

# QUEER(Y)ING FREEDOM

## Black Queer Visibilities in Postapartheid South Africa

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On any given Thursday night, the residents of Soweto gather around their radios to listen to the salacious radio show *Cheaters*. Inspired partly by the US-based television show of the same name, and broadcast on Jozi FM, the radio show encourages disgruntled lovers who suspect their partners of infidelity to call in and have the radio station investigate.<sup>1</sup> The show asks, “Are you having a problem with your lover? Infidelity, *Uyajola?*”<sup>2</sup> If the answer is affirmative, the parties are asked to call a hotline number. Typically, the investigation takes several weeks, but at its conclusion the disgruntled lover, his or her partner, and the person he or she is being unfaithful with are invited to the radio station. The invitation often involves some form of deception, as the idea is generally to attract the unfaithful lover and his or her accomplice to the station unaware of exactly why they are there. What follows is a raucous exchange of words between the wronged party, his or her lover, and the person with whom he or she is cheating. Unlike the American version of the show, which is screened on television, the radio version in Soweto is broadcast live and encourages audiences to comment and participate. Thus the pleasure of listening to the show comes not only from hearing the battling parties reveal the most intimate details of their dysfunctional relationships in the most graphic detail but also from the commentary and questions from the listeners who call in. Furthering the public humiliation of the parties is the fact that a large crowd often gathers outside the radio station itself, to catch a glimpse of the players. The aggrieved party receives offers of support and encouragement, while those considered on the wrong side of this moral play are subjected to verbal, and in some cases physical, abuse.<sup>3</sup>

Predictably, this radio drama plays out in ways that are specifically gendered and heteronormative. Overwhelmingly, those who seek redress in the public forum are women who have been wronged by unfaithful male lovers. This often

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pits the “good” faithful woman against the “bad” wanton woman who is the man’s paramour. Not surprisingly, the men in this scenario are not usually the target of commentary or public scorn. Men calling the show to investigate the infidelity of female lovers are far less common. This is partly because of a certain machismo constructed around South African masculine identity where it is assumed that a man can handle issues of infidelity on his own, without getting others involved. Furthermore, because of gendered hierarchies inherent in postapartheid South Africa, men whose female lovers cheat on them with other men are more likely to receive scorn than support, because accusers are made less masculine in this process. This is because it is assumed that these men either could not sexually satisfy their partners or could not exert appropriate masculine control over their women.

One important exception to the involvement of men as accusing parties is the number of gay-identified men who have called in to complain about unfaithful lovers.<sup>4</sup> On one particular night in 2005, a gay man confronted his “straight” male lover about his infidelity.<sup>5</sup> The lover was fairly unrepentant and even went so far as to laugh openly about his infidelity and to boast that he had played his partner for money. In essence, he explained to all who would listen that the basis of the relationship was purely financial, and now that he had milked the duped gay man dry, he was moving on to greener pastures (presumably the other man with whom he was cheating). Then he stated that other “straight” men should, like him, realize the financial possibilities of relationships with gay men and similarly take advantage of them. “Brothers, let’s fuck these gay guys and take their money.” Immediately a number of young male callers phoned in, offering to help the unfaithful man in his enterprise. They offered their services, suggesting that they too would be willing to play the game, assuming the price was right. The aggrieved gay man lashed out, “I have been screwing you; you bitch! Why don’t you tell your home-boys that? I hope they are prepared to give up their ass as easily as you were, ’cuz that’s the only way they’re getting any money!” Whether or not his assertion was true, he certainly upset conventional wisdom on the nature of same-sex relationships in Soweto, and this particular episode of *Cheaters* caused quite a sensation, as it became fodder for the Friday morning taxi commute, which serves as a primary version of “water cooler” talk in Soweto. These conversations after the fact revealed a lively public debate, much of which centered on the appropriateness of the increasing visibility of queer relationships and queer people in the black public sphere.<sup>6</sup>

This example animates many of the central concerns of this essay on black queer visibilities and the creation of freedom in postapartheid South Africa. For black queers, equal, if not more, importance must be paid to a notion of free-

dom that rests on forms of cultural belonging (family, community, culture, nation, and race) that retain their salience in the postapartheid era and cannot be fully accounted for by the state. As such, black queer struggles for recognition and respect are less about a challenge to the state (although this is important, particularly when state actors invoke culture to exclude black queers) than about a challenge to how black subjectivity is performed and imagined as heteronormative in the public sphere. Black queers actively challenge how their bodies are marked as the constitutive outside of blackness.<sup>7</sup>

For the South African queer activist Mikki van Zyl, belonging is a crucial construct that reveals the limits of human rights discourse for the most vulnerable queer South Africans. As a concept, belonging exposes the differential power relations that are sometimes obscured in the language of universal citizenship. Van Zyl writes:

Belonging is a thick concept which includes affective and cultural elements making visible the limitations of citizenship through contextualizing the politics and power dynamics in discourses of human rights. It [belonging] also allows us to focus on the everyday dynamics of oppression which form the bedrock of marginalization and Othering.<sup>8</sup>

Belonging neatly frames the main assertions central to my argument. First, I argue that while securing legal and political rights as encoded in the constitution is an important first step to creating the possibility of freedom for black queer subjects in postapartheid South Africa, definitions of freedom must expand beyond the legal, political, and the economic.<sup>9</sup> Second, black queers forge possibilities for belonging through deliberate destabilizations of heteronormative notions of black identity. Third, as a concept, belonging navigates the fraught relationship between forms of legal/constitutional freedoms and social and cultural freedoms, serving as an important reminder that the existence of the former does not guarantee the possibility of the latter.

The notion of freedom central to the arguments that I develop here is socio-cultural and is engendered through particular forms of cultural labor that increase visibility and create possibilities of belonging for black queer people in black social milieus. Heretofore, freedom has been typically conceptualized within the realm of political economy, with insufficient attention to cultural politics. Therefore, what is typically understood as necessary to exercise freedom is limited to forms of political representation or redistributive economic policy. In what follows, I insist on the interplay between the sociocultural, the sociopolitical, and

the socioeconomic, revealing cultural politics to be a fecund site for examining the processes of freedom, particularly as it relates to black queer subjectivities. Freedom must be understood not as a set of political, economic, and legal rights that exist a priori waiting to be conferred on an abject population but as a sociocultural construct that is given meaning and contested in communities through citizens' actions. Freedom in this context refers to the ability of black queer individuals to create forms of visibility that work to enable what Judith Butler calls "livable lives."<sup>10</sup> These livable lives are constructed through public naming and performance of gender and sexuality dissidence with the understanding that such public disclosures will not result in the curtailment of or loss of life.

Black queers create freedom through forms of what I term cultural labor. The cultural labor of visibility occurs when black queers bring dissident sexualities and gender nonconformity into the public arena. Visibility refers not only to the act of seeing and being seen but also to the process through which individuals make themselves known in the communities as queer subjects. Ultimately visibility is about recognition, since "it is only through the experience of recognition that any of us becomes constituted as socially viable beings."<sup>11</sup> How that recognition occurs varies and includes the range of sensory perceptions including sight, but also important for my argument, sound in the form of speech acts, public pronouncements, and the act of listening.

