

The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa

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Introduction

I saw Zanele Muholi's image *Aftermath* (2004) for the first time when I was visiting the Month of Photography exhibition called *Is Everybody Comfortable?* at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town in 2005. Muholi's *Aftermath* had an outstanding effect on me (and other viewers), generating various, contradictory emotions. *Aftermath* shows the body of a black woman from just above the belly-button down to her knees. The woman is only wearing underpants bearing the label 'Jockey,' which can be read as a signifier of lesbian identity. Her hands, at the center of the picture, are clasped over her genitals. There are different possible readings of the image but Muholi guides the viewer by including a caption which states the following: "(m)any lesbians bear the scars of their difference, and those scars are often in places where they can't be seen." Just underneath the hands on the right thigh a big, long scar makes this violation of the body visible. The scar almost covers the entire thigh and it takes the viewer's attention away from the center of the picture, the hands covering the genitals. The eyes, however, return to the hands immediately once the viewer realizes that the scar is already healed, thus illustrating Muholi's comment on scars of difference that often "can't be seen." It is in that moment that the gesture of the hands becomes central. The gesture does not imply shyness, possibly due to the women's nakedness in front of the camera. Instead the gesture functions as a form of protection where the hands also express a certain fragility and vulnerability. So while the scar on the thigh is already healed the gesture of the hands implies a more recent violation of the body. And it is this reference to the violated lesbian body that uncompromisingly creates a sense of accusation, of vulnerability, agency, intimacy, discomfort, pain and anger, all at the same time.

Muholi's image *Period* (2003) also deals with the issue of hate crimes against lesbians. But unlike *Aftermath* in which the body is used as a signifier for a lesbian identity, it is here removed from the picture. *Period* shows a used sanitary pad on a plate framed by a knife on the right and a fork on the left. While the fork is in line with the pad, the knife is not as parallel, pointing rather, away from the pad. It is the knife that seems to be the disturbing symbol within the picture, the active part in it, the element that

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goes along the squiggled silver fork. It is a sharp knife, of those used to cut meat. It can be considered threatening and thus useable in an attack. *Period* is a still life, a composition or arrangement of inanimate objects, each with possible symbolic significance. It is reminiscent of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974–1979). Muholi's *Period* provokes what Walter Benjamin calls the visual “shock.” It is this picture within the exhibition that has been perceived as most disturbing and evoking disgust. Not because of the connotation to hate crime as indicated by Muholi's strong subtext to the image: “the same blood that defines us as women, is the same blood which we shed in the attacks against us, while some make a meal of their hatred of us as women, as lesbians;” but rather because of the connotation to women's monthly period. The sanitary pad is a symbol for menstruation and thus for womanhood that girls enter with their first period. Womanhood is therefore closely linked to female sexuality as well as to women's culture. Muholi makes the link between menstruation and attack in the form of hate crime that leaves the woman behind, bleeding. She uses menstrual blood as a signifier for womanhood and female sexuality¹ while this same womanhood and a specific form of sexuality, namely lesbian sexuality, is the target in the attack against her.

Muholi's images in the exhibition, entitled *Visual Sexuality: Only Half the Picture*, all deal with issues of black women's sexuality. Similar to the images *Aftermath* and *Period*, her work de-romanticizes sexual pleasure by pointing out practices and commodities that transgress normative perceptions of (hetero)sexuality; this is achieved by introducing strap-ons, breast-wrapping and dental dams, for example. Accordingly, the responses of the media to Muholi's exhibition, which was first staged in Johannesburg in 2004, mainly reflected on the political dimension of the work and its impact on questions of lesbian and gay rights in the country. Gail Smith for example argued that Muholi's “photographs are not artistically or technically brilliant—and some are downright disturbing, but the exhibition, and the response to it, show some movement towards addressing the staggering absence of ‘out and proud’ lesbians in South African society” (2006, 90). In her article *Is Anybody Comfortable?* Nonkululeko Godana similarly highlights how the political project is central to this exhibition by contextualizing the work, and *Aftermath* in particular, as a direct translation of Muholi's activism into documentary photography. Godana states that Muholi has been documenting violence against lesbians over the last years in Gauteng townships and she informs the reader that *Aftermath* was taken two days after the woman in the image had been raped by a male “friend” aiming to show her that she is not a man (2006, 91). In the conversation with Godana, Muholi explains that the subject in the image “called me a couple of hours after the incident with no one to confide in. She already has a scar from a past incident, yet received new emotional scars from her rape” (Muholi in Godana 2006, 91).

