UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

DOCTORAL THESIS

A phenomenological study of the gendered and sexualised politics of a lesbian identity in contemporary Zimbabwe

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the

FACULTY OF LAW

by

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis, 'A phenomenological study of the gendered and sexualised politics of a lesbian identity in contemporary Zimbabwe,' which I hereby submit for the degree Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) at the Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, is my work and has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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Thesis summary

This thesis examines the gendered and sexualised politics of a lesbian identity in contemporary Zimbabwe. Recent writings of well-intentioned scholars, memoirists, bloggers and LGBTQ+ activists that are writing about African lesbian women have largely constructed them as passive victims, trapped in a history of political homophobias and the abusive hegemony of Western ethnocentric discourses that have objectified, erased or even violated African women's bodies. In these scenarios lesbian women are portrayed as passive bodies on which different forms of gendered and sexualised power act. While great injury and harm has indeed come to some lesbian women, such a limited reading of lesbian lives, and experiences belies the complex ways in which power operates in both liberating and disempowering ways and how it is navigated and resisted by those it is directed at.

Drawing on extensive field work I demonstrate firstly how individual and unique the identity formation journeys are and how despite the extreme and in some cases violent force of compulsory heterosexuality individuals still come to same-sex identities. Secondly, I argue that by using a phenomenological approach, African sexualities can be reimagined and explored to generate more than just new data sets, and instead provide new information and understandings of lesbian identity. Finally, through in-depth examination of participant narratives I argue that there is no unitary understanding of lesbian identity and that only those who identify as such can define what the identity means to them as well as shed light on the ways in which the identity is negotiated and navigated.

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The opportunity to count my intellectual and personal debts is a bittersweet time of reflection, for it reminds me of some of the painful moments along the way but also how immensely fortunate I am. It is not often that one finds the combination of teacher, mentor and cheerleader in one person, and to have found this in my supervisor Prof Charles Ngwena was not only humbling but a real honour. Right from the moment I began working on my master's thesis when he told me I could develop my interests further in a doctoral study, Charles has been a constant source of encouragement. The exercise of patience, the push for rigour and the encouragement to take full ownership of my work are the markers of the journey we have walked together. It is not possible to express the depth of gratitude owed to Charles for his support in my growth as a thinker under his supervision. Even when he was dealing with major health issues he continued to guide and support me in ways and with commitment I will never fully understand though I am immensely grateful for it. And deep gratitude to my supervisor's other half, Aunt Patricia who has walked this journey with us.

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List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
Criminal Code	Criminal Code Act
DVA	Domestic Violence Act
GBV	Gender Based Violence
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer, Non-binary, and Non-conforming identities
MSM	Men who have Sex with Men
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
WSW	Women who have Sex with Women
WLW	Women who Love Women
ZANLA	Zimbabwe National Liberation Army
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union, Patriotic Front

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Introduction: Socio-political narratives of same-sex sexualities

Until lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt will glorify the hunter.[1]

1. Introduction

In March of 2010 Gertrude Pswarayi published an online blog in which she shared an excerpt from the story of a Zimbabwean lesbian she had interviewed. In the introduction of her blog Gertrude was explicit, 'I have not edited the story because I wanted you, the reader to hear what she [the lesbian identifying woman] has to say'.[2] I did not realise in the moment of reading those words what meaning they would carry for me. At least not until sometime in 2012 when Zimbabwean media was awash with a story of a cheating scandal involving UK based Zimbabwean lesbians, one of whom had subsequently been disowned by her parents and the other who had attempted suicide a few days later.[3] Something in the telling of their story felt deeply offensive. There were hardly any images or stories of lesbian women in state media and when they did emerge these were the kinds of stories they told, stories of condemnation, perversion, vilification or even dismissal.[4]

The telling of stories on behalf of others or their complete absence in the public domain is commonplace for 'marginals'.[5] The proverb in the epigraph above accurately illustrates this. Many voices are intentionally obscured and silenced leading to competing interpretations of the lives and experiences of portions of our societies. There are complex causal factors for this reality alongside far-reaching consequences.

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1 This African proverb was globally popularized by the late Nigerian author Chinua Achebe in a 1994 interview with the Paris Review as he described the importance of the emergence of the voices of the colonised in a world in which the colonisers continually told the stories of Africans.

2 G Pswarayi 'Living in fear: a lesbian in Zimbabwe shares her story *World Focus* available at https://worldfocus.org/blog/2010/03/03/living-in-fear-a-lesbian-in-zimbabwe-shares-her-story/9930/ (accessed 3 October 2020).

3 Nehanda radio 12 July 2012 'Cheating Lesbian disowned by parents in Zimbabwe' available at https://nehandaradio.com/2012/07/12/cheating-lesbian-disowned-by-parents-in-zimbabwe/ (accessed 3 October 2020); Nehanda Radio 17 July 2020 'Zimbabwean lesbian cheat attempts suicide' available at https://nehandaradio.com/2012/07/17/zimbabwean-lesbian-cheat-attempts-suicide/ (accessed 3 October 2020).

4 The Herald Chronicle 3 August 2010 'Cops question pupils over lesbianism' (accessed 3 October 2020); Newsday 4 August 2010 'Cops question pupils over lesbianism' available at https://www.newsday.co.zw/2010/08/2010-08-04-cops-question-pupils-over-lesbianism/ (accessed 3 October 2020); 'Lesbianism: School readmits children' The Herald (Harare) 18 February 2003.

5 A marginal person refers to one that is seen as not belonging within a society, while they might be foreign to a place such as immigrants they are just as frequently individuals traditionally rooted to a place but are not fully accepted and pushed to the fringes based on the values of that society. KG Henshall 'On the fringes of society: Minorities and other marginals' (1999) *Dimensions of Japanese Society* at 48.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

Primarily this thesis aims to employ a phenomenological approach to describing and interpreting the gendered and sexualised politics of a lesbian identity in contemporary Zimbabwe.

Specific objectives are to

1. examine the historical and socio-political factors that account for state regulation of sexualities

2. present insight into the lives and experiences of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe

3. provide an understanding of the operations of patriarchal, nationalist, religious and cultural discourse in the regulation of sexualities

4. capture the gendered and sexualised experiences of navigating and resisting regulation by lesbian women

1.2.1 Research Questions

This study sets out to answer four questions. *First, what are the historical and socio-political factors that account for state regulation of sexualities by the nationalist Zimbabwean state?* With this question, I examine the complex historical events and factors as well as social and political ones that individually or cumulatively result in the regulation of sexualities. An examination of this nature enables an understanding of the logics of regulation as both an aspiration of an imagined national morality and as the product of trauma caused by Western assertions of African sexualities as excessive. *Second, how do lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe come to that identity?* With this question, I explore identity discourse, its usefulness and the ways in which individuals come to identities. I disrupt the conception of the North to South flow of ideas as the basis of lesbian identity and contend that beyond the word itself the nature and meaning of lesbian identities is formed contextually. In a sense, identities are not formed in a systematic manner and are the result of multiple and even contradictory factors

such that they take on diverse forms. Lesbian identities take on a variety of forms depending on who, where and how they are encountered and expressed and the debates surrounding them are deeply embedded in social and political tensions.

Third, how does patriarchy operate through nationalist, religious and cultural discourse in regulating sexualities? With this question, I explore the plethora of ways in which patriarchy operates through the institutions of religion, culture and nationalist discourse. I explore both the overt and more subtle ways in which it operates as an external as well as internalised force. Using the stories shared as a lens I make explicit the impact of patriarchy and its hegemonic force in the deployment of compulsory heterosexuality. And I examine the political subjectivities revealed through the stories told. *Finally, what are the gendered and sexualised experiences of navigating and resisting regulation by lesbian women?* Through this question, I examine the ways gender and sexuality operate and are used to privilege or repress. I uncover the ways in which the state is built on and instrumentalises ideas of gender and sexuality to serve its interests. I also examine the lives of lesbian identifying women and the ways they strategically negotiate life and resist regulation. From the narratives shared I consider what enables and hinders agency at different moments as well as examine the forms that resistance takes when it does occur.

1.3 Theoretical Framework: A phenomenological approach

1.3.1 The gendered and sexualised state

Archives of African political history reveal that scholars from various intellectual traditions and theoretical approaches have contended with the conceptualisation of the nationalist African state and its 'weakness'.[6] Varied propositions of historical and structural factors have been put forward to account for this state 'failure'.[7] In this process African states have been portrayed as ambitious in aspiration but weak in service delivery, as nationalist in rhetoric but divisive in reality. Representations of the state become especially important at times of crisis when the legitimacy of the government is being contested, for example in the early to mid 90s where the economic situation of Zimbabwe was on the decline we witnessed the morally and politically charged discourse around homosexuality which is discussed in significant detail later within

[6] P Nugent 'States and social contracts in Africa' (2010) 63 *New Left Review* at 38; P Englebert & DM Tull 'Postconflict reconstruction in Africa flawed ideas about failed states' (2008) 32(4) *International Security* at 106.

[7] J Bayart 'Africa in the world: A history of extraversion' (2000) 99(395) *African Affairs* at 217; F Cooper *Africa since 1940: The past of the present* (2002); J Herbst *States and power in Africa: Comparative lessons in authority and control* (2000).

this thesis.[8] It is at such times that the gendered and sexualised nature of the state is highlighted as the state seeks to compensate for its peripheral powerlessness through consolidating the centre of its strength, its nationalist core.

For instance, despite women playing an important role in the liberation struggle there is clear evidence of attempts to remove them from the public imagination into the domestic arena and regulation of female bodies thus emerges in the construction of the nationalist independent Zimbabwe.[9] Within contemporary urban communities, women's bodies and their sexualities continue to be constructed not only as symbols of cultural histories and traditions, and as markers that distinguish Zimbabweans or even Africans from Western women, they are also ideologically and materially contested sites of struggle amongst various social and institutional actors. The competition between Zimbabwean patriarchal traditions and expanding liberal and egalitarian values of a globalised world have turned the urban locale into a site of cultural conflict. A tension between aspirations of modernity of the nationalist leaders and their desire to establish a cultural and moral identity based on pre-colonial imaginations is evident.

This is the predicament that prompts pausing in this study before trying to understand the lives and experiences of lesbian women in Zimbabwe. It is helpful to understand the context within which the lesbian women in this study exist and how it impacts their lives. Monolithic and unitary definitions of the Zimbabwean nationalist reveal categories of people whose dreams of liberation have been suppressed and silenced.[10] Foucault's conceptualisation of power suggests that power is not only an oppressive and negative force that subordinates and limits but instead is productive.[11] Several feminists have explored and written about the productive nature and possibilities of power within the realms of law, bureaucracy as well as about how power disciplines and shapes women's bodies, movement, and expression.[12] Feminist actions on the African continent are influenced by converging constructs of statehood,

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8 J Bayart 'Civil society in Africa' in P Chabal (ed) *Political domination in Africa: Reflections on the limits of power* (1986); P Geschiere 'Sorcery and the state: Popular modes of action among the Maka of southeast Cameroon' (1988) 8(1) *Critique of Anthropology* at 35.

9 P Mcfadden 'Becoming postcolonial: African women changing the meaning of citizenship' (2005) 6(1) *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* at 9.

10 SJ Ndlovu-Gatsheni *Do 'Zimbabweans' exist?: Trajectories of nationalism, national identity formation and crisis in a postcolonial state* (2009) at 4.

11 N Fraser *Unruly practices : Power, discourse and gender in contemporary social theory* (1989) at 18; J Sawicki *Disciplining Foucault : Feminism, power and the body* (1991) at 21-3.

12 KE Ferguson *The feminist case against bureaucracy* (1984); S Bartky 'Foucault, feminism and the modernisation of patriarchal power' in I Diamond and L Quinby (eds) *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on resistance* (1988); C Smart *Feminism and the power of law* (1989).

culture, religion, politics and ethnicity.[13] Emerging feminist actions on the continent are aimed at highlighting the existing socio-cultural ideas of gender, engaging them and making the case in defence of acceptable alternative forms.[14] An African feminist lens offers this study an analysis that is informed by an understanding of these contextual nuances.

Feminist and queer accounts are necessary in this study to explain the roles of gender and sexuality in nationalism. A poststructuralist approach to understanding how the lives of lesbian identifying women interact with the state also offers an interesting heuristic tool for understanding how the nationalist state operates in gendered and sexualised ways and this is particularly beneficial to this study. From this analysis we obtain a theoretical basis for studying the intersectionality of these constructs within the Zimbabwean context. In order to go beyond merely describing the experiences of lesbian identifying women this study takes on a phenomenological approach that centres the experiences and meaning-making by lesbian women themselves, within the Zimbabwean state and its regulatory practices.

1.3.2 Phenomenology and African sexuality

African sexualities have been studied and described for centuries and have been portrayed and theorised largely from a Eurocentric standpoint.[15] These sexualities have been codified by the West as socially and culturally inferior along with the histories, cultures and knowledges of African people. Philosopher Valentin-Yves Mudimbe implicates three sources in the invention project of a primitive Africa and Africans. These are 'the exotic text on savages, represented by travellers' reports; the philosophical interpretations about a hierarchy of civilizations; and the anthropological search for primitiveness.'[16] Mudimbe argues that these discourses were an important tool of control by the West and have generated fetishized and inferior Africans that practice a homogenous and unitary sexuality. A degenerate sexuality that is practiced on the 'dark continent'. [17] These constructions of African sexuality were heavily gendered constructing the sexuality of African men as excessive and dangerous and African women as

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13 NI Aniekwu 'Converging constructions: A historical perspective on sexuality and feminism in post-colonial Africa' (2006) 10(1) *African Sociological Review* at 143.

14 S Fried & D Holcomb 'Report at the women's human rights caucus at the Fourth world conference on women, Beijing' (1995) *Center for women's global leadership*.

15 S Tamale 'Researching and theorising sexualities in Africa' in S Tamale (ed) *African sexualities: A reader* (2011) at 23.

16 VY Mudimbe *The invention of Africa : Gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge* (1988) 69.

17 Tamale (n 15) 14.

hypersexual.[18] These colonial ideas did not evaporate with flag independence, instead they are heavily embedded in the legal and structural frameworks of African states as well as within its socio-cultural and religious discourses. A phenomenological approach to African sexualities seeks to offset these deeply ingrained ideas by centralising lives and experiences of Africans and their relationship to or interaction with hegemonic power. Here hegemonic power refers to the ways in which the state as a result of its material and ideational capabilities exercises authority over citizens.

Phenomenology has evolved over time from the thinking of philosopher and founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. Phenomenology identified problems with the standard forms of research in Husserl's time, that is, empiricist, positivist, rationalist, neo-Kantian approaches. A phenomenological study allows for knowledge that is responsive to the concrete ways in which sexuality is experienced in African cultural spaces.[19] It revisits the ontological question of 'what is' by enabling knowledge to be generated from the experiences of individuals experiencing a particular phenomenon. Phenomenology allows for the unearthing of ideas and the meanings attached to these ideas and while it is not the only theory capable of generating rich and complex gendered accounts, the manner in which it centralises situated and embodied theory of knowledge and experience and rejects dualism makes it ideal for the exploration of the construction of subjectivities.[20] Embodiment of sexuality is central to this study because in the words of Kimani Kaigai, 'embodiment offers a nuanced optic through which to capture the way power hierarchies…are exercised.' It 'is through bodies,' for instance,

> that…narratives invite the reader to reflect on how certain forms of power and domination are gendered in particular ways and how stories present the gendered body as an unstable field of power contestation.[21]

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[18] D Lewis 'Representing African sexualities' in S Tamale (ed) *African sexualities: A reader* (2011) 199-216 at 203.

[19] C Ngwena *What is Africanness? Contesting nativism in race, culture and sexualities* (2018) at 216 citing S Tamale 'Researching and theorising sexualities in Africa' in Tamale ed) *African Sexualities: A Reader* (2011) at 11-12 and 20.

[20] B Bakare-Yusuf 'Beyond determinism: The phenomenology of African female existence (2003) 2 Feminist Africa available at http://www.agi.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/429/feminist_africa_journals/archive/02/fa_2_feature_article_1.pdf at 1 (accessed 21 October 2018).

[21] K Kaigai 'Encountering strange lands: Migrant texture in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fiction' PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2014 at 13.

The study examines how lesbian identifying women experience the political context and the embodied impact of the actions of institutions that are influenced by state, such as the family alongside the discourses of gender, culture and religion that are frequently activated in service of the national identity. Turning for instance to the words of Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl who suggest that

> our sexuality is shaped within our social understanding of selfhood, how we make sense of our relations to others and how we fit into our cultural institutions- the laws, religious institutions, schools, social venues and above all, families.[22]

The study also examines the relationship between lesbian identifying women and broader hegemonic understandings of sexuality as moral-cultural attitude and a rights discourse. In using a Heideggerian phenomenological approach this study allows for research that is centred on the interviewees' experiences and interpretations of those experiences and views them not as a subject but a co-researcher. The third chapter delves more deeply into the theoretical approach of this study. The exploratory process of this study does not imagine it will discover pure African sexualities untainted by the colonial project but instead sexualities that are in dialogue with a globalising world as opposed to subjects of it.

1.3.3 Theorising female sexuality

It is not unreasonable to infer that the ways in which female sexuality has been constructed over time has significant implications for female subjectivities more broadly. Given the preoccupation of this study with how lesbian women create meaning around their sexuality it may be of importance to reflect on as well as problematize the broader construction of female sexuality in dominant discourse. Female sexuality is constructed differently in medical, legal, political and religious discourse.[23] Looking upon the female body as 'thoroughly saturated with sexuality' is one of the ways in which it is most significantly regulated.[24] Experiences such as menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth and other extensions of sexuality are made central to the lives and identities of women in ways that give legitimacy to the regulation of their bodies alongside the medical scrutiny they are subjected to.

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22 M Steyn & M Van Zyl *The prize and the price: Shaping sexualities in South Africa* (2009) at 4.

23 CF Stychin 'Constituting sexuality: The struggle for sexual orientation in the South African bill of rights' (1996) 23(4) *Journal of Law and Society* at 471.

24 M Foucault *The history of sexuality, vol 1 An introduction* (1976/1990) at 104.

Turning briefly to the colonial period and its impact on the construction of female sexuality among Africans, it may be necessary to examine very superficially Western female sexuality. Prior to the Victorian era, Western constructions of female sexuality portray a dangerous and voracious sexuality. It is the assertion of Jeffery Weeks 'that female sexuality was inevitably a problem .... A long cultural tradition held that female sexuality was voracious, all-devouring and consuming…".[25] Weeks goes further to attest that these ideas were so deeply held that the sexual appetites of women were considered a threat to men. What the work of Nancy Cott in the late 70s contributes to this conversation is the pointing towards the diversity of sources of thought on female sexuality. For instance, in advancing her hypothesis of the logic behind the Victorian sexual ideology of women as 'passionless', lacking in sexual passion and appetite she places responsibility for this idea on religion, Christianity to be specific, wherein women were characterized as being more spiritual that men and therefore less susceptible to sexual desire.[26] This is despite the simultaneous labelling of 'unsanctified earthly women as the devil's agents' responsible for the sexual downfall of men. Pastor Mvumba's sermon in Huchu's 'The hairdressers of Harare', illustrates this idea of women as seductresses when he declares that,

> There are no more moral values in people's hearts. Just coming to this church this morning, I saw many young women wearing mini-skirts. Why do they do this? They do not know it but it is because they are sent by the devil to entice men and to lead their hearts astray. They are harlots like Jezebel and if you cannot resist, then it is better for you to pluck your eyes out so that you may not see.[27]

Colonial regulation of sexuality affirmed these same ideas of female sexuality, however African women were categorized as the unsanctified earthly women whose sexuality was a threat unlike the 'passionless' godly women. McFadden highlights that it is the inclination of an oppressor to have control over what they fear most and that 'men fear women's sexuality precisely because when women challenge and move beyond patriarchal borders of "good female sexuality", they threaten the very core of manhood—as sexually dominant and active'.[28]

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25 J Weeks 'Questions of identity' in P Caplan (ed), (1987) *The cultural construction of sexuality* at 47.

26 NF Cott 'Passionlessness: An interpretation of victorian sexual ideology, 1790-1850' (1978) 4(2) *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* at 220.

27 T Huchu *The hairdresser of Harare* at 72.

28 S van Schalkwyk *Narrative landscapes of female sexuality in Africa: Collective stories of trauma and transition* (2018) at 19 citing P McFadden 'Sexual pleasure as a feminist choice' (2003) *Feminist Africa 2: Changing cultures* available at http://www.agi.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/429/feminist_africa_journals/archive/02/fa_2_standpoint_1.pdf (accessed 20 November 2020).

Within contexts that are patriarchal, social anxieties about women's sexual freedom and sexual choices run deep.[29] As Jolly, Cornwall and Hawkins state,

> The desiring woman becomes transgressive; her sexual agency makes her a potentially disruptive threat to the containment of women, and to family structures built on meeting the desires of men.[30]

Sex and sexuality occupy a peculiar space in contemporary societies. It is perhaps the most talked about 'silence'. In the words of Foucault,

> what is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as the secret.[31]

A dominant narrative in this exploitation of the female sexuality secret is that of women's passive sexuality. By and large the common narrative is that of female passivity and a sexuality that is 'reactive, responsive, brought to life only through some sort of 'reproductive instinct', or kissed into life by the skill of the wooer, the male.'[32] That said however, there is need to account for the deployment of the lustful, voracious sexuality of women that is never too far to reach for. The continued existence of these opposing narratives even today attests to something, the strategic use of sexuality to regulate women using whichever tool suits the moment. Whichever narrative advances the interests of patriarchy at any one time seems to win. For instance, on the one hand restrictive abortion laws and the criminalization of sex work are seen as necessary for the regulation of the sexual excesses of women. On the other hand, female same-sex sexuality is trivialized as intimacies between women are seen as non-existent, lacking in passion due to the absence of a phallus.

A patriarchal model of gender and sexuality that sets up a dynamic of dominance and submission wherein a male assumes the role of dominance suggests that sexual relations were not designed to take place between equals and thus any sexual act inconsistent with this model was viewed as unnatural and deplorable.[33] The transgression of women that deviate from the submissive role through engaging in sexual relations with other women and disrupting the

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29 I Lynch 'South African bisexual women's accounts of their gendered and sexualised identities: A feminist poststructuralist analysis' PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, 2018 at 173.

30 S Jolly, A Cornwall & K Hawkins 'Introduction: Women, sexuality and the political power of pleasure' in S Jolly, A Cornwall & K Hawkins (eds) *Women, sexuality and the political power of pleasure* (2013) at 6.

31 Foucault (n 24) at 35.

32 Weeks (n 25) at 47.

33 MA Tolbert 'Homoeroticism in the biblical world: Biblical texts in historical contexts' *Paper presented at Lancaster school of theology* 20 November 2002.

narrative of women's 'natural' passivity as well as the sexual order is marked as unforgivable.[34] What are seen as radical transgressions of female sexualities such as same-sex sexuality and non-monogamous practices continue to be viewed as deviations requiring control.[35]

So far, I have focused on the limiting framings of female sexuality that have been in circulation ranging from dangerous, passive, passionless or purely in service of male desire.[36] Contemporary female sexuality is more than this historical account. The possibilities of self-determination and self-definition have increased over the decades and women continue to resist limiting and oppressive constructions of their sexualities. As Bakhtin suggests, that within the numerous utterances directed towards a person or object there exist 'opposing, contradictory utterances which function alongside those articulations' that have been reinforced by social conventions.[37] Women's resistance and agency is sustained evidence of this.

Much of the theory that has been used to understand female sexuality comes largely from Western and patriarchal assumptions that were pervasive at the time of study. Feminist studies were the first to shift this discourse as they moved away from androcentric research tools and methods. That said however such research remained Euromerican centric, paying attention to the realities of white, middle-class heterosexual women. This study seeks to combine the emerging works on African feminist approaches to female sexuality with the equally emerging queer sexualities work on the continent.[38] Looking at the lives of lesbian women without paying attention to these realities surrounding female sexualities more broadly would be a missed opportunity in this study.

African studies and the study of African sexualities within it has been rife with misrepresentation, homogenisation and essentialisation about Africa and African people.[39] Early knowledge about Africa was derived from colonial expeditions, missionary exploits and anthropological ethnographies with racist foundations, intentional or otherwise. As Charles Ngwena states, even where universal grammar does not intend to achieve othering,

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34 BJ Brooten *Love between women: Early Christian responses to female homoeroticism* (1996) at 195.

35 CS Vance 'Social construction theory: Problems in the history of sexuality' in PM Nardi & BE Schneider (eds) *Social perspectives in lesbian and gay studies: A reader* (1998) at 163.

36 Weeks (n 25) at 47.

37 MM Bakhtin 'Discourse in the Novel' in *DJ Hale (eds) The Novel: An anthology of criticism and Theory[1972]* 2006 at 493.

38 The work of Dankwa is particularly insightful as it begins to theorise the sexualities of African women. See S Dankwa *Knowing Women: Same-Sex Intimacy, Gender, and Identity in Postcolonial Ghana* (2021).

39 RN Pailey 'Where is the "African" in African studies?' (2016) *Africa at LSE* available at blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2016/06/27/where-is-the-african-in-african-studies/ (accessed 6 October 2018).

epistemologies produced in specific cultural and historical contexts can generate binaries that are discursively and inherently colonising.[40] According to Lucy Mtenje,

> Western imperialist stereotypes and caricatures of African sexualities were part of a wider design to colonise and exploit the black race. These narratives equated African sexualities with primitivism. African sexualities were depicted as primitive, exotic, rapacious, savage, bestial, lascivious....[41]

Liberian academic Robtel Neaji Pailey posed the question 'Where is the 'African' in African Studies?' She went further to insist that the 'African' be inserted into African Studies and not merely as a token gesture but as an affirmation of the knowledge about Africa that Africans have always produced.[42] She tracks the evolution of debate on decolonising African Studies from a 1969 meeting of the African Studies Association (ASA) in Canada, where African-American scholars dominated conversation asserting that African Studies was rooted in institutional racism. She links this to more recent discussion in which African scholars such as Amina Mama have argued that Africanists outside of Africa are complicit in the colonial patriarchal order through their dismissal of the intellectual priorities of African scholars.[43] Mama, further argues that the production of knowledge about Africa is 'as much an ethical dilemma as it is an epistemological consideration' for both Africans and non-Africans and should thus be taken seriously. She concludes by appealing for means of studying Africa that demonstrate respect and reverence for the lives and realities of African people and the matters of concern to them.[44]

Discussion on gender and sexuality in the field of African studies can be viewed in three categories of scholarship. The first is regurgitation in which existing Western concepts, theories and methods are used to collect data by African researchers, the second is protest scholarship which is devoted to the rejection of all that is Western and the last is a method of producing data of epistemic significance.[45]

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40 C Ngwena *What is Africanness? Contesting nativism in race, culture and sexualities* (2018) at 217.

41 AL Mtenje 'Contemporary fictional representations of sexualities from authoritarian African contexts' PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University Western Cape, 2016 at 12.

42 Pailey (n 39).

43 A Mama 'Editorial: sexual cultures' (2005) 5 *Feminist Africa* at 3 available at http://www.agi.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/429/feminist_africa_journals/archive/05/fa_5_editorial_1.pdf (accessed 22 October 2018).

44 Mama (n 43) at 7.

45 OO Adesina 'Sociology, endogeneity and the challenge of transformation', (2006) 10 *African sociological review* at 146.

The telling of our stories in ways that are culturally, historically and materially conscious of African time and location is imperative. Ngwena aptly points out that ' the onus is on the peoples of the continent, especially sexual minorities but also scholars and activists to develop an archive of knowledge about transgressive sexualities.[46] Macharia highlights that this is particularly important given that most literature on queer African sexualities has been generated by either non-Africans or non-queers.[47]

In a similar vein Sylvia Tamale focuses on language and argues that the dominance of the language of Western colonialists in sexuality discourses resulted in meanings and definitions of concepts that is reflective of realities and experiences from outside of Africa. Tamale encourages the expanding of African sexualities research by African researchers while sounding caution about unproductive essentialist approaches that ignore or discard existing knowledge or literature about African sexualities because it is Western and highlights that this could lead to unnecessary mimicry and reinvention of the wheel so to speak. Instead, she encourages that when using Western approaches and methods that this should be done critically.[48] As she states, the 'idea is to deconstruct, debunk, expose, contextualise and problematise concepts associated with African sexualities in order to avoid essentialism, stereotyping and othering.'[49] For example, Tamale demonstrates how this can be done when she discusses Gayle Rubin's sexual hierarchy using a context specific lens of an African society where for instance polygyny is valued over monogamy and hence would exist within the 'charmed circle' in place of monogamy as per Rubin's model.[50]

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46 Ngwena (n 40) at 214.

47 K Macharia 'Queering African studies' (2009) 51 *Criticism* at 157.

48 S Tamale 'Researching and theorising sexualities in Africa' in Tamale ed) *African Sexualities: A Reader* (2011) at 25.

49 S Tamale 'Introduction' in S Tamale (ed) *African sexualities: A reader* (2011) at 1.

50 GS Rubin 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality. In The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader' in H Abelove et al (eds) (1993).

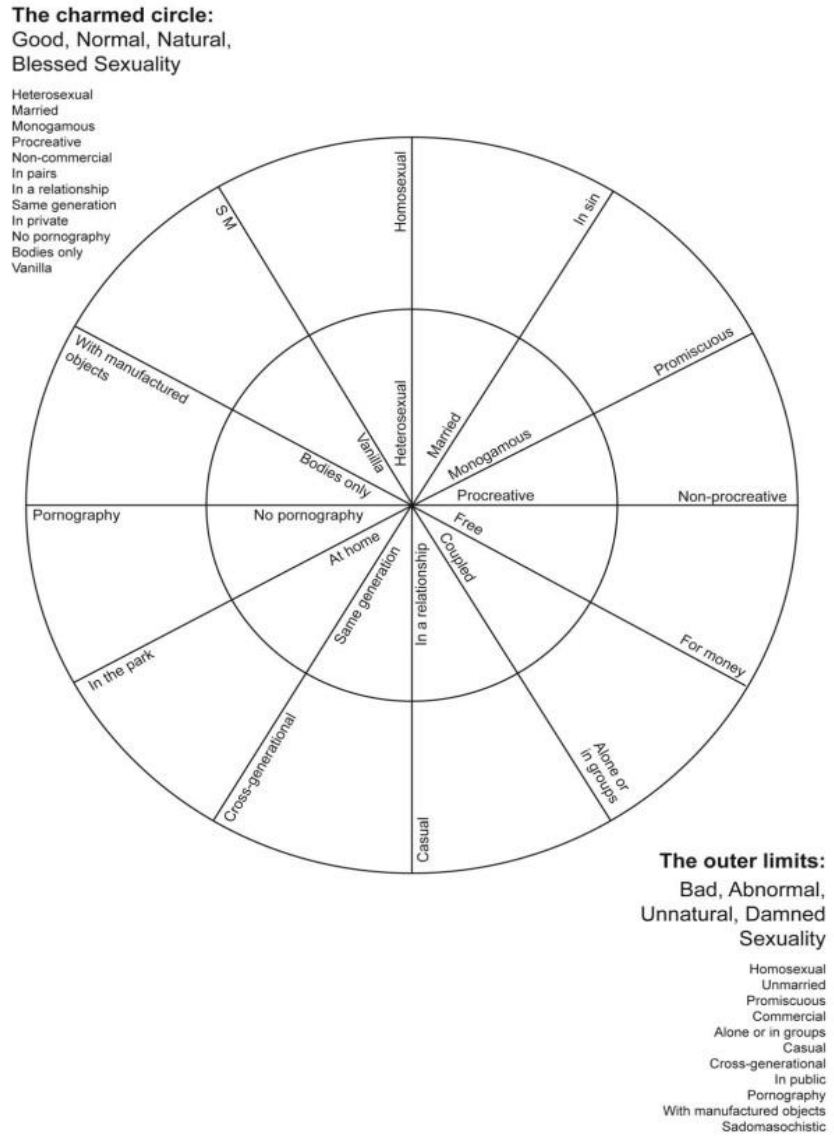

Fig 1: Gayle Rubin: Sexual hierarchy model

To the caution against essentialism, Ngwena additionally advises against unproductive anti-essentialism in his discussion on identity categories. He warns of the danger of entirely rejecting identity categories as this creates the risk of erasing commonalities amongst people and essentialising difference in instances where experiences might indeed be quite similar. He turns to Helen Irving in making this point, who refers to the importance of identifying historical cause of an injustice and not just seeing its effects since one structural mode of oppression could produce varied effects among people.[51] For instance, regulation of abortion and criminalisation of sex work are rooted in the same patriarchal ideas of the need to control female sexualities even though they manifest differently for different women.

51 H Irving *A woman's constitution?: Gender & history in the Australian Commonwealth* (1996) at .

What Ngwena describes as inculturation and hybridisation allows us to move away from clear cut cultures and identities that need to either be challenged or protected and see the ways in which ideas flow between contexts and cultures and how the different contexts affect each other.[52] In this way it becomes possible to engage contemporary sexual identities whose linguistic origins are outside of the African locale but that are experienced and produced in ways that are unique to the context in which they are being lived. William Spurlin implicates African cultural nationalism which continues

> to read homosexuality as an infection to be contained and as a remnant of empire, failing to acknowledge the difference(s) of African identities and cultures or account for hybridity and the ways in which African identities and cultures are shaped by transnational and global influences, thereby maintaining a problematic self/other split between Africa and the West which re-inscribes and repeats the imperialist gesture.[53]

Stella Nyanzi implicates scanty and inadequate home-grown evidence and theorisation about diverse queer African sexualities in the maintenance and proliferation of homophobia in Africa.[54] She asserts that prevailing homophobias are rooted largely in misconception, misinformation, myths and ignorance and thus the production of research and theory that exposes the subjectivities of queer Africans creates potential for undoing homophobias. She recognises the importance and existence of literature which is predominantly from South Africa and emphasises the need for scholarship from other countries and contexts on the continent.

1.3.4 Identity formation

Identity points to those elements that make an individual distinct from or similar to others.[55] It attests to the individual's search for personal meaning in relation to their place within the broader society within which they find themselves situated.[56] As stated by Melucci while discussing collective identities, there is much to be learnt not just in the content of an identity

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52 Ngwena (n 40) at 214.

53 W Spurlin 'Shifting geopolitical borders/shifting sexual borders: Textual and cultural renegotiations of national identity and sexual dissidence in postcolonial Africa' (2013) 13(1) *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* at 70.

54 S Nyanzi 'Knowledge is requisite power: Making case for queer African scholarship' in T Sandfort et al *Boldly queer: African perspectives on same-sex sexuality and gender diversity* (2015) at 126.

55 S Albert, BE Ashforth & JE Dutton 'Organizational identity and identification: Charting new waters and building new bridges' (2000) 25(1) *Academy of Management Review* at 13.

56 J Munday 'Identity in focus: The use of focus groups to study the construction of collective identity' (2006) 40(1) *Sociology* at 91.

but from the process through which that identity is produced.[57] In the last few decades, identity has been a topical issue attracting both theoretical as well as empirical investigation.[58] A sustained interest in identity as a concept emanates from the need to understand individuals as existing in social interaction and as embedded within society.[59] Of particular interest for those with marginal identities are the issues of identity construction as well as identity performance.

The formation and integration of same-sex sexual identities can be a challenging and complex process. This is largely as a result of ignorance, stigma, discrimination and often violence that exists in the context.[60] Identity formation theories are instructive in this study for both, what they contain and what they leave out.

While same-sex behaviour is historically noted across the world, the production or appropriation of identities based on same-sex behaviour is a more recent phenomenon. Identities based on same-sex practice have been supported by human rights and international law. However, most focus has been on gay men.[61] The lives and experiences of lesbian identifying women have not received much attention. Where are lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe, how do they give expression to this identity, in what ways are they regulated and how do they respond to and resist this regulation? In answering these questions, it is essential to foundationally understand, how lesbian women in Zimbabwe come to call themselves lesbian and what does that identity mean to them.

Various ways of understanding identity have been explored in political theory.[62] Some hold identity to be a valid category of analysis that possesses emancipatory potential for different identity groups while critics of identity reject identity categories as essentialist divisive, oppressive and monolithic. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, for example, problematise identity as being premised on exclusion on the basis of difference.[63] They argue

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57 A Melucci *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (1989) at 34.

58 PJ Burke & JE Stets *Identity theory* (2009) at 31; RT Serpe & S Stryker 'The symbolic interactionist perspective and identity theory' in S Schwartz, K Luyckx & V Vignoles (eds) *Handbook of identity theory and research* (2011) at 225.

59 JE Stets & RT Serpe *Identity theory* (2013) at 31.

60 DE *Bontempo &AR D'Augelli* 'Effects of at-school victimization and sexual orientation on lesbian, gay, or bisexual youths' health risk behavior' (2002) 30(5) *Journal of Adolescent Health* at 364.

61 C Dunton & M Palmberg *Human rights and homosexuality in Southern Africa* (1996); M Epprecht *Hungochani: The history of a dissident sexuality in Southern Africa* (2004); R Holzhacker '"Gay rights are human rights": the framing of new interpretations of international human rights norms' in G Andreopoulos et al (eds) *The uses and misuses of human rights* (2014).

62 CR Hayward 'Identity and political theory' (2010) 33 *Washington University Journal of Law & Policy* at 9; CJ Heyes *Anaesthetics of existence: Essays on experience at the edge* (2020) at 9.

63 R Brubaker & F Cooper 'Beyond "identity"' (2000) 29 *Theory and Society* at 19.

that the fields of humanities and social sciences have surrendered to the word 'identity'. Giving it too much or too little meaning and decentralising its meaning such that the word itself has taken dominance.[64] They further argue that identity is trapped between essentialist connotations and constructivist qualifiers rendering it ambiguous and of little use as a tool for analysis. It is Hall's assertion that identity is under erasure and that its use in its original form has expired but it must not, however, be done away with as there is no viable alternative that fills the void filled by identity. Instead, he suggests the use of identity in a deconstructed form that is not overly homogenising, essentialist, reductive or simplistic.[65]

Unlike most scholars that comment on identity for its inability to transcend difference, Kimberle Crenshaw argues that the problem with identity is that it ignores the differences within groups.[66] Linda Alcoff's view is that identity politics is not the cause of division but instead that it is the refusal to acknowledge the value of difference that is the source of distrust, miscommunication and hence disunity.[67]

The subject of same-sex intimacies in Zimbabwe is entangled in a complex highly layered socio- cultural history.[68] The history is both complex and contradictory and has a very shallow evidentiary pool. A focus on tracking same-sex activity in historical societies shifts attention from the prevailing reality which is the existence of people involved in same-sex practice in African states as well as the integration of African societies with the postmodern and globalised world. Achille Mbembe approximates that it is not really feasible to construct distinctive historicity of societies in Africa from about the fifteenth century as they are intertwined within rhythms that are deeply conditioned by European domination.[69] The depravation, movement, warfare and losses caused by colonialism make the tracing of sexual history in Africa virtually impossible.[70] In assuming Hall's proposal to think at the margins along with Kalua's liminal view of an Africa whose identities are not fixed, this study explores the ways in which lesbian identifying women construct their identities. I engage these lesbian identities from Ahmed's queer phenomenological frame examining the subjective experiences

64 Brubaker & Cooper (n 63) at 2.

65 S Hall 'Who needs Identity' in P du Gay & P Redman (eds) *Identity: A reader* (2000) at 15.

66 K Crenshaw 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of colour' (1991) 43 *Stanford Law Review* at 1242.

67 LM Alcoff *Visible identities: Race, gender and the self* (2006) at 6.

68 J Mudavanhu 'Attitude of the Methodist church in Zimbabwe to Homosexuality: Towards a socio-sexological theological investigation' Phd thesis, University of Birmingham, 2010 at 9.

69 A Mbembe 'On the postcolony: A brief response to critics' (2006) 4(2) *African Identities* at 9.

70 J Bennet 'Subversion and resistance: activist initiatives' *African sexualities: A reader* (2011) at 81.

of self-identified lesbian women in Zimbabwe.[71] Phenomenology steers clear of making outright assertions about the world and social relations within it in the absence of investigation making it well suited for the theoretical exploration into African female sexualities that this study concerns itself with.[72] It also avoids imposing other experiential and historical frameworks onto the communities and cultures included in this study. This is however discussed in more detail in the methodology in chapter three.

1.4 Methodology

I approach the gendered and sexualised politics of Zimbabwean lesbian identification through an examination of the interactions between lesbian identifying women with: (a) the dominant discourses of the state and society such as law, culture and family; and (b) the globalising world. Lesbian identifications can be a product of the appropriation of sexual identities whose origins are not indigenous to their locale.[73] The interaction between local and global discourses thus forms the backdrop against which lesbian women's microsocial experiences can be understood. Lesbian imaginaries in the Zimbabwean context are best comprehended when studied using a phenomenological approach as this centres the lives, experiences, interpretations and ways of meaning-making by lesbian identifying women themselves within their context.[74] In order to contextualise lesbian subjectivities, it is necessary to examine the gendered and sexualised nationalist discourse operating in Zimbabwe. It is then necessary to examine lesbian identifications and subjectivities and their interaction with hegemonic power by employing different levels of analysis.

Operating within a qualitative research paradigm, this study reflects on approaches from anthropology, political science and social history but advances a phenomenological approach as a means to make sense of how the research participants understand their personal and social worlds.[75] It centralises phenomenology as both a methodological approach and theoretical lens

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71 S Ahmed 'Orientation: toward a queer phenomenology' (2006) 12 *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* at 543-574. In this work Ahmed presents a novel approach to thinking about the spatiality of sexuality, gender, and race and questions the orientation of sexual orientation. She refuses to privilege heterosexuality and instead describes the formation of heterosexual genders as the product of renunciation of the possibilities of homosexuality.

72 Bakare-Yusuf (n 20) at 1.

73 Ngwena (n 40) at 214.

74 JA Smith et al *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, research, practice* (2009) at 21.

75 JA Smith 'Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology' (2004) 1 *Qualitative Research in Psychology* at 40.

for analysis in understanding the experiences of lesbian women in Zimbabwe and the ways in which lesbian women make meaning of such experiences.

Phenomenological research seeks to discover how individuals construct meaning of the human experience and is thus the guiding influence of understanding how lesbian women develop their identifications and navigate daily life.[76] As Bennet states methodology itself is a political process that carves out 'space' for interaction of complex issues such as context, voice, ethics and ideological depth. [77] While some methodologies seek out opinions and generalisations by engaging hypotheses, phenomenology explores contextualised meaning from the knowledge and understanding of those being researched.[78]

Diverse avenues of inquiry pursued include semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, observation in social spaces as well as reviewing primary and secondary literature. The fieldwork took place over a six-month period. Below I engage the three levels of analysis used, discussing specific methods and issues of access for each. These are micro, meso and macro level approaches to a phenomenological framework.

At the micro level, I explore the lived experiences of lesbian women. I conducted in-depth interviews with five lesbian identifying women. I used a 'snowballing' approach to identify lesbian interviewees in Harare across social class. For obtaining the unique experiences of lesbian women I depended largely on the narrative arch of the stories shared, however for understanding more specific details like the ways in which the State regulates sexualities and how this impacts lesbian women I traced patterns across the narratives that were shared.

Narratives are generally accepted as generalisable readings of events that both contain and communicate meaning along with possessing particular political context for society in the form of discourses. As Dunn states, discourses themselves are not just ideas but consist of sets of actions, thoughts, practices that transform ideas into a reality 'by structuring and delineating reality and thereby making it knowable'.[79] As such both narrative and discourse are important interpretive devices as they acknowledge deep historical process and subjectivity as instrumental to social and institutional formations. While this thesis does not concern itself

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[76] T Moerer-Urdahl & J Creswell 'Using transcendental phenomenology to explore the "ripple effect" in a leadership mentoring program' (2004) 3 *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* at 19-20.

[77] J Bennet 'Editorial: Researching for life: paradigms and power' (2008) 11 *Feminist Africa* at 1 available at http://www.agi.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/429/feminist_africa_journals/archive/11/fa_11_3_editorial.pdf (accessed 23 October 2018).

[78] JW Creswell *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2009) at 245.

[79] K Dunn 'African State: rethinking the sovereign state in international relations theory' in K Dunn & T Shaw (eds) *Africa's challenge to international relations theory* (2001) at 56.

with the historical place of same-sex sexualities in Zimbabwe it acknowledges the historical factors that influence the realities of persons that practice same-sex sexualities in contemporary Zimbabwe.

In contexts such as the weakly legitimated Zimbabwean State, the role of narrative and discourse is significant as a counterbalance of societally based sources of authenticity and authority. They offer alternative accounts of life and history as well as society's relationship to the state that can stand in opposition to official state narrative. An example of this is seen in the accounts of Zimbabwean citizens discussing state sanctioned violence during elections versus the official statements of the government declaring peaceful elections. At societal level the use of narratives explains the salience of ideas, memories and social customs in ways that cut across, state, cultures and religions. This is made evident by the stories told by the narrators in this thesis whose experiences sit at the intersection of various realms of life as well as institutions.

It is Nikhil Anand's contention however that stories have multiple vocalities and sites of production such that unlike discourses they are more aware of the different sites at which human agency can be disrupted and that they also reveal new ways of knowing the world.[80] Similarly Jackson asserts that storytelling is an important strategy for finding agency in situations that interviewees would otherwise see as disempowering.[81] Through the storytelling act, the storyteller shift from passively living past events and actively reframe those experiences through others but also within the new interpretations and meanings assigned to those experiences as they were re-lived. It is therefore narrative or storytelling that frames this study.

I looked to lesbian women to describe how they experience daily life and how they understand their lesbian identification. Ahmed in her work brings together queer theory and phenomenology to produce 'queer phenomenology'.[82] A queer phenomenological approach is ideal where there is limited or no information about a subject as it provides meaning where there is an existing void. This is the case with lesbian narratives and experiences in Zimbabwe. Ahmed explains that if phenomenology is about how we come to know things based on our orientation to them then queer phenomenology poses the question of not just what we are

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80 N Anand *Hyadraulic city: Water and the infrastructures of citizenship in Mumbai* (2017) at vii citing K Sivaramakrishnan & A Agrawal *Regional Modernities: The cultural politics of development in India* (2003) at 48.

81 M Jackson *The politics of storytelling: Violence, transgression and intersubjectivity* (2002) at 15.

82 S Ahmed 'Orientation: toward a queer phenomenology' (2006) 12 *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 543-574.

oriented towards but what would happen should our orientations be directed differently or disrupted.

In a sense if the ideas of homosexuality that are held by people on the African continent have been formed from Western constructions of homosexuality through scholarship and multiple forms of media what could richer, more complex and 'authentic' narratives enable? These broader narratives do not assume that lesbian identities on the continent are unaffected by global discourse. Instead, what it does is offer an opportunity to understand what these identifications mean, how they are formed and experienced and how they can be voiced by people on the continent without using Western cultural assumptions of homosexuality as the starting point in both academic and social ways. To negotiate access to these women I relied on my personal and professional links as a lesbian activist.

At the meso level I explored the relationships between lesbian women and their families and these were inextricably linked to the relationships to religious and cultural institutions. I ask what actions or attitudes animate the logics of family members. How did/do these actions or attitudes impact the ways in which lesbian women view themselves and the ways in which they relate with the social environment? I interview lesbian women as well as conduct informal discussions.

At the macro level I engage with the nationalist elites. I examined secondary materials of the gendered and sexualised rhetoric of nationalist elites as well as laws on non-normative sexualities. I ask what representations of the Zimbabwean citizen these elites have constructed to affirm their political hegemony which is based on a nationalist and 'anti-imperialist' idea of acceptable and indigenous sexuality. Textual analysis is supported by Sharma & Gupta as a key method in studying representations, as such I will analyse state-media, parliamentary debate documents and reports by LGBTQ+ activist groups along with the statements of nationalist elites commenting on non-normative sexualities.[83]

The political sensitivity of the research questions presented a potential limitation to the analytical approach as it may have precluded a fully encompassing representation of views regarding non-normative female sexualities thus resulting in a partial understanding of the issue. Careful purposive sampling, tactful interviewing and astute ethical awareness were therefore paramount in conducting this research.

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[83] A Sharma & A Gupta *The Anthropology of the state: A reader* A Sharma & A Gupta (eds) (2006) at 18.

1.5 Argument summary

Accounts of African sexualities from Global South perspectives are on the increase in evolving non-Western sexuality scholarship and these include lesbian subjectivities, wherein a Foucauldian understanding of subjectivity as a self-making and being made by power relations is applied.[84] Colonial anthropology lacked what Archie Mafeje refers to as 'authentic' interlocutors.[85] Here, 'authenticity' is not determined by indigeneity but by the recognition that in order to represent the people they study, anthropologists must develop their ability to decode local vernaculars and encode local ontologies into their research and writing.[86] As a result, colonial anthropology generated an archive about Africans which was devoid of the voices of the Africans and did not acknowledge the political and social power at play in the production of this knowledge. Early researchers on African sexualities were often disappointed by a failure to locate an identifiable category of African lesbians.[87] It was only later when researchers that chose an immersive approach into local communities discovered that same-sex relations between women existed but they 'exceeded and evaded common linguistic expressions.'[88]

More recently, well intentioned scholars, memoirists, bloggers and LGBTQ+ activists that are writing about African lesbian women have largely constructed them as passive victims, trapped in a history of political homophobias and the abusive hegemony of Western ethnocentric discourse that have objectified, erased or even violated African women's bodies.[89] The reference to 'Western' is a cautious one that recognises the diversity of cultures and contexts that are lumped together in this framing. Despite this, there are some voices on the margins contradicting these discourses and challenging the hegemonic construction of women

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84 Growing scholarship on African sexualities is evident in works such as S Ekine & H Abbas 'Introduction' in S Ekine & H Abbas (eds) *Queer African reader* (2013); S Tamale *African sexualities: A reader (ed)* (2011); S Nyanzi 'Queering queer Africa' in Z Matebeni (ed) *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer perspectives on sexual and gender identities* (2014); T Sandfort et al *Boldly queer African perspectives on same-sex sexuality and gender diversity* (2015) HIVOS; N Mkhize et al *The country we want to live in: Hate crimes and homophobia in the lives of black lesbian South Africans* (2010).

