of interventions, aimed at changing prejudice, are needed. More research is needed to identify those conditions that are conducive to the outbreak and concentration of hate crimes in townships. Perhaps the issue of violence against lesbians can be linked to the issue of violence against women more generally, or other kinds of violence motivated by an intolerance of people considered 'different', for one reason or another.

Endnotes

- 1 Questioning here refers to someone who feels they do not conform to a hetero-normative society or agrees that they live a lifestyle that is different/outside the societal norm, therefore they may be 'questioning' their sexuality.
2. The South African Broadcasting Authority (SABC) 1 soap opera, *Generations*, depicts a modern

South African middle-class lifestyle. The character, Anne, was introduced as a female but later changed to male as part of the plot.

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From kitchen to corridor of power: Yoruba women breaking through patriarchal politics in south-western Nigeria

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, a number of socio-cultural agencies have played a significant role in the rise of Yoruba women in civil politics. Amongst these are the increasing value of monogamy and women's greater access to Western education; the culture of first ladies in government; and female socio-economic empowerment through paid labour. Despite their increasing participation, women are still marginalised in elective politics. Using the ethnographic methods of key informant interviews, observation and focus group discussions and a theoretical analysis of patriarchy, this article examines gender relations in Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement in south-western Nigeria. The rise of Yoruba women in politics in south-western Nigeria is discussed, along with the factors influencing women's participation in civil politics. The study concludes that patriarchal politics still exists in the Yoruba political system. Factors inhibiting the total collapse of patriarchal politics in south-western Nigeria include the nature of Yoruba politics; women being pitted against women in politics; gender stereotypes and household labour. Thus, to make Yoruba politics friendlier to all, it would be desirable to create more political openings for women.

Keywords: civil politics, patriarchy, political power, south-western Nigeria, women

Introduction

In many African states, women's participation in civil politics is said to have relatively increased within the last two decades, due to the re-emergence of democratic governance (Seebens 2007). The increase has also been linked to the success of multiple efforts, focused on both the national and the international spheres, at breaking through the barrier of gendered political inequity. The late 20th and early 21st centuries have seen Yoruba women negotiating for greater inclusion in civil politics, which has hitherto been patriarchal/male dominated in nature. While the current Yoruba civil politics in south-western Nigeria has, of late, become more gender sensitive, women's political participation is still limited to peripheral politics.

The discourse on women in politics started to receive more attention from the late 1980s, partly due to the low level of commitment on the part of male politicians to development – especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, the discourse mostly focuses on women's tender nature as assurance for their creditable performance in politics (Arifalo 2003). The discourse is largely supported and has translated to policy statements both at national and international levels. Women's political empowerment has been boosted by the implementation of affirmative action, which stipulates a 30 per cent inclusion of women in both elected and appointed positions in every member state which is a signatory of the United Nations (UN) policy statement (CCPR 1989; Sowell 2004). The affirmative action stipulation was later increased to 34 per cent in 1995 and presently stands at 40 per cent. In some quota systems women are pushing against that ten per cent disparity, and have campaigned for a 50 per cent share in both elected and appointed political posts. After 1989 most of the signatory states began to ratify the affirmative action stipulation, yet globally it is yet to translate into an optimum increase in women's political participation (Badmus 2006). By 2010, none of the signatory states had met the target for either elected or appointed political positions. In many states the claimed increase in women's political participation is restricted to the grassroots level of mobilising voters on behalf of political parties and male politicians. Women have thus far not been successful in elective politics, and so tend to be under-represented at the level of political decision-making. In countries such as Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Liberia and Senegal, as regards local legislative politics, on average fewer than ten per cent of positions requiring elections are filled by women (Blackden and Bhanu 1999; MDG 2009; Seebens 2007). In Muslim-dominated countries of Africa (mainly in northern Africa), the proportion of women in elective office (both parliamentary and executive) averages a mere five per cent (UNDP 2008). The data suggest a new dimension to the gender gap in politics, indicating that substantial gender inequity is still prevalent in world politics.

The gendered political gap is a global phenomenon. Even in the few cases where women have greater political representation the women:men ratio is still low, in terms of elective posts. By November 2010, only 11 countries in the world had women heading national governments as either prime ministers or presidents. In 2007, as the continent with the highest rate of female political representation in parliament, 22 per cent of parliamentary elective posts in Latin America and the Caribbean were held by women (Seebens 2007), with Cuba at 43 per cent (MDG 2009) (the majority of Cuba's parliamentary elective posts were still held by men). Sub-Saharan Africa continues to make strides, with Rwanda out in front. The country made history in September 2008 when its lower parliamentary chamber elected a majority (56%) of women members (MDG 2009), yet elective posts to the executive arm of government recorded a lower success rate. In western Asia, four women were elected to Kuwait's parliament for the first time in May 2009, after gaining the right to stand for election in 2005. This is regarded as a major step forward for Kuwaiti women. In terms of the variety of political leadership positions (MDG 2009; UNDP 2008), as of January 2009, women reached the highest parliamentary position – presiding officer – in about 31 parliamentary chambers worldwide. Yet, the remaining 145 countries, said to embody democratic governance, saw a predominance of male political leaders.

In Nigeria, female political participation only expanded following successful demonstrations against the male-dominant military regimes that had been in control of the government for an extended period.² Under these military regimes, the interests of women at a political and a governmental level were not only marginalised, but the ability of women to govern was also suppressed. Between 1983 and 1999 (the second military regime) there were no female state military governors in Nigeria, as it was unthinkable for women to show an interest in such a political position. This is partly due to the restricted profile of women in the Nigerian military.

Since 1999, democracy has seemingly given women greater freedom in Nigerian politics, while projecting society as one of 'inclusive gender politics'. Some political groups, aspiring politicians, political office-bearers (especially the offices of first lady, at all levels of governance)³ have attracted greater participation on the part of women, and established women ubiquitously within Nigeria's public and political spheres. By 2010, women's political participation had increased to 51 per cent. Despite Nigeria's 30 per cent affirmative action, only nine per cent of political positions were held by women, while the majority of women in politics were employed as political party supporters and for election mobilisation (AM Express 2010). The increase in women's participation raised questions about the redefinition of the gendered political spectrum, and about a wide range of political, economic, social and moral concerns related to community development outside of women's traditional role in the kitchen. Yoruba society is central to Nigerian politics, because of the people's cultural tendency to adapt quickly to political change. In terms of political participation, between 1999 and 2009, Yoruba politics recorded increased participation on the part of women, which created a number of challenges. It also raised fresh ideas relating to gender discourse as a contemporary development issue. While Yoruba women's participation increased in terms of political appointments, they still had to contend with factors limiting their participation in elective politics. This suggests that in Yoruba society it is still not *uhuru* for women in patriarchal politics. This is because Yoruba women in elective posts are few, compared to the number of women appointed or participating in local party politics.

Considering women's low success rate in electoral politics in Yoruba society, this article provides an overview of gendered political relations by arguing that female participation not only empowers women, but also reinforces complementary gender relations in the political (public) sphere. Drawing on a long local history of Yoruba politics, the authors argue that women's participation in politics is influenced by time and interest, as well as the political nature of the Nigerian state.

The authors substantiate their argument within the context of ethnographic data collected in south-western Nigeria, which draws heavily on qualitative data collected from Osun and Ekiti states. Inferences were also drawn from earlier ethnography conducted on politics and nationalism in numerous Yoruba towns. The authors assume gender relations to be symbolic and social constructions that benefit both men and women. They contextualise Yoruba women in politics within a historical context and within the radical postcolonial feminist idea of patriarchy, shaped by modernisation, globalisation, democratic process, urbanisation and a capitalist economy. They trace the history of women's participation in Yoruba politics and the nationalist movement, specifically analysing how such participation draws on the traditional practice of Yoruba women's resistance against political injustices and the political traditions of women in anti-colonial anti-military

movements, as well as recently formed nationalist groups in the Yoruba region. Historically, women's political participation is associated with a low representation of women's interests in the various military governments of Nigeria and in the dawn of democracy. However, the authors will illustrate which factors influence female participation in civil politics and locally-based nationalist movements, and the challenges hampering women's equitable participation in Yoruba politics and the nationalist movement. They conclude that the new political dispensation empowers women in a limited yet very important way, as their political participation in Yoruba communities is not yet conceived of on the basis of gender equity. While Yoruba women are yet to record optimum success in elective politics, Yoruba politics strongly reflects the fact that the life experiences of the majority of its women differ sharply from those of men. Such differences are mostly defined through patriarchy, which forms the basis of Yoruba gendered political relations and development. As this is against the democratic rule, a return to civil rule in Yoruba society (as in other parts of Nigeria) should characterise all gender political spaces and positions.

Patriarchal politics: African patriarchy, Yoruba politics and gender relations

The theoretical view of how Yoruba women break through patriarchal politics in south-western Nigeria rests on the conceptual analysis of patriarchy. Patriarchy defines women in terms of the domestic sphere, and simultaneously draws an artificial line between men and women as regards the domestic (private) and the public spheres, thus ascribing different roles to men and women. The public sphere presents men as the locus of socially valued organs of activities such as politics and business (Tamale 2004), while the private represents domestic activities centred around the family and household, and makes women its dominant organ. Patriarchy thus provides an understanding of social relations between men and women. The public sphere represents a larger spectrum of the community and/or society, while the private purely represents the domestic and the household arena. Women are confined (rather, trapped) to the domestic arena – a space where men still ideally rule as heads of the family – and men spend most of their time in the public realm without female interference. Men rationalise that women's reproductive roles (the crux of the domestic sphere) make them biologically and 'naturally' predisposed to providing sexual pleasure, carrying a child, raising children and taking care of the domestic sphere. Thus, biology instead of gender (Rendel 1981) is used to explain the social differences between men and women in many societies. In short, gender differences are reduced to and justified by biological difference – a practice that is more prevalent in sub-Saharan African societies.

In these societies, gender separation between the public and the private spheres preceded colonialism. Gender practice was consolidated and reinforced by colonial policies and practices, as well as by the authoritarian regimes of many African postcolonial states. Among the Lugbara of Uganda, the Ashanti of Ghana, the Igbo and Yoruba of Nigeria, and the Luo of Kenya, precolonial male–female relations were demarcated into public and private spheres. Colonial structures and policies delineated a clear gender distinction, guided by an ideology that further perceived men as public actors and women as private performers (Aina 1992; Conquerry-Vindrovitch 1997;

Tamale 2004). As specifically noted in precolonial Yoruba society, gender structures reflected that women engaged in domestic work while men dealt with public roles in family and household settings. The colonial notion of gender relationships introduced a new domestic arena outside of the traditional notion of gendered production systems. For instance, in Yoruba society, land was communally owned in the precolonial system of land tenure, while the colonial land tenure system allowed men absolute control and individual ownership of land. At the same time politics and power were formalised and institutionalised with males as the major public actors. Such patriarchal delimitations in African colonial societies gave rise to patriarchal politics, which sees the allocation of and access to political power based on 'biological' nature. In patriarchal politics women are considered inferior by virtue of their biology, therefore they are deprived of equitable participation in (especially) elective posts.

Western capitalism and political ideology based on neoliberal economic and democratic practices that were introduced to the African people focused on the individual, replacing traditional African politics and economics that valued equitable representation between men and women (Geisler 1995; Maty 1994; Ruth 1997). These changes had a profound impact on African women's access to and control over political resources. Significantly, the changes caused inequitable political participation between men and women (Olorode 2003). However, patriarchy and neo-liberalism are colliding forces, with patriarchy still forcing itself into (and reinventing itself within) the new democratic system. In these circumstances (contrary to what obtains in Western society), men in many African societies still consider childbearing and rearing, cooking, certain aspects of subsistence farming, scrubbing and cleaning of the house, along with other household chores, to be women's inescapable destiny. As a threat to women's political autonomy, for fear of breaking with patriarchal politics, these duties were (and still are) performed gratuitously mainly by women, without formal recognition or remuneration. Propelled by the patriarchal nature of these societies, African women engage in the drudgery of domestic work for longer hours (on average 17 hours a day) (Tamale 2004), leaving them almost no time to actively participate in the public sphere. The fact that their domestic roles remain unacknowledged and 'invisible' in traditional economics and GDP statistics confirms the denigration of women in neoliberal economies. In addition, the ideology of domesticity is so efficient that the majority of African women have internalised it, allowing it to inform the construction of a self-identity, which is the basis of their political relationship (Rendel 1981). Given the self-identity constructed for and by women, partisan politics disturbs women's domesticity so that they need not become involved. Patriarchal politics, indeed!

This constructed patriarchal politics is redeployed in many African societies to systematically disenfranchise women from accessing and controlling political resources. Indeed, the gendered public/private spheres carved out of and reaffirmed by the ideology of domesticity have overarching consequences for both men and women. The most important way in which patriarchy has restricted women's access to and control over political resources is in its reconstruction of public spheres as exclusive political resources, occupied by and relating only to men. During the colonial and postcolonial eras, the gendered male 'public' sphere is reconstructed as the key to power, enshrined with enormous political privileges, opportunities and wealth, and beyond women's reach. Patriarchal politics similarly restricts women to marginal domestic 'private' spheres and grants men not only

free access to it, but also allows them to take charge of these spheres. Women's access to the public sphere, on the other hand, is extremely limited and utterly controlled by men.

African patriarchy thus uses several tools, including ideological conceptions, and economic and religious forces, to safeguard the public sphere as a domain of men's political hegemony. It resists any attempt by women to make the transition to the public sphere. Thus, patriarchal politics sets male values and interests as the norms in the public sphere, and allows men to easily maintain this status. Any woman who wishes to enter this sphere is forced to meet male/masculine standards. Such restrictive measures in Yoruba civil politics include (but are not limited to) the use of money in political bargaining, political violence, and voting requirements which are not women-friendly. Therefore it is much more difficult for women to participate in civil politics. Tamale (2004) notes that the constructed masculine standards of patriarchal politics operate as a 'glass ceiling' that stops many women from entering the public sphere. In the political domain (the main component of the public sphere) women therefore become the 'other' who are constantly confronted with obstacles impeding their access to and control of political resources. This therefore limits women in terms of both the physical and metaphorical sphere of politics. As this portends marginalisation, women's political and social status remains subordinated to that of men (Ruth 1997). Their mobility and erudition in a political career are also significantly curtailed, as is their potential for success – especially in Yoruba civil politics.

While political participation is an essential component of accessing, allocating and controlling political resources, patriarchal politics hampers women as follows: First, women are generally excluded from what is conventionally regarded as politics and they miss out in the negotiation of this vital resource. Second, what women do in the domestic domain is not regarded as political; state support for what women do is limited, hence women's appropriation from this vital resource is also significantly limited. This suggests that patriarchy limits women's participation in politics, even if the public sphere becomes democratised. In Yoruba land, even the democratic public sphere still refuses women equitable access to and optimal participation in electoral politics. As Yoruba politics still feature certain elements of patriarchal politics, it remains hostile to a more significant input from women and dictates a policy of non-interference by women in the public sphere. Therefore, a moral decadence pervades Yoruba politics, in contrast to the precolonial era when the vital presence of women in palace politics dispelled political and moral panic.

The above theoretical discussion suggests that patriarchal politics is a pervasive socio-cultural practice constructed from patriarchy in many African societies. It represents one of the most formidable constraints implemented by men as a social system that creates a gendered political relationship. This discussion suggests that patriarchy is not based on biological differences between males and females, but rather that it is a cultural and social construction which perpetually relegates women to the background and disempowers them in terms of political decision-making. Patriarchy therefore imposes a number of customary restrictions, such as denying women access to the means of production (land), disinheritance, humiliating widowhood rites, taboos against women's acquisition of property, beliefs in supernatural forces, and exclusion from political decision-making (mostly at community level) (Aina 1993; Badmus 2006).

The changing face of patriarchy and implications for patriarchal politics in Yoruba land

In postcolonial Yoruba society, gender relations are still structured around a patriarchy which continues to mutate based on time, the nature of power relations and the understanding of public space. Patriarchy can be traditional, transitional or postmodern, and each phase has different effects on female–male political relations among the Yoruba. Traditional patriarchy is based on a sharp division of labour between males and females within the household. Males are exclusively in control of works outside the confines of domestic roles (mostly tasks that impact physical exertion), while females are vested with domestic roles (requiring less physical exertion). Traditional patriarchy is commonly found in rural communities, though instances have been noted in urban communities. Specific forms of traditional patriarchy include women's loss of access to the basic means of production (capital and land) and their total dependence on men. In such cases, most of these women's needs are subjected to their husbands' approval (Oluwabamide 2009), and revolt may cause the marriage to collapse. Subjected to religious indoctrination and a host of other cultural prejudices, in traditional patriarchy some women still reject the notion of gender equity and shun political participation which is deemed for men only, because masculinity conforms to the 'dirty' nature of politics. Transitional patriarchy evolved with women's increasing access to education, profitable careers and urban migration. It breaks the cycle of women's economic dependence on men on a large scale, allowing women greater control over their economic activities. A women's working class has emerged through female professionals earning a similar economic status to that of their male counterparts. As the means of production is owned by the state and by private individuals who do not engage in gender restriction when recruiting labour, more women are exposed to the periphery of the public space. However, rather than also having absolute control of political decision making, transitional patriarchy still subjects women to a certain degree of approval-seeking from their men, thus their political participation is restricted.

Postmodern patriarchy reflects elements of radical feminism, where Yoruba women appropriate the gains of a global agenda, fighting for equality with men in all spheres (social and political) and in their access to education. Of significance in the construction of a postmodern patriarchy is democratic politics which not only guarantees voting rights for all adults, but also accommodates a rule of law that is not gender restrictive. Underlying the perspectives of postmodern patriarchy is the growth of women's interest in civil politics. As more women favourably and successfully contest and win elections in south-western Nigeria, the division of space into public/private has proven to be a subjective patriarchal feature which cannot be explained solely by female biological characteristics.

Yet postmodern patriarchy also constrains women's political participation: Many Yoruba men consider it abominable to be under a woman's political (civil) leadership, thus many Yoruba political elites engage in political behaviours that make politics a hostile environment for women. As in many sub-Saharan African societies,⁴ in postcolonial Yoruba politics many male politicians resort to political thuggery, eliminate political opponents, incite ethnic and sectarian violence, and are not above vote-rigging, intimidation, buying votes or holding clandestine meetings that

are so typical of Nigerian prebendal politics (Badmus 2006; Joseph 1981). All these actions are aimed at preventing women's political participation. These factors coalesce to legitimise Yoruba men's political control and perpetuate the re-election of the same class of male politicians. In postcolonial Yoruba society, which is still subjected to certain patriarchal norms, women's political expression is mostly limited to entertainment at political rallies, voter mobilisation and voting for their husband's preferred candidate. Furthermore, postcolonial Yoruba civil politics seemed to hamper women's participation, as many of the political parties subscribed to obnoxious policies against female aspirants.⁵ Of note is the fact that the political parties determine who may contest a seat, and the party apparatus is deployed to enhance the ambition of selected candidates (Badmus 2006) – usually men. Since the majority of the political parties' executives are men, their decisions invariably favour men.

The above constitutes some of the elements of patriarchal politics that can be explained through feminine constructs, which Bernad (2000) refers to as post-structural feminism. Underlying this theoretical basis is the fact that Yoruba political behaviours are sharply shaped by gender differences in which women are 'muted' (Jaggar 1985; Smith 2004) as profane and as objects of marital exchange among men. Women are not regarded as prime players in economic and political actions which are central to building influence and power and enhancing social life. Thus, as a muted group they are passive and silent in political activities. Nonetheless, postmodern patriarchy provides an understanding that all patriarchal politics is man-made. As postmodern patriarchy is enhanced by globalisation and the spread of democratic norms, as well as increasing rates of literacy among women, so Yoruba women have gradually begun to break through patriarchal politics. Within the last ten years, Yoruba women have become increasingly visible in nationalist movements and civil politics.

Historical marginalisation and the rise of women in Yoruba politics

In precolonial Yoruba society, women's and men's spheres of activity were complementary. Although this does not necessarily imply equality between the sexes, the extent of that inequality depended on the family structure and social class of each woman (Aina 1993). Nonetheless, as evidenced in the traditional Yoruba social system, with the practice of polygyny and the patriarchal nature of society, the male sphere of activity was traditionally accorded greater value and prestige. Traditionally, a woman derived her social status from her two major roles: reproduction and production. A perfect combination of the two afforded her greater recognition, as well as political and social status. Such women were often regarded as *Obinrin bi okunrin* [a woman who is like a man] and were recommended for a chieftaincy title, through granting them a political role in the community. The title underscores the fact that women remained subjected to men's perceived superiority. Thus men still dominated the socio-political resources associated with the public space, they controlled wealth, and had influence and authority. Nonetheless, Yoruba women played active roles in traditional politics. Awe (1992) notes that the *lyalode* [female chieftainship] was the channel through which Yoruba women participated in political activities during precolonial times, despite prohibitions imposed by polygyny and patriarchy.

Women's participation in the decision-making of precolonial Yoruba communities therefore existed parallel to male hierarchies. Apart from holding specifically female chieftaincy titles such as the *lyalode* (representing the interests of women) (Denzer 1998), they held other ritual positions reserved for women in ancestral masquerade societies or Ogboni associations, which advised the rulers of towns and were generally concerned with maintaining social order and communal wellbeing (Denzer 1994; Nolte 2008). In addition, the importance of women's roles in palace affairs as *olori* and *iya-oba* remains significant in Yoruba traditional palace politics. The desire to reinvent the *olori* in representative government, with executive governors as leaders, may have informed the creation of the current office of first ladies. While *oloris*, as the Kings' wives, are afforded great political influence in the traditional political system, many first ladies who were the wives of state governors in the modern political system held political power and influence that was greater than that of deputy governors, and received statutory and constitutional recognition. In some Yoruba communities women access titles that were typically male, such as that of ruler of a town/kingdom, as with the regency in Akure (until 2009), and in many other Ekiti and Ondo communities. Denzer (1994, p. 8) similarly points out that prior to the 19th century three women were installed as rulers of the Ijebu-Ode.