Black queers demonstrate that far from being a Western contaminant, queerness is embedded in black communities. The historian Marc Epprecht argues that forms of public dissident sexuality have the effect of "destabilizing invented nationalist fictions about African masculinity."<sup>12</sup> In this essay, I examine how black queer citizens rework the identities of apartheid South Africa and use the space created by legal changes to create new forms of visibility and belonging for themselves. However, in a departure from other recent work on black queer visibilities, I focus on the representational as a key battleground that cannot be separated from the material.<sup>13</sup> Even middle-class black queers struggle to access the rights enshrined in the constitution—not for lack of material resources but for lack of cultural ones—where blackness continues to cohere around heteronormativity.

Visibility for black queers in specifically black cultural spaces continues to be policed, and the cultural labor done by black queers to challenge the heteronormativity of blackness continues to be costly. Examples of the policing of black queers in specifically black cultural and political spaces are numerous. Recently, political figures such as Jacob Zuma and Lulu Xingwana have garnered controversy because of homophobic comments they made in the public sphere. Zuma

stated that in his day, gays would not have dared to make themselves visible in front of him, for he would have inflicted bodily harm on such a person.<sup>14</sup> Xingwana walked out of a recent exhibit featuring work by the black lesbian photographer Zanele Muholi, remarking that her photographs were not only “pornographic” but a threat to the project of nation building.<sup>15</sup> The council for traditional leaders called homosexuality un-African in stating their opposition to same-sex marriage in South Africa, arguing vociferously for the incompatibility of same-sex practices with “African culture.”<sup>16</sup> These remarks, and others, by political figures, both elected and unelected, work to create an environment whereby black queer bodies are subject to policing and violence. The recent high-profile cases of rapes, beatings, and murders of black lesbians combined with other forms of homophobic violence experienced by black township-based queers further archives the high level of resistance to black queer visibilities in specifically black cultural and political contexts.<sup>17</sup>

Queer visibility, then, is not only about finding acceptance for difference within black communities but also about a defiance and a subversion of blackness in ways that are potentially transformative, thus creating the very liberation promised by the constitution and giving freedom its substantive meaning. I highlight the cultural labor of black queerness to suggest how it destabilizes heteronormative notions of black identity formed through explicit forms of public desire and gender conformity. These destabilizations have the effect of creating additional possibilities for all South Africans to forge livable lives. In doing so, black queers reveal both the possibilities and the limits of the postapartheid state and the salient difference between citizenship and forms of belonging.

### **Freedom, Visibility, and Cultural Labor**

In 1996 South Africa became the first country in the world to provide protection for its gay and lesbian citizens.<sup>18</sup> Hence it also became the first state with a majority black population to provide these protections. Based on the fundamental notion of equality outlined originally in the Freedom Charter, the pertinent clause relating to queer citizens states,

The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.<sup>19</sup>

Several scholars have noted, however, the disconnect between the lofty language of the constitution and the real lived experiences of black queers in postapartheid South Africa.<sup>20</sup> In fact, as the social geographer Natalie Oswin details, the movement for Gay and Lesbian Equality represented by the Equality Project was able to successfully challenge homophobic legislation by creating the figure of the “black, poor, gay and lesbian,” who was imagined to be the putative beneficiary of the organization’s lobbying efforts.<sup>21</sup> This figure would have neither the economic nor the cultural capital to fully access the constitution’s protections. While much has been made of the lack of the economic capital central to accessing protections based on insurance, marriage, and inheritance, less attention has been paid to the lack of cultural capital for black queers. Furthermore, while black queers as a group can do little on their own to overturn centuries of capitalist exploitation, they can and do work to create spaces for themselves to be respected and accepted as black queers in their own communities. It is this discursive cultural work that is the primary focus of my argument.

The fact that these laws have yet to bear fruit for the majority of black queer South Africans seems to strike many scholars of sexuality in postapartheid South Africa as paradoxical. The cultural anthropologist Graeme Reid highlights this paradox when he argues that homosexuality occupies an intermediary space in postapartheid politics, serving as a “litmus test for the success of constitutional democracy—emblematic of a human rights based social order, [while being] cast as untraditional, as un-African, and as unchristian—a dangerous threat to the social fabric.”<sup>22</sup> However, I argue that there is little paradoxical about this representation (formation) of homosexuality at all; in fact, its ability in the South African context to be both representative of what the literary scholar Brenna Munro calls “democratic modernity” and a “threat” rests on the racialization of the queer body as white and the sexualization of the black body as straight.<sup>23</sup> That is, adding a racial analysis to a queer analysis reveals how the white queer body is emblematic of human rights protections used to position South Africa as a progressive queer-friendly tourist destination (for white queer tourists), while the black queer body remains the threat to African culture and tradition. The policing of queer bodies in postapartheid South Africa falls disproportionately on black queer bodies.

In other black spaces, this split does not exist. For a postcolonial black state, the split does not exist because the queer body is not allowed to be part of the black nation and therefore is not part of the citizenry. Numerous examples from Jamaica to Zimbabwe demonstrate the impossibility of the black queer national citizen. In diaspora formations where blacks are the minority, their belonging to

the nation is already always a vexed subject regardless of their sexual identity. One needs only to look at the riots in Paris or Hurricane Katrina to see this. South Africa, however, offers the possibility for the black queer subject to have a different kind of relationship to both national and cultural belonging. Unlike spaces in Europe and North America, South Africa is understood as an ostensibly black state. Yet, unlike Uganda or Jamaica, there is a sizable white minority presence that considers itself autochthonous to the nation. I suggest, perhaps provocatively, that the clause on sexual orientation in the South African constitution was not developed with black queers in mind. My statement is not meant to discount the important work done by such black queer pioneers as Bev Ditsie and Simon Nkoli. Yet despite their efforts, Jacklyn Cock reveals how the inclusion of the equality clause was in the main a negotiation between a rather conservative, white-male-led queer constituency and important black male leaders of the liberation movement.<sup>24</sup> For the black majority, queerness is racialized as white and blackness is heteronormative. Therefore, I contend that the equality clause as it relates to sexual orientation was part of a concerted effort to retain the white minority population in postapartheid South Africa by suggesting that even those most abjected under apartheid rule (white queers) would be safe in the postapartheid state.<sup>25</sup> Andrew Tucker shows how the apartheid state's prohibitions against "homosexuality" were directed almost entirely toward the white population, and in some instances the apartheid state encouraged or at least looked the other way when it came to same-sex sexuality among black South Africans.<sup>26</sup> To return briefly to Reid's formulation, it becomes clear that for black queers, it is white queer bodies that represent the litmus test for constitutional democracy while their own bodies represent the threat to social order in a postapartheid state that is the fear of a government led by the black majority.

On some fundamental level, black queer South Africans know and understand this fact. Thus for them belonging must occur simultaneously on two levels. First, black queers must be recognized and create visibility and belonging within their communities. The labor of creating this visibility then destabilizes the consistent representation of queerness as outside blackness and blackness as heteronormative. This visibility and belonging can effectively animate the equality provisions of the constitution. Unlike black queers elsewhere, who are subjected to exclusions of either their racialized or their queered bodies (or in some cases such as the United States their racialized queer bodies), black queer South Africans have the possibility of full recognition from the state because of their location in Africa and the protections of the constitution. Yet this recognition at the state level can be lived only through forms of black cultural belonging that are vital to black

queers, such as customary marriage practices. This point should not be overlooked by scholars and activists who seek to provide equal forms of protections for black queer subjects living elsewhere on the continent (or in majority black Afro-diasporic spaces like the Caribbean) under the auspices of human rights. Thus black queer attempts to gain freedom operate within this dichotomy between the state and community and are necessarily sociocultural in nature. While the state can create rights through legislation, it is only within the spaces of black communities that real protection lies.