Muholi usually invites the audience who attends her exhibitions to write down comments and reactions to the images. She has also shown her images in the streets of Johannesburg and has made a short documentary about it, titled *Enraged by a Picture*, which was produced for Out in Africa, the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in South Africa, in 2005. Muholi included some of the responses to her work in the documentary. Some members of the audience were in distress, some overtly expressed homophobia, and some commentators went even further by expressing strong anger and directly threatening the artist: “you need a smack” and “you must be hung,” while one painted a penis with big balls saying, “I believe this is art, but then this would also be art” (GALA—AM 3106). However, there was also strong positive feedback that viewed the images as “eye-opening” and “mentally stimulating,” and that welcomed the space that could be opened through these kind of debates on sexuality: “. . . excellent. I think it’s about time people stopped being so ashamed about human sexuality. For centuries women have been ‘desexualized’ and, I just feel that people need to embrace their sexual identities” (GALA—AM 3106).

The responses to the exhibition in general, and the image *Aftermath* in particular, made me realize once again how contested the question of sexual rights is in contemporary South Africa. In 1996 South Africa became the first and only country in the world to explicitly incorporate the rights of lesbians and gay men into its constitution by prohibiting, among other things, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Since then a visibility of discussion and proclamation of sexual identities has increasingly emerged. However, fifteen years into democracy the public discourse of homosexuality in South Africa still remains controversial and contested—as is evident in the responses to Muholi’s images on black lesbians’ sexuality. While some viewers celebrate the new sexual identities that Muholi represents in her work others respond to it by being overtly homophobic. Why is the reaction to her work so divided? What is at stake in her work and how is this linked to the formation of new sexual identities in South Africa? If South Africa is being celebrated for the rights it gives non-heteronormative sexualities, how come homophobia continues to grow and continues to proliferate and affect the lives of so many?

The image *Aftermath* in particular starkly reveals the tension between the constitutional rights in post-apartheid South Africa and the living reality of (black) lesbians in the country by bringing to light the complexity of sexuality and identity in this country. This volume focuses on this tension between sexual rights on the one side and the violence against lesbians as portrayed in *Aftermath* on the other. I am interested in the question of how this tension is articulated within the postcolonial nation state. How did the constitution and its incorporation of sexual rights come to being and what are the arguments against it? The latter question turns the focus to the actual act of homophobia: which identity categories are constituted and contested in the act of violence? To what extent does the question of rights

bring up not only the issue of sexual identities but also of gender relations? In fact, to what extent is the violence against lesbians, as visible for example in Muholi's *Aftermath*, linked to the modernization of gender roles in metropolitan South African?

By addressing these questions this book project is centered around, and seeks to account for, the sexual politics that have emerged out of post-apartheid South Africa. In doing so the book investigates the contested meanings of same-sex intimacy, in particular female same-sex intimacy, in this country. I am interested in the cultural and historical representations of female same-sex intimacy outside the axes of lesbian and gay cultures and politics. This book considers the ways in which historical and cultural representations and practices of female same-sex intimacy in South Africa do not intersect with, in some cases even actively resist, globalized lesbian identity politics and cultural practices and their underlying gender organizations.

The responses to Muholi's exhibition and the image *Aftermath* further reveal how race and gender operate in the construction of post-apartheid homophobia. One common response to Muholi's exhibition is that her images of the black female body are either degrading for all (black) women or alternatively, are demeaning for the community, the nation or the race, as one of the visitors wrote in Muholi's response book at the exhibition: "It is truly unacceptable for you to undermine our race's especially black portraying nudity and sexual explicit content images as if they are the only one who are involved these inhuman activities. After all Black was African and proud of its roots and cultures until you inflicted pain and trash to our community. Get a life you people" (GALA—AM 3106). Another visitor similarly expressed her anger about the 'nature' of the images: "yes, art is an African thing. However, when degrading of women's (make that black woman) bodies, it is no longer a question of art and beauty but of discrimination—the nation cries" (GALA—AM 3106). This intersection of sexuality and race in conjunction with 'the nation' within post-apartheid homophobia marks one of the key discussions throughout the pages of this book.