The nature of colonial rule in south-western Nigeria excluded many Yoruba women from the colonial administration. One major constraint was that little preference was given to women's access to Western education among the Yoruba people during the early days of colonialism. With recruitment based on Western literacy, Yoruba women were excluded from colonial politics. Yet, as part of their contributions to the Yoruba nationalist movement, Yoruba women featured in many nationalist and political associations during colonial times. Examples include *Egba Women's Congress* (EWC) in Abeokuta (Mba 1982), *Binukonu* and *Majiyagbe* in Ibadan (Labinjo 1991), and professional associations such as market women's associations across Yoruba towns and cities. As this confirmed Yoruba reliance on shared male and female leadership in the nationalist movement during the colonial era, it also shows that colonial civil politics relied on separate gendered political hierarchies, mostly favourable to men.

The non-inclusion of women in the colonial administration meant they became part of civil society groups acting as anti-colonial movements. Their voice therefore emerged from marginalisation through recognition and participation in the Yoruba nationalist movement in the late colonial and early postcolonial periods of the 1950s and 1960s. Yoruba women, who were involved in a number of protests against British colonialism, were recognised especially in the grassroots mobilisation of support for the Yoruba nationalist movement. Despite their success, which can be attributed to associational networks, the number of women nominated into elective politics or appointed to higher political office was still low in the western region government (1954–1966) (Denzer 1994, p. 33).

The collapse of the first Nigerian Republic and the political experience in the western region where fears of political violence prevailed, made Yoruba politics even more of a hostile environment to women. Coupled with the prolonged Nigerian military rule (1966–1979 and 1983–1999), women's tenuous foothold in the Yoruba postcolonial nationalist movement and in politics sharply declined. During these two lengthy periods of military rule, women were almost

completely excluded from active political participation in south-western Nigeria. Already affected by the low and negative growth of the economy – which was heightened by the introduction of structural adjustment programmes from the 1980s onwards, and which further limited their access to state resources – women were thus denied participation in Yoruba civil politics and in the nationalist movement. According to Howard (1985), the majority of Yoruba women engage in some form of informal trade, and they therefore felt the impact of a struggling economy more heavily. Moreover, the over-centralisation of state politics and the militarisation of power between 1983 and 1999 further contributed to a militarisation of the entire society. These circumstances affected all sectors of society, but specifically schools, businesses, politics and general perceptions about the legitimacy of violence. These factors made it more difficult for women to organise and speak for themselves (Abdullah 1993; Shettima 1995). Between 1993 and 1998, when the Nigerian leadership engendered dictatorship and fascism, women's political interests in south-western Nigeria were further endangered, and many Yoruba women were driven further away from civil politics and the nationalist movement.

As in the colonial period, Yoruba women joined their male counterparts in a number of protests staged against the continued military rule in Nigeria. Women were actively involved in protests from 1993 onwards, in response to the annulment of the Nigerian general elections on 12 June 1993.⁶ Examples include the Campaign for Democracy (CD), O'odua Defence Assembly (ODA) and O'odua People's Congress (OPC). In many anti-June 12 protests, Yoruba women participated. Notably, Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, whose husband (Chief Moshood Abiola) claimed to have won the annulled election, evoked sympathy from many Yoruba women's organisations that cut across religion and class. Significantly, many Yoruba women supported the revalidation of the annulled election. Between 1993 and 1998, in what seemed to be an unending protest, some Yoruba women activists were murdered in state-linked political assassinations.⁷ Amongst the victims were Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, murdered in 1995 in Ikeja, Lagos; and Alhaja Suliyat Adedeji, murdered in 1997. The latter had been an Ibadan-based businesswoman, not aligned to the Yoruba nationalist movement and politics prior to the annulment of the June 12 election, but she rose to political fame in Ibadan by supporting the revalidation of the annulled election. The murder of the two women garnered support for the Yoruba nationalist movement and politics in such a way that the part Yoruba women later played in calls for democracy in Nigeria, could not be ignored.

In subsequent struggles for the revalidation of the June 12 election and a return to democratic rule, many Yoruba women joined the Yoruba nationalist movements and pro-democracy rallies. Among them are Funmilayo Olaseinde and Nike Omoworare from Osun state, as well as Kofoworola Bucknor from Lagos State – all strong members of pro-democracy groups such as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO). During this period, many grassroots women pledged their support to the OPC, a Yoruba militant association and the most popular socio-cultural group (founded in 1994). Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999 opened many opportunities for Yoruba women to become integrated in Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement. Therefore, many women who had participated in pro-democracy campaigns and political campaigns for the 1999 elections were offered political positions in several Yoruba states.

While the process did not yield a woman governor in any of the Yoruba states in 1999, there was a woman deputy governor in Lagos state, two women members of the Federal House of Representatives who represented Osun and Ogun states, and 12 women cabinet commissioners in all south-western Nigerian states (1999–2003). There were also significant numbers of women in the states' houses of assemblies, while a small number of local governments were headed by female chairpersons. As the offices of first ladies in south-western Nigeria became extra-political offices (often stronger than many government ministries and parastatals in terms of political influence and workforce), many Yoruba women were drawn to civil politics through the offices of first ladies, headed by the wives of state governors. Between 2003 and 2009 there was an increase in the number of women in Yoruba civil politics. Four states (Lagos, Osun, Ekiti and Ogun) out of the six in south-western Nigeria had women deputy governors. Five Yoruba women from Lagos, Ogun and Osun states were voted into the Federal House of Representatives, and two into the Senate (2007). As of 2009, like their male counterparts most women voted into the Federal House of Representatives have retained their political positions, with more women across all Yoruba states being elected and appointed to political positions at the local and state levels. Since 1999, Yoruba women have become more visible in political activities as they form the largest electorate and constitute the largest proportion of political party supporters active at the grassroots level.

The above raises two important cultural issues related to gender and women's participation in Yoruba politics. The first is that it seems obvious that marginalisation tends to raise women's awareness of political freedom, especially in a democratic setting. Thus, as with many forms of nationalism which tend to grow in democratic settings following socio-political marginalisation and repression (Gellner 1983), Yoruba women also view the new democracy as an opportunity to rise against their marginalisation in politics. The second postulation (directly related to the first), is that democracy tends to open up networks and agencies for women's inclusion in politics and in the nationalist movement. This is particularly because democracy does not respect any form of inequity in terms of political participation. The abovementioned cultural issues account for the greater inclusion of women in Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement since 1999. The situation is also typical of the Akans and Ashanti experiences in Ghana since 1995; the Kru of Liberia since 2000; and the Buganda of Uganda since 2000 (Olurode 2003; Tripp 2001). However, many specific factors contributed to the success of Yoruba women in this regard.

Socio-cultural agencies and female participation in civil politics

Cultural development rests on certain agencies upon which new ideas and constructs are introduced. In the case of Yoruba women, certain social and cultural agencies have acted as drivers for their participation in civil politics. The first is the increasing influence of other religions (Islam and Yoruba traditional religions) on Yoruba nationalism and politics since the 1990s. Predominantly Christianity dominated Yoruba nationalism until the late 19th century (Peel 1989). As Yoruba nationalism became more inclusive of other religions, it sparked their political participation. This spurred other categories of Yoruba people (across religion and gender) to become politically active, alongside Yoruba Christians who had dominated the political scene. As soon as the Yoruba nationalist movement became all-inclusive of religions it also became gender inclusive, thus

opening up women's active involvement. In 21st-century Yoruba politics, women's participation has become vitally important, given their complimentary roles in political mobilisation and in the election process.

A major religious influence that heightened women's participation in Yoruba civil politics and the locally-conceived nationalist movement was the openness of Islam and traditional religion, after the 1990s. As for Islam, the success of Moshood Kasimowo Abiola in the general elections had the effect of mobilising many Yoruba Muslims to support the Yoruba nationalist movement and politics (De Farias 1989; Doortmond 1989; Reichmuth 1996). Abiola was seen not just as one of them, but as a strong, pivotal and philanthropic Muslim who contributed financially to the building of new mosques and Islamic institutions. Abiola became a model among Yoruba Muslim politicians in the south-west. In supporting the completion of abandoned mosques in south-western Nigeria, Abiola drew large numbers of Muslims into Yoruba politics, including women. Sympathy for Abiola grew during his 1994 treason trial and subsequent detention (following the 1993 annulment of his election victory and his self-declaration as Nigerian president in 1994). During the struggle for his release and for the revalidation of his electoral victory, his wife, Kudrat Abiola, was killed by assailants linked to the state. This garnered even more support for Yoruba nationalism not only among Muslims, but also among Christians and traditional religious worshippers. Abiola was a member of the Ansar Ud Deen (AUD) Muslim group – an association supported by and popular among a large number of influential and wealthy Yoruba Muslims. Many of its members⁸ (male and female) had benefitted from Abiola's philanthropy, and following his disputed victory, many sympathisers began to support the Yoruba nationalist movement and civil politics in Yoruba land. Like Yoruba men, women viewed what happened to Abiola as the highest degree of political marginalisation and repression against the Yoruba. This heightened the suspicion which characterises Nigerian ethnic relations. In the interviews, many Muslim women identified the Yoruba nationalist movement as a serious issue which all Yoruba people should support. One respondent linked the locally-conceived nationalist movement with an injunction from the Holy Quran:

It is in the teaching of the Prophet Mohammed that we should defend our people and help to secure their rights and privileges.⁹

The emergence of the National Congress of Muslim Youths Organisation (NACOMYO), the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) and the Nasiru-llahi Fatir Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) raises women's awareness regarding their political participation. These organisations are elite groups that support the professional and career development of their members. While NASFAT, which began as a prayer group, was founded in Lagos in 1995 at the height of the Yoruba's political oppression and marginalisation, it cannot be said that it was intended to further Yoruba nationalist objectives. As the group grew, other objectives were integrated. Of course those objectives did not focus directly on the Yoruba nationalist movement and civil politics, but since the organisation seeks to protect the welfare of its members, their political interests became a concern. NASFAT's broad-based membership became a rallying platform for political mobilisation and its role in spurring many Muslims (men and women) into Yoruba civil politics

was quite astounding. While some women drew political inspiration from NASFAT's support, others who were already in politics before they became members came to count on the organisation to boost their political careers.¹⁰ While NASFAT does not consider gender in its indirect support for Yoruba nationalist movement and civil politics, as an exclusive Muslim women's organisation FOMWAN is gender-restrictive and more directly supports its members to become active in politics. Believing that women can be empowered and can contribute to community development by engaging in community politics,¹¹ FOMWAN supports members who are politicians in political campaigns and elections.¹² The Pentecostal Christian organisations, by contrast, did not directly support the Yoruba nationalist movement and civil politics in south-western Nigeria. Many other Christian denominations did, however, show support for women in Yoruba politics. A number of female Anglicans, Baptists, Apostolics and Methodists are currently prominent Yoruba politicians. Such support for women in Yoruba politics therefore transcends a specific religious bond, but is connected with Yoruba women's ability to break the barriers of patriarchy, which hitherto has limited their roles in religion and politics. In the 21st century, due to numerous factors, many Yoruba women understand that they need to be engaged in the public sphere, and religious organisations serve as a means of building a political network.

The 1995 founding of a militant socio-cultural and nationalist group, the OPC, had a dual effect on women's participation in Yoruba nationalism and civil politics. The OPC is disposed to the use of Yoruba traditional magical instruments in pursuit of its nationalist programmes. Involved in the largest grassroots mobilisation between 1995 and 2003, it draws on the support of Muslim women.

Many nominal Muslim and Christian Yoruba politicians (men and women) support the OPC agenda, despite spiritual constraints. As noted by Nolte (2008), besides the OPC's strong grassroots mobilisation, it acts on behalf of women. Many Yoruba women who broke out of strict patriarchal contexts (e.g., absolute conformity to their husbands' rule, hostility to women in public roles) were drawn to the OPC which offered them an opportunity to get involved in local Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement.

Since the early 1990s, many other socio-cultural-cum-civil society organisations (both non-governmental and governmental agencies) have been involved in awareness programmes which redirect women's attention to political participation in Nigerian civil politics. While the impact of these efforts could not be directly measured until 1999, when Nigeria successfully returned to civil politics, it was obvious that both religious and cultural agencies have some (albeit negligible) impact on increasing female political participation. Founded in 1982, Women In Nigeria (WIN) represents the voices of oppressed women, and sponsors women's research and education initiatives. WIN refutes the notion of women as subordinates, thus emphasising that 'gender is a social, not a biological, category' (Okeke 2000). This notion thus aims to neutralise the categorisation of women as the weaker sex.

In 1987/1988, WIN was appointed by Babangida's regime (at the start of the failed Third Republic) to represent women's perspectives on the Nigerian transition to democratic rule (Okeke 2000). To properly represent all women, WIN divided the country into seven regions and founded 97 affiliate women's organisations. Thus, it not only provided grassroots support for women, but also allowed women's various political interests to be articulated in their local media, in as many

as five different languages. Other indigenous languages were employed to communicate with local women, and this strengthened the grassroots network. In early 1999, WIN held a conference to mark the return to democracy, demanding rights that would secure women's increased political participation. The demands included

the right to form political parties without property qualifications, the reservation of 50 percent of all seats in legislative and executive bodies for women, the right of workers to seek leave of absence to contest for elections, ... the right for women to control their bodies, ... and the removal of prejudices against women in employment and parity of treatment in work places.¹³

In 1987, the Babangida regime created the Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW) organisation. Directed by the then first lady, Maryam Babangida, it aimed to 1) mobilise women to work towards concrete results and seek leadership roles; (2) bring women together in order to better understand their problems; and (3) create awareness among women of their social, political and economic rights and responsibilities.¹⁴ A similar programme was implemented in 1994 by the then first lady, Mrs. Abacha, called the Family Support Program (FSP).

In addition to government efforts, women's organisations such as WIN and the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) have been raising awareness on women's political rights and have been educating women politically. The NCWS, founded in 1958 as a federation of non-partisan women's organisations, encourages women to participate in politics. Its objectives are

to promote the welfare, economic and social progress of women, with special emphasis on education and training; to awaken and encourage in women the realization of their responsibilities to the community; to ensure by every legal means that women are given opportunities to act as full responsible members of the community; to encourage the affiliation of all non-political women's organizations in Nigeria; and to foster cooperation with other national and international bodies with similar aims, and assisting women in towns and villages in their roles as homemakers and nation builders.¹⁵

The NCWS encourages its members to organise their own awareness programmes at local and national levels. Activities include providing channels through which women's options and ideas can be made known. It is also actively involved in developing leadership among women.

During the aborted Third Republic, in 1991, the NCWS created the National Task Force Committee on Political Transition Program (TFCPTP), whose purpose was to 'raise political awareness of the Nigerian women in such a way that they will become interested in the promise of a new social and democratic order that was expected to start from 1992 and to become impartial moderators at the great debate' (Chizea and Njoku 1991). Although the NCWS also worked with women in rural areas, its target was female leaders. The TFCPTP organised a four-day workshop from 18 to 21 September 1989, to train female leaders on the 'role of women in the political transition program' (Chizea and Njoku 1991). The idea was that training female leaders would be more productive and effective in raising women's awareness of their rights, responsibilities and duties in the new republic. Dr Dora Chizea, chairman of NCWS, informed Nigerian women that they have the right to make a choice in terms of political decisions, and need to play an active role in politics, so that the colonial legacy would not be an everlasting obstacle for women. In effect,

women were encouraged to make their own choices, to vote for officials they believed would best represent their interests, and not to elect officials who bribed them with food, or those their husbands chose for them.

With the ripples of globalisation, specifically in the context of rendering politics and bureaucracy more gender-sensitive, the above agencies are reflections of the 1995 Beijing declarations on gender equity. The declarations connected Yoruba women's ideas with those of other women, thus reinforcing the former's stoic position on universal ideals related to gender-friendly politics. Raising gender issues as human rights concerns,¹⁶ Nigerian women (and in particular Yoruba women) argued that increasing female participation in civil politics has to do with the protection of female dignity. Specifically, international summits in Nigeria led to the establishment of ministries for women's affairs in all tiers of government in the country.¹⁷

Access to education has also raised women's awareness of their role in civil politics. A Western education builds confidence and improves women's academic credentials when it comes to political posts. It also reduces the attachment to polygyny, a predominant traditional Yoruba marriage system that sustains patriarchy and its political tendencies: the more educated a woman is, the less chance she has of experiencing polygyny. In essence, women's education increases recognition of the values of monogamy, which in turn gives women greater power in terms of political decisions on a domestic level, as well as on the broader level of the community and society at large.

The capitalist economy, which accommodates a neoliberal economic agenda in which women are no longer barred from economic pursuits (Aina 1993), has provided opportunities for women to freely develop their informal economic interests beyond household consumption. Through the new economic mode, and in conjunction with their increased capacity in terms of literacy, many Yoruba women now live mostly in cities that provide them with more opportunities to participate in an expanded economy and in civil politics. From the 1980s onwards the Nigerian oil economy began to grow, and although Yoruba women did not directly benefit, the ripple effects were nonetheless felt. Through rapid urbanisation and a host of economic opportunities provided by oil incomes in many Nigerian cities between the 1980s and the late 1990s, many urban women established a broader network of social and economic relations. As argued by Jaggar (1985) and Harding (2004), neoliberal economic pursuits tend to open up women's economic vistas, especially in low-industrialised economies that mostly rely on an informal economic system.

Between 1999 and 2009, Nigerian politics conceded more political power to women through the offices of the first ladies. As these offices tend to be stronger than many other government ministries – especially in south-western Nigeria – they accrue a great deal of political influence, fortified by a level of fiscal power through which they mobilise political support. As these offices are headed by the wives of the executive heads of government in all three tiers of government, they recruit more women into the government – women who develop an interest in civil politics.

While it is expected that all the above agencies would have tremendously impacted on women's political participation across the spectrum of Yoruba civil politics, the available data merely suggest an increase in Yoruba women's political party membership and participation in the nationalist movement. Women's participation in elective politics remains abysmally low and marginal. This suggests that while Yoruba women have recognised that their role is not limited to the kitchen,

and that they have to play a more significant role within the public spheres, the core of the public sphere is still very difficult for them to penetrate. This position is confirmed by a female politician (and key informant):

In those days, women did not know that they were to participate in civil politics, but in the recent due to democratic openings and awareness level, they are aware of their importance in politics.¹⁸

Constraints against women's equitable participation in elective politics in Yoruba land

While female participation in the Yoruba nationalist movement has increased tremendously, their participation in civil politics is still limited to being part of the electorate and being supporters of political parties. Yoruba women's chances in elective politics remain limited, judging from the number who won elective posts in south-western Nigeria between 1999 and 2007 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Yoruba women in elective posts in south-western Nigeria (1999–2007)

Positions	No. of available seats	No. of women elected and percentage of total in 1999	No. of women elected and percentage of total in 2003	No. of women elected and percentage of total in 2007
FEDERAL ELECTIONS				
Presidency	1	-(0%)	- (0%)	-(0%)
Senate	18	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)
House of Representatives	71	1 (2%)	2 (2.8%)	3 (4.2%)
Total	88	1(1.1%)	2(2.2%)	5 (5.6%)
STATE ELECTIONS				
Governorship	6	0 (0%)	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
State Houses of Assembly	143	10 (7%)	9 (6)%	4 (3%)
Total	149	10(7%)	9 (6%)	4 (3%)
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS				
Local Government Chairmen	147	12 (8%)	10 (7%)	15 (10%)
Local Government Councillors	1617	28 (2%)	42 (3%)	37 (2%)
Total	1764	40 (2%)	52(3%)	52 (3%)

Source: National Independent Electoral Commission, Abuja, Nigeria, 2008.

Table 1 presents an interesting analysis of Yoruba women's participation in elective politics. While there was an increase from 1.1 to 5.6 per cent in participation in federal elections between 1999 and 2007, there was a decrease at the state elections, from seven per cent in 1999 to three per cent in 2007. Participation at local level also recorded a marginal increase from two per cent in 1999 to three per cent in 2007. An explanation for the declining trend at the state level, which was supported by some of the informants, is the political violence that characterised Yoruba politics at the state level, more than at any other level of government, between 2003 and 2007. Again, one informant noted that election to state political office requires more money than election to any other tier of government. A female politician who was to contest the State House of Assembly (Osun State) during the 2007 election, noted that in some areas elections were more difficult as they required a lot of money and involved tough campaigns, *'so I had to withdraw from the competition for a male rival in the same party with me, because I could not get enough money to pay for the party nomination'*.²⁰

Merging the table with some responses from oral interviews reveals a discrepancy in terms of female political participation in south-western Nigeria: more women have demonstrated their interest in civil politics through their increased engagement with the ethno-nationalist movement, which is rooted in political sensitivity and awareness among Yoruba women. Nonetheless, as is evident in the table, there is an unimpressive rate of female participation in elective politics.

While women were not adequately represented in elective politics, there was a slight increase in the number of women appointed to political positions during the same period. In 1999, since the party that won the presidency was not popular enough in south-western Nigeria, the political appointments allocated to that region were minimal and the positions assigned to women were insignificant. Again, the political party in control of state government between 1999 and 2003 did not sufficiently recognise women's political ability. This was previously the case with the political parties controlling south-western Nigeria between 1951 and 1964, and between 1979 and 1983, when similar sentiments against women's political participation prevailed (Nolte 2008).²¹ In contrast to the civilian era, in 1999 only one state in south-western Nigeria appointed a woman as deputy governor, but she was impeached and removed from office at the end of her second year. The popular political views that accounted for her impeachment were that she had been scheming to contest a governorship position in the next election (2003). The male governor under whom she served felt threatened by her popularity among the female electorate. The official complaint was, however, based on a flimsy allegation of official insubordination and being too strong to control, which were pure elements of patriarchal politics.

The volcanic nature of political change in south-western Nigeria saw the emergence of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), which took control of the federal government, winning around 70 per cent of the governorship and House of Assembly elections during 2003 (Ukeje and Adebaniwi 2008).²² The PDP claims to be friendlier to women, and employed this strategy to draw grassroots support in Osun, Ekiti and Ogun States during the 2003 elections. The party also claimed that the incumbent party – the Alliance for Democracy (AD) was too autocratic, gerontocratic and unfriendly to women. Relatively speaking, the PDP increased women's participation in both

elective politics and political appointments, since 50 per cent of its deputy governors in the region were women, as at 2009. The Yoruba thereby became the first ethnic group in Nigeria to have three women deputy governors, followed by the Igbo with one. A woman was also appointed as a deputy governor in northern Nigeria. The PDP further created more welcoming conditions to enable women to participate in both elective politics and to hold political office (Badmus 2006), especially from 2003 to 2007.