85 A Mafeje *The theory and ethnography of African social formations* (1991) cited in JO Adesina 'Archie Mafeje and the pursuit of endogeny: Against alterity and extroversion' (2008) 33 *Africa Development* at 146.

86 Ngwena (n 40) at 75.

87 A Currier & T Migraine-George 'Lesbian'/female same-sex sexualities in Africa' (2016) 21(2) *Journal of Lesbian Studies* at 135 paraphrasing KL Kendall 'Women in Lesotho and the (Western) construction of homophobia' in E Blackwood & SE Wieringa (eds) *Female desires: Same-sex relations and transgender practices across cultures* (1999).

88 KL Kendall 'Women in Lesotho and the (Western) construction of homophobia' in E Blackwood & SE Wieringa (eds) *Female desires: Same-sex relations and transgender practices across cultures* (1999) 157-178 cited in A Currier & T Migraine-George 'Lesbian"/female same-sex sexualities in Africa' (2016) 21(2) *Journal of Lesbian Studies* at 135.

89 A Currier & T Migraine-George 'Lesbian'/female same-sex sexualities in Africa' (2016) 21(2) *Journal of Lesbian Studies* at 133.

as passive, lacking sexual desire and only responsive to male active sexuality.[90] These voices however, are few and those that write specifically about female same-sex sexuality are even fewer.[91] The emergent voices have come predominantly from South Africa where a permitting legal context facilitates broader conversation and scholarship in academic institutions.[92] This is not to say that these are the only voices, however they are the most dominant and their narratives of lesbian experiences have centred mainly on violence, particularly 'corrective rape'.

In these scenarios lesbian women are portrayed as passive bodies on which different forms of gendered and sexualised power act.[93] While great injury and harm has come to some lesbian women, such a limited reading of lesbian lives, and experiences belies the complex ways in which power operates in both liberating and disempowering ways and how it is navigated and resisted by those it is directed at.[94] Stella Nyanzi states that even with the contributions on African sexualities from South Africa, there is need for scholarship from other countries and contexts on the continent which demonstrates the inflections of religions, cultures and histories of those contexts.[95] It is in response to Nyanzi and to the call by Sylvia Tamale for researching and theorising African sexualities that this thesis seeks to contribute by bringing Zimbabwean lesbian women into discourse at the cutting edge of debate, research, scholarship and theorising on African sexualities.[96]

This study attempts to surface the multiple narratives of lesbian women and their political subjectivities in an effort to move away from the constantly reinforced singular story of unidirectional power acting on passive lesbian women's bodies and reifying ideas of helplessness, disposability, victimhood and misery. This study does not suggest that existing stories are false, merely that they are incomplete and as such the ways of seeing, understanding and representing lesbian women is therefore also incomplete. This empirical exploration

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90 T Shefer & D Foster 'Discourses on women's (hetero)sexuality and desire in a South African local context' (2001) 3(4) *Culture, Health & Sexuality* at 375.

91 Some of the voices writing on African sexualities include, S Tamale; C Ngwena; Z Matebeni; S Nyanzi, D Lewis, H Abbas, S Ekine, P Mcfadden.

92 TA Osinubi 'Queer prolepsis and the sexual commons: An introduction' (2016) 47(2) *Research in African Literature* at xiv.

93 *Z* Matebeni 'Feminizing lesbians, degendering transgender men: A model for building lesbian feminist thinkers and leaders in Africa?' (2009) S*ouls* 11(3); A Currier & T Migraine-George 'Lesbian'/female same-sex sexualities in Africa' (2016) 21(2) *Journal of Lesbian Studies* at 135.

94 M Epprecht *Sexuality and social justice in Africa: Rethinking homophobia and forging resistance* (2013) at 58.

95 S Nyanzi 'Knowledge is requisite power: Making case for queer African scholarship' in T Sandfort et al *Boldly queer: African perspectives on same-sex sexuality and gender diversity* (2015) at 130.

96 S Tamale 'Researching and theorizing sexualities in Africa' in S Tamale (ed) *African sexualities: A reader* (2011) at 30.

surfaces a richer more complex array of stories and is potentially contributing to scholarship on African sexualities that is informed by the 'authentic' voices of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe.

I make several arguments in this study. To begin I argue that the archive on African sexualities is lacking though it is growing and that lesbian women in Zimbabwe are missing in this developing archive. I suggest that their absence is not accidental but the result of a gendered and sexualised construction of the Zimbabwean nation-state in which women are both heavily regulated and excluded from the imagination of citizenship. The lives of lesbian women offer a lens through which to see the ways in which the imagination of nationalist state is built on bodies.

The second argument I make is that through the careful detailing of experiences of the narrators we gain insight into the diverse ways women come to lesbian identities along with the varied meanings lesbian identities take for different individuals. The existence of multiple lesbian identities is fraught with political contention as individuals are misrecognised or judged for either conforming or not conforming to behaviours, practices or lifestyle patterns believed to be consistent with lesbian identity. I argue that identities are false and limiting in some ways yet present opportunity for collective organising, recognition and should not be done away with in the absence of an alternative. I also argue that the nature of the response to lesbian women through state, cultural and religious institutions though designed to re-enforce heterosexuality is part of the fuelling force of resistance and an increased desire to assert a lesbian identity. In this sense these institutions are themselves part of the contributing factors to the assertion of lesbian identities.

The third argument I make relates to lesbian subjectivities. I suggest that same-sex sexualities are yet another contentious frontier where nationalist elites make claims to national sovereignty both as a strategy of distraction from other economic and political discourse and out of a genuine desire to function autonomously as a country. At the same time the international community's 'saviour' response is in many ways tied to beliefs of the 'uncivilised' African. I illustrate how the rejection by the state, cultural and religious institutions feeds narratives of disposability and how media images and stories of lesbian women as victims of gendered hate crime feeds narratives of victimhood. And finally, how the agency and innovation of lesbian women in building community with each other and creating chosen families, along with other ways in which they negotiate daily life attests to narratives of adaptation.

1.6 Positionality and ethics

Prior to the study an application for ethical clearance was made to the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria.[97] A research project of this nature poses complex ethical questions about the security of both the researcher and the interviewees. This however was cause for caution and not deterrence from conducting research of this nature. According to Joan Sieber research on sensitive topics must not be discarded simply because it poses complex questions, in fact, avoidance can itself be seen as evasion of responsibility.[98] In saying this she asserts the importance of conducting research that may otherwise be avoided because of its sensitivity. Caution was taken during this study ensuring the anonymisation of people's names and identifying information in the writing of the thesis as well as in the transcripts and notes.

One cannot engage in empirical research without a discussion on objectivity, bias and positionality. My positionality undoubtedly influenced the ways in which I perceived and was perceived by the narrators and this may have impacted the information that was either shared with me or withheld. This concern is in part mitigated by the already clearly articulated and established argument that there is no social science research that can claim true objectivity largely because by its very nature it is imbued with the interpretations of the researcher and coloured by their subjectivity and experiences.[99] I therefore did my best to limit bias by making explicit my position coming into the study. In the presentation of the findings, I also disclose relevant personal factors to the reader.

Through the act of collecting the stories of the narrators and interpreting their words, this study is of my making. Resultantly in the telling of the stories, their analysis and interpretation I consistently attempt to make explicit the distinction between my interpretation and the actual words of the narrators along with this I also make explicit the intellectual choices made along the way. If I may be so bold, I also acknowledge that through writing work I too am contributing to the social and political context in which lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe exist. As a starting point I begin by sharing how I came to study this subject matter.

As a lesbian identifying woman this study is a deeply personal project. I began this exploration because I had grown tired of myself and others complaining about how our lives

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97 Ethical clearance appendix at 205.

98 JE Sieber & B Stanley *Ethical and professional dimensions of socially sensitive research* (1988) at 55.

99 J Clifford & GE Marcus *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography* (1986); Comaroff, J & Comaroff, J *Ethnography and Historical Imagination* (1992); DJ Haraway Modest_witness@second_millenium.femaleman_meets_oncomouse: Feminism and technoscience (1997).

were being constructed through the gaze of the West and projected onto our communities in ways that made us alien within our own communities. On the one hand hate was flowing violently from the mouths of nationalist elites aimed at the 'deviant' (read as non-heterosexual) category of their society. On the other hand, the loudest protest against this violence and discrimination was coming largely from the West. The articulations however were tinged with a contempt for 'authoritarian and backward' African leaders who had not evolved enough to understand acceptance of same-sex sexualities as a mark of modernity.

Frustrated by being misunderstood and misrepresented I wanted to show that there was more to lesbian women in Zimbabwe than incomplete and often inaccurate representations made through global gay discourse and by nationalist leaders. Why did the state reject non-heterosexual persons so violently? Why was the international community so invested in saving non-heterosexuals from their African leaders? Why were African people that practice same-sex sexualities placed in situations that forced them to pick between this identity and their African or racial identity? How were those that practice same-sex sexualities navigating through all of this?

1.7 Significance of research

Research and scholarship on African sexualities broadly has developed and rapidly grown over the last decade and this study seeks to contribute at the cutting edge of the emerging debates and theorising. In bringing to the fore a category of people whose lives and experiences have largely been shrouded in silences this study carries forward what some scholarship has already started to do through centralising and turning to 'authentic' interlocutors to understand their experiences, ways of seeing and meaning-making and theorising from them. Focusing on Zimbabwe, the study examines the gendered and sexualised logics of state regulation of female same-sex sexualities.

In such an examination, a phenomenological approach foregrounds the lives and experiences of lesbian women who have been excluded from the national imagination on one hand and on the other hand have been swallowed up within a homosexuality discourse that has focused almost exclusively on gay men.[100] Their lives and experiences have been framed largely by Western theories and representations and a phenomenological approach creates an opportunity for newer writing that is based on how lesbian women in Zimbabwe perceive and

[100] R Auchmuty 'Feminist approaches to sexuality and law scholarship' (2015) 15(1) *Legal Information Management* at 5.

understand themselves and the world around them. Without starting with the lives and experiences of lesbian women and theorising from them, their realities will continue to be misunderstood and misrepresented within Zimbabwean society.

It is expected that this study will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the state and sexuality discourse in Zimbabwe and will offer broader theoretical contributions to identity construction and meaning-making by lesbian women. Conceptually, the ontological implication of existential phenomenology is that it necessitates a rethinking of the construction of hegemonic power structures such as patriarchy, capitalism and heteronormativity as acting on passive bodies.[101] Without denying that oppression is a concrete historical reality or that the biological body imposes constraints, a phenomenological approach acknowledges the ways in which interactions between society and embodied experience translate to individuals being actively involved in the process of self-discovery and determining who they become. Seeking out the multiple narratives of lesbian women humanises them as individuals with unique experiences and who are also connected to others.

As such, this study will not only be relevant to individuals interested in lesbian subjectivities in Zimbabwe but also to academics with an interest in state-sexuality relations in African nationalist states, human rights activists and persons interested in African sexualities. Equally it is potentially of value to policy makers and legislators as it offers guidance on how to think about equality and inequality, though this in not the intention of the study. By focusing on lesbian experiences and construction of lesbian identities by Zimbabwean women, this study adds to African sexualities scholarship and potentially offsets skewed Western epistemological and ontological canons and representations of African women's sexuality.[102] Additionally it enables us to make potentially novel claims about agency, style, liminality, community and history.[103]

1.8 Anatomy of the thesis

The thesis is organised into seven chapters across two main ideas, the lesbian identity itself and its subjectivities. First is this introductory chapter which introduces the study and lays the

101 Bakare-Yusuf (n 20) at 8.

102 The term 'Western' is often used as shorthand for a diverse people and inaccurately assumes a unitary, ahistorical and culturally homogenous foundational unity. I therefore use the term Western, in its deconstructed form and interrogate its historical fabrication and question its future continuance.

103 J Halberstam 'What's that smell: Queer temporalities and subcultural lives' (2003) 2(1) *The scholar & feminist online* available at http://sfonline.barnard.edu/ps/halberst.htm#section1 (accessed 3 November 2020).

structural foundation of the study by highlighting purpose and significance of the study along with the research questions it answers.

The *second chapter* presents an overview of Zimbabwean nationalism and same-sex discourse. While the introductory chapter offers some background and points to existing scholarly consensus it is evident that no scholarship has provided a satisfying look into the lives and experiences of lesbian women in Zimbabwe. Given the intimacy of this matter and the paucity of data on the subject, this chapter delves into finer detail in its examination of the subject of same-sex sexualities in Africa and how it is impacted by nationalist discourse.

The *third chapter* focuses on the research methodology and theoretical underpinnings of the study. It centralises phenomenology as both the main theoretical and methodological frame and sets the discursive foundation of the study. The merits as well as challenges of a phenomenological approach are highlighted and a justification for its suitability for a study of this nature is explained. Additionally, there is discussion on the supporting theoretical frames that are used in this study. I argue in this chapter that phenomenology supported by a feminist and postcolonial approach makes possible the task of unearthing new contextually nuanced knowledges about African sexualities.

In the *fourth chapter* I situate Zimbabwean lesbian identifying women in contextual perspective by offering a theoretical reading of the Zimbabwean context. The chapter centralises pivotal moments that illustrate the role of the state in the regulation of same-sex sexualities. I offer an analysis of same-sex sexuality discourse by tracing its emergence in the public domain in the 90s and argue that this contributed to cementing homophobic sentiments within the Zimbabwean population. I also trace the unfolding of same-sex sexuality and the role played by culture and religion in influencing public attitudes. Lastly, I analyse lesbian identities and argue that they are formed as products of the local and global context and that this reality has contributed to the transformation of same-sex sexuality discourse. I contend that lesbian identities in contemporary Zimbabwe are different from both historical same-sex sexualities and from Western lesbian identities.

Chapter five builds on the last chapter and brings the lesbian women and their experiences to the fore. It reveals the impact of the actions of the state as well as religious and cultural actors and how these individually and collectively act as straightening devices directing individuals towards heterosexuality. I discuss how lesbian women come to their identities despite the hegemonic force of compulsory heterosexuality and how focusing on this reality enables meaningful contribution to the African sexualities archive.

In *chapter six* I grapple with meaning making and the interpretation of the experiences shared by narrators. I seek out locally nuanced understandings of lesbian identity and experience through an analysis of the changing force of nationalism, culture and religion on lesbian women. I examine the stories told by the narrators to better understand how they navigate regulation within a gendered and sexualised nation-state and how their experiences have contributed to defining the ways in which they currently live their lives. I demonstrate that ideas such as 'coming out' and visibility are not the pressing issues among lesbian identifying women and that issues such as belonging, love and community appear more critical to negotiating daily life. Lastly, I seek out the social and political subjectivities that have emerged out of patriotic history and political homophobia surrounding the lives of lesbian identifying women.

The *seventh* and final chapter presents the conclusion of the study. It reiterates the main arguments of the study and discusses how these arguments both challenge and support existing knowledges on same-sex sexualities in Africa. I also revisit the methodological approach of this study, its successes as well as limitations along with its potential use in other studies to further expand the African sexualities archive. I then conclude with the practical implications of this study. While some recommendations are made, this chapter makes clear that the purpose of this study is to visibilise a category of people who are often forgotten and to contribute to their presence in literature where their voices and their interpretations of their experiences become the basis for theorising about their own lives. Lastly, I end this thesis on a hopeful note that focuses on the possibilities for same-sex sexualities in Zimbabwe that is not about reaching into the past to seek legitimacy but walking into a future that can be shaped differently and provide 'home' for a category of people that have been excluded and marginalised.

2

Tracing the national narrative arch

Nationalism of one kind or another was the cause of most of the genocide of the twentieth century. Flags are bits of coloured cloth that governments use first to shrink-wrap people's brains and then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead.[1]

2. Introduction

African women's history has chartered a long and winding path from indigenous communities through the colonial era and then contemporary Zimbabwe. Alongside it, sexuality discourse has evolved with the transitions in the society. What is significant to note for the purposes of this study is that the territory now known as Zimbabwe consisted of communities that were different from each other in traditions and cultures but that also had intragroup differences.[2] The process of colonisation, aided by missionaries and white traders who laid the colonial foundation is what created a territory known as Southern Rhodesia in which these diverse people now existed along with the settler colonisers. Within this Southern Rhodesian state, there were racialised citizens and tribalised subjects, black people indigenous to the territory falling into the latter category.[3] A range of wars or uprisings that were centred around dispossession took place and the colonial forces triumphed. In 1896-97 there was a Ndebele-Shona uprising known as the first Chimurenga/Umvukela wokuqala.[4] This was later followed by the second Chimurenga in the 1970s and the flag independence in 1980.[5] During this colonial period four significant processes were involved, i) dispossession of land, ii) subjugation of indigenous sovereignties, iii) racial proletarianization in which black people became the labour force and iv) epistemicide (the killing of local knowledges, culture and

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1 A Roy *War talk* (2003) at 47.

2 C Ngara & M Porath 'Shona culture of Zimbabwe's views of giftedness' (2004) 15(2) *High Ability Studies* at 193.

3 Y Siddiqi (2007) *Anxieties of empire and the fiction of intrigue* at 131 citing M Mamdani (1996) *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism.*

4 T Ranger Revolt *in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7: A study in African resistance* (1967).

5 SJ Ndlovu-Gatsheni 'Re-thinking "chimurenga" and "gukurahundi" in Zimbabwe: A critique of partisan national history (2012) 55(3) *African Studies Review* at 3; SJ Ndlovu-Gatsheni *Do 'Zimbabweans' exist?: Trajectories of nationalism, national identity formation and crisis in a postcolonial state* (2009); The term flag independence is described by Fanon as referring to a negotiated settlement made between nationalist elites and the colonisers wherein very little changes apart from a new flag. Instead, a more authentic independence is realised through the acquisition of reappropriation of power and resources by the formerly colonized.

beliefs).[6] In acknowledging epistemicide, I do not wish to suggest that there was a total destruction of belief systems and cultures but that there was significant alienation and separation of people from their beliefs and cultures. In fact, it is Tamale's assertion that despite these losses Africa 'is not a hostage of its late colonial history' however 'colonial methods of researching, theorising and engaging in sexualities in Africa left indelible and significant imprints on people's lives' and these have in some ways a continuing impact on African peoples.[7] We must therefore pay some attention to the

> "diverse forces" which "interrupted the shape of sexualities on the continent – redefining notions of morality, for example, and 'freezing' them into social and political spaces through both penal codification and complex alliances with political and religious authority.[8]

Through colonialism a white man's polity had been put in place, racial segregation enforced, and white superiority entrenched. Black people were settled into reserves and required to have passes in order to travel.[9] Pass laws sat at the intersection of nationality, gender, identity and citizenship and were developed and utilized in complex gendered ways.[10] The Rhodesian State had in place laws to legitimise their position, regulate people and to run the bureaucracy they had established. When flag-independence was achieved in 1980, the nationalist state inherited these laws along with the state apparatus.[11] Upon independence Mugabe extended a conciliatory hand to the Rhodesians and supported his rhetoric of goodwill with influential governmental appointments for White Rhodesian and African opposition party leaders. These actions were clear statements of the intent to build 'a nation of resilience beyond its political, historical, and ethnic schisms'.[12]

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6 T Madlingozi 'Mayibuye iAfrika? Disjunctive inclusions and black strivings for constitution and belonging in "South Africa"' Phd thesis, University of London, 2018 at 39.

7 S Tamale 'Introduction' in S Tamale (ed) *African sexualities: A reader* (2011) at 2.

8 Tamale (n 7) at 2.

9 I Schapera *Migrant labour and tribal life: A study of conditions in the Bechuanaland protectorate* (1947) at 4; S Stichter *Migrant labourers* (1985) at 86 ; T Barnes '"To raise a hornet's nest:" The effect of early resistance to passes for women in South Africa on the pass laws in colonial Zimbabwe' (1989) 5 *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity* at 41 ; C Robertson 'Traders and urban struggle: Ideology and the creation of a militant female underclass in Nairobi, 1960-1990' (1993) 4(3) *Journal of Women's History* at 15.

10 T Barnes '"Am I a man?": Gender and the pass laws in urban colonial Zimbabwe, 1930-80' (1997) 40(1) *African Studies Review* at 59.

11 K Helliker & T Murisa 'Zimbabwe: continuities and changes' (2020) 38(1) *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* at 13.

12 BS Mavima 'Popular expressions of pan-Africanism and Southern African nationalism(s): Convergences, divergences, and reconciliations in South Africa and Zimbabwe' PhD thesis, Michigan State University, 2019 at 107.

A black majority rule was in place and the agenda was nation-building. As in most other African states, it was not long before the narrative shifted from the celebrations of independence. While women's role in the liberation struggle was significant there is clear evidence of attempts to remove women from the public imagination into the domestic arena and regulation of their bodies became a feature in the construction of the nationalist independent Zimbabwe.[13]

Nationalism is a patriarchally-rooted ideology which has claimed that the national question is primary to all other questions and therefore must be resolved before the issues of power can be addressed.[14] The consequence of this view is observed in how issues of power, gender and sexuality remain unaddressed. The role of nationalism in constructing the gendered and sexualised experiences of Zimbabweans can therefore not be ignored. As Gramsci argues, individuals are products of their historical processes and after exposing relevant historical developments it becomes important to carefully examine the ways in which power relations are established and preserved resultantly.[15]

In order to examine the role of nationalism in constructing the gendered and sexualised experiences of citizens it is important to know a little bit more about nationalism. According to Max Weber a nation is 'a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state' and as Gerth and Mills would add, holds notions of common descent, though not necessarily common blood.[16] Jocelyn Alexander in her examination of state-making in Zimbabwe asserts that,

> Nationalism was exclusively about fighting men and land, about British perfidy and national sovereignty – it was not about democracy or rights, concerns that were recast as part of an alien and imperial agenda.[17]

In a critique of studies about nationalism and Zimbabwe, Ndlovu-Gatsheni points out that the greatest weakness can be found in the historicist approaches taken that lack deeper theorisation on nationalism as a phenomenon.[18] Lack of theorisation is critiqued equally by

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13 GW Seidman 'Women in Zimbabwe: postindependence struggles' (1984) 10(3) *Feminist Studies* at 433; P Mcfadden 'Becoming postcolonial: African women changing the meaning of citizenship' (2005) 6(1) *Meridians* at 9.

14 P Mcfadden 'Nationalism and gender issues in South Africa' (1992) *Journal of Gender Studies* at 517.

15 A Gramsci *Selections from the prison notebooks* (1971) at 324.

16 M Weber, HH Gerth & C Wright Mills *from Max Weber: Essays in sociology* (1948) at 176.

17 J Alexander *The unsettled land: State-making and the politics of land in Zimbabwe 1893-2003* (2006) at 185.

18 Ndlovu-Gatsheni *Do 'Zimbabweans' exist?: Trajectories of nationalism, national identity formation and crisis in a postcolonial State* (n 5) at 40.

John Breuilly who contends that the 'danger of untheorized history is that it either smuggles in unacknowledged definitions and concepts or substitutes ill-focused narrative for clear analytical description and explanation.'[19] He further adds that theory that cannot be applied to history is futile, as is history that is not theoretically informed.[20] In seeking to understand nationalism in Zimbabwe therefore I trace briefly the emergence and development of nationalism form its point of departure (anti-colonial discourse) to its graduation into post-independence state ideology while touching briefly on the significant shifts, raptures, continuities and developments that are most relevant to this study.

The 1980s were marked by triumphalist euphoria signifying the transition of Zimbabwe to independence and black majority rule.[21] A national Zimbabwean identity was assumed to be in existence along with the idea that all indigenous black people were included in it. The majority of Zimbabweans gained unique access to education and healthcare.[22] Zimbabwe was well on its way to creating a new life for the black majority. A new national anthem was adopted, 'Ishe komborerai Africa', that echoed the pleas for guidance and blessings for the African continent as a whole. As Hegel states, however, 'every country has its own imagery, its goals, angels, devils or saints who live within the nations traditions…'[23] Zimbabwe was no exception and while it had inherited a highly centralised, technocratic and bureaucratic state apparatus from its colonial predecessors there was an urgent and desperate desire to construct a new and inclusive national identity; an identity from which the black majority had been excluded by the white colonial state.[24]

It was not long before the euphoria began to fade however, and strong efforts to push women liberators out of the public domain into the domestic space were observed.[25] Even their histories were being re-written, stories about rape and male sexual abuse of women by male guerrilla fighters and state military officers violating fellow guerrilla women, civilian women

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19 J Breuilly 'Approaches to nationalism' in G Balakrishnan *Mapping the Nation* (2006) at 146.

20 Breuilly (n 19) at 146.

21 Ndlovu-Gatsheni (n 18) at 3; A Rwodzi 'Reconciliation: A false start in Zimbabwe? (1980- 1990)' (2020) 7 *Cogent Arts & Humanities* at 4.

22 AS Mlambo 'From Education and Health for All by 2000 to the Collapse of the Social Services Sector in Zimbabwe, 1980–2008' (2013) 29(4) *Journal of Developing Societies* at 355.

23 GWF Hegel 'The positivity of the Christian religion' in early theological writings (1795) published (1948) University of Pennsylvania Press at 101.

24 Ndlovu-Gatsheni (n 18) at 10.

25 E Levon 'Sexual subjectivities and lesbian and gay narratives of belonging in Israel' in L Zimman et al (eds) *Queer excursions: Retheorising binaries in language, gender and sexuality* (2014) at 104. See also Mcfadden (n 13) at 9.

or war collaborators have been censored and silenced.[26] The response of silence to such atrocities has resulted in the privileging of repressive masculinist voices in the representations and expression of nationalism in Zimbabwe.

The historical-political patterns behind the role of women in public space is shown in creative ways by Tinashe Mawere.[27] He summarises the history of Joice Mujuru who was born in 1955 in Mount Darwin. At the age of 18 years, after completing two years of secondary school, she joined the liberation struggle. She is recognised in dominant historical narrative for refusing to retreat after she shot down a Rhodesian helicopter using a machine gun in February of 1974.[28] In 1975 she

> served as a political instructor at two military bases, and at the age of 21 years she became camp commander of the Chimoio military and refugee camp in Mozambique. She acquired the liberation war name Teurai Ropa (Spill blood) and rose to become one of the first woman commanders of ZANLA forces.[29]

Her journey through these masculinised spaces reveals femaleness as a site of struggle. Like many other female guerrillas however, despite the experiences of war and contribution to the country, she still conformed to gender expectations and the role of wife. According to Chipo Hungwe this acquiescence is not without context. Hungwe argues that the roles of women in the liberation were largely domestic or involved the entertainment of male guerrillas and that the women who were on the frontlines actually hoped to earn some respect and a sense of equality.[30] After independence women liberators were reduced to 'whores' and difficult women. Mujuru was not prepared to be discarded in these ways and instead toed the line.

Mujuru went so far as to publicly reject the idea of equality between men and women as she declared, 'there is nothing like equality. Those who call for equality are failures in life.'[31] The feminist movement took great offence to her words, it was clear that though Mujuru was a

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26 T Lyons 'Guns and guerrilla girls: Women in the Zimbabwean national liberation struggle' Phd thesis, University of Adelaide, 1999 at 250-251.

27 T Mawere 'Introduction: The historical and cultural trajectory' in C Kruger (ed) *Gendered and sexual imagi(nations) the 2018 Zimbabwean e(r)ections and the aftermath* (2019) at 16.

28 LB Christiansen 'Mai Mujuru: Father of the nation? in K Muchemwa & R Muponde (eds) *Manning the nation: Father figures in Zimbabwean literature and society* (2007) at 92-3.

29 T Mawere 'The gender gaze: Politics, nation and women surveillance' in C Kruger (ed) *Gendered and sexual imagi(nations) the 2018 Zimbabwean e(r)ections and the aftermath* (2019) at 21.

30 C Hungwe 'Putting them in their place: 'respectable' and 'unrespectable' women in Zimbabwean gender struggles' (2006) 6 *Feminist Africa: Subaltern sexualities* at 40.

31 EJ Win 'Joyce Mujuru is a man and can stay with the boys' available at http://www.newzimbabwe.com (accessed 20 November 2020).

woman and a liberation fighter, her service to patriarchy was a threat to Zimbabwean women. The benefits of Mujuru's chosen position were clear, she unlike most other women liberation fighters was spared the insults and condemnation of being a whore and a troublemaker. As Gibson Ncube points out,

> women politicians in Zimbabwe are cast in two diametrically opposed frames. They are referred to as "mothers" when their roles in politics suit patriarchal dictates. However, once they seek to impose themselves as active political subjects and destabilise male-domination, they are considered 'whores' or 'witches'.[32]

Mujuru opted to be 'mother' and played the respectable woman role in exchange for acceptance. However, she falls out with ruling ZANU (PF) when she is believed to have aspirations of presidential leadership. Suddenly she poses a threat to male dominance and leadership. At this point her heroic liberation history is retold in distorted ways and her political ascendence is reduced to the result of her relationship to her late husband Solomon Mujuru. She too becomes a 'whore' in this moment. The vilification and slander of female political aspirants demonstrates the gendered dictates of patriarchal societies. This kind of misrepresentation of women's histories is often seen in accounts from male perspectives framed within patriarchal notions of nationalism.[33] Mujuru's story is just one of many.

In the 1990s within the art spaces including fiction writing and film, the seemingly perpetual disenfranchisement of Zimbabwean women was being highlighted.[34] The 1996 film *Flame* is one such example that tells the story or two girls Florence and Nyasha who leave high school to join the liberation struggle. Within the ranks of the ZANLA fighters when they arrive in Mozambique, they are renamed Comrade Flame and Comrade Liberty respectively. During their time there, they experience the struggles and traumas of being women on the frontlines. Following independence, they are celebrated for a brief moment and soon Comrade Flame finds herself in a rural home, in poverty and with an abusive husband. The narration by Comrade Liberty at the beginning of the film where she is remembering how they felt when the war was won, 'we thought we were free, but life did not live up to our dreams' is made evident by the

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[32] G Ncube 'Eternal mothers, whores or witches: the oddities of being a woman in politics in Zimbabwe' (2020) 34(4) *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity* at 26.

[33] J Nhongo-Simbanegavi *For better or worse?: Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle* (2000); T Lyons *Guns and guerilla girls: Women in the Zimbabwean national liberation struggle* (2004); M Samuelson *Remembering the nation, dismembering women? Stories of the South African transition* (2007).

[34] T Dangaremba *Nervous Conditions* (1988); C Hove *Bones* (1988); the film *Neria* written by T Dangarembga (1993).

ending in which Flame and Liberty are discussing the Independence Day celebrations of that year and Flame asks Liberty when they would be celebrated again:

> Flame: That's for us...aren't we heroes?
> Liberty: No Flame, we're just women.

With those words Liberty summarises the lives of women within post-independence Zimbabwe and how 'women entered the Zimbabwean post-colonial national project already facing an uphill task in pursuit of liberation and equality'.[35] The attempts to erase them and their contributions to the nation are startling. These women's narratives illustrate the ways in which Zimbabwe's

> political history is one that makes wombs of women, empties [them] of all human complexity, impregnates [them] with all that is good or wrong in our society so that women are either Mothers of the Nation, birthing all that is good, or Evil Stepmothers, birthing all that is bad in our society.[36]

Along with other identity politics-based approaches, the nationalist elites' concern with controlling the sexuality of its members in the nation-building project became apparent. There were clear efforts to define acceptable sexual behaviour of citizens and a rejection of that which was perceived as repugnant to the image of the nation.[37] Controlling the sexuality of citizens as a means of maintaining hegemonic power was integrated into the agenda of nation-building and framed as being 'for the wellbeing of the nation.'[38] The need for the 'barrel of the gun' narrative emerged. As Zimbabweans became increasingly disillusioned by economic decline the ZANU (PF) government in a bid to maintain power turned to the liberation history to remind Zimbabweans of who they were and how the state had come into being. The importance of defending what had been attained through struggle was increasingly highlighted and nationalism was conflated with the liberation war. This message was not just a reminder of history but a caution that violence could be used in defence of that independence. As Hannah Arendt states however,

35 Mavima (n 12) at 197.
36 P Chigumadzi *These bones will rise again* (2018) at 125.
37 Ndlovu-Gatsheni (n 18) at 4.
38 S Pryke 'Nationalism and sexuality, what are the issues?' (1998) 4(4) *Nations and Nationalisms* at 530.

> Power is indeed of the essence of all government, but violence is not. Violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues. And what needs justification by something else cannot be the essence of anything.[39]

This statement by Arendt visibilises the danger of centralising the liberation war in the Zimbabwean narrative. What is of value in Zimbabwean nationalism should be what it set out to achieve, however when that began to fail it was the means through which independence had been attained that took centre stage. A new national anthem was adopted in March of 1994, one that shifted significantly from the previous anthem shared by several countries in the region and focused precisely on the narrative of liberation. Mama and Ozakawa-Rey in reflecting on the political culture of new African nations describe how,

> authoritarian and militarist legacies, ritualised in the national parades of the Head of State and 'his' armed forces, echoed in the national symbols - flags and anthems that invariably have military origins.[40]

The first verse of the new anthem in particular is of significance,

> Simudzai mureza wedu weZimbabwe
> *Lift high the flag of Zimbabwe*
> Yakazvarwa nemoto wechimurenga,
> *Born of revolutionary fire*
> Neropa zhinji ramagamba
> *And the abundant blood of our heroes*
> Tiidzivirire kumhandu dzose;
> *May we defend it from all foes*
> Ngaikomborerwe nyika yeZimbabwe.[41]
> *And may the almighty, protect and bless our country Zimbabwe.*

While there is an official English version of this anthem, it does not truly convey the same meaning as the Shona and Ndebele versions. The verse essentially states that Zimbabwe was born from revolutionary fire and the blood of heroes and must thus be defended from all foes

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39 H Arendt *On violence* (1970) at 51.

40 A Mama & M Okazawa-Ray 'Editorial: Militarism, conflict and women's activism' (2008) 10 *Feminist Africa* at 4.

41 The literal translation of this verse is, Lift high the flag of Zimbabwe, born of revolutionary fire, and the abundant blood of our heroes, let us defend it form all foes, and may the almighty protect and bless our country Zimbabwe.

while the second line of the English version merely describes the flag as a symbol of freedom. Whatever the distortions or intentions of those distortions, that is not of importance in this study, all the new national anthem set out to do was cement the nationalist intentions of the government.

In Zimbabwe, nationalism is not just studied as a historical phenomenon but additionally as an ever-present reality in the composition of the post-independence state.[42] The dominant narrative in Africa broadly and in Zimbabwe in particular is that of nationalism as a fight against foreign rule. As the Zimbabwean government was taking the citizenry down memory-lane they were also seeking to firmly establish a more present rallying point to mobilise a unified Zimbabwe. A moral code that was both gendered and sexualised emerged as a key strategy. In mobilising citizens around the rejection of certain practices or towards the affirmation of others the state focused on sexuality and bodies.

Fifteen years after independence, the topic of 'homosexualism and lesbianism' was discussed in the chamber of parliament and one member of parliament remarked, 'If this was to be talked about in rural areas where we hold our meetings people will run away from such meetings. It is really disgusting and humiliating. ...'[43] The negative opinions of nationalist elites were spread through media in speeches and statements at public meetings and during political rallies. For a moment there was something to rally behind. The political elites worked to spark moral outrage around homosexuality in the hope that it would offer some reprieve from the economic and political frustrations of the masses.

The theorisation of the nation and nationalism as gendered and sexualised is therefore key in this study.[44] Nations have been understood as endorsing the construction, institutionalisation and persistence of divisions along gender lines and condoning gendered access to resources.[45] Through this process gender differences are naturalised in nation-building projects. As historical constructs however, nations shift culturally and politically and understanding such shifts is useful for understanding discourses of gender and sexuality. These shifts are resisted in various ways by political elites because as Andreea Enache argues,

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42 Ndlovu-Gatsheni (n 18) at 41.

43 M Matura Zimbabwe parliamentary debates Vol. 22/38 (6 September1995) at 2520 cited in M Epprecht 'The "unsaying" of indigenous homosexualities in Zimbabwe: Mapping a blindspot in an African masculinity' (1998) 24 (4) *Journal of Southern African Studies* at 638.

44 A McClintock *Imperial leather, race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest* (1995); A McClintock 'Family feuds: Gender, nationalism and the family' (1993) 44 *Feminist review*; A McClintock '"No longer in a future heaven": Women and nationalism in South Africa' (1991) 51 *Transition;* N Yuval-Davis *Gender and nation* (1997); N Yuval-Davis & F Anthias *Women-Nation-State* (1989).

45 McClintock *Imperial leather, race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest* (n 44) at 353.

> Nation states rely on cultural, ethnic and religious homogeneity in order to exist. Diversity can only be external for them, it can only inhabit the spaces beyond the nation's high and broad (de)fence. "One nation, one state, one territory" is the death penalty for the possibility of existence of a respected and dignified Other.[46]

The strategies employed by political elites to preserve norms are thus not surprising. Nationalisms are about power and a Foucauldian conceptualisation of power centralises resistance as a result of power relations far more than its repressive function. This is based on Michel Foucault's observation that state projects are not readily taken up by citizens and are often opposed in ways that create gendered nationalist power struggles.[47] In exploring contemporary African states there is a need to reflect on the complex colonial legacies as a means to distinguish between continuities and new nationalist discourses. The hallmark of colonial studies is that colonialism is produced, extended and illuminated by gendered and sexual power.[48] A similar argument may be made for contemporary African nationalist states however gendered and sexualised politics is under-theorised within these contexts.

Keguro Macharia suggests that while theories and methodologies for developing queer African sexualities must be drawn from African studies, queer studies and postcolonial studies, the pivotal hinge is a necessity of remaining loyal to African-centred inquiries in their diversity, ambivalences, contradictions and complexities.[49] Most existing scholarship on queer sexualities has centred around gay men. In highlighting this centralisation of gay men, I do not seek to accuse them, instead I seek merely to make obvious the gendered politics and power inequalities at play in the production of queer knowledge.[50] In the vast majority of international contexts queer refers to a broad spectrum of diverse sexual identities and practices that resist heteronormativity though when analysing literature by researchers and theorists in African contexts, one finds that it typically makes reference to gay and lesbian identities and is not

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46 A Enache 'Nation states and cultural diversity' (2005) 1(4) *Europe's Journal of Psychology* at 1.

47 M Foucault *The history of sexuality: An introduction vol 1* trans R Hurley in 1990 (1978) at 92.

48 SL Morgensen 'Theorising gender, sexuality and settler colonialism: An introduction' (2012) 2 *Settler Colonial Studies* at 3.

49 K Macharia 'Archive and method in queer African studies' (2015) 29(1) *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equality* at 145.

50 PA Medie 'Power, knowledge and the politics of gender in the Global South' (2018) 1(1) *European Journal of Politics and Gender* at 38; K Celis et al 'Introduction: Gender and politics: A gendered world, a gendered discipline' (2013) *The Oxford Handbooks Online* at 2.

particularly accommodating of other sexualities.[51] That said, within the queer studies discipline itself there is a clear Eurocentric bias that leaves African sexualities outside of its purview. As Spurlin asserts, queer studies

> …have shown little interest in the cross-cultural variations of the expression and representation of same-sex desire; homosexualities in non-Western societies are, at best, imagined or invented through the imperialist gaze of Euroamerican queer identity politics, appropriated through the economies of the West, or, at worst, altogether ignored.[52]

Consequently, though the use of the term queer in the description of African sexualities has grown significantly over the last two decades it is yet to gain political significance that goes beyond gay and lesbian identities. It is still currently not understood by the vast majority of people. For some that use queer identity it is formed as resistance toward what is normative, it is for them a disruption of the heterosexual/homosexual binary and an embrace of the 'other' subject position. In a sense they take lesbian or gay discourse which is equated with same-sex sexuality and redeploy it to serve the political agenda of disrupting the homosexual/heterosexual binary and the normativity of these constructions. In this study however it was clear that the language of lesbian was the most accessible whether or not it was understood in the same ways by those who used it.

The proposed study is not an archival recovery project and thus does not overly concern itself with historical documentation of same-sex relations amongst women in Zimbabwe. However, this study seeks to bring voice where silences have characterised the lives of lesbian women and unearth how they experience their identities and their daily lived realities. It further surfaces the gendered and sexualised nature of the Zimbabwean state. If one were to view this documentation of non-normative female sexualities as signifying a reclaiming of academic province that has been drawing predominantly from imported theory, then this attempt at a phenomenological approach to Zimbabwean women's narratives would be significant. Phenomenology is a methodology rooted in philosophy that has developed and evolved from the work of Edmund Husserl. Phenomenological analysis takes an interest in lived experiences

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51 DP Amory '"Homosexuality" in Africa: Issues and debates' (1997) 25(1) *A Journal of Opinion* at 8; V Reddy 'Moffies, stabanis, and Lesbos: The political construction of queer identities in Southern Africa' PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu Natal, 2005; EP Motswapong 'Surviving behind the mask: Lesbians and gays in Botswana' in B Scherer (ed) *Queering paradigms* (2010).

52 WJ Spurlin 'Broadening postcolonial studies/decolonising queer studies: Emerging "queer" identities and cultures in Southern Africa' in JC Hawley (ed) *Postcolonial, queer: Theoretical intersections* (2001) at 185.

and how people make sense of their experiences.[53] It is an ideal approach for research where little information exists. This study proposes to employ a combined approach of African studies, postcolonial theory and African feminism within a phenomenological framework that goes beyond 'standpoint epistemology' and deconstructs binaries and the essentialisation of identity categories.[54]

Through examining the production of lesbian identifications and the lived experiences of lesbian women in Zimbabwe I suggest that as conceptualised by Foucault, it is through the fractures and interstices of multiple points of state power that lesbian agential movement and experiences emerge.[55] Such realities must thus be reflected in the 're-writing' and 're-righting' of our versions of our narratives in our own ways and for our own purposes.[56] The paucity of local research on lesbian subjectivities and the gendered and sexualised politics necessitates an examination that highlights local perspectives on the issue.

2.1 Understanding the subject

The rapidly growing field of African sexualities scholarship creates an opportunity for discussion on female same-sex sexualities in Africa which have been largely invisible. Although the literature covers a wide range of themes, this section will focus on five themes that provide both a theoretical and contextual basis for this study. These include, exploring the relationship between nationalism, gender and sexuality, examining the existing debates about necessity of African sexualities scholarship, discussion on identity and identification politics, understanding operations of power through gendered and sexualised discourses and very briefly introduces phenomenology as a methodological approach for this study. These themes are presented in the literature in a variety of contexts however this study will primarily focus on their relationship to lesbian identification in Zimbabwe and its interaction with hegemonic power.

2.1.1 Nationalism, gender and sexuality

Despite the strong connections between nationalism, gender and sexuality, inadequate attention has been paid to understanding states through the lenses of gender and sexuality. Kim-Puri

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53 JA Smith et al *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, research, practice* (2009) at 57.

54 M Maynard 'Standpoint epistemology'' in S Lewis-Beck et al (eds) (2011) *The sage encyclopaedia of social science research methods* at 2.

55 M Foucault *The government of self and others*: *Lectures at the collège de France* (1982-1983) at 63.

56 LT Smith *Decolonising methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (1999) at 28.

(also known as Kim and Puri) argue that understanding the cultural and political landscape of nation and state is essential to an analysis of gender and sexuality making this linkage particularly important for this study.[57] Their work builds on the work of other feminists such as Anne McClintock that focused on linking gender to nationalism by advancing the idea that all nationalisms are gendered.[58] As McClintock agues,

> [d]espite many nationalists' ideological investment in the idea of popular unity, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalisation of gender difference. No nation in the world gives men and women the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state. Rather than expressing the flowering into time of the organic essence of a timeless people, nations are contested systems of cultural representation that limit and legitimise people's access to the resources of the nation-state.[59]

The centrality of sexuality as a unique site where state desire and efforts towards disciplined, governable subjects interacts with the expansion of individual desires and subjectivities is increasingly visible through activism, criminalisation and other forms of regulation in post-independent states.[60] Women's rights activism in particular attests to this growing tension.

As the assertion of women's rights has grown on the continent more women have taken an interest in reconciling 'feminism' with culture and other converging factors, in assertive and positive ways. At the same time however, it has become increasingly evident that the earlier preoccupation with achieving post-colonial 'democracy' and 'modernisation' was misplaced, because despite all their efforts women are still struggling and confronting patriarchy and regulation in different realms of their lives.[61] National progress did not necessarily translate into progress for women.

Gender and sexuality within the field of African studies have traced complex and sometimes opposing trajectories. The history of gender within this field is a much longer one while the visibility and analytic relevance of sexuality is more recent. Both gender and sexuality

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57 Kim-Puri, H J 'Conceptualizing Gender-Sexuality-State-Nation: An Introduction' (2005) 19(2) *Gender and Society* at 137.

58 McClintock *Imperial leather, race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest* (n 44) at 353; Yuval-Davis *Gender and nation* (n 44) at 33.

59 McClintock *Imperial leather, race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest* (n 43) at 353.

60 S Osha 'A postcolonial scene: On girls' sexuality' (2005) 2 *Understanding human sexuality seminar series* at 64.

61 KG Asiedu 'Africa has forgotten the women leaders of its independence struggle' (2019) *Quartz Africa* available at https://qz.com/africa/1574284/africas-women-have-been-forgotten-from-its-independence-history/ (accessed 12 November 2020).

have had their theoretical reach and heuristic value critiqued from African perspectives. As far back as 1987, Africanist scholar Ifi Amadiume critiqued the binary structure of gender arguing that the dichotomous categories of male and female do not fully encompass various roles and statuses in society.[62] Similarly, Oyeronke Oyewumi challenged gender for its Western based ethnocentric presumptions.[63] Critically, more recent ethnographic studies have centred sexual fluidities thus disrupting the binary opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality.[64] Other scholars have pushed this even further calling for re-thinking or un-thinking of sexuality in African studies.[65]

Zimbabwean nationalist elites have much to say about women and sexual minorities and though their rhetoric may seem illogical, obsessive and morally charged it cannot be ignored. It conflates complex processes about identity and belonging, gender and sexuality, nationalism, anti-colonialism, religion and culture into a single debate that pits an international human rights discourse against nationalist claims to state sovereignty. This rhetoric is not benign as it has political implications, however it also provides a lens into the gendered and sexualised nationalism of Zimbabwe and other African states. It reveals the commitment of Zimbabwean nationalism to what is repeatedly referred to by nationalist elites as 'Africanness' and the subsequent rejection of ideas that are perceived to threaten this 'Africanness'.

The response to protecting this 'Africanness' can be observed in the gendered regulation of sexuality in Zimbabwe. This regulation is rooted in the socio-cultural, economic and political grasp of nationalism and constitutes a dialogue within patriarchy. Anne McClintock boldly states that all nationalisms are gendered, and all are invented.[66] Ernst Gellner concurs with the idea of nations as inventions that are constructed by nationalisms.[67] Gellner goes further to assert that 'it is nationalism that engenders nations, and not the other way around'.[68] While Anderson agrees that nations are invented he cautions that they are not a 'falsity' as portrayed by Gellner but rather are imagined communities. He views them as the product of systems of cultural representations in which people come to imagine a shared experience of identification.[69]

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62 I Amadiume *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African society* (1987) at 225.

63 O Oyewumi *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses* (1997) at 13.

64 SE Dankwa '"It's a silent trade": Female same-sex intimacies in post-colonial Ghana' (2009) 17 *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* at 192-3.

65 S Arnfred *Re-thinking sexualities in Africa* (2004) at 7.

66 McClintock 'Family feuds: Gender, nationalism and the family' (n 43) at 61.

67 E Gellner *Thought and change* (1964) at 151.

68 E Gellner *Nations and nationalism* (1983) at 49.

69 B Anderson *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (1983) at 6.

Anderson's insight helps us make sense of why this 'invention' is protected and so highly valued even by those that it excludes from citizenship. Women constitute one such category that is frequently excluded from citizenship in various ways. For example, the framing of a person's love for their country as 'patriotism', an etymologically male word demonstrates the view of the nation and citizen as being male.[70] The imagination of the shared experience of Zimbabwean identification however means that women often continue to see themselves as Zimbabwean and the same may be said for sexual minorities who despite exclusion and marginalisation still see themselves as Zimbabwean.

2.1.2 Patriarchy within nationalist, anti-colonialist, religious and cultural discourse

In addition to nationalism, anti-colonialism, religion and cultural discourse all constitute dominant discourses that account for the regulation of sexualities in Zimbabwe. What these discourses have in common is their rootedness in a patriarchal ideology. The discussion on nationalism demonstrates its gendered and sexualised nature. In order to maintain its dominance nationalism invokes anti-colonialist, religious and cultural discourse to help anchor itself.

Fetson Kalua, in his reflections on Homi Bhabha's 'third space', posits that the popular consciousness of black Africans has not yet been pervaded by the fluidity of identity.[71] This is reflected in the continued belief in a pure African identity even in this increasingly globalised and globalising world.[72] It is this belief that nationalist elites have been striving to assert right from flag independence. This idea of a singularity of identity shared by black individuals within the nationalist state is glorified as an anti-colonialist stance. African nationalist elites are constantly in search of epistemologies that affirm this singular identity. It is Basile Ndjio's contention that through nationalist discourse on sexuality,

> African history and culture are…selectively reshaped, revised and even re-invented by nativist discourses through a deliberate amnesia regarding earlier forms of African sexualities, including male and female same-sex relations.[73]

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70 A Hamrud & C Wassholm 'Patriotism and patriarchy – The impact of nationalism on gender equality' (2014) *Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation* at 36.

71 F Kalua 'Homi Bhabha's third space and African identity' (2009) 21 *Journal of African Cultural Studies* at 25.

72 Kalua (n 71) at 25.

73 B Ndjio 'Sexuality and nationalist ideologies in post-colonial Cameroon' in Wieringa et al (eds) *The sexual history of the global south: sexual politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (2013) at 199.