Black queerness is important because it occupies this contradictory space in postapartheid South Africa. In what follows, I necessarily focus on the creative ways that black queers undertake labor to challenge their exclusion from forms of black cultural belonging. The cultural historian Robin D. G. Kelley argues that scholars should take a more expansive look at what is considered labor, particularly with respect to black communities in which forms of creative expression are labor.<sup>27</sup> I borrow this idea here to think about how the discursive labor of black queers is a form of creative vernacular expression that creates the space for black queer belonging. In this case, the cultural labor that I focus on is primarily discursive and representational because it is in this realm that black queers face significant exclusion and where they are most empowered to enact change.<sup>28</sup> I recognize that the forms of cultural labor black queers participate in are diverse and expansive and include television, film, literary, and visual art representation. However, I look specifically at forms of “quotidian conversations,” everyday discursive practices that work to create social spaces for black queer belonging as a less-examined archive for examining processes of black queer cultural labor.<sup>29</sup> These black queer challenges to exclusion are about a purposeful reworking of identity and refashioning of selves both individual and communal. Ossified identities, created and imposed by colonialism and apartheid, and variously contested and given meaning and significance by various different communities themselves, are under increasing pressures as people seek to (re)define themselves according to new sociopolitical realities. A significant part of this redefinition involves the appropriation and use of Western-origin identifications such as “straight” and “gay” and their relationship with local vernacular terms describing nonnormative sexual practices. This essay shows that these Western-derived terms do not simply obliterate local ways to describe gender and sexuality dissidence. Instead, the terms *straight* and *gay* come to take on additional meanings related to local understandings of gender and sexuality. Local vernacular terms coexist with and are at times used interchangeably with international and global terms. This practice fundamentally changes the meaning of Western sexual identity markers as they



come to describe a variety of positionalities, including cross-dressing and transgender identities for gay men and lesbian women and explicit same-sex desire for “straight” men and women not typically accounted for under the Western rubric of “gay,” “lesbian,” or “straight.” Likewise, the meanings of the local vernacular terms such as *injonga*, which often described sexual positioning, sexual acts, and public gender performance, are reworked into categories of sexual identity.<sup>30</sup>

### **“Economic Bisexuality” and Other Queer Notions: Who Is Penetrating Whom?**

I return to the opening ethnographic vignette to delineate how black queers appropriate public space, in this case the space of the airwaves, to create visibility for themselves. In appropriating widely held beliefs about transactional sex, the gay-identified man’s non-queer-identified lover attempted to buttress his own claims to heterosexuality by relying on forms of masculine gender performance such as suggesting that he was the insertive partner during sexual intercourse, as well as claims about explicit public desire such as insisting that he was not nonnormative in his sexual identity. Since neither party is visible to the general public, gender performance was enacted through language and vocal expression. In this instance, the gay-identified man spoke in a softer, more high-pitched voice. While his voice was not so high-pitched as to be confused with that of a biological woman, it did contrast with the low vocal tones, cadence, and township-inflected slang of his more masculine partner. Thus, although neither party was visible to the majority of the audience, members of the listening community could infer that the gay-identified man, based on his speech patterns and vocal inflections, was the more stereotypically “feminine” of the two men in public gender performance.

The gay-identified man in this partnership uses the public airwaves to create queer visibility. He insists that he is a “wronged” party who has been cheated on by an unfaithful lover, and he argues for the radical equivalence of his relationship with that of the numerous heterosexual relationships typically featured in the show. The gay-identified man invites the audience to identify with him and to have sympathy for him as a gay man involved in a same-sex relationship. This is important, since a strong component of the show is its moral impetus that suggests that cheating is always wrong and that the person being cheated on and deceived is worthy of community sympathy and support. In fact, the head of the radio station blunts criticism of the show’s more salacious and tawdry aspects by arguing that the show performs an important community service. Ostensibly, the fear of unwittingly becoming a part of the drama of *Cheaters* serves as a possible deterrent to

community infidelity.<sup>31</sup> The queer man, like his heterosexual counterparts, places his life on display for public consumption and possible ridicule. However, in the discursive terrain that has been preestablished, not only is he a sympathetic character, but the audience is expected to identify with him as the “good” guy as well. His cultural labor of calling in to the show because he experiences the same problem of infidelity as many of the women who make up the show’s core audience also “works” to humanize gay men and the queer body. The possibility of humanizing and destigmatizing queer relationships, of course, does not completely overturn preexisting homophobia that casts queer bodies as outside blackness. Yet the very location of the queer body at the center of this public cultural event embedded in Soutwestern culture creates the possibility for at least the momentary decentering of heteronormativity. This labor is important because it forms the basis of a necessary public dialogue about sexuality and queer bodies that is not contained in legal-judicial discourse. Whether this kind of labor has long-lasting tangible effects cannot be precisely known, yet one must presume that on some levels there is an expectation that it does. By insisting on inclusion in this particular public space, this queer man is breaking the silence around queer bodies and insisting on recognition.

Equally important is the labor done by the straight-identified masculine man in this scenario to discredit and pathologize the queer body while marking his own body as nonqueer. To do so, the straight-identified man relies on several important tropes that allow black heterosexuality to cohere around publicly expressed sexual desire and gender conformity. These very tropes are called into question both through the labor of the gay man on the radio station and through my own ethnographic work.

The straight-identified masculine man relies, in particular, on the trope of “economic bisexuality.” In an article detailing the queer sexual milieu of Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, the anthropologist Vinh-Kim Nguyen encounters a class of men who are described by his gay-identified male informants as “economic bisexuals.” As the term suggests, these men engage in sexual relationships with other men solely for economic gain. In the case of *Cheaters*, the straight-identified man argues that he falls into this category and delights and revels in the angst of his spurned lover, since in essence there was no actual “love” in the relationship—only material exchange. The category of economic bisexuality challenges the conceptual limitations of transactional sex as an analytic on the African continent. These men provide a counterpoint to the often-raced, heterosexist, gendered, and classed literature on transactional sex that posits black, poor, and working-class heterosexual

women as the primary agents of transactional sexual relations. Left uninterrogated are the ways in which many sexual relationships (even those among the Western bourgeoisie) are enacted with materiality in mind, and the ways that men may participate as agentic actors in pursuing “transactional sex,” whether with women or, in this case, with other men. However, Nguyen suggests that the term *economic bisexuality* is too simplistic a way to describe the complex technologies of the self that mark the motivations of these straight-identified men. He states:

[The] dismissal of bisexuality as “economic,” rational, and calculating was, I found, often inaccurate. For many youth, the acquisition of style was desired in terms of being “fashionable” or the pleasure of belonging to a secret community rather than being part of a conscious strategy for “getting” men. Homosexual relations could not be reduced to economic strategy, nor were they simply about experimenting with gender roles. Rather, as forms of self-fashioning they incorporated concerns that were simultaneously those of material and emotional satisfaction, pleasure and desire.<sup>32</sup>

It becomes impossible to reduce sexual relations of this nature to their transactional aspect. Nguyen’s precaution is important for the study of sexuality in Africa generally, and South Africa particularly, because it accounts for the complexity of sexual relationships that destabilize the generally accepted notion of these interactions as primarily transactional.