The above increase is insignificant in terms of the equal gender representation campaigned for by the WIN in 2000, but despite this marginal increase, it is a clear sign that Yoruba women are gradually breaking through patriarchal political structures. Relying on a multiplicity of forces, Yoruba women have begun to view patriarchy as a social construction, rather than biological. Translating this into politics, Yoruba women can now appropriate their changing conception of patriarchy to be more inclusive in civil politics. The early 21st century has seen progress in terms of women's political participation in Yoruba land. Compared to their prior political participation, this progress is indeed significant. Between 1979 and 1983, very few women (such as Regina Agbakoba, Janet Akinrinade, Bimbo Akintola, Ebun Oyagbola and Bola Ogunbo) were prominent political players in Yoruba civil politics (Arifalo 2003). However, since 1999, more Yoruba women have shown an interest in civil politics, and are now breaking down traditional patriarchal stereotypes, challenging the harsh nature of gender-based power distribution within the present postmodern patriarchy (which many have started to embrace). However, as a result of political and cultural obstacles, many women are still restricted to seeking political appointments, rather than being active players in elective politics.

As in the previous elections in Nigeria (1964, 1979, 1983 and 1993), where equally low levels of women's participation in elective politics were recorded, many scholars have blamed British colonialism for the situation. Scholars such as Alen (1972), Mba (1982), Chisea *et al.* (1991) hold the view that colonialism played a significant role in female political marginalisation in many sub-Saharan African states. In the case of the Yoruba, given that the Yoruba precolonial political system was more inclusive of women, they sustained their colonial-centric argument by maintaining that British colonialism destroyed or weakened most of the already existing institutions that accommodated women in local politics (Adeleye-Fayemi 1997; Arifalo 2003; Falola 1995). British colonialism misconceived the Yoruba political and administrative system which was in operation, as it did with the Igbo society in eastern Nigeria (Mba 1982). In this misconception Yoruba women were perceived more or less as 'slaves' since their positions were mostly limited to domestic life (i.e., the kitchen). Patriarchy was therefore reinforced by denying Yoruba women access to most of the facilities that could empower them politically – including access to the vote.²³

One crucial facility that enhances political participation and influences involvement in elective politics among the Yoruba, is access to formal education (Peel 1989). During British colonial rule, however, Yoruba women were denied formal education – an institution largely introduced by British colonialism. The curricula emphasised more lucrative professions for boys than for girls. In rare cases of women being enrolled at school they were forced to take domestic science (Okeke 2000). Therefore, the patriarchal doctrine of men as superior and more deserving of an education than women largely excluded the latter from academic institutions. As at 2009, more

Yoruba women have been educated, yet the shadow of the past, which made women subservient to men, still persists. Many women still believe female education is not as important as male education (the practice of only educating men is prevalent in northern Nigeria). While female politicians who recognise that Western education empowers women and boosts their ability to participate in civil politics have a better chance of success in Yoruba politics, those who do not, form the bulk of ordinary female party supporters. According to an informant in Ilobu, Western education (especially higher education) has a significant influence on women's social status, as it places them in positions where they can obtain better and quicker access to male authorities. In her view, *'Western education is very essential in the process of integrating a higher number of women into electoral politics. But only very few women in Yoruba society used their educational status to establish a career in elective politics'*.²⁴

Other cultural constraints affect the number of women in politics. Yoruba women's self-perception as sisters, mothers and wives, restricts them to a domestic role rather than the public role of community decision-maker. Yoruba women are still perceived as child-bearers and housekeepers whose responsibilities are limited, more or less, to household affairs. Thus, their role in civil politics is considered to be limited to mobilising voters in support of the men who are involved in taking decisions in the public sphere. According to many women interviewed in Ekiti and Osun States, despite being active party supporters, they rejected the idea of contesting elective political posts due to the notion that civil politics would affect their roles as mothers and wives.²⁵

Lack of support from other women, among female office-bearers, also contributes to the low rate of women's participation in elective politics. It is common for women in political power (for example, first ladies) to forget about other women as soon as they rise to power. Those who are not in power seldom support women in positions of authority, and give almost no support to aspiring female politicians. It was hoped that with greater female participation in Yoruba nationalism and in voter mobilisation, Yoruba women would have the advantage of a larger demographic and greater electoral strength than men. However, due to a lack of support from other women, they have not been able to capitalise on this. Such attitudes present a psychological barrier against women's optimal participation in Yoruba politics.

In addition, religion plays a significant role in marginalising women politically, as many strict Muslims and born-again Christians are constrained by religious limitations against women's presence in the public sphere. They perceive other women who are involved in politics as irresponsible and tend to stereotype them. A female leader of a Pentecostal church in Ado-Ekiti opined that any *'woman involved in politics is an immoral and useless woman who do not have respect for the roles which God has fixed for her'*.²⁶

Furthermore, the nature of civil politics in Yoruba land also discourages female participation in elective politics. Civil politics is mostly characterised by political violence and fraud, as election-rigging and stuffing of ballot boxes. Such conditions require 'manly' efforts to succeed. As many women are not biologically prone to engage in political violence, they tend to abandon elective politics to men, who exist within the moral devaluation and political panic that presently pervade south-western Nigeria. Also, as participation in elective politics is determined by individual party members' contributions to the party's success during elections, and since women do not tend to

engage in election fraud to ensure their party's success, they tend not to be nominated to contest elections. Other vices associated with Yoruba politics, that make elective politics hostile to women, include the use of political thuggery, the elimination of political opponents through assassination and kidnapping, an incitement to ethnic and sectarian violence, intimidation during elections, vote-buying and unnecessary clandestine meetings. Such practices make political participation patriarchal, and further exclude women from politics. During the general elections in 2007, some political parties had unwritten policies against female aspirants, as was the case in the 2003 elections in south-western Nigeria (Badmus 2006). Such policies include limiting the number of executive posts which women could contest in political party offices. Some parties also did not nominate women to their central working committees. Since these agencies are vital in deciding nominations for elective office, they tend to support male politicians. The effect is that the parties determine who contests which post, while the party apparatus is used to enhance the ambition of selected candidates (mostly male politicians).

Yoruba civil politics now requires enormous financial resources to ensure success in elective politics. At various levels, varying degrees of financial contributions are required, ranging from building political alliances to establishing and sustaining political party membership. Traditionally, women are restricted by socio-cultural prescriptions to poorly remunerated subsistence and informal business activities, meaning they do not have much in the line of assets, if they want to secure a loan. Many hold low-level administrative positions or are involved primarily in domestic labour centered around procreation/motherhood. Thus, their prospects of mobilising the required funds are greatly reduced, and as a result Yoruba women are often excluded from elective politics.

Conclusion

Many political systems are undergoing radical reforms aimed at addressing growing challenges, such as public apathy, questions of credibility, and relevance to people's concerns. Women's political participation is therefore critical to these advancements. In the Yoruba society of south-western Nigeria, while there is an increase in the role of women as voters, party leaders, supporters, activists and (a small number of) candidates for elective office, there are still numerous obstacles hampering their participation in Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement. Despite the fact that Yoruba politics was rooted in democracy from 1999 to 2009, political equity between men and women in terms of political participation continues to be a distant goal. Because cultural perceptions forbid female leadership, women still remain largely excluded from political decision-making, and face a number of cultural prohibitions that deny them the right to stand for election. While women constitute almost half of the population, and are far more active in party politics in terms of grassroots mobilisation and party support, fewer than ten per cent of female politicians in south-western Nigeria can access elective politics.

Given the marginal increase in women's participation in Yoruba politics since 1999, it would appear that they are gradually breaking through patriarchal politics in Yoruba land, despite the many cultural barriers imposed by patriarchy. For democracy to fulfill its tenets and to allow development for all human beings, optimum female participation in Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement needs to be guaranteed. It is only through gender-friendly elective politics that

the new Nigerian democracy can appropriate the gains of democracy for community development in Yoruba land.

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Endnotes

- 1 The first author was a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Scholarship at the University of Mainz, Germany (October 2008–October 2009), when the first draft of this article was written.
- 2 In Nigeria, military governments were in power in two segmented periods from 1966–1979 and 1983–1999.
- 3 There are three tiers of government in Nigerian federalism, viz: local, state and federal governments. All have offices of first ladies, headed by the wives of the heads of the executive arm of the government.
- 4 Tripp (2001) notes a similar situation among the Buganda of Uganda, where civil politics is influenced by gender differentiation.
- 5 Only the PDP in Yoruba land made nomination free for women politicians in 2003 and 2007. The AD and the Action Congress (AC) charged nomination fees (see Badmus 2006).
- 6 To end ten years of military government in Nigeria (1983–1993), a democratic presidential election was held on 12 June 1993. The election was contested by Moshood K. Abiola (a Yoruba) Bashir Tofa (a Hausa-Fulani). The result favoured Abiola, as he fulfilled all the electoral requirements, yet the military government, in an attempt to hold onto power, annulled the election. This action led to violence in many parts of Nigeria (mostly in south-western Nigeria) between 1993 and 1998.
- 7 Some assassinations are still under judicial trial in Nigeria. Although not yet confirmed as state-linked assassinations, popular opinion in Nigeria implicates the state.
- 8 The late Alhaja Suliyat Adedeji, an Ibadan-based hardcore supporter of Moshood Abiola, and murdered in 1996, was said to have an Ansar Ud Deen link with Abiola. She was the Iya Adini of the Ansar Ud Deen Society of Nigeria, while Abiola was its grand patron.
- 9 *Alhaja* Sikirat Adeoti, in Osogbo in 2006. She is a female Muslim leader of the Ansar Ud Deen group at Sabo.
- 10 Inferences drawn from an interview with Adijat Bakare in Ilobu in 2007. She was an active member of NASFAT, and of the PDP, the ruling political party in Nigeria.
- 11 This opinion was based on an interview with Alhaja Munirat Adepoju in Ilobu. A strong member of FOMWAN, she was a key informant interviewee in 2007.
- 12 Opinion of Sister Ganiyat Adubi, member of the Executive Council of FOMWAN in Osun State, interviewed in Osogbo in 2007.

- 13 2000 WIN Conference Proceeding, Women Research and Documentation, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
- 14 See MAMSER 1996.
- 15 National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS): <http://www.wiserearth.org/organization/view/a3ca728d8b96f47651904e55c1020e7a>
- 16 See Article 8 of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women Beijing Declaration, UN Beijing Declaration.
- 17 Apart from the Beijing conference of 1995, other international conferences sensitive to female marginalisation include United Nations conferences and summits on: Women (Nairobi 1985), Children (New York 1990), Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro 1992), Human Rights (Vienna 1993), Population and Development (Cairo 1994) and Social Development (Copenhagen 1995).
- 18 Response from Mary Akinwumi from Ado Ekiti. A retired headmistress, she is now a local politician. She was interviewed in 2008.
- 19 There were no regular elections at local government level, but the data presented were that of the composition of the local government as at the time of the research.
- 20 Response from Adija Bakare, interviewed in Ilobu in 2007.
- 21 In the following political parties: Action Group (1954–1964), Unity Party of Nigeria (1979–1983) and Alliance for Democracy (AD) (1999–2003). While all these parties had women's branches and a few women were offered political appointments, most women were either directly or indirectly related to the male party leaders, all of whom shared similar political ideologies of strict patriarchal politics that not only made men dominate, but even Yoruba youths were not properly integrated into party political participation.
- 22 The political change in south-western Nigeria was volcanic as it was unprecedented and mired in controversy, of which the details are not pertinent to the present discourse of gender relations in Yoruba politics. For details, see Ukeje and Adebani (2008).
- 23 Until 1954, universal adult suffrage was not provided by British colonialism in south-western Nigeria. It was either male adult suffrage between 1922 and 1946, or quantified adult suffrage based on property and taxation up until 1954. So, the practice excluded women from elective politics during the colonial period. The situation was similar in many African British colonial states such as the Gold Coast and Kenya.
- 24 Interview with Mrs. Remi in Ilobu in 2007. She was appointed as Commissioner for Finance in Osun State between 2003 and 2006. She holds a Master's degree in Education/English from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
- 25 The majority of the women interviewed stated that they could not contest an election because there would be nobody to take care of their household.
- 26 The female respondent is a pastor of a new generation church in Ado Ekiti. She was interviewed in 2007.

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The politics of heteronormativity for Indonesian *waria* in YouTube videos

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Abstract

Through the lenses of structuration and gender performativity, this article investigates how select YouTube videos speak to the complexities of *waria* identities and the politics of heteronormativity. *Waria* are male-to-female transgendered individuals in Indonesia. Although the YouTube videos often try to 'humanise' and 'normalise' *waria* to non-*waria* viewers with the hope that such exposure can lead to greater tolerance and support, the videos present particular images and messages that, at times, reinforce a heterosexist gender binary framework, while on other occasions resisting that system or duality. Using an interpretative approach, the analysis treats the videos as data and texts. The general orientation of this type of content analysis is to uncover patterns of actions and meanings. This article pays special attention to the ways in which identity is socially constructed, and how the YouTube videos both support and challenge current dominant discourses about gender in Indonesia.

Keywords: gender, heteronormativity, identity, politics, *waria*, YouTube

Introduction

In an effort to build a national community from a diverse population, President Sukarno announced *Pancasila* at the Republic of Indonesia's Independence Proclamation in 1945. It is a type of state ideology or philosophical foundation derived from the Sanskrit terms *panca* meaning 'five' and *sila* for 'principles'. The five interconnected principles are 1) belief in the one and only God; 2) just and civilised humanity; 3) the unity of Indonesia; 4) democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives; and 5) social justice for all the people of Indonesia.¹ Added to *Pancasila* is Indonesia's official motto of *Bhinneka Tunngal Ika* (unity in diversity). Although the second president Suharto (1966–1998) claimed to uphold *Pancasila*, critics contend that his military-dominated government and authoritarian rule instead contradicted the true aims of the doctrine.

Since the fall of the Suharto regime, contemporary democratic reforms have provided opportunities for different political and social groups to once again pursue and implement *Pancasila* in a way that benefits the masses and specifically groups that have traditionally been marginalised or underrepresented, such as women. While there have been great strides in improving the status of women in Indonesian politics, society and economics, there is still room for improvement under *Pancasila*'s fifth principle of social justice. Complicating the discourse on development, however,

is the very concept or definition of ‘woman’, which has specific exclusionary characteristics and boundaries according to the Indonesian state and Islam, the majority religion. Estimates vary, but Islam is generally understood to be the religion of between 80–90 per cent of the Indonesian population. While Islam is ubiquitous, it is by no means uniform or standardised across the archipelago.

The presence of *waria* – male-to-female transgendered individuals – embodies the multilayered debate over gender inclusion and how to accommodate and promote ‘unity in diversity’, equality and justice in a developing democracy. Since ‘transgender’ can have different meanings and histories, depending on the country case of interest, *waria* will be used in this article as it is unique to Indonesia.² ‘*Waria*’ is a term that combines *wanita* for ‘woman’ and *pria* for ‘man’, but not usually meaning intersex people. Instead, a *waria* is male in a biological sense, but typically self-identifies as a woman psychologically, emotionally and, depending on the person, spiritually as well. ‘Spiritually’ here refers to identifying with certain Islamic beliefs and practices that *waria* may rather associate with the domain or purview of women, as opposed to those associated with men. As one *waria* notes in a movie trailer clip for *Tales of the Waria* (2011): ‘A waria is a man. But he has a woman’s soul.’ There is also variation regarding self-presentation and body modifications. Film notes from a study guide for *Tales of the Waria* explain: ‘While some *warias* wear women’s clothes, put on makeup, take hormone pills, and pursue cosmetic surgery, not all do.’ In addition, not all *waria* are transsexuals who try to align their gender and sex through medical interventions. Like transgender individuals in other countries, *waria* may forgo surgery altogether or just have a part of it (e.g., surgery of the chest area). Many *waria* choose not to have full sex reassignment surgeries for two main reasons: as the aforementioned film notes report, ‘[t]heir reluctance stems from both an economic factor (the high cost) and a religious one’.

Indonesia is a large country with over 240 million people; activists estimate seven million Indonesians are *waria* (*Tales of the Waria* [study guide] 2011). The presence of *waria* in Indonesia is not new, but their visibility has slowly increased over the years as their numbers have grown and changes take place in the sociopolitical climate of the post-Suharto era. A rise in domestic and international media attention focused on women and gender sometimes opens up discussions and debates about transgender issues in Indonesia as well.

YouTube is one Internet medium for learning about and from *waria*. A variety of topics are covered in YouTube videos concerning *waria*. When an online user searches for videos by using keywords such as ‘waria’, ‘transgender’ and ‘Indonesia’, popular results include clips of beauty pageants, musical and dance performances, health-related issues, movie trailers and mini-documentaries. These video categories can overlap in form and content. Many of the YouTube videos attempt to challenge negative stereotypes of *waria* by presenting sympathetic stories and images. These videos focus on the ups and downs of faith, love, family, friendships and health – subject matter that is common, and with which non-*waria* viewers can identify. In the spirit of Sandy Stone’s call in ‘The empire strikes back: A posttranssexual manifesto’ (1987), to move beyond ‘passing’ as a certain gender and thereby perpetuating gender binary divisions, these videos can be seen as a means of sharing multiple voices or narratives and diverse identity experiences

– a way for *waria*, like the transsexuals to whom Stone is speaking, to ‘be consciously “read”, to read oneself aloud and by this troubling and productive reading, to begin to *write oneself* into the discourses by which one has been written ...’ (Stone 1987, p. 232). Stone adds: ‘I ask all of us to use the strength which brought us through the effort of restructuring identity, and which has also helped us to live in silence and denial, for a re-visioning of our lives’ (1987, p. 232). YouTube is also perhaps a forum for not just educating non-*waria* about *waria*, but also a way to ‘fight back’. Kate Bornstein, in a chapter titled ‘Gender terror, gender rage’ (1994, p. 243) writes: ‘There are lots of ways to fight, and transgendered people these days are coming together in the common fight for the right to express our genders freely. Where once we met only in drag bars or social teas, we’re now meeting at protest marches and in consciousness-raising groups.’ For Indonesian *waria* living in a society where there are still limited opportunities for activist marches and groups, the internet is one avenue to conduct the ‘good fight’.

Through the lenses of structuration and gender performativity, this article investigates how some of the videos speak to the complexities of *waria* identities and the politics of heteronormativity. Although the YouTube videos often try to ‘humanise’ and ‘normalise’ *waria* to non-*waria* viewers, with the hope that such exposure can lead to greater tolerance and support, the videos present particular images and messages that, at times, reinforce a heterosexist gender binary framework and at other times resist that system or duality. This article pays special attention to the ways in which identity is socially constructed and how the YouTube videos both support and challenge current dominant discourses about gender in Indonesia.

Heterosexism in Indonesia: Duality in discourses

There are two types of duality in Indonesian political discourses on gender: 1) gender is understood and experienced as a binary system, which has implications for 2) a division between public and private spheres. In Indonesian society and politics, gender is usually presented and performed as a binary concept and practice. This reflects a heterosexist system whereby heterosexuality is favoured over other types of sexuality or sexual orientation. Heterosexism is found among individuals, groups and institutions. It is consciously and unconsciously reinforced and reproduced over time through multiple formal and informal channels and actions. As such, heterosexism can be understood as a cumulative phenomenon or development in which fixed gender categories, and the social and political meanings attached to biological differences, become a hegemonic norm. Although heterosexism can manifest in different ways, the primary effect is that acceptance into mainstream society – and all the social, political and economic benefits associated with such acceptance – hinges on individuals and groups adhering to the heterosexist system *and* contributing to its maintenance, thus leaving little space from which to challenge the system from within.

Waria – along with *tomboi* (female-to-male transgenders), gay men and *lesbi* (lesbians) – complicate the binary view of gender because their ‘nature’ does not fit neatly into the existing heterosexist binary framework.³ Evelyn Blackwood (2010, p. 33) writes: ‘Contemporary Indonesian discourses create an image of innate gender difference in which modern women are oriented to domestic and wifely tasks, while men are encouraged to be heads of households and active leaders

in the public domain.’ This image is reinforced directly and indirectly in a variety of settings: schools, business, government and public policy, religion, marriage and family, social groups and mass media. The New Order government’s emphasis on nuclear families and motherhood – known as *Ibuism* – from 1965 to 1998 in particular, set the tone and context for viewing women and men as naturally and socially different.⁴ Sharyn Graham Davies (2010, p. 98) adds: ‘The hierarchical order of a woman’s duties, which is still influential today, shows that only after a woman has married and produced children is it her duty to be a member of society.’ In other words, women are frequently domesticated and depoliticised, relegated to the private sphere of the home. There are exceptions, and Davies (2010, p. 99) states: ‘Indonesian women are now more frequently assuming positions of political power than in the past. Yet a closer examination shows that in popular understandings in Indonesia, women are still considered innately suited to the home environment while men are seen as better equipped for engagement in the public world.’ The national language of Bahasa Indonesia also structures gender into an either/or dichotomy. Blackwood (2010, p. 40) notes: “*Perempuan*” means both female and woman, “*laki-laki*” means both male and man; “*kelaki-lakian*”, for example, which has the root “*laki*”, is defined as manliness, mannish. In using these terms, Indonesians express a concordant relationship between bodies and behaviors.’ Biological sex is thus difficult to disentangle from perceptions of gender and related practices. The existence and experiences of *waria* suggest a need to deconstruct these political labels and categories for gender, especially taking into consideration the real tension and conflict of trying to force-fit *waria* into a framework that many of them feel is too restrictive and unfair.

Waria face further difficulties with their identities, since Islamic gender ideals intersect with the heterosexist political models outlined above. For example,

Islam exhorts Muslim men to be the caretakers of women and to be their managers, leaders, and educators. Entrusted with providing for their wives and children, men are economically responsible for their families. Islam requires men to ensure the protection, provision, and development of their family, while fostering a home environment that is cooperative and equitable, rather than combative and competitive. Muslim men are required to pray at the mosque on Fridays; this large gathering of men often serves as a public forum for asserting and affirming notions of masculinity. (Davies 2007, p. 148)

Although there is much diversity in Islamic discourses and practices across Indonesia and other parts of the world, there is a general consensus in Indonesia on the ‘natural’ differences between men and women, along with strict prohibitions against same-sex relationships and transgenderism. While Islam is not monolithic in form, substance or practice in Indonesia, and certain versions of Islam can be described as feminist, most of the population has been socialised to believe in the aforementioned differences and prohibitions. These complexities and challenges in public and private settings are evident in YouTube videos online, examples of which are examined in the next section.