In Ndjio's analysis of postcolonial sexualities in Cameroon he argues that through attempts at reconstructing an 'authentic African selfhood' that was perverted by colonialism, an

> 'imagined community' was forged: firstly, by the political annihilation of any kind of (sexual) difference that could constitute an obstacle to the achievement of nation-building, [then] secondly, by the means of violent exclusion from the postcolonial public sphere of the embarrassing presence of those sexual 'aliens' whose unconventional sexual desires and practices problematise the very ontology of the African subject.[74]

Prinsloo suggests that this longing and search for African epistemologies, culture and a pure African identity is not an unreasonable one.[75] Instead he profers three possible logics for this desire and search, two of which have resonance in this study. The first being that it is part of an attempt to offer narratives that can challenge or replace the dominant Western epistemological and ontological canons of representation of African identity. The second is that the desire for a unitary and exclusive African identity would provide a sense of belonging.[76] This second logic supports the idea that this quest and yearning of nationalist elites is the product of a desire to belong resulting from exclusion from the colonial state.

As Mamdani suggests, colonialism did not create 'African people' instead it created subjects - tribes regulated by customary law and racialised citizens under single civil law.[77] Colonialism produced what Cameroonian theologian Engelbert Mveng refers to as 'anthropological poverty' which acted to diminish the cultures, histories and identities of colonised peoples.[78] This framing advances the ideas of Fanon in his seminal work on the trauma of colonisation in which he describes the colonial project as;

> not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.[79]

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74 Ndjio (n 73) at 199. See also M Epprecht *Heterosexual Africa?: The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS* (2008); CA Johnson 'Off the Map: How HIV/AIDS programming is failing same-sex practicing people in Africa' *New York: International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission* (2007).

75 P Prinsloo 'Being an African: some queer remarks from the margins' in M Kearny (ed) *From conflict to recognition: Moving multiculturalism forward* (2012) at 151.

76 Prinsloo (n 75) at 152.

77 M Mamdani *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996) at 19.

78 B Bujo *African theology in the 21st Century: The contribution of the pioneers, Vol 2* (2003) at 238.

79 F Fanon *The wretched of the earth* (1967) at 169.

Africans were not viewed as neutrally different but as inferior and their existence, beliefs, knowledges were marked against the 'proper' and 'civilised' way of the coloniser. Achille Mbembe in his writing discusses the 'various discourses of longing, the longing for black freedom, black beauty and black unity.[80] This history continues to weigh on the beings of former settler colonies and as such it is challenging to imagine colonisation as a past or historical phenomenon. Rather, colonialism is still heavily implicated in regulation discourse, not just from what it legally and structurally imposed in formerly colonised territories but as Fanon observed, in what it distorted, disfigured and destroyed in the histories of colonised peoples which in some ways many African nationalists have struggled unsuccessfully to reach for.

This context sets an ideal scene for the nationalist driven anti-colonial project. Nationalist elites manipulate the traumas of citizens and use their hegemonic control to reject and define as unacceptable any position which threatens their power and dominance and this includes their violent responses when feminism presents challenges to patriarchal repression and heterosexism. In the words of Rahul Rao:

> [nationalist elites] have tended to valorise state sovereignty by exaggerating the risk of neo-colonial predation by external actors and obscuring the culpability of postcolonial states in impeding the enjoyment of self-determination by their societies.[81]

Conversely those that fixate on African states as dysfunctional treat the international as sanitised space consisting of heroic actors that are ready to rescue people in benighted locales in what Rao describes as 'spatial allocation of culpability'.[82] Rao's insights make it possible to understand the dangers of taking on either one of these extremes which either absolves nationalists of responsibility or glorifies non-Africans as saviours.

Religion is implicated in the colonial project and in the maintenance of post-independence order. Pastor Roger Mvumba in Tendai Huchu's 'The hairdresser of Harare', in a passionate sermon pulls religion and the nation-state together blaming immorality for the unfortunate decline of Zimbabwe.[83] He assigns blame for Zimbabwe's political, economic and social angst on the existence of deviant sexualities such as homosexuality and sex work. In the

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80 A Mbembe 'On the postcolony: A brief response to critics' (2006) 4(2) *African Identities* at 152.

81 R Rao 'Postcolonial cosmopolitanism: Making place for nationalism' in J Tripathy & S Padmanabhan (eds) *The Democratic Predicament: Cultural diversity in Europe and India* (2013) at 172.

82 As above.

83 T Huchu *The hairdresser of Harare* at 72.

novel, Huchu demonstrates the ways in which the practices of religious institutions construct homosexuality as a 'perverse, filthy, disease' linking it to social moral decay when he makes the fervent declaration,

> Brothers and sisters, don't you see the signs in front of your eyes? Look at Zimbabwe. Ask why the Lord is punishing us like this. It's because the whole earth has become like Babylon or Sodom and Gomorrah. […]You must be on the lookout for homosexuals and sexual deviants. Perverts shall burn. How can a man and another man sleep together? God made Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve. Can a woman and a woman make a baby?[84]

This judgment loaded sermon condones exclusionary and discriminatory moral codes. And in this scene where this declaration is made, it fills the character Vimbai with the holy spirit when she hears these words, pointing to the

> persuasive role that Christian religious languages and symbolic practices play in masking as 'holy' what are in fact punitive and exclusionary behaviours, not only in facilitating the governing of sexualities via stigmatising spiritual edict, but simultaneously in linking this to views of the properly powerful and devout nation.[85]

In this sermon the pastor makes reference to collective sin. While Christianity is built on individual accountability to God and the salvation of individual souls there is a clear belief in earthly collective punishment for collective sin. This idea might offer an explanation for why individuals and religious communities are concerned about what would otherwise be the 'individual sins' of members of the society. If people believe that the actions of pockets of their society can be responsible for their own pain and suffering through punishment from god it is no surprise therefore that they would be invested in regulating morality and other people's behaviour in the ways we observe.

The role of the state and other institutions such as a religion and culture in condemning and repressing same-sex sexualities limits the ability of people that practice same-sex sexualities to live in ways that are open, causing them to seek out other ways of establishing healthy balanced lives. Some of these ways will be explored in later chapters when we begin to explore the lives and experiences of lesbian women.

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84 Huchu (n 83) at 72.

85 AL Mtenje 'Contemporary fictional representations of sexualities from authoritarian African contexts' PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University Western Cape, 2016 at 107.

2.2 Conclusion

The above synopsis of literature illuminates the gendered and sexualised context in which this study takes place and brings to the fore the centrality of power in understanding the lived experience and subjectivities of lesbian women. At the point of intersection between nationalism, regulatory discourse, hegemonic forces, gender and sexuality this overview also reveals the partial and often inaccurate representation of African sexualities. It brings same-sex sexualities into focus from the perspective of those that practice them and understanding them through that lens. It is about the force of patriarchy and the ways it manifests through institutions such as state, culture and religion. It is about the gendered and sexualised nature of the state and the marginalisation of women within it but also the powerful ways in which women resist, subvert and negotiate life.

3

Phenomenology as methodology and theory

Only when our entire culture for the first time saw itself threatened by radical doubt and critique did hermeneutics become a matter of universal significance.[1]

3. Introduction

Qualitative researchers highlight the idea that reality is a socially constructed idea. They pay particular attention to the intimate relationship between researcher and the object or subject of study while acknowledging the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Additionally, they emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry.[2] They seek answers to questions that emphasise the ways in which social experience is created and given meaning. Research that is qualitative in nature concerns itself with the central and interpretive role of the researcher and focuses on the meaning of human experience.[3]

There is a long tradition in social science of critiquing positivist approaches to knowing phenomena. We see the promotion of different epistemological methodologies to gain fuller descriptions and interpretations of experiences and understanding the ways they have been committed to memory in the intellectual context of their time.[4] While such contributions are foundational to the present work, it remains the case that what has been explored to a lesser extent in social science are the theoretical implications of how Western logics and methods can miss out critical knowledge and generate skewed results if not critically applied and contextualized.[5] For instance, if we take lesbian identification as our analytical object and travel with it as it is experienced and understood in practice from one place to another, a new series of insights about the identification or its related experiences would potentially emerge. It reveals that one identity is linked to many varied experiences. From individual to family realities, from the household to community, from the community to the state, the reality and experiences of these identities take a variety of forms that are historically, culturally and materially located. Same-sex sexualities are an expression of human sexuality, a sexual

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1 H Gadamer *The Gadamer reader: A bouquet of the later writings* (2007) at 237.

2 NK Denzin & YS Lincoln 'Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research' in NK Denzin & YS Lincoln (eds) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (2005) at 10.

3 B Banister et al *Qualitative methods in psychology: A research guide* (1994) at 1.

4 P Sutch & J Elias *International relations: the basics* (2007) at 14.

5 S Tamale 'Researching and theorizing sexualities in Africa' in S Tamale (ed) *African sexualities: A reader* (2011) at 25.

identity, a pathologized phenomenon, an unspoken reality and a political paradox all at the same time. These realities co-exist sometimes in harmony and sometimes in conflict. To engage in the politics of same-sex sexualities in Zimbabwe is to engage in an exercise in ontological politics – the politics of what is real and how these different realities co-exist and collide with each other.

A collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated and is visible through the ways in which knowledge about African sexualities was historically collected and through the dominance of Western discourse in framing same-sex sexualities globally. What Said refers to as the Western discourse about the 'Other', speaks directly to the ways in which African sexualities have been constructed. Wherein data has been collected, classified and represented in various ways to the West, then through the eyes of the West back onto those that have been colonized.[6] This study highlights the inherently limited and positivist understanding of lesbian identity and centralizes the experiences borne of this identity, at the same time paying attention to the ways in which knowledge about African sexualities has been constructed and contested. Sexualities are historical, social and political phenomena. Their acceptance, recognition, regulation and rejection are social and not scientific processes. To attempt to understand them in scientific terms would be to limit what can be known about them. Using lesbian identification and experience this study attempts to surface this reality.

This chapter is separated into two parts. The first focuses on tracing the evolution of phenomenology from Husserl to its modern adaptations, as well as the theoretical parameters set by phenomenology in this study. The second addresses the methodological approach along with how it was applied in this study. As a methodological frame, phenomenology has evolved into a process of seeking the reality of individuals' narratives of their lived experiences of phenomena.[7] The chapter then concludes by consolidating the reasons why phenomenology was the preferred framework for this study and how it was applied.

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6 EW Said *Culture and imperialism* (1993) xxvii.

7 P Yuksel & S Yildirim 'Theoretical frameworks, methods, and procedures for conducting phenomenological studies in educational settings' (2015) 6(1) *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry* at 2 citing S Cilesiz 'Educational computer use in leisure contexts: A phenomenological study of adolescents' experiences at internet cafes' (2009) 46(1) *American Educational Research Journal*; E Husserl *Logical Investigation* vol 1-2 JN Findlay trans (1970); C Moustakas *Phenomenological research methods* (1994).

3.1 Part 1 – Phenomenology as theory

3.1.1 Tradition of phenomenology

This study relies on the tradition of phenomenology both as theory and as a research method.[8] For Moran phenomenology is best understood as 'a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears….'. In loose terms, phenomenology is an inquiry into the structures of consciousness as we experience them from the first-person point of view.[9]

The phenomenological tradition is rooted in the seminal works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Satre and Merleau Maurice Ponty amongst others. In its evolution over the last century phenomenology as a philosophical perspective has shed light on previously ignored phenomena of the human experience, reformulated philosophical questions and penetrated thought in almost all fields of scholarship.[10] In observing the tradition of phenomenology there are a variety of distinct philosophies.[11]

For instance, 'transcendental philosophy is often connected with being able to go outside of an experience, as if standing outside of ourselves to view the world from above, while existential philosophy reflects a need to focus on our lived experience.'[12] If we turn to hermeneutic phenomenology however, the emphasis lies on interpretation rather than mere description.[13] This study uses hermeneutic phenomenology, a phenomenological strand that emerges from the writing of Martin Heidegger whose own theory developed from the work of Edmund Husserl. Husserl conceptualised the original phenomenological philosophy known as transcendental phenomenology which stands in stark contrast to the hermeneutic school of Heidegger. Hermeneutic phenomenology turns its focus from the mere description of an experience towards an interpretation of it, believing that descriptions themselves are an

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8 SB Qutoshi 'Phenomenology: A philosophy and method of Inquiry' (2018) *Journal of Education and Educational Development* at 215-216.

9 JJ le Vasseur 'The problem of bracketing in phenomenology' (2003) 13(3) *Qualitative Health Research* at 411; KA Lopez & DG Willis 'Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge' (2004) 14 *Qualitative Health Research* at 727.

10 MT Tymieniecka 'Introduction: Phenomenology as the inspirational force of our times' in MT Tymieniecka (ed) *Phenomenology world-wide. Foundations expanding dynamics life engagements: A guide for research and study* (2003) as cited in DM Wojnar & KM Samson 'Phenomenology: An exploration' (2007) 25 *Journal of Holistic Nursing* at 173.

11 NP Kafle 'Hermeneutic phenomenological research method simplified' (2011) 5 *Bodhi: An Interdisciplinary Journal* at 185.

12 D Langdridge *Phenomenological psychology: Theory, research and methods* (2007) at 15.

13 SM Laverty 'Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations' (2003) 2(3) *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* at 24.

interpretive product.[14] Additionally, Heidegger rejects a process used by Husserl known as bracketing in which the researcher is expected to set aside their own beliefs, values, ideas and experiences as they conduct the research in order to generate some absolute truth or fact.[15] Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology undermines this, calling it disingenuous and unattainable. Instead, according to Heidegger a researcher ought to be open about their own beliefs, ideas, values and experiences and the ways in which they may have influenced the research as this allows readers to better understand the ways in which the data were interpreted.[16]

A phenomenological study presents both ontological and epistemological value enabling us to first understand 'what is' as well as engaging the questions of 'what we know' and 'how we know it'. Moran argues that reality is constituted at the core of lived experience, which is situated in and generated by history.[17] A phenomenological approach as articulated by Heidegger centralises this situatedness of study participants, claiming that the meaning made from their experiences is rooted in temporal collective experience. It enables us to explore 'what is', by facilitating the investigation and deciphering of meanings held in local narratives of lesbian identities that are wrapped up in history, cultural repertoires and beliefs about same-sex relations. It facilitates a revelation of the multiple realities of lesbian experience within Zimbabwe, where a canon on female sexuality particularly same-sex relations is currently lacking. This study therefore attempts to contribute at the foundational stages of building such a catalogue.

This endeavour takes us to the epistemological questions of what we do know about female same-sex sexuality in Zimbabwe and how we know it. Hermeneutic phenomenology recognises the relationship that emerges between researcher and the researched and the ways in which this impacts what can be known or understood about a phenomenon.[18] This opens up space to problematise the generalisations that have been made about various populations based on the findings of positivist research conducted by largely by white, heterosexual, middle-class males.[19] Heidegger argues for incorporation of personal subjectivities as embedded knowledge,

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14 Kafle (n 11) at 185.
15 Tymieniecka (n 10) at 173.
16 DM Wojnar & KM Samson 'Phenomenology: An exploration' (2007) 25 *Journal of Holistic Nursing* at 178.
17 D Moran *Introduction to phenomenology* (2000) at 248; D Moran *Edmund Husserl: Founder of phenomenology* (2005) at 200.
18 M Heidegger *Being and time* (Original work published 1927) (1962) at 24-26.
19 F Boonzaier & T Shefer 'Gendered research' in F Boonzaier et al (eds) The gender of psychology (2006) at 4.

which enhances our understanding, and interpretation of phenomena.[20] Bracketing is dismissed as an approach based on the view that a researcher cannot stand outside the pre-understandings and historicity of their own experience.[21] As opposed to attempting to suspend my experiences I am instead called on to continuously reflect and explicitly claim the ways in which my position or experience relates to the issues at hand .[22] This approach proved useful for this research given my own position as a lesbian identifying woman. It would have been a challenge to take on a meaningful study without situating or positioning myself and this may have made it equally challenging for the readers to make sense of the study.

While gathering phenomenological experiences largely focuses on experiencers' accounts of a particular phenomenon, phenomenological research methodology goes a step further by leaning on phenomenological theory to attempt to carry out an in-depth analysis of the data to obtain knowledge that can go beyond the experience. A phenomenological analysis should consist of two perspectives: that of those living through the experience and that of the researcher who has taken interest in the phenomenon. This approach encapsulates Heidegger's double hermeneutics.[23]

3.1.2 Goals of hermeneutic phenomenology

Phenomenology aims at generating an in-depth reading of the nature and meaning of daily lived experience. It seeks out illuminating descriptions of the ways in which we experience the world pre-reflectively without taxonomizing or abstracting while offering a description of experiential meanings we live, as we live them.[24] Human sciences research places emphasis on statistical relationships among variables, where phenomenology places its primary focus on meanings. At the same time, phenomenological reflection is retrospective rather than introspective, as reflection on lived experience is the remembrance of an experience that has already passed.[25]

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[20] R Ajjawi & J Higgs 'Using Hermeneutic Phenomenology to Investigate Practitioners Learn to Communicate Clinical Reasoning' (2007) 12(4) *The Qualitative Report* at 612.

[21] Heidegger (n 18) at 24.

[22] F Friberg, PE Andersson & J Bengtsson 'Pedagogical encounters between nurses and patients in a medical ward—A field study' 44(4) *International Journal of Nursing Studies* (2007) at 534; DW Wilson 'From their own voices: The lived experience of African American registered nurses' (2007) 18(2) *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* at 142.

[23] Heidegger (n 18) at 24.

[24] T Mapp 'Understanding phenomenology: The lived experience' (2008) 16(5) *British Journal of Midwifery* at 308.

[25] M van Manen *Researching lived experience* '(1990); D Moran *Introduction to phenomenology* (2000).

Therefore, in this study lesbian identifying women were asked to relive their experiences of their sexuality, when and how they came to call themselves lesbian, their relationships with family and community in relation to this identity as well as to the state. Contrary to Husserl's statement that 'we can only know what we experience' I assert that as argued by Moen, personal narratives may not reflect just the experiences of the individual participant but 'the voice overpopulated with other voices, with the intentions, expectations and attitudes of others in history and culture.[26] Phenomenologists attempt to understand human experiences through the eyes of the participants in the study by beginning with the phenomenon of interest and not with a hypothesis that gets proved or disproved.

Phenomenology focuses deeply on the meaning of a particular aspect of an experience with the belief that through dialogue and reflection the quintessential meaning of the experience will be revealed.[27] In this study, language is seen as a means through which meaning is both constructed and conveyed hence the use of both English and Shona during the interviews. Some direct quotes as well as concepts are also written in Shona albeit with English translation. In thinking about language, an excerpt from Zimbabwean author NoViolet Bulawayo's book *We Need New Names* comically describes the potential tragedy inherent in the limitations of language,

> The problem with English is this: You usually can't open your mouth and it comes out just like that – first you have to think what you want to say. Then you have to find the words. Then you have to carefully arrange those words in your head. Then you have to say the words quietly to yourself, to make sure you got them okay. And finally, the last step, which is to say the words out loud and have them sound just right. But then because you have to do all this, when you get to the final step, something strange has happened to you and you speak the way a drunk walks. And, because you are speaking like falling, it's as if you are an idiot, when the truth is that it's the language and the whole process that's messed up. And then the problem with those who speak only English is this: they don't know how to listen; they are busy looking at your falling instead of paying attention to what you are saying.[28]

The deliberate approach to language and its use in this study therefore has both epistemological and ontological significance. It was imperative to construct lesbian identification from the

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[26] T Moen 'Reflections on the narrative research approach' (2006) 5(4) *International Journal of Qualitative Methodology* at 3.

[27] RB Rossman & SF Rallis *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research* (1998) at 72.

[28] NoViolet Bulawayo *We Need New Names* (2013) at 193, cited in Z Matebeni & T Msibi 'Vocabularies of the non-normative' (2015) 29(1) Agenda: Empowering women for gender equality at 3.

frame of reference of participant language and its everyday uses in Zimbabwean society, thereby transcending or augmenting Western constructions of lesbian identity.

The essence of a phenomena is derived from the participants' perceptions and experiences regardless of the interpretation of the researcher and as a result Moustakas defines research participants as co-researchers. He asserts that it is the participants' narratives of experiences that provide meaning to the phenomena.[29] I however posit that it is not necessary to downplay the role of the researcher in the interview process as this ignores the power held in the role of the researcher. By downplaying their role, the researcher as opposed to valuing the participants, merely hides the power they hold in the relationship and this increases the chances of misusing this power.

The approach in this study uses the framing of 'understanding' as a process, which according to the reflections of Lopez and Willis creates room to allow for unanticipated meanings and interpretations to emerge without being viewed as hard facts.[30] Stories describing in detail the social experiences of lesbian-identifying Zimbabwean women offer a rich and resonant source of information for those who work with this population.

3.1.3 Adapting the hermeneutic interpretive paradigm to this study

This study is inspired by the central argument that a qualitative analysis engendered in interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology provides a novel lens from which to contemplate the social experiences of lesbian women in Zimbabwe. It utilises qualitative methods including life histories, textual analysis of media report, newspapers, speeches and general observation. The aim in this section is neither to review nor rearticulate discussions on my theoretical framework, interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology. Instead, it is to illuminate the ways in which this theoretical framework and similar ideas have been adapted to guide this study.

Heidegger describes what he calls a fore-structure as relating to the situatedness and the human way of being in the world (*dasien*).[31] First, there is the lived experience of the individual which makes interpretation possible and this he calls fore-having. Secondly, there are the socio-cultural factors that lend the viewpoint from which interpretation is then made and this he calls foresight. Finally, there are the ways in which the social-cultural background may mirror the

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29 C Moustakas *Phenomenological research methods* (1994) at 9.

30 KA Lopez & D Willis 'Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge' (2004) 14(5) *Qualitative Health Research* at 729.

31 Heidegger (n 18) at 65.

findings and this he calls fore-conception.[32] It can be argued based on this that the fore-structure is inextricably linked to how an individual both perceives the world and makes sense of it. This study adapts Heidegger's fore-structure by elucidating participants' meaning of lesbian identity from a combination of information from the participant, the researchers understanding of the phenomenon and data from other sources.

The research problem, study objectives, research questions along with the composition of study participants demonstrates the salience of context and situatedness and thus the relevance of Heideggerian hermeneutic enquiry in this study. This study describes the experiences of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe and the meaning they make of this identification, and finally proceeds to analyse these through a hermeneutic interpretive phenomenological lens using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).[33]

No attempt was made in this study to isolate the participants from their socio-cultural arrangements, from their family traditions, the obtaining socio-political atmosphere or historical period in which they live. Instead, these factors were recognised as integral to the experiences of the participants and the ways in which they made meaning of their experiences. This approach demonstrates the importance of context in this study and offers a more holistic approach to understanding the lives and experiences of lesbian women in Zimbabwe. In addition to sensitivity to the context in which participants existed in, I also engaged a reflexive process that acknowledges the consequence of my worldview and subjectivities in this study. For instance, I acknowledge that my own feminist and post-structural roots inevitably form part of my analytical discussion.

An interesting link exists between homosexual identity in Africa and Heideggerian hermeneutic inquiry as it relates to the importance of context and situatedness. While extensive research and information exists about same sex identities, lives, lifestyles, laws, in the Western world the dominant narratives on the African continent have been about legal battles mainly centered on decriminalisation of sexual practices as is observed in South Africa, Botswana, Uganda, Nigeria and Kenya among others. The limited canon on lesbian lives and subjectivities creates a vacuity and fertile ground for various, perspectives and cultural notions to advance our own understanding of the lives and subjectivities of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe.

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[32] JA Smith, P Flowers & M Larkin *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research* (2009) at 25.

[33] JA Smith & M Osborn 'Interpretative phenomenological analysis as a useful methodology for research on the lived experience of pain' (2015) 9(1) *British Journal of Pain* at 41.

What hermeneutic phenomenology enables is the capturing of illuminating details from what might appear to be trivial aspects within experience, with the goal of making meaning and achieving a better sense of understanding. Where Husserlian phenomenology focused on understanding being or phenomena, Heidegger focused on *dasein*, the mode of being human or the situated meaning of a human in the world.[34] This Heideggerian approach places emphasis on historicality, giving importance to the background and history of a person without making that background explicit. According to Laverty, meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while simultaneously, we are constructing this world.[35] In essence, humans are societal products in as much as individuals shape society within a dialect of mutual effect.[36]

3.1.4 Limitations and delimitations of this theoretical framework

Following the rise of French poststructuralism in the 1970s, the notion of experience within phenomenology has been heavily criticised.[37] Resultantly, experience fell into disrepute and this did not shift even as poststructural feminism developed. As Elizabeth Grosz put it, experience became almost a 'dirty word' in poststructuralist philosophy. If anything, Alcoff argues that the dismissive attitude towards phenomenology was transferred onto poststructural feminism which equally discredited experience.[38]

The critiques mounted against phenomenology include; epistemological foundationalism in which poststructuralist theorist Joan Scott argues that when using experience as knowledge, the experience is taken as a given thus representing an unquestioned precondition.[39] This means that experience alone does not prompt the question of whether or not the experience has an underlying origin and whether such underlying conditions could in fact be responsible for the experience in question.[40] This critique thus questions for instance, why an experience is taking place at one moment and not another or in one place and not in

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34 M Heidegger *Being and time: A translation of Sein und Zeit* (1996) at 6.
35 Laverty (n 13) at 1.
36 AK Perkel 'Deconstructing the patriarchal myth' (1994) 19 *Psychology in Society* at 4.
37 To name a few examples: M Stimolo 'On Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence implications for scientific inquiry' (2016), Michel Foucault's critical examination of the concept of experience from the perspective of discourse analysis – M Arribas-Ayllon & V Walkerdine 'Foucauldian discourse analysis' in C Willig & W Stainton Rogers (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology* (2017) ; Louis Althusser's stand on the question of experience in the context of his Marxist critique – RW Connell 'A Critique of the Althusserian Approach to Class (1979) 8(3) Theory and Society at 311.
38 LM Alcoff 'Phenomenology, post-structuralism, and feminist theory on the concept of experience', in L Fisher and L Embree (eds) *Feminist phenomenology* (2000) at 39.
39 S Stoller 'Phenomenology and the poststructural critique of experience' (2009) 17(5) *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* at 708.
40 As above.

another. This critique positions poststructuralism in opposition to empiricism, wherein empiricism is based on the epistemological assumption that all knowledge has its 'origin' in experience. Silvia Stoller however argues that though phenomenology is about experience the arguments mounted against experience do not strike at the heart of phenomenology and that phenomenology can withstand the poststructuralist critique of experience. For instance, experience is challenged for being ahistorical and yet hermeneutic phenomenology values historicity as evinced in the work of Heidegger.[41]

Additionally, within the field of philosophy there is a critique of the gender 'neutrality' and androcentricity of the field. This led to feminist critiques asserting the idea of a uniquely female experience which in turn was heavily and accurately challenged as it was seen as an essentialising construction that implied a universal identity of women.[42] A similar critique can be leveraged against the essentialist idea of an African sexuality or lesbian experience in this study, hence it is essential to be explicit that this study does not seek out the universal experience of 'the' Zimbabwean lesbian woman. Instead, it suggests that if experience is understood as situated in the bodies of subjects, then a collective experience of women or lesbians can be described without losing the ability to describe different gendered and sexualised experiences from person to person such that it is lesbian identities and experiences in their plurality that emerge.

One of the main limitations of hermeneutic phenomenology is that it emphasizes depth and rigour on a small sample which thus precludes replicability and generalisability. In this study however, the aim is not to generalise but to deeply examine the experiences and focus on the validity and uniqueness of individual subjective experiences. That said, the rigour with which the individual interviews are analysed reveals what sits at the core of the experience and that essence can be similar for other people experiencing the same phenomena, that is lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe who fall outside of this study. Therefore, while not generating representation of a universal experience the analysis can produce findings with the ability to enhance understanding, enlarge insight and contribute to existing theories and the generation of new hypotheses, a phenomenon called vertical generalisability.[43] Stephen draws a clear distinction between what he calls horizontal and vertical generalizability.[44] With the former,

41 Stoller (n 39) at 709.
42 Stoller (n 39) at 720.
43 M Stephens 'A question of generalisability' (1982) 9 *Theory and research in social education* 75-86 cited in: JL Johnson 'Generalizability in qualitative research: excavating the discourse' in: Morse JM (ed) *Completing a qualitative project: details and dialogue* (1997) at 191.
44 As above.

findings are meant to be applicable across settings. However, the latter seeks to enhance our understanding and deepen insights while contributing to existing theories or the generation of hypotheses.[45]

Positivists challenge Heideggerian phenomenology on the basis that it offers weak causal explanations.[46] Counter to this, the logic of this study is not to generate data with correlations of statistical significance, instead it is to provide rich descriptions and valid interpretations of the experiences of people who are inimitable. The goal is to offer meanings and interpretations of the lesbian identifications and experiences of Zimbabwean women.

Proponents of structuralism argue that phenomenology neglects the robust analysis of structural factors of social phenomena by being limited to microscopic elements and subjectivities. This critique is offset by Heidegger's focus on context and situatedness of individuals which permits an analysis of macro elements for instance the conditioning impact of the socio-cultural, political and economic environment on individual dispositions or idiosyncrasies.

3.1.5 Complementary theory

While Heideggerian phenomenology is the main analytic framework, this study also utilises elements of feminist post-structuralism. A feminist post-structural lens enables the critique of dominant masculinist conceptions of knowledge but more importantly is useful in the analysis of the experiential accounts of the study participants.[47] According to Gavey, feminist post-structuralism rejects the idea of static or absolute truths and knowledge and instead promotes the perspective that knowledge is socially constructed, temporal, historically specific and embedded in relations of power.[48] A combination of phenomenology and feminist post-structuralism builds on the work of Sara Ahmed who combines these two frames to produce what she calls a queer phenomenology.[49] In her work she combines the 'post-structuralist

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45 BR Johnson 'Examining the validity structure of qualitative research' (1997) 118(2) *Education* 282 at ; I Pietkiewicz & JA Smith 'A practical guide to using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in qualitative research psychology' 18(2) *Psychology journal* (2012) 361-369.

46 Gadamer (n 1) at 276.

47 P Lather 'Critical frames in educational research: Feminist and post-structural perspectives' (1992) 31(2) *Theory Into Practice* at 88.

48 N Gavey 'Feminist post-structuralism and discourse analysis' in MM Gergen & SN Davis (eds) Toward a new psychology of gender (1997) at 462.

49 S Ahmed *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others* (2006) at 93.

critique of discourses of race, gender, and sexuality, with a phenomenological understanding of bodies inhabiting a world.'[50]

An additional lens utilised in this study which pays attention to the peculiarities of context, in this case the geographical location of the participants in Africa is an African feminist approach. Though there is no unitary definition of what African feminism is there was a tendency to define it in terms of what it wasn't.[51] It was described largely in opposition to Western feminism however more recently feminist academics, movement members and activist have sought to describe it for what it is. According to Amina Mama,

> African feminist thought refers to the dynamic ideas, reflections, theories and other expressions of intellectual practices by politically radical African women concerned with liberating Africa by focusing women's liberation. … African feminism is a radical proposition: it refers to the liberatory political philosophies, theories, writings, research and cultural production, as well as the organizing work of the transnational community of feminists from Africa.[52]

A platform set up by and for African feminists known as the African feminist forum also articulates the intention and approach of African feminism. An extract from their charter of feminist principles states the following;

> By naming ourselves as feminists we politicise the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African feminists. We are African women – we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent.[53]

This study focuses on the lives of a category of African women and thus benefits from an African feminist approach. As Susan Ardnt asserts, research in African societies necessitates African feminism, which critically examines African gender relations and the peculiarities of

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50 As above.

51 O Nnemeka 'Introduction: Reading the rainbow' in O Nnemeka (ed) Sisterhood, feminisms & power: from Africa to the diaspora (1998) at 6.

52 A Mama 'African feminist thought' *Oxford research encyclopedias* (2019) available at https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-504?rskey=IS7xxr (accessed on 10 August 2020).

53 African Feminist Forum 'Charter of feminist principles for African feminists' (2006) available at https://awdf.org/wp-content/uploads/AFF-Feminist-Charter-Digital-%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%93-English.pdf (accessed on 10 August 2020).

the lives of African women.'[54] African academics such as Amadiume, Tamale, Nyanzi, Mama have been engaged in work that connects the realities of women on the continent to the historical as well as current realities of colonialism, sexism, racism, neo-colonialism along with the impact of globalisation.[55] An African feminist approach creates an opportunity to transform the representations of gender and African women within feminist scholarship as well as in the global order.

The realm of sexuality is one of the territories within which the premise of the universal woman and the treatment of women as a homogenous group is re-enforced in Western feminist discourses. African feminism rejects the universalisation of women by for instance respecting the status of women as mothers but challenging obligatory motherhood. When it comes to same-sex sexuality however there have been some tensions within African feminist spaces. According to Signe Arnfred even radical and innovative African feminist scholars such as Amadiume and Oyèrónké Oyéwùmí did not go near issues of sexuality. Pat Mcfadden was exceptional however by being one of the earlier writers on sexuality at the beginning of the 90s.[56] Arnfred further argues 'that knowledge on sexuality in Africa has been externally conceptualized and produced, initially by colonial anthropologists and later in contexts of biomedical discourses of risk and danger.'[57] More recently however, African feminists have begun to write, theorise and create art that represents the lives of lesbian women on the African continent.[58]

3.2 Part 2 – Phenomenology as methodology

Numerous areas of academic research have historically used quantitative or empirical methods, with emphasis being placed on the observable and accessible. Researchers focused

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54 S Ardnt 'Perspectives on African feminism: Defining and classifying African-feminist literatures' (2002) 54 *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity* at 32.

55 I Amadiume *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African society* (1987); S Tamale *African sexualities: A reader* (2011); S Nyanzi 'Queering queer Africa' in Z Matebeni (ed) Reclaiming Afrikan: queer perspectives on sexual and gender identities (2014); A Mama *Beyond the masks: Race, gender, and subjectivity* (1995).

56 S Arnfred 'African feminists on sexualities' (2009) 43(1) *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 151-159 at 151.

57 As above

58 S Tamale *African Sexualities: A reader* (2011); H Abbas & S Ekine *Queer African reader* (2013); Z Matebeni *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer perspectives on sexual and gender identities* (2014); A Currier & T Migraine-George '"Lesbian"/female same-sex sexualities in Africa' (2017) 21(2) Journal of Lesbian Studies 133-150.

predominantly on ideas and questions that adhere to empirical ways of inquiry.[59] Though researchers continue to favour these methods there is a growing interest in qualitative research methodologies since the 1980s when greater disenchantment with the limits of logical-empirical research methodologies began.[60] There has been a growing interest in methodologies that emphasise discovery, description and meaning rather than prediction, control and measurement. Phenomenology is one such methodology and is considered both a philosophical discipline (theory) and a research method.[61]

Phenomenology which is used in this study as a theoretical frame is also instructive in methodological terms. The central and recurring argument of this chapter is that phenomenology is an ideal frame for illuminating self-determined and perhaps new knowledges about the experiences of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe. This section begins by detailing the methodological orientation of the study and then proceeds with the practicalities such as research design, scope of the study, sampling, participant recruitment, data collection strategies, the data analysis and interpretation. It then outlines the challenges and lessons learnt in the process of conducting this study.

There is extraordinary diversity in the interests, interpretation of core tenets of phenomenology and the application of what is understood as phenomenological method.[62] Among the disparate ideas and approaches of different categories of phenomenology there remains a shared ideal of phenomenology as the return to embodied and experiential meanings seeking out new, 'complex and rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is lived.'[63] Put differently, the primary objective of a phenomenological study is to unearth the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience of a person or group of people in relation to a particular phenomenon.[64] In this process the phenomenologist attempts to interpret human

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59 K Gergen 'The social constructionist movement in modern psychology' 40(3) *American Psychologist* (1985) at 266; R Valle, M King & S Halling 'An introduction to existential-phenomenological thought in psychology' in R Valle & S Halling (eds) *Existential-phenomenological perspective in psychology* (1989) 3-16.

60 Laverty (n 13) at 1.

61 R Geanellos 'Hermeneutic philosophy. Part I: Implications of its use as methodology in interpretive nursing research' 5(3) *Nursing Inquiry* (1998) at 154; JJ le Vasseur, JJ 'The Problem of Bracketing in Phenomenology' 13(3) *Qualitative Health Research* (2003) 408-420; KA Lopez & DG Willis 'Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge' (2004) 14 *Qualitative Health Research* at 726.

62 Moran (n 17) at 3.

63 L Finlay 'Debating phenomenological research methods' 3 *Phenomenology and Practice* (2009) at 6.

64 LB Christensen, RB Johnson & LA Turner *Research methods, design, and analysis 12th edition* (2010) at 350.

behaviour through the eyes of the study participants, called *verstehen* the interpretive understanding of human interactions.[65]

Heidegger understood people as hermeneutic or interpretive beings fully capable of finding meaning in their own lives.[66] This is where the pivotal difference between Husserl's descriptive phenomenology and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology emerges. For Husserl the context in which the experience exists is only peripheral to the phenomenon while for Heidegger it is central. Heideggerian phenomenology is founded on the view that understanding individuals cannot happen in isolation of their cultural, socio-economic, political context or the historical period in which they exist.[67] Therefore, in this study when considering the lives and experiences of lesbian identifying women, it is not possible to ignore the lives they live outside of this identity. In fact, their experience of lesbian identity is within the context of family traditions, community values and the broader socio-political context.

3.2.1 Descriptive vs Interpretive phenomenology

Husserlian successors including Heidegger, Kieregaard, Satre and Merleau-Ponty critiqued and further modified Husserl's approach. Resultantly, these differences have generated lively debate about criteria for acceptable indicators of rigour in qualitative inquiry.[68]

Hermeneutic phenomenologists maintain that before conducting inquiry, the researcher must reflect on their lived or past experiences of the phenomenon in question, their biases and what meaning is made of this so that during the interpretive process this understanding is held.[69] In this study I therefore began by reflecting on my own lived experiences of lesbian identity, how I came to that identity and the meaning that I make of it. In this process I enabled myself to access what Heidegger referred to as the fore-structure of my understanding of lesbian identity and related experiences. I acknowledged that I came to this study with practical familiarity from my own world that made interpretation possible. Further, I recognized that my

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65 DE Rohall *Symbolic interaction in society* (2019) at 27.

66 CB Draucker 'The critique of Heideggerian hermenuetical nursing research' (1999) 30(2) *Journal of Advanced Nursing* at 360.

67 CB Draucker 'The critique of Heideggerian hermenuetical nurshing research' (1999) 30 *Journal of Advanced Nursing* at 360; R Campbell (2001) 'Heidegger: Truth as Aletheia' in R Small (ed) (2001) *A hundred years of phenomenology: Perspectives on a philosophical tradition* 73-89.

68 Wojnar & Samson (n 16) at 174.

69 P Benner 'Hermeneutic phenomenology: A methodology for family health and health promotion study in nursing' in Benner P (ed) *Interpretive phenomenology: Embodiment, caring, and ethics in health and illness* (1994) 71-72.

socio-cultural background provided a point of view from which my interpretations were made as well as a basis for anticipation of what might be found in the investigation.

Heidegger viewed the interpretive process as circular, moving back and forth between the whole and its parts. Between the investigators fore-structure of understanding and what was learned through the investigation. This is what he referred to as the hermeneutic cycle of understanding that blends the meanings as articulated by the participant and the researcher.[70]

During the interviewing process a key element was to encourage the narrators to stay as close to the lived experience as possible in order to get at what was experienced.[71] To complement this I paid close attention not only to what was said but also what could be read between the lines of what was said.[72] In the overall process the transcripts were supported with field notes and researcher interpretation. However, there is also a need to recognize that narratives themselves are not just descriptions. In reconstituting a lived experience into a narrative during the interview process, the experience is shifted from being a passive encounter into one that is actively reworked in dialogue with others and within the individual imagination. In this process, individual narratives are revealed to be a close link between individual and collective memory which is neither entirely individual nor socially determined.[73]

Despite being diverse, the narratives often saw the experience of being a lesbian identifying woman in terms of broad social, political and historical factors. The identity and related experiences took place within the realms of state, religion, culture, family and human rights. The realms within which narrators had the most intense experiences or feelings affected how they interpreted the experience. For instance, rejection and demonization within religious circles was often experienced as individual failure and spiritual weakness while those harassed by the state often saw their experiences as the product of a collective hatred and rejection from citizenship of people that deviated from the shared image of the state. Rejection by family was a little more complicated, being seen by some as a product of ignorance by family members but also linked to the shame that this brought onto the entire family.

The narratives of lesbian women are not just about a label. An attempt to condense such multifarious stories and experiences is an implausible task. What I thus present in this study is not an objective account or lesbian identities and experiences in Zimbabwe but a subjective

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70 T Koch 'Interpretive approaches in nursing research: The influence of Husserl and Heidegger' 21 *Journal of Advanced Nursing* (1995) 831-832.

71 C Geertz *The interpretation of cultures* (1973) at 113.

72 S Kvale *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research* (1996) at 186.

73 S Nuttall 'Telling ‘free’ stories? Memory and Democracy in South African Autobiography since 1994' in S Nuttall & C Coetzee (eds) *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (1998) at 99.

one that is framed by my intellectual choices and limitations, along with the material conditions within which I gathered the data. I accept these limitations at the outset and now shift to the task of explaining how I methodologically grappled with such a personal and potentially sensitive subject.

I examined the ways in which lesbian identifying women arrived at that identity alongside their experiences related to that identity and the attendant political subjectivities through a range of different sources. I began my interviews by asking the participants to share a narrative account of their life and their experiences of their sexuality broadly. Following this I turned to a semi-structured interview in which I asked for more details on the salient issues and themes relevant to my study. All the interviews were in-depth typically lasting between an hour and a half and two hours. In addition to the interviews, I engaged in several informal discussions and in all the interviews I used a recorder with the consent of the interviewee. I also took copious field notes alongside the interview recordings. I transcribed all the interviews myself and manually coded the transcripts categorizing the information gathered.

In a deliberate attempt to emphasise and privilege the voices of the narrators I often use direct quotes in the writing of this thesis. In all cases the identities of the narrators are anonymized, and aliases are used instead. Often when similar ideas were shared, only one quote was used to encapsulate these sentiments with the intent to maintain brevity, clarity and coherence. In totality the data gathered presented critical insights into the socio-economic, cultural and political nature of a lesbian identity and the experiences related to this identity. It surfaced multiple discourses at play in regulating same-sex sexualities among Zimbabwean women as well as the politics of the non-governmental organisations that work with LGBTQ+ identifying persons.

Given that this study was exploratory of a phenomenon that has not been previously researched in this manner within this context, the research design was crafted in an iterative manner, where the steps taken inform what step is taken next. This approach is consistent with the hermeneutic cycle proffered by Heidegger and which was instructive in this study.

3.2.2 Scope of the study

The study took place in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. Though the narrators were all residents of Harare they were not all born and raised in Harare and this had some impact on the experiences. So, while Harare is the site of the study the experiences of narrators were clearly

influenced by time spent elsewhere as well as by knowledge gathered from other local and international sources.

3.2.3 Ethical approval

The study was cleared by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria law faculty.[74] Before every interview the research aims, and objectives of the study were explained to each participant and verbal informed consent was obtained. A study of this nature though not overtly risky still posed questions about the security of the researcher and the researched. I was not deterred from conducting such research. Instead precautions for security were taken including the use of aliases, the avoidance of referring to identity markers of individuals or places mentioned as well as using data encryption on my laptop. All transcripts and notes were anonymised as per the requirements of the University of Pretoria.

3.2.4 Sampling and recruitment process

Given the lack of representation of Zimbabwean women in sexuality discourse this study is deliberate in its focus on the experiences of self-identifying lesbian women. As highlighted in the introductory chapter there is a dearth of literature on Zimbabwean lesbian women and the little that exists is largely untheorised. Additionally, a similar pattern can be observed across the African continent of unarticulated practices of lesbian women which contributes to their erasure and also marginalization. In attempting to attend to these gaps, this study turned its focus on a small group of 5 lesbian identifying women to collate their narratives and examine their gendered and sexualized subjectivities.

I developed an evolving research design in which initially I identified narrators through known channels, largely networks of friends and relevant organisations. Subsequently though, I used a snowballing approach in which narrators directed me to other individuals. The use of one's social networks to identify participants is discussed by Browne who asserts that, it shapes two key factors, firstly the kind of participants one gets and secondly the ways in which those participants respond and what kind of information they share all of which impacts the findings.[75] In this study I found this to be true in that the participants identified through my social networks knew me even though I knew little about them. Knowing my feminist and

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[74] See appendix A on page 205.

[75] K Browne 'Snowball sampling: Using social networks to research non-heterosexual women' (2005) 8(1) *International Journal of Social Research Methodology: Theory & Practice* at 47.

activist background they spoke very freely and noted that they felt safe being interviewed by a fellow lesbian. I am however aware that my feminist profile may have affected what was shared with me in terms of gender roles in relationships as well as gender identities of the lesbian women.

In total I conducted 5 individual interviews. Phenomenological studies tend towards small sample sizes owing to the nature of the data analysis process which is rigorous and labour intensive.[76] The criteria for selection for this study was that individuals had to be lesbian identifying Zimbabwean women willing to share their experiences of this identity. In using lesbian self-identification as a criterion for selection in this study I expose myself to the critique highlighted by Potgieter that such selection does not necessarily include 'real' or authentic lesbians. That said however, this phenomenological study much like social constructionist research does not aim to generate totalizing representations or reality but just to understand 'how people construct, negotiate and interpret their experience.[77] Therefore in this study, the use of self-identification as inclusion criteria is not only defendable but essential to the goal of the study.

In the selection of interviewees, the question of speaking from within or from beyond the Zimbabwean context was important. I chose to speak only to those within Zimbabwe, whether or not they had lived in the diaspora in the past. This choice was informed by Kizito Muchemwa's analysis. He asserts that the African writer "in the diaspora occupies a liminal space", uneasily negotiating "the melancholia" alongside the foreign and liberating norms of their new locale.[78] Alongside it he implies the limitations of those writing from home who are surrounded by a variety of deprivations. Though Muchemwa spoke of African writers and not interviewees, I found his analysis insightful and relevant for my work. I chose my category so as to intentionally exclude lesbian identifying Zimbabwean women living in the diaspora and the inflections brought about by the diaspora space as well as the risk of them retelling stories of home that are consumed through media and lack the experiential nuance that those at home have.

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[76] M Englander 'The interview: data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research' 43 *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* (2012) 13-35.

[77] C Potgieter 'Black, South African, lesbian: Discourses of invisible lives' PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, 1997 at 116.

[78] KZ Muchemwa 'Old and new fictions: Rearranging the geographies of urban space and identities in post-2006 Zimbabwean fiction' (2010) 27(2) *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies* at 135.

Diversity in the sample was of importance in order to provide a broader set of experiences from which to elucidate the essence of the phenomenon.[79] Participants varied in their demographic characteristics. With this very small sample there was no need for 'saturation' or any efforts that give the sense that the experiences of new participants would be captured by the themes that had emerged from these participants. Saturation is not a requirement of the hermeneutic interpretive approach as the approach does not aim at generating generalizable data.

Though there are numerous social signifiers that impact how individual identity is formed there are signifiers such as race, culture, educational background and class that have been marked as being of particular significance in understanding gendered and sexualized subjectivities.[80] Within the Zimbabwean context there is a history of privileging male voices and from the history of LGBTQ+ organizing in the country we also hear largely the voices of gay men and white lesbian women. Therefore, with this in mind I aimed as far as possible to centralize the voices and narratives of black Zimbabwean women while maintaining diversity in backgrounds in relation to class and educational background. A deliberate attempt was also made not to exclusively capture the voices of lesbian activists as these voices have also formed a significant portion of the existing lesbian voices in Zimbabwe. In doing this I did not set out to increase the representative nature of the sample as this is inconsistent with the phenomenological approach used in the study, instead I sought to broaden the scope of discourses represented in the narratives so as to add depth to the findings.

3.2.5 Collecting the narratives (interviewing)

I predominantly used the approach of narrative enquiry, asking questions only during the semi-structured interviews in to make clarifications and prompt further detail about an experience being shared. The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours to two hours in length resulting in between eight to ten hours of interview material to transcribe and analyse in granular detail. The narrators because of the nature of inquiry would speak at length for periods at a time and this led to fatigue at about the one-and-a-half-hour mark. In both instances where I noticed fatigue, I tried to stop the interview and suggest that we continue at another time however the narrators wanted to finish telling their stories, the first explained that

[79] H Starks & SB Trinidad 'Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis and grounded theory' 17(10) Qualitative Health Research (2007) at 1374.

[80] F Boonzaier & T Shefer 'Gendered research' in T Shefer, F Boonzaier & P Kiguwa (eds) The gender of psychology (2006) at 11.

there was something unsettling about a partially told narrative and that she would not be at ease if she left without bringing closure to her narrative. The other narrator also wished to continue and shared that the narrative process itself was cathartic and that she too needed the closure of finishing her narrative in one sitting. Two of the interviews were conducted exclusively in English while in the other three English was the predominant language with the occasional use of Shona. At the beginning of the process, I encouraged participants to use Shona or English as they pleased as I am fluent in both these languages and also indicated that they could also use Ndebele which I am less fluent in but can understand well.

At the beginning of each interview, I collected some basic biographical data about each of the narrators so that I would not unnecessarily interrupt the narrative process. In the next section I share details about the phenomenological and feminist formulations I applied to the interview process.

Table 1: Participant biographical information

Participant	Educational background	Age	Language
Olivia	Degree	33	English/Shona
Cassie	Degree	26	English/Shona
Mary	Diploma	50	English
Ray	Diploma	32	English/Shona
Marcia	Degree	22	English

The narrators in this study range from young adults to middle-aged. They all have educational qualifications that go beyond a high school education. Additionally, there are other signifiers that limit heterogeneity among participants, and highlight uniform privilege for instance all the

participants being able-bodied. Future research would benefit from increased diversification through the inclusion of voices from a broader range of subject positions.