Regarding the radio show *Cheaters*, I suggest that the supposed transactional nature of the sex between the gay-identified man and his straight-identified masculine partner becomes a way for the straight-identified man to remove his body from queerness.<sup>33</sup> He accomplishes this by trading on commonsense understandings of the motivations for these relationships and to deny the queer man the equivalence he sought within the black cultural sphere that is accrued through the shared wrong of infidelity. If the relationship becomes solely transactional, then of course there is no equivalence with heterosexuality. The queer man is no longer the wronged party; rather, he becomes a predator using his financial might to corrupt an otherwise straight man into behavior the latter might not otherwise pursue. Furthermore, as the predator, the gay-identified man in this scenario functions in a colonial relationship with the straight-identified man. Thus, while removing his own body from queerness, the straight-identified man also removes the black gay man from blackness and toward whiteness.<sup>34</sup> I am not arguing here that South Africans generally find queerness more palatable if it can be couched in the language of transaction. However, I insist that in a situation of decreased economic

possibilities and astronomically high rates of youth unemployment, the body may be one of the few resources that a young person has that can significantly improve his or her life chances.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, relationships with individuals who can provide forms of material sustenance become, if not acceptable, understandable given the socioeconomic realities.

On more than one occasion I was told by several friends of mine that I could have a relationship with any young man or woman that I desired in the township. My relative wealth as an American who had access to education and financial resources would make me a desirable partner even among men who ostensibly had no previous interest in queer sexuality. The veracity of this claim, which I confess went untested, is less important than the fact that numerous people would make it to me. What it highlights is the complicated nature of sexual desire and the materiality of sex that suggests that the two can never be completely separated. Rather, desires for upward mobility occur through attachments that are both emotional and erotic. Yet the straight-identified man accused of cheating sought to disaggregate the sexual desire from material desire. In the case of *Cheaters* it is necessary to interrogate statements made about the transactional nature of the sexual act, for to speak of desire, love, and affection for their gay partners would cost these straight men their claim to heterosexuality. The popular discourse of transaction allows straight identity to remain intact.

In this scenario, however, the gay-identified man did not allow the straight-identified man to have the last word in defining the relationship. In one final defiant move, he revealed that if in fact the purpose of the relationship was transactional, the straight-identified masculine man earned the money not through the assumed role of penetrator in the relationship but by being penetrated regularly by the gay-identified, more feminine man. As numerous scholars have opined, queer relationships, particularly those centered in township spaces in South Africa, have often operated based on a strong butch-femme aesthetic, with butch and femme articulated around both gender performance and sexual role (top or bottom).<sup>36</sup> Masculine men and feminine women who identify as straight form relationships with gay-identified feminine men and lesbian-identified masculine women.<sup>37</sup> As the anthropologist Amanda Swarr revealed during her discussion of queer sexuality, butch-femme relationships “render same sex sexuality intelligible within [black] communities. They make it easy for families to understand ‘gay’ relationships because they pair masculinity with femininity.”<sup>38</sup> Swarr further states, “Gender and sex are produced . . . through sex acts themselves in which partners articulate their respective genders.”<sup>39</sup> Queer relationships then become visible through the assumed conflation of straight identity with gender-conforming

public performance and appropriately positioned sexual acts. Straight masculine men penetrate gay feminine men; lesbian masculine women “penetrate” straight feminine women in this scenario.

The gay man in the *Cheaters* scenario as well as my own research among gay-identified feminine men in Soweto presents a striking challenge to this commonsense notion of queer relationships. For instance, Monday evenings are a surprisingly popular party night in townships in the Johannesburg area including Soweto. On these nights various “Monday blues” and “stokvel” parties are held to ease people back into the week.<sup>40</sup> Several of these parties are known to be either gay or gay-friendly venues. During one particular party, several of my gay friends worked their magic on the dance floor as they enticed masculine straight-identified men with their dance moves. Later in the evening I learned that one of my friends, Thuso, had successfully hooked up with one of these masculine men as his partner for the evening. He shared a laugh with me later as he recounted his tale:

When we got back to my place I was all ready to be ravished by this straight guy. I mean he was a real man and I was expecting a good fuck. Instead he looked me dead in the eye and said, “We are both men here so I will fuck you and then you’ll fuck me.” I almost died. Needless to say this ruined the mood for the evening.<sup>41</sup>

I found the idea of my thin, rather frail-looking, feminine gender-performing friend being considered a “man” by his butch masculine sexual partner and desiring penetration from him to be equally humorous.<sup>42</sup> In their 1994 essay on gay sexuality in Guateng, Hugh McLean and Linda Ngcobo called such men *imbubes*. Evidently these are “men who go 50–50” in sexual relations and are therefore sexually versatile.<sup>43</sup> Although my friend chose not to indulge his partner’s request for sexual versatility, I learned that this was not always the case. While many of the feminine gender-performing gay men were reluctant to admit that they had penetrated some of their straight-identified partners, others boasted of their exploits. I was stunned as my feminine friend Mandla pointed to the numerous men in his neighborhood whom he had fucked. While he disavowed seeking out this kind of sexual practice, he ultimately stated that “if they ask me to do it, then I’ll do it. . . . I get asked to do it a lot.” Neo, another feminine gay man, had this to say:

Well it’s all about having fun right? I mean when I was younger I would never, that would just end the whole thing. But hey if they want some meat

I'll give him some meat. It's all about having a good time and pleasing each other.<sup>44</sup>

What my research shows is that in the Johannesburg townships, a high degree of sexual versatility occurs in a lot of these relationships, although both parties are often reluctant to admit it, precisely because of the destabilizing effect such admissions can potentially have on forms of queer belonging, particularly as it relates to what Swarr has identified as the ability of the community to understand and therefore possibly accept such relationships. In other words, butch/femme creates possibilities for black South African queer belonging. The gender/sex system of public gender-conforming performance buttressed by particular sex acts is placed in crisis by the possible inversion of presumed sexual roles. I suspect the more stereotypically feminine gay man would have likely kept quiet had he not been so thoroughly humiliated by his ex-lover. By bringing his philandering partner on the show, he reveals the power of black queerness. First, black queerness destabilizes the heteronormativity of blackness by presenting black queer relationships as equivalent to heterosexual ones. Second, in his performative utterance, the gay-identified man forces the audience to rethink his lover's motivations for the relationship. Public proclamations of desire, or in the case of his philandering lover, the lack of explicit queer desire, do not suffice to instantiate heterosexuality. Third, public gender performance does not reveal either sexual desire or sexual identity. That is, masculine gender performance does not guarantee exclusive heterosexuality or that the masculine partner is insertive and therefore dominant.<sup>45</sup> It is this explosive revelation that shows the danger of black queerness to destabilize black heterosexuality, since even the most masculine of men can be "fucked."

