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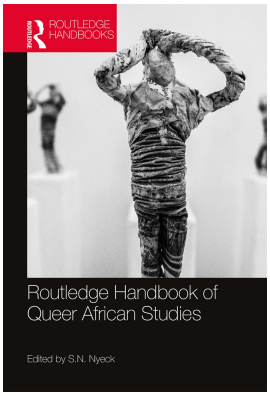

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Women who love women

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3

Women who love women

Negotiation of African traditions and kinship

Phoebe Kisubi Mbasalaki

Introduction

In one social media post by Tshwane LGBTQI Facebook group are customary wedding pictures of a young black lesbian couple.[1] Friends and family flank the happy couple and appear to be in a festive mood. It is a beautiful sight, set against the backdrop of a bustling township. From the pictures, it appears to be a customary wedding, as opposed to a religious or civil one.[2] Prior to the wedding ceremony, the *ilobolo* (bride wealth) negotiations and transmissions thereof would have been ironed out.[3] These negotiations are usually conducted between the elders from both the bride and groom (a butch identified lesbian in this case) families. These pictures exemplify a traditional cultural activity, which forms the basis of this chapter. Such traditional occurrences are approached here through a careful analysis of same-sex relationships and desires amongst black township women, how they negotiate customary marriage and kinship set against the backdrop of their everyday lives.

The everyday lives of black township women in same-sex intimacies take place against the backdrop of apartheid/post-apartheid, heteropatriarchy, high levels of poverty, neoliberalism, globalization, and heterosexism. Their everyday lives are performed in a context in which dominant discourses and tropes overwhelmingly claim that same-sex relations are unAfrican. How then are African traditions, such as customary marriages, featured in the opening lines of this chapter, reconciled among women in intimate same-sex relationships, especially in a context where the South African National House of Traditional Leaders openly condemned the Constitutional Court's decision to legalize same-sex marriages? Is it primarily because this decision would go against *ilobolo* practices? How do women in same-sex intimacies navigate their way around such heteronormative traditions? How does legal permission and traditional interdictions coming from certain corners interfere with and shape black women's interpersonal relationships, kinship, and community at large?

These questions foreground and mark this cultural terrain as a site of struggle in South Africa where strategies popularizing the fiction that homosexuality is a "white thing" deny the very (contemporary and historical) existence of African people in same-sex intimacies. In this case, the dominant trope of homosexuality as being "unAfrican" that prevails in contemporary South Africa places black women and men in same-sex relationships outside of

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African-ness. Livermon (2012) underlines this alienating dynamic as the racialization of the queer body as white and the sexualization of the black body as straight. Under this formulation, Livermon further notes,

> The idea that same-sex sexuality is somehow un-African and alien to African cultural traditions … [thus suggesting that] if tradition is represented as that which is authentically and unproblematically African, then same-sex sexuality is its direct opposite – its constitutive outside … [B]lack queers cannot exist as part of African cultural practices represented by tradition. They can only be some manifestation of cultural loss, and ultimately alienation, from African subjectivity. As a result, black queers become visible manifestations of cultural taint that exist to be excluded at best, or as the quote from Jacob Zuma indicates subjected to forms of bodily violence at worst.
>
> *(2015, 16–17)*[4]

The cultural struggle rages in the everyday lives of women in same-sex relationships through the implementation of the constitution (and public policy), at the workplace, on township streets, and in their homes. This chapter is premised on the idea that culture and questions of identity have been at the heart of the most intense battles facing African people in same-sex relationships over the past decade or so. As Kelley (1997) reminds us, as the global economy grows, the cultural terrain becomes even more crucial as a site of struggle. In this way (and in a quest for recognition), black township lesbian's everyday struggles produce everyday forms of resistance, at home, at work, and on townships streets.