3.2.6 Power dynamics in the interview process

There is no escaping the operations of power in research and during an interview process. Feminist research in particular pays close attention to the role of power in seeking to disrupt the traditional hierarchies of social science research that operate between researcher and those being researched in ways that are exploitative or even dehumanising.[81] Traditional approaches to social science research are what Franklin described as extractive wherein the researcher actively elicits 'feelings, ideas, and/or knowledge' from a passive interviewee.[82] In this process the researcher works actively to maintain objectivity and is deliberate to share as little information about themselves as possible in an attempt to eliminate or reduce bias in participant responses.

This approach is critiqued both in feminist research and in interpretive phenomenology. The feminist critique is that such an approach eliminates spontaneity and creativity in the responses of participants.[83] Interpretive phenomenology similarly asserts that bias cannot be eliminated albeit for different reasons. It claims that there is greater danger in pretending or imagining that bias can be eliminated than there is in simply acknowledging its existence enabling the reader to draw informed conclusions about the material they are reading. Within feminist research attempts are made to disrupt the power differential by approaching the research as being done with and not on the participants.[84] This approach places emphasis on the agency of the participants and is viewed at an interactive counter between researcher and participant in which the researcher participates in knowledge construction through the negotiation of meaning with the participant.[85] A feminist approach acknowledges that the power dynamic between the researcher and the participant will inevitably 'colour' the responses of the participant in terms of 'what is said and how' it is said.[86] A variety of ways of offsetting the power differential are suggested, including the researcher sharing personal

81 S Reinharz *Feminist methods in social research* (1992) at 18.
82 MB Franklin 'Making sense: Interviewing and narrative representation' in MM Gergen & SN Davis (eds) *Toward a new psychology of gender: a reader* (1997) at 100.
83 As above.
84 E Burman 'Interviewing' in P Banister et al (eds) *Qualitative methods in psychology: a research guide* (1994b) at 51.
85 Burman (n 84) at 51.
86 Franklin (n 82) at 104.

information with the participant in the same manner that the participant is being asked to share personal information with the researcher.[87]

In relation to the tension of power dynamics in the interview process Tindall suggests that the researcher should disclose information that clarifies the positionality of the researcher while making it clear that the interviewees have control over what they share and the extent to which they might wish to reciprocate. It is important however to concede that even with every intention to minimize the power differential between researcher and participant it is not possible to achieve total equality as inevitable it is the research who,

> …is firmly positioned by participants as knowledgeable, who sets the process in motion, who decides on the initial research issue, which frameworks to use, which prospective participants to contact and what happens to the final product. In the final analysis it is the researcher's version of reality that is given public visibility.[88]

Bearing this in mind I pondered ways of disclosing personal information to the narrators not as a means to elicit their own disclosure but to clarify my positionality in relation to the subject and the participants themselves. It turned out that all the participants already knew me as a lesbian identifying woman and therefore there was no need to disclose this information to them. When the narrators elicited my views on ideas, they were discussing I responded openly and honestly without attempting to manage how this might affect the ways in which they shared their stories. I was particularly aware of this as I knew that some of the narrators knew me and my activist work outside the context of the interviews and did not want them to feel that I was intentionally closed off as researcher.

As already stated, the interpretive phenomenological approach similarly recognizes the role of power in the research process but rather than shy away from it, the approach insists that it be acknowledged in ways that allow readers to make their own judgments of how the position or biases of the researcher may have 'coloured' the research process and its results.

3.2.7 Data collection strategies

Abayomi Alase suggests that data collecting procedures for an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of data consist of the following:

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87 A Oakley 'Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms' in H Roberts (ed*) Doing feminist research* (1981) at 30-61

88 C Tindall 'Issues of evaluation' in P Banister et al (eds) *Qualitative methods in psychology: a research guide* (1994) at 155.

- An IPA research study should conduct semi-structured and unstructured interviews with no more than 25 but no less than 2 participants
- The interview duration should be approximately sixty to ninety minutes in duration per interview session
- The study should keep the interview invitation to one interview per participant. However, only if there is a need for a follow-up interview shall the researcher contact the participants for additional interviews.
- The site (including the date, time and place) for the interviews should be left to the participants to decide. However, the researcher's natural first choice and preference should always be at the participants' place of comfort, for convenience purposes to the participants. But if need be, a safe and comfortable alternative place should be provided for the meetings by the researcher (i.e., at restaurants, coffee shops and/or any other convenient outlets).
- Finally, the research study should utilize different technological devices to collect necessary data (i.e., electronic voice recording devices and video recording devices, if need be). And naturally, the traditional 'note and pen' should be used for jotting down important observations as the interviews progress.[89]

While guided by the above frame the section below details how I went about collecting and analyzing data and not so much about how data should be broadly gathered and analysed. Using varied avenues of inquiry, I pursued a phenomenological inquiry using the following four steps. I began with a free flow life narrative, conducted semi-structured interviews, held a focus group discussion and observed the narrators as well as had informal discussion with them.

Life narrative

One of the primary preoccupations of this study was building an understanding of the lives and meanings made by lesbian identifying women of their identities without a predetermination of themes of interest. To begin I therefore asked one question of the narrators, that they share their life story. I began by collecting life narratives because the focus of life histories is the tracing of critical life events that have shaped an individual's perspective or world view.[90] Life

[89] A Alase 'The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach' (2017) 5(2) *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies* at 10.
[90] RG Burgess *Field research: A sourcebook and field manual* (1982) at 2.

histories present a greater opportunity for revealing the ways and sites at which human agency is interfered with while presenting other ways of knowing the world that may not have otherwise surfaced from researcher questions. Stories, unlike discourse have multiple vocalities and multiple sites of production.[91]Rather than limit what would emerge, I allowed narrators to tell their stories uninterrupted and only occasionally encouraged them to continue with a smile or a nod, or any other gesture to assure them that I was listening and engaged. Once I had the full life narrative it was somewhat evident what the key issues or life moments of the narrators were and this was used as a basis for the semi-structured interviews. These life narratives ranged between 45 minutes to an hour.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews followed the life narrative. They enabled a further understanding of the individual experiences of the narrators while remaining aware of the interview context and staying in the frame of the study by asking more direct questions related to the subject. Direct questions were used to clarify issues mentioned in the life narrative that were unclear and to seek more details about what seemed to be significant moments. The decisions about what these significant moments are, was based on either the repetition of the issue by the narrator or by emotions expressed when the narrator described an experience. The semi-structured interview was not always easy, some moments were emotional but the interviews continued at the insistence of the narrators. The semi structured interviews lasted between 1.5 to 2 hours.

Focus group discussion

Though unconventional for a phenomenological study yet still consistent with its principles, I conducted a focus group discussion which brought together a group of 8 interviewees to gain deeper insights into the identity and experiences of lesbian women. Hermeneutic phenomenology reminds us of the significance of context in the ways in which meaning is made by individuals experiencing a phenomenon. This focus group was a continuation of the narrators own articulations of their experiences and the interpretations of them, however in this case they were nuanced by the presence of an audience in the form of fellow lesbian identifying women. Based on my own experiences as a lesbian identifying woman, as an activist and often a facilitator of meetings and workshops and trainings I was curious about how the articulations

91 N Anand *Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai* (2017) at vii-viii.

of self might be inflected by the presence of an audience in the form of their peers. The focus group discussion lasted approximately two and a half hours. Individual thoughts, ideas and experiences were shared during this discussion however they were in dialogue with the ideas and experiences of others. Some of the issues like experiences in school and with religious institutions surfaced more strongly during the focus group while experiences with family took more of a back seat. The ways in which narrators described their identities and how they came to also shifted slightly during the focus group.

Observation and Informal conversation

Consistent with the hermeneutic cycle that loops between individual descriptions and interpretations of their own experiences of a phenomenon with the interpretations of the researcher the final step of my data collection process was observational. I engaged in close observation of the narrators and other lesbian identifying women in a variety of spaces. This took place before, during and after interviews and the focus group discussion. I also attended social events organized by LGBTQ NGOs for their members. Another research site was the homes of lesbian identifying women when they had small social gatherings with friends. This observation process facilitated the gathering of taken for granted gestures, language and behaviour which was informative to the study. In such spaces I used the notes function to write my observations immediately on my phone instead of a notebook and pen to avoid the intrusive sense that people were being watched. I however was clear that I was engaging in these social spaces as a researcher. Further, I engaged in informal conversations with lesbian identifying women in these social interactions and that also contributed to understanding and interpretating the research. Through observation I went back to the spectator role that I assumed in the initial life narrative process, allowing the narrators this time, not to talk uninterrupted but to move through the world and through their social spaces uninterrupted as I silently observed.

3.2.8 Data interpretation and analysis

The data interpretation and analysis processes were based on Heideggerian interpretive hermeneutic analysis. It is hinged on the understanding that the lives and experiences of people cannot be delinked from their relationship to context, language and culture.[92] In a sense engagement with data began as soon as I completed the first interview, in keeping with a

92 M Larkin et al 'Giving voice and making sense in interpretative phenomenological analysis' 3(2) *Qualitative Research in Psychology* (2006) at 102.

phenomenological approach where data is constantly being analysed and this is used to inform the continuing research process.[93] Heideggerian belief seeks out how participants make meaning of their experiences along with their person and social world.[94]

The bottom line of IPA is its commitment to or focus on the participant. It concerns itself with the 'human lived experience and posits that experience can be understood via an examination of the meanings which people impress upon it.'[95] This is articulated clearly when Smith et al further assert that 'making sense of what is being said or written involves close interpretative engagement on the part of the listener or reader.' Essentially the task of IPA is for the researcher to make sense of the participant who is making sense of phenomenon or experience X. Consequently there is a

> dual role of the researcher as both like and unlike the participant. In one sense, the researcher is like the participant, is a human being drawing on everyday human resources in order to make sense of the world. On the other hand, the researcher is not the participant, she/he only has access to the participant's experience through what the participant reports about it, and is also seeing this through the researcher's own, experientially lens.[96]

IPA as a qualitative approach allows for a variety of individuals who experience similar events to narrate their stories without any misrepresentation. According to Creswell a 'phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon.'[97] Such exploration however allows the individual experiences to be shared and understood within the broader frame of the concept of phenomenon under investigation.

I concerned myself in this study with the detailed examination of human lived experience of the narrators. The intention was as much as possible to enable the experience being shared to be expressed in its own terms, rather than through predefined category systems, which was a foundational critique I made of historical African sexualities research. This approach is what makes the IPA approach and this study as a whole truly phenomenological.[98]

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93 LC Callister & AH Cox 'Opening our hearts and minds: The meaning of international clinical nursing electives in the personal and professional lives of nurses' 8(2) *Nursing and Health Sciences* (2006) at 95.

94 JA Smith et al 'Interpretative phenomenological analysis' in Smith J.A (ed) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Methods* (2008) at 2.

95 JA Smith et al *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, research, practice* (2009) at 34.

96 Smith et al (n 94) at 35-36.

97 JW Creswell *Educational research: Planning conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (4th ed)* (2012) at 76.

98 Smith et al (n 94) at 32.

The semi-structured interview transcripts were copied into a template with three columns. The first column title is emergent themes, the second or middle column is the original transcript, and the third column is the exploratory notes column. The full text is read for meaning after which it is read line by line and exploratory comments are made in the third column. The exploratory comments are then used for deducing themes that are noted in the first column. In Brenner's approach on how to analyse data he proposes isolating paradigmatic cases. Identifying repetitious themes arising between the cases for similarities or deep contrast. Then, selecting exemplary quotes to illustrate the themes.[99] The thematic analysis serves to demonstrate more clearly the structures of meaning that are lived by participants. All this does not occur in a linear fashion as the process was reflective and necessitated a circular motion of going back and forth between transcripts, field notes, literature and emerging themes. I also identified patterns that linked the themes, and the final step is to elicit the comments and responses on a draft of the analysis from those familiar with the content or the method.

3.2.8 Data storage and management

One cannot over emphasis the importance of securing and managing data collected in a qualitative study. This task was a responsibility that was not taken lightly. I took guidance from Alase who suggested the following measures for securing data. He stated that,

> As an added protection, an IPA research study should destroy through deletion of any video, audio and/or taped recorded information after it has been transcribed for the safety and protection of the participants. Additionally, IPA study should also provide a safe and sturdy storage system for the safekeeping and management of the research data. Rubin and Rubin (2012) advised that researchers should have a sturdy safety system that protects the data collected from the hands of any outsider, i.e., providing a protected password system for the filing and storing of research data.[100]

3.2.9 Researcher Reflections

While the entire thesis is perhaps the culmination of my reflections, I share briefly here my process reflections that demonstrate the ways in which the research is phenomenological. Starting with the acknowledgement that this research like most research is truly an intrusion

99 Wojnar & Swanson (n 16) at 177.

100 AO Alase 'The impact of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX) on small-sized publicly traded companies and their communities' PhD thesis, Northeastern University, 2016 at 85.

into the private lives of the narrators, even if there is curtesy in the intrusion through the seeking of informed consent. Steen Halling posits that

> In everyday life each of us is something of a phenomenologist insofar as we genuinely listen to the stories that people tell us and insofar as we pay attention to and reflect on our own perceptions.[101]

As a result, the academic researcher stands out from this through the intentionality with which they listen and the self-reflective process, which must be more than a casual reference to reflexivity and must instead enunciate a detailed account of the journey taken by the researcher and participants. I do not attempt to detail in one place what this process entailed however continuously through this work I describe the process beyond the content of conversation and my analysis of data, adding texture through description of details such as where and how conversations took place.

Alase recommends that IPA research be accompanied by a post reflection script as a way of consolidating the research journey and process that led up to the final product. He asserts that in a

> qualitative research study where subjectivity and interpersonal actions and experiences interplay with everyday life nuances, it is very important that a thick [and thoughtful] personal reflective description be included in the narrative of the research study, so that the audience can see for themselves the journey that the research study has gone through. As a matter of fact, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research study holds that it is important that every research study give a detail account of the mountains each study has climbed to get to their individual final destinations. For a research study to be authentic and credible, telling a narrative of the journey should be part of the research study's narration.[102]

While I agree with Alase's intentions, I find that careful integration of such detail within the research text itself has the same effect perhaps even greater effect, as the nuances of the process can be read alongside the research content enabling the reader to make immediate connections and their own interpretations. This approach equally allows for acknowledging positionality and reflects on awareness of self and participants throughout the research.

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101 S Halling *Intimacy, Transcendence, and Psychology* (2008) at 145.
102 Alase (n 100) at 148-149.

3.3 Conclusion

This study is about the production of knowledge on African sexualities and the experiences of lesbian women in contemporary Zimbabwe. It is about the multiple ways people arrived at that identity and how they navigate or experience it in their daily lives in gendered and sexualised ways. It is about how this case study illuminates the ways in which different approaches to research or the critical application of existing methods creates an opportunity for new knowledge.

Phenomenology has been exceptional in identifying and enunciating the complexities of human experience.[103] In this study therefore I did not start from a 'grand' theory. Instead, I leaned on phenomenology as a guiding lens, using it as both the theoretical and methodological approach. Additionally, I acknowledge that my own feminist and post-structural roots formed part of my analytical discussion and that although I have chosen phenomenology as I find it incisive, it does not mean that other theories do not have explanatory power.

[103] MJ Larrabee ' The contexts of phenomenology as theory' (1990) 13(3) *Human Studies* at 195.

4

Situating Zimbabwean lesbian identifying women in contextual perspective

African "homosexualities" can never be comfortably slotted within identity politics carved out of Western "gay" and "lesbian" liberation struggles, and display queer and even post-queer characteristics.[1]

4. Introduction

This chapter offers a theoretical reading of the Zimbabwean context within which the subjects of the study are located. I lean on phenomenology, feminism and postcolonial frames to make sense of the context and situate lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe. Alongside these frames I conceptually grapple with Judith Halberstam's queer temporality to disrupt chronological time in this sense-making attempt.[2] The chapter touches on critical events relating to same-sex sexualities in Zimbabwe's recent history, about which there has been intense social and political debate. It traces the emergence of contemporary same-sex sexuality discourse, how it has unfolded, along with its transformations. It reveals the tensions, and critically analyses diverging and converging trajectories of different manifestations of nationalism, colonialism, religion, culture and the global LGBTQ+ politics in contemporary Zimbabwe focusing on the Harare metropolitan area.

The chapter focuses on pivotal moments that bring into focus the role of the state, religion and the broader society in constructing the prevailing context around same-sex sexuality in Zimbabwe. I begin with the emergence of same-sex sexualities, the public opposition in parliamentary debate following the infamous book fair events of 1995 which I suggest cemented homophobic sentiments in political discourse and informed its subsequent use as a moral and political tool to consolidate power by nationalist elites. Additionally, I explore the ways in which discourse on same-sex sexualities subsequently unfolded in the years that followed and the role that religion has played in influencing public attitudes. Finally, I look at lesbian identities and the ways in which they have emerged as products of local and global contexts and realities and have transformed same-sex sexuality discourse in Zimbabwe.

If the chapters to follow are pivotal in illuminating the experiences of lesbian women, then this chapter by situating lesbian identifying women in contextual perspective insists on

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1 C Zabus *Out in Africa: Same-sex desire in sub-Saharan literatures & cultures* (2013) at 5.
2 J Halberstam *A queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives* (2005) at 1.

the role of context and situatedness as adding a further explanatory dimension for the production of those experiences and the meanings made subsequently. In particular the salience of nationalism, religion and culture including global discourses is explored.

4.1 Emergence of a same-sex sexuality discourse in Zimbabwe

In January of 1994, Gays and lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) advertised its counselling services in the Daily Gazette in a moment that brought homosexuality into the public political domain. An attempt to advertise their services in a national newspaper, the Herald were refused on the basis that the Herald is a 'family newspaper'.[3] The then Minister of Home Affairs Dumiso Dabengwa was quoted as saying 'homosexuality is abhorrent and should not be allowed' and expressing anxious desire as well as the clear intent of the police to make arrests, 'we are going to arrest them. It is illegal in this country.'[4] For a period there was a media frenzy which died down later in that year as a result of what some speculate to have been a government-imposed media ban on all gay related matters.[5] The silence was short-lived however, as in 1995 GALZ applied and was accepted to exhibit material on their counselling services at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZIBF). A week before the event launch, the Zimbabwean government wrote a letter to the ZIBF Trust giving a directive for the withdrawal of GALZ's acceptance and within days the acceptance had been withdrawn.[6] With reluctance and acting under severe constraint the fair trustees withdrew GALZ from the fair, however this resulted in the resignation of two of the ZIBF trustees.[7]

The exchanges between the government and the ZIBF trustees had attracted outrage from some participants, but broader public attention came following condemnation of homosexuality by former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe at the 1 August book fair launch. Shortly afterwards, in a press conference following the book fair opening Mugabe proceeded to declare that he did not believe homosexuals had rights at all. He set off a sustained attack on homosexuality that has continued past his time as Zimbabwean president.[8] Just ten days after the book fair launch, during his Heroes Day speech on the 11th of August, Mugabe

3 B Clark 'Zimbabwe' in R Rosenbloom (ed) *Unspoken rules* (2003) at 233.
4 'Police warn homos' Daily Gazette 24 January 1994 as cited in Clark (n 3) at 232.
5 C Dunton & M Palmberg *Human rights and homosexuality in Southern Africa* (1996) at 12.
6 Statement to all ZIBF participants 31 July 1995.
7 Dunton & Palmberg (n 5) at 14.
8 'Disapproval of GALZ mounts' The Sunday Mail (Harare) 28 July 1996.

gave what has become the most referenced speech in Zimbabwean homosexuality discourse in which he referred to homosexuals as worse than dogs and pigs.[9]

Then a week later the ruling party ZANU-PF's women's league organised a solidarity march to affirm their support for the then president's stance against homosexuality.[10] They invoked motherhood and the role of women as custodians of heritage as the basis for their position as they marched carrying placards with religious messages such as, 'God created Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve.' For Mugabe and his supporters, theirs is a narrative of Western impositions and moral corruption in which an entanglement of culture, religion and 'Africanness' is clearly demonstrated and in which the nationalist elites see themselves as holding the mandate of preserving the African identity and imagination.

The role of the postcolonial state has been largely overlooked in the oversimplified transnational equation that links formation of non-normative sexual identities to colonialism and global cultural flows. Instead, Evelyn Blackwood places importance on sources for theorising women's sexuality that go beyond a narrow focus on Western cultures and concepts.[11] As such, we are contending with a question, not of representation of identity but one that is much more about the unrecognised emergence of new forms of governmentality that consist of strategies, regulatory practices and instrumentalities that connect the State to the body.[12] This reality looms beneath the radar as focus is largely fixed on coloniality. A fixation on a North to South flow of ideas that has masked the role of the State.

Homosexuality is political, cultural, social and historical. According to Foucault, 'homosexuality threatens people as a way of life rather than as a way of having sex.'[13] We observe this in September 1995, a month after the infamous speech by Mugabe during the opening of the international book fair when the matter of homosexuality was tabled in parliamentary debate.[14] The then member of parliament Anias Chigwedere gave an account of

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9 T Shoko '"Worse than dogs and pigs?" Attitudes toward homosexual practice in Zimbabwe' (2010) 57(5) *Journal of homosexuality* at 644; J Moyo 'Worse than dogs and pigs: life of a gay man in Zimbabwe' Thomas Reuters foundation (Harare) 4 September 2017; A Laing 'Mugabe calls David Cameron "satanic" for backing gay rights' The Telegraph (London) 24 November 2011.

10 Inter Press Services Africa 18 august 1995.

11 E Blackwood ' Culture and women's sexualities (2000) 56(2) *Journal of social issues* at 223.

12 I Grewal & C Kaplan 'Global identities: Theorizing transnational studies of sexuality' 7(4) *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (2001) 7(4) at 672.

13 M Foucault, 'Friendship as a way of life' in S Lotringer (ed) translated by L Hochroth & J Johnston *Foucault live: Collected interviews 1961-1984* (1996) at 310. Also cited in Halberstam (n 2) at 1.

14 On 1 August 1995, during the opening of the Zimbabwe international book fair from which the Gays and Lesbian of Zimbabwe had been excluded former president Robert Mugabe described it as 'outrageous and repugnant to my human conscience that immoral and repulsive organisations, like those of homosexuals who offend against both the law of nature and the morals of religious beliefs espoused by our society should have any advocates in our midst and even elsewhere in the world.'

multiple definitions of homosexuals that he claimed to have gathered. He described homosexuals as being, morally rotten, promiscuous, lecherous and in vernacular *imbwa* meaning dogs. In contextualising homosexuals within Zimbabwe, he went on to add:

> What is at issue in cultural terms is a conflict of interest between the whole body, which is the Zimbabwean community and a part of that body represented by individuals or groups of individuals. … The whole body is far more important than any single dispensable part. When your finger starts festering and becomes a threat to the body you cut it off. … The homosexuals are the festering finger.[15]

According to Chigwedere, the existence of homosexuals within Zimbabwe poses a threat to the wellbeing of the nation, to its collective way of life as Foucault suggests. Homosexuality is not about individuals and what they might claim to be entitled to, instead it is about the threat it poses to Zimbabwe as a whole. Homosexuality was invoked as a reminder of the consequence of allowing immorality to prevail in a society. Borrowing from Kristeva's stance on abjection, the homosexual is constructed here as the abject of Zimbabwean nationalism. There is an attempt to expunge them from the society as they are deemed impure.[16] In a sense, they are a reminder of the instability of the nationalist identity and the nation birthed at independence. I suggest that while the nationalist elites rejected colonial dominance in the political realm, they not only maintained its moral ethos but also found affirmation from their ability to uphold it. In an attempt to distance themselves from the idea of an 'African sexuality' that was constructed as primitive, uncivilised and excessive they held on tightly to the moral and legal values of the colonial state. They continued and reinforced the capitalist and patriarchal constructions of family as a reproductive unit, being nuclear, heterosexual and monogamous. The African homosexual poses a threat to this and was not going to be tolerated.

The political discussion at parliamentary level did not stop there. Two months after Chigwedere's statement, traditional chiefs during parliamentary debate weighed in on the matter with Chief Makoni expressing concern that talk about homosexuality should not be tolerated at all. He cautioned, '…we do not talk about this rubbish in public.'[17] Yet for Chief Mangwende, lesbianism and the threat to reproduction was the primary concern which he made known saying:

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15 MP Anias Chigwedere, Zimbabwe parliamentary debate, 28 September 1995, Hansard 2779-2781.
16 J Kristeva *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection* (1982) at 4.
17 Chief Makoni, Zimbabwe parliamentary debate, 8 November 1995, Hansard.

> I would like to look also at the other side of the matter, where women are resorting to lesbianism. We should look at this case and see what pleasures women get in marrying each other and what pleasures men get in engaging in homosexuality. We have read in the Bible, where God said I create you so that you may multiply on this earth. How then are we going to multiply if we do not do it the right way? Are we going to produce any children if we promote lesbianism?[18]

Chief Mangwende's reference to child-bearing gestures towards a fear of lesbianism as a threat to reproduction and thus a need to censor and regulate women's bodies. While men are seen as constituting the collective political body, women constitute the reproductive mechanism/machinery for this body and lesbianism emerges as a threat to this. Women that fall outside of this reproductive machinery are essentially out of place in the imagination of the political body and are 'linked to chaos and social breakdown, spurring attempts to control their visibility and mobility'.[19]

The regulation of sodomy dates back as far as 1891 and the abjected sex in the colonial state was anal sex between men and this continues in the Criminal Law Act 2006, Section 73 which criminalises all sexual acts between men and reads as follows,

> Any male person who, with the consent of another male person, knowingly performs with that other person anal sexual intercourse, or any act involving physical contact other than anal sexual intercourse that would be regarded by a reasonable person to be an indecent act, shall be guilty of sodomy and liable to a fine up to or exceeding level fourteen or imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or both.[20]

In this process the criminalising and stigmatising spotlight rested squarely on men who have sex with men and whose actions threatened the preferred masculinity. Media attention in particular focused almost exclusively on the issue of sodomy, and rarely are lesbians mentioned in conversations about homosexuality. Blackwood makes the assertion that lesbian women are barely visible and are instead subsumed in the homosexuality category.[21] A few rare exceptions exist however, for instance an article printed in the June 1992 issue of a tabloid-style magazine called, Just for me. In the article the author shares 'lifestories' of lesbian women and while Clark questions the accuracy of the details of the stories, she points to a more revealing fact in

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18 Chief Mangwende, Zimbabwe parliamentary debate, 8 November 1995, Hansard.

19 R Mudiwa 'As it was bodily, so it is politically': Prostitutes, wives, and political power in Zimbabwe' (2020) *The Oxford Handbook of Zimbabwean Politics* at 1.

20 Criminal law (Codification and reform) Act 9:23 of 2004 Section 73 (1).

21 E Blackwood 'Cross-cultural lesbian studies: Problems and possibilities' in B Zimmerman & TAH McNaron (eds) The new lesbian studies (1996) at 194-200. See also DA Elliston 'Erotic anthropology: "Ritualized homosexuality" in Melanesia and beyond' (1995) 22(4) *American Ethnologist*.

the form of the author's confessed hesitance to take on the task and her fear that she would be 'groped and molested (and threatened)' by the lesbian interviewees.[22] While we learn about the experiences of some lesbian women at that time, we also gain insight into the attitudes and stereotypes surrounding their lives.

The public stigma surrounding women who have sex with women only enters much later. The logics of this can be found in the fraught relationship between feminism and nationalism as discussed by Shireen Hassim.[23] She points to the unavoidable masculinity of nationalism as a politics and state practice.[24] Similarly Cynthia Enloe observes that 'nationalism has typically sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope'.[25] It is this nationalist masculinity that the elites are desperate to defend at the expense of minority groups they see as a threat.

Ideas of what constitutes morally acceptable/unacceptable behaviour have long been shaped by fierce ethical and political divisions between traditional moralists and liberals, defenders of male privilege and the feminists that have challenged it, where the Zimbabwean state sits firmly on the side of traditional morality and the defense of male privilege.[26] This provides some context for the remarks by Chigwedere and the chiefs but needs also to be examined in relation to the historical and contemporary factors that underpin these views of morality.

Aaron Fellmeth makes the assertion that states deny individuals equal treatment and force them into a position of underclass for their preferences which 'minutely affect anyone'.[27] While this may appear true it may be a little simplistic. State regulation of same-sex sexuality is not about threat to individuals within the nation at an interpersonal level. The vicious stances taken by nationalist elites which cause humiliation and material disadvantage to people that practice same-sex sexualities are indicative of a commitment to regulation of sexuality as part of protecting the imagined nation as a whole. This is observed in Chigwedere's statement about the festering finger which captures on one hand a sense of inherited colonial morality and on the other a grasping at an imagined national identity.

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22 Clark (n 3) at 233.

23 S Hassim 'Nationalism, feminism and autonomy: The ANC in exile and the question of women' (2004) 30(3) *Journal of Southern African Studies* at 433.

24 P McFadden 'Becoming contemporary African feminists: Her-stories, legacies and the new imperatives' *Feminist dialogue series* at 5.

25 C Enloe *Bananas, beaches and bases: Making feminist sense of international politics* (2000) at 44.

26 J Weeks *Sexuality* 3rd edition (2010) at 2.

27 AX Fellmeth 'State regulation of sexuality in international human rights law and theory' (2008) 50(3) *William and Mary Law Review* at 800.

I am interested in how context and situatedness shape the lives of lesbian identifying women but also in turn in the ways in which lesbian lives inflect and reconfigure norms. Therefore, this thesis offers an opportunity for this examination and 'challenges us to confront issues that society has clothed in taboos, inhibitions, and silences.'[28] The subject of sexuality has been historically cast as taboo in essentialist arguments in which even socially and morally sanctioned heterosexual marital sex is still a difficult subject to navigate outside the realms of disease and reproduction.[29]

> In the recent few decades however multiple, intersectional critical theories in the form of feminism, queer and postcolonial theories 'have interrogated the ways in which sexuality is conceptualised and constructed, specifically with the intention of deconstructing essentialist notions of sexuality and identity formation.[30]

This shift has repositioned sexuality as a historical and social category facilitating the understanding that 'ideas about sexuality are linked to forms of power and other hegemonic categories of identity and subjectivity like class, race, gender and nationality.'[31] To attend to sexuality therefore is to attend to systems of power.

The increased visibility and discussion of sexuality that emerged in the 1990s is 'implicated in long contested gender struggles along with attempts at self-definition by the Zimbabwean nation at its moment of acquiring national independence'.[32] This process of self-definition informed the framing of state power in relation to sexual rights and their impact on the exercise of agency. During this period sexuality emerged as a key marker of citizenship through the extirpation of homosexuals from the national polity. It is significant for instance that criminalisation of homosexuality originated from colonial laws, yet nationalist elites paradoxically point towards homosexuality as a colonial attempt at corrupting 'traditional' African society.[33] An accusation leveraged often against the 'West'.

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28 S Tamale 'Introduction' in S Tamale (ed) *African sexualities: A reader* (2011) at 5.
29 Tamale (n 28) at xi.
30 J Gwynne & A Poon *Sexuality and contemporary literature* (2012) at xii.
31 As above.
32 'Police warn homos' Daily Gazette 24 January 1994 as cited in B Clark 'Zimbabwe' in R Rosenbloom (ed) *Unspoken rules* (2003) at 232.
33 M Epprecht *Heterosexual Africa? The history of an idea from the age of exploration to the age of AIDS* (2008) at 161.

4.2 Unfolding of a same-sex sexuality discourse in Zimbabwe

The events during and after the book fair enabled a series of constitutive, though contested expressions of political homophobia in daily life by thrusting homosexuality onto the agenda in the whole of Southern Africa.[34] The subjects of patriotic history and political homophobia are accompanied by an accumulated history of normative national identity construction. Within Zimbabwe these normative constructions were sedimented in the period immediately following independence through continuities in colonial regulation and the assertion of nationalist morality which have thus collectively maintained considerable disciplinary power. As Bell reminds us in her study of anti-Semitism, 'norms not only empower and encourage normative identity but in fact insist on it.'[35]

Before 1995 South Africa was the only Southern African country where extensive debate and rights discourse was in place. While the Zimbabwean state has been centralised in LGBTQ+ discourse there is evidence that the emergence into public debate of homosexuality was ignited by the actions of LGBTQ+ persons, in this instance the attempts by GALZ to publicise their counselling services. Jeremy Youde argues that though political organising by LGBTQ+ groups preceded the political homophobia and rhetoric,

> …the prominence and vitriol of the political homophobia far outstripped both the degree of political influence that the LGBT political groups had and the prominence of these issues in the public domain.[36]

As condemnation of homosexuality was at its peak at national level, the international community was fully enraged. A letter from 70 US congressmen was sent to Mugabe accusing him of bigotry. His response to this was that homosexuality may be tolerated in the US and Europe but had no place anywhere in Zimbabwe except for prisons 'where there are mad people and criminals.'[37]

The role that has been played by international and human rights law in the evolution of state practice in regulating of sexualities must necessarily be discussed. The ways in which it is experienced as solidarity by LGBTQ+ activist movements as well as the manner in which it reinforces the idea of homosexuality as foreign and its rejection as part of a claim to

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34 Dunton & Palmberg (n 5) at 12.

35 V Bell 'Mimesis as cultural survival: Judith Butler and anti-Semitism' (1999) 16(2) *Theory, Culture and Society* at 151-152.

36 J Youde 'Patriotic history and anti-LGBT rhetoric in Zimbabwean politics' 51(1) *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (2017) at 62.

37 Quoted in IPS Africa, August 18, 1995.

sovereignty. Fellmeth suggests there is an incomplete application of human rights to sexual minorities and at the same time highlights the disadvantages of the logical and theoretical inconsistencies in human rights doctrine.[38] While the international community and international human rights discourse have been framed as saviours in the struggle against homophobia there is need for new ways of thinking about what the desires and needs of lesbian women are and allowing those ideas to lead the strategies on how to improve their lives.

A phenomenological reading of lesbian lives creates such an opportunity, not just for informing the future but also for understanding how we come to be where we are now. The lives and experiences of the women in this study disrupt linear time and to understand this I invoke queer temporalities. Where the sexual life or maturation of an individual is typically read from childhood to adolescence, adulthood, marriage, parenthood and then death the lives of many LGBTQ+ identifying persons deviate far from this. It is not surprising to hear of or see adults exhibiting what might be seen as 'adolescent behaviour' in terms of dating and navigating relationships particularly when an individual comes to their sexual identity or its expression much later in life. In understanding the non-linear journeys and experiences of the lesbian identifying women in the chapters to come I will invoke queer temporalities, which are discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

While the international community was declaring its support, hate speech, condemnation, demonisation and nationalist rejection of homosexuality was being sealed firmly in the minds of part of the Zimbabwean population. Calls for arrests and violence were made resulting in intense fear amongst those practicing same-sex sexualities in Zimbabwe. The leadership had made its position known and those in agreement had verbalised their support. It was not until 1998 however that the extent of the law in relation to homosexuality was tested in post-independent Zimbabwe. A case that was about violence and abuse became the symbol of same-sex sexuality in Zimbabwe in the case of former president Canaan Banana who was convicted of sodomy and indecent assault against his bodyguards and other staff while he was president.[39] This case and the narrative constructed around it, did not distinguish between the coerced and non-consensual acts Banana was accused of and consensual same-sex activity more broadly. Instead, it entrenched the criminal stereotype of homosexuality, portraying it as violent and further cementing the ideas of same-sex sexuality as an unacceptable practice that should never be tolerated in Zimbabwe.

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38 Fellmeth (n 27) at 798.

39 *S v Banana* 2000 (1) ZLR 607 (S).

Criminalisation being the most obvious expression of state regulation has meant that most focus has revolved around the regulation of sodomy. Looking closely at the recent conversations about sexualities in Zimbabwe by homing in on the 2010-2013 period where unlike earlier periods of colonial legacy there was finally the opening of a unique window in which Zimbabwean desires and ideas could be collected and formulated into a new constitution acceptable to the majority. Much like the events of 1995 this constitution-making period is significant as it is marked with the same highly public, deliberate and systematic deployment of homophobic rhetoric by the Zimbabwean government.

After decades of conversation and contestation about a new Zimbabwean constitution the process finally succeeded. The first attempt at a new constitution was in the year 2000. Prior to this, in 1998 a civil society constitutional collective known as the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) was formed to drive constitutional and electoral reform in Zimbabwe. In response a state-appointed Constitutional Commission was set up. These processes resulted in a draft constitution that was taken to referendum in February of 2000. As Zimbabweans took to the polls however the draft was rejected, and violent electoral processes followed in both the 2000 general election and into the 2002 presidential elections. The political developments from the year 2000 highlighted the increasingly visible deficiencies in democratic governance and stability in Zimbabwe.[40]

Building on the lessons from an earlier attempt at drafting a Zimbabwean constitution, The Constitution Parliamentary Committee (COPAC) led a constitution-making process.[41] The first constitution drafted by Zimbabweans for the post-independent nation. Integral to the constitution-making process was the idea of a collectively built and agreed upon constitution that based on extensive consultations with citizens. The process took place during the period of a Government of National Unity (GNU) that came into being in February of 2009. The GNU followed the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), a power sharing agreement designed to break the deadlock that resulted from a contentious presidential election in 2008. Robert Mugabe remained president and opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai became Prime Minister.[42]

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40 T Mungwari 'Representation of political conflict in the Zimbabwean press: The case of The Herald, The Sunday mail, Daily news and The Standard, 1999-2016' PhD thesis, University of South Africa 2017 at 58.

41 COPAC comprised of 25 members, appointed by the Committee on Standing Rules and Orders of Zimbabwe's Parliament from the three political parties represented in the Parliament at that time.

42 Mungwari (n 40) at 5.

During the constitution-making process homosexuality was enmeshed in the large political discourse about constitutional reform.[43] While GALZ, led by Keith Goddard wanted sexual orientation included as a protected category in the new constitution along with other supporters, COPAC did not include it in the public comment meeting citing that 'according to the ethics, morals, and values of the nation, such an issue cannot be a talking point during the outreach program'.[44] Goddard being a white gay man also fortified the 'Western import' discourse. Instead, Mugabe and other nationalist elites within his government took the opportunity to talk about homosexuality on their own terms. In one of his speeches Mugabe declared, 'We say NO! to gays, and we will not listen to those advocating for it.'[45] Yet again the government had succeeded in squashing conversation started by LGBT activists and reintroduced it on their own terms not as conversation or debate but as declarations wherein the narrative was framed by them, leaving little if any room for dissent.

The government carefully constructed an idea of what it means to be Zimbabwean. In another speech Mugabe declared, 'As Zimbabweans, we have already said Yes! To economic empowerment No! to reversing the land reform programme No! to homosexuality or lesbianism.'[46] To combine homosexuality and lesbianism with the two most important issues in Zimbabwe at that time, economic stability and land is perplexing. However, it is an indication of how homosexuality was opportunistically being thrust into the public imagination. Leading up to the referendum this rhetoric continued and in March of 2013 by a 94.49% margin a new constitution was voted into existence.[47] LGBT activists supported this constitution despite sexual orientation not being specified as a protected category. Rather, the LGBTQ+ activist community focused on the opportunities that the constitution presented for the protections of human dignity for all as a possible entry point towards the protection of LGBTQ+ persons.

Even after the referendum, anti-gay sentiments continued in the lead up to the 31 July elections. A month before the election Mugabe guaranteed 'Hell for gays' if ZANU-PF won

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43 M Tanhira & T Reid-Smith 'Zimbabwe LGBTs fear constitution change after Mugabe 'behead the gays' threat' (2013) Grey Star News available at http://www.genocide-watch.com/images/Zimbabwe_2013_08_13_LGBTs_fear_consitution_change_under_Mugabe.pdf (accessed 24 January 2021).

44 G Chateta 'Zimbabwe rules out gay rights in new constitution' (2010) ZimEye 24 May (accessed 14 November 2019).

45 J Youde 'Patriotic history and anti-LGBT rhetoric in Zimbabwean politics' (2017) 51(1) *Canadian Journal of African Studies* at 72.

46 D Mahuku & B Mbanje 'A lion does not fear the forest' *Herald* 31 August 2012 (accessed 14 November 2019).

47 Youde (n 45) at 62.

the elections.[48] The ZANU-PF manifesto went so far as to declare the ruling party's intent to 'defend Zimbabwe's traditional and religious values against such evils as homosexuality.'[49] Youde describes ongoing efforts by the government to invoke ideas of patriotic history to justify the repression of and lack of respect for LGBTQ+ persons and rights, in a process in which LGBTQ+ rights are constructed as foreign and constitute Western ideas that betray 'authentic' Zimbabwean values.[50] Resultantly LGBTQ+ persons are marked as sell-outs for their 'un-African' behaviours. They sit on the wrong side of patriotic history and are therefore excluded from citizenship.

The intense denunciation of homosexuality raises interesting questions about morality, sex and sexuality as well as normative attitudes about women. It surfaces the gendered subtexts at play in the construction of the image of the nation. Engaging in an analysis of the words spoken by Mugabe and other nationalist elites, I argue that there is a collapsing of various issues in the construction of a troubling account of who a Zimbabwean citizen is. Firstly, there is a merging of traditions, culture and religiously grounded morality into one. That is, the labelling of homosexuality as 'unAfrican' and at the same time calling it 'unGodly' based on a colonial religion. This insistence on 'unAfricanness' solidifies the argument put forward by Homi Bhabha that in order to sustain the nation-state's invention of social and national cohesion there must necessarily be some highly discriminate and repetitive cultural shreds and patches to evoke in order to sustain the illusion of a cohesive national culture. Secondly, there is a rejection of Western sexualities while leaning on colonial law to regulate sexuality. Finally, there is an essentialised view of women as mother/reproducer and nurturer yet still outsider to the national imagination.

The regulation of sexualities does not only occur through repression it also happens through the normalisation of certain practices and is given backing by national cultural traditions. This is often implicit in the glorification of marriage and sex only within marriage, condemnation of 'deviant behaviour', pre-marital sex, adultery and sex between same-sex partners. The anchor for this kind of normalisation is found in the teachings and assertions of churches and religious leaders.

Social repugnance to unconventional forms of intimacy and sexuality manifested at some point or another in the laws of many states arising primarily from religious condemnation

48 T Chitagu 'Hell for gays if ZANU-PF wins' (2013) *Newsday* 15 June (accessed 14 November 2019).
49 MR Tanhira '"Evil" Gays are no closer to freedom in Zimbabwe' (2013) *Mail and Guardian* 26 July.
50 Youde (n 45) at 75.

of these practices.[51] This is more visible in states affiliated with homogenous and well-organised religious orders. Fellmeth suggests that the opposition to unconventional regulation and the imposition of doctrinal control can be easily understood.[52] He states that given that religion is based entirely on faith and there is no concrete evidence to refer to in transmitting its belief, it becomes essential to the survival of religion that socialisation and inculcation of religious beliefs occur before an idea can be critically of intellectually engaged. From an early age using parents, community, the church, and schools, ideas such as masturbation, fornication and homosexuality are labelled as immoral and 'gravely disordered conduct'. What these condemned practices have in common is their engagement of sexual faculties for reasons outside of procreation and thus they are severely frowned upon within religious spaces.

Two decades ago, when former Zimbabwean President and clergyman Canaan Banana was convicted of sodomy, indecent assault and committing unnatural acts he was defrocked by the Methodist church.[53] In an interview with IPS News, Methodist Reverend Margaret James shared her belief that all sinners were welcome into the church along with these reservations,

> We would not be happy with a situation where homosexuals become full members. We focus on all sins, murder, rapists but in Zimbabwe there is excessive focus on sex sins.[54]

The church context has been a painfully reductionist space where talk about LGBTQ+ persons is unidirectional, and the voices of congregants are never heard on the subject.[55] The tone within the church is an emphatically moralising one that sets parameters for what the body should not do.[56]

Christian missionaries were the earliest representatives of the imperial world in what is now known as Zimbabwe. This idea is advanced by John and Jean Comaroff who argue that missionaries were not just the bearers of a hegemonic Christian ideology but were also human

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51 Fellmeth (n 27) at 912.

52 As above.

53 L Machipisa 'Crime-Zimbabwe: Former president to go to jail for sodomy' *Inter Press Service* 20 May 2000 available at http://www.ipsnews.net/2000/05/crime-zimbabwe-former-president-to-go-to-jail-for-sodomy/ (accessed 24 January 2021).

54 L Machipisa 'Religion – Zimbabwe: Gays, lesbians church irks other christians' *Inter Press Services* 22 July 1999 available at http://www.ipsnews.net/1999/07/religion-zimbabwe-gays-lesbians-church-irks-other-christians/ (accessed 24 January 2021).

55 T Msibi 'Denied love: Same-sex desire, agency and social oppression among African men who engage in same-sex relations' (2013) 27(2) *Agenda* at 111.

56 G West, C Van der Walt & KJ Kaoma 'When faith does violence: Reimagining engagement between churches and LGBTI groups on homophobia in Africa' 72(1) *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* (2016) at 1 referencing JL Comaroff & J Comaroff 'Beyond bare life: AIDS, (bio) politics, and the neoliberal order' (2007) 19(1) *Public Culture* at 197.

vehicles of a Western world view.[57] They argue that their mission was that of engaging African communities in a web of symbolic and material transactions that was to bind them over more securely to the colonising culture.[58] Ndlovu-Gatsheni makes a similar assertion stating that missionary activities did not directly impact the autonomy of Shona and Ndebele people but that 'Christianisation' as a process colonised the consciousness of Ndebele and Shona peoples with the axioms and aesthetics of Western culture. This process constituted part of the systematic 'epistemicide' of knowledges and beliefs of Ndebele and Shona peoples and advanced the idea of individual accountability to God alone.[59] I posit that the impact of individual accountability to God shifted focus away from the principles of communal good on which most social regulation was based. This meant practices that might have not triggered societal alarm because they did not harm the collective society began to come under regulation because they were biblically condemned.

Much as Christianity and the Bible were foreign, one must appreciate that they gradually grew a life of their own on the African continent beyond the work of the missionaries. In the early 1990s for instance, Canaan Banana created a stir after suggesting that the Bible must be re-written for it to have relevance for the diversity of people and contexts in the world today. This led to the writing of the book, *Rewriting the Bible: The Real Issues: Perspectives from Within Biblical and Religious Studies in Zimbabwe* in which the argument was made that the Bible was contextual to a time and place and could not possess universally normative value across contexts that are typified by diverse traditions.[60] This is potentially still the most critical engagement of the Bible to emanate from Zimbabwe where questioning the Bible is considered blasphemous.[61]

The grip of religion, the interpretation of the Bible as being anti-homosexuality, the misrepresentation of Canaan Banana's prosecution, the tensions of the constitution making process, and the active support of the international community have all contributed to the persisting negative and harmful attitudes and actions towards same-sex activity and those that

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57 JL Comaroff & J Comaroff *Of revelation and revolution: The dialetics of modernity on a South African frontier* (1997) at 8.

58 J Comaroff *Body of Power, spirit of resistance: The culture and history of a South African people* (1985) at 1.

59 SJ Ndlovu-Gatsheni 'Mapping cultural and colonial encounters, 1880-1930' in B Raftopoulos & A Mlambo (eds) (2009) *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008* (2009) at 42.

60 I Mukonyora et al (eds) *Rewriting the bible : The real issues: Perspectives from within biblical and religious studies in Zimbabwe* (1993) at xi.

61 M R Gunda *The bible and homosexuality in Zimbabwe* (2010) at 47.

practice it. Zimbabwe's position on sexual morality can be summarised in the words of the Zimbabwe Supreme Court in the Banana case,

> Zimbabwe is a conservative society on questions of sexual morality and the Court should not strain to interpret provisions in the Constitution which had not been designed to put Zimbabwe among the front-runners of liberal democracy in sexual matters.[62]

This position on homosexuality is socially and legally reproduced by accreted laws and policies as well as religious and cultural techniques of regulation. In a time where progressive attitudes and policies about sexuality have become the marker of civilisation and modernism, one might read in this statement by the Zimbabwean Supreme Court an intentional rejection to being measured against this standard. This is consistent with the country's frequent claims to sovereignty as verbalised by Mugabe. We however, observe in the Zimbabwean state a schizophrenic relationship with what it labels as 'Western' culture. Where in instances we see aspirations to modernity and notions of respectability through African urban imaginaries and the elevation of nuclear families and 'Western' institutionalised education systems. Yet, at the same time there is an almost violent desire for distance from 'modernity' in the realm of sexuality. I suggest that while education and nuclear families represent an aspirational modernity for nationalist elites, the traumas of a historically demonised African sexuality still persist and sexual conservatism has remained the mark of 'civilised' sexuality.

4.3 Transformation of a same-sex sexuality discourse in Zimbabwe

Historical narratives on same-sex sexualities give insight into what once was, however, same-sex discourse has not been static. It has transformed over the decades as ideas of morality and sexuality have also shifted globally. While transformation is a slow and winding process there are moments that point towards gradual societal change. Within Zimbabwe, deep conservativism continues to prevail around the subject of same-sex sexualities and yet changes such as increased discussion on the subject are indicative of a shift from the historical shroud of silence. Transformation takes place in individuals and in broader society and the two have an impact on each other.

62 *S v Banana* 2000 (1) ZLR 607 (S).

Sojourner Truth deconstructed the term woman by using her own lived experience to challenge it.[63] What are the ways if any that lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe use their own realities and experiences to challenge the essentialised 'Western' lesbian identity? The self-identification/self-definition theme is a particularly important one for lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe whose lives are a negotiation and attempt to reconcile their internally defined images of self with objectifying views and misrecognition by others. In trying to understand their identities, it is necessary to understand the means through which they come to the term lesbian. The ways in which they measured their experiences, desires and pleasures against it, subsequently recognising within it a cathartic fit. What was the moment of cathartic recognition, was it even a moment or a process?