### **I'm a "Double Adaptor": Emergent "Bisexuality" and New Identities**

Above I explored how relationships between gay-identified and straight-identified queer men rest on understandings of explicit public desire, transaction, and gender conformity. Yet these understandings when held to closer scrutiny were challenged by the cultural labor of gay-identified queer men who claim public queer identities. Here I explore what it means when many of these formerly straight-identified, gender-conforming partners begin to understand themselves as and openly identify as bisexual. Significantly, much of the literature on black queer identities in postapartheid South Africa has focused on the emergence of sexual identity in relation to gay and lesbian identities. Work by McLean and Ngcobo, Swarr, Donald Donham, Reid, and Tucker has heretofore focused on how black

queer South Africans, when confronted with new social and political identities both nationally and internationally, came to understand themselves as “gay” or “lesbian.”<sup>46</sup> Less attention has been paid to what these changes in forms of social identities might mean for the gender-conforming partners of many of those who have adopted the gay and lesbian terminology.<sup>47</sup> I argue that changes in queer identity, that is, the rise of explicit nonheteronormative identities of gay and lesbian in postapartheid South Africa, have also given rise to a class of people who have begun to think of themselves as bisexual. Significantly, this label has been adopted by both men and women who in previous years would not have adopted any kind of identity label to describe their sexual practices. Importantly, in black communities, these individuals have been able to maintain straight identities because of their gender-conforming behavior and the fact that they still continue to publicly have relationships with members of the opposite sex. In this section, I discuss the rise of bisexuality as descriptor in black communities as yet another way that black queerness both becomes visible and destabilizes forms of black identity based on heteronormativity. The fact that those whose gender performance and presumed sexual role would allow them to defer queer identity choose to adopt bisexuality challenges heterosexualized conceptualizations of queerness that are built on models of penetration.

The late *kwaito* star Lebo Mathosa came out as bisexual in 2004 after years of speculation about her sexuality. Mathosa, the dance diva who has been described by many as the *kwaito* generation’s Brenda Fassie, has been one of the most controversial figures in black public culture for over a decade.<sup>48</sup> Initially members of the multiplatinum-selling *kwaito* group Boom Shaka, Mathosa and her female counterpart Thembi Seete were often criticized for the hypersexuality of their dance routines. Traditionalists and feminists alike were concerned that Mathosa’s presentation of her exuberant sexuality and her brash onstage performance persona suggested both a degradation of “traditionally demure” female sexuality and the objectification of women as sex symbols. Mathosa was well aware of the constant commentary about her body as a hypersexualized figure and defended herself on two fronts: first, by suggesting that she was weaving together an aesthetics of the African diaspora by incorporating dances from West and Central Africa, Jamaican dancehall reggae, and “traditional” South African coming out/initiation dances; and second, by insisting that what she presented onstage was a performance that was not meant to be taken literally as a true reflection of her personal desires or wishes.<sup>49</sup> Mathosa was continuously dogged by rumors of drug use and outrageous sexual practices. She herself fueled much of the speculation by suggesting that her sexual persona was for the consumption of not just

heterosexual men (the presumed target of her performances) but gay and lesbian fans as well.

Throughout her too brief life, Mathosa was coy about her own sexual preferences. Despite the fact that she often performed at gay and lesbian events, and socialized in black queer social spaces, she never confirmed what many people suspected, that she was a lesbian. In two separate interviews Mathosa denied she was a lesbian.<sup>50</sup> In both cases, the interviewers linked rumors of her drug use with rumors of her sexuality into a discourse of excess, the notion being that Mathosa presented a form of wild or uncontrolled femininity outside the normative roles of black women in South Africa. Commenting on whether her image was too forceful for a South African public, Mathosa states, "I could have changed my image and look to be more feminine and timid, but I wanted to continue with what I have already made of myself."<sup>51</sup> Commenting on rumors about her sexuality, she denied being a lesbian and argued that the rumors of lesbianism and drug abuse were part of the territory of being a celebrity. She suggested that the rumors might also be good for her, for if she were a boring person, no one would bother to speculate about her behavior. Yet what intrigues me in these numerous interviews is Mathosa's attempt to rehabilitate her image through denying lesbianism, and the pervasive attempts by the media to equate drug abuse with lesbianism. Once again, the queer body, in this case the queer body of a black woman, must enter the public discourse through pathology and social depravity. Even in denying that she was a lesbian, Mathosa suggested that there is something inherently "wrong" with same-sex practices by reinforcing the notion that the very rumor of same-sex preferences constitutes something that is negative and designed to bring her down.

Therefore, it was unexpected when during a live radio interview Mathosa admitted that she was bisexual. After telling her fans on air that she was an open book and that people should feel free to ask her anything, a female caller took Mathosa up on her offer and asked if she were a lesbian. After a slight pause, Mathosa revealed that she was "bisexual," a "double-adaptor" in her own words, who enjoyed the pleasures of men and women. The origin of the term *double-adaptor*, like much slang terminology in postapartheid South Africa, is unclear. According to the *S'camto Dictionary*, *double-adaptor* is translated as "bisexual."<sup>52</sup> The double-adaptor slang terminology may come from the popular pin plugs that most South Africans use that plug into electrical sockets and then can take differently shaped plugs. In one sense, the notion of being a double-adaptor emerges from commonsense notions of penetration, since this particular plug fits into an electric socket and can also be plugged into. But the fact that *double-adaptor* appears in the *S'camto Dictionary* speaks to the widespread use of the term in



specifically black township-based youth public culture as a term for a queer-identified individual who is separate from “gay” or “lesbian” and describes both identity and behavior that are considered separate from gay and lesbian.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, the media seemed less fascinated by this explanation of Mathosa’s identity; her coming out as bisexual elicited little response from both the mainstream and tabloid media. The only image that caught my eye in the weeks after the coming out was a picture of her in the *Sowetan* promoting an upcoming performance in which she was identified in the caption as having recently come out as bisexual. I would like to offer another anecdote through which to explore the notion of bisexual identity. At a 2003 party held in Meadowlands Soweto, four friends and I (who were all openly identified as black gay men) were enjoying ourselves at a party when we decided to leave early because of some damage our car had received. I was involved in a conversation with one of the young men at the party, and when I told him that we were leaving, he insisted that we stay. Confused as to why our presence at the party would make any difference to him, I asked him quite bluntly what it was to him if we remained or left. He shocked me by saying, “Well to tell you the truth, I’m bi.” I assume that left unsaid in this declarative statement might have been the phrase “and I am interested in/attracted to one of you guys.” When I told my friends about the revelation, they were surprised. However, their surprise was not that the person might be interested in one or more of us romantically; rather, it was that he would couch his interest in the sexual identity of bisexuality. Marco, one of my friends, explains, “Things are changing in South Africa. I mean ten years ago, you would never have heard a boy, especially a township guy like him, say he was bi.”<sup>54</sup> My friends suggested that other norms of behavior were also changing because of the shifting discourse of sexuality and the increased salience and visibility of gay and lesbian identity in black spaces. “Guys used to hold hands and be very physically affectionate with one another. You see that less often these days as such behavior seems to be considered gay.”<sup>55</sup> While I would like to leave aside for the purposes of this essay the interrogation of the second claim, I would like to explore further the first, which is that bisexuality as a descriptor of sexual behavior as well as sexual identity is a possibly new construct in the constitution of black queer publics, and to ask what work bisexuality does in shifting understandings of black queer sexuality and making it more visible.

Consider Mathosa, on the one hand, and the unnamed young man, on the other, as both enabling the creation of bisexual identity within black queer publics. Increasing visibility of a particular kind of queerness, that of gay and lesbian identity, with its associated commonsense markers of feminine gender for men and masculine gender for women has had a direct effect on their gender-conforming

partner's sense of identity. Just as many of these same people may not have previously identified their sexual practices as sexual identity and now deploy the terminology of *gay* and *lesbian* for political strategy and self-fashioning, their formerly straight partners similarly have begun to access bisexuality. Part of this is the effect of the South African constitution, which cannot in its very nature define rights on the basis of unnamed queerness. Yet part of the rise in bisexuality as an identity for black queers must also rest on forms of self-fashioning and an increasing awareness of what bisexuality allows these individuals to achieve: the ability to attract potential partners and demand visibility and respect for themselves outside heteronormativity. Again, bisexuality might be called an emergent form of belonging in black Soutetan culture.