In identifying these everyday forms of resistance, I am influenced by the scholarly work of political anthropologist James C. Scott (1990). Rather than seeing "resistance as organization," Scott looks at less visible, everyday forms of resistance (Chin and Mittelman 1997).[5] Scott defines the infra-political as the cultural and structural substratum of those more visible forms of action that attract most scholarly attention. Everyday resistance, which Scott calls "infra-politics," can be variously quiet, dispersed, disguised or otherwise seemingly invisible (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013). Everyday resistance is about how people act in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine hegemonic power structures. As such, these forms of everyday resistance are not easily recognized, as with public or otherwise collective resistance – such as rebellions and demonstrations. Noting that the conduct and meaning of resistance are culturally embedded, I will argue that black township lesbians resist everyday heterosexism and homophobia, while simultaneously creating spaces of belonging in the performance of everyday life. I work with heterosexism rather than prejudice or discrimination precisely because it captures the role of heterosexual privilege in acts of prejudice and discrimination in addition to drawing out the structural and systemic dimensions. It also enables a perspective on how people who are gay, lesbian, and bisexual internalize heterosexist thought and action. In fact, close attention to social realities of black township lesbian women in South Africa echoes what bell hooks (2013) describes as "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy;" a concept that I suggest is inescapably entangled with heteronormativity, each being constitutive of the other. Through their undertaking of what I refer to as cultural labor, black township lesbians (re)produce spaces of belonging in their communities, therefore contributing, not only to the township, but also to African cultural capital, thus underwriting the very culture that often rejects and expels them.

This chapter discusses how black township women in same-sex relationships navigate the cultural terrain of customary marriage and kinship, all set in heteronormative traditions in township social spaces against the backdrop of Ubuntu, which is central to everyday

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encounters and experiences. This chapter draws on research carried out in 2014 as part of a doctoral study that relied on interviews, focus group material, as well as ethnographic observations from 31 townships both in Cape Town and Johannesburg.[6] I will begin by unpacking Ubuntu as capital – as a conceptual tool and cultural language that offers me a located avenue to engage with the narratives of marriage and kinship. Following which I will present the interview and focus group material on how black township lesbians in South Africa negotiate this cultural constituency against the backdrop of everyday heterosexism. I will then firm up this discussion by focusing on why I code some of the narratives as the cultural labor of black township women in same-sex relationships, prior to concluding.

Ubuntu as capital

Belonging came out as a central narrative from black township lesbian women who participated in this study, which I situate within Ubuntu kinship. Along similar lines, van Zyl (2015) works with Ubuntu, in the framework of "Ubuntu freedom" as primarily referenced through kinship and therefore associated with belonging to a community. Marriage and lineage are embedded in this. In other words, "in Ubuntu kinship, relations of intersubjectivity are central focus and fertility is the spiritual nexus between past and future" (van Zyl 2015, 7). Therefore in Ubuntu kinship, African marriage occupies both the framing of belonging in the extended family or clan as well as a counterpoint for regulation and surveillance (van Zyl 2015; Yarbrough 2014).

But before I unpack Ubuntu as capital, it is important to pay attention to differences and inconsistencies between Ubuntu ideology and ubuntu praxis. What Gouws and van Zyl (2015) categorize as "Ubuntu talk" is the ideology and is largely inclusive, supposedly non-discriminatory.[7] This is precisely what Praeg (2014) refers to as Ubuntu (emphasis on the capital U) as a set of theories and ideologies that attempt to make sense of the precolonial lived experiences of African people. For Praeg, ubuntu (ubuntu do) is a cultural praxis; a historical practice, or an activity producing particular kinds of human beings, namely those who have ubuntu. Praeg further suggests that there was a time when ubuntu was a lived experience in precolonial Africa. However, clarity is lacking on what form ubuntu historically took, not least due to lack of historical empirical data. Available data colonialists produced come to us loaded with certain assumptions.