The word lesbian itself is laden. Here I refer to McConnell-Ginet's ideas on words and social practice where she suggests that the shaping and reshaping of word meanings is part and parcel of shaping and reshaping of social and political practices. The word lesbian has a history or perhaps histories that are informed by the varying contexts in which it has and continues to be used. While lesbian can simply be understood to be a female same-sex desiring person this is inflected in different ways depending on the context. For instance, the idea of man hating, masculine presenting women is a rather pervasive American lesbian stereotype. In another context they are constructed as ugly women who are unable to get men or traumatised victims of sexual violence. Whatever the local stereotype the meaning conveyed by the word lesbian cannot be universalised as it is enriched and complicated in many different ways based on context.

To therefore assume that the word lesbian can be collectively understood in a singular manner would be remise. I choose here to focus on the linguistic discourse around the word lesbian and the social and political effects of the word itself. I reflect on how this discourse influences the ways the term is understood by lesbian identifying women and by the broader Zimbabwean society and therefore why this phenomenological endeavour is appropriate. This study can be seen in two ways, firstly as the strengthening of the lesbian identity category in Zimbabwe but also as part of its disruption, by rejecting it as a universalisable and unitary category. The fact that the word itself does not have origins in the languages and cultures of Zimbabwean people has contributed to the idea of its foreignness. Instead of expending energy on attempts to dig into its historical origins I instead turn to its value as a symbol of a shared

[63] Sojourner Truth 'Speech Entitled "Ain't I a woman?' (1851) Delivered at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio.

discursive history. In whatever way each lesbian identifying woman interviewed in this study understands the term lesbian and whatever meaning they make of that identity and its related experiences; they are all linked by the history and contextually nuanced ideas of what a lesbian is. This shared discursive history is such that the designation of lesbian as 'deviant' and 'abnormal' looms in the background of dominant culture despite the affirming ways in which may they have come to their individual identity.

Most literature on lesbian and gay identity development makes reference to coming out. While for many gender theorists 'coming out' has been understood as the culmination of sexual identity formation in which an 'awareness of being different' leads to sexual orientation becoming embedded in a new sense of self. Such a reading remains devoid of an understanding of the multiple dimensions along which identity is constructed.[64] Foucault's anti-liberal ideas of power as productive and existing within relationships are particularly illuminating as they construct power as not the exclusive function or property of the state but as being exercised at multiple levels of life.[65] At the same time the fixedness of identity is challenged as Foucault describes the question 'Who am I?' as an affirmation of subjectification.[66] The ways of seeing and understanding self is therefore layered and this study attempts to create space for understanding the ways in which lesbian identifying women understand themselves. Said makes the assertion that,

> Gone are the binary oppositions of the nationalist and imperialist enterprise. Instead, we begin to sense that old authority cannot simply be replaced by new authority, but that new alignments made across borders, types, nations, and essences are coming into view, and it is those new alignments that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of identity that has been the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism.'[67]

The words of Said encapsulate the current moment in the lives of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe whose lives, identities and experiences are constantly being constructed between the internal and external realms. Where internal and external applies to the individual level and also at the state level. In this process realities and ideas are constantly being created and disrupted or transformed at these interfaces.

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64 ES Abes & SR Jones 'Meaning-making capacity and the dynamics of lesbian college students' multiple dimensions of identity' (2004) 45 *Journal of College Student Development* at 626.

65 M Foucault D*iscipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans) (1977) at 208.

66 M Foucault *The history of sexuality: An introduction vol 1* translated by Hurley, R in 1990 (1978) at 92.

67 EW Said *Culture and imperialism* (1993) at xxvi.

4.4 All in queer time

Earlier in the chapter I introduced queer temporality as an instrumental frame in understanding the lives and experiences of the lesbian women in this study. I highlighted that queer temporality allows us to understand these lives and experiences differently from when outdated and heteronormative frames of understanding time are used. Sociologist Pamela Aronson points us to this when she describes the "objective life events" that continue to be used in mainstream discourse to measure the entrance into adulthood, that is "completing education, entering the labour force, becoming financially independent, getting married, and becoming a parent" as based on simplistic and inaccurate ideas about class and gender.[68] Declining economic conditions around the world have had a significant impact on the process of becoming an adult. Sociologist Jennifer Silva states that in 'the contemporary post-industrial world… traditional markers of adulthood have become tenuous'.[69] Additionally, Aronson contends that social changes created by the feminist movement over time have resulted in young women significantly shifting the ways they view themselves and the markers that reflect their transition to adulthood. According to Aronson, as more young women are consciously or unconsciously living feminist ideals they are disrupting the processes and timing of the 'objective life events'.[70] As such, the ideas of what the progression of time looks like in the lives of women along with differences in how time is spent provide a useful frame for understanding the lives of lesbian identifying women in this study. Given the ways in which definitions of adulthood operate as a cultural model of personhood adulthood is particularly significant and is traditionally viewed as a movement from disorder to order.[71]

A narrative approach as used in this study is a category of importance for examining the ways in which selfhood is built through culture, religion and other social modes. Cultural theorist Illouz contends that the role or influence of religious, moral and gender codes in constructing selfhood have in more recent times been significantly altered by selfhood that is individually negotiated, self -actualising and constantly evolving.[72]

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68 P Aronson 'The markers and meanings of growing up: Contemporary young women's transition from adolescence to adulthood' (2008) 22(1) *Gender and Society* at 56.

69 JM Silva 'Constructing adulthood in an age of uncertainty (2012) 77(4) *American Sociological Review* at 506.

70 Aronson (n 68) at 57.

71 N Lee *Childhood and society: Growing up in an age of uncertainty* (2001) at 141.

72 E Illouz *Saving the modern soul: Therapy, emotions, and the culture of self-help* (2008) at 171.

There is something to be said here for how lesbian identifying women come to view themselves as adults or as coming of age within their societies in the absence of traditional rites of passage. In Michelle Tea's novel Black Wave she writes that,

> It [was] so hard for a queer person to become an adult. Deprived of the markers of life's passage, they lolled about in a neverland dreamworld. They didn't get married. They didn't have children. They didn't buy homes or have job-jobs. The best that could be aimed for was an academic placement and a lover who eventually tired of pansexual sport-fucking and settled down with you to raise a rescue animal in a rent-controlled apartment.[73]

With this description, Tea paints an image of queer life in San Francisco. To transpose this statement onto an African locale like Harare would be dishonest and simplistic, however it provides a place to start from in understanding queer lives. In chapters four and five where I share the lives of Zimbabwean lesbian identifying women and analyse their experiences this excerpt finds both resonance and contrast. What is clear however is that time does not look the same for all, as Sara Jaffe states, 'queer lives are notable for their lack of chrononormativity'.[74]

Where the normative rites of passage are absent, time continues to pass and meaning is found in different ways that are not bound to chronological age. Where the life of a daughter is structured around marriage and motherhood for instance, this creates significant challenges. In many traditional families in Zimbabwe daughters remain 'children' until they become married or have children. In the absence of this they are often expected to continue living in the homes of their parents and are subject to parental regulation. This points us to the reality that time itself is gendered both in the exploration of individual lives but also within the social frame of national time.[75] McClintock in an examination of gender and colonial discourse describes how women's bodies were constructed as the

> atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking and natural) embodying nationalism's conservative principle of continuity', while men are constructed as 'progressive agents of national modernity (forward thinking, potent and historic) embodying nationalism's progressive or revolutionary principle of discontinuity.'[76]

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73 M Tea *Black wave* (2015) at 31.

74 S Jaffe 'Queer time: The alternative to "Adulting" Jstor Daily (10 January 2018) available at https://daily.jstor.org/queer-time-the-alternative-to-adulting/ (accessed 18 November 2020).

75 S McBean *Feminism's Queer Temporalities* (2016) at 5.

76 A McClintock *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995) at 358-9.

Therefore in examining queer time we attend to both the individualised experiences of lesbian identifying women as well as the collective or national time of the context within which they exist. According to McClintock colonial discourse has both leaned on and advanced ideas of temporality that place women firmly on the side of tradition while men represent the march towards progress and modernity.[77] It is therefore my contention that in thinking about queer time the realities of women are particularly significant because as men tend towards progress and modernity the constraints of the traditional rites of passage have a looser grip upon them. This is not to suggest that men in contemporary Zimbabwe are not bound by markers of adulthood. Instead, I suggest that these markers have been modified, that jobs, and a decent financial base have more significance for male acceptance into adulthood than they have for women. Women remain bound to the more traditional rites such as marriage and reproduction whether or not they have achieved academic success or built careers.

An examination of time as individual and national directs us to global time. I argue that both individual and national time are impacted by global time through global movements on various subjects such as feminism, gender equality, LGBTQ+ discourse. I critique the Western centrism of these global and particularly the LGBTQ+ movement over time. I suggest that activism around same-sex sexualities in Zimbabwe does not reflect the ways in which same-sex sexualities have moved in complicated ways that in many instances run parallel to Western discourse such that in these different contexts, same-sex sexualities have had significantly independent trajectories and sources of movement. Instead, ideas of progress over time are being framed around linear Western centric time from criminalisation to decriminalisation or no marriage to marriage. This process paints same-sex sexualities on the African continent as static and trapped in a historical time that has and is continuing to pass in other places in the world. Queer time however enables us to disrupt such a simplistic reading. It is Halberstam's suggestion that,

> queer lives exploit some potential for a difference in form that lies dormant in queer collectivity not as an essential attribute of sexual otherness but as a possibility embedded in the break from heterosexual life narratives.[78]

As such queer lives follow their own temporal logic and present opportunities for other kinds of living that sit outside the normative. That said the erasure of queerness from history is

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77 McClintock (n 76) at 359.
78 J Halberstam *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) at 70.

responsible for what Christopher Dinshaw describes as 'queer desire for history'.[79] As described in the introduction, this thesis does not preoccupy itself with historical authentication of contemporary same-sex sexualities and people that practice them but it is important to acknowledge the reasons why that has been such an important preoccupation for many over the last few decades. A dominant strand of work that has emerged on queer temporality has been a direct response to the notion that queer subjects do not have a past or are without history. This idea has offended many thus triggering a need to defend their sense of being. A strategic response to this by the likes of Valerie Rohy has been avoiding the trap of needing to provide historical authentication of queerness but still attending to historical specificity.[80] A critique of queer time has been on the emphasis of its 'oppositional temporality' to linear time which has been linked to the production of exceptionalism.

This study therefore recognises the construction of the narratives of these lesbian identifying women as not being built upon linear time. It sees personhood as being constructed not just by social and cultural modes but through the impact of national and global discourse and most importantly through individual negotiation wherein a sense of self comes not as the result of the passage of chronological time but through experience. What some might call 'the baptism of fire' where difficult and challenging experiences lead to the sedimentation of ideas of self. After a marriage one entered into reluctantly or by force ends and they find the courage to be with whom they desire and not whom they are expected to be with or when years of denial, substance abuse turn into the courageous act of partnership with a woman they love it is as though one has finally come into their own, they have come to be fully adult. Additionally through the recognition or application of queer time in this study this approach opened possibilities of stepping away from Western centric time and discourse towards the recognition of the contextual peculiarities that frame the lives of lesbian identifying women or any other non-Western category of people. Most importantly queer time as used in this study challenges 'national time' and the construction of women as domestic and reproductive. It recognises lesbian identifying women as exemplary in the ways of not just resisting but as creating new possibilities and ways of being outside what is normative.

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79 C Dinshaw et al 'Theorizing queer temporalities roundtable' (2007) 13(2) *GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* at 178. See also Dinshaw, Getting medieval. For another exploration of queer desires for historicity see C Nealon *Foundlings: Lesbian and gay historical emotion before Stonewall* (2002).

80 V Rohy 'Ahistorical' (2006) 12(1) *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* at 66.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted key moments that demonstrate the regulation of sexualities in Zimbabwe and specifically in relation to same-sex sexualities. I discussed moments of tension and debate and various discourses that have and continue to contribute to the prevailing context in relation to same-sex sexualities. In my discussion of these moments and how they have contributed to the current context there are themes that emerge. The first is the depth of the grip of nationalist and anti-colonialist discourse in defining acceptable and respectable sexuality. The second is the salience of religion in influencing, politics, culture and society more broadly and how its impact is neither arbitrary nor accidental but rather the outcome of deliberate and calculated current and historical strategies. It will become even clearer in the next chapter how influential state, religion and culture have been in informing the experiences of lesbian women and the meaning that lesbian women make of those experiences.

I have not only used lesbian identities to illustrate the debates and tensions surrounding same-sex sexualities but also the role of the state, religion and culture in regulation of sexualities in Zimbabwe more broadly. The point that the experiences of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe are nuanced by a complex context has been demonstrated. The intersection of various discourses mutually reinforcing each other plays out in the lives and experiences of these women.

Lesbian women's constructed knowledge of self can be linked to their struggle to resist and replace controlling images of themselves that are generated by others. As such, they develop self-defining ideas and knowledge as a means of survival. Part of this survival takes the form of what Hill Collins describes as a 'realm of relatively safe discourse.'[81] Lesbian women realise the threat posed to them by heteronormativity. Instead, they turn to their own socio-cultural spaces, build 'chosen families' and engage with organisations or movements that feel safe for them as persons with same-sex identities. These spaces support and are evidence of their resistance to regulation, discrimination and repression. At the same time the lives of lesbian women can be viewed as existing in queer time where they disrupt the normative and create other possible ways of being. In the words of Halberstam queer lives also 'point us to those modes of resistance which survive the encounter between marginal subjects and dominant culture.'[82]

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81 P Hill Collins *Black feminist thought* (1st ed 1990) (2008) at 100.

82 J Halberstam 'What's that smell: Queer temporalities and subcultural lives' (2003) 6(3) *International Journal of Cultural Studies* available at http://sfonline.barnard.edu/ps/printjha.htm

I suggest therefore, that lesbian identities in contemporary Zimbabwe are in themselves a political act of resistance that continues to persist despite heterosexuality and patriarchy remaining normative. They surface the ways in which the nationalist state is both sexualised and gendered. There is however a need to enrich the inadequate 'home-grown' evidence and theories about diverse African sexualities and narratives that are reflective of the realities and priorities of queer African women. This study attempts an empirical project to better understand the concrete specificities of individual gendered and sexualised experiences of lesbian women and their connection to as well as difference from the experiences of others. In providing an account of the context for same-sex sexuality in contemporary Zimbabwe, this chapter sets the backdrop for an exploration of the multiple experiences of lesbian identifying women, the meanings made of those experiences and their interpretations. While I introduce queer time in this chapter and its explanatory power for the lives and experiences of lesbian women in Zimbabwe and particularly for the narrators in this study who are introduced in the next chapter, this is only evinced in their lives and experiences in the next chapter.

Even when the parameters are drawn: Exploring lesbian identity/identification

Torn between the homophobia of the black community and the racism of the white lesbian community, I need, as a black lesbian, to speak for myself and in my own voice, which is not the voice of the white world. I do not want my black experience filtered through your white academic language, the rage and passion edited out, explained away. I do not doubt your good intentions; I do doubt your ability to comprehend or accurately represent my lesbianism, which cannot be taken out of the context of my blackness.[1]

5. Introduction

In the writer's yearning to speak for herself as a black lesbian lies the driving force for this study as well as the paradox of it. This study attempts to surface the voices of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe through academic writing but at the same time seeks to stay true to the words and experiences without editing out or explaining away their 'rage and passion'.

The events in 1995 precipitated a global outcry about the regulation of same-sex sexualities in Zimbabwe.[2] The years that have followed reinforced the image of Zimbabwe as intolerant and hostile to the expression of same-sex sexualities as evinced through the rhetoric of nationalist elites, religious leaders and the outcry by global actors.

In this chapter I seek out the experiences of Zimbabwean lesbian women without attempting to construct a generalised perspective from which one sees and interprets the identities and lives of lesbian women. Charles Ngwena cautions against such a project suggesting that it inclines us towards the essentialisation of identities.[3] The analysis in this chapter emerges from my reflections on an intensive period of fieldwork with five lesbian identifying women between the ages of twenty-one and fifty in Harare as described in Chapter Two. The interviews were conducted in places where the women felt comfortable to speak openly. This ranged from their homes, the back seat of a car under a shady tree to a quiet office after working hours. We drank cups of tea and nibbled on snacks as we spoke. In moments it was easy and relaxed, whilst in others it was tense and uncomfortable. We laughed and joked but also sat in reflective pain and emotion, continuing only if the women wished to. Weaving

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1 C Kitzinger (1987) *The social construction of lesbianism* (1987) interview at 88.

2 See fuller details of 1995 events in Chapter four. C Dunton & M Palmberg *Human Rights and Homosexuality in Southern Africa* (1996) at 12.

3 C Ngwena *What is Africanness? Contesting nativism in race, culture and sexualities* (2018) at 217-218.

through their narratives I examine the manifold ways in which homosexuality becomes a polarising issue between the international and the national and the ways in which identity formation takes place between these domains.

I demonstrate that through the contestations we see a variety of actors in the cultural and religious realms whose actions and rhetoric act as 'straightening devices' that orient individuals towards heterosexuality. I argue that these concerted straightening efforts arise from the fear of homosexuality not as a way of having sex but as a way of life that disrupts, patriarchy and heterosexuality. This helps us to explain how actors in these different realms are so deeply invested in the anti-homosexuality project.

To begin, I discuss the processes of identity formation and the use of the phrase in the chapter title 'even when the parameters are drawn'. With this phrase I make explicit that lesbian identity formation is not a neutral event, but that it continues to emerge in a world where the odds and orienting forces are stacked against it. The boundaries of what is normative and acceptable are already in place and multiple forces are at play to reinforce them. I share the experiences of women that illustrate how same-sex sexualities endure despite the hegemonic force of heterosexuality. I also engage how the journeys to self-identification are individual and unique. I illustrate this through the words and experiences of the narrators. Finally, I contend that challenging the narrative of same-sex sexualities as 'unAfrican' and the deployment of normative sexuality as a marker of proper citizenship has consumed too much time and energy. Instead, by focusing on how lesbian women come to call themselves lesbian and the meanings they make of that identity we can more meaningfully contribute to the African sexualities archive and hence to the lives of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe.

In this chapter I grapple with something that had never concerned me, by asking 'how one comes to be a self-identifying lesbian?' and 'what meaning they make of that identity?' In asking these questions I was compelled to make sense of my own familiar and intimate relationship with lesbian identity then subsequently turned it into an idea to be questioned and denaturalised. Sitting outside of heterosexuality, I had often asked questions of heterosexuality, but never of the lesbian identity. Here, I turned the stability and certainty of my lesbian identity into alien territory in an attempt to conduct what Pierre Bourdieu calls an 'epistemological break' with my uncritical view of lesbian identity.[4]

[4] P Bourdieu, J Chamboredon & J Passeron (1991) *The craft of sociology: Epistemological preliminaries* at 23.

I engaged in intimate inquiry into the lives of Zimbabwean lesbian identifying women and analysed their lives in an effort to reconstruct the practical logic through which they come to a lesbian identity. In asking these questions I was not seeking a universal narrative, instead it was an effort towards the articulation of the complex ways Zimbabwean women have overcome straightening devices to construct identities and viable modes of existence.

5.1 Phenomenological conception of identity

Sexual identity formation has been researched and theorised a great deal in recent years.[5] In this study, sexual identity refers to how individuals situate themselves into culturally constructed sexual categories that have resonance for their attractions, desires and behaviours.[6] While some have discussed non-heterosexual identity formulation broadly others have focused explicitly on lesbian identity formation. In psychological studies, identity formation models have been described in a manner that largely follows linear and sequential stages that lead to the production of 'types' of lesbians.[7] The challenges with research within psychology have been the absence of historical and social context and an over fixation on sexual identity to the exclusion of other identity traits. This literature has been challenged by both proponents of multiculturalism and poststructuralists who are unconvinced by the stability of identity categories and who are committed to the salience of historical and sociocultural context.[8] Additionally, there has also been a critique of the Eurocentric focus of most of the existing work which has centred mainly on white, middle class women. African feminists have extensively documented this dominance of 'Western' scholarship in African studies.[9]

Arguments about who is included and excluded from the lesbian identity category as well as what constitutes it are as frequent among those who believe in identity categories as they are among those that dispute their validity.[10] In some ways lesbian identity has been self-deconstructing for a long time even outside of queer theory as is evident from the diversity of narratives in lesbian texts.[11] While many have preoccupied themselves with the question of

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5 MJ Eliason 'An inclusive model of lesbian identity assumption' (1996) 1 *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* at 3.

6 RC Savin-Williams 'Lesbian, gay male, and bisexual adolescents' in AR Augelli & CJ Patterson (eds) *Lesbian, gay and bisexual identities over the lifespan* (1995) at 166.

7 Eliason (n 5) at 3.

8 As above.

9 A Mama 'Is it ethical to study Africa? Preliminary thoughts on scholarship and freedom' (2007) 50(1) *African Studies Review*; J Ahikire 'African feminism in context: Reflections on the legitimation battles, victories and reversals' (2014) 19 *Feminist Africa*; O Oyewumi *African Gender Studies: A Reader* (2005).

10 Eliason (n 5) at 4.

11 As above.

causation, asking what causes one to become lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans, this study takes no interest in such a question.[12] The existence of non-heteronormative sexualities is truly not anomalous. Rather than questioning how people are non-heteronormative in their sexualities, I explore the assumptions that lead to such a question being asked in the first place and ask questions of those assumptions. Why is heterosexuality always assumed? How do those that sit outside of it resist its hegemonic force? And what does this teach us about resistance and personhood. Franklin, Lury and Stacey state that, 'the lesbian perspective can make it possible to see clearly how heterosexuality is constantly reinforced and reproduced as a fundamental component of all the elements of social existence'.[13]

As extensively discussed in Chapter Two, this study centralises the narrators' accounts of particular phenomena with the focus of this chapter being on identity formation and in-depth analysis of the identity formation process in order to obtain knowledge that goes beyond an experience. The phenomenological approach employed in this study and in the understanding of lesbian identity formation in this chapter allows room for the emergence of unanticipated meanings and interpretations of the experiences of lesbian women in Zimbabwe.

In thinking about the narratives of the women in this study I use Bruner's observation that there is no such thing as an intuitively obvious or essential self but rather that people constantly construct and reconstruct themselves to adapt to situations and context. This adaptive process is aided by memories as well as future hopes and fears.[14] Story telling is tailored to an audience and as such the stories of these narrators are told in ways that reflect how they wish to be perceived and understood or perhaps how they now understand their past experiences.

This study is by its nature both current and retrospective. In terms of the identity formation process it is mostly retrospective. Given how complex and often challenging the identity formation experiences of the women were, one must be attentive to the fact that in engaging these experiences we are getting a retrospective account for which there is now language and meaning attached to events that during the time they occurred were difficult and perhaps even impossible to articulate. This reading allows us to make sense of the choices made

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12 MJ Eliason 'Identity formation for lesbian, bisexual, and gay persons: Beyond a" minoritizing" view' (1996) 30(3) *Journal of Homosexuality* at 31.

13 J Stacey, S Franklin & C Lury *Off-centre: Feminism and cultural studies* (1991*)* at 121.

14 J Bruner (1997) 'A narrative model of self-construction' in JT Snodgrass (ed.) *The self across psychology* New York Academy of Science at 151.

in which parts of a story were shared and what was omitted as well as how meaning is retrospectively constructed.

5.2 Identity formation in the face of compulsory heterosexuality

As the focus of this chapter is on the voices of lesbian identifying women and the ways they come to their identities, I argue that Adrienne Rich's notion of 'compulsory heterosexuality' is pervasive in this process.[15] The influence of compulsory heterosexuality is shared by Canny-Francis et al when they state that,

> The power of compulsory heterosexuality is that for those whose lives conform to its demands, it acts as a constant reinforcement and regulatory mechanism, producing its compliant readers as viable social subjects and regulating any thoughts they might have about alternative gender roles or sexual choices. For those who do not conform to its demands, on the other hand, compulsory heterosexuality acts as a mechanism of exclusion and oppression, because it consistently constructs them as outsiders, aberrant and bad.[16]

Lesbian identification has been lived without access to knowledge, tradition, continuities or social underpinning.[17] As such, this section demonstrates the normalisation of heterosexuality and its impact on the lives and identity formation of lesbian-identifying women. In referring to lesbian identifying women I attend to both the historical presence of lesbians and to the continued creation of meaning that emerges from their existence.

When orienting from heterosexuality lesbian identification is viewed as deviant or pathological. A question thus arises. How do bodies come to have queer orientations against such a hegemonic force? It is this question that leads the analysis in this chapter engaging how identity construction occurs in the lives of these five women despite the heteronormatisation of bodies.

5.2.1 Olivia's heartbreak

The narrators each took individual and unique journeys to arrive at their lesbian identities. For instance, Olivia had multiple intimate sexual and emotional relationships with women without assuming a lesbian identity. She made sense of her relationships as mere responses to her

15 A Rich 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence' (1980) 5(4) *Women, Sex and Sexuality*.
16 A Cranny-Francis et al *Gender studies: Terms and debates* (2003) at 19.
17 Rich (n 15) at 649.

desires. Even when the word lesbian surfaced in conversations with her lover, it was not as an identity to claim but rather one to reject. As Olivia states about their conversations

> we would always say to each other that we are not lesbians we are just really close friends but we would do all the things that people who are in intimate relationships would do….[18]

Although Olivia did not identify as lesbian at that point it is at this time that she becomes aware of the label and what it means. How then does Olivia later come to a lesbian identity? To argue that she simply comes to a moment of recognition would be inadequate. Her journey meanders through assuming relationship roles that were expected of her by her lovers. She dates boys in high school and calls herself bisexual to accommodate her affections for women but without stepping so far as to reject heterosexual relationships entirely.

> I dated two guys. So, the first guy I dated was to prove to myself that I wasn't a lesbian. But that was spectacular fail. It just proved more that I was attracted to women and so it was the same thing in the second relationship. I actually found myself deeply attracted to his younger sister. So, I came to the point where I said okay, why am I trying so hard to run away from this? What would happen if I just let myself be who I feel I am.[19]

When she starts university she describes a period of self-discovery during which she '…became more comfortable with being a lesbian but not an out lesbian to the world'. Olivia finds acceptance within herself before she is ready to contend with what the world makes of her sexual identity and behaviour. Her process to self-identification is not linear, it begins by being told that she isn't a lesbian by her teenage girlfriend. She is introduced to the lesbian label and told to reject it because it is not an acceptable thing to be. She fights the idea that she might be one of these unacceptable people by dating boys in order to prove she is not lesbian. Eventually she accepts her attraction to women and acts on it but does not call herself lesbian. We see in Olivia no real desire to self-define or identify, as long as she could have the relationships she desired.

It is only when Dudzai, one of Olivia's lovers is pressurised by her family to settle down, get married and have children that things shift. She asks Olivia to run away with her so they can escape and have their life somewhere where the pressure of the family cannot reach

[18] Interview with Olivia 2019.
[19] Interview with Olivia 2019.

her. Olivia is unable to run away and so her lover feels she has no choice but to do what her family expects of her. Dudzai finds a man, gets married and starts a family, leaving Olivia heartbroken. At this point Olivia begins to realise that there is more that affects her ability to quietly live her desires than mere self-acceptance. While the self-acceptance and internal harmony is crucial, she also begins to see that from a relational point of view the expression of who she is must in many ways be lived outwardly and that an identity category might enable her to find others like herself. Unlike her girlfriend, Olivia cannot bring herself to live the life that is expected of her. At this point she feels that her attraction to women is more than desire and is a part of who she is. This is when Olivia assumes a lesbian identity but still chooses to live the identity in selective and negotiated disclosure, not as an entirely 'out lesbian'.

5.2.2 Ray's late night movie

In contrast Ray comes to her identity in an arguably simpler manner. She is the only child of a single mother and grows up around her mother and mother's sisters. The relationships of these adult women around her form her introduction to relationships and sexual intimacy. She catches glimpses of kisses and other sexual intimacies between the women and their boyfriends and is often sent to deliver love letters between them. At the age of nine, while sneakily watching a late night movie, Ray comes across a sex scene between women and describes an overwhelming sense of knowing that this is who she was.

> Then there is like a really intense sex scene there and I'm like, Jesus !!! I understand. This is me. Like I had seen… *Basic Instinct*, Sharon Stone with her open legs and stuff and I was just like ah. But when I saw *When Night falls*, I was like, ah-ah… Because I had seen men and women before and I had said, whatever. But now I was like, ah-ah, now that. Now that is definitely me.[20]

The following day Ray asked her best friend to be her girlfriend and even though she was not sure what that really meant she just knew that it was what she wanted and they had a week long relationship. In Ray's experience no negative meanings were associated with the recognition of her same-sex attraction, that, only came much later. In the years that followed all the relationships she saw around her were heterosexual relationships and Ray dated a few boys and dismissed her crushes on women as *kungofarira* a chiShona word meaning mere like. As Ray states '… that idea of being gay through primary school had been washed away because nobody

[20] Interview with Ray 2019.

[else talked about it].' At the age of nine, through contact with female to female sexual intimacy Ray's attraction to women had found resonance and when nothing else around her affirmed it, she discarded the idea until another interaction brought the idea into proximity yet again. Ray describes how her physical 'boyish' presentation was perceived by others,

> There were some issues about my appearance but not because of me. I was okay with the person I was, and because I was allowed that space to be that person, I was okay. But because other people when they see you, they comment, right. So society has always had a say, they used to say a child is raised by a village, right. So there is obviously mai vepa (the woman from) next door who has her own daughter as well and who doesn't want her daughter to be [like me] and because [my] mother is a single mother and then they blame it on her. They assume that it's like your mother's parenting [that] is playing a role in this even though that is not the cause. So I didn't think that there was a problem with the way that I was. I wondered why it couldn't just be easy, why everybody has to question that if you look a certain way, then it means this, or then it means that.[21]

Ten years after her experience with the late night movie at age nine, Ray once again comes into contact with the idea of being gay when she finds a lesbian chatroom online. At this point Ray begins to reorient and her world expands beyond heterosexuality. Through connection to lesbian identifying persons she begins collecting and bringing into proximity ideas and ways of loving that were otherwise inaccessible in the realm of heterosexuality.

She begins to chat to other lesbian-identifying people online. When she travels to South Africa, she meets a woman while visiting a friend and it is soon clear that the attraction between them is mutual. She describes the awkwardness of engaging in physical intimacy as it moved her attraction and desires out of the realm of her mind into her physical world. During the date with the woman she meets in South Africa she remembers wondering'

> Do people actually have [physical] relationships? Then I was now more aware of [her physical presence], of course there is different sexualities but, seeing myself positioned in it, am like, am I going to take part in this, it was something I had never really thought of. You can imagine something. It's very easy to imagine something, or to wish for something, but to act on it is something different. So I'm wondering in my head, is this going to amount to anything? And then so we start watching TV, we start talking about music, we start dancing, you know. And then she was gyrating like, just putting herself out there like…. But I didn't know what to do with this. So I'm just looking at her, and I guess maybe she figured that she needed to make the first move or something.[22]

21 Interview with Ray 2019.
22 Interview with Ray 2019.

Though Ray found that there were many things to figure out about how to be in relationship with another woman, as she had not seen these relationships elsewhere, they managed to teach each other and in her words 'the rest was history'.

5.2.3 Cassie and her kissing friend

A younger woman, Cassie, is born in the 90s just before the 1995 book fair saga. She grows up in a slightly different world. One that is already charged with homophobic rhetoric and where the words of Mugabe have taken firm root in popular imagination. Homosexuality is constructed as a symbol of Western interference with Africa and its peoples. From an early age the word lesbian exists in Cassie's world. She however comes into contact with the lesbian subject a little later when she goes to an all-girls boarding where upon arrival they are warned to stay away from certain older girls who are perceived to be lesbian.

> I think that is when I first got to really know about lesbians because we had people that were named lesbians among the senior students. We were warned not to talk to so and so because she is a lesbian. 'Be careful of being made a lesbian if you talk to so and so'.[23]

While in this school Cassie develops a close relationship with a girl who every night would come to her hostel to say goodnight and peck her on the cheek or forehead, until one night when she pecks her on the mouth. Cassie is quietly excited about the kiss and she writes a diary entry about it. As Cassie highlights, 'For me it was, okay, we were just friends but now we were 'kissing friends.' However, when Cassie's deeply religious parents find the diary entry during the school holiday they are so concerned about their daughter 'becoming' a lesbian that they transfer her to a different all-girls school. During the confrontation about the diary entry Cassie is amused by her parents accusations as she does not see herself as lesbian;

> my dad had this issue with me going to a mixed school. He always thought if I send my daughter to a mixed school she will come back pregnant, so let me send her to a same sex school. And now that I am at a same sex school you are asking me if I am a lesbian. …for me it was more of a very funny issue…[24]

[23] Interview with Cassie 2019.
[24] Interview with Cassie 2019.

Cassie settles into the new school and for years it is uneventful, she has no recollection of being attracted to girls until at seventeen she comes across a Facebook profile picture with two women kissing. This is the moment at which 'lesbian' ceases to be just a word, a perception or accusation and becomes a reality for Cassie. As she states, 'I remember seeing a picture of two women kissing on Facebook and I got so excited and curious. That's when I realized that oh, there are actually lesbians in Zimbabwe.'[25] Through Facebook Cassie connects with different people and begins dating women but the internal conflict is serious. She is haunted by what she sees as a sinful practice.

> I didn't know what was going on and I think I really struggled with denial. I prayed a lot. I prayed a lot. I remember doing this prayer saying, God you didn't seek lesbians or gays, so why am I attracted to women… . For me it was that, if you are a lesbian, you are a Satanist….[26]

Although Cassie is conflicted and torn between two powerful forces, her religious practice as taught to her by her parents and her attraction to women which stands in opposition to this faith, she continues to date women. Her parents eventually find out and tell her to leave their home since she has chosen to 'become' lesbian. Cassie leaves their home and moves in with her girlfriend. During this period she comes to call herself lesbian and begins to more actively engage in social events with other lesbian identifying women.

5.2.4 Marcia fears more than hell

> I remember the first time I actively thought about the fact that I was a lesbian, was when I was thirteen and then I was like, okay, shelve this, because we just don't have the space to think about this. And so I did all of my high school. I was a very good girl who does her books and you know, very respectable good kid. And so I'm just like, okay when I get to college I'm gonna figure out my lesbianhood. So, I get to college, I join the women's rugby team, I meet more lesbians, we do a bunch of lesbian shit, so like, we're going out to like gay clubs and like gay knitting. … And then also for me actively then going to church as well. Coz, I have a thing about how if I'm feeling bad about something, if I just like have lingering shame then I have to deal with it, I have to throw myself into it or else I won't feel better. So I needed to go and feel all of my complicated and contradictory feelings in Church. And my best friend in college kept trying to like, assuage my fears, to like, soothe me. But then also, there is nothing anybody can really say, right? If it's coming back to like a personal faith, like, it's not an externalized thing, so

[25] Interview with Cassie 2019.
[26] Interview with Cassie 2019.

> my problem wasn't about what other people would think, right. I didn't care what you externally thought about my sexuality. I did care about whether or not I was going to hell for this shit.[27]

Marcia was born in Zimbabwe to Zimbabwean diplomats and subsequently grew up mostly outside of Zimbabwe. Though she is mainly raised outside of the Zimbabwean geography her parents values and ways of life are deeply embedded in the cultures of Zimbabwe which they themselves were raised in. They are fundamentalist Christians and raise their children within that same belief system. Marcia herself grows up deeply religious and when she is exploring her sexuality she is still trying to find balance between that and her faith.

> …especially in my late teens, early twenties, I was trying to actively navigate my sexuality and what that meant with my then quite fervent faith and at the same time not wanting to do harm. So I remember searching time after time and telling myself that you have this niggling something about religion and shame and you need to resolve it. Because if you don't deal with it head on you're also never going to make a good partner. That it's never going to be a thing that you can bring someone else into. Even if you say actually no, I will date dudes, okay, but then this dude is gonna have to deal with the fact that you're a lesbian and you're trying to hide it, like you know what I mean. I was just like, this will be a problem across the board. And so, I think part of the challenge was that, I wanted to like myself but I also didn't want to have to give up the faith that brought me a lot of comfort in other ways, right. So I was trying to then do the work of thinking through that and like what it meant and it wasn't enough for me to pretend that, I'm fine with it, when I know that I wasn't.[28]

Often people who describe a struggle between their faith and their sexuality are consumed by the fear of punishment. 'Am I going to hell for this', as Marcia says. Marcia however goes further to describe an even deeper conflict. Her narrative reveals a relentless tension between self-acceptance and the need for a faith that offered her deep comfort. Letting go of her faith in order to find peace with her sexuality would not just lead to the fear of hell and punishment. It would take away a belief system that offers her strength and comfort in other realms of her life. As she suggests, 'if you try to run away from Christianity after you have been raised Christian it affects your entire paradigm, so there is not very much getting away from it, really.' So instead, Marcia continued with her negotiation and eventually found peace in an understanding of her faith outside a religious institution and understanding it to be about community, kindness

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27 Interview with Marcia 2019.
28 Interview with Marcia 2019.

and justice and not punishment. When Marcia moves back to Zimbabwe she experiences her lesbian identity differently.

> When I moved back to Zim that's when I got extremely comfortable in my queerness. It's very comfortable, it's like a very natural ongoing component with me, and I think part of it is because when I was away, like you are always kind of being hunted, you are Black, and you are all these other things that don't belong, … so you don't ever get to settle into your skin, but I came home and I got to settle.[29]

The comfort and security of home provides some stability for Marcia and along with that, is what Marcia describes as different 'lesbian coding' in Zimbabwe. Once she is in Zimbabwe Marcia finds that she is not 'readable' as lesbian because she describes Zimbabwe as having two categories of lesbians. Either extremely feminine or masculine/butch. The feminine lesbians are not really read as lesbians. The masculine presenting lesbians are viewed socially as the 'real' lesbians. If you do not present as masculine you do not worry about being read as lesbian in the street unless you are walking with a masculine presenting woman. Two feminine women are seen as friends. Two masculine women are seen as sporty women, football , basketball or rugby players. It is when a feminine and masculine woman are seen together that they trigger the response that they are lesbians. The recognisable, heterosexual pairing of masculinity in relation to femininity is what triggers the idea that two people are sexually or romantically involved. Marcia therefore finds shelter in this and describes how she can go around and live life quite freely in most instances and that it is only when she is with a masculine woman than she draws attention or gets labelled as lesbian. Marcia's relationship to Zimbabwe is also quite distinct, which she attributes to growing up outside Zimbabwe.

> And also it impacted my relationship with like my country, that is like my relating to Zim as like a nation-state, and as a source of passports and certain kinds of diplomatic protections, which is an interaction that lots of people [other Zimbabweans] don't necessarily have. They have no interaction with the nation-state from a domestic point which [I do], and which also then has an impact in terms of the kind of slack [accommodations] I am willing to cut Zim, because the country or should I say the nation-state from the external side has done a lot for my family, which means that like when we're [Zimbabweans] complaining about the internal problems I'm just like, 'But there is good stuff that has been done for us out there guys!'[30]

[29] Interview with Marcia 2019.
[30] Interview with Marcia 2019.

With this Marcia refers to the pan-Africa reverence for Mugabe and his position on land and the ways in which he defended the sovereignty of Zimbabwe from the West. Another factor in Marcia's journey to self-discovery and settling into a lesbian identity were the different women in her life that contributed to her sense of self. She attributes some of the ease with which she came to her identity and lived it, to the love and support of these women when she says that,

> So, I appreciate the women who held space for me. Also women that I like, loved and also women that I had sex with, that I shared different kind of intimacies with, that were not necessarily defined as anything. They helped a lot as well. … I think increasingly through interacting with those women in different spaces, and in thinking about the different kinds of like, the beauty in different kinds of intimacies that really helped me.[31]

Finally, in coming to the language or her identity Marcia describes an interesting process,

> I had initially liked kind of the concept of queerness more than the word 'lesbian. Part of that was because everybody was so rigid in their understanding [of the lesbian label] and that didn't really resonate. However, it became increasingly apparent that I needed to use the word lesbian because people were reading things into the idea of queerness that do not exist, right. I'm just like, they're reading a level of patriarchy in here that I don't intend, they're reading a level of fluidity as well, ironically that I don't intend. Part of it was like when I actively started using 'lesbian' was because I was observing that when we were having conversations [with other lesbian women] about sexual fluidity we were preferring that term. Like this is the better way to describe the sexuality. Initially, I was just like, but that is concretizing sexuality? Then I wondered, what's wrong with the concretized one? Because I also liked the fact that like, when we used 'lesbian,' it was a kind of retaliation in feminist spaces.[32]

5.2.5 Mary wants to see lesbians

For fifty-year-old Mary, her journey to self-identification is quite distinct from the other women. She discovers her attraction to 'a' woman at a time when homosexuality was topical and heavily contested in Zimbabwe in the mid to late 90s. She was familiar with diverse sexualities through interaction with drag queens in the community where she grew up. She had a gay friend and had a high school friend that identified as lesbian but did not see herself as lesbian.

When she joins a basketball team, she finds herself attracted to the coach and eventually enters into a romantic relationship with her. She remembers only being attracted to this coach

31 Interview with Marcia 2019.
32 Interview with Marcia 2019.

and not to any other woman, so she continued to see her attraction as specific to her coach and not an indication of her general sexual attraction.

> I've never questioned why I was so attracted to this woman. And I didn't feel that sense amongst any other women and I've never ever felt that and even after I started dating this woman, I still never ever felt the sense of being attracted to any other woman. Or looking at women as people that I could be attracted to.[33]

Though Mary did not identify as lesbian at that point, she had a four-year long relationship with her coach. After four years Mary broke up with her girlfriend in order to date a man.

> I think that was the time I wanted to do the normal thing, and the family pressure was getting to me and it was just before I turned thirty. I thought I wanted to date a man. I broke up with my girlfriend. I dated this man for like two weeks. I didn't sleep with him but I felt that he was ten kinds of wrong, and yet there was actually nothing wrong with him. And that's when I realized that, the only reason that I didn't like this guy was that he was a guy, that's what was wrong. Because I found everything wrong with him, just the way he ate, the way he looked, the way he walked! Everything just irritated me. And I admitted to myself that I was just looking for a reason to leave him.[34]

The heterosexual family is perceived in state discourse as being aligned with the best interest of the nation and upheld as structure that safeguards children from harm and predation.[35] Maintenance of this heterosexual family is believed to provide normalcy and stability that challenges and eliminates 'improper forms of national belonging' including sexual deviance.[36] I bring this heterosexual family into focus as a result of the significance placed on it in the stories of narrators and the role played by the family as both a secure and hostile space for same-sex sexualities. In Ray's narrative for instance, she describes how her same-sex inclinations were blamed on her being the child of a single mother who lacks the stability of a heterosexual family. For Mary it is the need to conform to the familial expectations of marriage and heterosexuality that constrain her.

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33 Interview with Mary 2019.

34 Interview with Mary 2019.

35 A Kakande 'Protecting the "traditional heterosexual family"? The state and anti-homosexuality legislation in Uganda' in D Higginbotham V Collis-Buthelezi (eds) *Contested intimacies: Sexuality, gender, and the law in Africa* (2015) at 20.

36 M Keguro 'Queer Kenya in law and policy' in S Ekine & H Abbas (eds) *Queer African reader* (2013) at 275.

After the failed dating attempt Mary realised she did not want to date a man. She began spending more time with a friend who was affiliated with GALZ (formerly the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe) and ended up going to a GALZ event with them. While there she is introduced to a woman at GALZ who seems to be 'running the show' and is told about the different women that were there.

> There was herself, she identified herself as a bisexual woman. And there was a woman who was a sex worker. I said, 'a sex worker? She is sleeping with other women'? 'No?, how is she part of the group? Then there was another one that was a lesbian by default. How was she a lesbian by default? Her best friend was a gay man and she was attacked, because they said she was a lesbian. But she is not really, but she is part of the group, okay. Then there is that one, never had sex with a man EVER in her life. Doesn't want to. Looks like a guy. That's a lesbian as well. I said, 'where do I fit in here?', because I clearly don't fit into any of these boxes. So, if I call myself a lesbian, will I have to be one of…? She is just like, no! You can just be an addition to all these other women and I'm like, 'Lord, this is not for me.' Because I was expecting to get into a space where everybody was like me and we were all lesbians.[37]

At the point at which Mary comes to a lesbian identity she seeks out others like her and is disappointed and confused when she goes to the place she expects to find them. Instead, she meets a diversity of women who identify as lesbian but are otherwise very different in who they are and how they have come to a lesbian identity. Additionally, there are women in the space who despite not identifying as lesbian are part of the fold because their experiences of stigma and of violence are gendered and sexualised in similar ways to those of lesbian identifying women. The idea that lesbian is a unitary identity is interrupted for Mary and eventually from continued engagement with others within the GALZ space she comes to the understanding that there is no singular way to be lesbian or to arrive at a lesbian identity. However, that was not before spending many years boxing herself and others into 'types' of lesbians.

> There is so much I would want to tell an eighteen-year-old lesbian that is coming out now. I have wasted so much time being in this box that I created. No one created that box for me. Yes, they said to me this is what these people are, and this is how these people identify and I said, okay, I need to be part of this category of people, so I went there. I started putting myself and other people in boxes. And that for me I think, has not brought me any happiness at all. It has not. But then I realized that I brought the box myself and I needed to get out of it because no one is gonna take me out of it.[38]

[37] Interview with Mary 2019.
[38] Interview with Mary 2019.

Two decades later, Mary is still coming to new realisations about her identity and the ways she chose to live that identity. Thinking that because she was feminine she was meant to only date masculine presenting lesbians led to a great deal of misery for her and only later did she question this choice and start to live more authentically based on her desires and not the ideas of which kind of lesbian can date which other kind. She now combines her passion for women's issues with lesbian activism. In Mary's experience we begin to see resonance with Foucault's suggestion that homosexuality is not about connection to some established orientation that was suppressed by heterosexuality.[39] Rather, it is an opportunity for creating or discovering other ways of being. This will however be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

5.3 The meaning making process

In what follows I do not offer a detailed description of the narrators lives and the unfolding events linked to their identification journey. Rather, I analyse singular events in the lives of the lesbian identifying women. I have already described how they each came to a lesbian identity and now I turn to analyse the meaning they make of that identity and the processes that facilitate that meaning making project. I will describe how there is no linear path towards lesbian identity formation as well as how the meaning made of the lesbian identity is unique and inextricably linked to both individual experience and the context. I now turn to analysing the relationship between the formed identity and the meaning made of that identity.

This approach however emphasises the issue of finality and the idea of lesbian identity as a static destination that one travels towards and eventually reaches. It is evident however from the experiences shared by the narrators that there is no linear or sequential process to be followed in arriving at a lesbian identity. Equally what a lesbian identity means to an individual is not fixed. Mary's narrative for instance highlights how her sense of what it means to be a lesbian shifted over time.

Additionally, the act of seeking out meaning from the experiences of the narrators assumes an intentional process of meaning making by the narrators. In reality however, this is not a viable assumption as the identity formation process along with the meaning making process can be unconscious or subconscious events. In many of the conversations with the

[39] M Kingston 'Subversive friendships: Foucault on homosexuality and social experimentation' (2009) 7 *Foucault studies* at 9.

narrators they reflected on how the interview process had been a unique opportunity for them to think about their journeys and experiences in a deliberate and intentional way.

If I were to analyse the narratives of the women in relation to existing gay and lesbian identity development models, I would juxtapose every described event to stages in the Cass, Fassinger or other lesbian identity formation models that have been proffered.[40] Through exploring the stories of the narrators' experiences, it would be possible to account for their behaviour as being linked to a stage of these identity development processes. While this may be insightful, it runs the risk of leaving out information that is not accounted for in these existing models. For instance, while gay and lesbian identity literature has offered various models of identity, hardly any considered the broader social-psychological processes that underlie all types of identity development.[41] Instead, the bulk of gay and lesbian identity research has been limited by the assumption that gay and lesbian identity development is unique and dissimilar from the identity issues of other stigmatized groups and other individuals. It has placed importance on empiricism but neglected interpretation and its theoretical value. Additionally, most models were constructed around ideas such as coming out and closets that have shifted significantly over the last four or so decades. According to Shallenberger coming out is about "coming to the awareness and acceptance of one's homosexuality".[42] The coming out process is seen by Shallenberger as pivotal in the life of gay and lesbian individuals.[43] Rust contributes to this discussion asserting of coming out, that

> it is the process by which individuals come to recognize that they have romantic or sexual feelings toward members of their own gender, adopt lesbian or gay (or bisexual) identities, and then share these identities with others. Coming out is made necessary by a heterosexist culture in which individuals are presumed heterosexual unless there is evidence to the contrary.[44]

The linear construction of the coming out process or disclosure of one's sexual orientation as a process that all LGBTQ+ individuals must follow if they are to be considered healthy and well-

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40 VC Cass 'Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model' (1979) 4(3) *Journal of Homosexuality* at 1; See also RE Fassinger & BA Miller 'Validation of an inclusive model of sexual minority identity formation on a sample of gay men' (1996) 32(2) *Journal of Homosexuality*.

41 K Klein et al 'Complicating the coming out narrative: Becoming oneself in a heterosexist and cissexist world' (2015) 62(3) *Journal of Homosexuality* at 298.

42 D Shallenberger 'Reclaiming the spirit: The journeys of gay men and lesbian women toward integration' (1996) 19(2) *Qualitative Sociology* at 195.

43 Shallenberger (n 42) at 204.

44 PC Rust 'Finding a sexual identity and community: Therapeutic implications and cultural assumptions in scientific models of coming out' in LD Garnets & DC Kimmel (eds) *Psychological perspectives on lesbian, gay and bisexual experiences* (2003) at 237.

adjusted is problematic.[45] It limits coming out to an internal process and neglects its social dimensions. Development of gay and lesbian identities has been investigated and some have proffered models of how individuals come to those identities.