The fact that a gender-conforming individual, in this case either Mathosa or the young man whom I met at the party, would publicly queer his or her identity when he or she does not have to speak to a shifting terrain of identity made possible precisely by the rise of gay and lesbian identity in postapartheid South Africa. These individuals shift some paradigms in the discussion of sexuality in many non-Western contexts, which tends to be overly theorized on the basis of active-passive relations that rely on the notion of penetration and gender performance enacted through sexual roles. Many of these bisexuals may enjoy a fluidity of roles in their sexual practices, including "top," "bottom," and "versatile" sexual roles. With this definition of bisexuality, it then becomes possible for a gender-conforming man or woman who performs conventional gender practices publicly and takes on the assumed sexual role appropriate to that gender performance to be queer by adopting bisexuality as an identity. Furthermore, such individuals, if they do not have sexual desire or sexual relations with the opposite sex, can even adopt *gay* or *lesbian* as identity markers. Both sets of individuals, the gender-conforming gay or lesbian and the gender-conforming bisexual, work to destabilize heterosexuality, since neither gender conformity nor sexual role signifies heterosexuality as it may once have been assumed to do so.

### Conclusion

I have argued that black queer South Africans are not able to enjoy fully the privileges encoded in the South African constitution as *black* and *queer*. I suggest that this is because cultural politics consistently mark the black queer body as the constitutive outside of blackness and the queer body is subsequently racialized as white. This creates a conundrum for black queers, who are caught outside

both the representational and the material realities of queerness. Lacking both the economic capital to benefit from provisions related to marriage, insurance, and inheritance, and the cultural capital to be inclusive of blackness, they enact different forms of discursive labor to shift the cultural politics of blackness and argue for their inclusion into black communities as explicitly black queer subjects. As of now, while black queers may enjoy the protection of the state, such provisions cannot guarantee that these protections will have any real meaning in their lives. The current regimes of representation do not allow black queers to experience their lives wholly. To experience freedom in postapartheid South Africa, the black queer body must enter either a deracinated queerness or a blackness divorced from sexuality. Realizing this, black queers struggle against definitions of blackness that are inherently exclusionary and heteronormative. These exclusive definitions of blackness mean that freedom for most black queers remains elusive. To create possibilities for freedom, black queer South Africans enter the discursive realm and enact forms of cultural labor, even forms of belonging, to destabilize the heteronormative construction of blackness. By claiming discursive visibility in the public sphere, black queers work to create the possibilities for freedom.

This possibility for freedom as an explicitly queer subject has implications for black queers worldwide. Black queer South Africans are not estranged from the state by their blackness, nor are they estranged from the state by their queerness. They are, however, estranged from realizing the freedoms enabled by the postapartheid South African constitution by their black queerness. This estrangement is one that cannot be resolved at the state level but must occur in communities that ultimately can provide safety and security to black queers and thus make the rights of the constitution meaningful. If black queers could get to a point in South Africa where they were accepted and respected in their communities, then they could take the first steps toward creating radically different forms of black cultural and national belonging that do resist heteronormativity. For now, however, this remains only a possibility and not a full realization. This essay is an exploration of one way that black queers will continue to labor within the means they have available to push past the limits of blackness and make the promises of the constitution a reality.

## Notes

1. Jozi FM is a Soweto-based station. Formerly a community-based radio station, it is now being run for profit.
2. *Uyajola*, in this particular case, might translate loosely as “Is he or she fooling around?”
3. A strong part of the show’s appeal is the ethical element, where there are clear “good” and “bad” people. In this sense, like all “reality” television, the various parties have a strong incentive to play to type. Furthermore, while the premise of *Cheaters* is loosely based on the American television show of the same name, there exists a vibrant and antecedent storytelling tradition of radio dramas in South Africa that often follow the soap opera tradition of melodrama. These shows are presented on state-owned African-language radio stations and often play out with clear villains and heroes. While *Cheaters* is “reality,” it is clearly scripted by the hosts in a similar genre.
4. During the time that I listened to the show in the fall of 2005, I never once heard a lesbian couple call in to the show.
5. An abundance of literature on queer identities in South Africa speaks about gender-conforming men who identify as “straight” having sex with gender-nonconforming men (often, but not always, gay identified) and retaining their identity as straight. For more discussion of this phenomenon, see Hugh McLean and Linda Ngcobo, “Abangibhamayo bathi ngimnandi (Those who fuck me say I’m tasty): Gay Sexuality in Reef Townships,” in *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1995), 158–85; Donald Donham, “Freeing South Africa: The ‘Modernization’ of Male-Male Sexuality in Soweto,” *Cultural Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (1998): 8; Amanda Lock Swarr, “Moffies, Artists, and Queens,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 46, no. 3 (2004): 76–77; Graeme Reid, “How to Become a ‘Real Gay’: Identity and Terminology in Ermelo, Mpumalanga,” *Agenda* 67 (2006): 137–45; Reid, “‘A Man Is a Man Completely and a Wife Is a Wife Completely’: Gender Classification and Performance amongst ‘Ladies’ and ‘Gents’ in Ermelo, Mpumalanga,” in *Men Behaving Differently: South African Men since 1994*, ed. Graeme Reid and Liz Walker (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005), 205–29; Andrew Tucker, *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity, and Interaction in Cape Town* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); and Tucker, “Shifting Boundaries of Sexual Identities in Cape Town: The Appropriation and Malleability of ‘Gay’ in Township Spaces,” *Urban Forum* 21 (2010): 107–22.
6. *Queer* is used in this essay primarily as an analytic. Following the earlier work of Marc Epprecht, *queer* refers not to a sexual identity but to a way to think through how “nonnormative [genders] and sexualities infiltrate dominant discourses to loosen their political [and cultural] stronghold.” Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press,

- 2004), 15. In his later work, Epprecht suggests that *queer* functions as “an antiessentialist approach to researching gender and sexuality that is open to the whole range of human sexual diversity.” Marc Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 13. For more on the use of *queer* analytically in South(ern) Africa, see Epprecht, *Hungochani*, 11–16, and *Heterosexual Africa*, 15–20.
7. The concept of a constitutive outside is indebted to Judith Butler’s use of this term to describe how the normative is constituted by what is excluded or its constitutive outside. Butler used this formulation to discuss how same-sex desire relates to heterosexuality. In this case, I am suggesting that for black communities, queerness represents a similar constitutive outside. For more discussion of Butler’s concept, see Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
  8. Mikki van Zyl, “Beyond the Constitution: From Sexual Rights to Belonging,” in *The Prize and the Price: Shaping Sexualities in South Africa*, ed. Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl (Cape Town: HSRC, 2009), 367.
  9. During apartheid, there were four designated racial categories: white/European, Coloured, Indian/Asian, and black/African. Blackness took on a political dimension during the fight against apartheid. This political blackness, perhaps akin to the US terminology “people of color,” developed out of the black consciousness movement and encompassed Coloured and Indian identities. For the purposes of the present essay, I use the term *black* as it is generally used popularly in South Africa and in the communities where I did research. Therefore, when I use *black*, I am not referring to Indian and Coloured South Africans.
  10. For more discussion of the concept of livability, see Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
  11. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 2.
  12. Epprecht, *Hungochani*, 22.
  13. See Tucker, *Queer Visibilities*, 13. Tucker seems to identify a danger in “focusing at the level of representation and limiting an understanding as to how materialities that surround, limit and give opportunity to different communities can go to affect representations.” While I am sympathetic to this danger, I argue for the importance of examining representation qua representation and make the assertion that questions of culture and representation are already always constitutive of materiality. See also Stuart Hall, “Subjects in History: Making Diasporic Identities,” in *The House That Race Built: Original Essays by Toni Morrison, Angela Y. Davis, Cornel West, and Others on Black Americans and Politics in America Today*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 289–99.
  14. The exact quote from Zuma was as follows: “Same-sex marriages are a disgrace to the nation and God. . . . In my day an *ungqingili* [considered by many Zulu-speaking