Structuration, gender performativity and multifaceted YouTube messages

YouTube videos about and by Indonesians, and in this case *waria*, are significant for their role or space as a free ‘marketplace of ideas’.⁵ Alexa Internet (2012a) ranks Indonesia #13 in the percentage of visitors to YouTube, and reports that YouTube is the fifth most popular website in Indonesia (2012b). A lot of content from YouTube is cross-posted or shared on Facebook as well. In June 2012, YouTube launched YouTube Indonesia (www.youtube.co.id), which aims to attract even more local viewers and advertisers (*The Jakarta Globe* 2012). Unlike newspapers, books, television programmes and movies, which are reviewed and monitored by local media outlets, the Ministry of Communication and Informatics, the Film Censorship Board and other entities, the Internet is much harder to regulate and censor. The Indonesian masses know this and often turn to the Internet to ‘shop’ for and share ideas. While the marketplace is not always easily accessible or a level playing field for all participants, it is an interesting and relatively inclusive democratic environment that opens up opportunities for users to learn about minority groups and for *waria* themselves to have a place to share their identities.

One common theme that appears in YouTube videos by and about *waria* is the presence of gender binarism, which is sometimes supported and at other times resisted by *waria*. Because of firm expectations and norms influenced by gender binarism, the *waria* profiled in several YouTube videos encounter many stereotypes, namely that they are too feminine to ‘belong’ as men, too masculine to ‘belong’ as women, or too ‘abnormal’ to belong anywhere. This can have negative consequences for employment, social events and spaces, and relationships. For example, in a country where employers typically require that employees strictly adhere to traditional gender norms for clothing, manner and disposition, speech and physicality, *waria* face job discrimination whenever they do not (or cannot) easily conform to such gendered expectations. Social events are often restricted to beauty-oriented and entertainment industry activities as opposed to activities found in religious, educational and community spaces. As for relationships, *waria* regularly face hardships and opposition in their search for love and partnership. Applying certain elements of ‘structuration’ and ‘gender performativity’ to five YouTube videos about *waria* can aid in our understanding of the stereotypes and limitations that they face and the corresponding negotiations that they make within a heterosexist gender binary system.

The five videos analysed in this article were selected based on their public availability online, top positions in YouTube search results (also indicative of a high number of video views), the use of Bahasa Indonesia and English (the author’s languages), and relevant examples demonstrating different types of negotiations that reinscribe heteronormativity, but also challenge heteronormative discourses. Using an interpretative approach, the analysis treats the videos as data and texts. The general orientation of this type of content analysis is to uncover patterns of actions and meanings. The units of analysis include a combination of individuals, behaviors, themes, concepts and messages.

First proposed by sociologist Anthony Giddens in *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration* (1984), structuration theory focuses on the production and reproduction of various social systems that involve agents and structures (e.g., rules and resources). Structuration

points to a duality: actions that we take produce and reproduce social structures, and these structures in turn or simultaneously can define and direct our actions. In other words, agency and structures exist in interdependent or reciprocal relationships that serve to enable or constrain one another. A structurational approach to the politics of heteronormativity for *waria* helps locate the specific ways in which social agents create, reinforce/reproduce, resist or change structures. In this case, 'structures' refers to gender binary frameworks, discourses and policies in Indonesia.

Structuration can work in tandem with 'gender performativity'. Philosopher Judith Butler introduced her performative theory of gender in *Gender trouble* (1990). She argues that 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality' are culturally or socially constructed categories and not manifestations of some kind of intrinsic essence inherent in human beings: 'Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler 1990, p. 33). Gender identity is thus understood to be a product of recurring performances over time. This performance aspect of identity points to instability in the assumed 'natural' relationship between 'gender' and 'sex', which implies that gender identity can be altered or resisted. For example, *waria* identities and actions can contribute to the reproduction of gender binary social structures, but their gender performances at the individual level or in group settings can also challenge that heterosexist system or duality. YouTube videos that cover employment, beauty pageants and relationships, provide evidence of structuration and gender performativity in practice.

Employment

One stereotype that is projected onto and often internalised by *waria* is that they are ill-suited for employment in most economic sectors. In the public sphere, *waria* have some room to maneuver when it comes to the beauty industry and entertainment, however. Beauty salons and independent beauticians are one arena where *waria* may be employed or be their own boss, provided they have sufficient resources and live in a community where *waria* are socially permitted to live and work. In the seven-minute YouTube video *The wrong body* (2012), a *waria* named Nancy Iskandar is shown styling a bride before a wedding ceremony in an urban city. She is conservatively dressed in all black and wears a headscarf. Her own make-up and glasses fit with the style often expected of older women in Indonesia. Nancy remarks: 'The people accept us now because waria (transvestites) have a gift that is well known now. Our achievements, our capacities are what can we do good. We are good in cooking. We are good in make-up for brides. Beauty parlours. That is our capacity. A good factor for our lives and the people approve it.' On the one hand, Nancy indicates a certain level of human agency here: she is determining a career path for herself and encouraging others to do the same. There appears to be some level of tolerance or support for *waria* agency in this regard by non-*waria* as well. A Muslim man, identified as such by the black *peci* (small fez-like hat) he wears, who is present at the pre-wedding preparations states: 'This is not strange. In a way, it is already common. In humanity you have deviations. There are women. There are men. And at the end you have these people.' Elsewhere in the video, a sub-district head official talks about Nuke, another *waria*: 'He understands more about make-up when people have a party. He can help with

the make-up of the bride.’⁶ On the other hand, Nancy’s comments and those of the two men reflect structuration in practice: *waria* who choose to only work in the beauty industry and community members who believe that beautician jobs are the only socially acceptable type of work for *waria*, together serve to reinforce existing social structures. ‘Women’s work’ is thus confined to select domains, which in turn constrain future career trajectories for Nancy, Nuke and other *waria*. From Nancy’s standpoint, the beauty industry affords a space and prospects for success and acceptance. Her viewpoint, however, is shaped by the reality of heterosexism and gender binarism which are present in the economy. This is further illustrated in the types of remarks Nancy makes during the wedding preparations. In reference to the function of make-up for the bride, she explains: ‘This make-up is for getting married. To pleasure the husband.’ Later, addressing two men, Nancy waves them out of a room and firmly says: ‘Men cannot be here with women. Go away to the place for the men.’ Nancy is reproducing expected gender norms here, but by virtue of her being a *waria* in that space, she is also simultaneously challenging the socially constructed border between the genders. Her performance as a woman permits her to do ‘women’s work’ and be in women’s spaces, while reinscribing heteronormativity, but her identity and actions also resist strict gender binarism because she and the people around her are aware that she is performing gender, and crosses over or moves between the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘man’ or ‘female’ and ‘male’.

Another YouTube video titled *Indonesia’s transsexual Muslims* (a documentary) (2012), is about 28 minutes long and profiles Maryani, a *waria* in Yogyakarta, Java, who built a business to financially support herself and provide resources to carry out her faith. Maryani operates a beauty salon along with an attached small school for the unique purpose of helping other *waria* learn about and practise Islam. Maryani created this alternative religious space since most mosques do not permit *waria* to enter, dress or engage in prayer and rituals as women. Maryani explains:

I want people to open their eyes and minds. Transvestites are humans. We are created by God and we must worship Him. And as transvestites, we all have the right to worship Him. This is applicable to all religions. Christians, Confucianism, Hindu ... They all have to be able to practise their own religion. When a man or woman wants to learn how to pray, there is a place to go. But if transvestites wanted to learn how to pray or go to an Islamic school, they would never be accepted. People only view transvestites in negative aspects. This Islamic boarding school is a place of worship for transvestites. It is a place for them to learn about Islam.

Running this school is a form of resistance to the gender binarism supported by most versions of Islam in Indonesia. Maryani states: ‘The main purpose of this boarding school is to provide a place for *warias* to worship. A place to feel comfortable and accepted as *warias*.’ This is in contrast to Nancy Iskandar, from *The wrong body*, who comments: ‘For the One up there I pray. When I pray, I pray as a man. I don’t want to pray wearing woman clothes. For me I realise when I pray to God my whole body and soul asks forgiveness for my sins. You cannot cheat God.’ By removing her make-up and changing into traditional male religious clothing, Nancy may enter a mosque and pray in the men’s section. Her performance as a man in this context reinforces heteronormativity.

A young 19-year-old *waria* named ‘Nur’ traveled from Lombok near Bali to Yogyakarta after reading about Maryani, her business and the rare boarding school, on the Internet. Nur describes her personal background and experiences:

I came to Yogyakarta by myself without any friends or anyone I knew. Maryani accepted me right away. In Lombok, the Muslims are very fanatic. So whenever we'd go out, the people always ignored or mocked us. My parents died in 2010. Since I met this new community and joined the Islamic boarding school, I consider them my new family. They made me feel right at home.

Nur's move to join other *waria* in Yogyakarta shows her resistance to the heterosexism and gender binarism she met with in Lombok, but she reinforces heteronormativity with her comments about her future career goals and her current means of making a living. When asked by an interviewer: 'What would you like to do with your life?', Nur responds: 'Right now, I'm taking a course specialising in hair and beauty. So, God willing, I can open my own hair salon in the future. I'm going to work very hard to have my own hair salon.' To make ends meet in the meantime Nur works as a prostitute, much like Maryani did before converting to Islam in her 30s and opening her salon and school. Due to a multidirectional flow of influences, Nur's choices and actions can be understood as both voluntary and involuntary. Nur's situation highlights employment marginalisation for *waria*, where certain perceptions of *warias*' 'feminine' characteristics and sexuality are 'accepted' enough by local communities, thereby allowing them to be hairdressers, make-up artists or sex workers, but they are still not accepted in the sense that they are often restricted to occupations commonly considered the domain of the lower class or 'invisible' populations. As these 'rules', social relationships and individual gendered performances are repeatedly produced and reproduced over time, it becomes increasingly difficult to change or undo these structures and engage in alternative performances.

Indonesia's transsexual Muslims further addresses employment marginalisation by examining the difficulties of underground economies like those of street performances or busking and prostitution. While the 'streets', like beauty salons, appear to be another public space where *waria* are relatively permitted, they are not completely accepted or tolerated. Street performers and prostitutes can be subjected to harassment, environmental hazards, health risks, arrest and violence. Maryani says: 'Most young transvestites start working as prostitutes because they left home without any money. When I first started out doing prostitution, I got a lot of negative comments from people. People yelled, "Sissy! Sissy! Sissy!"⁷ Now, a lot of transvestites are changing directions from prostitution to street singing. The income is better and more predictable. Street singers make about Rp 100000 (\$10) per day.' In addition to potentially improved income for *waria*, street singing can be safer than prostitution. Maryani gives an example of when she experienced violence while working as a prostitute:

When I was 14 or 15 years old, I was a prostitute in Alun Alun, Yogyakarta. I made between Rp 2000–3000 (20–30 cents), which was considered a lot of money. Nowadays, they get paid between Rp 20000–25000 (\$2.00–2.50). I was beaten by the national police. They hit my arm with a gun. They stripped me naked. They pissed on my face. Yes, it all happened. I experienced all of that because I didn't know it was so risky.

Wulan, another *waria* profiled in *Indonesia's transsexual Muslims*, is shown dressed in a bright-pink sari and goes from shop to shop requesting tips. She transitioned from prostitution to street singing and tells the interviewer in the video: 'I'm much happier now working as a street singer

than being a prostitute.’ Although there are some smiles here and there, the video shows more images of bad traffic jams, pollution and wary onlookers, along with commentary about long hours and spontaneous, intense interactions with other people on the street, to convey the message that though an improvement on prostitution, street singing is not without its own set of hardships.

Whether as street performers or prostitutes, the *waria* are self-presenting in public as ‘women’, as exhibited by their clothing, make-up and mannerisms, but in hyper-feminine or sexualised ways, which is not a conventional norm in this Muslim-majority society. Their jobs require attracting attention to their femininity *and* difference in order to receive money. They are not merely blending in or trying to ‘pass’ as women. In this way, *waria* identities support and oppose heteronormativity in these specific economic contexts. Similar to clips of Nancy Iskandar in *The wrong body*, the scenes of *waria* street performers show that they and the people around them are all aware that the *waria* are performing gender, which can be perceived as reinscribing or resisting gender binarism, depending on the participant/subject and viewer. As these performances and scenes are repeated daily on the city streets of various cities across Indonesia, the existing social structures are reproduced and, in turn or simultaneously, define and direct individual and group actions, but are also shifting or changing in form and function as *waria* are not completely passive or submissive actors in the process.

Beauty pageants

Besides salons or the streets, beauty pageants are another public space where *waria* navigate and negotiate the gender binary framework, at times supporting it and sometimes resisting it. In *Miss International Queen 2005* (2012), YouTube viewers can watch four-and-a-half minutes of spliced highlights of an international competition, one in which Miss *Waria* Indonesia 2005 – Olivia Lauren – is awarded the title of ‘Miss Congeniality’. The entire programme is structured by and reflects the gendered norms and practices of popular women-only beauty pageants like the Miss World and Miss Universe contests. The award categories, voting process, hosts’ comments, stage production, contestants’ attire (e.g., evening gowns and national costumes) and participants’ performances all mimic women-only competitions. YouTube users who are unfamiliar with transgenderism might even have a hard time distinguishing between transgender and women-only competitions online, since the video categories, titles and presentations of self are so similar. For instance, the types of make-up, hairstyles, clothing and jewellery displayed in the video are ‘feminine’. All serve to highlight stereotypical female features such as ‘softer’ faces, breasts, hips and slender bodies. During the evening gown competition, men dressed in suits and ties escort the contestants onto the stage and present them to the judges. The transgender contestants also walk, gesture and pose as one would expect contestants to do in women-only pageants. There appears to be an emphasis on grace, poise and ‘naturalness’. The entire event and its micro-level details reinforce heteronormativity and the social structures associated with it, as the gender performances aim to copy women-only pageants as closely as possible. At the same time, the staging of transgender beauty contests separate from women-only events could suggest a form of resistance in the creation of a safe alternative space for *waria* to be *waria*. Whether initially created out of necessity due to

being locked out of traditional women-only events, or because of a desire to celebrate members of the *waria* community, the public nature of these activities pushes against the prescriptions and proscriptions of gender binarism. In this way, *warias*' positions and actions are simultaneously informed by existing heteronormative structures and serve to influence potential avenues for adaptation and change.

In a YouTube video titled *Shemale, ladyboy, transgender, waria, from Indonesia 'Hanny Liem'* (2012), a *waria* takes to the stage during a semi-final round of a beauty contest. The banner hanging on the stage reads 'Miss Universe Beauty Contest IPOOS 2011'. IPOOS refers to *Ikatan Persaudaraan Orang-Orang Sehati* (Fraternal Association for People of the Same Heart), a Jakarta-based gay organisation. The clip is a little under four minutes and shows a *waria* named 'Hanny Liem' on the catwalk, in various evening gowns. The gowns are of the kind worn by contestants in a women-only pageant. They are colourful, long and flowing. The dresses are perfectly coordinated with matching high heels and jewellery. The swimsuit portion of the competition in particular garners raucous applause, shouts and whistles from the audience. Hanny wears a green patterned bathing suit that looks like a one-piece from the front and a bikini from the back. American and Indonesian music can be heard over the loudspeaker. She has 'the look' in this video: glamorous make-up and hair, fine clothing, and attractive poses and walking style. Similar to the scenes from *Miss International Queen 2005*, Hanny Liem's gender performance supports the gender binary framework by attempting to fit into the category of 'woman', while also subverting it by demonstrating that femininity is not the sole domain of biological women or females.

To see more videos of Hanny Liem, users can click on her YouTube channel. Several videos are of a beautifully dressed and made up Hanny Liem lip-syncing to songs from around the world. One video shows Hanny Liem 'transforming' herself with make-up and a different hairstyle. Her persona and performances can be characterised as hyper-feminine, but because exaggerated self-presentation is often expected in entertainment, viewers who are unfamiliar with *waria* may perceive Hanny Liem as 'just' a woman. Here, again, Hanny Liem is both reinforcing and resisting heteronormativity and gender binarism. Her musical and make-up videos directly and indirectly show that a physical transformation has taken place, from male to female or man to woman, which implies one can only be in one of those gender categories at a time, but because the transformation is even possible, her performances also suggest that gender binarism is socially constructed and can therefore be deconstructed or problematised. Hanny Liem's identity both conforms and fails to conform to traditional gender expectations and norms in Indonesia.

Relationships

YouTube videos about and by *Waria* at times address certain challenges related to relationships and religion. *Tales of the Waria* (2011) presents examples of these challenges with an emphasis on the pursuit of love. The film's director, Kathy Huang, did not originally intend to make a film about love, though. She writes:

As an American entering the scene, my initial interest had been in the role Islam played in *warias*' lives. How did they negotiate their faith with their lifestyles? How did the members of their religious

community receive them? When I approached *warias* with the idea of making a film on this topic, they were unenthused. ‘What for?’ one *waria* asked. For them, religion was not a source of conflict in a way that an outsider might imagine. They suggested a film on a more immediate concern: how to find lasting love. This was a story overlooked by the mainstream media, which preferred to portray *warias* as buffoons or sexual deviants. A film on love could be a wonderful opportunity to deepen people’s understanding of their community, to recast their image in the public eye. (Huang 2012)

Although the film’s director and the *waria* profiled in the film may have been able to reconcile religion on a personal level, it is hard to imagine a narrative that is absolutely devoid of the roles that Islam and the state play in structuring and conditioning love and the very possibilities of partnership. There are cultural norms and, arguably more importantly, there are also formal policy and institutional norms that tell society what is and is not permitted when it comes to love and relationships. In a book chapter titled ‘The state, gender and sexual politics: Theory and appraisal’, R.W. Connell (1994, p. 158) writes that the state is ‘not just a regulatory agency, it is a creative force in the dynamic of gender. It creates new categories and new historical possibilities. But it should not be forgotten that the state also destroys.’ The *waria* in Huang’s film (and from the videos discussed earlier in this article) may not always be cognizant of how Islam and the state apply and promote gender binarism, or how they may involuntarily contribute to gender binarism themselves. It is difficult to be consciously aware of these norms, and to be in a position to resist or change them.

Conformity to norms concerning heterosexual relationships is generally expected and hard to avoid in Indonesia. Davies (2010, p. xiii) writes: ‘In Indonesia gender ideals are disseminated through a variety of sources, such as government ideology, school curricula and religion. The strength and pervasiveness of these ideals means that individuals feel constant pressure to conform to gendered expectations.’ In the two-and-a-half minute YouTube movie trailer for the film *Tales of the waria*, viewers hear different *waria* sharing their thoughts on the pressure to conform and its related consequences:

If a waria loves a man and sacrifices everything for him, there’s nothing wrong with that. I’ve been with my husband for 18 years. I don’t know how much longer our relationship will last. If it were up to me, it’d last forever.

[A waria looking through a photo scrapbook] *This is Akmal. He was with me for seven years. He told me that if I had been a woman, he would have married me. I was just a place to stop until he found a woman.*

Love is important for a waria. It completes her life. She must find love. Even if she fails, she must keep trying. (Global voices|Tales of the Waria|Trailer|ITVS 2012)

These quotes are presented with scenes of everyday life (e.g., neighbourhood streets, mosques, homes and sunsets) and melancholic music in the background. There are additional comments in the video, such as: ‘*Having a partner is every waria’s dream. Someone who inspires us and makes life more beautiful.*’ These thoughts and images reinforce conceptions and practices of romantic love, ‘soul mates’, marriage and failure from a heteronormative perspective – one that is closely

tied to Islamic and state perspectives. They also juxtapose the ‘normality’ and ‘otherness’ of *waria* in Indonesian society.

Nancy Iskandar, from the video *The wrong body*, points to one potentially grave consequence for non-conformity in gender performance and when relationships do not work out: ‘*For sure always all transvestites want the following: They all want to get married ... When a transvestite loves a man the love will be total. Total or full love. Sorry, one aspect of our customs is when a waria breaks a relationship with a man they sometimes commit suicide.*’ In this example, it seems that a *waria*’s actions would be reinforcing heteronormativity. It is important to note, however, that gender performativity in this case is not simply confined to the distinct individual or couple, nor are they necessarily making conscious decisions daily. Judith Butler (1993, p. 95) explains in *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of ‘sex’*:

... I would suggest that performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that ‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance.

Perhaps this is why the same video also profiles a couple that appears relatively successful in negotiating their relationship. As the passage above suggests, gender performativity and gender binarism do not predetermine the same outcomes for all *waria*. One husband of a *waria* comments: ‘*Waria are more complete than women. They give a lot of love. For example, when I am sick, she is more careful with everything to me.*’ Though the clip is very short, it gives the impression that the relationship is successful, but to the extent that the *waria* engages in gender conformity and performs her gender as a really good wife to the man. To outsiders, their marriage could be seen as resisting heterosexist norms, but it may also reinforce those norms if their individual roles within the relationship are segregated based on a strict interpretation of gender binarism.

Conclusion

At present, the multifaceted media messages from YouTube about *waria* provide examples of and spaces to reinforce and resist heteronormativity. The videos identify a preference for and need to question and transcend the traditional ideals, norms and practices of gender binarism, if social justice – and specifically gender justice – is a priority. The videos also suggest that the politics of heteronormativity occurs in multiple arenas and can be hindered or facilitated by technology such as YouTube. The value of new social media is, in part, their contribution to Indonesia’s motto of ‘unity in diversity’. Though *waria* may continue to encounter personal, economic, social, religious and political challenges in the future, there is at minimum a space online for community, debate, education and entertainment that can bring some modicum of relief, recognition and change in the short term, and perhaps even justice in the long run. The latter, however, necessitates a sizeable and

genuine shift in thought and practice, not just in private spheres, but also in public spheres where diverse vantage points would be acknowledged and incorporated into creating and maintaining entirely new social structures.

Finally, in many of the YouTube videos about and by *waria*, there is an underlying tone and a direct appeal for ‘equality’. One interpretation is a request to shift from two gender categories (or even multiple gender categories) to the one category of ‘human’ or ‘citizen’ – a status that is symbolically referred to in Indonesia’s *Pancasila*. This interpretation leads to several other questions that arise in relation to *warias*’ day-to-day realities, Islam and the historical trajectory of the law in Indonesia: Are *waria*, then, to be included or excluded from discourses, activism and public policies related to women? To gays and lesbians? To minority groups, broadly speaking? Should there be similar or distinct categories of analysis and application for legal and religious purposes? These questions currently remain unanswered. In the search for answers in the future, using the lenses of structuration and gender performativity could be quite helpful in understanding and possibly resolving some or all of the problems of heteronormativity and gender binarism for *waria* in Indonesia.