It could be said "Ubuntu talk" and "ubuntu do" are in entanglement in contemporary South Africa. In this context, this juxtaposition shows the changeable and shifting nature where in certain instances, full immersion and belonging may be attained. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) notion of social capital, I code the "recognition end" of this juxtaposition – "Ubuntu capital." Hence capital manifests in recognition and belonging, yet the meeting of the two – their entanglement brings out the complicated nature of Ubuntu capital, it may be attainable however not constant. Therefore, on the one hand, there is inclusion such as Puleng's narrative, which will be discussed at length in the next section, yet on the other hand, certain instances and interactions lead to exclusion. The dynamic nature that makes capital attainable, yet unattainable due to the mechanisms of everyday inclusion and exclusion regimes, also makes for contemporary expressions of ubuntu in South Africa. In this entanglement, both Praeg (2014) and Gouws and van Zyl (2015) note how politics and power are embedded in Ubuntu talk and ubuntu do. In South Africa, I read this entanglement through intersectional prisms coded in imperialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. It is in the context of these intersections that one notices ubuntu praxis failing women as evidenced in the high levels of violence against women (Gouws and van Zyl

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2015) and the exclusion of black queer bodies from Africanness further evidenced in the war on butch-identified lesbians through extreme violence as well as exclusions from traditions such as customary marriage.

Township lesbians navigate customary marriage and kinship

Marriage is a powerful mechanism for social belonging, for the community's acknowledgment of a binding relationship. Thus, globally, struggles for same-sex marriage are the ultimate target for many fighting for LGBTQI equality. Many black township women in same-sex intimacies who participated in a study conducted in Cape Town and Johannesburg expressed their desire to eventually get married in the future. Customary marriage was the preferred choice, as opposed to civil union, which was hardly ever spoken of or discussed. Participants who were married had done so through traditional marriage. This then begs the question, how do African township lesbians maneuver gendered and heterosexist customs surrounding customary marriages? How is this maneuvering deployed as hidden transcripts or everyday resistances employed to manoeuver around gendered traditions such as *ilobolo*, while creating spaces of belonging? Below, I will elaborate on the ways in which "hidden transcripts" are detected in lesbian relationships such as butch/femme relationships as well as negotiation of kinship where allyship becomes central in these predominantly heterosexist traditions.

With regards to coupling, the commonly expressed form was through butch/femme or butch/straight woman relationships. The gender expression therefore plays within the prevailing binary that endorses localized township masculinities and femininities. In an environment where heteropatriachal hegemonies prevail, the patriarchal family has become naturalized in contemporary South Africa. Same-sex relationships like these, even though shaped within the prevailing gendered binaries, become a hidden transcript, especially in this context where the dominant trope affirms homosexuality as unAfrican. Following everyday resistance and hidden transcript prisms, butch lesbians in South African townships perform a specific township's masculinity.[8] The butch lesbian and role can be "most usefully understood as a category of lesbian gender that is constituted through the deployment and manipulation of masculine gender codes and symbols" (Rubin 1992, 467). This then makes both butchness and masculinity performative roles with codes and symbols available for the use of anyone, regardless of biological sex (Butler 1990; Halberstam 1997, 1998). Butchness hence characterizes how butch lesbians define their appearances and shape their social interaction within masculine prisms in their specific locales.

Like Swarr (2009), I argue that township butch lesbians' self-definitions must be understood in relation to township male heterosexual masculinity, where township butch lesbians take up on masculinity like heterosexual masculine men. They both draw on/share similar symbolic resources, technologies, and strategies to negotiate and accomplish masculinity in their everyday lives. To undertake cultural labor, butch lesbians work with similar symbolic resources to produce and perform masculinity. For instance, most couples that participated in this study referred to themselves as "husband" (husbian) and "wife." Although they appear to cement heterosexual relationships by co-opting heterosexual signifiers, they are in fact highly destabilizing this status quo. The status quo that privileges certain bodies – male-bodied subjects as the only ones that produce masculinities. Yet in this male role, butch lesbians have financial obligations to their partners/wives and their families as the main providers. In addition, butch lesbians are also often expected to be exempt from housework, laundry, and cooking. In fact, this queering of the heterosexist status quo is enforced so much so that a butch lesbian dating another butch lesbian is a no go for some, as exemplified in the conversation below:

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APHIWE: We are women that love each other and that's all, but then the problem is that she won't want to be with me, even if I'd talk softly and be all girly. Even if I say I love you, she would say "No, you [are] Butch," which becomes a worry.