- black queers as a derogatory term for a gay person] would not have stood in front of me. I would knock him out.” For more information, see “Zuma Earns Wrath of Gays and Lesbians,” *Mail and Guardian*, [www.mg.co.za/article/2006-09-26-zuma-earns-wrath-of-gays-and-lesbians](http://www.mg.co.za/article/2006-09-26-zuma-earns-wrath-of-gays-and-lesbians) (accessed December 3, 2010).
15. Lulu Xingwana was quoted as saying that the pictures were “immoral, offensive and going against nation building.” For more discussion, see Hlengiwe Mnguni, “Minister Snubs ‘Porn’ Exhibition,” *news24.com*, [www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Minister-snubs-porn-exhibition-20100302](http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Minister-snubs-porn-exhibition-20100302) (accessed December 3, 2010). For more commentary on the controversy, see Gabeba Baderoon, “On Looking and Not Looking,” *Mail and Guardian*, [www.mg.co.za/article/2010-03-09-on-looking-and-not](http://www.mg.co.za/article/2010-03-09-on-looking-and-not) (accessed December 4, 2010).
  16. For a larger discussion of the House of Traditional Leaders and Their Opposition to Same-Sex Marriage, see Graeme Reid, “The Canary in the Constitution: Same Sex Equality in the Public Sphere,” *Social Dynamics* 36, no. 1 (2010): 38–51.
  17. For a discussion of homophobic violence in Johannesburg that precedes the media attention given to lesbian rapes and murders, see Graeme Reid and Teresa Dirsuweit, “Understanding Systemic Violence: Homophobic Attacks in Johannesburg and Its Surrounds,” *Urban Forum* 13, no. 3 (2002): 99–126. To address the situation, black lesbians have organized a group named the Forum for the Empowerment of Women. Their website is [www.few.org.za](http://www.few.org.za). In October 2010 black queers in Vosloorus, a township in the East Rand near Boksburg, staged a protest against police-sanctioned and perpetuated homophobia. For more information, see Karabo Keepile, “Call for Probe into Alleged Homophobia in Vosloorus,” *Mail and Guardian*, [www.mg.co.za/article/2010-11-04-call-for-probe-into-alleged-homophobia-in-vosloorus](http://www.mg.co.za/article/2010-11-04-call-for-probe-into-alleged-homophobia-in-vosloorus) (accessed December 4, 2010).
  18. The equality clause is unclear in how it refers to transgender and intersex individuals. According to Thamar Klein, “In 1996 South Africa was the first and is still the only country worldwide to enshrine the rights of trans persons in the Constitution.” See Thamar Klein, “Intersex and Transgender Activism in South Africa,” *Liminalis: Journal for Sex/Gender Emancipation and Resistance* (2009): 26, no. 3. Her article suggests that the rights of intersex and transgendered persons were secured through activism that resulted in the interpretation of the equality clause to expand the definition of “sex” to include intersex individuals (accomplished in 2006) and a broader interpretation of “gender” and “sexual orientation” to include transgendered persons. Part of the cultural labor enacted along with this activism was for individuals to increasingly take on public transgendered, and less often intersex, identities.
  19. The Freedom Charter was a manifesto of ten core principles that guided a coalition of representative political organizations from South Africa’s major racial groups. The ANC (African National Congress), South African Indian Congress, Coloured People’s Congress, and the South African Congress of Democrats came together to draft the

document based on the fundamental equality of all of South Africa's racial groups. It was signed in Kliptown, Soweto, in June 1955. The material quoted is from the South African constitution.

20. For more discussion of this disconnect, see Jacklyn Cock, "Engendering Gay and Lesbian Rights: The Equality Clause in the South African Constitution," *Women's Studies International Forum* 26, no. 1 (2003): 35–45; Natalie Oswin, "Producing Homonormativity in Neoliberal South Africa: Recognition, Redistribution, and the Equality Project," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 32, no. 3 (2007): 649–69; Tucker, *Queer Visibilities*; Zanele Muholi, "Mapping Our Histories: A Visual History of Black Lesbians in Post-Apartheid South Africa," [www.zanelemuholi.com](http://www.zanelemuholi.com) (accessed July 1, 2010); and Reid, "Canary in the Constitution."
21. Oswin, "Producing Homonormativity," 666.
22. Reid, "Canary in the Constitution," 38.
23. I am aware that postapartheid South Africa contains a complex array of racialized bodies including the four-race categorization of apartheid and more complex definitions of blackness and African identity created by increased immigration from elsewhere on the African continent and the desire to deracinate the category of African. However, equally noteworthy is how queer sexuality is presented in binary terms, particularly by those in black communities who police black gender and sexual non-conformity. Those who are concerned with policing black sexuality limit their critique to black South African communities, rarely extending their pronouncements to new immigrant communities or South Africans of other racial backgrounds. Their concern about the contaminant that is queer sexuality is limited to a concern about the effects of dissident sexualities on black South African communities. Furthermore, the discursive production of black queer South Africans as outside South African and African blackness rests on the constant production of these black queer bodies as somehow aligned with all that is white, Western, and foreign. For more on this construction of queer sexuality as a "white man's disease," see Neville Hoad, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 68–89; Epprecht, *Hungochani*; Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa?*; Margaret Aarmo, "How Homosexuality Became 'Un-African': The Case of Zimbabwe," in *Female Desires: Same Sex Relations and Transgender Practices across Cultures*, ed. Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E. Wieringa (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 255–80. The quotes are from Brenna M. Munro, "Queer Family Romance: Writing the 'New' South Africa in the 1990s," *GLQ* 15 (2009): 398.
24. See Cock, "Engendering Gay and Lesbian Rights." The behind-the-scenes negotiations between gay and lesbian rights activists and the black leadership seemed to bypass many of the black queer activists "on the ground." For a detailed discussion of the creation of the equality clause and its racialized and gendered exclusions, see Neville Hoad, Karen Martin, and Graeme Reid, eds., *Sex and Politics in South*

