

Intersecting identities

Race, sexual politics, and place in the discourses of young, gender non-conforming 'coloured' persons on Cape Town's urban peripheries

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inequalities and justice:

influences, effects, intersections and evidence



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love
class
agency race
sexual politics
Southern Suburbs
gender non-conforming
personal/political
performance
Cape Flats
place

Background

- Little research conducted on the possibilities of expressing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexed, and queer identities in peripheral and predominantly 'coloured' suburbs in the Western Cape of South Africa.
- Most studies have centralised the ways that heteronormative values give rise to, and sustain, violence against black African lesbian women residing in South Africa's townships.
- Existing studies have excluded the specific experiences of persons living on the peripheral suburbs of Cape Town, in spaces designated as 'coloured' through forced removals.

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

Doing feminist research: intersections and situated-ness

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

Central concern

- To explore the intersections between race, gender, class, and sexuality in the lives of gender non-conforming young people, in specific spaces, at a particular moment in history.
- Emphasis on geographic situated-ness and its ties with race: provides a lens to explore how space and its interconnections with the socio-economic, mediates the experience of gender non-normativity.

The participants

- Localised and context-specific study conducted over 13 months.
- 31 participants (8 biological men and 23 biological women) in 10 communities.
- Cape Flats: Bellville-South, Bridgetown, Delft, Elsies River, Grassy Park, Kuils River, and Mitchell's Plain.
- Southern Suburbs: Ottery, Lansdowne, Rondebosch East, and Wetton.

On space & safety

Nadia: So around Rondebosch-East, Wetton, Lansdowne, where would you be able to go as an individual gay man or as a couple? Where you would be able to express yourself freely?

Zakaria: Everywhere

Bevan: There are places like...

Zakaria: Not outside the Mosque

Bevan: But like in Moslem Wembley

Zakaria: That's very true but that was never a joke, hey

Bevan: No, there are places that have strong....

Zakaria: Masculine and homophobic...

Bevan: And also religiously, if you go to Lansdowne for instance, where there's a Muslim population and in Islam it's not okay to be gay, it's harder, it's difficult to go to a place that has a strong religious environment, it's difficult to be comfortable. I didn't feel comfortable in holding his hand in front of all Muslims, thinking that a hate crime could happen, they could have ... done something to us, so I was reluctant to be his boyfriend.

Lansdowne, Southern Suburbs, Cape Town

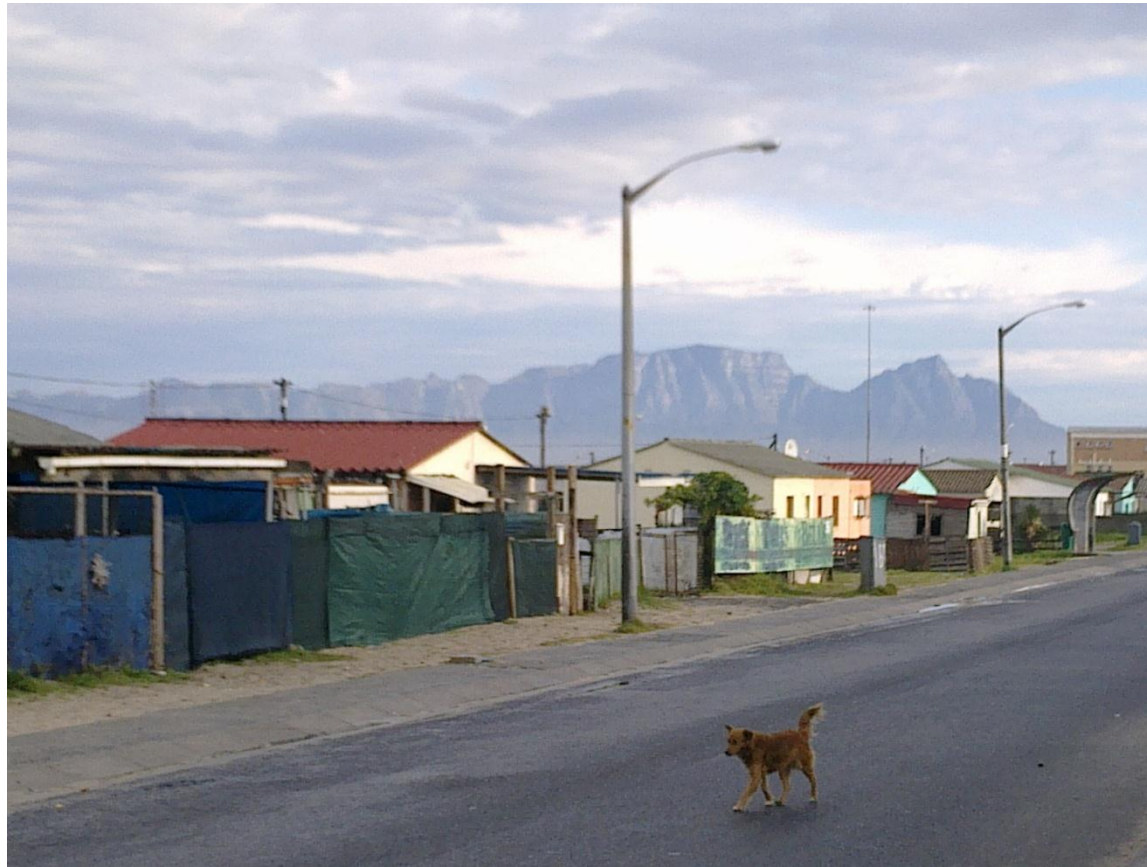


On class & independence

If I felt like I could not be financially independent with my parents, I couldn't be strong in my identity 'cause I was dependent on them. How can I assert my identity? My identity is now dependent on them because I'm dependent on their money (Zakaria, 24-year old gay man, Rondebosch-East).

I can't be the person that I really wanna be because I don't have a job and I don't have a stable place. That is keeping me back in my life (Coco, 23-year old transgendered woman, Mitchell's Plain).

Tafelsig, Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town



Space, sexuality & race

All of the clubs within the CBD to me are predominantly white, with the exclusion of *Rosies* which is situated a block from other clubs, so race definitely plays a role. There's interplay between the type of clubs and the race [of people] who frequent them (Selwyn, 23-year old gay male, Bellville-South).

Difference, excess, & intersections

Our rights are violated much more. In terms of the remarks, in terms of the rape, the abuse, physical abuse, the way they categorise us, in terms of fighting against this. I would say socially I don't think there's much more we can do. We can try and form more groups but I think forming more [groups] just shows other people or straight people that *we are groups*, we're different. That is wrong - that's why I enjoy being part or supporting any group, whether we're standing for feeding the cats on campus, support just to show that there is no difference. There are no differences between me and the next person, especially when it comes to sexual preference (Sarah, 22-year old lesbian, Bellville-South).

On agency and resistance

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