LINDELWA: And [she would] say: "I can't love another man."

ESIHLE: And [she would] say: "I don't sleep with other men." [Laughter]

ANATHI: Serious! If a butch wants another butch, chances are the other is going to say "No I don't sleep with other men" and people would even say it out loud: "I don't sleep with other men."

PHOEBE (AUTHOR/INTERVIEWER): Oooohh! I don't sleep with other men?

ANATHI: Yes! Saying you [are] making me a *moffie* [gay man], I'm not gay. Whereas you [are] already part of the LGBTI family.[9]

(Focus group discussion in Khyamandi Township, 2014 Cape Town)

For a butch lesbian being in an intimate relationship with another butch was equated to being a *moffie* at that time, a case of queering up the queer.[10] The coupling of butch lesbians may represent itself as a heterosexist conformist logic, yet it is also a powerful subversion of normative ideas on gender and sexuality. I code this a reflection of a majoritarian politics of belonging through a hidden transcript of same-sex desire that manifests itself as a public transcript of a butch lesbian dating women, and not a fellow butch, thereby cementing a certain form of heteronormativity, albeit a queered one.

As per van Zyl (2015), traditional belief systems are organized around the needs of communities and structured around Ubuntu kinship including lineage, all of which underlay economic and political alliances. Children for instance, bind people into webs of social obligations stretching from their ancestors into the future, tying people's sexuality as reproduction and therefore inextricably linked to wider social responsibilities to the community. Here I note a key emergent theme of children, how the lesbian couple will have a child/children. Take for instance Deneo, a *femme* identified lesbian who was married to the love of her life, Palesa, a butch identified lesbian, through customary marriage with the blessing of their parents and family. Both are from Ratanda Township in Johannesburg. Deneo recalls a conversation she had with her father as the customary marriage conversation was being initiated. During a focus group discussion, she vividly recalls how the conversation about having children was raised:

> [B]efore we got married when I was talking to my parents then my father was like … was like, so what about the grandchildren? I would love to have one. And I was like, that one is not a problem, as much [sic] as we can negotiate *lobola* (*ilobolo*), then we can still negotiate the baby thing. So, that's how it went. Maybe it's because my parents understood me better, that's why we came to that point that they understood that I am still going to have a baby. Even if it's going to be a different one, then they will just going [sic] to be happy that there is going to be a child in the family that will be said it's a Palesa's child.

The entanglement of marriage, having children, ancestry/lineage is noted in lesbian relationships situated within Ubuntu kinship. However, because same-sex partnerships are deemed not to be primarily procreative units, contrary to popular assumptions, bearing of a child becomes a negotiation as the above-quoted informant states. Yet, like Deneo and Palesa, other informants prefer in vitro fertilization (IVF) and adoption, two reproductive possibilities that add to the dimensions of negotiation between the couple and their families, the butch identified lesbian, and her in-laws. The general expectation was that it was the femme

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who would carry the child and not the butch lesbian.[11] There were creative ways for butch lesbians being genetically, albeit indirectly involved in the child-making process. For instance, the biological brother of the butch could be asked to be the sperm donor. Although IVF was financially out of reach for the same-sex couples I spoke to, some expressed that they would endeavor to save up for it. The conversation below draws out some of the above-mentioned issues:

PHOEBE (AUTHOR/INTERVIEWER): So, going back to the family issue … Is motherhood important?

PULA: I for one [think that] being a mother is very important, as lately I have been doing research on in vitro [fertilisation] and how does it work [sic].

PHOEBE: So, don't you want to carry the child?