- Africa: The Equality Clause/Gay and Lesbian Movement/the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005).
25. For an insightful discussion of the importance of the white body to postapartheid South Africa, see Lewis Gordon, foreword to *I Write What I Like: Selected Writings*, by Steve Biko (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), xii.
  26. Tucker, *Queer Visibilities*, 109–10.
  27. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon, 1997), 45.
  28. This does not mean, however, that the economic exclusions faced by black queers are unimportant or that the discursive and representational exists in a sphere completely separate from the material.
  29. I thank Marlon M. Bailey for pointing out that this study is informed by everyday vernacular conversations.
  30. On the reclamation of local vernacular terms to assert sexual identity, see Epprecht, *Hungochani*. On the malleability of Western-based sexual identity terminology, see Tucker, "Appropriation and Malleability."
  31. In a country with the highest number of adult HIV cases in the world (approximately 5.7 million, according to UNAIDS 2010), the idea that personal infidelity is a community concern definitely has some merit. See UNAIDS Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic (Geneva: Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS, 2010).
  32. Vinh-Kim Nguyen, "Uses and Pleasures: Sexual Modernity, HIV/AIDS, and Confessional Technologies in a West African Metropolis," in *Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality, and Morality in Global Perspective*, ed. Vincanne Adams and Stacy Leigh Pigg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 253.
  33. Writing in a different context, Mark Hunter describes a situation where a young man constructs his sexual identity as "not gay" and is able to maintain heteromascularity *because* his relationship with a queer man was purely transactional. It is accepted by his peers and his community because it is seen as purely for money and not for love. See Mark Hunter, *Love in the Time of AIDS: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 175.
  34. In so-called transactional relationships involving heterosexuals, neither the "sugar-daddy" nor the "sugar-mummy," if they are black, is represented in this colonial trope. This may be due to the historical and contemporary experience of wealthy white men in relationships with poor black men that may in fact be "colonial" in nature, yet interestingly such relationships, when they are heterosexual, lack the colonializing stigma.
  35. Black unemployment is high, having increased from 23 percent in 1991 to 48 percent in 2002. For more, see Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007), 272. Youth unemployment is particularly high, at 72 percent for women ages fifteen to twenty-four and 58 percent for men ages



fifteen to twenty-four. See Republic of South Africa, Department of Labour, *Women in the South African Labour Market* (Pretoria: South African Department of Labor, 1995–2005), 18. More recent statistics suggest that black youth unemployment is 53 percent, more than four times that of white youth. See “Youth Unemployment Is a Ticking Time Bomb,” TimesLive, [www.timeslive.co.za/local/article625827.ece/Youth-unemployment-is-a-ticking-time-bomb](http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/article625827.ece/Youth-unemployment-is-a-ticking-time-bomb)—Mdladlana (accessed December 4, 2010).

36. See McLean and Ngcobo, “Abangibhamayo bathi ngimnandi”; Donham, “Freeing South Africa”; Swarr, “Moffies, Artists, and Queens”; and Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar, “Dismantling Assumptions: Interrogating ‘Lesbian’ Struggles for Identity and Survival in India and South Africa,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29, no. 2 (2003): 491–516.
37. See Swarr, “Moffies, Artists, and Queens”; Reid, “Man Is a Man”; and Tucker, *Queer Visibilities*.
38. Swarr, “Moffies, Artists, and Queens,” 84.
39. Swarr, “Moffies, Artists, and Queens,” 85.
40. At such parties, *mogodu*, a type of tripe typically made from sheep intestines and believed to help cure and stave off hangovers, is often served. *Stokvels* are savings societies where members pool their money to be distributed at particular times of the year or used in times of emergency. Some *stokvels* throw parties to raise funds.
41. Thuso, conversation with author, January 2004.
42. Thuso’s feminine gender performance was enacted through forms of androgyny including wearing lip gloss and having a light dusting of foundation on his face. Similarly, his wild and abandoned style of dancing while at the party, including flirtatious gestures, gyrations of the hips, and limber fluid dance movements involving the hands and arms, is associated with feminine gender performance.
43. See Ngcobo and McLean, “Abangibhamayo bathi ngimnandi.” Reid, in his discussion of “ladies” (gay-identified feminine men) and “gents” (straight-identified masculine men) in rural Ermelo, also provides an example of a masculine “gent” who on spending more time in Johannesburg comes to identify as gay. More disconcerting for the “ladies” of Ermelo is his insistence that he can have sex with another “gent” named Mandla. See Reid, “Man Is a Man.”
44. Mandla, conversation with author, July 2009.
45. While I understand that being the insertive partner does not necessarily make one the dominant individual in a sexual relationship, I am interested in investigating how commonsense interpretations center on the equivalence of masculinity with penetration and dominance.
46. Donham, “Freeing South Africa”; Reid, “Man Is a Man”; Tucker “Queer Visibilities” and “Shifting Boundaries of Sexual Identities in Cape Town”; Swarr and Nagar, “Dismantling Assumptions”; and McLean and Ngcobo “Abangibhamayo bathi ngimnandi.”

47. The gay and lesbian terminology is animated by legal protections on the basis of sexual orientation. Thus to access rights enshrined in the constitution on many levels requires the strategic and political adoption of gay identities. For more of a discussion on the relationship between rights and identity, see Cock, "Engendering Gay and Lesbian Rights"; and Tucker, *Queer Visibilities*.
48. Brenda Fassie was a major pop icon who emerged in 1980s South Africa and was noted as much for her controversial personal life, which included public professions of lesbianism and battles with drug abuse, as she was for her onstage charisma and performance style. For more on Fassie, see Pumla Dineo Gqola, "When a Good Black Woman Is Your Weekend Special: Brenda Fassie, Sexuality and Performance," in *Under Construction: "Race" and Identity in South Africa Today*, eds. Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn (Sandton: Heinemann, 2004), 139–48. See also Desa Philadelphia, "Brenda Fassie: Africa—The Madonna of the Townships," *Time*, September 15, 2001, [www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000782,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000782,00.html) (accessed November 26, 2011).
49. Many commentators were quite resistant to the idea that what Mathosa was putting forth onstage bore any resemblance to traditional dances done by young women throughout South Africa. The fact of the matter is that the interpretation of "traditional" dances is an open field, but I would suggest that what many may have been resisting was Mathosa's right to label the aesthetic "traditional" while divorcing it from its functional context. For example, some of the aesthetic may have occurred in female-only spaces, where sexuality could be celebrated outside the gaze of men; by bringing these performances into the public light and presenting them to mixed-sex audiences, Mathosa (and her partner in crime, Seete) were contravening social conditions. In addition, some of these dances may have been associated with particular cultural contexts or even initiation ceremonies and as such were considered inappropriately contextualized.
50. Madala Thepa, "Up Close and Personal with Lebo Mathosa," *Sowetan Sunday World*, December 5, 2004, 4; Amanda Ngudle, "Lebo Mathosa Speaks Out: Drugs, Lesbians, and Lies," *Drum Magazine*, September 23, 2004, 15–16.
51. Thepa, "Up Close and Personal."
52. Lebo Motshegoa, *Township Talk, the Language, the Culture, the People: The A–Z Dictionary of South Africa's Township Lingo* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005); Tom Dalzell and Terry Victor, eds., *The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 215.
53. According to [www.speaksouthafrican.com](http://www.speaksouthafrican.com), "Scamto is the township-speak that is a mixture of words and derivations of words from all 11 languages and includes many words from the traditional tsotsitaal that was the language of the township gangster element" (accessed July 1, 2010). According to *Ethnologue*, Scamto is a mixed language used mainly by youth and developed in the 1980s from the original Tsotsitaal.

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Ethnologue also suggests that Scamto is “basically Zulu or Sotho language with heavy codeswitching and many English and Afrikaans content morphemes.” See Paul M. Lewis, ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2009).

54. Conversation with author, December 2003.
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