Notes

- 1 Alternative wording for *Pancasila* include ‘religious devotion, humanitarianism, nationalism, consultative democracy and social justice’ (see *National symbols*, The Embassy of The Republic of Indonesia [2012]).
- 2 For historical background on the origin(s) and meaning(s) of ‘transgender’ in the United States, for example, see David Valentine’s *Imagining transgender: An ethnography of a category* (2007). For background information about ‘transgender’ in Indonesia, see Tom Boellstorff’s *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia* (2005).
- 3 See Don Kulick’s *Travesti: Sex, gender, and culture among Brazilian transgendered prostitutes* (1998, pp. 9–11) for arguments and critiques related to the ‘inversion’ of male and female roles, how biological sex is a gendered notion, and ‘cultural configurations of sexuality, sex and gender’.
- 4 See Sharyn Graham Davies, *Gender diversity in Indonesia: Sexuality, Islam and queer selves* (2010) for a literature review of this period.
- 5 For more on this metaphor, see John Stuart Mills’ *On liberty* (1859).
- 6 Although the YouTube video uses ‘he’ in the English captions for this quote, the speaker uses the term *dia*, which can mean ‘he’ or ‘she’ in Bahasa Indonesia.
- 7 The English translation of ‘sissy’ arguably does not convey the severity or possible threatening tone for the original Indonesian term *banci*.

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Homosexuality in Cameroonian prisons: Perspectives of female inmates, prison staff and NGO representatives

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Abstract

Homosexuality is highly resisted in Cameroon by all spectrums of the social strata and it is a criminal offence under Cameroonian criminal law. Yet there has been little research on homosexuality in Cameroon, let alone prison sexuality. Defence lawyers for lesbians, gay, bisexuals, transgender and intersex individuals (LGBTI) and their families receive anonymous telephone calls and text messages threatening them with death if they do not withdraw from defending homosexuals. The National Commission for Human Rights and Freedom (NCHRF) refuses to protect LGBTI victims from arbitrary arrest and police brutality, and their subsequent incarceration in prison. Workshops organised for sexual minorities are being disrupted even when the organisers obtain due authorisation. The article examines the continuation or spread of the practice of homosexuality despite its criminalisation, as well as the dynamics of the practice within a prison system. The research is qualitative, involving the narratives of 38 research participants distributed as follows: 18 female inmates, 18 prison staff members and two NGO representatives. The findings reveal that homosexuality exists in Cameroonian prisons and is more common in men's cells than in women's cells. Prison staff have attempted to limit its practise in the cells, yet it is ongoing and both prison staff and inmates punish the perpetrators of this offence. The decriminalisation of homosexuality as an offence has become imperative, because in this author's view sexual orientation is not biologically determined but rather the result of socialisation.

Keywords: Cameroon, female inmates, homosexuality, NGO representatives, prison staff, prisons

Introduction

To discuss sexual relations in prison effectively warrants a definition of the concept of sexuality. From the working definition of the World Health Organisation (in Izugbara 2011, p. 533),

[s]exuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life, which encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships.

While sexuality may include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. The concept of homosexuality, as espoused in this study, is based on Foucault's suggestion that the inclination to define the psychological character of individuals in terms of their sexual preferences is a recent phenomenon (Moodie 1994, p. 119). This article has been divided into six major subsections, which focus on the methodology employed, Cameroonian law, homosexuality

and international human rights, conceptual underpinnings, the notion that homosexuality is ‘un-African’, an overview of homosexuality in Africa, and the reality of homosexuality in Cameroonian prisons. The article also discusses power relations and power structures within the discourse of sexuality in prison.

There is limited or no data available in Cameroon regarding homosexuality, let alone in the prison milieu. At this juncture scholarship on the decriminalisation of same-sex relationships between two consenting adults becomes pertinent, particularly when Cameroon justifies its submission to Amnesty International (AI) by claiming that ‘the position of Cameroon law is based on Article 29 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and 29 (7) of the African Charter for Human and People’s Rights that are safeguard clauses, invoked by each democratic society according to the moral specificities’. The government of Cameroon also justifies the fact that the criminalisation of sexuality is not contrary to duly ratified international instruments that guarantee freedom. For example, Article 12 of the UDHR and the provisions of article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) state that homosexuals cannot be denied the enjoyment of a right or a service because of their presumed sexual orientation, forgetting to acknowledge that Article 12 of the UDHR also guarantees the right to privacy of all persons, while Article 26 of the ICCPR guarantees the equality of all persons before the law, without discrimination. This, according to AI (2013), is a subversion of human rights standards, as the persecution, prosecution and imprisonment of individuals on the basis of their perceived sexual orientation does not conform to international standards, but rather constitutes a negation of their rights.

The question is: If the general opinion towards homosexuality is homophobic, what therefore is the situation of lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals held in Cameroonian prisons? Is it any better, or are their conditions more deplorable than they would be within the community? The aim of this article is to examine whether LGBTI people exist in Cameroon prisons despite the criminalisation of alternative sexualities. If such individuals do exist, what is the reaction of prison staff and inmates towards those inmates involved in same-sex relationships? To what do they link these homosexual practices? The article concludes with policy recommendations.

Methodology

The article stems from a 14-month qualitative research project based on the narratives of female inmates, prison staff and two non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives working closely with female inmates. The study, conducted from January 2011 to April 2012, is based mainly on 38 in-depth interviews with female inmates,¹ prison staff and representatives of NGOs at six prisons (there are 73 prisons in Cameroon), amongst which are the two largest facilities: New Bell central prison and Kondengui central prison. Other prisons include Buea central prison, Bamenda central prison, and Kumba and Mbengwi which are principal prisons. The six prisons hold both male and female inmates, and were selected based on size and their urban and proximal location. The research involved participant observation of prison conditions from the perspective of female inmates² and an exploration of prison reports and newspaper articles. Interviewees were

recruited purposively, according to how long they had been in prison, their expert knowledge, age, socio-economic background and life experience. The participation of female inmates in in-depth interviews was voluntary, which explains why no lesbian was interviewed. Prison staff were selected purposively, given their expert knowledge of prison conditions and other dynamics (including homosexuality) inherent in the prison system.

The interviews were audio-taped and followed a semi-structured interview format, with the use of an interview guide. The interviews were, however, flexible enough for respondents to bring up additional issues and concerns (Babbie 2013). Interviewees answered general questions about sexuality, reproduction, the experience of homosexuality in prison and its consequences.³ Clearly the interviewees felt at ease in revealing very personal details about themselves, and even expressed deep pain. Some women revealed sorrows they had hidden for many years and as they spoke about the devastating prison conditions they had to endure, some cried during the interviews. Some told stories about sexual offences such as rape, while others revealed their homophobia towards those inmates who expressed their sexual orientation. The expressions on the faces of the interviewees, when questioned about same-sex sexual relations in Cameroonian prisons, were revealing. They grimaced when asked about homosexuality, and referred to those who practised it as prostitutes.

As a regular visitor, the author built up a friendship with the female inmates and therefore cannot be described as a distant observer. Her interaction with female inmates, most often in their cells, informed her understanding of the women's experiences as well as their discourse on sexuality. This helped her to gain perspective on the interview findings.

While collecting data, the author was reminded of the stigma accompanying imprisonment. During the interviews an attempt was made to create a safe space for participants. This relates to the issue of self-harm which, if not properly handled, stigmatises the responses. Besides her identity as a scholar and a woman, the author is also a counsellor. This helped her to understand the psychological harm the study might potentially cause the participants. As such, all possible measures were taken to treat participants with the utmost respect, confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms have been used to conceal the identity of the respondents – especially those who asked to remain anonymous. Being a university lecturer, however, made the inmates view the author as their advocate – someone from whom they could get help. The author was, therefore, careful to refer them to appropriate social workers and NGOs charged with that responsibility. Having examined issues of methodology, the next section investigates homosexuality in the Cameroonian context.

Cameroonian law, homosexuality and international human rights

The concept of 'homosexuality' has become a catch-all phrase in Cameroon. Homosexuality evokes contempt, and conjures up stereotypes and prejudices against those who define alternative sexuality as part of their being or their sexual preference, even if they are consenting adults. However, this is in contravention of all instruments and conventions which Cameroon has ratified, and which support section 347 of the Cameroonian penal code which criminalises same-sex sexual acts. Such acts are punishable by imprisonment for up to five years and a fine of up to US\$ 350. Those who are predisposed to same-sex sexual relations in Cameroon have lost all protection, even from the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedom (NCHRF), which is charged with protecting

the rights of individuals. Indeed, senior NCHRF officials argue that LGBTI individuals should change their sexual preference in order to avoid being arrested and punished, in accordance with Cameroonian criminal law. In common with the dictates of the Ministry of Justice, this specific argument of the NCHRF is based on the premise that Cameroonian law reflects the religious convictions of most Cameroonians, as contained in both the Christian Bible and the Islamic Quran (AI 2013). Such stipulations do, however, ignore the fact that international human rights standards protect the right to freedom of religion and thought of all individuals under the jurisdiction of the government, including those who do not adhere to a dominant religion – or any religion, for that matter.

If same-sex relations are openly stigmatised in a free society, what is the position of ‘homosexuals’ in prison?

Conceptual underpinnings

According to Kiragu and Nyong’o (2005), ‘homosexual’ is a term used to describe people who are physically, emotionally and sexually attracted to people of the same sex. In the context of Cameroon, sexuality is influenced by religious fundamentalism, which emphasises heterosexuality as opposed to homosexuality. This makes homosexuality a criminal offence, and it is regarded by most Cameroonians as a taboo. Although being gay or lesbian is considered a vice, it is a human rights violation to prevent two consenting adults from exercising their sexual orientation. The responses of two female inmates reflect their homophobia:

For what I have experienced is that when I came I was told by the old set of prisoners that lesbianism existed. But these set of prisoners are children of God and so do not behave like that. (Christie)

Ehhh! No, this does not happen amongst women, I have never seen it for my three years in prison. Maybe because we are not many. We are just six of us. (Alvine)

Similarly, AI (2013) confirms the presence of homophobia amongst the Cameroonian public. A case in point was when three women in Ambam, in southern Cameroon, were accused of and arrested for being lesbians. The husband of one of the three accused told the authorities that his wife had been enticed by the two other women into engaging in a same-sex sexual relationship. The matter went to court and the case was repeatedly adjourned. To date, the court of appeal has not yet pronounced judgement. The children of the victims have, however, been subjected to verbal abuse by fellow pupils, and the accused have reportedly been ostracised by their families on the grounds of their perceived sexual orientation, even though sexuality is not seen as natural but socially constructed and policed. As a result, the children of the accused have been removed from urban schools and been sent to rural schools. This is, however, problematic because if the accused are found innocent, the effect of the stigmatisation may continue to hunt their children – and them – for the rest of their lives.

Another school of thought may read the respondents’ statements, as reflected above, as denialism. The impression is that female inmates are unfamiliar with the concept of homosexuality, which to them is taboo if it does exist, and therefore must not be discussed in public. Nkealah (2013) asserts

that in many cultures people tend to attach negative labels to behaviour they perceive as unfamiliar, and therefore unacceptable.

Furthermore, the responses of the research participants show that Christians abhor the practice of homosexuality, and it is also not acceptable in Cameroonian culture, which explains why the female inmates were shocked about the nature of the subject matter. There is a power struggle between the various forces in the prisons which aim to prevent inmates from engaging in homosexual practices and those that apparently do not mind what the inmates do as far as their sexuality is concerned. The attitude of the research participants is not surprising, because the position assigned to sexuality, by law, is deployed by the instruments of state control and dominance. For instance, the criminal justice system in most African countries attempts to regulate how, when and with whom citizens have consensual sex. Thus, the criminalisation of homosexuality affects all males and females who do not conform to the dominant discourse of heterosexuality (Tamale 2011).

The homophobia or denialism reflected in the narratives of the research participants is embedded in discourses on heteronormativity, and which are widely used in contemporary political, social and critical theory to describe socio-legal, cultural, organisational and interpersonal practices deriving from and reinforcing a set of taken-for-granted presumptions relating to sex and gender. These include the notions that human beings fall into two distinct and complementary categories (male and female), and that sexual and marital relations are 'normal' and 'natural' only when people of different genders are attracted to each other. Such attractions may then be publicly displayed and celebrated. Therefore, same-sex couples are, if not 'deviant', then a 'variation on' or an 'alternative to', heterosexual couples (Kiragu and Nyong'o 2005; Kitzinger 2005, p. 478). These conceptual underpinnings paint a picture of homosexuality that warrants an examination of the concept in the African context.

Homosexuality is 'un-African'

A tide of homophobia is sweeping through the Cameroonian public, masterminded by the media (principally newspaper articles), religious leaders, politicians and the wider community. Discourses on homosexuality being un-African dictate the pace at which those practising same-sex relationships would be accepted, especially when such discourses emanate from presidential spaces. President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Sam Nujoma, his former Namibian counterpart, repeatedly described same-sex sexual relations as an un-African 'disease', introduced by disreputable European settlers (Niehaus 2002, p. 77). Both presidents have, on several occasions, threatened to expel gays and lesbians from the body politic. To Mugabe, homosexuality on the African continent is inexcusable: 'Let them be gay in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, they shall be sad people here' (Clark 1997, p. 32).

Apart from presidential voices manifesting homophobia, female parliamentarians also decry the practice of homosexuality as un-African. This is evident in the voice of Sabina Themban, member of parliament for Mufakos, Zimbabwe, who indicated that 'homosexuality is not African. It hurts us mothers to hear that our children are turning to homosexuality, our children must be punished' (Clark 1997, p. 32). Furthermore, in South Africa, visionaries such as Kenneth Meshoe,

charismatic leader of the African Christian Democratic Party, often uses the phrase ‘God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve’ (Niehaus 2002, p. 77).

In Cameroon, political leaders also condemn homosexuality as a ‘foreign imposition’. Against this backdrop a state minister noted that ‘the Cameroon people are not ready or disposed to accept the promotion of such homosexual practices on their territory’ (AI 2013, p. 29). This is premised on the fact that homosexuality is a criminal offence under section 347 of the Cameroon Penal Code, and on the general public’s reticence towards same-sex sexual relations, which they claim is foreign and a product of neo-colonialism and sexual abuse.

Apart from politicians fuelling prejudices against and hatred of LGBTI individuals, religious leaders also join the queue. *L’Effort Camerounais*, a newspaper of the Catholic Bishops’ conference, reported that in 2009, the Catholic Church in Doula Archdiocese protested against Cameroon’s ratification of the Maputo Protocol.⁴ According to the newspaper, the Catholic Church finds fault with the protocol’s stance on issues of reproductive health and same-sex marriages, which the church considers an aberration (AI 2013). It is rather outrageous, because although the protocol’s article 14 forbids all forms of discrimination based on sex, it does not overtly protect the rights of LGBTI individuals, hence the protest was not necessary.

Moses Tazoh, contributor to *L’Effort Camerounais*, wrote that ‘homosexuality is an abnormal behaviour that goes against natural law and human behaviour. Thus it is detestable and punishable as a crime in most African cultures and countries’ (AI 2013, p. 30). That explains why defence lawyers for LGBTI individuals and their families in Cameroon receive anonymous telephone calls and text messages threatening them with death if they do not withdraw from defending homosexuals. The Cameroonian government and security officials also turn a blind eye to individuals or groups who attack those defending the rights of LGBTI individuals. For example, a European Union-sponsored workshop on the rights of sexual minorities, scheduled for 27 March 2012, was disrupted by Cameroonian government officials and a self-confessed anti-LGBTI group known as the Rally for Cameroonian Youth. The workshop was disrupted despite authorisation from a local government official (AI 2013, p. 30). Moreover, people accused of being gay or lesbian continue to be arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned.

It is noteworthy that a writer of *L’Effort Camerounais* views African politicians, soldiers, prisoners and some professionals who perform homosexual acts as people seeking spiritual, political or social power, promotion, status and riches. He does not believe any man in his right mind can indulge in homosexual practices. This homophobic attitude continues to gain ground in Cameroon: in December 2012 the Cameroon Ministry of Justice stated that ‘homosexuality ... is an unnatural activity that seeks to eliminate human reproduction. As a result, during the passage of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council, Cameroon rejected the recommendation relating to decriminalisation of homosexuality’ (AI 2013, pp. 4–6).

That explains why some newspaper articles in Cameroon condemned homosexual practices as un-African, assuming that embracing same-sex relationships means indulging in demonic sexual orgies and is a reflection of humanity rapidly sinking into barbarism (Opio 2012, p. 9). Similarly, Adams’ (2012, p. 4) newspaper article on Cameroon, entitled ‘Homosexuality: We vote God’s ways’ argues that it is through the Bible that Africans knew of Sodom and Gomorrah and how God

turned his wrath against sodomy by destroying the community of those practising it. Although Adams can be criticised for his essentialism, he seems convinced that homosexuality is a Western concept. He therefore recommends that Western powers identify homosexuals and transport them to their own countries, where such a sin is not a crime.

An overview of homosexuality in Africa

The preceding section painted a picture of homosexuality in Cameroon. In some parts of the African continent, heterosexuality is celebrated and any person who does not conform to it is punished severely, by law, for such abominations. This supports Telesa (1995), who argues that certain religious institutions have turned sexual expression and practices into an abomination, if not done for the purposes of procreation within heterosexual marriage.

Dlamini (in Lewis 2011, p. 208), for his part, writes that African sexuality was defined in relation to reproduction, with the assumption that Africans could not possibly display homoerotic desire or agency – attributes associated with sophisticated human desires and eroticism. Denial of the existence of same-sex practices in Africa continued until the mid-20th century. Therefore, colonial and early anthropological representations of sexuality remain central to many taboos, laws and attitudes surrounding sexuality in Africa today (Dlamini in Lewis 2011, p. 208). This assertion is no different from Jane Bennett (2011) suggesting that European and Christian colonial values denied sexual liaisons outside of sanctioned marriage and same-sex sexual display as the reason why homosexuality is considered un-African.

Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests that homosexuality has always been part of the social fabric of Africa. Mutua (2011) points out that in Uganda, as in many African states, homosexuality and related sexual practices were first criminalised by the colonial state. He notes that there were few epithets in African languages for gays – words in Kiswahili, for instance, are mostly derived from the Arabic.

Jacklyn Cock (in Ratele 2011, p. 410) problematises the use of the terminologies ‘gayness’⁵ and ‘lesbianism’⁶ as ‘identities’, since it is politically dangerous and can provoke strong reactions, arguing that ‘the assertion of a public gay identity is particularly problematic in an African context’. Ratele (2011), citing Kendall, found out that the notion of ‘lesbian’ was not helpful in understanding female–female relationships among the Basotho. Research found widespread, apparently normative, erotic relationships among Basotho women, but these were not defined as sexual, and not a single Mosotho – to Kendall’s knowledge – defined herself as a lesbian. As a result, Kendall (in Ratele 2011, p. 410) concludes that ‘love between women is as natural to Southern Africa as the soil itself, but that homophobia is a Western import’. She reiterates the fact that Basotho society has not constructed a social category ‘lesbian’. As far as she is concerned, Basotho women define sexual activity in such a way that makes lesbianism linguistically inconceivable.

Homosexuality: A reality in Cameroonian prisons

I remember that when I was working in the Northern part of the country inmates used to confide to us that there were some people who were harassing them in the night and that they will sleep and they will come and start caressing them. Usually it is prisons in the urban areas, not rural areas like

Mbengwi ... but I make sure I educate the inmates on such practices, that is why we have beds I always insist that the beds be separated. No two beds are put together because it can lead to such practices.
(Superintendent, Mbengwi)

The narrative of the superintendent mentions that inmates were being caressed at night, which indicates the existence of homosexuality in Cameroonian prisons. That homosexual practices took place in urban (and not rural) prisons cannot be belaboured. The narrative of the superintendent also brands homosexuality as an unacceptable practice in prison, that is why, as a superintendent, he went the extra mile to ensure that the beds were placed at some distance from each other. This leaves the impression that failure to separate the beds gives rise to homosexual practices. However, the strategy of the Cameroonian prison authority, which is geared towards lessening sexual activities amongst inmates, is not unique to Cameroon. The issue is also discussed by Blackburn, Fowler and Mullings *et al.* (2011), who highlight how, in America, correctional administrators responded to prison homosexuality in men's and women's facilities respectively. The authors discuss how the state of Virginia came under fire for separating women who were thought to be lesbians, since the segregation was not meant to protect the women from victimisation, but to decrease sexual activity among female inmates.

There is no denying the fact that some prisons which harbour fewer female inmates might not be exposed to lesbianism, while those in urban areas, like Kondengui and Douala central prison, may very well experience it. A female inmate in Kondengui explained her experience as follows:

... and then there is this lesbianism. I saw it ... I had doubted before I saw it with my own eyes. I was in one room with one girl, that girl she is just like a boy so I have never called her a woman so she was having her boyfriend (another woman) in the other room, room 6, there was a time they were having problems ... she sent and they bought her a shirt. She now came and folded it, perfumed it and was asking the other girl ... I am telling you that there are lesbians, and then I was denying and then she said do you think that she will fall in love. Then the other girl said it is you who has to know her objective. So generally there are lesbians in prison and they carry out the act openly especially as most of them are prostitutes. These lesbians smoke cocaine with the complicity of the guards. (Dorothy)

It is worth noting how the research participant equates lesbianism with prostitution. From Dorothy's narrative it is clear that she labels lesbians 'bad girls', especially as she links them to the use of drugs. Such prejudices around female sexuality are rooted in ideologies that good women are not expected to enjoy sex, whereas 'fallen' women (nymphomaniacs, prostitutes and lesbians) are thought to crave sex and can therefore be labelled 'pathological' (Nzegwu 2011, p. 264). These women are deemed to have disrupted the normal and natural order. Chacha (2011) points out that the assumption of universality has subtly influenced thought patterns with regard to deviations from the norm as sick, perverse or immoral – a picture demonstrated in this narrative. The research participant further raised the issue of lesbians smoking cocaine with the complicity of the guards, which echoes the research findings that some inmates in South African prisons bought cannabis from wardens (Niehaus 2002). This is thought-provoking, because drugs are prohibited in prisons, yet some prison staff subvert the rules.