PULA: I want to carry the child by myself and I think for me it will be very important and I think it can be a very important and a nice experience that I could say I am very proud to be a parent and to show the world that I am very proud to be a lesbian mom as well …

THLOKOMELO: Coming to that one, yes, being a mother is very important, as we have been raising our sisters' children and our brothers,' [and] it has been a nice experience. Hence, carrying a child will be a good experience and carrying one will also be very nice and as yourself knowing that you have helped somebody's child, we have been going around visiting orphanages and seeing those kids. They are so lovely and you [would] so love having one of them …

NTHABISENG [A BUTCH LESBIAN]: Family is good, being a father. I also want to be a father one day on Father's Day. There comes that time with your partner; who is going to carry [the child]? If maybe at home, my girlfriend's home, they won't understand the way science works. That a female get the baby or they want her to be penetrated and I don't want it like that. It's where it comes to the situation that I will be happy to be a father in the way that she gets pregnant but the way she said, but I think there it comes with an agreement because I would love to have my own baby [and] teach her or him whatever. But it will depend according to whatever we have like currency, like if we go for in vitro [IVF], it will cost like 30 thousand rands. How can I [pay for that?] Either then adoption will be the best thing. I once came to a situation whereby at home they told me that, Ntabiseng, we have accepted you as a lesbian. And at home we are all boys from my uncles, so I am the single lady to all the family. So, they made a meeting and say [sic] okay, we have accepted you as a lesbian, could you do just one thing for us? Just have a baby. And then [it] comes to the situation that I have to separate with my family as now [I] am staying around, I am not staying [at] home because of that. And that is the challenge that I am facing: If I have to stay at home at … [my] family, then I have to get pregnant.

TLOTLISO: Maybe you can sit them down and tell them that there is science, there is technology and there is one, two, three, you can still have a baby, but then from my girlfriend. You said that you understand that I am a lesbian, but this is how I am going to bring the child that you need. So, your mother wants a grandchild, [and] then that would show that this is Ntabiseng's child. At the same time your girlfriend will be pregnant and you as the father will also be happy towards the situation …

NTABISENG: They want … [my child], his or her blood … In the family there is this person who is going to understand you better and that's my brother, I come after him. I once sat down with him and talked to him and he said: You know how difficult it was to accept you as you are, since we are traditional people from KZN [KwaZulu Natal] and how people look at us? How difficult it is when we have family gatherings and we understand

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> that you are going to come and acting like a boy? And then if you [are] going to come again with technology … and things like that, I think that I am pushing them harder.
>
> *(Focus group discussion, Ratanda Township, 2014 Johannesburg)*

The above conversation draws out the centrality of motherhood and fatherhood as well as the tensions between the traditional and the modern in relation to this, at the core of which lies a sense of belonging. On the one hand, having a child confers upon some women in same-sex intimacies a legitimate call for acceptance, as in the case of Ntabiseng, drawing upon the Ubuntu capital of kinship. Yet, Ntabiseng, a butch lesbian, is unwilling to carry the child herself. On the other hand, the part played by the male in the traditional conception of a child induces discomfort with some lesbian women, as in the case of Pula, who prefers IVF, even though it is the more expensive option. IVF and new reproductive technologies, albeit within globalizing frameworks, confer new possibilities for women in same-sex intimacies who want to become parents. However, are these possibilities attainable, with the meagre economic resources to which many lesbian women have access? In addition, the above excerpt demonstrates that adoption is another possibility considered by some of the participants; an approach that poses its own challenges in relation to some matrilineal and patrilineal traditions that place emphasis on blood and biological lineage. Both these new technologies clash with tradition and expectations of how to conceive a child. Even allies, such as Ntabiseng's brother, may find it difficult to accept new technologies – a difficult dynamic, creating a space of uncertainty.

New reproductive technologies as well as the possibility of adoption could be read in the context of resistance to the traditional/conventional expectation of the conception and birthing process. Technology allows same-sex couples to resist heteronormative family as well as its particular way of raising children, all of which share various entanglements in a context of surveillance structures set up within Ubuntu kinship. This framing of Ubuntu kinship lays out such clear boundaries and regulatory structures, such as how to have a child, even in spaces where there is some form of recognition and belonging for women in same-sex intimacies, shifting those rigid expectations/boundaries becomes difficult. Thus while new technologies and reproduction can be said to be part of hidden transcripts of subversion surreptitiously challenging ideological domination, the economic status of women in same-sex relationship does not always allows for the full use of technologies. Thus negotiation becomes a more subtle ways to gaining concession and shifting boundaries of belonging in townships.