According to artist and curator Gabi Ngcobo, Muholi, however, acknowledges the gaze and challenges its biased nature (2006, 5). Ngcobo highlights the questions that Muholi poses in her work: the title of one of Muholi's works "What don't you see when you look at me?" was further developed through Muholi's question "What do we see when we look at ourselves?" (Ngcobo 2006, 5). With her work Muholi reclaims, to borrow Ngcobo's words, "the (visual) culture that was historically denied" (2006, 4). Pumla Dineo Gqola argues in her essay on Muholi's images that "the work is less about making Black lesbians visible than it is about engaging with the regimes that have used these women's hypervisibility as a way to violate them" (2006, 84). According to Gqola, black lesbian bodies were never invisible in society, but were in fact "highly visible manifestations of

the undesirable” (2006, 83) expressed, for example, through hate crimes such as those visible in the image *Aftermath*. Very similar to Ngcobo, Gqola is not only interested in the question of *what* Muholi makes visible but in *how* she makes it visible.

Despite their differences, the position of the two scholars, Ngcobo and Gqola, and the position of the respondents in the exhibition space, they all raise the question of representation² and its historical relevance/implication within the (South) African context. The responses to Muholi’s exhibition are concerned with the representation of the black female body and so raise questions about who is representing whom, under which conditions, and with which purpose? Linked to this is the question of who has the right to look? And despite their differences the positive and negative responses to Muholi’s images encourage the viewer to think about (historical and cultural) representations of black women’s bodies, particularly in relation to sexuality.

COMPLICATING THE ISSUE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIANS

Muholi’s work, as well as the wide-ranging responses to her images, highlight the fact that homophobia is, as Jodi O’Brien argues, not a monolithic concept that operates outside parameters of cultural and historical context (2008, 497). I want to take up this argument by pointing to a series of related incidents that forced women’s organizations in South Africa to join forces with LGBTIQ communities. I mention this alliance because it cannot be taken for granted. During the last couple of years a serious amount of new studies have emerged that deal with the issue of violence against women. However, these studies almost entirely ignore violence against lesbians. At the same time, lesbians are experiencing violence not only as a form of gender-based violence but also as a form of homophobia. This neglect of the issue of sexual orientation—and thus heteronormativity—within both academic research and activism became too apparent to ignore and led to an increased personal interest in the experiences of hate crime towards lesbians and women within same-sex relationships in South Africa.

In February 2006, 19-year-old Zoliswa Nkonyana was stabbed and stoned to death for being a lesbian near her home in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. In July 2007 Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Massoa were shot and allegedly raped in Soweto, Johannesburg. Two weeks after the Soweto murders 23-year-old Thokozane Qwabe was stoned to death in Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal. In April 2008 Eudy Simelane, former mid-fielder for the national women’s football team Banyana Banyana, was allegedly raped and stabbed to death in KwaThema, Gauteng. A year later, in June 2009, 37-year-old Girly ‘S’gelane’ Nkosi was stabbed by two men in KwaThema and passed away a couple of days later due to internal bleeding. All of these women identified as lesbians.

These are not isolated incidents; these are only some of the more widely publicized events that need to be seen in the context of similar public violent attacks. In July 2007, for example, 25-year-old Zandile Mpanza was attacked by four men in Durban as a result of her non-compliance with a ban which stipulates that women are not allowed to wear trousers in Umlazi's T-section. She was stripped naked and forced to walk through the streets. Her assailants destroyed her home and belongings and she was forced to move out of the township.³ In February 2008, 25-year-old Nwabisa Ngcukana was sexually assaulted by taxi drivers at the Noord Street taxi rank in the Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD) for wearing a mini-skirt. In this incident some taxi drivers poured alcohol over Nwabisa's face, while others inserted their fingers into her vagina. The taxi drivers said that they were teaching her a lesson. A few days after the incident around 600 commuters marched to the Johannesburg CBD in protest. Confronted by protesters dressed in mini-skirts, the taxi drivers 'stripped naked in retaliation' and sang the song 'Awuleth' umshini wami,⁴ a song made famous (again) by supporters of current South African President, Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma, during his rape trial in 2005–2006, which I introduce in more detail in the following chapter.

In the same month of February 2008 a racist video, produced in the Free State, appeared in public. This time four white male students at the University of Free State thought they could control old black women's (and men's) bodies by forcing them to drink alcohol before making them 'run a race, play rugby and then kneel and eat meat that had been urinated upon.' This incident took place in the context of violent protests of white students against the university's hostel integration policy.