Although Freud made the assertion that homosexuality was a mere step in the development of normal heterosexual identity, other scientists have provided approaches that are more affirming of gay and lesbian identities.[46] Of particular significance is perhaps the most widely used and adopted model by Vivian Cass.[47] The Cass model for instance is based on the following stages. Stage 1 is identity confusion which is characterized by feelings of turmoil, in which one questions previously held assumptions about one's sexual orientation. This is followed by identity comparison in stage 2 which is characterized by feelings of alienation in which one accepts that possibility of being gay or lesbian and becomes isolated from non-gay others. Stage 3 is about identity tolerance which characterized by feelings of ambivalence in which one seeks out other gays and lesbians but maintains separate public and private images. Stage 4 is identity acceptance characterised by selective disclosure in which one begins the legitimization (publicly as well as privately) of one's sexual orientation. Stage 5 is identity pride which is characterized by anger, pride, and activism in which one becomes immersed in the gay subculture and rejects non-gay people, institutions, and values. Finally, stage 6 is identity synthesis which is characterized by clarity and acceptance in which one moves beyond the dichotomized worldview to an incorporation of one's sexual orientation as one aspect of a more integrated identity. In this model it is only disclosure or coming out that symbolises self-acceptance while activism and subculture immersion are the markers of pride in one's identity. These stages were largely instructive for mental health professionals seeking to better understand how to clinically support LGBTQ+ youth, however as LGBTQ+ activism has shifted focus away from pathology to social approaches and the centralisation of individual experience is being recognised as more important, these older approaches have shown their limitations.

Cass' model is built upon congruence theory which states that 'stability and change in a person's life are influenced by the congruence or incongruence that exists in her or her interpersonal environment.' [48] The experiences shared by the narrators in this study are

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45 Klein et al (n 41) at 297.

46 D Levy 'Gay and lesbian identity development: An overview for social workers' (2009) 19(8) *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* at 984.

47 Cass (n 40).

48 S Hunter et al *Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths and adults: Knowledge for human services practice* (1998) at 58.

reflective of the above observations. They however illustrate that there is more to the identity formation process than linear and sequential stages and that the context and experiences of each individual are essential. As Rust attests, 'although models are developed to describe psychological and social phenomena, when they are used in efforts to predict or facilitate the processes they describe, they become prescriptive'.[49] Particularly problematic, is the value placed on individual stages as being imperative in the identity development process and the idea that reaching the final stage is what is required for the achievement of a fully developed sexual identity.

Hunter states that stage models are consistent with essentialist views of sexuality, to which Rust adds that these essentialist views 'of cross-cultural differences reveal another bias inherent in linear models of coming out, that is, that they do not adequately account for the role of social constructs in shaping sexuality'.[50] Rust's analysis has significant resonance in the approach taken in this study, that is, it is constructed precisely on giving necessary value and significance to contextual influences and social constructs in shaping sexuality of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe. In response to the essentialist views generated by stage models Hunter proposes a constructionist approach that accommodates individuals having multiple sexual identities across the lifespan and having this not viewed as confusion but as logical response to a changing context.[51]

In the identity development journeys described we see different levels at which the identity is experienced and explored, these being the personal, the relational and the social levels. Additionally, a variety of themes emerge in relation to the identity development process and its meaning making and these are discussed below within the frames of personal, relational and social identity.

5.3.1 Personal identity

The narrators reveal to us their intrapersonal negotiation of a meaningful sense of self. This level is dominated by attempts at developing a clear sense of self despite being situated in relational and social space. We witness Cassie struggle with the idea of being lesbian as her imagination of god and faith exclude and even condemn such an identity. For a period of time Cassie prays fervently in the hope that she would be redeemed and cease to have attraction and

49 Rust (n 44) at 239.
50 Rust (n 44) at 243.
51 Hunter (n 48) at 64.

desire for women. She wishes to change herself in order to be acceptable to family and to the god she believes in. While Marcia too struggles with aligning her faith with who she is, she is not carrying real doubt about her desires, attraction or lesbian identity. She is more concerned with bringing her sexuality into alignment with other parts of herself as she seeks to harmonise, being concurrently daughter, sister, lesbian and Christian among other things.

Ray from the young age of nine feels a certainty about her inclinations. It is in the realm of gender performativity that the tensions of identity manifest. Her choice of dress, toys and the kinds of games she likes to play mark her as tomboy and spark in others the idea that she is a lesbian. This creates in Ray the idea that there are traits that mark a person as lesbian. The peace she has with her identity and attractions mean that she does not battle to shift her behaviour or expression in order to be more acceptable, instead she builds community with others like herself. These negotiations affirm the work of Swann and his students which puts forward self-verification theory and argues that in relational terms individuals seek to have others affirm their view of themselves and that where others around an individual do not affirm this view they have of themselves, there are strategies employed to offset this.[52] Either the individual, as in Ray's case, becomes selective of whom they surround themselves with in order to ensure that they are surrounded by people who confirm their identities or they modify their behaviour to make it more congruent with the identity as we see with Mary. When Mary comes to call herself lesbian she seeks affirmation of that by searching for others who are just like her but when she finds the manifestations of lesbian identification to be so varied, she tries to make sense of this by mentally creating lesbian categories. She chooses to play the role of a femme lesbian, dressing as such and dating only butch lesbians.[53] In this way Mary actively performs her idea of her lesbian identity as part of affirming it.

The personal level of identity development is truly a quest to know and understand oneself. The process is not necessarily a simple one and leads to varied results. Marcia displays a high degree of exploration and commitment to understanding herself and her identity and subsequently

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52 J Suls *Psychological perspectives on the self: The self in social perspectives vol 4* (1993) at 139.

53 Femme and butch are lesbian subculture identities. They consist of individuals that ascribe to feminine and masculine identities along with the traits or roles ascribed to femininity and masculinity. Though distinct from heterosexual genders, when they first surfaced as a subculture, they carried the complexities of heterosexual genders and maintained a dichotomous gender system. While they were critiqued by some, they were celebrated by others as a bold claim to lesbian identity and a refusal to pass as straight, which is often the case for femme-femme and butch-butch relationships. Critics include, E Lapovsky-Kennedy & MD Davis *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The history of a lesbian community* (1993); L Feinberg *Stone butch blues: A novel* (1993); J Nestle *The persistent desire* (1992); while celebrants of the butch/femme subculture include HM Levitt & KR Hiestand 'A Quest for Authenticity: Contemporary Butch Gender' (2004) 50 *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 605–621.

commits to her ideas of herself. Mary does not invest in deep exploration when she first recognises her attraction, she flows with where desire and attraction take her and later when she thinks about the lesbian identity she seeks a pre-existing frame into which to fit. Consistently the narrators explored ways of being that aligned with their desires and needs, they negotiated these with other parts of themselves. While some came easily to a lesbian identity others sought alternatives to it, yet found resonance or stability there and eventually assumed the identity. In their journeys, the linear progression of time is disrupted. In Mary's case for instance, motherhood finds her in her journey of self-exploration and when she enters into partnership with a woman, they co-parent Mary's children. Parenthood comes before partnership/marriage. Similarly, Cassie finds herself in co-habitation very early in life, long before she engages in more casual dating.

5.3.2 Relational identity

Even with a strong sense of self the narrators continue to seek coherence and continuity from interpersonal relations. At the relational level it is the roles that are assumed that give meaning to one's identity and it is within this domain that the greatest instability surfaces for the narrators. What is truly stark in Olivia's narrative is how relational identity is. Olivia's journey begins and centres around her relationships with lovers and with family. Before having an opportunity to explore and understand herself, Olivia is told by others, what she is and what she is not by virtue of her interactions with them. Of particular interest is when her teenage girlfriend tells her they are just friends and not lesbians or when another girlfriend tells Olivia what roles she is expected to assume in their relationship because she is masculine presenting/butch.

Outside the realm of lovers, Olivia is also a sister and a daughter, and she is aware that a lesbian identity poses a threat to these other identities. It is through recognition from her siblings and mother that her identities as sister and daughter are affirmed and even though these relationships are biologically determined Olivia feels that she can only live out being a sister or daughter in meaningful ways if her family members acknowledge her as such. She therefore decides that in order to preserve the integrity of her other identities she must hide her lesbian identity from her family. While self-acceptance is important, we see through Olivia that it is not enough for her and that recognition by others is a key part of forming and preserving one's sense of self.

Marcia's description of who is perceived and read as lesbian in Zimbabwe suggests that masculine presentation and behaviour would lead to being perceived as lesbian and as such a lesbian wishing to be identified as such would present in more masculine ways. Marcia discusses in great

depth her experiences within lesbian subcultural spaces in Harare and her observations about who is seen as a lesbian and who is not. Additionally she observes the adjustments individuals make in order to fit into these subcultures.

5.3.3 Social identity

Membership within a social group encourages both a sense of belonging and a sense of emotional attachment to something greater than the self.[54] This group identity is particularly important for minority groups especially in non-Western, collectivist cultures, where there is greater emphasis on relationships with community or other members of a group.[55] The lesbian identity category like other sexual identities is a social identity. Existing research on sexual identity reveals that heterosexual persons adopt the heterosexual identity and apply the group norms and behaviours to themselves.[56] When examining this among self-identified lesbians through the journeys of the narrators in this study we see both congruence and divergence from this finding.

For self-identifying lesbians that find community in formalised spaces such as GALZ one might observe aspirational tendencies towards norms and behaviours of prototype lesbians. Wherein the lesbian prototype is a real or imagined group member who embodies all the definitive characteristics of lesbians. Some of the ideas held about the lesbian prototype in these spaces include butch or masculine presentation, non-reproductive with no history of sexual intercourse with men.

Though very few fit the prototype, part of asserting a lesbian identity is bringing oneself as close to the ideals as possible. For instance, for some narrators who disclosed past sexual intimacies with men there was an almost desperate need to distance themselves from those encounters and to prove their lesbian identity. In terms of intimate relationships there is an emphasis and expectation of butch-femme pairings as the 'right' lesbian relationship. A great deal of pressure to be identifiable as butch or femme exists in such spaces. According to Burke and Stets, when one appears predictable in the eyes of others, this predictability in turn

54 JS Phinney 'Identity formation across cultures: The interaction of personal, societal, and historical change' (2000) 43(1) *Human Development* at 28.

55 H Markus & S Kitayama 'Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation' (1991) 98 *Psychological Review* at 227.

56 O Schutte 'A Critique of Normative Heterosexuality: Identity, Embodiment, and Sexual Difference in Beauvoir and Irigaray' (1997) 12(1) *Hypatia* at 40.

stabilises the way that others respond to the self.[57] As such the women that engage in these spaces often seek to maintain clear gendered lesbian identities.

> It is ironic that the very visibility as lesbians that makes butches targets of homophobia in public spaces also makes them more visible as "real" lesbians than femmes in the context of a lesbian community. While both butch and femme positions have been vexed within lesbian and feminist communities, the visibility of butches has often empowered them to speak for butch-femme. Thus femmes have been seen neither as "real" feminists within feminist communities nor as "real" lesbians within lesbian communities.[58]

For women that sit outside of formal LGBTQ+ spaces there appears to be greater fluidity in the expression of the sexual identity. For example, femme-femme or butch-butch relationships are not seen as unusual or taboo. Roles in relationships and ways of interacting are still impacted by socialisation within heterosexuality however this is not operationalised in the same ways as among those that subscribe to the idea that there is a specific way of being lesbian. The ways of constructing community and belonging are evidently different for these two categories however the need for belonging remains critical. Having others with whom one identifies and can rely on was a salient theme that affirmed the reality of lesbian identity as a social identity. Sexual subjects have a desire for history and

> the disappointment and anger at not being able to see oneself in the mirror of history has fuelled some criticism of social construction theory in the belief that a more essentialist perspective would permit the development of group history and solidarity.[59]

The experiences of the narrators echo Ahmed's concept that bodies, through contact with other objects, shift orientation facilitating the emergence of the lesbian subject.[60] Ahmed suggests that there are ways in which compulsory heterosexuality fails to regulate our bodies. For instance when bodies come into contact with objects that are not meant to be there such as another queer body or another contingent lesbian.[61] We see this in the experiences of the narrators as Olivia describes her relationship with her first girlfriend in high school and the sex scene between women that Ray watches when she is nine or the kiss on the mouth Cassie gets

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57 PJ Burke & JE Stets (2009) *Identity theory* at 38.
58 L Harris & E Crocker *Femme: Feminists, lesbians and bad girls* (1997) at 2.
59 CS Vance 'Social construction theory: Problems in the history of sexuality' in PM Nardi & BE Schneider (eds) *Social perspectives in lesbian and gay studies: A reader* (1998) at 167.
60 S Ahmed *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others* (2006) at 93.
61 As above.

from her school friend. Even after initial contact with the lesbian subject the women take a while to come to a lesbian identity as the forces directing them towards heterosexuality are strong, though not strong enough to completely override their desire and attraction to women. Whether influenced in their social identity by the norms of LGBTQ social spaces or more fluid in the expression of their lesbian identity there is a common pattern in the desire to self-identify as lesbian.

5.4 A multiplicity of identities

A common critique of identity categories is the centralisation of one trait or characteristic over others. There exists little research on the relationship between lesbian identity and other dimensions despite there being strength associated with integrating multiple identities.[62] Rust states that by virtue of the fact that, 'one's sexual identity is intertwined with one's gender, racial/ethnic, religious, and other identities; a change in one implies changes in others.'[63] Cass' model however does not engage these other identities. Furthermore, the unique experiences of lesbian women were notably absent from stage models prompting the work of the likes of McCarn and Fassinger who created a more flexible model that introduced phases of awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis.[64]

Eliason discusses such a phenomena explaining that in the identity exploration process both direct and indirect experiences resulting from an identity can lead to that identity taking on greater significance.[65] Marcia's experience is particularly revealing in this regard. While growing up outside Zimbabwe and the African continent, her experience of being 'other' as a result of her race and immigrant status is at the forefront of her experiences. She internally battles with the lesbian identity and fears adding yet another unacceptable identity to who she already is, however she seems to live out a lesbian identity quite comfortably with a community of lesbian identifying peers. When she moves back to Zimbabwe and her 'otherness' in relation to race and descent are erased her lesbian identity becomes more present. Though she does not battle a great deal with the lesbian identity because of the privileges of being cis-gendered and not being read as lesbian socially, the identity is still dominant in her life as she remains

62 Anzaldua, 1999; Lorde, 1984.
63 Rust (n 44) at 232.
64 SR McCarn & R Fassinger 'Revisioning Sexual Minority Identity Formation: A New Model of Lesbian Identity and Its Implications for Counselling and Research' (1996) 24(3) *The Counselling Psychologist* at 521.
65 Eliason (n 5) at 16.

constrained in her ability to live this identity. Marcia's experience reveals how one can be simultaneously privileged and oppressed and the ways in which this is negotiated.

In her exploration of LGBTQ+ lives in Uganda, Tamale describes how the absence of a sense of belonging in relation to the dominant culture has led to LGBTQ+ identifying individuals reconstructing affirming identities for themselves.[66] She invokes Wendy Clark's analysis in explaining how questions of 'identity' and 'self' gain particular significance when there is a part of oneself that is hidden and in direct and immediate opposition to the social and cultural mores of society.[67] In this study we see a mobilisation around sexual identity by those sitting outside the frame of heterosexuality which is a consequence of the realm of sexuality being the space in which they felt most powerfully invalidated. In Olivia's words, 'It's like it invades your world… . It sort of takes up your life.' The greater the social regulation and the more limiting the context is for expression of an identity, the more significant that identity seems to become in the life of an individual. Even when some of the narrators attempted to live their lives without an identification relating to their sexuality, their experiences continued to make their sexuality a central feature in their lives.

Olivia's narrative reveals identity formation to be a temporal process rather than a static moment of identification.[68] The identification process is non-linear as individuals go through different phases such as awareness of oneself as different from the norm, exploration of that difference, denial of the difference, acceptance of it, commitment to it or internalisation of it. The journeys of the narrators indicate that one can experience only some of the phases described above and that even when all of these are experienced, they do not necessarily occur in a linear fashion as some models suggest. A person can experience different iterations of the same phase at different moments, for instance moving from denial to acceptance and back to denial. Or one may begin from acceptance before negative ideas of their sexuality enters their world and triggers, doubt or self-rejection. Another common misconception that is disrupted by these narratives is the idea that the end event that marks self-acceptance is a coming out process.[69] In the experience of the narrators, the coming out event has many inflections, for instance where the negative implications of coming out extend to others such as family members or threaten an individual's other identities it is often avoided. For others, the cost of

66 S Tamale 'Out of the Closet: Unveiling Sexuality Discourses in Uganda' (2003) 2 *Feminist Africa* at 3.
67 W Clark 'The Dyke, the feminist and the devil' (1987) 11(1) Feminist Review at 35.
68 H Easthope 'Fixed identities in a mobile world? The relationship between mobility, place and identity' (2009) 16(1) *Identities* at 65.
69 Klein et al (n 41) at 297.

silence and secrecy feels too high and the choice to come out leads to negative consequences that one has to live with. While identity categories are often associated with knowable characteristics about a group of people this study has both affirmed and challenged this.

The narrator's experiences surface what might be read as a strong sense of being trapped. Trapped in an unaccommodating education system; trapped in judgemental religion; trapped in a criminalising state, trapped in a policing society and trapped in the navigation of self-disciple and self-surveillance. That said however, the practices of agency displayed by the narrators shows that they are not trapped in their existence, rather it is that there is a constraining that they experience. The idea of being trapped suggests an inability to escape, which is not a universal truth for the narrators. For instance, Olivia's narrative challenges the idea that marginalisation, fear and discrimination lead to silence, repression and a 'trappedness'. Instead, it was the fear, pain and marginality of a constrained existence that prompted Olivia to assume and assert an identity. The feeling of being limited and constrained therefore has significance in the lives of the narrators as a driving force in their identity formation processes as well as in the exercise of agency.

If we therefore view lesbian-identification as individual agency rather than co-option or corruption, then lesbian identifying women are not products of Western corruption as they are often depicted. Their self-identification does not disrespect their national or African identities. Arguably from the experiences of the narrators, the logic of lesbian self-identification is tied to the need for belonging and the assertion of human dignity and recognition. As I point out earlier in this chapter, their choices of visibility and invisibility find refuge between agency and fear, rationality and courage, recognition and privacy. Such that, the fundamental argument that invisibility is victimhood does not hold up for the narrators in this study.

The narratives in this study in various moments show family members as accepting of lesbian identifying women on condition that this identity is kept private. Though the arguments made against homosexuality are often moralised, we see the so-called 'immorality' of homosexuality being privately accommodated in the stories of Marcia and Cassie. This signals that homosexuality is not entirely seen as a moral question but rather a normative one, rooted in a social discomfort with the disruption of the status quo. Asserting the rights of LGBTQ

persons therefore can be expanded beyond appealing to a moral idea, towards the articulation of a salient concern with how society holds any kind of difference whether inherent or chosen.[70]

Additionally, while the impacts of criminalisation of homosexuality are evident in the narratives of Cassie and Ray, it is also clear that the family is often the first site of rejection or acceptance that influences the ways in which lesbian identifying women make meaning of who they are and how they can and cannot exist in the world. Though criminalization is centralised in LGBTQ discourse the salience of the institutions of religion, education and family is what surfaced as most influential in the identity formation and meaning making processes of the narrators. The experiences of the narrators disrupt the dominant idea of sexual identities as individualized and point towards a collective nature of identities. This is witnessed in how the narrators experience and navigate their lesbian identity based on how it impacts not just themselves as individuals but their family more broadly as we observe with Olivia. In the context of these narrators we see a deviation from a global movement of individualised rights of same-sex practicing persons, towards a more communal and collective one. One might argue that the lesbian identities explored in this study direct us towards an understanding of identities that is more collective rather than individual as a result of their location in a context where lives in general are closely linked and often collectively negotiated.

Finally, this study through the voices of the narrators and those of other lesbian-identifying women in the literature explored in this thesis offers an interesting perspective that studies on other groups within the LGBTQ category does not offer. Lesbian subjectivities on the continent allow for a racialised, gendered, classed analysis of African sexualities. Where trans and intersex conversations engage gender, and gay discourses have focused on health, disease and criminalisation. These lesbian subjectivities open a political and feminist conversation that emerges at the intersection of same-sex sexualities, 'Africanness' and femaleness, similar to the collection of Nigerian lesbian women's narratives.[71]

5.5 Conclusion

I began this chapter by sharing the stories of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe. I asserted that their experiences became the basis for forging relationships, that might be viewed as familial or 'chosen family' with non-biological kin. These relationships are necessitated or

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70 Z Matebeni et al (eds) *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI identities, citizenship and activism* (2018) at 13.

71 A Mohammed et al (eds) *She called me woman* (2018) at 3.

motivated by a need for community. In most instances however, the narrators also work hard to preserve their relationships with biological family by either concealing their lesbian identities or negotiating them in ways that preserve relationships with family. Through a granular analysis of the identity formation journeys of the interviewees, this chapter has confirmed/reinforced the notion that identity is unstable, fluid and unique yet carries value in the construction of a sense of self and in mobilising against oppression. I argued that lesbian identities carry unique meanings for individuals yet communicate a collective category that enables the building of community and solidarity with each other. The collective category of 'lesbian' allows lesbian identifying women to see themselves as part of a group rather than the individualised deviants they are constructed as within family, school, community or religious spaces. In this respect I echo Moran that there is value in identity categories as categories of analysis and not necessarily as practice.[72]

While reflecting on identity formation in the face of compulsory heterosexuality the task was not to establish a queer line that runs parallel to the heterosexual line but rather to create space to imagine what could exist if society did not compel individuals towards heterosexuality. During this process it surfaced that even the dominant force of heterosexuality is not always powerful enough to erase sexualities that sit outside it.

Lesbian identities create opportunity to challenge compulsory heterosexuality, not only for the benefit of lesbian women but for challenging regulation of sexualities more broadly. Through providing detailed accounts of identity formation processes of these narrators, this chapter sets the scene for the various narratives and interpretations of experiences of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe. Much like the writing of the pasts of Zimbabwean liberation struggle veterans, the writing of the pasts of these lesbian women serves the needs of the present. Placing their narratives in contextual and historical perspective allows us to imagine them beyond their individuality and instead to see them in the next chapter as part of the spectrum of a gendered, sexualised, national, Pan African, cultural and racialised identity.[73] Despite their society viewing them as a moral outrage they continue to construct positive and empowering self-identification.

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[72] O Mallett 'Identity as a category of theory and practice review of M Moran (2014) *Identity and capitalism' Ephemera: theory & politics in organization* at 167.

[73] T Mawere 'Decentering nationalism: Representing and contesting chimurenga in Zimbabwean popular culture' PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2015 at 97.

6

Gendered and sexualized realities

Women in this culture live with sexual fear like an extra skin. Each of us wears it differently depending on our race, class, sexual preference and community, but from birth we have all been taught our lessons well. Sexuality is dangerous. It is frightening, unexplored, and threatening... Many of us become feminists because of our feelings about sex...[1]

6. Introduction

In the experiences of the women in this study the weight of the 'extra skin' that is sexual fear is evident. The experiences are nuanced by various factors but most heavily by their sexual preference. With fear and danger looming, the women find ways to reach through and beyond the threats by challenging, resisting and staking claims. Whether or not they call themselves feminist, their practice certainly is.

This chapter disrupts the Western, elitist and reductionist analysis of lesbian identities and lives that dominates global LGBTQ+ discourse by engaging African lesbians who are often on the margins of global same-sex sexualities discourse. It questions how lesbian women in Zimbabwe have formed their lesbian identities given their context. It asks in what ways the experiences of African female same-sex practising individuals are different from global experiences. How have lesbian women built a sense of belonging in the face of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality? This approach rooted in the experiences and meaning-making processes of lesbian women in Zimbabwe offers a more nuanced discourse on same-sex sexualities.

Even with all the efforts to contain, repress and eliminate homosexuality from the national body, same-sex sexualities have continued to exist in ways that challenge the power and hegemonic force of heterosexuality. They continue to reveal that they have a life force, history and narrative of their own within the nationalist Zimbabwean state. In attestation to the complex, multiple and sometimes contradictory understandings of same-sex sexualities in Zimbabwe, emerges their hybrid composition, their contentious nature in nationalist, religious and cultural spaces and the adaption of individuals. As such, my investigations into the social contours of female same-sex sexualities in Harare surface the constantly evolving meaning-

[1] A Hollibaugh 'Desire for the future: Radical hope in passion and passion' in S Jackson & S Scott (eds) (1996) *Feminism and sexuality: A reader at* 64.

making process through which lesbian identifying women make sense of their identities and experiences and how they come to terms with their realities as socio-political events.

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the mutually constitutive relations of state, nation, sexuality, and gender and their impact on the lives and experiences of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe. It attempts to foster locally nuanced understandings of lesbian identity and experience by analysing the evolving forces of nationalism, culture and religion on lesbian women. It sets out to challenge naturalised ideas of power and heteronormativity and integrate empirical research that illustrates the experiences of lesbian identifying women. In order to bring together the concepts and social structures of state, gender and sexuality into the same analytical field, transnational feminism and phenomenology are used to help reframe analyses of African same-sex sexualities by 'denaturalizing' states and nations, while also unravelling their material and cultural linkages with sexuality and gender.[2]

My investigations into the social contours of same-sex sexuality regulation in Zimbabwe reveal the salience of compulsory heterosexuality and the institutions collectively acting to enforce it. I examine the stories told by the narrators to ascertain how they navigate regulation within a gendered and sexualised nation-state and how their experiences have influenced the way they currently live. I seek out the social and political subjectivities that have emerged out of patriotic history and political homophobia surrounding their lives.[3]

The stories shared by the narrators of violence, fear, pain, suffering and harassment at the hands of the state evince narratives of disposability. Part of the disposability discourse is accompanied by a politics of disgust.[4] The idea of lesbian women as undesirable elements is supported by images of them as repulsive and other, they are marked as a festering body part that must be removed. When citizens like the 'cheating lesbians' discussed in the introduction of this thesis or an individual accused of a sexual offence such as Moleen Mupedzi are thrust into the public sphere it is for precisely the reason of triggering disgust and contempt towards

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2 HJ Kim-Puri 'Conceptualizing gender-sexuality-state-nation: An introduction' (2005) 19(2) *Gender and Society* at 139.

3 Patriotic history refers to a partial and partisan history driven by a political agenda and commonly by the desire to rally segments of society behind the ruling party and to present a positive image of the nation to the outside world. Terence Ranger first coined the term 'patriotic history,' describing it as an effort by the government to 'proclaim the continuity of the Zimbabwean revolutionary tradition'. See T Ranger 'Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: The struggle over the past in Zimbabwe' (2004) 30(2) *Journal of Southern African Studies* at 215; Political homophobia refers to a purposeful state strategy that seeks to stigmatize and/or repress LGBT persons and groups as part of a process of state and national self-definition. See MJ Bosia & M Weiss 'Political homophobia in comparative perspective' in ML Weiss & MJ Bosia (eds) *Global homophobia: states, movements, and the politics of oppression* (2013) at 20.

4 J Deight 'The politics of disgust and shame' (2006) 10(4) *The Journal of Ethics* at 383.

all lesbians and essentially chipping away at the idea of them being equally human.[5] Both these stories trigger a particular identity of lesbians in the minds of Zimbabweans. This identity though shaped by the political elites and the media, draws on pre-existing beliefs of the public about lesbian women that exist at the intersection of race, class and gender. Lesbian identifying women are easier to despise, harass and reject if they are constructed as vile. We witnessed the deployment of the politics of disgust during the constitution making process where bestiality, homosexuality and paedophilia were packaged as one issue that the masses were asked to take a stand on. The harsh light under which the UK based lesbian women such as Chido and Brenda found themselves is symbolic of the conditions under which the Zimbabwean constitution was developed and eventually endorsed by public vote.

Much like Martha Nussbaum in her analysis of the role of disgust and shame in influencing the law as it relates to the regulation of sexual conduct, reproductive choices, family life and interactions between genders , I argue similarly that societal and state driven disgust has had a pernicious influence on the law and in driving systemic homophobia.[6] On one hand there is the triggering of physical disgust by people like Ugandan Pastor, Dr Martin Ssempa who drew public attention for his statement, 'den da poo poo comes out, an dey eat da poo poo, like this, like ice cream …' as he demonstrated anal licking during an anti-gay press conference in Uganda.[7] From his graphic description Ssempa himself does not appear to be disgusted by the human body and its excretory functions, however by zoning in on a function which many people are uncomfortable with and additionally suggesting the consumption of excrement from the human body he attempts and succeeds at revolting his audience. In this process he others the act of anal licking, distancing it from the heterosexual body and attaches it to the homosexual. He disgusts his audience while at the same time reassuring them that this revolting act is far from their own bodies and intimacies and exists further away as the act of repulsive homosexuals. Here Ssempa manages to both inspire revulsion and connect the image of homosexuality to dangerous and disgusting behaviour. This image helps to distance people that

5 T Machakaire 'Lesbian drugs fellow reveller' Nehanda Radio 29 September 2018 https://nehandaradio.com/2018/09/29/lesbian-drugs-fellow-reveller (accessed 20 January 2021).

6 In invoking Moleen Mupedzi I do not attempt to engage the merits of the case or draw conclusions about her guilt or innocence. I merely seek to highlight that it is only negativity that is reported where this category of people is involved. While the media also reports rape, sexual assaults and gender-based violence amongst heterosexuals there are numerous images of love-filled, flourishing heterosexual relationships and interactions that are also profiled.

7 M Ssempa 'eat da poo poo'(posted 25 May 2010) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euXQbZDwV0w (accessed 12 November 2020).

practice same-sex sexualities from humanity making it more difficult to see them as deserving of compassion, kindness, protection or other considerations that humanity demands.

Physical revulsion is only part of the politics of disgust. It is not all people that are disgusted or offended by same-sex sexualities however for those invested in the ostracisation of this category of people it is not just physical but also moral disgust that they appeal to. Rhetoric by Zimbabwean political elites and religious leaders for instance sits largely in the domain of eliciting moral rather that physical disgust. It is not the physicality of same-sex interactions that is highlighted but rather their moral deviance. Roger Giner-Sorolla et al state that it might be possible to 'convince someone by argument that foie gras is a morally awful food because of the way the goose is treated, but my arguments will never convince lovers of foie gras that it tastes disgusting.' It is therefore my contention that while moral disgust has succeeded in spreading homophobia the assertions of Giner-Sorolla et al suggest to us that it is possible to shift the way people act towards LGBTQ+ persons particularly if they are not emotionally affected by them and are rather operating on social moral code. According to Nussbaum it is the emotional trigger that elicits the strongest responses.

Between the rejection and exclusion by the state there is layered social stigma, discrimination, condemnation and vilification of people that practice same-sex sexualities. One might read victimhood from these realities but in so doing it limits us to only one aspect of layered realities and we run the risk of affirming the systems we are challenging and critiquing by re-enforcing a narrative of victimhood. The narrative of victimhood is the dominant narrative of lesbian women on the continent particularly in South Africa where cases of rape and murder of lesbian women are disturbingly frequent.[8]

A bleak narrative of lesbian women as victims fails to recognise how lesbian women can challenge their ascribed positions and identities in complex ways. From this supposed victim position LGBTQ+ identifying persons in Zimbabwe continue to assert their presence and make demands for citizenship as was evident in their efforts during the constitution-making processes in 2000 and during the 2010 – 2013 period.[9] Within broader society we also witness the creation of communities of solidarity and care which are described by some as alternative

[8] E Kimana 'Classifying 'corrective rape' as a hate crime in South Africa' (2011) Institute for Security Studies.

[9] Y Youde 'Patriotic history and anti-LGBT rhetoric in Zimbabwean politics' (2017) 51 *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 61-79 at 72. M Ndulo 'Unfulfilled struggle for a legitimate constitutional order in L Miller & L Aucoin (ed) Framing the state in timeos of transition (2010) at 176.; L Sachikonye 'Constitutionalism, the Electoral System and Challenges for Governance and Stability in Zimbabwe' (2004) 2 African Journal on Conflict Resolution https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/%ef%bf%bcconstitutionalism-the-electoral-system-and-challenges-for-governance-and-stability-in-zimbabwe/ (accessed 5 November 2020).

families. In this study I do not wish to dwell too long on theories of victimhood but seek to highlighting the politics of the narratives of victimhood, which in this study refers to the ways in which victimhood is negotiated and contested both socially and politically.[10]

It is necessary to point out that there is a significant difference in victim as a self-identifying marker and victim as a label placed on an individual or group by others. In the first instance, the use of victim as self-identification is because it can serve as a source of mobilizing power that cements a collective identity. Individuals who self-identify with a shared struggle are able to mobilise and collectively act based on that shared struggle or the identity of being persons who share a particular struggle. In the second instance, victim status is conferred on an individual or group by others and this is significant for a different set of reasons. I offer two reasons for this, firstly that it creates an opportunity for misrecognition and ushers in the harms that come with being constructed as something you are not or that you do not believe yourself to be. Secondly it is tied to the fact that it is social norms and customs that are embedded in law, politics and culture that play the role of cementing or bestowing victim status on individuals. The mere fact of being harmed physically, psychologically, emotionally or economically though important is not seen as enough to make a victim. In instances where legal justice is being sought or even social recognition of harm then this idea of victim as determined by others is significant.

There is a submerged tension in the narratives of victimhood discussed here. What are the implications of turning the light away from victim status to agency and resistance when the ability to assert rights claims is bound so strongly to the victim position? It appears increasingly that victimhood has become a status that must be established before rights claims can be pursued.[11] According to Fassin and Rechtman victimhood is about 'simply claiming one's rights in an increasingly rights-based culture.'[12] In her work Tamy Jacoby formulates political theory on victimhood that is built on the distinction between victimisation as an act of harm done to another and victimhood as a form of collective identity. Jacoby asserts that the relationship between the two is a product of the context, such that victimhood is more prominent in societies that recognize justice. A conflict arises between global LGBTQ+ discourse and the Zimbabwean context. While the international community asserts a

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10 L Jeffery & M Candea 'The politics of victimhood' (2006) 17(4) History and Anthropology at 288.

11 RB Horwitz 'Politics and victimhood, victimhood as politics' (2018) 30(3) *Journal of Policy History* at 552.

12 D Fassin & R Rechtman *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (2009) at 279.

victimhood narrative around LGBTQ+ persons in Africa or Zimbabwe specifically, and support the mobilization of LGBTQ+ identified persons to make rights claims from the state based on their victim status, a key ingredient is overlooked. If the recognition of justice in a country is poor or absent as is the case with Zimbabwe, then a rights claims approach does not deliver the desired results.

Unfortunately, this approach has been dominant within the Zimbabwean context, where energies are constantly directed at rights approaches that do not improve the daily lives of the community. If anything, such an approach focuses on narratives of victimhood which unlike in other contexts are unsupported by powerful movements built on that shared experience which in turn provide a sense of solidarity and belonging. The risk therefore is that by reinforcing victim status without justice systems that offer reprieve, lesbian identifying women can find themselves alone, afraid or depressed and having to find individualized ways of coping. It is therefore my argument that while victimhood has currency elsewhere, within the Zimbabwean context it is unhelpful and profiling agency is more beneficial than reinforcing victimhood. Like Jacoby I believe it is victimisation that should be highlighted and not victimhood.

Jeffery and Candea from a different standpoint also question the ideas of victimhood when they ask, 'how should we relate to claims to subalternity when such claims are also deployed by states and powerful groups'?[13] Here they interrogate the ways in which victim status is used by groups but also manipulated by states and other powerful groups to dismiss others. How can claims to passive victimisation face up to counter claims of agency and resistance? This tension is exploited by different groups to advance their interests. For instance, for an international community that is in sustained opposition to nationalist African leaders, illustrating the suffering of citizens under African leaders is a useful tool for advancing their agenda. This idea is supported by Kleinmans assertion that,

> Cultural representations of suffering—images, prototypical tales, metaphors, models—can be (and frequently are) appropriated in the popular culture or by particular social institutions for political and moral uses.[14]

The lives of LGBTQ+ persons on the continent have been no exception. Their suffering has been instrumentalized to advance causes that are not about their freedom and humanity. They have and continue to legitimately suffer and face victimisation and there is need to shed light

[13] Jeffery & Candea (n 10) at 287.
[14] A Kleinman et al 'Introduction' in A Kleinman et al (eds) *Social suffering* (1997b) at xi.

on this suffering. I have no intention here to downplay or reject any actual victim claimants' narratives but wish to equally assert the existence of agency and resistance that lesbian identifying women are capable of and often exercise.

I therefore argue that despite the narratives of disposability seen through criminalisation and exclusion by the state, or the narratives of victimhood observed in rejection and condemnation by community members and family we see narratives of adaptation in the ways through which lesbian identifying women survive and navigate their contexts.

When considered against the narratives of disposability and victimhood highlighted, it appears to me that the lives of the narrators though managed through survival and adaptation, are not free from the internal impacts of their hostile contexts and it is through community and solidarity that they find reprieve.

The chapter is constructed around three frames through which the narrators discussed their experiences, namely, the gendered and sexualised political context, the socio-cultural realities and the adaptive power of lesbian identifying women. I analysed the narratives shared by the narrators in this study, cleaned and anonymised the data and extracted thematic categories from it. The chapter focuses on the meaning made from the gleaned knowledge and its linkages to the theoretical pillars of this study. These narratives were supported by informal conversations with other lesbian identifying women I met in social spaces within Harare. A shared characteristic of the narrators in this study is that they all reside in the Harare metropolitan, even though some of them lived outside of Harare at other times. That said, the group is by no means homogenous, they range in age from twenty-one to fifty years of age. Hence while the younger ones were being born in the turbulent mid to late 90's, the oldest was already an adult experiencing same-sex sexual intimacies. They are all variedly educated and live across low-density, medium-density and high-density areas of Harare. While three have connections to formal LGBTQ+ activist spaces the other two are removed from them.

6.1 The gendered and sexualised political terrain

The statist development process following independence in most African countries shifted from an emancipatory political conception to a technical neo-colonial one of 'modernisation' leading to development approaches imposed by neo-colonial forms of domination.[15] This process systematically transformed most Africans into victims whose main feature has been passivity,

[15] M Neocosmos 'Analysing political subjectivities: naming the post-developmental state in Africa today', (2010) 45(5) *Journal of Asian and African Studies at* 536.

not agency. Today, the approaches of humanitarianism and certain human rights discourse re-enforce that narrative.[16] The examination of the gendered and sexualised realities pays attention to this background and to the location of contemporary Zimbabwe at the intersection of a colonial history, a global order and a nationalist imagination.

Both gender and sexuality have had their theoretical reach and heuristic value critiqued from African perspectives.[17] Here I examine how lesbian identifying women experienced and made meaning of their gendered and sexualised experiences in relation to the political, economic and socio-cultural dynamics of the Zimbabwean context. As Bibi Bakare concludes following her review of Oyeronke Oyewumi's work, 'research into gender outside of the West must be conscious of the risk of projecting into the society that which is not there at either a discursive or praxial level.'[18] While she challenges Oyewumi's assumptions about the nature of language and its relation to power, she affirms her success 'in demonstrating the need to be aware of the issue of automatically importing assumptions about the structure of society under study which may not apply on the ground.'[19] In this analysis of gendered and sexualised realities, Bakare's assertions are particularly instructive.

As for sexuality, historical accounts have focused largely on dominant forms of sexual experience. The importance given to birth, marriage, reproduction and the silences around non-reproductive, extramarital and non-heterosexual sex leaves only a partial narrative of the sexual history of many cultures. Moral ordering through the church has dominated extramarital sex alongside state ordering of sex work and homosexuality. However, it appears that same-sex sexuality has stirred the most intense and sustained and often misleading accounts of sexual histories in Africa.

For all the narrators in this study there was anger towards a state that excluded them from citizenship and criminalised them, creating in them a sense of being disposable. While this anger has led to some degrees of organising, it has not always translated into effective political mobilisation. I contend that the regulation and criminalisation of same-sex sexualities is indicative of multiple prejudices; gendered, sexualised, historical and political ones. The

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16 M Neocosmos 'Can a human rights culture enable emancipation? Clearing some theoretical ground for the renewal of a critical sociology'(2006) 37(2) *South African Review of Sociology* at 356; M Mamdani *Saviours and survivors* (2009); M Wa Mutua *Human rights: a political and cultural critique* (2002).

17 Kim-Puri (n 2) at 137; I Amadiume *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African Society* (1987); O Oyewumi *The invention of women: Making an African sense of western gender discourses* (1997) at 13.

18 B Bakare-Yusuf '"Yoruba's don't do gender": a critical review of Oyeronke Oyewumi's *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses'* in S Arnfrede et al (eds) *African gender scholarship: concepts, methodologies and paradigms* (2004) at 79.

19 Bakare-Yusuf (n 18) at 79.

anger conveyed during the interviews cannot be easily separated from the contemporary circumstances in which the narrators were speaking. This suggests that the periods of heightened homophobia stand as moments of reproduction and reinforcement of pre-existing as well as new forms of gendered and sexualised exclusion. In Ray's reflections for instance, direct contact with the state has left her deeply scarred following arrest, detention and verbal harassment.

> My experience with the State is that of being arrested and wondering why I was really arrested and then how for three years I was in limbo and anxious about it. I wondered each year if this is the year that they charge me with this? Is this the year that I'm gonna go to jail? It's like everytime something political came up I always wondered, is the gay issue gonna come up? Am I the one? Is our case the case they're gonna start with and then try and create more scenarios to arrest more people? I don't know, but for three years I was in limbo, thinking, my life could change, I might just be in jail because I have seen people go to jail over silly things. … I try not to think about it now because I feel a bit more comfortable but, sometimes when it's time to go to the police station to report something. *Mu*Central *handipinde zvangu* which is Shona for, I will not enter the Harare Central police station.[20]

Similarly, Cassie describes her own experience of arrest;

> Sometime in 2012, my parents were not home and so I decided to attend a GALZ event where we were discussing the constitution and what we wanted included in the constitution and there was also a party after the workshop. I think it was around seven in the evening, police just arrived. But it wasn't bad. They were just asking, "What's going on here and why are people gathered? You know that when you are having a gathering you need to get police clearance?" and they were just mentioning that they didn't get any notification that there would be a gathering at our offices. Then before we knew it, a mass of police officers just walked in, and I remember just thinking, "I'm supposed to be home before the parents come back." And that is when the police took us, the forty-four members. It was thirteen women and thirty-one men. We slept at Harare Central police station. It was terrible. It was really terrible. I remember around midnight, one of the police officers was like, 'What are these women still doing in the holding cells?' Like, women were taken to the holding cell and all the men were taken to the cells, like actual cells. So, one of the police officers was like, 'Why are these women still in the holding cells? They should go out to the cells.' It was in August and it was very cold. And the officer is like, "when you going to the cells you need to be wearing at least one item, so either you are going to be wearing your top without a bra. If it's tights you don't have a panty or anything, just one item, then no shoes. One thing up here, one thing down there, and no shoes." And the Zimbabwean cells being, ooh, yah! (shudders at the thought of the conditions of the cells). That's when I started crying. The other time we had been taken by police it

[20] Interview with Ray 2019.

> was, okay, we just got detained briefly but now going to the cells, reality really kicked in. I remember I started crying. It was on a Saturday and the coming Monday was Heroes Day, so the police were like we will only release you on Wednesday because we can't process you till then. Aah, thinking I ran away from home, my parents are coming back. Reality kicked in. Then fortunately as we were about to go, having changed and now wearing one item and all, another officer came and asked why we were being moved to the cells without having been officially charged. I think he was our god. Because we were given back our clothes and stayed in the holding cell. And around five in the morning, two GALZ staff members came to our rescue. We went out of the cells on Sunday morning, but ooh! It was quite an experience.[21]

Cassie shared many disturbing statements made by the police officers during the arrest and detention process. For instance, *'Hamusati manyatsorohwa nayo. Tikanyatsokurovai nayo imi hamuzvidzokorodzi* meaning you have never been beaten with it, if we beat you with it you will stop this behaviour. *Muri kushayei?'* I remember one officer *asking me, 'Uri kushayei nhaiwe mwana iwe?' (officers asked Cassie and the other women what they were searching for from other women then said some obscenities suggesting that having sex with the police officers would cure the women of their lesbianism).* The statements made by the police were not only sexually inappropriate but were also experienced as threats. Such statements from the protectors of the law in a country also show prevailing ideas about women and the masculinised nature of state institutions. While the police training itself may not directly include training officers on how to view women and women's sexuality, its masculinised nature reinforces already existing problematic attitudes about women's sexuality. The threat by the police demonstrates the belief that all women should desire men and that failure to do so is indicative of a problem that can be fixed through sex with a man. Therefore, even though cases of rape of lesbian identifying women are not as high in Zimbabwe as they are in neighbouring South Africa, the psychological threat of it persists through statements such as those made by the police officers.

Further, the police officers engaged in physical violence;

> Oh, they were beating people. When they came here they were beating people. I remember one of us was beaten for laughing. The other one was beaten for walking slowly. It was silly issues that they were beating us for. It was a horrible night. One of the police officers hit me with a button stick on my leg. It

[21] Interview with Cassie 2019.

> was only when the marks came out, that my sister realized I had really been arrested and beaten. At first no one believed me.[22]

It is as though the police go through their days longing for moments to exercise their power. If this assertion is right, one might ask what creates such violence from those that should be protecting civilians. Kubatana, a popular Zimbabwean website proffers that such acts of violence are embedded within the police institution as a branch of or product of a masculinised and militant state.[23] Following a leak in 2002 of a video of new police recruits being beaten by their superiors, Kubatana editors posed the questions,

> What are the implications for policing in Zimbabwe if this is how new recruits are 'hazed' by their superiors? Is it any wonder then that the police are quick to respond to civic demonstrations with violence, and that there are frequent reports of detainees being mistreated by the police? What are the long term psychological implications, if this is how police routinely deal with their own?[24]

The treatment of police officers during their training sends them a message that undue and excessive use of force is an acceptable way of wielding and demonstrating power. Additionally, one might suggest that with limited resources for conducting meaningful police work, and very low wages, the drudgery of their days is disrupted when opportunities for action arise.

The experiences of the narrators exemplify what South African advocate Peter Pelser describes as 'Rule by Law' which he details as, 'a police state in which government invokes the law (indeed creates law) to 'justify' excessive use of government force.' Detention without trial laws are common examples of this and in Zimbabwe the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) which mandates the notification of police of gatherings is another.[25] It is such laws that are invoked and selectively applied to limit the rights of categories of citizens such as women, and the LGBTQ+ category.

Both Ray and Cassie emphasised how their arrests affected them at multiple levels, there was fear of the police, the fear of family members and how they would be distressed and or angered by the arrests, then there was verbal harassment and physical abuse by the police and finally the deplorable conditions of the holding cells. Their descriptions of the feelings

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22 Interview with Cassie 2019.

23 Kubatana 'Violent induction for police recruits' (2009) available at http://www.kubatanablogs.net/kubatana/violent-induction-for-police-recruits/ (accessed 18 November 2020).

24 Kubatana (n 23).

25 Public Order and Security Act (POSA) Chapter 11:17 available at https://zimlii.org/zw/legislation/num-act/2002/1/Public%20Order%20and%20Security%20Act.pdf (accessed 18 November 2020).

during and after the arrest spotlight a feeling that many other lesbian identifying women expressed about their daily lives. The feeling of being hunted and that something is coming for you, whether it is being 'outed' in some way or the heaviness of imminent danger and violent punishment. For Ray, Cassie and other lesbian women who have been arrested or harassed, being visibly lesbian has an inescapably despondent character: it means a life of fear and hiding, engaging in love affairs that feel illicit and the real possibility of violence and spending time locked away.

When Ray describes the fear that her arrest would be used to attack or hunt down others like her, she opens another avenue for analysis. She reveals how this seemingly personal, private and individual identity is strongly linked to other similarly identifying individuals and how the visibility of some hypervisibilises others.[26] While Ray worries about how she might visibilise and endanger other lesbian women through her arrest, Cassie fears the family implications of her being arrested and Olivia describes her own fears of being visibilised and endangered by the visibility of other lesbians, for instance being visibilised by her partner through her 'masculine' style of dress. In order to contain the situation Olivia explains how she began to try and control her public interactions with her partner as well as her partner's dressing. When she was out in public with her partner, they would often be called lesbians and Olivia experienced this as an insult.

> So I started to correct what I felt like *kutukwa* [were insults] so *kuti tisatukwe handibatane maoko newe* [to avoid the insults I will not hold your hand] in public, 'kuti tisatukwe' [to avoid being insulted] maybe I should control the way you dress. Or I should control certain things about you that make us, or that make it obvious that we are gay.[27]

Here the 'politics of visibility' becomes apparent. What does it mean to 'look like a lesbian' or to pass as straight? When and why do individuals choose to be read as lesbian or straight. A large volume of literature discusses lesbian visibility as aspirational or as the victory of decades of attempting to visibilise a category of people that has sat in the shadows or at the margins. More recent work has however begun to challenge this perspective.[28] Villarego in discussing lesbian visibility states that,

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[26] RA Delong 'Missing bridges: The invisible (and hypervisible) lesbian of colour in theory, publishing, and media' PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2013 at 55-56.

[27] Interview with Olivia 2019.

[28] M Liinason 'Challenging the visibility paradigm: Tracing ambivalences in lesbian migrant women's negotiations of sexual identity' (2020) 24(2) *Journal of Lesbian Studies* at 110; C Jones 'Balancing safety and visibility: Lesbian community building strategies in South Korea' (2020) 24(3) *Journal of Lesbian Studies* at 273.