Scholars have argued "throughout history, Zulu married women who were paid *ilobolo* for who bore children have received considerable recognition in their communities in addition to gaining a certain status as well as being awarded domestic powers" (Rudwick and Posel 2015, 292). Having a child confers upon some women in same-sex intimacies a legitimate call for acceptance buying into the Ubuntu capital of kinship in the South African context. Having a child also provides the same-sex couple with an enhanced social standing with regard to their extended family and community neighborhoods. On this subject, based on her research with black lesbian women, Matebeni (2011) notes that women in same-sex relationships garner support from family members, friends, and neighbors who know they are lesbians, who then become allies in the struggle against everyday heterosexisms. Hence, the social role of mother and participation in community life, which seems to hold more importance than sexuality per se, confers to lesbian women with a child, regardless of how the child was conceived, the power to negotiate social belonging.

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Ubuntu praxis is therefore expressed through communal interdependencies: Sharing, reciprocal obligations, and responsibilities, which are recognized to circumscribe freedom. Because of the way ubuntu praxis is currently lived through heterosexism, excluding those deemed non-heterosexual, having allies within kinship becomes very important for people in same-sex relationships. When one has allies like Dineo and Palesa, negotiation within heterosexist institutions such as customary marriage is likely to succeed. Allyship then allows the unfolding of cultural labor at work collectively to gain inclusion, recognition, and belonging. With no, or few allies, a butch lesbian *ilobolo* negotiations may collapse because the family of the soon-to-be bride refuses to welcome her as the groom/marriage partner. The reverse is also true. In the previous case, Puleng had allies in her family, but her fiancée had none in hers and Puleng's *ilobolo* proposal was turned down. The consequences of not having supportive allies can best be illustrated in the voices of the informants (Puleng from Thembis Township) as follows:

> [M]y girlfriend was straight when I met her … my girlfriend's family, they don't approve of our relationship. I love her, [but] due to the way her family is treating me I lose my interest … Why? Because like I keep on loving her and when her family want[s] something from us they act as if they care and once we give them that something that they want, they are out of our lives, and when we have problems both families must contribute. My family is cool, my sisters and brothers they are cool with the way that I am because I grew up the way that I am now, my family is very supportive. And then we once had this *lobola* (*ilobolo*) negotiation stuff for my girlfriend and stuff, and they turned us down.

The above excerpt highlight what Yarbrough offers as reasons for *ilobolo*'s importance as "building caring relationships between the families, constructing appropriate ethnic and gendered identities, and maintaining good spiritual relations with deceased ancestors" (2014, 17). Arguably, Puleng gets recognition as a provider. She is gainfully employed and takes the responsibility of being a provider to her kinship seriously. Still, Puleng's masculinity, and by extension sexuality, is threatened and rejected (Swarr 2012) when the *ilobolo* negotiations collapse, thereby obliterating Ubuntu freedom when black queer bodies such as hers, are maintained outside of socio-cultural institutions.

The infra-politics and cultural labor of sexuality – black township lesbian women

Rudwick (2011) notes that when and how exactly the myth that homosexuality is unAfrican emerged is difficult to ascertain. Tushabe (2016) reads the statement of "homosexuality is unAfrican" through a de-colonial reading of history, locating it in the interconnectedness of language and cultural knowledge systems reproduced through historical, political, economic, and social dynamics. Several (queer-friendly) scholars and activists have refuted the argument that homosexuality is a perversion that was introduced to Africa (Nyeck and Epprecht 2013). Along similar lines, several scholars (Epprecht 2004; Gunkel 2010; Murray and Roscoe 1998) have demonstrated how the legacies and cultural imperialism of (post)colonialism and apartheid have shaped the complicated relationship between race, gender, and sexual dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa, thus consequently spilling into ubuntu dynamics. Ubuntu do/praxis hence supports heteronormative tropes, legitimizing the rejection of the perceived homosexual as alien in the community, especially when homosexuality is perceived as a Western invention