All of these examples show an attempt to restore the gender regime that endorses men being in a dominant position while occupying public space—a space that, as the book shows, represents access to economic resources that are not necessarily gendered, sexualized or racialized. By raising the question of "what do emotions do?" rather than "what are emotions?" Sara Ahmed (2004) provides us with the tools to understand public acts of violence, such as the ones described above, as affectively *sticking* the imagined community of men together through the emotion of hate which, as a consequence, marks this violence as (culturally) legitimate.⁵ The publicity of the incidents refers to the sense of men's entitlement to women's bodies; this, in conjunction with a sense of impunity, is translatable into a notion of 'we are getting away with it.' The incidences therefore demonstrate the need to complicate the issue of homophobia and to expose violence against lesbians as not only an act of hate crime based on sexuality. This becomes even more pressing in light of the recent court case against one of Simelane's murderers. The accused who decided to co-operate with the state and, as a result, had his case removed from a collective representation in court, argued that the attack against Simelane was initiated around her cell phone and not around her sexual orientation. In fact he was not even aware of the

fact that Simelane identified as lesbian, a testimony that was reflected in the judgment. This shows that some of the cases that involved the murder of lesbians have not yet been unmasked as actual acts of homophobia.⁶

Homophobia in contemporary South Africa hence needs to be contextualized in the broader culture of violence that links gender-based violence, homophobia and racism. Beverly Palesa Ditsie recognized this complexity during her struggle for gay rights at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s. She states this in relation to a speech given by the late Simon Nkoli, one of the black gay icons of the country, in her documentary *Simon and I* (2001) in which she pays tribute to his life and to her relationship with him:

The speech [Simon Nkoli] made when he said I am black, I am gay, I cannot put my struggles as a primary or secondary struggle, they are all one. And I stood there, looked around and realized "Oh my god!" It was an epiphany for me. I realized what he meant. That not only am I black and gay but I am also a woman. And they are all one struggle for my freedom. (Ditsie in *Simon and I* 2001)

While I introduce Ditsie and Nkoli in great detail in Chapter 2 in this book, at this point I want to extract this quote and write a theoretical introduction around it. The quote underlines the fact that homophobia in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa cannot be separated from discussions around gender and race and by doing so refers back directly to the responses to Muholi's exhibition. Ditsie realizes that her oppression was/is not one-dimensional; she cannot separate her homosexual identity from her identity as a woman and as a black person. This indicates that her homosexuality is not necessarily more important than race or gender. And in fact in her documentary Ditsie describes the different levels of violence that she experiences as a lesbian, as a black person and as a woman. These acts are inter-linked. Ditsie is unable to divide up her identity and decide why a particular act of discrimination is being committed against her. However, as this book argues, particularly in Chapter 2, in the context of South Africa (as well as in the global context at that time) the reactions against homophobia were separated for a long time from any wider critique of hegemonic structures, such as institutionalized racism. This book, particularly Chapter 2, looks at the ways in which 'raciality' becomes silenced within gay and lesbian discourses and practices through mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Muholi's work as well as the wide-ranging responses to her images, Ditsie's quote, and the different incidences of hate crime, however, urge us to complicate the notion of homophobia while avoiding a 'universal understanding' of the concept. We need to rethink the historical use of homophobia and answer the questions of who was historically and is in contemporary society the target of homophobic discourse. Likewise, we need to respond to the question of who were/are constituted as perpetrators. Which subject formations are initiated within the discourse of homophobia?

In this introduction, and throughout the book, I want to approach the question of how to handle homophobia and especially the increasing violence against lesbians in contemporary South Africa. My aim is thereby not so much to explain homophobia as such, particularly the supposedly increasing violence against black lesbians. My aim is rather to develop an understanding of homophobia as a discursive formation—by taking into account that the discourse “reveals its own form of violence,” discursive and material, as Karl Bryant and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz (2008) argue. By doing so this book highlights the “importance of complexity as an analytical lens in general and the necessity of problematizing existing discourses of homophobia in general” (O’Brien 2008, 496).