It is also evident from the narrative of the female inmate that she abhors lesbianism. This is not unique to Cameroon, but manifests in most countries, and is driven by natural law.⁷ For example, Ojo (in Izugbara 2011, p. 551) points out that the Nigerian Anglican Communion stipulates that ‘there could be no compromise over homosexuality because it is clearly outlawed by the Bible’. The Anglican Communion also insists that ‘homosexuals are worse than animals in the forest’. The former stance is milder when compared to Williams Kumuyi’s argument that any form of sexual activity occurring before and outside marriage is an unwholesome submission of the body to sinful pleasures, punishable by eternal damnation (Izugbara 2011, p. 552). No wonder inmates who are caught practising homosexuality in their cells in Cameroon are given snake beatings⁸ by fellow inmates, and are further punished by prison staff if the matter is brought to their attention. An NGO research participant had this to say:

Another problem that worries the prison is homosexuality, it is both a house problem⁹ and probably sometimes they say at the end of the day, what do you do? There was one of them who was almost killed because he was caught like that and he was beaten mercilessly. It is what goes on in the prison; I was looking at the male inmate with somebody who is condemned to death. They have friends there and they practise same-sex relationships, some of them. (NGO research participant)

Irrespective of the fact that homosexuality is condemned in Cameroonian prisons, it is widely practised in the men’s cells, which are often overcrowded. The vulnerable and newcomers to prison suffer the consequences. The NGO research participant explained:

Some of them practise homosexuality and one of the ex-prisoners was explaining to me what happens, it is very dramatic. It is usually those who have the urge they start looking for clients who are weak, young people who have come into the prisons and maybe in one or two weeks they realise that they don’t have this or that, they are suffering. They are suffering they are poor, so they propose to them that they will care for them and with that sometimes they drug them and they use them and some of them have just developed partners there ... There was one who was beaten because the partner found him with another person and they started fighting and there was such a big fight and ...

The explanation the inmate gave to the NGO research participant is similar to practices in other prisons in countries such as South Africa, where same-sex marriage is legal. According to Gear (2011, p. 317), newcomers to South African men’s prisons are vulnerable because they are not familiar with the unwritten prison rules. As a result they are easily tricked and manipulated by other inmates, especially if they are naive or needy. The risks further increase for the poor, physically weak, ‘pretty’ prisoners, those linked to crimes associated with women, and men who identify as gay or transsexual. Nonetheless, Hunter (1993) points out that even males put into a position of subservience through force and intimidation are blamed, much like female rape victims, and their identity is mistaken for that of a male who actively wishes to give other males sexual pleasure. It is important to note that some inmates who did not ascribe to such vices before imprisonment accepted it once they were incarcerated, as a means of survival, even though these men also have agency, for they are not merely silent victims.

All 18 prison staff who were interviewed, reported that homosexuality is common in prison. They did, however, note that they were doing all they could to reduce this crime, but *'it cannot really be abolished where there are only men. We educate, separate them and at times that is why I told you that we put them on restraint.'* A prison staff member explained what they are doing to reduce homosexuality:

I want to say we have reduced this happenings ... those of them who are of good comportment are allowed to go outside. When they go outside they can have their deals with their wives and things like that ... It is a right in developed countries ... under very organised conditions. Do you understand, because they are human beings, but here we don't tolerate it? (Prison Administrator, Buea)

This quote supports the belief that sexuality is a human right and that inmates should not be deprived of this right. Conjugal visits are permitted in other parts of the world, specifically in many Western-European jurisdictions such as Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Spain (Coyle 2002). Prisoners in these countries can be visited by their spouse or long-term partner, for a period of up to three hours. The couple is given privacy in a small unit which contains a bed and a shower, along with other sanitary facilities. According to Coyle, a much less formal version of these visits occurs in many Latin American prisons, where the norm is that at the weekend there are family visits for male prisoners, and in some places for female prisoners. These visits take place in the cell areas, and often sheets and blankets are hung on ropes to create a private space.

Similarly, in Hameenlinna prison in Finland, even though sexual contact is forbidden in prison, the staff take flirtation and attraction to be part of human nature (Talvi 2007). In addition, inmates' sexuality is respected, since women are allowed monthly unsupervised, overnight visits with their male partners in a small yet comfortable room, regardless of whether they are married or not. When prison authorities in Finland were asked if same-sex couples should be allowed to spend the night together, the reply was: 'No one's asked yet, but if they do, of course we'd let them. If they're in a relationship, then that's that' (Talvi 2007, p. 256).

The author's research suggests that homosexuality is more prevalent amongst male inmates than female inmates. The findings also suggest that some homosexual activity in the cells (in men's and women's prisons) is consensual and rooted in affection and attachment, instead of dominance motives as found amongst South African gangs.

Yes it happens in prison especially homosexuality but I have never seen it with women. I have seen how men do it. A man will pay his fellow prisoner 10¹⁰ FCFA and then use him for sex. When the other male inmates find these same-sex couples enjoying sex, they punish them before the prison authorities know about it. By the time we come you will see the prisoner beating the man. We shall come and separate the beating and take the culprit to the solitary cell and punish him. (Prison Administrator, Buea)

In a nutshell, no one can deny the existence of homosexuality in Cameroonian prisons, despite the criminalisation of this practice. It is suggested in the narrative that sexual access to a fellow inmate is not expensive (20 cents; the equivalent of 10 FCFA). The economics of sex within a homosexual framework accounts for why gayness is commonplace in Cameroonian prisons. In some prisons in South Africa, homosexual 'husbands' provide their lovers with extra food, cigarettes, cannabis and

small amounts of money (Niehaus 2002). Therefore, provision determines who has power in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. When looking at the narratives of female inmates, as reflected in this article, it is possible to conclude that sexuality involves more than the physical act of sexual intercourse – it extends to a range of personal services that male inmates may be reluctant to forego.

Conclusion

Inmates' adaptation to imprisonment through the expression of their sexuality obviously calls into question the functional theory of what is applicable in prison. There is a link between the findings in Cameroon and the early scholarly history of women's adaptations to imprisonment, as propounded by Ward and Kassebaum (1965) and Gillombardo (1966). These studies found that female prisoners had many roles, which revolved primarily around homosexuality and prison family relationships. According to the authors the prison experience could be understood by employing deprivation and importation paradigms. This was a way in which women specifically attempted 'to resist the destructive effects of imprisonment by creating a substitute universe within which the inmates may preserve an identity relevant to life outside of prison' (Gillombardo 1966, p. 129). The social system among female inmates aligns with the proposition that pre-prison identities are critical to understanding how inmates serve their imprisonment (Irvin and Cressey in Kruthschnitt and Gartner 2003).

What is particularly relevant in this study is the fact that male inmates were not interviewed, since the research focused on female inmates. Yet, through the voices of women, NGO representatives and prison staff, it became evident that homosexuality is more prevalent amongst male inmates than female inmates. This does not mean that men expressed their sexuality more than women did; rather, the findings suggest that overcrowding maybe an influencing factor. The percentage of female inmates to male is so small that it is negligible, with an average ratio of 1:40 nationwide (Atabong 2007, p. 72). Although this study did not focus on male inmates, the author agrees with the argument made by Ratele (2011), who states that any discussion of manhood in Africa is inadequate if it does not include same-sex male desires. Just as discussing men who have sex with men is important, so discussing women who have sex with women is important, for the simple reason that all forms of sexual desire need to be acknowledged in Cameroon until such time that it becomes obvious to Cameroonians that there is little point denying its existence and aiming to 'stamp it out'. A wider scholarship in Cameroon on homosexual practices will not only reinforce its existence, but will also deconstruct the notion of 'heteronormativity' to include other sexual preferences.

Moreover, a rethink is needed of societal norms which criminalise homosexuality and uphold heterosexuality, taking into consideration those who are behind bars (although the respondents were not behind bars because of their homosexuality). This is important because heterosexuality, which is the accepted norm in society, is not granted to inmates and therefore they are left with no choice but to improvise. Social norms and the Cameroon Penal Code both need to be interrogated for criminalising homosexuality, irrespective of whether or not it is practised by prison inmates,

because, in this author's view, sexual orientation is not biologically determined but rather the result of a socialisation process.

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Notes

- 1 The essence of targeting only female inmates was to capture their voice, taking into consideration that narratives do not require a large sample size.
- 2 The author sometimes spent a whole day with female inmates chatting, cooking, taking photographs and having her hair braided, which gave her some perspective on prison life.
- 3 Discussions on homosexuality became stronger, when the author posed the question: 'Have we missed anything?'
- 4 The Maputo Protocol of the African Charter for Human and People's Rights seeks to promote and protect the rights of women.
- 5 Has come to be referred to as 'men who have sex with men' or MSM (Ratele 2011: 410).
- 6 Refers to 'women who have sex with women' or WSW (Ratele 2011: 410).
- 7 Natural law refers to a body of principles and rules, imposed upon individuals by some powers higher than man-made law, that are considered uniquely fitting for and binding to any community of rational beings. Natural law determines what is right and wrong and whose power is made valid by nature; its precepts are eternal, universal and unchangeable.
- 8 Severe torture.
- 9 A common phenomenon in prison.
- 10 Offering 10 FCFA to a fellow inmate shows how desperate an inmate could be in prison. Currently, 10 FCFA has lost its value in Cameroon, as most items are sold for 25 FCFA. Therefore, the usage of 10 FCFA in the narratives portrays the kind of monetary transactions that underpin homosexual relationships in prisons, thus contributing to the stigmatisation of homosexuals as prostitutes.

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Sworn virgins, male and female *berdaches*: A comparative approach to the so-called ‘third gender’ people

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Abstract

The phenomenon of sworn virgins in Northern Albania applies to women who, by taking a vow of celibacy, dressed and behaved as men (Young 2001). *Berdache* males and females are aboriginal North-American Indians¹ who assumed the dress, occupation and roles of the opposite sex by changing in this way their gender status (Blackwood 1984; Schnarch 1992). This article is based on a comparative approach which looked at different cultural variations of sworn virgins, male and female *berdaches*. The reason for examining such practices is to show how gender and sexuality can be seen as culturally defined phenomena, embedded in society and not necessarily in biological sex. Therefore, it is important to look and think beyond labeling individuals based on Western gendered and sexual prescriptions, as is evident in the terminology. These categories do not fulfil the notion of gender normatively; they can be seen as cross-cultural gender variations that need to be analysed in greater detail.

Keywords: *berdaches*, gender roles, sworn virgins, third gender, transgender

Background history and origin of sworn virgins

Albanian sworn virgins, whose biological sex was that of women, became ‘socially men’² for different social, economic, emotional and cultural reasons (Young 2001, p. 27). There is no exact date for the origin of sworn virgins, although many writers mentioned the sworn virgins of Albania during the 19th and early 20th century, while other cases were reported around 150 years ago (Young and Twigg 2009). The existence of sworn virgins was exacerbated by Albania’s patriarchal society, which established men in a dominant position, while women did not have rights at all (Young 2001, p. 28). The only way for women to be afforded rights, was to take an oath of celibacy or to dress and engage in activities that were considered part of men’s domains (Bilefsky 2008). If women were to break the oath, however, they were punished with death (Spectator 2007, p. 7) while there were also reports of sworn virgins who had sex with men being burned alive (Littlewood 2002, p.47). Thus, it is clear that Albanian patriarchal society has somehow enhanced the phenomenon of sworn virgins, since women could only gain their independence by becoming ‘socially men’. Yet, the cost of such a sacrifice was very high, since they could no longer dress and behave as women after taking the oath to remain virgins and become ‘socially men’ for the rest of their lives.

Young (2001, p. 32) points out that sworn virgins were responsible for all those activities associated with men, including hoeing, chopping wood, harvesting, irrigating crops, and taking

care of animals and property. Moreover, they could smoke, drink and make decisions for their family, which other women were not allowed to do. Sworn virgins dressed in men's traditional clothes such as trousers, jacket and skull cap, but never wore skirts (Young 2001, p.106). One of the sworn virgins, Pashke, revealed that 'to dress as a man earns the respect due to a man' (Young 2001, p. 108). Gender identity can be expressed through external manifestations, such as clothing. Thus, men's clothing had symbolic meaning in terms of being considered masculine. The clothes are a symbol of the respect which was denied women. Therefore, it is safe to assume that cross-dressing among sworn virgins was seen as way to gain power from the family and society, since it represented the masculine role.

Reasons for changing gender among sworn virgins

In her book *Women who became men: Albanian sworn virgins*, Young (2001) describes different categories of sworn virgins, each with its own reasons for changing gender (p. 60). The first category includes women who were raised as boys, to become the head of the household and allow them to inherit the family wealth, in cases when there were no other males in the family, in line with the patrilineal system in Albania. The second category offered women an escape from arranged marriages, given that it was considered an insult for the clan of a rejected husband if the wife left the home (2001, p. 60). This was the only way for a woman to still be considered respectable after refusing marriage (Doja 2008, p. 61). Another reason why women rejected marriage and assumed the role of a man was to seek revenge, in cases where all the males of the household had been killed (Whitaker 1981, p. 151). A further essential reason relates to Albanian patriarchal society and its oral law, *Kanun*, which positioned women as far inferior to men (Young 2001). Women did not have a voice in the family, nor were they afforded equal respect to their male counterparts. In an interview, Ms. Keqi (a sworn virgin), stated: 'Back then, it was better to be a man because before a woman and an animal were considered the same thing' (Keqi in Bilefsky 2008). As the above arguments make clear, the decision to become a sworn virgin sometimes seemed like a free choice, while in other cases it was an obligation or a social necessity. Apparently, only by taking the oath to 'become a man', could women be more independent and embrace those rights generally denied women. This is one way in which women could gain power and control – privileges that were reserved solely for men.

Sexuality of sworn virgins

'Homosexual(ity)' is used to describe both lesbian and gay male sexuality, i.e., people who are sexually and emotionally attracted to others of the same sex. 'Lesbian(ism)' is a term preferred by many women who are sexually and emotionally attracted to women (Haxhiymeri and Gjermeni 2003).

Young (2001) points out that the sexuality of sworn virgins was not clear, being deemed a very intimate topic on the basis of the vow sworn virgins took, and also Albanian taboos which did not allow sex to be discussed in public. Young (2001, p. 59) notes that female-to-female sexuality was considered a rare phenomenon or even non-existent among sworn virgins, adding that the issue

of lesbianism was an alien concept to such women. However, in discussing sworn virgins, Young (in Bewerten 2008) notes that 'this would be a way round for a woman who had homosexual inclinations'. Young (2001, pp. 57–58) argues that the reason why sworn virgins were hesitant to talk about their feelings and emotions, were fears that such secrets could damage their reputation, since they considered themselves as honorary men. These women, in striving to become men and through performing their gender (Butler 1990, 1993), in fact reinforced patriarchy rather than questioning it. This author argues, instead, that Young's arguments show ambivalence as to whether or not these women may have had homosexual preferences. Young supposes that such preferences may have existed, even though social mores and their status as respectable men may have forced these women to hide their true feelings. However, in contrast with Young, Gremaux (in Young 2001, p. 59) reports on sexual tendencies in couples among the sworn virgins. These couples had a kind of ritual or spiritual kinship that bound them as a 'blood sisterhood'.³ Similarly, Vukanovic (in Young 2001, p. 59) notes that sworn virgins generally had a bad reputation for having 'abnormal sexual relations' with their 'blood-sisters'.

***Berdache* males**

Berdache males established their social status through a 'mixture' of the two genders (Goulet 1996, p. 685). The word *berdache* derives from the Arabic *bardag*, meaning 'kept boy' or 'male prostitute' (Saundres and Foblets 2002, p. 124) even though the use of the term was criticised for its negative connotations. Here, the term (despite its connotations) is employed since it was most often used by other authors who preferred it to the longer 'two-spirit persons' which has more recently been used to define this phenomenon. It is important to avoid blurring the lines between the historical context and the contemporary. However, this does not mean that the term is necessarily the most suited. In this article the term 'male *berdache*' is used to refer to biological males (as opposed to 'female *berdache*'), but in certain cases (i.e., when discussing society's reaction, current phenomena or misconceptions), *berdache* is used without specifying the sex.

Berdaches are considered to have special powers that mediated between the spiritual and the physical worlds (Schnarch 1992). Moreover, they were involved in women's activities such as sewing, cooking, raising children and other tasks which made them highly skilled and superior in terms of women's chores. *Berdaches* had no restrictions in terms of the sexual division of labour, which made them free to combine both men and women's chores. Male *berdaches* often dressed like women and tried to imitate women's voices and copy their hairstyles (Schnarch 1992, p. 112). As Callender *et al.* (1983, p. 447) argue, however, the dress-code of *berdaches* varied among different tribes and it was permissible to combine men's and women's clothes (Schnarch 1992, p. 112). However, in contrast to the freedom of dress and activities male *berdaches* enjoyed, sworn virgins dressed and performed the activities of the opposite sex in a more rigid way. Thus, male *berdaches* could perform their gender by cross-dressing, imitating women's voices and hairstyles and engaging in traditional women's activities such as sewing, cooking and raising children.

Reasons for changing gender among male berdaches

Men had various reasons for becoming *berdaches*, ranging from free choice to obligation. In many tribes, if a child behaved like or socialised more with members of the opposite sex, the family would dress and socialise the child in accordance with that gender (Goulet 1996, p. 685). Indeed, as Forgey (1975, p. 10) points out, overprotective parents may have pushed boys to assume the role of *berdache*. Many wars at that time resulted in the death of the husband, therefore mothers would engage in intense relationships with their sons, which would make the children anxious about their masculinity and their future gender role (Forgey 1975, pp. 10–12).

Another hypothesis relies on supernatural validation. During adolescence, some boys had visions or dreams which urged them to become women, and this resulted in the public transformation of their gender (Callender *et al.* 1983, p. 451).⁴ Moreover, another possible reason mentioned by Callender *et al.* (p. 455) was the fact that young boys whose mothers had been very overprotective were later unable to meet the demands of virile and aggressive warriors. So, in order to escape these harsh physical demands they decided to become *berdaches*, which was socially more acceptable (Schnarch 1992, p. 113).⁵ This also relates to Western socialisation processes or myths associated with homosexuality, which place great value on women's role in shaping and transforming children's gender roles and attitudes. According to Haxhiymeri and Gjermeni (2003), parents (especially mothers) play a significant role in socialising their children. Therefore, it is argued that boys who have difficulty separating from their mothers will become homosexual later on in life. Freud (1993) argued that if boys failed to identify with the father they would have problems with their sexual orientation later on in life. His theory on homosexuality is based on the idea that boys who are over-attached to their mother, and identify with her and not the father, become homosexual later in life (Freud 1993, p. 42), i.e., an incomplete resolution of the Oedipus complex.⁶ In a similar way, by taking on the role of men, sworn virgins could escape the patriarchal norms of society which located women in an inferior position, and it allowed them to refuse pre-arranged marriages. However, by taking a vow to become 'socially men', these women strongly reinforced the roots of the patriarchal system, which placed men in a powerful position in society.

Sexuality of berdache males

Such men could have sex with non-*berdache* women and men (Schnarch 1992, p. 111) but not with each other (Tinker 1989, p. 607). In contrast to Euro-Western societies, where sexuality was considered an important element in the definition of gender, Schnarch (1992) assumes that among *berdaches* spirituality was of primary importance. Heterosexuality was not strictly compulsory and the choice of sexual partner did not determine gender assignment (Schnarch 1992, p. 111). While William (in Epple 1998, p. 269) writes that homosexual attraction among male *berdaches* was seen as an important aspect of their character, sexual behaviour among different tribes varied from asexuality, bisexuality, promiscuity, long-term sexual relationships to stable marriages (Callender 1983, p. 449): while Santee and Teton Dakota *berdaches* would engage in promiscuity, they were not allowed to establish long-term sexual relationships or to marry. In contrast, long-

term sexual relationships were common among the Hidasta tribes, where *berdaches* could even marry older men (Callender 1983, p. 449). This practice could be related to Ancient Greek, Indian and Japanese culture: the most widespread form of same-sex sexual relations in ancient Greece was between adult men and teenage boys. In Japan, same-sex sexual relations between an older man and an adolescent boy spread from religious circles to the warriors (*samurai*) (Haxhiymeri and Gjermani 2003). Another example of third genders are the *hijras* of north India who undergo castration (penectomies) to remove their genitals, so that they cannot be considered as men or women. As Gutmann (1997) argues, emasculation was seen as the only source of ritual power, apart from engaging in sexual activity with other males. Certain ritual traditions among tribal societies can serve as a source for constructing masculinity. For example, amongst the Sambia, oral insemination of children, which consists of an initiation ritual to transform 'boys' who are considered feminine persons into masculinised, strong male warriors, by drinking the semen of older men, is seen as a social and sexual practice which is rooted mainly in the culture (Gutmann 1997). As Herdt (in Gutmann 1997, p. 397) points out, this kind of ritual is seen as a possible way to 'create a pool of maleness'. Obviously, this type of insemination ritual should not be mistaken for or confused with the practice of homosexuality. In fact, homosexuality is based on a Western dichotomy,⁷ and it would be inappropriate to refer here to this binary system. The ritual is based on the Sambia's sexual culture, sexual beliefs and ideologies, and is seen as quite natural in the construction what is referred to as 'masculinity'. Thus, as Herdt (in Gutmann 1997, p.394) notes, 'it is no longer useful to think of the Sambia as engaging in "homosexuality", because it will be a quite confused meaning based in the Western sexuality'.

Among some tribal *berdaches*, notably the Cheyenne the men assumed the role of the second wife in another man's household (Forgey 1975, p. 4). Some *berdaches* were asexual (Pratt 2007, p. 60) or abstained, since in cases of war, abstinence supposedly heightened men's strength and virility (Forgey 1975, p. 4).

Furthermore, modes of intercourse among male *berdaches* varied from tribe to tribe. For example, among the Arpaho anal intercourse was practised in homosexual relationships (Kroeber in Callender *et al.* 1983, p. 450) while among the Crow sexual intercourse was limited to fellatio, regardless of the heterosexual or homosexual context (Holder in Callender *et al.* 1983, p. 450). Devereux reported that among Mohave, sexual intercourse was limited to the manipulation of the sexual partner using different techniques, and in certain cases they insisted that female terms be used for sexual organs. Sometimes they would engage in such stimulation during menstruation, pregnancy and child-birth (in Callender *et al.* 1983, p.450). Williams (1986, p. 2) writes that *berdaches* would frequently take on non-masculine roles during sexual intercourse.