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that former colonizers imported to Africa. All this contributes to the unstableness of Ubuntu talk and ubuntu do, embedding them in power structures that exclude, as we note in the case of Puleng whose *lobola* negotiations failed, and sometimes violate certain bodies. And this is why infra-politics is central in understanding how black township women in same-sex relationships resist these power structures while simultaneously creating spaces of belonging within these very structures that exclude them.

When everyday resistance is evoked, it may expose the instability of terrains, such as those of heterosexuality, and cultural traditions imbued in this. The inherently instable character of these practices implies there is room for those constituted as "outsiders" by those very practices/terrains to utilize them as tools in their emancipatory struggle, such as the narratives of black lesbians women discussed here. Therefore in these cultural traditions and practices of *ilobolo* and lineage embedded in Ubuntu kinship where sexuality is only denoted through heterosexual/heteropartriachal prisms, recognition, and belonging by black lesbians who are deemed as "outsiders" has to be "worked" at. The emphasis here is on the laboring – the working at through negotiations and seeking inclusion in these predominantly heterosexual spaces exposing slippages. Therefore, the usability of Ubuntu kinship, and the negotiation of belonging in these predominantly heterosexual spaces where work/labor has to be put in for recognition by black township women in same-sex relationships is what I consider as the "undertaking of cultural labor." My use of the term cultural labor here is informed by the work of Maxwell and Miller (2006), who see it as more than merely a repository of textual signs or everyday practices, because it provides the legitimizing ground on which particular groups (i.e. ethnic minorities, gay, lesbian, or disabled people) articulate deficits, claim resources, and seek inclusion in national narratives and in this case, the cultural and national narrative. Against this backdrop, black township lesbians articulate slippages in ubuntu heterosexist frames by undertaking cultural labor. In doing so, they create spaces of belonging. As in the case of butch lesbians who draw on available resources in order to, for instance, articulate female masculinities in their role as "husbian" – the provider in the butch/femme or butch/straight woman dynamic. This becomes an articulation of cultural labor to seek inclusion in the masculine terrain. In addition to this, having a child was both desirable and also, as we saw in the case of Dineo and Palesa, offered a legitimate call for acceptance in Ubuntu kinship which I code cultural labor. But the entanglement between Ubuntu do and ubuntu praxis discussed previously produces a shift where recognition is not constant, this has implications on cultural labor in that it has to be consistent or perpetual. Cultural labor therefore not only offers spaces of belonging for black lesbians in these predominantly heterosexual practices and constituencies but also exposes their instability, usability, and possibilities for reconstruction.

Conclusion

Despite the heterosexist and homophobic denunciations of traditional leaders, community members, and some political figures, black women in same-sex intimacies (and their allies) are making use of tradition to situate their queerness within established South African cultural contexts. A reconstruction of tradition is in order to create the possibilities of a contemporary, more demonstrative black queer subjectivity. This idea of reconstruction has been treated in this chapter as implying a form of collective cultural labor to create spaces of belonging in South Africa. For some, such a reconstructive cultural labor is useful, while for others, homophobic and heterosexist wall remain too virulent to permit similar engagement with culture and society. Reconstruction then could be read as a hidden transcript, while simultaneously representing

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a space in which black township women in same-sex intimacies are claiming traditional resources as a means to securing inclusion. Having allies, such as siblings or family members, plays a key role in facilitating these processes and spaces of inclusion. These allies also undertake cultural labor, and in that process, create spaces of belonging for black queer subjectivities, honing in on Ubuntu capital. This is by no means a case of assimilation, referred to by Duggan (2002) as homonomativity. Rather, such cultural labor exposes the holes within Ubuntu heterosexism while simultaneously claiming and contributing to the strategic use of Ubuntu capital.