HOMOPHOBIA

In a special issue on *Retheorizing Homophobias* in the Journal *Sexualities* guest editors Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz define homophobia as a “conceptual tool and a discursive resource for individuals and collectivities to name and respond to their oppression” (2008, 387). The two scholars briefly trace the history of the term ‘homophobia’ as coined in the 1970s by George Weinberg with the intention to challenge what David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz call “the normalizing mechanisms of state power to name its sexual subjects” (2005, 1): it is not the ‘homosexual’ that should be considered as the problem, Weinberg argues, but instead “the individuals’ and society’s negative reactions to homosexuality and homosexuals” (Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz 2008, 388). Since then ‘homophobia’ was conceptualized, particularly through psychology, with various subcategories emerging, e.g. ‘internalized homophobia.’ With their definition Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz point to homophobia as a discursive framework utilized in the surveillance of various populations (not only homosexual but also heterosexual), a framework that allows the inclusion of other concepts such as ‘heterosexism,’ ‘heteronormativity’ but also ‘homonormativity’ (2008, 390). The authors therefore exceed the construction of homophobia as a narrowly psychological and individualistic concept in constant demand for more criminal proceedings and laws by not only placing it on a social and institutional as well as interactional level but, more importantly for the context of this book, by linking homophobia to racism and by doing so critiquing a common usage of homophobia:

Homophobia thus becomes a shorthand to demand a set of rights without necessarily studying the full impact of those demands. The outcomes of such demands (and the discursive frameworks they draw on) are varied, but may produce exclusions, in part by solidifying images of what constitute gay and lesbian populations. In addition, such discourses may shore up ideas about what constitutes ‘homophobes,’

including putatively homophobic cultures, or those most likely to contain internalized homophobia. (2008, 391)

The question of what constitutes ‘homophobes’ is central for this book project and is discussed in great length in relation to apartheid as well as post-apartheid politics. While not denying the very material consequences of homophobic violence, Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz motivate to focus on “homophobia as a conceptual tool and discursive resource [that] itself engenders sets of effects” (2008, 392) by addressing the relationship of homophobia to axes of difference. O’Brien similarly raises the question of whether “there are additional features (e.g. economic class, ethnicity, gender non-conformity, religion) that make certain groups and individuals more or less likely to be the targets of so-called homophobic violence and discrimination” (2008, 498). Moreover, Bryant in his analysis of the psychiatric diagnosis of *Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood* (GIDC) in the US-American context provocatively argues that “homophobia and antihomophobia may work together to produce ‘homonormative’ gay subjects” (2008, 455). And in fact, in recent years scholars have increasingly pointed to the use of homophobia, and concurrently the mobilization of gay rights, in anti-immigration discourse within European and North American discourses of nationalism (Yeğenoğlu 1998; Puar 2007; Haritaworn 2008; Gunkel and Pitcher 2008). Concomitantly with a mainstreaming of gay and lesbian identities in the West which is informed by gay liberalism and, in particular homonationalism, gay rights are being increasingly associated with the West while Islam is constituted as homophobic and thus outside the discourse of ‘human rights.’ Gay rights (and human rights more generally) are mobilized in anti-immigration discourse as well as in recent military interventions, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, while (white) lesbian and gay men claim their membership of the national communities through the construction of the homophobic Muslim. Within the geopolitics of war on terror homophobia therefore is simultaneously nationalized and racialized (Gunkel and Pitcher 2008). The complicity of queer but also feminist organizations in Europe and the US with right-wing discourses/politics of national and global consequence does not contradict but in fact underlines this analysis. Jin Haritaworn, therefore, highlights how the assimilation of certain forms of (white) gay subject into social citizenship has not only occurred against the backdrop of the war on terror, but has moreover served as a mode of its legitimation, reinscribing gay and queer identity as white and gender-conforming within the parameters of the nation (in Gunkel and Pitcher 2008).

Adjacent to the question of what constitutes a homophobe and which individuals, communities and nations are more homophobic than others, is therefore the question of what constitutes a homosexual—a process that Bryant calls “creating homosexuals”—hence the question of homonormativity. Vidal-Ortiz, in particular, points to productions of homonormativity

within discourses of homophobia as well as the use of homophobia as a link to the invisibility of whiteness in hegemonic frameworks of gayness (Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz 2008, 392). Similarly O'Brien argues that homonormativity, as shown in the production of homophobia, is constituted along other axes of difference, proliferating "a culturally specific way of being queer that is enough in 'sync' with existing gender, class, racial and cultural norms as to be considered 'acceptable'" (2008, 501). O'Brien refers to Lisa Duggan's conceptualization of 'new homonormativity' that, as Duggan argues, upholds and sustains heteronormative assumptions and institutions "while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumptions" (Duggan in Bryant 2008, 455). The question of homonormativity, and linked to this mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion on the basis of gender and race, will be explored in detail in Chapter 2 in this volume in which I discuss the history of the gay movements in South Africa, a movement that eventually succeeded through the implementation of gay rights in the post-apartheid constitution.