***Berdache* females**

Schnarch (1992) and Trexler (2002) concur that *berdache* females assume the role and dress of the opposite sex, and they were known as 'manly-hearted women' (Goulet 1996, p. 682). In many cases, certain rituals followed during a ceremony allowed female *berdache* to transform girls into boys. The purpose of such ceremonies was to prohibit the girls' menstruation, prevent

pregnancy, change girls' 'erotic orientation' and give them strength for hunting (Goulet 1996, p. 690).⁸ By contrast, sworn virgins did not follow any kind of ritual to change their gender or 'erotic orientation'. The rituals used for these female *berdaches* can be interpreted as an overlap of gender and sexual categories. This point is important for understanding perceptions around gender and sexuality, as well as erotic orientation: gender cross-dressing was not considered sufficient for transforming female *berdaches* into men – sexuality mattered as well.

Female *berdache* performed the behaviours and duties of the opposite sex, such as hunting, trapping, cultivating crops, working the fields and fighting in battle (Blackwood 1984, pp. 29–31)⁹ and sometimes outperformed their male counterparts in terms of hunting (Callender *et al.* 1983, p. 447). In a similar way, sworn virgins engaged in 'masculine' activities.

Reasons for changing gender among female berdaches

Trexler (2002, p. 629) points out that among American Indian females, becoming a *berdache* was not necessarily an act of free will, but was highly predetermined by political and familial conditions. Thus, Honigsmann (in Jacobs, Wand and Lang 1997) argues that parents without sons would, during their infancy or early childhood, select one of their daughters to dress and treat as a boy, so that the girl could be strong enough to hunt for food for the clan.¹⁰ Another possible reason for becoming a *berdache* was to inherit property, in cases where there were no men in the family (Trexler 2002, p. 628) – a similar reason applies to the sworn virgins. Thayer concurs that visions in dreams may have prompted women to assume the role of the opposite sex (Thayer 1980, p. 289).¹¹ Likewise, the same reason applied to male *berdaches*. However, there are no reports of sworn virgins changing their gender based on dreams.

Sexuality of berdache females

Berdache girls avoided sexual contact with boys but not with other girls (Goulet 1996). The sexuality of cross-gendered females was recognised as homosexual or lesbian (Blackwood 1984). Holder (in Callender *et al.* 1983, p. 449) notes that even though among Crow *berdaches* marriage was not forbidden, the women would seldom marry. During sexual intercourse female *berdaches* would sometimes imitate male sexual behavior. For example, among the Kutenai tribes, female *berdaches* would use an artificial phallus to create the perception that they were males (Holder in Callender *et al.* 1983, p. 449). Goulet (1996, p. 690) states that among the Kaska tribes, female *berdaches* could have sexual relations only with other women, and adds that there were reports of female homosexual relationships among different tribes. While a variety of sexual behaviour among *berdache* men relates to the intermediate nature of their gender status, in *berdache* females and sworn virgins such variety of sexual relations does not exist.

Society's reaction

All three gender categories – sworn virgins, and male and female *berdaches* – were highly respected and accepted in their societies. Sworn virgins were fully accepted and respected (Young 2001, p.

65), while male and female *berdaches* were not only accepted in society but were viewed and respected as saints and inspired beings (Lewis in Thayer 1980, p. 288). Such acceptance is not always mirrored in contemporary society, which is often closed and individuals ‘come out’ of the closet to reveal that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

As Wilson (in Opheim 2010) notes: ‘Two-spirited identity is about Aboriginal concept of “coming into yourself”... an empowered identity that integrates their sexuality, culture, gender and all other aspects of who they understand and know themselves to be ... as opposed to just “coming out”.’ Antonia Young (2001, p. 113) adds that ‘to become a sworn virgin ... is putting on a role ... rather than an occasion on which some inner self is permitted to come out’. Although Sedgwick (1993, p. 46) assumes that ‘the closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century, the above categories (LGBT) are highly respected and recognised in society, therefore the concept of a “closet” cannot apply to them. Thus, it is no longer useful to think of these people as “coming out of the closet” if they have never been in it.’ Therefore, while two-spirit people value their attachment to the inner self, sworn virgins, as Young (2001, p. 36) notes, ‘put on a role’ to alienate themselves from their inner self. This is a very important point to consider, since it clarifies the larger theoretical concepts of gender and sexuality, and how they are shaped by different cultures and societies.

The present existence of these phenomena

The phenomenon of sworn virgins is becoming obsolete due to dramatic changes in Albanian society post-1991, which transformed women’s role in the family and the community. Nowadays men are no longer the breadwinners in their households, and women have gained a more respectable status¹² (Young and Twigg 2009). One argument is that the role and visibility of *berdaches* began to disappear soon after European or American control was established (Forgey 1975, p. 67).¹³ However, *berdaches* still exist and are recognised today, particularly by the queer community.¹⁴ Although, whether the term ‘two spirit’ can be used to refer to Native-American gays and lesbians is still controversial. While some might identify with the traditional *berdache* identity, others reject such identification (Lang 1997, pp. 109–115). Lang (1997, pp. 109–115) argues that identification is seen as a way to preserve old traditions that go far beyond sexuality. At the same time it makes them different from white gays and lesbians who define themselves according to their sexual preferences. It is therefore clear that some contemporary gays and lesbians may view any identification with historical *berdaches* as a powerful tool to legitimate their status and as necessary when it comes to recognising their roots within an ancient heritage. Affirming their identity with that of the ancient *berdaches* might be a source of power and pride, and may enable these people to fight homophobia. The same point can be made for women and gay men, or even as regards discrimination within and between minorities. Consider, for example, Gayle Rubin’s explanation to Judith Butler in *Gender deviations* of the origin of her oft-cited ‘charmed circle’ which had, ironically, very little to do with the hetero/homosexual binary, but rather focused on internal divisions within homosexuality itself.

By contrast, Williams (1986) argues that some modern gays and lesbians find the old historical *berdaches* too feminine or mystical to represent them, insisting that their distinct form of identity is different from the historical one. These arguments reveal that while identification with ancient *berdaches* is seen as a unifying factor for modern gays and lesbians, non-identification is seen as a way to assert a unique identity that differs from the ancient one.

Misconception and critiques on labeling sworn virgins and *berdache*

There are misconceptions when it comes to the use of inappropriate terminology which different authors and anthropologists employ when defining sworn virgins, and male and female *berdaches*. Some employ Western terminology related to cross-gender behaviour, such as transvestism, homosexuality, intersexes, transsexuals, gender mixing, transgender or 'third sex' (Callender *et al.* 1983; Roscoe 1998; Schnarch 1992; Young 2001). For instance, Shryock (1998 p. 113) writes of sworn virgins as 'virginal transvestites'. However, there is another implication which makes transvestism a non-relevant category: in psychiatric terms, cross-dressing or 'transvestic fetishism' is used to explain a heterosexual man, who is usually married and cross-dressed to gain erotic pleasure, while at the same time expressing a distinct inner self (Valentine 2007, p. 88).

Dickemann (in Young 2001, p. 117) calls sworn virgins 'transgendered individuals who have become social men leading masculine lives enjoying the traditional status role and identity of social men'. Antonia Young (in Lopasic 2001, p. 405) refuses to use the term 'third sex' or transsexuals, transgendered or cross-dressers to label sworn virgins, but rather considers them to be women who became 'socially men' for different reasons. In a similar way, Schnarch (1992 pp. 114–115) points out that many writers and ethnographers have somehow failed to explain the institution of *berdache* because they relied on the rigid distinction of sex and gender, in accordance with Western conceptions. By contrast, Schnarch assumes that the institution of homosexuality does not apply to male *berdaches*, because their sexuality was highly variable among different tribes (they could have sex not only with other *berdaches*, but also with other non-*berdaches*, male and female). Moreover, in his view male *berdaches* cannot be considered transvestites because of instances of weak men dressing in women's clothes in order to avoid having to fight. Their dress was also highly variable (Schnarch 1992, p. 115). Furthermore, Forgey (1975, p. 2) writes that the term *berdache* should be not mistaken for transvestism or cross-dressing, because their social status and gender were institutionalised changes, accepted by others. Another error on the part of non-natives and anthropologists is to assign *berdaches* the concept of intersex, because their genitalia have been proved. The misconception might rely in the terminology or the linguistic, as *berdaches* were considered half woman, half man (Callender *et al.* 1983; Schnarch 1992).

Finally, it is also inappropriate to categorise *berdache* males as transgendered (Schnarch 1992), since the term has been used to refer to 'any variance from imagined gender norms' (see also Valentine 2007, p. 14). Valentine (2007, p. 132) writes that 'identity categories such as gay or transgender can not account for the complexity of people's desires, understanding of self, and experiences'. It seems that labeling is merely a way to categorise those people who have been left out of the binary system of male/female. According to Foucault (in Halperin 1993, p. 416), 'sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given power ... it is the name that can be given to a historic construct'. Consequently, making categorisations and assigning labels to such categories can restrict our possibilities of understanding gender variances and diversities, as well as human experiences within different cultures and societies. In the same way, Valentine (2007) agrees this does not mean such labels are wrong and should not be used, despite the fact that such terms fail to explain the complexity of gender categories. He further argues that 'complicated topics

require complicated language' (Valentine 2007, p. 27). Therefore, it is important to understand clearly what the terms stand for, or what consequences their use might have.

Conclusion

In this article the author attempted to compare and contrast various accounts of gender categories, including sworn virgins, and male and female *berdaches*, that do not rely on Western terminology. It is important to recognise that a single term, *berdache*, was used to define both males and females among native tribes. This may be attributed to the individuals' intermediate status, i.e., between woman and man.¹⁵ Most importantly, what makes all these gender categories fit within the same family of 'third gender' is the adoption of the gender roles, manners, dress and activities of the opposite sex. These can be understood as 'non-normative gender' (Valentine 2007) categories that go beyond Western notions of gender and sexuality. These gender categories showed many similarities, but also differed in many respects. Reasons for choosing to assume the identity of the opposite sex varied, and depended on social, economic, political, emotional and cultural factors. Individuals in all these categories engaged in at least one activity normally associated with the opposite sex. While sworn virgins and female *berdaches* would dress, behave and perform activities associated with males in a rigid way, male *berdaches* were less rigid in following the same path. Their behaviour was freer and also varied among different tribes. One condition for becoming 'socially men' was that a sworn virgin had to take a vow of celibacy, whereas no such condition was set for male and female *berdaches*. While sexuality among *berdache* men varied from asexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality, promiscuity and marriage, the sexuality of *berdache* women was limited to bisexuality, homosexuality and heterosexuality. Even though same-sex relations were reported among sworn virgins, no author found any mention of their sexuality. All sworn virgins, and male and female *berdaches* were fully accepted in their societies.

Finally, while the number of sworn virgins decreased due to women's empowerment in Albanian society, *berdache* males and females began to disappear due to American colonisation. Some say sworn virgins still exist (Young 2001), while *berdaches* seem to be recognised within the queer community.

Again, it is worth emphasising that sworn virgins, and male and female *berdaches* are considered unique categories, and should not be interpreted as homosexuals, transsexuals, transvestites, lesbians, cross-dressers or transgender. It is relevant to refer here to queer theory, which is based on different sets of political movements, mobilisations and academic activities working against conventional lesbian and gay identity politics (Gamson 1995). In terms of queer theory, fixed identity categories that produce binaries such as gay/straight, man/woman are 'both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power' (Gamson 1995, p. 391). 'Queer' has been used as an umbrella term to highlight differences between people, but also membership of one family that shares a common identity. Thus, GLBT people can be included in the category of 'queer', as can people of colour. Therefore, 'queer' has been used as an identity category based, on the one hand, on the struggles between assimilation and sameness, and on the other hand on ideas on separation and difference (Gamson 1995).

It is important to look and think beyond the Western dichotomy, rather than labeling with Western terminology. It may be prudent to refer to 'alternative varieties' in terms of gender roles. These categories break apart the notion of gender normatively; they can be seen as cross-cultural gender variations that need to be analysed in more detail. It is vital to recognise the difficulties in understanding gender variables that do not necessarily fit to a Western binary gender system. Without names, categories and labels it would be hard to understand such gender variety. The idea of anxiety stemming from an inability to label such categories appears in Valentine's book *The logic of inclusion: Transgender activism* (2008), where the author states that upon labeling such categories, the anxiety disappears. Numerous self-identified transgender persons constantly repeated: 'I know what I am' (Valentine 2008, p. 108), and in similar way these gender categories 'know what they are'. The problem may lie in the way we perceive things and try to interpret them, which is somehow different from what these 'others' think of themselves. Valentine (2007, p. 135) notes in regard to self-identified transgender persons: 'They were exactly what they were. Rather, a powerful system of binary gender and sexed bodies produced them as ambiguous.' It is therefore important to avoid labeling variant gender categories, especially when referring to historical and non-Western phenomena. Defining and labeling certain categories with Western concepts erases the possibility and complexity of such categories in different cultures.

A queer dilemma

Queer activists argue that sexual and gender identities are not fixed, solid, politically grounded and natural, but rather fluid and always changing, thus identities are not given or naturally divided into distinct groups such as man/woman, gay/straight. For example, gay discourse argues that people are not 100 per cent gay or straight, feminine or masculine, but rather, that they are ambiguous. They advocate for a re-examination of what constitutes a man or a woman. Therefore, it is obvious that binary categories are oppressive and inaccurate, if neither biological differences nor gender (which is socially assigned) account for being a man or a woman. For instance, transgender people or people with ambiguous sexual desires in particular subvert those binary categories that are supposed to be fixed and natural (Gamson 1995).

On the other hand, essentialist concepts about sexual minorities are very important for both resistance and political gain. In fact, collective identities are deemed very important for bringing about successful collective action and awareness, as far as a number of movements are concerned. The problem is that if membership of a certain group is highly ambiguous and unclear, it is quite difficult to claim rights and protection for a group with minority status. It is also difficult to make claims without a solid group identity. Thus, collective identity is used to gain legal benefits and state protection. Therefore, clear identity categories are dangerous, but they are nevertheless important (Gamson 1995).

In a similar way to queer activists, many authors have critiqued the supposed naturalness of sexual and gender categories. Wittig, for instance, points out that what we consider to be 'woman' is in fact a myth: being a woman is something which is performed and constituted through the reinforcement of compulsory heterosexuality, but it is also accompanied by given natural characteristics. Wittig

(1993, p. 104) asserts that by ‘admitting that there is a natural division between women and men, we naturalize history, we assume that men and women have always existed and will always exist’. However, while queer theory aims to deconstruct all identity categories, Wittig sees the deconstruction of the class of ‘woman’ and particularly the deconstruction of heterosexuality, as possibly enabling lesbian survival. Furthermore, gender and sexuality are seen to be in constant change, and as the products of imitation. Butler (1991, p. 21), for example, notes that ‘gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original’, whereas Foucault (1997, p. 168) asserts that sexuality is a social construct – because gender and sexual identities are constantly evolving and therefore do not have clear boundaries.

Again, given the fluidity of sexual and gender categories, it seems (according to queer activists) that individuals can shift from one identity category to another, and that such movement is merely a matter a choice or preference. Dugan (1994) compares queerness to religion, in which people can freely chose whether or not to convert. However, by contrast, identity is not totally fluid and shapeless: there are specific representations that shape identity, such as power, social relations and cultural representations.

Finally, from the above arguments it can be deduced that sexual and gender categories are proven to be socially and historically constructed by hegemonic social discourses. Therefore, queerness is offered as an alternative to non-heteronormative identities and lifestyles. It aims to deconstruct and denaturalise an identity which is, in fact, another problematic issue for gay and lesbian activism. The problem is the particular notions of a ‘collective identity’ and ‘shared oppression’ that encourage a range of political and social actor to empower certain ‘minority’ groups such as gays and lesbians. What is interesting about the queer social movement is its solidarity and sense of being united by the idea of ‘sameness’ and similarity, while at the same time reinforcing the distinctions that exist between them and others.¹⁶

My concern in labeling same-sex practices as homosexual is that it becomes very difficult to understand whether sexual relationships between two persons of the same sex, but of different genders, can be referred as homosexual. Given the above arguments it is clearly difficult to break away from dichotomous notions of female/male in analysing gender and sexuality. As noted, even within the so-called ‘homosexual relationships’ among *berdaches*, it was important for ethnographers and writers to determine which was the passive and which the active role, in order to make such sexual practices fit into Western categorisations. Much emphasis is still on the idea that those who do not behave in accordance with their biological sex (assigned at birth) and who fall outside socially constructed gender roles, are regarded as somehow ‘different’. Many scholars therefore see it as their duty to find suitable names and labels to categorise such individuals or groups. However, this is a problematic situation, given that such categorisations narrow the variety of gender categories in keeping with our binary system. It is therefore vital to understand gender and sexuality as culturally constructed concepts, and as Gamson (1998, p. 590) argues, ‘historical and social products, not as natural or intrapsychic ones’.

Notes

- 1 Sworn virgins from Northern Albania and *Berdache* Native-American Indians are chosen for comparison since they have more similarities than 'third gender people' and since both categories are now extinct.
- 2 The term is used to refer to those women whose anatomical sex was female but would change their gender roles from female to male, thus meaning that they would behave and adopt the activities of the opposite sex (Young 2001).
- 3 This term, although not explained in detail, is used by Gremaux in his book *Women become men in Balkans* (1994).
- 4 This practice was reported among Pawnee and Yankton *berdaches*, prairie and plains tribes, the Hidatsa and Algonquian.
- 5 This practice is found among the Teton Dakota, the northern Plains and the Mohave (Schnarch 1992).
- 6 The Oedipus complex sees boys and girls experiencing intense yet unconscious feelings for the parent of the opposite sex. The boy experiences the fear of castration and his object of love is the mother, whereas the girl blames the mother for not having a penis. Moreover, in girls, the object of love changes from the mother to the father (Freud 2003).
- 7 Western dichotomy refers to the rigid division as male/female, homosexual/heterosexual.
- 8 Cases were reported among the Kaska Indians. According to Williams (1986), during the ritual of transformation parents tied the dried ovaries of a bear to a girl's belt to wear for life, as protection against conception.
- 9 For example, Mohave *hwamewere* known as excellent providers, hunting for meat, working in the fields and caring for the children of their wives; Cocopa *warrhameh* established households just like men did and fought in battles, while Kaska males allocated tasks (Blackwood 1984, p. 31).
- 10 This is most often the case with Kaska tribes (Goulet 1996, p. 685).
- 11 This practice was reported among the Southwestern tribes, Mohave *hwame* and Maricopa *kwiraxame* (Blackwood 1984, p. 29).
- 12 Antonia Young (2001, p. 65) points out that sworn virgins still exist, but are less likely to be recognised.
- 13 The oldest documentations on *berdaches* date from the 17th century, from European travellers in North America. More detailed records appeared during the late-19th century, although recent studies into the phenomenon have continued. Many North-American cultures disappeared before they could be studied by anthropologists, which makes it difficult to interpret their history and life experiences (Roscoe 1998).
- 14 See Tully, M., n.d.
- 15 Blackwood (1984) uses 'intermediate gender roles' and 'gender mixing' between male and female, to refer to the status of *berdaches*.
- 16 'Others' here refers to the rest of the population.

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Book reviews

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Jane Bennett and Charmaine Pereira, eds. 2013. *Jacketed women: Qualitative research methodologies on sexualities and gender in Africa*. Claremont: UCT Press. ISBN: 978-1091989-558-1.

Do gender researchers approach their subjects differently from the way other researchers approach theirs? Should they conduct their research according to particular ethics and methodologies? These questions have been discussed for decades by scholars such as Sandra Harding, Liz Stanley, Linda Alcoff, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak. The general consensus, which is appropriate for the postmodern academic landscape where decentralisation and micro-knowledge are the order of the day, is that gender research should, itself, be gendered. One of the most important working principles of research into gender is that it should not ‘speak for’ the research subjects. A more appropriate position for enunciation is, in Trinh T. Minh-ha’s words, speaking ‘next to’ or ‘adjacently to’ those who are being researched. This involves the researcher placing him/herself on an equal plane of enunciation with the subjects of research and enabling those subjects to be heard equally or perhaps heard even more loudly than the voice of the researcher.

This, then, is the playing field where *Jacketed women* belongs. Editors Jane Bennett and Charmaine Pereira do not engage in their introduction with the topic of voice, besides noticing (p. 2) that ‘there is a classic (by now) tradition of research orientation, which works at/on the meaning of “voice” and the politics of privilege and location’. The matter of speaking is more dramatically examined in Bennett’s final chapter in the book, through the example of Khwezi’s ‘speech’ against Zuma in the now-infamous rape trial. When opening the volume, Bennett and Pereira pay careful attention to the politics of location in the researcher, who, they note, is frequently occupying ‘gendered and sexual identities’ and the appropriate ways of dealing, in research, with matters such as talk, sexuality and cultural translation. It is possible that they omitted comment on the matter of speaking for and to the subjects of research, because they believe this to be a debate whose outlines are so well known that it does not bear repeating. This omission, however, becomes symptomatic of a slight limitation on the book’s market: it is noticeably pitched more at the specialist scholar than at the beginner researcher.

In this context, *Jacketed women* offers an array of essays and articles that exemplify research into gender in the African context. These are beautifully punctuated by Zanele Muholi’s evocative photographs of African women, drawn from her anthology, *Faces and phases* (2010). The

photographs become bookmarks, indicating shifts in research topics. Taken together, the essays cover some of the most important sub-fields of research into gender: widow inheritance, sexual misconduct, lesbian marriage, abortion and teenage pregnancy. Each essay both performs and reflects on the appropriate research methodology for approaching the topic. Karabo Mohlakoana-Mosala's essay offers a highly self-reflexive discussion of the challenges of research into gender. Mohlakoana-Mosala begins by locating herself through her own journey as a developing researcher with an interest in teenage pregnancy. She makes the crucial point that

[n]arrating my 'research' thus involves rethinking my life, moving between and across different periods of time, and this kind of movement suggests that my past is tied quite closely to the steps taken to conduct the study on sexuality, as well as to the way that that research unfolded as a process. (p. 24)

She is also, crucially, the originator of the book's title: a 'jacketed' woman in the religious context of Lesotho is one who has earned a special position of privilege. The title therefore speaks to the position of privilege occupied by gender researchers. Bennett and Pereira explain:

'[J]acketed' women [are] honoured and privileged by access to education and resources, and by the way in which others perceived us as 'good' women. Our 'jackets' could also affect our intellectual and imaginative selves, organise our bodies and minds in ways which sat awkwardly with our own aspirations and dreams (p. 3).