> To see a lesbian means to place a specific set of beliefs, politics or sexualisation onto a body, and to acknowledge an identity that is anti-normative. A lesbian's visibility ensures that she will be looked at with the knowledge of whom she desires to attract, objectified as a lesbian rather than a heterosexual woman for a masculine gaze.[29]

As Lindah Alcoff states, 'in our excessively materialist society, only what is visible can generally achieve the status of accepted truth'.[30] While this is indeed true, the stories of the narrators reveal an additional layer. One in which being visible is not always ideal. Ray and Cassie's narratives are both indicative of this as they highlight the dangers of visibility where the state is concerned. In contexts where visibility generates the risk of individual or structural violence, choosing to be invisible can be an act of passive resistance. It is not always important, progressive or necessary to be visible.[31]

Being invisible or passing as heterosexual can offer security and privacy for individuals. However, it also has the unfortunate consequence of holding larger social hierarchies and compulsory heterosexuality firmly in place. When considering visibility and invisibility as ways of celebrating self or as means for survival and security, there is the assumption that there is always choice in the matter. For example, both Olivia and Ray describe being called lesbian based on their physical appearance and not on their own declaration. The question thus arises, what does it mean to look like a lesbian? Butler argues that in practice, gender and sexuality are codified by activities, practices and cultural meanings that make gendered and sexual identities and discourses 'meaningful' to subjects. This means that gender identities are imaged as 'performances' or 'acts' where different social subjects perform 'scripts' involving their participation in social 'plots.'[32] A display of masculinity in the physical body or in the dress that adorns it, often translates to assumptions of lesbian identification. While Ray's family assumed she was lesbian from her choice of dress right from childhood, no matter what Olivia wore she was given boys names and assumed to be lesbian because of her physical bodily appearance.

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29 A Villarejo *Lesbian rule: Cultural criticism and the value of desire* (2003) at 56.

30 LM Alcoff *Visible identities: Race, gender and the self* (2006) at 6.

31 L Schlossberg 'Rites of passing' in MC Sanchez & L Schlossberg *Passing: identity and interpretation in sexuality, race and religion* (2001) at 3.

32 J Butler 'Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory' (1988) 40(4) *Theatre Journal* at 520.

Even though both Ray and Olivia identify as lesbian, being labelled as such by others shows the real potential not just of recognition but also of misrecognition.[33] Some lesbian self-identifying women can pass as heterosexual and access the comforts or privileges of being perceived as heterosexual. At the same time, some heterosexual women can be victimised based on the incorrect assumption that they are lesbian. A frequent result of this is that individuals compartmentalise parts of themselves in attempts to conceal their identity. They may also bend and contort to try and fit the social perceptions of others, a process which can harm emotional and mental wellbeing. As the director of GALZ, Chester Samba states, 'when sexual orientation is used as a tool of repression, our communities are affected and exposed to harassment and violence.'[34]

In thinking back to her arrest, Ray observed how she was now unable to go to the police when she needs to because of the residual trauma. How does one seek support from a system they feel is hunting them? As Outright Action International states in a report on the relationship between members of the LGBTQ+ community and police,

> Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) communities in the Philippines face violence, abuse, and discrimination from the police and are excluded from police assistance and protection when they are victims of crime.[35]

From Ray's experience we sense an attempt and desire to be invisible to the state for self-protection while in the Outright International report they surface how the state attempts to invisibilise LGBTQ+ persons through the unwillingness of the police to assist individuals identified as belonging to the LGBTQ+ community when they are victims of crimes. The compound reality of these scenarios is a profound exclusion of members of the LGBTQ+ community from the national imagination. The violence, criminalisation and exclusion generates a toxicity that impacts mental and emotional wellbeing and creates a deep persistent fear as discussed by the narrators. This sense of being disposable captures the paradox of being both visibilised through state rhetoric but also being expected by the same state to self

[33] Misrecognition results when one's view of themselves is at odds with the way they are perceived by others.

[34] C Samba, GALZ director quoted in, 'Mugabe comes face-to-face with gays' Zimbabwe Independent 27 November 2015 available at https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2015/11/27/mugabe-comes-face-to-face-with-gays/ (accessed 18 November 2020).

[35] G Cristobal - Outright action International 'To serve and protect without exception: Addressing police abuse toward LGBTI people in the Philippines' G Poore & K Kraan (eds) at 9. Available at https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/serveProtectFull.pdf (accessed 24 November 2020).

invisibilise within dominant society. The real crime seems to be that of making the socially and politically 'embarrassing' reality of African homosexuality visible to the nation and to the outside world and thus betraying the nationalist narrative.

One of the most revealing and instrumentalist attempts at controlling the nationalist narrative was in the response to the now deceased MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai who was condemned by Mugabe for making a statement deemed to support homosexuality. He was constructed as a 'point of Western penetration' which made him unsuited for the role of leading a 'sovereign' Zimbabwe. Tinashe Mawere in his unpublished PhD thesis describes the image that Mugabe constructed of Tsvangirai as that of a sell-out 'offering' his anus, his 'feminine' body for 'penetration' by 'gay' Britain and its allies in their bid to re/conquer Zimbabwe.' This yielding to the West feminizes Tsvangirai in the view of nationalist elites whose gendered views of leadership are masculinity, domination and control. A 'gender-sexuality-nation/alism' nexus is illustrated by feminists such as McFadden and Kim-Puri but is inverted by the Zimbabwean government in ways consistent with the discursive practices of patriotic history and the preoccupation with political homophobia. Quite notorious in this respect was Mugabe. The political homophobia epitomised by his anti-gay hate speech could be attributed to a government seeking to detract attention from more pressing political and economic issues. His joint invocation of 'patriotic history and political homophobia potentially emerges out of the unique political and economic context which Mugabe's regime found itself unable to adequately address.'[36] Neville Hoad argues that Robert Mugabe used 'homophobia to deflect attention from his increasingly autocratic rule and Zimbabwe's social and economic problems', by framing his homophobic sentiments within a postcolonial narrative aimed at reconceptualising proper African values that were destabilised by Western imperialism and colonialism.[37] GALZ concurs with Hoad and in their Independence Day statement of 2020, they articulated this as follows,

> Against a background of being society's scapegoats to deflect attention from glaring shortcomings by inciting homophobia, GALZ has fought an uphill struggle every step of the way to gain audience and recognition. We stayed the course and continue to chip away steadily on the structures that hinder our liberation.[38]

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36 Y Youde 'Patriotic history and anti-LGBT rhetoric in Zimbabwean politics' (2017) 51 *Canadian Journal of African Studies* at 61.

37 N Hoad *African intimacies: Race, homosexuality and globalization* (2007) at 68.

38 GALZ statement on Independence Day, 18 April 2020.

Figure 2. Satirical cartoon of President Robert Mugabe dressed as the queen of England suggesting gay bashing as a distraction for the hungry population. Source: The Guardian.

The satirical cartoon above makes the same assertion as GALZ through the insistence that the political homophobia deployed by Mugabe and his government was part of a larger scheme to divert attention from more pressing issues in the country. A country that Raftopoulos states was in political and economic disarray,

> This upheaval consisted of a combination of political and economic decline that, while it had its origins in the long-term structural economic and political legacies of colonial rule as well as the political legacies of African nationalist politics, exploded onto the scene in the face of a major threat to the political future of the ruling party, ZANU(PF). The crisis became manifest in multiple ways: confrontations over the land and property rights; contestations over the history and meanings of nationalism and citizenship; the emergence of critical civil society groupings campaigning around trade union, human rights and constitutional questions; the restructuring of the state in more authoritarian forms; the broader pan-African and anti-imperialist meanings of the struggles in Zimbabwe; the cultural representations of the crisis in Zimbabwean literature; and the central role of Robert Mugabe.[39]

However, the preoccupation with Mugabe's character and the deployment of homophobia as a political strategy while valid, does little to illuminate the depth of the socio-historical issues involved in the regulation of same-sexualities in Zimbabwe. The following anecdote is indicative;

[39] B Raftopoulos in B Raftopoulos & A Mlambo (eds) *Becoming Zimbabwe: A history from the pre-colonial Period to 2008* (2009) at 201-2.

> …the Zimbabwean government issued me with a deportation order, in which accusations of my betrayal of "Zimbabwean culture" and "family values" featured prominently. I was identified as a lesbian (and therefore automatically vilified), on the grounds that I wrote about women's rights to choose their intimate partners, and because I defended the rights of gays and lesbians.[40]

The gendered politics implicit in the actions of the Zimbabwean government towards Pat Mcfadden are noteworthy. They reveal the ways in which ideas of sexuality and gender that go against the grain of mainstream ones subvert conventional gendered relations and hierarchies and are quelled by the state. Sexuality therefore becomes a critical site for maintaining patriarchy and reproducing African women's oppression.[41] Which in turn reveals from the positions of women and marginalized groups the flawed promises of nationalism as an all-inclusive, horizontal community.[42]

We can also see the 'gender-sexuality-nation/alism' nexus being instrumentalised as a basis for international intervention and rights based discourse and the ways in which such interventions are subsequently rejected by the government in the name of safeguarding national sovereignty. Hoad sees merit in this analysis stating that,

> it may be possible to read homophobic strands in African nationalisms as displaced resistance to perceived and real encroachments on neocolonial national sovereignty by economic and cultural globalisation.[43]

Put differently the rhetoric of homosexuality as being un-African though misguided, the concerns about economic and cultural neo-colonisation could be legitimate. LGBTQ+ identities are perceived as Western and foreign and therefore inimical to an authentic Zimbabwean identity. This takes us back to Rahul's ideas on spatial allocation of culpability discussed in earlier chapters and which reveal opposing narratives of a Zimbabwean state defending its sovereignty against claims of an undemocratic and homophobic state and that of a socially just international community seeking to 'save' the oppressed and marginalised people of Zimbabwean society.

To comprehend more clearly the tension between the views of the international community and Zimbabwean nationalists, I turn to the metaphor of 'mutual demonisation', employed by Miles Tendi in his critique of discourses between Britain and Zimbabwe during

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40 P McFadden 'Sexual pleasure as feminist choice' (2003) 2 *Feminist Africa: Changing cultures* at 3.
41 S Tamale 'Out of the Closet: Unveiling Sexuality Discourses in Uganda' (2003) 2 *Feminist Africa* at 3.
42 Kim-Puri (n 2) at 137.
43 Hoad (n 37) at xii.

what he refers to as the 'crisis years'.[44] He makes a distinction between normative and instrumental demonisation. We observe normative demonization of the Zimbabwean government by the international community and LGBTQ+ activists, emanating from rights based ideas about justice and human dignity. And in contrast observe instrumental demonization in the homophobic rhetoric of nationalist elites who mobilised a homophobia rooted in nationalism to exclude LGBTQ+ identifying persons from citizenship and to attack a 'perverted' West. It would be far too simplistic to paint an image of nationalist elites as homophobes that are anti progress and anti-modernity. It is Makau Mutua contention that, 'the human rights enterprise inappropriately presents itself as a guarantor of eternal truths without which human civilization is impossible'.[45] Mutua further argues that the human rights corpus, though well intentioned, is a Eurocentric creation for the reestablishment of non-Western societies and peoples using culturally skewed norms and practices.[46]

The language of rights can and has been mobilized by the international community to patronise African leaders in ways that are reminiscent of colonial discourses and it is therefore no surprise that their agendas are met with resistance by African nationalists. Irish scholar Peter Fitzpatrick has argued that human rights have become the "pervasive criteria" by which nations approach a universal standard of civilization, progress, and modernity.[47] It is this idea that has been resisted by some African nationalists.

Martin Chanock's work similarly explores this tension in his exploration of the relationship between Occident and Orient. He discusses Edward Said's view of the concept of the Orient as disparaging and demeaning and based on an infantilization of non-Western peoples that are viewed as backward and in need of enlightenment.[48] These orientalist views emerge from a sense of superiority over the Other and a deep investment in providing proof of the inferiority of the Other in an attempt to assert Western superiority.[49] The condemnation of homophobic African elites feeds into this orientalist idea advanced by Said. On the other hand Ian Buruma's Occidentalism, that is the nationalism emerging out of imperialism and colonialism, explains resistance of African nationalists and how this resistance is sometimes weaponised by nationalist elites to dismiss all things Western in the name of cultural

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44 BM Tendi 'The Origins and functions of demonisation discourses in Britain–Zimbabwe relations (2000-).' (2014) 40(6) *Journal of Southern African Studies* at 1255.
45 M Mutua *Human rights a political and cultural critique* (2008) at 15.
46 Mutua (n 45) at 11.
47 P Fitzpatrick *Modernism and the grounds of law* (2001) at 120.
48 D Lary 'Edward Said: Orientalism and Occidentalism' (2006) 17(2) *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* at 3.
49 As above.

preservation in ways that can be detrimental for the masses.[50] Both Occidentalism and Orientalism can be exploited in order to impose varying degrees of hegemony and this understanding is essential when analysing the actions of African nationalists and the international community and examining the logic of their actions.[51] In this study I do not set out to create a dichotomy that pits nationalists against international human rights discourse, I merely seek to make a case against the dominant Western human rights project but also acknowledge the ways nationalist elites instrumentalise the resistance of the West to limit freedoms of citizens.

The notion that Zimbabwe is one of the most 'homophobic and authoritarian' countries in the world became something of a truism in western journalism about Zimbabwe. Caution is however required in order to avoid reading these ideas too simplistically and constructing a dichotomy between an authoritarian and regressive Zimbabwean state and a progressive saviour in the form of the international community in ways that reinforce colonial ideas of the all-knowing West.

The following cartoon by a Kenyan cartoonist surfaces the tensions in the approach of the West in their so-called attempt at promoting gay rights in Africa.

50 I Buruma & A Margalit *Occidentalism: A short history of anti-Westernism* (2002) at 41.
51 E Said 'Introduction' *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient* (1995) at 5.

Figure 3: A Kenyan cartoonist highlights the tension created by aid conditionality

In an attempt at problematising aid conditionality by the West, the visual choices of the cartoonist are in themselves problematic and additionally indicative of the cartoonists own ideas and perceptions of sex and homosexuality. The representation of an Africa bending over with its pants down suggests the view that to bend over is to be subordinated and feminised. An idea that causes a great deal of discomfort to the masculinised ego and reveals the gendered discomfort homosexuality creates for the masculinised ego. He also likens aid conditionality to sex work, the monetization of sexual labour, revealing a common stereotype of homosexuality in Africa. That it is not an 'African' sexual expression but rather a transactional act for financial benefit.

Through the commentaries recounted in this section, we see political subjectivities emerging from the experiences of lesbian identifying women, in particular the articulation of outrage at the cruelty and demonization by a state willing and seeking to eliminate them as members of the body politic. The lives of LGBTQ+ persons through these stories can be read as texts that illuminate the gendered and sexualised nature of the Zimbabwean state and its struggle in attempting to write part of its population out of history and its nationalist narrative.

6.2 Socio-cultural analysis

As the Zimbabwean government through its rhetoric and laws demonised and framed homosexuality as inimical to Zimbabwean identity, a broader social discomfort with same-sex sexualities was also emerging. Within the social and cultural realm we observe how the LGBTQ+ community is relegated to hidden gathering places, demonized as deviants, pathologised as mentally ill or possessed by ancestral spirits, and even considered threats to the integrity and dignity of their families, communities and broader Zimbabwean society.

The narratives shared reveal that the changing cultural and political terrain of states and nations is relevant and crucial to analyses of sexuality and gender. In seeking out these narratives, I also hold concern that the narratives can be a trap if they are allowed to become too still and too complete, reifying a victim idea of lesbian existence in Zimbabwe, a context already known to be exclusionary and violent and rooted in a colonial fixation with marking difference and casting out enemies.

What might it mean to for instance take images of Olivia's middle-class life as an accomplished photographer living with her partner in a posh two bedroomed flat in a gated complex in Harare and slot them next to the kinds of images of lesbians we see in the media: of vulgar perverted women or raped and murdered ones? There is no uniform, comforting narrative of what lesbian women's lives are that can come out of this study. As Mary states,

> as much as we need to relate on identity issues it is also very difficult for us within our own identities to understand each other and be accepting of each other because we are different'.[52] Intersectionality discourse lends intelligibility to these differences among lesbian-identifying women and presents social identities such as gender, race, class, and sexuality as mutually constituted, interconnected, fluid, and contextually specific in ways that reveal the heterogeneity among individuals.[53] Intersectionality theory illustrates that people are often 'living at the intersections of overlapping systems of privilege and oppression', such that even though individuals may have a shared oppression based on one identity marker, their realities are nuanced by their other identities and experiences.[54] According to Tamale the statuses of African peoples differ based on gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, and so on and this is a consequence of the rich and diverse sociocultural and political differences across

[52] Interview with Mary 2019.
[53] CT Mohanty cited in AL Coleman 'What's intersectionality? Let these scholars explain the theory and its history' (2019) available at https://time.com/5560575/intersectionality-theory/ (accessed 18 November 2020).
[54] As above.

> African societies.[55] Even within the same societies, such as among the Harare based lesbian-identifying women in this study, significant differences still exist.[56]

Class privilege for instance provides a buffer from the pressures and oppressive possibilities of a lesbian identity. For instance, middle-class lesbian-identifying women are able to afford privacy and security from neighbours in ways that working-class lesbian identifying women in high density areas are less able to. According to Ray, her positioning within the family shifted based on her financial position. When she was younger and struggling financially the family made an issue of her lesbian identity and excluded her from family events and rituals such as weddings, lobola ceremonies and funerals. However, when she gained financial independence and was thriving, her sexuality became marginal because the extended family had more to gain from her than what they had believed they were losing by having a lesbian family member. All of a sudden, she was receiving phone calls to notify her of the weddings of cousins and funerals of aunts and uncles. Marcia's also describes her own experience of being buffered by financial stability when she says,

> But that's also the benefit of not being really reliant on anybody. For like money I mean, I'm reliant on my employer but I'm financially stable. I'm meeting my own needs. Like, I'm not in a position where I have to meet anybody's requirements in order for me to run my life. And I have my own [living] space, as well.[57]

What some lose in their sexual identity they make up for in class privilege, financial stability or geographical location while for others additional oppressions compound their marginal positions. All this study can therefore hope to do, is reveal the multiple and complex realities of the diverse group that is lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe.

Through the exploration of stories of identification, struggle and ideas of citizenship and belonging engaged thus far in this study, emerge intricate patterns of subversion and resistance. As neither citizens in the expansive and substantive sense of the concept, nor subjects deprived of political voices and rights, the narrators tell stories that reveal a relentless tension in their political subjectivities and historical consciousness between narratives of disposability and victimhood and narratives of adaptation. Ray's description of her late teen

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55 S Tamale 'Exploring the contours of African sexualities: Religion, law and power' (2014) 9(1) *African Human Rights Law Journal* at 151.

56 Interview with Mary, 2019.

57 Interview with Marcia 2019.

experiences when she moved to live in South Africa for a few years are particularly illuminating. Her sense of self is markedly different between these two contexts. While in South Africa she is part of an active online community and as she attests,

> I learnt a lot and made a lot of friends online. So when they eventually had a physical meetup, I went and then I made like, a lot more friends. So that made me understand that, okay, my inclination, as much as I had guilt about not being married, I had guilt about not having kids, I had guilt about, just being you know [myself]. In my country it [felt] like it's something that shouldn't happen, then here I am and it's allowed and I am free, well until when my uncles who I was staying close to, got wind of it and called everybody back here [in Zimbabwe] and told them. '*Mwana akuita zvechingochani kuno ku*South Africa! *Zvakatooma!*' meaning this child is engaging in a homosexual lifestyle here in South Africa.[58]

Three experiences more than any other test the ideas of agency and self-determination for the lesbian women in this study - repression, subversion and performance. These three categories also provide a frame through which I demonstrate their political subjectivities. This section deals with each of them in some detail. It is only by delving into an interpretation of the experiences of the narrators that we begin to acquire a depth of understanding of the ways in which they see themselves as active participants in their lives and/or as products of their contexts trapped in an illusion of self-determinacy. The experiences shared here provide a rich opportunity to observe not just the major events influencing the lives of the narrators but also the smaller more subtle details that help them to make sense of their worlds. Here we see the narrators in their individuality but also as representative of a gendered, sexualised, national, Pan African, cultural and racialised identity.

6.2.1 Repression

Through criminalisation and anti-homosexuality rhetoric the state succeeds to a degree in keeping individuals that practice same-sex sexualities largely invisible. The experience of being hidden and limited in the ways of self-expression are the products of repression. State as well as social repression is closely linked to self-regulation in the expression of same-sex attractions and individual attempts at suppressing same-sex desire. The forces of state, religion and culture converge in the regulation of same-sex sexualities. Even within the education system the regulatory forces can be observed. As Cassie stated in her reflections about high school,

[58] Interview with Ray 2019.

> I think the headmistress would actually tell the pastors that came to lead the church services at the school what to say, so you would get stories of Sodom and Gomorrah, you would get stories that God created Adam and Eve. They would even read that verse from Leviticus, I don't even know it, about homosexuality. So yah, it would make me pray against these feelings or whatever was going on around me.[59]

Even later while in university the problems continued

> In university, when people got to know that I am a lesbian, it became very tense, even to attend classes. I remember I was in my second year and there was a rumour of a photograph of me kissing another girl and it caused a lot of havoc. I got so many messages from people, 'we didn't know we now have gay people in Zimbabwe. This is what Robert Mugabe doesn't want. These people are worse than dogs and pigs.' These messages were from classmates and other schoolmates, and then during a lecture, the lecturer was like, 'Ah, so it happens we also have gay people in this school?' I was shocked. I didn't expect that from a lecturer and especially not during lecture time. I could wrap my head around the fact that the students were saying things about me but to have a lecturer saying that about me made me wonder, who do I go to report to?[60]

Regulation and surveillance creates among LGBTQ+ identifying persons in Zimbabwe the feeling of being trapped. Whether it is through overt state, religious or social condemnation or more subtle means. For instance, Olivia makes constant reference to the word lesbian as *kutukwa (*an insult). Because of all the negative ideas attached to lesbian identity and the word lesbian itself, when she is called lesbian by people other than other LGBTQ+ identifying persons it was often both intended and received as an insult. On close inspection however I must also ask the question, what is it within Olivia herself that results in her perceiving the word lesbian as an insult. Olivia confesses, 'I was uncomfortable with that part of myself and I wasn't sure that that's what it was, the idea of being a lesbian would make me cringe.[61] Foucault argues that effective power functions through replacing force and coercion with subtle control of self-discipline and self-surveillance.[62] As Olivia's experience reveals this self-discipline and self-surveillance is effective and thrives on how power becomes experienced

59 Interview with Cassie 2019.
60 Interview with Cassie 2019.
61 Interview with Olivia 2019.
62 M Foucault *The history of sexuality* (1978), and *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (1977) at 169.

intimately in and through the body.[63] For Ray one of the instruments responsible for ensuring self-discipline and self-surveillance is religion.

> Now I just feel that religion is there to be a prison. Religion is okay, but it is now a prison for a lot of us. We tend to have that self-stigma. It's because of religion. But then you can play around with it. God loves us all, and everyone is a sinner. But I don't think I'm sinning.[64]

Marcia has not abandoned her religion but had to figure out her way through it. As she described in her narrative abandoning her faith would mean an entire paradigm shift that she was not prepared to contend with. As she stated,

> I think for me, I have moved away primarily from the institution of the church. So, when I started really interrogating the role of the church in colonialism, in perpetuating certain ideas about women and about queer people. I found it was actually good for my health to be outside of like that physical space…[65]

An interesting convergence takes place for Marcia. In her attempt to reconcile her sexuality with her religion she digs into the history of her Christian faith. She finds that her religion is implicated in the colonial project and it is suddenly at odds with her racialized national identity. The very identity that was challenged and threatened the most in her upbringing as a third-generation Zimbabwean child growing up in the West. This religion that had anchored her so firmly was tied to a colonial history that fragmented and fractured the lives of her ancestors. Though unable to discard the religion completely, it was no longer untouchable. It was open to critique and questioning and as such, Marcia concluded that just because it served her in certain ways it was not full-proof and it was certainly wrong about same-sex sexualities and the people who practice them.

The dilemma described by Marcia points us to the possibilities of what Epprecht describes as the humanistic potential of faiths. He suggests that there are numerous people that fall in between those that sit at the extremes of the homosexuality/religion debate.[66] He contends that an overemphasis on the homophobia within religions in Africa and the portrayal of religions as enemies of progress is unhelpful and dangerous and further deepens the gap

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63 B Anderson 'Affect and biopower: towards a politics of life' (2012) 37(1) *Transactions of the institute of British geographers* at 36.

64 Interview with Cassie 2019.

65 Interview with Marcia 2019.

66 M Epprecht *Sexuality and social justice in Africa: Rethinking homophobia and forging resistance* (2013) at 67.

between same-sex sexualities and religions.[67] Marcia shows us that there are possibilities for the co-existence of homosexuality and faith and that with information and patience more people can see these ideas as not being at odds with each other. Rather than propel 'homonationalist' and homopatriotic' narratives of 'Western superiority over African backwardness', there is an opportunity to encourage humanism in the hope of overriding doctrine, allowing those that find strength from faith and culture to hold on to their beliefs but not uncritically so.

The experiences of lesbian identifying women can be influenced by the attitudes of others around them. However, they are also impacted heavily by the internalised ideas the women themselves hold about same-sex sexuality. If we were to shift attention to Olivia, we would see that the imperative to align identity or self with internalized belief systems is layered with greater complexity than what humanistic potential can offer. Olivia describes the weight of carrying that secret part of herself and the pain and isolation it caused but also the strategies for surviving it.

> I was devastated by a breakup and I was dealing with my feelings of obviously being heartbroken and somewhat facing the reality of what it means not to be out. I couldn't express to anyone that I was devastated because my heart had been broken by a woman. There is no one that I could have told this to and it's something that for the most part I dealt with by myself. It would be music, crying in the middle of the night, writing and things like that.[68]

More than what humanistic potential might enable, Olivia's experience illustrates that there are hierarchies of forces of influence and those ideals that rank highest create opportunity for the challenging, questioning or setting aside of others. Olivia describes her internal struggle with a lesbian identity and the constant preoccupation with protecting her mother from the public shame she believes she would experience for having a lesbian daughter. She also anticipates physical violence as her mother's response should her mother find out about her lesbian identity. As a result, she has chosen to not reveal her same-sex intimacies to her family and has to constantly deal with the tensions this creates in her relationship with her partner of several years. For the security gained through silence and a concealed sexuality there is a price to be paid in other ways, whether it is a dissatisfied hidden lover, or a heartbreak nursed secretly. Though living her sexuality openly is important to Olivia it is evident that either her

67 As above.
68 Interview with Olivia 2019.

relationships with family matter more to her or the fear for her safety should her mother find out about her lesbian identity out-ranks living openly as lesbian and therefore take priority.

In other instances, the family is the first place where one's sexuality is revealed, making the broader society the site of tension. Whether a family is accepting or not there is a pattern of trying to ensure that information is contained within the family and does not become public. Much like the state attempting to control its collective image, a similar phenomenon is observed with the family unit and the concern with preserving its public image. A common response of families is the ostracization of the family member. Part of this is that if they do not have to see this behaviour, they do not have to deal with it, another other part is that it enables them to distance themselves from the taint that is brought on by the lesbian identity or practice. Even with that there is still another layer, knowing the value and meaning of family some families hope that the threat of ostracization will be enough to force the individual to conform to the expected norms. It is a sense of wanting to belong to these social units that often results in the setting aside or concealment of individual wants and desires.

While Cassie was dealing with family tensions and denial, she was also confronted with the stigma at school where rumours and snide remarks were rife,

> So, the rumours were, 'aah, she is a lesbian. Do you see the people that come to see her? She is bringing homosexuality here. I even got the name 'lele'.[69]

There is nothing that could extricate Cassie from pariahdom within the school setting. She has no choice but to contend with the gossip and sideways glances. Though Cassie was tormented with nicknames, her fate is not shared by all alleged lesbian girls. In August of 2010 state media reported that 20 girls from Eveline Girls High School in Bulawayo had been picked up from their school by the police for allegedly engaging in homosexual activities.

Mark Gluckman points out about the effects of words and gossip,

> When people gossip about each other, and about outsiders, they make ethical judgements about behaviour and maintain their group's social values. At the same time, gossip is a means of social control: it polices acceptable behaviour and reinforces the values and demands of the dominant group. It's like a 'social weapon' that members of the group can use against each other. […] It is an important means by which

[69] Cassie, interview 2019.

> conflicts are resolved or exacerbated, values are maintained and transmitted, and group unity is reinforced.[70]

It is also a means through which individuals can be pushed over the edge. To be the subject of gossip as a result of social shame often leads to individuals refraining from the behaviour and can have the effect of persuading others to not dare risk transgression and thus encourages conformity with normative values. While I concede that gossip and shaming can have the intended social impact of deterring certain behaviours in the experience of Gamuchirayi Chimoto this was not the case. In 2013 state media reported a tragic case, the suicide of 15-year-old Gamuchirayi following her expulsion from Queen Elizabeth High School in Harare for supposed lesbian misconduct.[71] In this unfortunate case gossip functioned as the viral force and oppressive tool for social control that it is, with devastating effects on a young woman. Gamuchirayi succumbed to the fierce negative judgment of others.

As the interviews and media reports reveal the context within which one exists has a significant impact on how they experience and live out their lesbian identities. The opinions and actions of close community such as schoolmates or teachers or those of biological family members seemed to have far more impact than other members of society that were less involved or less present in the daily lives of the narrators.

> I don't let most of the things that happened really affect me. Unless they are coming from my mum or my sister. But from everyone else, the world out there, I really don't get affected. I just believe I'm living my own life and everyone else has their own lives. So, you can't make decisions for me, or you can't affect my life in any way.[72]

The narratives reveal how social repression manifests through regulation by state, religious and cultural institutions and the ways in which these forces can also lead to self-discipline and self-surveillance. Additionally, this self-discipline and self-surveillance resulted in the repression of desire as part of denial or rejection of same-sex attractions. Repressed anger and pain also surfaced as problems which were navigated differently depending on the individual. Where some resorted to alcohol or other substance abuse as escape strategies, others used violence as a release or found community, friendships or counselling which helped them better cope.

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70 M Gluckman 'Gossip and Scandal' (1963) 4(3) *Current Anthropology* at 309.

71 The Herald 29 November 2013 'QE girl killself' available at https://www.herald.co.zw/qe-girl-killself/ (accessed 18 October 2020)

72 Cassie interview, 2019.

I was particularly struck by the recurrence of the phrase ‘a certain way’ that repeated in Olivia’s narrative. She described herself as ‘feeling a certain way’ about her sexuality or ‘a certain way’ about a woman she was attracted to. People in the street looking at her ‘a certain way’ or assuming things about her because she looks ‘a certain way’. I was both intrigued and disturbed by this phrase. On the one hand it appears to operate as a shorthand for descriptions Olivia would rather not waste time getting into because their meaning is clearly implied. On closer inspection however I concluded that this phrasing was her strategy for keeping distance between herself and ideas that cause her pain or discomfort and that are better left unsaid. In between what is stated explicitly and the silences in the narrative I argue that we begin to see the fractures created by the gap between individual agency and the constraints generated by structural or societal homophobia. As lesbian identifying women adapt to their contexts, build community and solidarity with each other, make families and careers, the backdrop of violent, limiting and homophobic societies still lingers and for that reason must continue to be challenged.

For all the narrators, their lesbian identities are certainly an important part of who they are, but it is also more than that. It is a crisis of belonging as illustrated by their experiences and it is characterized by constant make or break, and in some cases even life and death decisions. All the narrators at different times and in different words indicated in no uncertain terms their belief that familial, religious, cultural and state-society relations should not be predicated on sexuality or sexual practice and that it is unfortunate that within the Zimbabwean context this is all too often the case.

6.2.2 Subversion

Although Zimbabwean women have been redefining traditional gendered roles over many decades, sexuality persists as a frontier in desperate need of change. In the sociological work of Belinda Bozzoli between 1900 and 1983 she highlights a range of identities and experiences of women in South Africa that are comparable to those of women in the Zimbabwean context. She points to the patriarchal socialisation of young girls; the conditioning of girls into feminine identities but also the options created by peasantisation of economies; the role of Christianity and education in transforming households; and the ways in which Christianity and education were not only markers of colonialism but also created opportunities to shift gender relations in

women's favour.[73] Chipo Hungwe discusses the idea of 'respectability' and 'unrespectability' of Zimbabwean women in gender struggles that date as far back as precolonial time. She sheds light on the gendered regulation of women but also the ways in which Zimbabwean women have subverted traditional gendered roles and the social expectations of marriage, bearing children within wedlock and labouring for the sustenance of the patriarchal family unit. A significant marker of subversion was the movement of women from rural areas to urban areas, which were sites of freedom from the restrictive regulation of family and culture.[74]

With all the changes that have taken place the realm of sexuality remains a challenging one with same-sex sexualities being particularly contentious. Same-sex relations amongst Zimbabwean women force a re-evaluation of social and national agendas in ways that could restructure national identities. In exploring lesbian women's lives and how they potentially impact national identities I do not seek to reinforce the existing heterosexually informed notions of the national body politic or patriarchal power structure. Instead I attempt through the lens of sexuality to highlight the plurality of women within Zimbabwean society and surface their defiance of patriarchal power structures.

This study revealed lesbian identifying women to be liminal individuals within Zimbabwean society and that the liminality serves to disempower. Despite the existence of regimes of power however, human agency seems to continuously emerge. João Viegas Ferdandes attributes this to fissures caused by contradictions and tensions in existing practices of domination and systems of power.[75] It is because of these fissures that repression and resistance co-exist. Comaroff exemplifies this in his exploration of colonial domination in South Africa citing the opportunities for new forms of empowerment that existed for black South Africans resulting from the fissures among the whites as they fought over terms of command.[76] These tensions illustrate the limitations of repressive tools to completely repress as there is often agency, however limited to resist or modify the repression. In stating this I do not seek to diminish or minimize the effects of oppressive forces but to broaden the analytic compass as suggested by Comaroff and make provision for the moments of incoherence and complexity in dominant power systems and the ways in which these moments present

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73 B Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, life strategy, and migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (1991) at 61.

74 C Hungwe 'Putting them in their place: "respectable" and "unrespectable" women in Zimbabwean gender struggles' (2006) 6 *Feminist Africa* at 34.

75 JV Ferdandes 'From the theories of social and cultural reproduction to the theory of resistance' (1988) 9(2) *British Journal of Sociology of Education* at 169.

76 J Comaroff 'Images of the empire, contexts of conscience: Models of colonial domination in South Africa' (1989) 16(4) *American Ethnologist* at 677.

opportunities for the exercise of agency by the dominated.[77] This discussion identifies some of those transgressive acts which shift attention from regulating icons towards subversive expression by Zimbabwean lesbian identifying women.[78]

Moving away from the regulation of women's sexuality, whether heterosexual, lesbian, or bisexual, appears to hold possibilities for social progress and creates space that is transgressive of the static gender and sexuality roles created out of, and to sustain, patriarchal ideology.[79] The experiences of the narrators reveal the tensions of lesbian identity and the ways in which it is constrained as an option by societal norms, or how it often leads to self-exiling or compartmentalised identities for the lesbian subject. I however assert that through subversion these lesbian women have carved out spaces for themselves in their society and that simple politics of visibility are insufficient in determining or establishing subversion. A shift from the politics of visibility to a focus on queer acts is fundamental in exploring Zimbabwean lesbian women's subversion, as such a shift gives specific attention to the realities of the lesbian women within the Zimbabwean context without a default privileging of visibility discourse.[80]
As Cassie describes

> Ooh, I became very rebellious. I got into a relationship with a woman who was very, very masculine. Maybe it was because I was in love and all. My parents found out, and they would make comments. The hate speech was too much, especially from my mum. My mum would say things like, 'I don't want to see that lesbian here. If you now feel that you are a lesbian, go to her house. Don't stay in my house.' My daddy would say, 'these funny looking friends of yours, I don't want to see them in my house.' And at one time my dad was like, 'If you feel this is how you want to be, get out of my house.' And I actually did, I left my parent's house and stayed with this girlfriend for like eight months, until my parents looked for me, asked for forgiveness, and asked me to come back home.[81]

Incidents such as this were described by the narrators as being out of character, however their occurrence point us to something. While the narrators describe their continuous attempts to negotiate their sexuality in ways that would preserve relationships with family or protect family members there is also evidence of moments of rapture, often the result of cumulative or built up tension. We witness moments were it almost becomes too much for the women and in

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77 Comaroff '(n 76) at 662.
78 M Maltry & K Tucker 'Female fem(me)ininities' (2002) 6(2) *Journal of Lesbian Studies* at 99.
79 M Chancy 'Subversive sexualities: Revolutionizing gendered identities' (2008) 29(1) *A Journal of Women Studies* at 52.
80 Maltry & Tucker (n 78) at 95.
81 Interview with Cassie 2019.

different ways they claim their identity or a relationship they truly desire even though they know it comes at a cost. Olivia describes her experience in this way,

> What we were doing was something that we weren't supposed to be doing. But in as much as it felt that way, it also felt good, it felt gloriously natural to me. Yeah, it felt like something that I wanted and so I did it.[82]

Once this moment has occurred and the act of subversion has been performed, a range of responses follow. Some attempt to suture their life before the rapture, others distance themselves from that past as they construct new life narratives and continue their acts of subversion, yet others compartmentalise their lives in an effort to accommodate both the impulse to restore their lives before the rapture and the active pursuit of what is desired.

From the experiences of the narrators, it is evident that an overemphasis on 'coming out' or being visible as the markers of subversion is culturally limiting and reflective of the reality of only some contexts but not all. Identification is commonly associated with 'coming-out' wherein the act of revealing one's attraction is seen as an 'essential' and therefore inevitable and compulsory step of identity formation? If anything, to endorse coming out as essential, is to participate in the dissemination of the dominant homosexual discourse. A discourse that is largely Western, white and middle class as evinced by the stories of the narrators that problematise visibility and 'coming out'. There are many ways in which lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe subvert normative ideas of gender and female sexuality. In their choices to pursue relationships with women, choosing to parent without male partners/husbands or to not parent at all, building community and family with people that love and support them whether or not they are biologically related. Tamale describes the created spaces as 'comfort zones.'[83]

Additionally, lesbian performances of masculinity, femininity or androgenicity can be politically and socially transgressive in ways that have the potential to liberate women from a long history of patriarchal bodily regulation. The acts of subversion discussed provide insight into some of the lesbian subcultures and how they cleverly unravel cultural truisms and present a solid foundation for understanding lesbian women as autonomous beings with agency and not just passive victims. However few the images of subversion, they are adequate to disrupt

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82 Interview with Olivia 2019.

83 S Tamale 'Out of the Closet: Unveiling Sexuality Discourses in Uganda' (2003) 2 *Feminist Africa* at 3.

the dominant narratives of lesbians as victims and to broaden discourse on gender performance and sexuality.

6.2.3 Performance

Often phenomenology is described as a turning towards objects. As discussed in Chapter Four, Ahmed suggests that bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, which are available within the bodily horizon.[84] Ahmed further assets that in turning towards an object other objects that are in proximity also come into view even though they are not quite where the individual's attention is directed. She adds that the nearness of such objects is a matter of coincidence; although it is no coincidence that they are what the individual sees. Ahmed's observations were confirmed in my own explorations of the experiences of the narrators.

While same-sex desire, orientation or attraction is the object towards which the narrators turn, in so doing other related ideas and objects come into their view. In turning towards same-sex attraction, ideas of what it means to be lesbian and even how to be lesbian are brought into view. These ideas emerge from both the dominant culture of heterosexuality which forms the main societal backdrop as well as from same-sex subcultures. Performance therefore becomes largely a material consequence or manifestation of these ideas and objects on an individual.

> … maybe this is everywhere, not just in Harare or Zimbabwe, everywhere, like I mentioned, if you're lesbian you can't hang around men. If you're masculine it's even worse. You can't get pregnant if you are a lesbian. How? Especially in Zimbabwe we don't even have ways to get pregnant that are medical, that are artificial, we do not have. [You have] to sleep with a man for you to get pregnant. And there is a lot of stigma and discrimination around that. So if you are a lesbian you can't get pregnant. It means you can't get children, just because Zimbabwe doesn't have other means for you to have kids.[85]

The problem cited by Cassie in the excerpt above is one of intelligibility. According to Isabelle Coy-Dibley,

> an unintelligible identity is constituted as a body that performs societally normative constructs when, according to the dominant mainstream standards that govern such bodies, it should not. For example, if a male body is considered to be performing a high level of femininity, this supposed incoherence between

84 S Ahmed *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006) at 25.
85 Interview with Cassie 2019.

> the male body and its gender performance may make this individual unintelligible. The actual femininity itself is not unintelligible, instead, what is perceived as less intelligible is the relation of this gender performance to the specific body subsuming this performance.[86]

In the case of pregnancy described by Cassie though, there would be nothing usual about a female body carrying a pregnancy. However, as Coy-Dibley goes further to explain, the repetitive performance of those acts by an individual results in

> a set of behaviours, mannerisms and gender signifiers that generates an intelligibility whereby the individual becomes recognisable as someone who consistently undertakes those performances. Consequently intelligibility is not a static condition, but one in which there is potential for change …[87]

Consequently what would otherwise be a normative sight of a pregnant woman becomes an unintelligible one because a female body that consistently dresses and behaves in 'masculine' ways becomes understood as that and no longer as a normative female. A pregnancy would therefore render them unintelligible. Though Cassie is not what she describes as masculine she is still troubled as her desire to have children is complicated by a different set of reasons. Cassie shared the thoughts that had been preoccupying her mind in the few months before the interview,

> Actually I'm thinking of having a kid, not kids but just a kid. But then again it's also an issue because family expects you to have children when you get married to a man, so it's something that I'm constantly having challenges with and that's constantly affecting me. I want a kid but how do I get to a point where my mum understands, okay, she wants a kid and she can have a kid without [wanting] a male counterpart or without getting married.[88]

Cassie's reflections illustrate that as is the case with heterosexual women the desire to either have or not have children also exists among lesbian identifying women. According to Judith Halberstam the queer gaze reveals 'the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing.'[89] While accurate, Halberstam's theory however silently spotlights bodies that are marked by racial privilege and class privilege.[90] For the Black, lesbian

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86 I Coy-Dibley 'The "homofeminine" lesbian: An (un)intelligible identity?' (2016) 2 *Critical Studies* at 52.

87 As above.

88 Interview with Cassie 2019.

89 J Halberstam 'Queer temporality and postmodern geographies' in J Halberstam (ed) in *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives* (2010) at 2.

90 Delong (n 26) at 2.

identifying women in this study their queer or lesbian identity does not necessarily exclude them from the responsibilities or desires of family or raising children (whether or not they gave birth to those children). Some find themselves left with the responsibility of raising the children of deceased siblings, co-parenting a partner's children from previous relationships or actively seeking out children. Cassie's reflections complicate the categorisation of family, reproduction and childrearing as ideas that exist outside of same-sex intimacies. She also surfaces stereotypes about what masculine and feminine presenting lesbians can and cannot do according to the local same-sex subculture. For instance the idea that a masculine presenting woman cannot be pregnant. She talked about the burden of, 'the societal expectations and all, and there is the belief that there are some actions for lesbians, or ways to act as a lesbian.'[91]

While there are expectations about presentation by lesbian women at societal level there are additional dynamics about roles and ways of performing lesbian identities that surface in intimate relationships. The narrator stories illustrate performance at a societal level as well as in intimate partner relationships. A couple of the narrators employed strategies aimed at not making their homosexuality too visible. The public performance of heterosexuality came up repeatedly as a way to fit in, maintain peace with family and friends or to avoid violence which is consistent with theories of recognition/misrecognission, passing or covering discussed in earlier chapters. Of interest however are the subculture dynamics. Olivia describes being called 'butch' based on her appearance and being expected by her partners to play the role of a butch. As she attests, 'I took up the role that was given to me because I look a certain way and was therefore assumed to be the dominant one or the male in the relationship'.[92] While this may come across as a silly insight into lesbian culture in Zimbabwe it also articulates a contemporary existence of a heavily policed authentic lesbian identity based on various versions of masculinity.[93]

Mary similarly describes her own thought process when she was introduced to a community of lesbian women, 'I will go to the girlie looking girls, and I will date the masculine looking girls. That was my thinking. Years later, I laugh at my stupid self and I say, what were you thinking?' On reflecting on her experiences in these relationships and the toxic masculinities she encountered she reminds us of a long history of the privileging of masculinity in the development of dyke identities and the ways in which it falls short at accurately reflecting

91 Interview with Cassie 2019.
92 Interview with Olivia 2019.
93 Maltry & Tucker (n 78) at 90.

the contemporary plurality of lesbian identities, practices, and modes of existence.[94] While lesbian masculinity is privileged due to its status as politically subversive, lesbian femininity is seen as assimilation. Partly this comes from the reality that certain acts of violence are directed specifically at butches as they are visible or recognisable. Their social vulnerability to homophobic attack and violence is directly linked to their celebration and recognition within lesbian subculture.

It is evident in these experiences that in developing and maintaining romantic relationships individuals seek models of ways of being in relationship with each other and that often it is in looking around us or subconsciously absorbing what is around us that individuals get their sense of how to behave as well as what to expect from a partner. It is no surprise therefore that we witness lesbian couples that reproduce the relational dynamics of heterosexuality. I therefore engage in an analysis of performative femininity and masculinity.

Lesbian identity is considered a transgressive form of agency linked to unwelcome appropriation of traditionally masculine space which is often perceived as a threat to the hegemonic force of patriarchy. It 'is this threat to masculinity which requires rigorous disciplining of the lesbian body, constructed…as deviant femininity since it is read as mimicking men and masculinity.' [95] This understanding of lesbian is skewed towards masculinity and its performance which aligns with Cassie's assertions that it is masculinity in women that is read as lesbian.

For the narrators in this study there is a critical factor in their exploratory journeys. Their familial relations or familial obligations surface as heavily influential in the choices of living privately or publicly as lesbian. The fear of violence from the society rates lower than the fear of violence from family members and the impact on the family of one being known to be lesbian. Olivia's narrative is punctuated heavily with the voices and comments of relatives or neighbours and friends expressing fear of or condemning lesbians. While she desires lifelong partnership, she feels she is unable to offer this to her partner as she is unprepared to come out to her family.

In Olivia's account of selective disclosure of her sexual orientation she surfaces the experiences of many Zimbabwean lesbian identifying women who are caught not just in a desire to self-define, self-express or be accepted as who they are, but are also invested in

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94 As above.

95 B Boswell 'On miniskirts and hegemonic masculinity: The ideology of deviant feminine sexuality in anti-homosexuality and decency laws' in D Higginbotham & V Collis-Buthelezi (eds) *Contested intimacies: Sexuality, gender, and the law in Africa*) (2015) at 51.

protecting their families and loved ones from harm or shame that might be caused by their sexual orientation being known within the broader community or society. Marcia describes a cost benefit analysis in deciding whether or not to disclose her sexuality to family members. As she states,

> I'm just also trying to learn to factor in other people and their values. Like, as in other people that I love, so like for example, with my parents. In my mind I'm just like, 'we all know who they are. Will they have a sense of peace if I tell them? Or will their hair just fall out, because now they have to deal with it, and it's not like I am getting married, so I don't need them to come and bless me at the scene.

Marcia decides that it is not worth stressing her parents if there is no serious reason to tell them. In her case, if there is a woman she wants to marry and spend the rest of her life with, that would then warrant telling her parents. Outside of that she sees the cost of telling them as just too high, and unnecessarily so.

A real tension arises at the meeting point of individual rights and the social need and desire for community acceptance and belonging. What is unfortunate is that no leadership whether opposition or sitting in government has ever made real attempts to shift from the demonization and pathologizing of members of the LGBTQ+ community to an approach that recognises the human dignity of all citizens and seeks to protect it. Lesbian women remain vulnerable to gendered and sexualised violation yet they continue to resist and create communal spaces where they can exist without fear or judgment.

6.3 Ownership not just acceptance: their adaptive power

The homophobic statements made in the name of morality, as described in the stories of the narrators, are born out of different ontologies. Each of the statements entail a different understanding of the nature of the social threat posed by homosexuality depending on the ways each institution understands and interprets the causes and consequences of homosexuality. Within the religious domain the sexual sin that is homosexuality is punishable by god and those that see themselves as agents and believers often take it upon themselves to violently condemn it and those that practice it.

However, in the domain of the state the practice of homosexuality is associated with foreign and Western corruptions and thus in the name of preserving a national and cultural identity it must 'like a festering finger' be eliminated from the national body. Socially we witness the delineation of a more causation-based narrative of homosexuality. Outside of those

that see it as mortal sin, there are beliefs that one's same-sex sexuality is the product of ancestral connection to an ancestor of the opposite sex, or that it is the result of one seeking to escape traumatic experiences with the opposite sex resulting from past violation or rejection.

Subsequently we see within these institutions varied approaches of responding to persons with same-sex attractions and practices. While some seek out prayer and different forms of exorcism, others insist on finding them a 'good' mate of the opposite sex in the hope of making the individual realise that they are actually heterosexual. From the perspective of the State it is punishment through ejection from citizenship and criminalisation that dominate. Human rights discourse in Zimbabwe was packaged as neo-colonialist, un-African and inauthentic.[96]

Despite all of these interpretations or theories of causation lesbian women in Zimbabwe continue to identify as such, not just as acceptance of an identity they had no control over but one that they own as theirs. As Cassie states when describing her sexuality journey and where she finds herself at the time of the interview,

> I think now I'm in a good place with my sexuality. I feel like the most difficult moment was dealing with my family. And now that somehow they understand, I feel I'm in a good place.[97]

Marcia attests to the comfort and convenience of taking up a ready-made identity;

> And I think there is an appeal as well in ready-made identities that you can just take on, because then you instantly belong. It's already there, right. But I don't think we necessarily teach people to think about their identities or to think critically about their identities. Or even to think about who it is they want to be, right.