In this book I am interested in these mechanisms of homophobia and by taking this up I will explore the question of how homophobia is mobilized as a distinctive marker between different racialized groups in the post/apartheid South African context. As we will see in the following chapters the discourse of homophobia in South Africa has shifted dramatically. During apartheid homosexuality was considered as a white problem only, which is reflected in the 'pink is white' phrase in the title of Chapter 2. Chapter 1, however, discusses how post-apartheid homophobia is informed by the populist notion of homosexuality as un-African which seems to reduce homophobia to black communities while hinting to similar and, at the same time, culturally specific mechanisms at play. While apartheid and post-apartheid homophobia seem fundamentally different in relation to discourses of homophobia, in this book I argue that the different discourses are not as contradictory as they seem. By pointing to the history of colonialism and apartheid I examine the construction of homophobia as rooted in whiteness, and analyse how postcolonial nation states such as South Africa reproduce homophobia narratives (Vidal-Ortiz 2008, 476). This book develops the argument that racialized violence as well as anti-queer violence as discursive frameworks both utilize the surveillance of the population—both in the past as well as in the present.

INTERSECTIONALITY

In Europe we are often readily prepared to develop a voyeuristic, popular cultural view on cases of gender-based violence such as those described in the previous section when they occur in countries like South Africa (or, respectively, when they occur in migrant communities in Europe/US-America). This perception needs to be understood as continuous with the colonial gaze that portrays South Africa, and in fact the entire African continent, as

barbaric that gets out of control once left alone by the colonizing–civilizing forces of the West. This gaze continues to (re-)hypersexualize the African body through discourse; this is also achieved by linking sexuality to current discourses of HIV and AIDS on the African continent. Furthermore, post-apartheid homophobia, linked to populist notions of homosexuality as un-African to which this book turns in the following chapter in great detail, leads to a perpetuation of the perception of South Africa/Africa/black communities in general, as being more homophobic than others (meaning white communities).⁷ Until today, Africa as a continent serves as a reference point in the negotiation of a European, white identity. These current politics of difference widely ignore that discourses of sexuality in contemporary South Africa are still heavily informed by colonial discourses of sexuality and, linked to that, discourses of race. As I argue throughout the pages of this book, colonialism constituted race as a sexualized category, and sexuality a racialized category. Racialized bodies are reproduced through (hetero)sexuality; the discourse of race is hence corporealized in each single human body. Also, in Europe conceptions of sexuality are coined/affected by the colonial past. Colonial legacies are inscribed deeply in notions of desire for the (black) *Other* and are to be found everywhere. In fact, whiteness is negotiated around black sexuality described by Antje Schuhmann in her title “White on White via the Black Body” (2008). White identity formations continue to guarantee systems of white privilege and entitlement, including sexual entitlement.

This neo-colonial discourse of sexuality is not only visible in mainstream popular culture but also within queer communities. One example is the often racist exclusion of non-white people from queer spaces. Another example is the academic exclusion and/or exoticization of non-Western scholars at conferences and institutions. Both examples are reflected on in a recent anthology entitled *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Racality* (2008), edited by Adi Kuntsman and Esperanza Miyake. As a result, queer theory is often linked to European and US-American informed scholarship that display an attitude/perception of the West as most liberating and therefore as a reference point of development and progress to all other countries/societies:

The elite institutions from which queer theory advances complement the paternalistic activist wisdom of lesbian and gay organizers in the United States who judge the level of progress another country is making in the arena of lesbian and gay rights by the uniquely US trajectories of Stonewall, coming out, and identity-based civil rights. Of course, it is always the US standard that these other countries must live up to and, naturally the United States is always the leader in this race for gay utopia. (Barnard 2004, 7)

The West as the reference point of modernity/development is therefore also mobilized in sexuality studies. In her paper “Is Queer Theory Always