Wearing the 'jacket' of a feminist researcher, they argue, entails navigating and negotiating between existential and personal difficulties with honest self-reflection; it also involves focusing as much explicit attention on the processes of research as on its findings.

Conspicuously, the researchers whose work is collected in *Jacketed women* are all women and they are all involved in research into women, despite the volume's title as a collection of research into 'gender and sexuality'. The absence of research into masculinities is an aspect that could have been productively addressed from a number of possible scholarly and theoretical angles. For example, it can be argued that the people who most keenly experience gender dynamics are women (especially in the context of such practices as widow inheritance and HIV/AIDS care). Seen from this perspective, the people who 'have' gender, for whom gender is visible as an axis of identity, are women rather than men. Nevertheless, this does not detract from an outstanding collection of scholarly and ethical research into the state(s) of gender research practice in southern Africa. Students and more established researchers alike will find much to learn from this excellent volume.

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Graeme Reid. 2013. *How to be a real gay: Gay identities in small-town South Africa*. KwaZulu-Natal: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. pp. 24–38 ISBN: 13 978 186 914; 10 186 914 2438

How do homosexual men, particularly those in small-town South Africa, negotiate a (gay) identity which is caught, as it were, between two almost opposing poles of influence? On the one hand a constitution which has been hailed as one of the most progressive and exemplary in the world in terms of its recognition of, respect for and protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA) rights, and on the other hand a country in which tradition, and traditional values and culture, exert an influence of almost gravitational force in terms of its dismissal of homosexuality as a product of Western import and therefore fundamentally *un-African*.

The title of the work was inspired by an eponymous series of workshops held in October 2000. The workshops, together with events such as Miss Gay Queenstown (2000), served as the medium for the exploration of gay self-identification which not only mediated, but is also a means of addressing, the nod of approval provided by the South African constitution to the LGBTQIA community, and to LGBTQIA identity and rights. In addition, they come to represent a component of (or independent response to) an international LGBT movement. Finally, the workshops come to echo the anti-apartheid struggle in their capacity as a site of resistance. These constitutional rights ultimately serve as a barometer or litmus test for any constitution claiming (or aiming) to protect its ‘weakest and worst’ (p. 15).

Problematically, however, being a ‘real gay’ in small-town South Africa is a gay identity which is strongly (almost exclusively) predicated on a range of stereotypical notions such as, for example, that homosexual men have a natural predilection towards creative enterprises such as hairdressing and fashion. In addition, the ‘gayness’ of the ‘real’ small-town gay (by extension its authenticity) is located in the performance of a distinctly hyper-feminine model of masculinity (and gender) which ultimately does not subvert any gender roles, but instead reinforces the stereotype which dictates that in a male same-sex relationship, one partner is expected to play the masculine role, while the other is expected to play the feminine role. Simply stated: in a gay relationship one man is the man, and the other is the woman.

The ‘real’ gay is therefore not a gay after all. The hyper-femininity of the man (who has sex with men) who self-identifies as feminine and female, particularly in terms of adopting stereotypical gender and sexual roles such as passivity and submission, enables the construction of a same-sex sex act in which the active partner (who demonstrates a corresponding hyper-masculinity) is then

able to self-identify as a straight man, thereby avoiding classification as a homosexual man. This, of course, ultimately serves to reinforce the belief that homosexuality is, in fact, un-African. This belief, according to the findings of the research, is located in the unquestioning acceptance of gender difference, which forms 'the basis for erotic activity in male same-sex relationships' (p. 30) amongst the gay inhabitants of these small-town communities.

So, at the end of the day, this is perhaps not entirely about stereotypical gender roles, but rather about the tenacity with which these roles are adhered to in these specific male same-sex relationships, which form the subject of the study. It should of course also be taken into consideration that the results of this study, as indicated in the title, are context specific. This means that the location of the argument in a specific context makes the interpretation of the final product not only somewhat biased, but distinctly limited as well, in that in this case it caters almost specifically to a stereotypical construction and adoption of gender roles by virtue of the fact that this appears to be the predominant feature characterising these relationships and identities.

While this may indeed be the case on the one hand, an additional problematic arises which, on the surface, appears to address and challenge the dismissal of the gay African identity as an *un-African* anomaly. This problematic takes the form of fashion, and the association which is made between the concepts of fashion and contemporary gay lifestyles. Drawing strongly on the idea that gay men possess a natural inclination towards industries such as fashion – which itself is seen as emblematic of modernity – and reinforced in events such as the beauty pageant which formed part of the original impetus for the research, an identity is established which appears to rest between two conflicting poles of origin and influence. While gay men, as mentioned, are stereotypically associated with consumer-focused areas such as the fashion industry, and the men examined in the study (specifically the 'real gays' or *ladies*) equally stereotypically perpetuate this cliché, what occurs as a result is a gay identity which could effectively be seen as cancelling itself out, as it were.

This is due to a paradox inherent to the fashion industry. On the one hand, the *ladies*, too, become emblematic of modernity and the quest for modernity, albeit from the marginalised position of a sexual and social minority. Theirs, too, is an identity which is modern, and given South Africa's own advances in the fashion industry, theirs is also an African identity – a modern African identity. However, the very location of this identity in the realm of fashion also means that this identity is capricious, flighty and largely determined by trends and measures of popularity and public consumption. The gay African identity in this regard becomes something which, though emblematic of modernity on the one hand, is also unstable, unpredictable, transient and ultimately insubstantial on the other hand. While the author does indeed acknowledge the problematic nature of the association made between the construction of this particular segment of gay African identity and the ephemeral nature of the fashion industry, the research provides very little indication regarding a suggested theoretical response to, or a way forward from, this juncture.

Problematically, the research seems to indicate an adoption of an almost completely Western gay identity and, by implication, the (perhaps unintended) negation or dismissal of the recognition of an authentic *African* gay identity. In addition, owing to the adoption and perpetuation of Western,

heterosexist and heteronormative positions regarding gender and sexual roles, as well as the equally stereotypical association made between contemporary gay lifestyles and creative industries such as fashion and hairstyling, one is also encouraged to question the extent to which the *ladies* of these small-town South African communities demonstrate or embody a response to (or even result of) the international gender equality and human rights movement. While it could certainly be said that there has been a marked increase in the visibility of gay groups and communities in South Africa since 1994, coinciding with democratic and constitutional developments made in the country, the immediate and overwhelming impulse remains, however, to question what Reid himself refers to as ‘the primacy of gender roles in same-sex relationships’ (p. 49).

At the end of the day, the problem could effectively lie in the practice of naming and categorising and, by implication, in the act of (self)-identification. The highly problematic dynamic of stereotypical gender roles adopted in the same-sex relationships examined by Reid leads one to question the legitimacy of the impact made by the international LGBT rights movement on sexually marginalised communities. This is, of course, particularly relevant to those communities existing on the fringes of a country whose history has been permanently scarred by the discrimination and segregation of individuals on the basis of (amongst others) race and sexual orientation. The international LGBT rights movement was centred on the emancipation of individuals who had been (and continue to be) persecuted and oppressed because of their sexuality. These individuals were classified as deviant because of the behavioural patterns associated with their classification. The categories of deviance were located under the Western rubrics of ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’ and exist in opposition to a heteronormative frame of reference. Western systems of categorisation and self-identification dominate the relations and, indeed, the communities explored in the study. It does, however, remain clear that the imposition of a Western system of categorisation (particularly the stereotypes and clichés emanating from within these categories) is also one which confines sexual practice to a limited and limiting binary, which threatens the modes of expression (and by extension the very existence) and occurrence of practices outside the parameters of the binary. So, while the *ladies* and *gents* examined in the study may or may not be the ‘real gay’, it may in fact be because there simply is no other word for it.

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Brenna M. Munro. 2012. *South Africa and the dream of love to come: Queer sexuality and the struggle for freedom*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press. 352pp. ISBN: 978-0816677696.

An axiomatic ‘rainbow nation’, in 1996 post-apartheid South Africa was the first country in the world to recognise gays and lesbians as full citizens in its constitution. Brenna M. Munro’s book, *South Africa and the dream of love to come: Queer sexuality and the struggle for freedom*, informed by queer cultural studies and historiography, sets out to systematically chronicle the changing (and often contradictory) status of queer sexuality and citizenry in South Africa, as presented in diverse literary and artistic media. This book places particular emphasis on the often disregarded role played by queer citizenry in the construction of new imaginings of the ‘rainbow nation’.

In the introduction, Munro systematically traces queer sexuality in South Africa from the 1960s right through to the present day. She explores the ramifications of queer sexuality and identity on the closely interconnected discourses of nationhood, sexuality and race. In the introductory chapter, Munro exposes how in the period between the 1960s and the 1990s, queer sexuality was considered at once as a ‘perversity of apartheid’ (p. viii) and paradoxically also as an extended metaphor of the mores of the authoritarian apartheid regime which had attempted to control, for the sake of social purity, the sexuality of all South Africans. She moves on to show how this conception of queer sexuality and identity changes to fit into the scope of the creation of a multiracial democracy, as from 1994. Munro’s main thesis in this introductory chapter, as in the entirety of the book, is that queer sexuality is a pivotal locus of power relations and transformation in the fledgling democracy of South Africa.

The book is organised into three major sections, each composed of closely related essays. In the first section, entitled ‘Fraternity and its anxieties’, Munro examines several prison narratives that she contends made it possible for the emergence of mainstream gay rights in South Africa. Not only does she convincingly argue that prisons were an important space for the proliferation of homosexual and homosocial behaviour, she also contends that queer prison narratives played a central role in creating a protest culture against an imposing trope of the depravity of apartheid. In this first section she surveys the intersections of homosexuality and whiteness through an interrogation of multiple opposing ‘imagined fraternities’ which bring to light different relations to nationalism and sexuality. The paralleling of whiteness and queerness reveals the manner in which both are in a precarious and uneasy state, in the face of the end of apartheid.

Entitled 'Gender, apartheid, and imagined spaces of nation', the second section analyses several literary texts by apartheid-era writers. These texts befuddle post-apartheid discourses on sexuality as a result of a specific vision of imagined topographies of the nation. The overarching argument in this section is that South African literature from the 1980s offers a different set of opportunities for envisioning the intersecting notions of sexuality and race in the desired democratic nation of the future. Munro is convincing in examining the production of queer sexuality in the post-apartheid public culture; paralleling the delicate new legitimacy of queer citizenry with South Africa's struggle for multiracial democracy.

The ultimate section, 'Writing the rainbow nation', examines literary and artistic productions that engage with issues of nationalism and sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa. For example, by bringing to conversation the works of Nobel laureates Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee, Munro analyses the struggles of white middle-class South Africans as they grapple to integrate themselves into the post-apartheid 'rainbow nation'. These fictional white middle-class South African families equally have to deal with the homosexuality of their offspring. Munro argues that the gay sexuality of the younger characters represents the creative destabilisation of whiteness, as it attempts to carve its own place in the new socio-political dispensation. The final chapter of the third section is particularly fascinating for the manner in which Munro offers a comparative analysis of the literary oeuvre of the late writer K. Sello Duiker and contemporary lesbian photographer Zanele Muholi. Munro analyses how Duiker and Muholi reflect on the emergence of a queer township culture in post-apartheid South Africa. She considers at length the manner in which contemporary lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) activists and artists such as Muholi steadfastly decline to be viewed as emissaries for post-apartheid South Africa, and refuse to be stooges for the professed disillusionments in the face of enjoyment of civil liberties by different citizens of the new 'rainbow nation'.

The overall strengths of this book lie, first, in its unique and thought-provoking contextualisation of queer citizenry in different historical periods in South Africa. Munro's book is punctiliously comprehensive and theoretically solid, and offers an admirable and effective mix of history, theory and literary and cultural analyses. Second, the text provides a comprehensive historical and contemporary outline of important issues on sexuality, race and citizenry in South Africa's struggle against apartheid, as well as its transition to democracy. Munro does not downplay the struggles that remain in the fight by LGBT individuals for full inclusion in the democratic space and processes in South Africa, which certainly centres on freedom of expression, association and liberal thought. She equally calls attention to the fact that the new legibility of queer identities can lead to a disregard of indigenous marginal sexualities and practices, thus representing them as both backward and outmoded.

Perhaps one key weakness of this book, on a thematic level, is the lack of a nuanced justification of why little is said about lesbianism. Despite attesting in the introductory chapter to the ostensible invisibility of lesbianism and female same-sex intimacies, Munro does not offer a plausible explanation as to why they are not caught up in the anti-apartheid and democracy discourses. Except for the enthralling analysis of the photographic oeuvre of Zanele Muholi, Munro ostensibly sidelines female queer sexuality and intimacy.

Analytically and stylistically, another apparent failing is that Munro occasionally tends to rely on the excessive use of long quotes from secondary sources to make her point, jumping between quotations without exhaustively explaining how these support each other, as well as the thesis argument. Moreover, the quotes from the primary literary texts of analysis could also have been explained in greater detail. This weakness is, however, more than made up for by the simplicity and accessibility of the argument.

South Africa and the dream of love to come: Queer sexuality and the struggle for freedom is an insightful text that undoubtedly deserves a place on the bookshelf of any student or person interested in the history of queer sexuality and identity, as well as its artistic representation in South Africa and indeed other African countries. The volume of clearly articulated information in this book makes it an important read, whether one approaches it for theoretical insights into queer theory and citizenry or for its geopolitical implications and contexts in South Africa. Munro has certainly learnt from the diverse criticisms of queer theory, and her book is thus both intelligible and readable in its reflections on the multiplicity of LGBT experiences and artistic representations.

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Julia T. Wood. 2013. *Gendered lives: Communication, gender and culture*. Australia: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. pp. ISBN: 978 11333 074 1911 3330 7418.

Julia T. Wood's 10th edition of *Gendered lives* does not really need an introduction. That it is a tenth edition is itself a testament to the significance of this text. For both academics and students alike, it is considered to be a foundational work – most especially for undergraduates. This review is therefore simply a reiteration as to why this book is, and should remain, an essential source for those teaching and studying gender issues, whether in the fields of cultural studies, media or visual studies, developmental or sociology studies.

The book traverses a diversity of themes, from theoretical discourses framing the discussion of gender (masculinity[ies] and feminism(s) and queer theory, although post-feminism is notably absent) to gendered communication and gendered media, as well as practical or lived gendered lives (gender and work environs; gendered relationships; and gender and violence, for instance). The title of the book succinctly and accurately captures the contents and so, at a glance, the reader is immediately provided with insight into its subject matter.

What makes this book exceptional, however, is that it grounds all the theory and academic discourse within the lived lives of everywo/man. By this I am referring directly to the way the book is structured: it has block quotes in which women and men comment on their own direct, personal experiences of gender issues, relating specifically to the topic being discussed. These accounts range from 'Andrea' (p. 3) relating her stance on feminism and why she refuses to call herself a 'feminist'; to 'Keith' (p. 216) commenting on his masculine friendships and how he bonds with his male best friend. These are extremely significant, because Wood takes complex and intricate (often abstract) concepts and makes them accessible and relatable. This is not ivory tower philosophising, but the phenomenological positioning of the theory as it relates to us: you and me. By providing these intimate and often highly personal comments and shared experiences on gendered issues (from gendered rape to gendered domestic violence), it gives the reader a reference point, engages with us on a personal level, and in my opinion makes us think of gender issues in a completely new way. Wood encourages us to engage with the consequences of gendered concerns without being preachy or moralistic. These highly personalised accounts make gender real, raise our awareness of gender in our own societies and cultures, and in so doing challenge us to reflect on what we might often take for granted, or do not take cognisance of.

This also extends to the many case studies Wood provides: of gender being overcome and of gender trauma (see the case study of Fauziya Kasinga of Ghana and her experience of forced genital surgery [p. 307]; and also MukhtarMai of Pakistan on overcoming gang rape and her refusal to commit suicide from shame [p. 315]). Not only are these extraordinary stories of men and women overcoming gender, they also offer an insight into international gender concerns. The cover of Wood's book boldly announces that it is an 'international edition', and indeed it is. South Africa itself features (unfortunately) with the inclusion of the horrific act of 'corrective rape(s)' (p. 297). But these fascinating case studies and personal inserts are not limited to only the heinous and the shocking. Included are the more general gender and media issues (hip-hop, advertisements, magazines and pornography) and how they affect an individual's body image and self-esteem; discussions on gender and education, with arguments for and against same-sex schools; and even on the gender bias prevalent in university hierarchies.

The book seemingly covers everything to do with gender: from defining or redefining feminism to clitoridectomies and male circumcision to gendered policies and inequalities. This is both its strength and its (minor) shortcoming. Many of these topics are brief (if comprehensive), but if readers are looking for an in-depth analysis or critique, then they will need to look elsewhere. Although Wood has pre-empted this as well, quite simply by providing references that are almost all-encompassing (and in almost every instance inserted within the text), she directly refers the reader to further studies/discussions. Despite this, I found myself identifying gaps in her coverage – unfair, I know, because it is impossible to cover every concept, idea or practice in gender, especially when Wood has already rendered such a stellar and comprehensive account. Still, I would have liked her to mention post-feminism, New Queer Theory, issues related to social media (such as revenge pornography sites) and the new movement of 'pornyes' (a movement where women have claimed the term 'porno' and made it positive; the women are not only performers in the adult film industry, but more importantly, they are now the producers and distributors of the porn industry and have control over the creative side and the dissemination of the end product). Regardless of my personal ambitions for even more inclusive themes, Wood is to be commended on an outstanding academic work that navigates the academic and the personal, raises the reader's consciousness and challenges academe.

This book should be considered critical reading for all scholars and students in the humanities.

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Gayle S. Rubin. 2011 *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin reader*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Gayle S. Rubin, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Women's Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, made her first impact on feminist and gender theory in 1975 with the publication of her groundbreaking essay 'The traffic in women: Notes on the "political economy" of sex', in which she introduced the term 'sex/gender system' as a corrective to what she saw as the conceptual limitations of the word 'patriarchy' for theorising gender and sexuality. When 'Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality' (a 'protoqueer' text that became foundational to queer studies) was published in 1984, she had already established her reputation as a fearless and often controversial pioneering theorist of the politics of sexuality and an activist on behalf of sexual minorities, which brought her into open conflict with some sister feminists – notably those spearheading the anti-pornography lobby. As the title of this timely reader of Rubin's work suggests, her essays are *deviations* from norm and doctrine in their sustained and reasoned refusal of convention, including those givens of feminism, and in their centring of the idea and practice of sexual deviance as intellectual concerns that are always, inextricably, both personal and political. (Rubin's explicit appropriation of the terminology of 19th-century sexology is significant and the lineage of the term 'deviant' is comprehensively engaged in her essay 'Studying sexual subcultures'.) Her stated objective in 'Thinking sex' to 'contribute to the pressing task of creating an accurate, humane, and genuinely liberatory body of thought about sexuality' (p. 145) underpins the trajectory of the career mapped in her key essays and subsequent reflections on them in afterwords, postscripts and an interview conducted by Judith Butler included in this reader, which, in its entirety, stands as a necessary reminder of the role feminism should play 'as a progressive, visionary force in the domain of sexuality' (p. 275), especially when confronted by the cooption of its discourse by right-wing agendas.

Reflecting on the retrospective imperatives of writing the introduction to *Deviations*, Rubin uses geology – a 'recreational obsession' of hers (p. 2) – as an analogy to situate the essays as 'artifacts of very particular circumstances' or 'different matrices' which 'manifest a consistent lineage of theoretically interconnected interests'. The aptness of the analogy is increasingly evident as one reads through the sequence of essays – each 'something like a piece of amber that preserves' a particular cultural moment and place, to use Rubin's description of 'The traffic in women' (p. 12) – and her later reviews of them in which additional contextualisation deepens one's understanding of their significance, both then and now. She returns to this analogy in her final essay in the collection,

‘Geologies of queer studies: It’s déjà vu all over again’, elaborating it into the central metaphor for an argument that warns Queer Studies against ‘the glitter of the current, the trendy, and the new’ (p. 355) that obscures its roots in influential pioneering early scholarship, often ignored or forgotten. Although addressing scholars of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (GLBTQ) cultures that fall under the rubric of Queer Studies, Rubin’s warning and suggested alternative that ‘[a]ny scholarly project can benefit from an accumulation of knowledge that can be evaluated, validated, criticized, updated, polished, improved, or used to provide new trails to investigate’ have resonance in the broader academy where the metaphor of the cutting edge is wielded, frequently blindly, in pursuit of that will-o’-the-wisp ‘the new’.

Here, too, Rubin’s own work sets the example by meticulously tracing these intellectual genealogies back to collaborations between 19th-century sexologists and their patients – ‘the doctors and the perverts’ (p. 352) – through the 1960s and 70s when sociologists like Howard Becker, John Gagnon, William Simon, Jeffery Weeks, Nancy Achilles, Kenneth Plummer and Mary McIntosh (to name a few of the many, including historians, she recovers and re-establishes as canonical) conducted innovative research on homosexuality and deviance, which was also ‘extraordinarily subversive’ in ‘[g]iving equal consideration to the opinions of disreputable deviants, respectable citizens, and authoritative officials’ (p. 320). More than just the compulsions of an inveterate archivist, which she undoubtedly is (some of the most delightful anecdotes included in the frequent autobiographical excursions that enrich Rubin’s writing recount her adventures in tracking down archives of various kinds assisted by fascinating fellow enthusiasts), the comprehensive listing of prior and contemporary research that influenced her professionally and personally, while having the function to conserve and inform, is also indicative of the integrity of Rubin’s scholarship which is consistently shaped by this protocol of acknowledgment. The six pages of acknowledgements with which *Deviations* begins and the detailed notes to the essays and extensive bibliography with which it ends supplement the archival value of the essays themselves and are an invaluable resource for established and new researchers in feminism, gender and sexuality, specifically for those focusing on GLBTQ cultures.

Moreover, in a society in which the corrective rape and murder of lesbians continue to go unpunished and are implicitly condoned by a Minister of Arts and Culture who walked out of an exhibition that included photographs of nude lesbian couples, which she described as ‘immoral’, much is to be (re)learnt from *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin reader* about the imbrications of sex, gender and politics played out on the vulnerable bodies of those on the margins of the heterosexual centre and from the long history of anti-homosexual crusades that coincide with moral panics of various kinds that it traces. As Rubin reminds us, ‘[o]ur desires can be as selective, exclusive, and imperious as we like; our society should be as inclusive, humane, and tolerant as we can make it’ (p. 251).