In addition to her explanation for how convenience is a significant reason for why individuals would take on a ready-made identity, Marcia goes further to assert that identity processes broadly, are not always deliberately and intentionally engaged with by individuals. That it is not always the case that people critically think about the identities they have and the meaning they hold for them. While this holds true, it is not without exception. As discussed earlier by Olivia when a particular identity is challenged or questioned it gains more meaning in one's life and is therefore more likely to be thought out by the individual. Mary's narrative

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96 J Alexander 'Zimbabwe since 1997: Land & the legacies of war.' in AR Raufu & L Whitfield (eds) *Turning points in African democracy* (2010) at 193.

97 Interview with Cassie 2019.

exemplifies this. In the beginning of her journey, she sought out the convenience of a ready-made identity within which to fit and was distressed when she could not find that. Over time she settled on a femme identity. It is only when she becomes frustrated with the fixedness of that identity within the subculture, the prejudices against femme lesbians as not being 'real' lesbians and so on that she begins to more deliberately think about who she is and who she wants to be. She then begins to craft her unique identity, figuring out for herself who she is, what her identity means to her and as well as her performance of this identity.

Despite alienation and victimisation within broader society, lesbian identifying women continue to exist in Zimbabwe. In their different ways they adopt strategies to negotiate their context and resist regulation illustrating remarkable narratives of adaptation. I have discussed how the women adapted to their sense of insecurity, rejection exclusion by state and broader society and the ways they negotiate the manifold threats they face.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has offered an account of the experiences of lesbian identifying women within a gendered and sexualised nation-state and the ways in which they navigate, negotiate and resist within it. Through an examination of the narratives shared I have shown how deeply politicised same-sex sexualities are within Zimbabwe and how homophobia has been strategically deployed by different groups to serve the patriarchal needs of nationalist, religious and cultural institutions.

Through its actions, the Zimbabwean government over the last three decades has revealed the power it wields, which has been thinly veiled behind appeals for sovereignty and a uniquely African identity. This is however contested by those that sit at the margins and those outside the nationalist frame of who is recognised as the Zimbabwean citizen, among these are women, the poor, youth and sexual minorities whose experiences of the state are often of militancy and violence. Political processes such as elections or the constitution making process reveal the fractures in the imagination of the Zimbabwean citizen, where the marginals of the society become pawns or mere collateral damage in the pursuit of power. The journeys do not track linear or sequential paths, if anything the experiences demonstrate a rather web-like form wherein one experience triggers the next but in unpredictable ways. For one individual being discriminated against leads to resistance, for another it is crippling and for another it appears to have no obvious impact or even a combination of all these responses which can surface at different moments.

What then might we learn from the lives and experiences of lesbian identifying women? Their narratives present a unique lens through which to view the gendered and sexualised nation-state and the connections to as well as convergence with the institutions of religion and culture. The experiences surfaced here reveal a range of processes such as identity formation which was discussed in depth in chapter four, the strategic invocation of patriotic history, the opportunistic deployment of political homophobia, the social rejection and concealment of same-sex sexualities, violence and demonization. The experiences of the narrators however, also allow us to see how the dominant forces of the state and the hegemonic power of heterosexuality can be negotiated, resisted and conformed to. This revelation illuminates the danger of ontologising heteronormativity and assuming that human experiences are inevitably moulded by tyrannical power relations.[98] If we choose to see heteronormativity as a changing and unstable power system, it becomes possible to see its power to limit and restrict lives but without wholly constraining or determining the capacity for action and agency. When we broaden the gaze we open up the possibilities of recognising what already exists in terms of productive systems of contestation. We see the forms of kinship and alternative family formations that are enabled by existence outside the frame of heterosexuality, wherein intimate and sustained bonds exist outside of blood relations.[99]

For the narrators who had connections to activist institutions engaged in challenging political homophobia and or in work to transform attitudes and behaviour in the socio-cultural realm, their language in moments communicated an apparent position of victimhood. However, they also articulated their claims to substantive citizenship through their involvement in processes such as the constitution making process or voting. These claims to substantive citizenship demonstrate that though some of the narrators work through international NGOs and receive support or services through them, they also do not see these services as adequate or sustainable and are therefore invested in transformation of the nation-state to make Zimbabwe the home they feel it should be for all citizens.

Finally this chapter has demonstrated the multiple layers involved in navigating and negotiating life as a lesbian identifying woman in Zimbabwe. It has made evident that an identity claim within a nationalist, gendered and sexualised context is not a simple matter. It is layered with risk of physical, mental and emotional trauma but also with the possibilities of the

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98 B Bakare-Yusuf 'Beyond determinism: The phenomenology of African female existence' (2003) 2 *Feminist Africa: Changing cultures* at 2.

99 T Morison (eds) *Queer Kinship: South African perspectives on the sexual politics of family-making and belonging* (2018) at 16.

exercise of agency and power in ways that are not just about accepting who one is but about ownership of that identity. It has provided insight into how lesbian identifying women acculturate within both LGBTQ+ subcultures and within mainstream society.

Thus, the importance of the assertions, stereotypes and beliefs of the government, religious and cultural communities about same-sex sexualities in Africa, lies less in their truthfulness than in their intensity, their pervasiveness and their reflection of a society willing to discard a portion of itself to preserve an imagined identity of itself. As Tamale protests, 'that society could vilify the harmless, private, victimless acts of consenting adults defies logic'.[100]

[100] Tamale (n 83) at 1.

7

Conclusion: Maybe home is somewhere I'm going

And if disruption only fractures and doesn't again create connection… it will lack the vital energy… to sustain its own taxing work.[1]

7. Introduction

In the contemporary annals of African sexualities, the lives and experiences of lesbian women have remained largely invisible in stark contrast to those of gay men. Without resorting to an exogenous definition of lesbian, the Zimbabwean experiences and meaning-making by lesbian-identifying women documented in this study exemplify what is true of all identities. That they are unstable, in constant flux and contested. As one of the narrators states the shared lesbian identification does not mean homogeneity as there are numerous other differences among lesbian-identifying women.[2] Identities are however politically useful and should not be done away with in the absence of an alternative.

This study has examined the gendered and sexualised politics of sexualities through the lens of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe. It engaged the broader regulations of sexuality and the formation and meaning-making of lesbian identity. It examined the deployment of political homophobia and patriotic history in the regulation of sexualities. Over the last three decades beginning in the 90s same-sex sexualities have been foregrounded and paradoxically invisibilised. In this study I have argued that using a phenomenological approach African sexualities can be reimagined and explored to generate more than just new data sets, but to provide new information and understanding that enables the 're-writing' and 're-righting' of our versions of our narratives in our own ways and for our own purposes.[3] I also argued that there is no unitary understanding of lesbian identity and that only those who identify as such can shed light on how they came to that identity and the meaning they make of it.

In this study an association made between homosexuality and the West is shown to be a justifiable one. Images of gay and lesbian couples are far more visible on television screens than in daily life on Zimbabwean streets. Since the tensions of the 90s and deployment of political homophobia the responses and challenges to the state came largely from the West. Additionally, the activism of the local organisation GALZ and other NGOs whose programmes

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1 J Ritchie & K Boardman Feminism in composition: Inclusion, mentonymy, and disruption' (1999) 50(4) *College Composition and Communication* at 602.

2 Interview with Mary 2019.

3 LT Smith *Decolonising methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (1999) at 28.

are largely internationally funded re-enforced the idea of homosexuality as a West driven agenda. In the absence of locally funded initiatives or the casual presence of gay men and lesbian women in local film, in theatre, sport and academia among other sectors, the falsity of homosexuality as Western would continue to prevail. The Zimbabwean experiences documented in this study reveal what is true of homosexuality across the continent, that attitudes and behaviour are the result of both social and political interests, colonial histories, racism, sexism and a global discourse.

This study by examining the lives and experiences of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe has made a case against the common assumption of a singular and universal 'lesbian identity' that is often asserted through authoritarian states and cultural discourses. It has been built around what Matebeni and Msibi assert, that 'in African contexts vulnerability, risk, loss, violence and suffering still overshadow pleasure and desire in relation to sexuality', and that though it is essential 'to highlight and advocate on these issues, often narratives of pleasure and desire disappear'.[4] This study thus makes efforts to share narratives that do not exclude such pain but also include the beauty and joy lesbian women find with each other and in communities of solidarity. It heeds literary scholar Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's warning of the dangers of a single story and her encouragement that 'when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.'[5]

I have argued that the narrators through the richness and depth of their stories depict ambiguities, tensions, contradictions and conformities in understanding lesbian identities. They demonstrate how hegemonic forces can and are continuously challenged and negotiated as well as the ways in which lesbian lives in themselves disrupt heterosexual hegemony.

This concluding chapter is separated into three parts that harmonise the study's main arguments and reflect on the original contribution that this work makes to scholarship. The first part synthesises the main arguments of the study and explains how they both challenge and support existing knowledge on same-sex sexualities in Africa. The second deals with the methodological approach of this study and its successes as well as limitations along with how it can be used in other studies to further expand the African sexualities archive. By turning to the findings of the study, the third part engages how the arguments put forward in this study can be used to develop a better understanding of female same-sex sexualities in Africa. I then

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[4] Z Matebeni & T Msibi 'Vocabularies of the Non-normative' (2015) 29(1) *Agenda* at 4.

[5] C Adichie 'The Danger of a Single Story – Transcript' (2009) *TED available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg&vl=en* (accessed 12 November 2020).

conclude with the practical implications of this study. As such, this conclusion traces a path from the empirical to the theoretical and to the practical.

7.1 A hostile context

The first question posed in this study was: *what are the historical and socio-political factors that account for state regulation of sexualities by the nationalist Zimbabwean state?* I developed my answer in the third chapter in which I mapped the histories of same-sex sexualities in Zimbabwe and the current context in which I argued that the contemporary Zimbabwean state/nationalist state was a major contributor in creating a hostile homophobic, context as part of its identity construction attempts. It was both i) a political tool around which popular support could be garnered by the ruling elite as well as ii) a symptom of the anxieties about national identity that was being constructed on the bodies of sexualised citizens.

Here I briefly consolidate my arguments from the third chapter after which I state what information or knowledge this analysis contributes to. The regulation of sexualities can be traced back to the 19th century colonial laws on sodomy. Subsequently, the new colonial state not only continued this regulation but expanded it through further regulation and the recruitment of culture and religion in the deployment of homophobia. Additionally, the gendered politics of the nationalist state surfaced attempts to regulate and control women's sexuality. Through this we begin to see in the post-independent state the imagination of 'the' Zimbabwean citizen, as being male and heterosexual. For example, there were periodic spates of arbitrary arrests of women for walking in the streets after dark, supposedly for loitering for the purposes of prostitution. Through such events we begin to see 'excesses of a strong state, itself in many ways a direct Rhodesian inheritance, and a particular interpretation of nationalism'.[6] As early as three and a half years after independence in 1983, thousands of women were temporarily detained in prison camps during a campaign to end prostitution in Zimbabwe. Under the colonial vagrancy Act of 1960, women and 'vagrant' men were picked up on streets, in hotels and cinemas, and even at home, and held until they presented either marriage certificates or proof of employment.[7] Failure of this screening process resulted in being sent to

[6] J Alexander, Jo McGregor & TO Ranger *Violence and memory: One hundred years in the dark forests" of Matabeleland* (2000) at 6.

[7] As detailed by RHF Austin & G Feltoe, 'Blitz on vagrants raises key issues of rule of law', *The Sunday Mail*, 11 December 1983, A vagrant included 'any beggar, any person wandering about and unable to show that he/she has employment or visible and sufficient means of subsistence'. The Act also defined a vagrant as 'any person who lives wholly or in part on the earnings of prostitution and other immoral acts and any person who is unable to show that he is living by honest means and has a settled way of honest living'. A vagrant also included 'any person who is idle or disorderedly'.

a rural 'resettlement camp.' In a letter to the press a woman that was detained during this process illustrates the anger and frustration of many other women at the realisation that national independence did not mean liberation for women.

> I am a respectable married woman, 32 years of age. I do not live in a vice area. I live quietly with my husband in Montagu Avenue near the shopping centre. On Friday [18 November 1983] at 9 pm I was leaving my cousin's flat with my younger sister aged 17 on my way home – five minutes away from where my husband was working on his books. We were rudely stopped by police in a van and questioned as follows: whom were we and what were our names and ages, where did we live and where were we going, did we work and if so where, and where did my husband work? The officer said my husband could follow me to the charge office because they didn't want prostitutes walking in the streets. The driver, an older man and more respectful, said 'Mother, we want you to go and grow food in TTL'. I was growing food and looking after my father's cattle when I was 15 years old and I don't need a man, police or not, to tell me what I must do. Is this the independence and freedom?[8]

Figure 4: Some of the women held at Mutare Rural police grounds, *The Manica Post*, 18 November 1983

These arrests were aimed at limiting women's movement and containing the migration of women from rural to urban space as the city of Salisbury was expanding. This analysis of the regulation of women is not making a case for Zimbabwean exceptionalism. Rather it situates these exercises within a broader context of the imposition of 'morality' as a key feature of nation building in some post independent African states. As Patricia McFadden points out,

[8] 'Is this what my brothers died for?', *The Sunday Mail*, Harare 27 November 1983.

'the manner through which African and white men colluded to keep African women outside the emerging urban spaces of the colonial town and city' demonstrates the gendered exclusion as well as 'othering' of African women.[9] Apart from the regulation of movement, the 1980's were also marked by the gendered politics of reproduction.[10] In 1981, nationalism, gender conflicts and drug safety converged to present the state with an opportunity to 'purify the national body' by banning the use of the contraceptive Depo-Provera.[11] Though there were major drug safety concerns over the use of this contraceptive the state preoccupation was not with women's safety but rather the fear that contraception offered women too much freedom and control over their bodies and fertility. Not long after this there was an outcry of yet another crisis, a blemish on the national claim to morality and unsurprisingly women were placed at its centre, baby dumping and infanticide. Masakure posits that in,

> claiming that baby dumping was a blemish to the nation, the editorial and in extension authorities were imagining and constructing women's bodies as 'national bodies, [and as] sites [of] national honour [that] can be established, threatened and defended.[12]

More recently, the experiences of the erotic dancer popularly known as Bev are also illustrative of this regulation of women's bodies and attempts to contain women's sexuality to the private domain. On several occasions Bev has been arrested on charges of breaching the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act by making contact with men during her dance and striptease performances.[13] The logics of regulation particularly of women and their sexuality accounts for the heavy-handedness in the control of women that we see being consolidated through cultural and religious doctrine within the nationalist state. The regulation of women's bodies and movement is part of both the broader gender struggle as well as an example of the post-independence efforts towards social engineering and the violent imposition of 'morality' as a

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9 P Mcfadden 'Becoming Postcolonial: African Women Changing the Meaning of Citizenship' (2005) 6(1) *Meridians* at 5.

10 This is discussed extensively in A Kaler *Running after pills: Politics, gender and contraception in colonial Zimbabwe* (2003).

11 A Kaler 'A threat to the nation and a threat to the men: the banning of depo-provera in Zimbabwe, 1981' (2007) 24(2) *Journal of Southern African Studies* at 347.

12 C Masakure '"We will make sure they are rehabilitated": Nation-building and social engineering in operation clean-up, Zimbabwe, 1983' (2016) 68(1) *South African Historical Journal* at 100.

13 The Censorship and Entertainments Control Act is an Act of Parliament in Zimbabwe Act No. 37 of 1967.

critical feature of the national-building process.[14] For a nation so strongly pivoted on the female body as the anchor of morality and national honour it is therefore not surprising that same-sex sexualities between women are seen not just as dishonouring the national body but as threatening its reproductive regeneration.

Through the practices of the state we witness new forms of governmentality and continuities in regulatory practices that connect the state to the body. In line with the state driven narrative that homosexuality is foreign and un-African the construction of homosexuality as abject is witnessed through state rhetoric. Women who resist and rebel against the Zimbabwean state's patriarchal authority are labelled deviants and seen as pollutants to the national body. Public acts of control of women's bodies such as arrests serve as a powerful regulatory tool and act of surveillance aimed at keeping other women in line. Despite gestures towards transforming the status of women in society and ensuring greater protection and equality through inheritance laws and the Domestic Violence Act, very little changed in relation to the policing of women's sexuality. For a nation so strongly pivoted on the female body as the anchor of morality and national honour it is therefore no surprise that same-sex sexualities amongst women are seen not just as dishonouring the national body but as threatening its reproductive regeneration. There is a dismissal of intimacies between women as meaningless and 'not real sex' due to phallic absence and secondly rage resulting from the fear that lesbianism means no reproduction.

In addition to the international attention on Zimbabwe following the exclusion of GALZ from the Book Fair, Zimbabwe was in the midst of a political-economic crisis. The country was experiencing the effects of a structural adjustment programme. It is for this reason that some were convinced that the homophobic statements made were merely intended to detract attention from the crisis the country was in. By surfacing and explaining the socio-political processes that contribute to the lived experiences of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe I shed light on the multiple ontologies of regulation of same-sex sexualities. More specifically I have illustrated how the prevailing realities result from a combination of a politics of detraction from the bigger economic and political issues and from attempts to construct an image of the Zimbabwean citizen based on nationalist ideas. This study can be read along numerous other works that reflect both these realities.[15] Through surfacing the experiences of lesbian women I

[14] Masakure (n 12) at 102.

[15] Y Youde 'Patriotic history and anti-LGBT rhetoric in Zimbabwean politics' (2017) 51 *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 61-79; T Ranger 'Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the NationThe

make a novel contribution to the sexuality discourse of Zimbabwe where same sex sexualities of women remain largely invisible. I also illuminate the connection between regulation of female bodies and their exclusion from the imagination of the Zimbabwean citizenship. The analysis additionally demonstrated how factors such as culture and religion, familial loyalties, rejection and violence all act to re-enforce compulsory heterosexuality, yet lesbian women continue to subvert and resist.

In existing Zimbabwean literature lesbian identifying women are merely a speck, a tiny blemish mentioned in passing by nationalist elites. However, in this study I argue that their narratives have greater significance. They are an illustration of how African sexualities have been defined exogenously and through a Western lens that has no recognition of the peculiarities of the different African contexts. In a broader sense, I argue that the study of female sexuality in revealing of the gendered and sexualised nature of states and that the forceful regulation of women's bodies it strongly linked to the preservation of power by the elites in masculinised states.

7.2 'I am a lesbian'

The second question posed in this study was: *how do lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe come to that identity?* In exploring this question, I combined data from the women's narratives of how they came to the identity with observations and information gathered from informal conversations with other lesbian identifying women in Harare. I argued that there is no singular pathway for coming to a lesbian identity. Coming to the identity appeared to be the culmination of a variety of small encounters and moments of recognition, resonance, defiance and subversion. While the nationalist state blames the West for the presence of homosexuality in Africa it was also evident that the rejection of people who practice same-sex sexualities by the state was a contributor to the identity formation process as it created the need amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer identified individuals to collectively resist and coalescing around identities becomes a part of that process.

The normativity of heterosexuality in the Zimbabwean society means that lesbian identifying women have to contend with developing an identity that is out of place in their

Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe' (2004) 30(2) *Journal of Southern African Studies* 215–234; MJ Bosia & M Weiss 'Political Homophobia in Comparative Perspective' in ML Weiss & MJ Bosia *Global Homophobia: States, Movements, and the Politics of Oppression* (eds) (2013).

society.[16] That identity development process can be a lifelong one and changes in identities within an individual can continue to take place across time.[17]

The premise of this study has been the disruption of the idea that lesbian is a Western identity that is being mimicked in Africa. While I concede that the language of lesbian is not indigenous to the cultures or languages on the African continent, I argue that lesbian does not refer to a singular idea and takes on various meanings and is lived in diverse ways that are unique to context. As such lesbian identities take on localised meanings based on histories and the cultures in which the women exist. By highlighting the stories of how the women came to lesbian identities as well as how they live those identities, I have sought to demonstrate their agency in the identity formation process either despite or because of the added impact of environmental influences. The information presented in this study illustrates the bold and subversive acts of the women as they come to lesbian identities but there was also an overwhelming articulation of the role of fear, love and desire for preservation of relationships and the ways these nuanced the journeys to self-identification.

The narrators' experiences made clear that the international community could condemn the state for repressing same-sex sexualities and the nationalist state could blame the West for introducing same-sex sexualities but at the core of these acts lies political strategy and interests that have little to do with the individual lives of lesbian women. The lives of lesbian women in their dailiness are supported by solidarity and community building and challenged by institutional discrimination and family rejection. The contemporary formation of lesbian identity is informed by both the affirmation and rejection of the lesbian identity.

To write about lesbian identifying women in a context such as Zimbabwe with its history of homophobic rhetoric by political leaders takes some degree of calculation. Bringing lesbian women into view interrupts the illusionary silence around female same-sex sexualities. Illusionary in that though lesbian women and their lives do not feature in daily conversation their existence is still known, attempts to silence and repress exist and what would be normal freedoms of movement, association and privacy do not quite apply in the same ways. I had to carefully consider whether this visibilising act creates risk and threat to the lives of lesbian women in Zimbabwe or whether the falsity of silence in itself poses a greater threat. The very existence of this text shows the choice I made.

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[16] DF Morrow & L Messinger in DF Morrow & L Messinger (eds) *Sexual orientation and gender expression in social work practice: Working with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people* (2006) at 85.

[17] CW Johnson 'Living the game of hide and seek: Leisure in the lives of gay and lesbian young adults' (2000) 24(3-4) *Leisure* at 258.

The identity formation process is deeply layered. Where lesbian identity is perceived by society the related shame and disgrace percolates inwards from there into the family of the woman or girl. This movement shows the inherently ambiguous nature of familial space as a social site. In one instance it is supposed to be the space for nurturing and supporting individuals right from childhood into their independence however it must do this in line with social norms whether or not they are counter or harmful to the individuals own choices and desires.[18]

Heteronormativity, compulsory heterosexuality and the force of patriarchy all reaffirm the complicity between the public and private. Through the actions of re-locating social shame into the intimate space of home family members assume the roles of private monitors, regulators even disciplinarians of sexual deviance.[19] It is the role of the family to restrict and shame an individual into compliance with social norms. Shame provides 'the conceptual link necessary to understand the relation between queer identity and queer performativity.'[20] It is less about weeding same-sex desires out of an individual and more about containing them through repression.

An unperformed identity does not pose a social threat if the family has done its job well enough to contain the identity. However, where the family fails and the deviance spills over into public space through performative display of 'sexual deviance' in whatever form, then social regulation and discipline through other institutions such as the state, schools and religious institutions come in. This stepping in is a message to the family, declaring its failure as the first site of regulation and surveillance and is also a message to other families to play their role or else. The social response point to a belief that through adequate regulatory measures in childhood and early adulthood the lesbian identity formation process can be interrupted and that failing that, even once formed its exercise or performance can still be curbed and all will be well.

The ability of lesbian women to come to lesbian identities despite the regulation and violence that often comes with it is testament to the value and meaning of the identification to them. There is something that is lost by assuming this identity, but it is evident that there is also something that is gained. Something powerful enough to challenge the hegemonic force of compulsory heterosexuality.

7.3 The patriarchal grip

The third question posed was: *how does patriarchy operate through nationalist, religious and cultural discourse in regulating sexualities?* As this study illustrates the dominant narratives

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18 AL Mtenje 'Contemporary fictional representations of sexualities from authoritarian African contexts' PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2016 at 238.

19 Mtenje (n 18) at 238.

20 D Halperin & V Traub *Gay shame* (2009) at 6.

of nationalism, religion and culture are scripted against a patriarchal backdrop. I argue that the masculinised nature of the nationalist state is built on patriarchal ideas of what power and strength mean. Equally the ways in which religion and culture are invoked in the regulation of sexualities is rooted in patriarchal ideas of the role and place of women and their sexualities. The forces of religion, culture and nationalism (where nationalism largely manifests through law and rhetoric of the nationalist elites) all converge on the common ground of patriarchy, in their engagement with African sexualities.[21]

The mere definition of patriarchy as a system of male dominance obscures the complex factors that coalesce to create and sustain the patriarchal system.[22] Joane Nagel in her work presents a challenge that directs us to examine the link between gender and nationalism not just as space that is devoid of women but space that is fundamentally gendered in its very construction.[23] Feminist scholars who have tried to offset the omission of women have focused on two strategies, profiling women's participation and leadership in politics and movements and revealing the processes through which women have been marginalised and excluded from political organisations, movements and decision making.

Nagel contends that the growing feminist work aimed at adding women and women's voices to citizenship and nationalist discourse though helpful in visibilising women's hands in the making of the nation state, actually serves to mask the true character of the projects of nationalism, politics, democracy as masculinist projects about masculinist institutions and masculine processes and activities.[24] Nagel is clear that in asserting the masculinised nature of these domains the goal is 'not to indict men for dominating national or international arenas, though they surely do' neither is it to dismiss the contributions of women that have already been limited by historical gender relations.[25] Rather her interest is in showing how the scripts within which the roles of political leadership and activism are embedded are written by men, for men and about men.[26] Women find themselves on the periphery as supporting actors and

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21 S Tamale 'Exploring the contours of African sexualities: Religion, law and power' (2014) 9(1) *African Human Rights Law Journal* at 151.

22 Patriarchy literally means rule of the fathers or the father principle and is generally understood to mean a society in which power is held by males or by elite males and where power is passed from father to son. See Biaggi C (ed.) (2005) The Rule of Mars: Readings on the Origins, History and Impact of Patriarchy. Manchester, CT: Knowledge, Ideas, and Trends. Here Biaggi gathers together a variety of definitions, theories, and hypotheses written by spiritual feminist scholars and others. Also see Lerner G (1986) The Creation of patriarchy.

23 J Nagel 'Masculinity and nationalism: gender and sexuality in the making of nations' (1998) 21(2) *Ethnic and Racial Studies* at 243.

24 C Pateman *The disorder of women: Democracy, feminism and political theory* (1989) at 33; R Connell *Masculinities* (1995) at 263.

25 Nagel (n 23) at 244.

26 Nagel (n 23) at 243.

acknowledging this allows for a more critical understanding of contemporary national and global politics.

I explored the ways in which organised religion including individual spiritual belief, culture and nationalist discourse shape African sexualities and particularly the lives of the lesbian-identifying women in this study. It unveiled some of the ways in which religious norms and values about same-sex sexualities are deeply institutionalised and how individuals come to accept these ideas as governing rules of their sexuality. Most importantly however through the narrators' journeys we gained insight into the ways these women resisted this regulation but also the price paid for their subversion. The experiences of Marcia and Cassie in particular reveal the intersection between sexuality and religion in African sexualities and the complexity created by this connection. The hand of patriarchy is seen in Cassie's experience of being rejected by the family because her sexuality is seen as the threat to the family unit and how her father mellowed towards her when she dated a woman with a child as it occurred to him that though his daughter was lesbian-identifying, she could still have children.

Through this work, I have immersed myself in stories of how lesbian-identifying women are silenced, invisibilised, forced into hiding, by virtue of their same-sex sexualities. I have demonstrated how a stigmatized and vilified identity touches on almost every aspect of the social and political life which points us to the intricate linkages between nationalism, gender, sexuality, religion, culture, social relations and individual bodies.

7.4 Gendered and sexualised experiences

The fourth and final question posed was: *what are the gendered and sexualised experiences of navigating and resisting regulation by lesbian women?* I developed the answer to this question in the last chapter, in which I analysed the stories of the narrators and revealed both the gendered and sexualized nuances of their experiences. The ways these converged to produce their realities but also the ways in which resistance was directed at both the forces of gender and sexuality simultaneously. The journeys of navigation and resistance were often lengthy and convoluted, they were shaped by current as well as historical ideas, realities, decisions and non-decisions but were overly determined by socio-cultural and political context though inflected by the individual narrator's character. The processes of navigation and resistance lie at the intersection of three phenomena; i) political homophobia and the ways in which it has been mobilized over the years to limit rights of those that fall outside of heterosexuality ii) global LGBTQ+ trends and influences and the ways in which information and homosexual subcultural

patterns and ideas have continued to spread and be adapted across the globe and finally iii) religious and socio-cultural patterns and the ways these influence ideas of self, relationships and sense of community and belonging.

In chapters three and four I discussed how the international community framed the situation of LGBTQ+ persons in Zimbabwe as a human rights crisis. The global community made pleas for Zimbabwe to observe and respect the human rights of LGBTQ+ persons. Some groups combined these human rights concerns with political allegations that pointed to human rights violations as being a marker of the failure of African states and African leadership. Such pronouncements placed LGBTQ+ persons in a precarious position, one in which the assertion and expression of their sexuality was tied to anti-nationalism and an endorsement of the Western position of failed African states and leadership. This created a tension for narrators like Marcia who wish to live out their sexuality freely but also defend the sovereignty of Zimbabwe from international interference.

For all the narrators, the deployment of political homophobia triggered an anger at a government that sought to exclude them from citizenship. What has been illustrated in this study is that this rage though instrumental in the individual lives of lesbian women in cementing the lesbian identity, the violent force with which LGBTQ+ activists, groups or individuals have been treated by the state has resulted in a level of collective impotence, at least in the public domain. Instead, apart from the media statements published at significant moments by GALZ, the communities exist in quieter ways, creating spaces where they can exist and even support each other away from the gaze of a violent state.

In the interviews with the narrators, three themes recurred though articulated in different ways. At various moments all the narrators expressed anger or frustration with a state that rejected them and wished to dispose of them (narratives of disposability); they also describe the ways they were victimized through the state or other institutions such as schools (narratives of victimhood); and finally they described the courageous ways in which they navigated daily life despite among other things, the regulation, discrimination, stigma and rejection they faced and managed to build community and solidarity with others, have loving relationships and ‘live’ not just survive (narratives of adaptation).

For two of the narrators Ray and Cassie, both of whom are referenced often in this thesis, their experiences of arrest have deeply scarred them. Both women are starkly aware that their sexuality is a weapon that can be wielded against them by the state at any time and put an end to the exercise of those limited social freedoms that they are able to exercise despite

regulation. It is not the act of arrest that is most haunting but the threat of its imminence. Moments of raids at workshops or GALZ offices serve as a reminder of the margins that LGBTQ+ persons exist within Zimbabwe. They serve as markers of the realities of abjection, disposability and exclusion.

At the same time, the remaining narrators identified the main challenges in their lives as existing around family, community, educational or religious institutions. The narratives shared in chapter four make explicit that for the non-activist lesbian identifying women, though the threat of arrest exists, their daily experiences are not built around the state and its regulatory practices. Despite this, the focus of activist organisations remains on health service provision and human rights discourse around decriminalisation of homosexuality. A disconnect persists between the lives, experiences and daily needs of lesbian identifying in Zimbabwe and what organisations that are meant to serve them are providing. For Marcia for instance whose narrative is summarized in chapter four, the main issues she has had to contend with are her religion and family. While for Olivia it is her relationships with her mother and sister that are troubling, and both these relationships are heavily influenced by the religious beliefs of the mother and sister. Olivia's familial relationships are built around fear much like those of the woman mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, whose story Gertrude Pswarayi did not wish to edit. As she states,

> although my friends, I mean my true friends are aware of my sexuality, I am still afraid that my family will find out one day and reject me. The fear is always there as I listen to comments made about homosexuality at home and in public places.[27]

The expectations of marriage and children persist for all the narrators, except for Mary who already has children and at the age of fifty, no one talks to about marriage to her anymore.

7.5 The phenomenological adventure

This study has revealed that answers to how lesbian identifying women come to that identity and how they navigate it are found not by examining experience alone but by analysing the compound effect of the processes of socialisation taking place during childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. To comprehend how lesbian women came to these identities despite the

[27] G Pswarayi 'Living in fear: a lesbian in Zimbabwe shares her story *World Focus* available at https://worldfocus.org/blog/2010/03/03/living-in-fear-a-lesbian-in-zimbabwe-shares-her-story/9930/ (accessed 3 October 2020).

hegemonic force of heterosexuality, I first had to understand their dispositions and lived experiences. As was noted by Durkheim, 'In each one of us, in differing degrees, is contained the person we were yesterday, and indeed in the nature of things it is even true that our past personae predominate, since the present is necessarily insignificant when compared with the long period of the past because of which we have emerged in the form we have today.'[28] The narratives of the women give us a clearer indication of who they are and how they came to that identity than their mere identification with a label or category. In the phenomenological approach employed in this study we acquire new insights based on the reflections of the narrators. It however became quickly evident that Bourdieu's habitus which describes who you are today based on your upbringing and the people and situations that have influenced you while growing up, adds further clarity in the interpretation of the experiences shared by the narrators.

The value of adding a habitus-driven approach to the interpretive layer of this study was that it enabled a connection between personal histories and present-day social contexts. Rather than seeing the narrators as individuals suspended in a single context within a single time frame the ethnography of the habitus compelled me to view them more broadly as both agents and inheritors of a specific social history and as being located and influenced by both a local and global context. In this process it became evident how the social order reproduces itself through everyday microlevel mechanisms as well as how resistance emerges against both overt and covert straightening devices.

Through the combination of phenomenology, African feminism and the concept of habitus during the fieldwork it was possible to reconstruct the logic of lesbian identification on its own terms. Instead of reducing the narrators to products of a global LGBTQ+ discourse who supposedly assumed a foreign identification it was possible to reveal them to be active participants in their identity formation whose ideas and choices were impacted by history and context.

As indicated at the outset of this study, attempts at understanding African sexualities have been plagued by Western framings and approaches to both research and the understanding of 'Africanness'. In assuming that individuals that practice non-normative sexualities go through linear and sequential stages in the identity development journey most academics inaccurately assumed a homogeneity among these individuals. I hope that I have demonstrated

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[28] É Durkheim *The evolution of educational thought: Lectures on the formation and development of secondary education in France* (1977) at 11.

how individual and unique the identity formation journey is and how despite the extreme and in some cases violent force of compulsory heterosexuality individuals still come to queer identities. I attempted through a phenomenological approach to centralise the practical experiences and ideas of the narrators along with the meanings they made of these realities and placed it above the analytical logic of feminism, postcolonialism, poststructuralism that I brought in my interpretation of the knowledges gathered. I carried the contradiction and made constant attempts at balancing the words and meanings ascribed by the narrators with the theoretical interpretations I made.

In this process I conceded that however rich the descriptions of the narrators, they generate only a partial and somewhat static image of the lived experience. Static in that it is coloured by the moment in which it is told and by the language available to the narrator in the time of sharing. At the same time the interpreter is compelled to sit in this static moment and put into words that which was lived and experienced beyond what the English and academic languages can communicate. As Desmond … states;

> Like the curious but clumsy child who can explore the shapes and colours of a butterfly only after rendering it flightless by touching its wings, the ethnographer who analyses practical logic can do so only by imposing on it a theoretical logic that simultaneously acts as its clarifier and its solvent.[29]

Attempts to overcome this are evident in the frequent use of the words of the narrators. Alongside this, a discussion of the theoretical resources employed in the interpretation process are delineated to enable the reader to follow the logic employed and decide for themselves where they agree and disagree with that logic. This way there is no betrayal in the commitment to both the phenomenon at hand and to the interpretations made from it. Even with the highlighted limitations the promises of Heidegger's double hermeneutics are delivered in this study through the prioritisation of three perspectives: that of those living through the experience and that of the researcher who has taken interest in the phenomenon, then additionally through the salience of context and situatedness. It is the hope that through the discussion about this study it is evident that hermeneutic phenomenology was ideal for the purposes of this study because it creates an opportunity for the narratives of lesbian identifying women in Zimbabwe to be told in our own ways and for our own purposes.

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[29] M Desmond *On the Fireline: Living and Dying with Wildland Firefighters* (2007) at 270.

By working with an African feminist lens, it was possible to uncover how the gendered and sexualised nature of the Zimbabwean society set the tone of regulation of women's bodies and sexuality. Using a phenomenological approach however I was able to break away from existing accounts of regulation and demonstrate that despite regulatory forces, lesbian women orient or gravitate towards same-sex attractions not because of some pathology of spiritual possession but because the force of their attractions can be stronger than the hegemonic forces of compulsory heterosexuality. A lesbian identity offers an outlet for same-sex desire and attraction by offering a culture within which such attraction is confirmed and affirmed. A culture that stands in stark contrast to the compulsory heterosexuality of its surroundings. For some lesbian identifying women, such identification and the living out of their sexuality is a bold leap into the unknown while for others it is an affirmation of who they are and represents a more casual stepping into self.

In tracing the transformation from a heterosexual worldview to an individual's same-sex orientation it became possible to illustrate how lesbian identification begins long before the woman calls herself such and is instead the result of an accumulation of multiple queer events and experiences. Childhood experiences of playing house and performing roles across genders served as an early disruption of the strict gender binaries of the society.

The benefit of combining theories of phenomenology and feminism is that it enabled the exposition of various categories of lesbian identifying women. It illustrated the different journeys to that identity, varied ways of living out the identities and diverse meanings made of experiences related to lesbian identity. It avoids the assigning of a single master logic for how one comes to self-identify as lesbian and recognises context-dependent factors as well as how an individual's positionality influences their choices. It opens possibilities for how gender and sexuality can be understood in Africa as ways of reclaiming identities in the continent. This study has demonstrated that if we wish to comprehend the experiences of lesbian identifying women, we must turn to the experiences themselves and then dissect and interpret the experiences.

7.6 Beyond this study

Are other categories of people subject to the same regulation as same-sex practicing individuals? Is the subversion of the heteronorm and the rejection of the status quo unique to LGBTQ+ identifying persons or is it identifiable in other groups that sit outside heteronormativity? The LGBTQ+ category is distinguishable from other regulated groups in

that; it has stirred the most intense, sustained and often misleading accounts of sexual histories in Africa. While sex work, extramarital sex, reproduction outside wedlock are frowned upon, their historical existence has not warranted sustained debate (sex work is an exception) and we do not see constant efforts to write these issues out of history. That said, I argue that it is this extreme rejection that builds resistance and drives individuals to form family or communities within which they seek safety, acceptance and support. When thinking about same-sex sexualities it is not uncommon to imagine them as instrumental in the disruption of the normative, however disruption alone can be temporary and as mentioned by Nedra Reynolds amongst others, it is fairly simple for disrupters to be pushed aside, to be ignored and marginalised once again. [30] It is not my assertion that disruption is futile however it is that the activism around same-sex sexuality cannot merely be about disruption but should be built on more meaningful ways of either asserting agency or shifting attitudes.

Through listening to, reflecting on and writing the narratives documented in this thesis, I hope I have provided a perspective on a category of people that is largely invisibilised and discriminated against. It appears from this work that, categories of people that are discriminated against, stigmatised and neglected from citizenship are driven to resistance and towards the assertion of their collective power. For other groups of people that are selectively included and excluded from citizenship in different moments, there is a greater propensity to assimilate based on their brief experiences of the privileges of inclusion. A critique of this analysis might be that it captures only the experiences of lesbian women that resist. However, the logic in this study is that the act of self-identifying as lesbian whether privately or publicly is in itself an act of resistance.

Stories such as those of the lesbian women in this study deserve attention, not only for showing us a more holistic image of the people of Zimbabwe and their history but also for their contribution to the growing archive on African sexualities being generated by African scholars across the continent.[31] The significance of this study is also held in that it demonstrates the voices of those who are not writing history. History is written by dominant culture such that in order to bring other voices there is necessity to interrupt discourse. Through the processes of listening to, reflecting on, compiling and interpreting the narratives of the women in this study, it is my hope that I have offered insight into the lives of a category of people that has been

30 N Reynolds 'Interrupting Our Way to Agency: Feminist Cultural Studies and Composition' in S Jaratt & L Worsham (eds) *Feminism and composition studies: In other words* (1998) at 73.

31 S Tamale *African sexualities: A reader* (2011); H Abbas & S Ekine *Queer African reader* (2013); Z Matebeni *Reclaiming Afrikan : Queer perspectives on sexual and gender identities* (2014).

largely invisibilised. I immersed myself into stories of pain, suffering, rejection, denial but also resistance, subversion, strength and agency. Additionally, I have shown how oppression and repression can turn a fraction of one's identity into a central feature of one's life and therefore how identities become deeply political.

While engaging with the narrators, I became very aware in moments, of how closely the events being described were to my own experiences or those of other people close to me. The conversations enabled me to understand a great deal about my own experiences but more importantly the theoretical underpinnings of those experiences. It presented a new way of seeing, of re-inhabiting the world in a sense. Earlier in this thesis I discussed my positionality in this study and the ways it was enabling but also potentially a challenge in other instances. Writing about experiences which were shared with such depth and emotion reminded me of the necessity of this project. It was uncomfortable yet reassuring to witness women with such varied experiences who navigate and negotiate their identities in markedly different yet powerful ways. Writing about narrators' experiences in the reflective and considered manner I attempted, certainly does not make me an expert on the lives and experiences of lesbian women. If anything, it is revealing of the impossibility of such a task given the diversity and complexity of individuals, instead I realised that in talking to a person, one can only ever get a glimpse into their life and world. Equally, I am uncertain how well I captured the experiences of the narrators given the limitations of what words on paper can express in matters of such depth.

Much like any other study this research has its limitations. By capturing the experiences of lesbian 'identifying' women the study is inherently retrospective as the narrators share their experiences of how they came to an identity they now hold. The experiences shared of different events are inevitably coloured by present realities and might not necessarily be seen for what they actually were. They are constructed with the benefit of hindsight. Thus, the stories gathered during this study can easily be reflections of what the narrators wish to tell and not necessarily what is or what was. There may be forgiveness and peace now over a situation that was painful and heart-breaking at the time it occurred. There were moments captured during the interview process where the narrators offered contradictory accounts for one event at different times during the interview process. For instance, where in one moment a narrator says they did not care about an event and then later describe feeling, hurt or angry about that same event. In such instances I asked the narrators to clarify which feeling they held to be true but noted these as instances where narrators describe their experiences based on how they wanted me to perceive those situations in the moment they were being related.

My unique perspective in this study was facilitated by both my proximity to the study group as insider to the category of 'lesbian identifying women' and my analytical distance from them, not just as researcher but as outsider to the very personal and intimate lives of the narrators. Other aspects of lesbian identity and life have not appeared in this study such as religious pluralism, intimate partner violence, toxic masculinity, eroticism and pleasure. Stigma and respectability likely mean that the narrators did not open up about uncomfortable subjects in which they might feel implicated. The erotic in particular is a subject many shy away from in general. For lesbian identifying women, whose lives have been perceived through the eyes of who they sexually desire it is unsurprising that there may also be a desire to talk about oneself completely outside this frame. If everything about same-sex sexualities is about this deviant sexuality, even the curiosity of some about how women's sex happens then there is truly no surprise in lesbian identifying women wanting to avoid this subject in certain spaces and conversations.

Similarly, toxic masculinities and intimate partner violence are two other subjects that would be shrouded in silence. For people that have been invisibilised and vilified, to show that violence can and does exist in their relationships is to sell out against the movement. It is perceived as an act that attracts additional negative attention and reinforces the idea of criminality that already surrounds people that practice non-normative sexualities. This study does not seek make saints out of lesbian women and sanctify their relationship, nor is it vilify. It is merely to illustrate their existence and their humanity.

Finally, with regard to religious pluralism despite the dominance of Christianity in Zimbabwe there is evident of diverse belief systems. If the trends in South Africa of African traditional religion and 'sangomahood' can be used as reference, one could observe a growing link between these practices and lesbian identity. For some, as pointed out earlier it provides a causation argument for same-sex desires. If one is medium for an ancestor of the opposite sex then their same-sex desires can be explained that way. For others it is that women called to spirituality cannot and should not be tainted by sex with men and therefore same-sex relations preserve this spiritual integrity. As stated clearly at the beginning of this study, this thesis did not set out to explore causation theories, here I just seek to highlight what might have been missing from the narratives of the women not because it does not exist but because for whatever reason the narrators did not bring it up. I argue that it is respectability politics that created some of those separations, however it is also possible that the narrators did not see it as important or significant to their journey. Of the five women interviewed, I was aware of the African

traditional religious beliefs and practices of one narrator but because she did not mention it in her narrative it did not form part of the study.

Though this study visibilised a group of lesbian women in their diversity and demonstrated the gendered and sexualised nature of the state along with the roles of culture and religion in regulating women's sexuality, the sample size was small. Therefore, further research with larger sample sizes (though not too large in order to maintain analytical rigour) would be even more illuminating. Additionally, the sample would benefit from geographical diversification beyond the Harare metropolitan area as this study was limited in geographical scope.

As a final thought, the journey of this study has shown pain, rejection and political manipulation however it has also demonstrated agency and self-determination despite hegemonic forces. Where some see disposability and victimhood the study has revealed the existence of subversion, solidarity, adaptation and innovation amongst a demonised and pathologized category of people. The hegemonic force of compulsory heterosexuality is not all consuming. The African continent has dwelt long enough on histories and origins of same-sex sexualities, it is time to look forward at what life on a continent of diverse people, culture and sexualities should look like. Perhaps it is time to imagine the kind of societies that might be possible knowing all that we know now and appreciating that there is plenty more to know and learn if we open ourselves to it. After all, as Warsan Shire states, 'at the end of the day, it isn't where I came from. Maybe home is somewhere I'm going and never have been before.'

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical approval

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
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RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

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RUDO CHIGUDU
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0002

7 December 2018

Dear Rudo,

ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

The Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Law at the University of Pretoria has reviewed your application for ethics clearance entitled **" A phenomenological study of the gendered and sexualised politics of a lesbian identity in contemporary Zimbabwe"** and granted ethics approval for your project.

Please note that you need to keep to the protocol you were granted approval on – should your study procedures be amended in due course, you will need to submit the amended version to us.

We wish you success in your research project.

Yours faithfully

(PROF) A G NIENABER
CHAIR: RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (FACULTY OF LAW)

Appendix B: Informed Consent

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND INFORMED CONSENT:

Dear Participant

Title of project: A phenomenological study of the gendered and sexualised politics of a lesbian identity in contemporary Zimbabwe

Introduction

You are invited to volunteer for a research study. This information leaflet is to help you decide if you would like to participate. Before you agree to take part in this study you should fully understand what is involved. If you have any questions, which are not fully explained in this leaflet, do not hesitate to ask the researcher. You should not agree to take part unless you are completely happy about all the procedures involved.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study seeks to surface the power dynamics operating in the lives of lesbian identifying women through the institutions of State and culture. It attempts to understand the ways in which gender and sexuality are constructed in Zimbabwe and how this construction affects the lives of lesbian identifying women. In this process this study allows the stories of lesbian to be told and their experiences to be understood in their own right and not in relation to male sexuality. It also contributes to literature on African sexualities as told by African lesbians in their own ways and for their own purposes.

How will the study be conducted?

The study is an ethnographic one and will be conducted using a phenomenological approach which is a grounded theory approach that involves interviewees in the project as co-researchers and not just subjects. The study will take three approaches. The first is one on one interviews with participants as a means to understand their experiences as well as their interpretations of those experiences. The second element involves focus group discussion or informal group discussions as a means to understand how identities and experiences are understood and

interpreted in community and response to others. The final approach consists of reviewing literature on state regulation of homosexuality by examining parliamentary debate reports and state media. Participants will be recruited initially through existing contacts with known lesbian identifying women and snowball sampling will aid further recruitment. I will use informed consent, voluntary participation, right to withdrawal, anonymity ethical guidelines during research process.

What is the duration of the study?

Six Months

Has the study received ethical approval?

This research protocol was submitted to the Faculty of Law Research Ethics Committee, University of Pretoria, and written approval has been granted by the Committee. The study has been structured in accordance with ethical considerations such as the protection of the identity of all participants.

What are my rights as a research participant in this study?

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate or stop at any time without stating any reason. The investigator retains the right to withdraw you from the study if considered to be in your best interest.

May any of the research procedures result in any discomfort?

Discussion of issues of sexuality may create some discomfort despite not being of a sexually explicit nature. The questions asked are intended to document experiences of a lesbian identity and interactions with institutions of power such as the State and cultural structures and this may be uncomfortable if such experiences evoke difficult emotions. Participants are encouraged to talk only about what they are comfortable to talk about and can stop the interview at any point should they wish to do so.

What are the benefits involved in the study?

The study creates an opportunity for lesbian women's voices to be the basis of theorising their lives. It allows them to be the centre of their narratives and experiences and for their lives to be viewed as valid in their own right as opposed to their marginal involvement and recognition in male-centred homosexuality discourse. This study allows the recognition of female sexuality in its own right. It is also my hope that this study will generate information that can be utilised to improve representations and understandings of lesbian women in Zimbabwe.

Are there any restrictions concerning my participation in this study?

The study is focused only on lesbian identifying women as this identification is a key part of the study.

Source of additional information

The study will be conducted by way of interviews, informal group discussions and observations by Rudo Chigudu. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact her. The telephone number is +263 773588234, through which you can reach her or another authorised person.

Confidentiality

All information obtained during the course of this research is strictly confidential. Data that may be reported in law or scientific journals will not include any information which identifies you as a participant in this study. Data / information will be published anonymously. No information will be disclosed to any third party without your written permission.

INFORMED CONSENT CLAUSE

I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher Rudo Chigudu about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of the proposed research. I have also received, read and understood the above written information (informed consent) regarding the study.

I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding sex, age, marital status etc (state) of myself will be anonymously processed into the research report. (See in particular the definition of "personal information" in the Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000.)

I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

I, _____ herewith confirm that the above participant has been informed fully about the nature and scope of the above study.

Investigator's name: _____

Investigator's signature: _____

Witness's name: _____

Witness's signature: _____

Date: _____

References

Primary Sources: Interviews

Participant	Brief background	Age	Interview date
Olivia	Olivia is a middle class woman. She grew up in a violent home, her parents eventually got divorced and	33	08/01/2019
Cassie	Cassie was born to traditional, religious working class parents. As the eldest child she is burdened by the pressure to set an example for her siblings.	26	09/01/2019
Mary	May was born in a coloured neighbourhood to coloured parents. Her background was humble but living in the city she had access to a good education and community resources.	50	04/02/ 2019
Ray	Ray was born to a working class single mother and grew up back and forth between working class neighbourhoods and middle class ones based on her mother's shifting financial situation.	32	12/02/2019
Marcia	Marcia is a young middle class woman. She is educated and grew up as a third generation child living in different countries as the daughter of diplomats.	22	15/02/2019

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