Notes

1 For the picture, see Tswane lgbti Tswane Facebook group (2016).
2 Customary marriages in South Africa became formally recognized with the enactment of the Recognition of Customary Marriages ACT 120 of 1998; a statute through which marriages performed under African customary law, including polygamous marriages, are recognized as legal marriages. Stats SA (2011) reports a decline of 41% in customary marriages to 5,084 in 2011.
3 *Lobolo* or *Lobola* (*ilobola*) in Zulu, Swazi, Xhosa, and northern and southern Ndebele (Mahadi in Sesotho, Roora in Shona, Magadi in Northern Sotho, and Lovola in Xitsonga), sometimes referred to as "bride wealth" or "bride price," is property in cash or kind that a prospective husband or the head of his family undertakes to give to the head of a prospective wife's family in consideration of a customary marriage. Given the intimate connection between power relations and custom, women's efforts to claim their rights are bound up with issues of culture (Geisler 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997). Certain traditions like *ilobolo* have been questioned as discriminatory to women, and some wonder whether these practices contradict the constitutional principles of gender equality (Nhlapo 1991). *Lobolo* is central to some traditional ways of African life. *Lobolo* is an enduring custom that offers insight into past and present gender and power relations. It has survived colonial and missionary cultural attacks and changing economic and political structures (Shope 2006).
4 Jacob Zuma, while still deputy president of the ruling African National Congress, declared that same-sex marriage was a "disgrace to the nation and to God", and that when he was growing up, a gay man would never have stood in front of him, as he would "knock him out" (Ismail and SAPA 2006). Zuma later apologized to the gay community for these statements.
5 The concept of infra-politics was most clearly articulated by anthropologist James C. Scott in his 1990 publication *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) note how Scott fundamentally transformed our understanding of politics, placing the ordinary life of the subaltern firmly on the political agenda: What matters is how people are acting and not what their intentions might have been. In other words, whether these acts or behaviors are consciously performed or not is not important. Rather, what counts is that they challenge and disrupt the status quo. For Scott, subaltern forms of resistance produce "hidden transcripts" that critique or challenge power in its intersectional predicament, thus escaping the dominant, and contrasting with "public transcripts" of power relations. "Infra-political acts thus operate insidiously, beneath the threshold of political detectability" (Marche 2012, 6), Scott insists. Such infra-politics need not be organized or even intentional to be significant.
6 Data drawn on here were part of a doctoral research where data were collected from 31 townships in both Cape Town and Johannesburg. I employed a mixed-method approach of quantitative (209 questionnaires) and qualitative (32 in-depth interviews and 12 focus group discussions) as well as participant observation.
7 Praeg also sees Ubuntu not only as localized (African), but also through global prisms, and hence notes: "To call Ubuntu Ubuntu [Ubuntu talk] a glocal phenomenon means recognizing that global discourses (Christianity, Human Rights and so on) give a particular expression to the meaning of the local traditions such as ubuntu [ubuntu do], but in a way that also allows the resulting Ubuntu to feed back into the global discourse as a locally based critique and expansion of those very discourses. The result, I argue, is that Ubuntu is neither here nor there, neither simply from 'over here' nor reducible to what is 'over there'. It is at once here and there" (Praeg 2014, 37).
8 I note that from North American scholarship and beyond, a number of interlocutors have offered varied positions on the importance of butch and femme categories, including how these categories are

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subversive and expose heterosexuality as both performative and normative; have strong erotic stances; are inherently unstable and conformist; or at times seem to be accommodating conditions of duress.

9 All names of research participants have been changed for privacy purposes.

10 *Moffie* is/was a derogatory term for gay men (feminine homosexual men) in Afrikaans that has been reclaimed or reappropriated by the Afrikaners and broader same-sex community, just like the term queer was in the West during the 1980s.

11 The fact that butch lesbians challenge the conventional sex/gender/sexuality system in South Africa centers the body, butch lesbian's bodies underscoring body politics. A theme in line with my research that came out was pregnancy and whether butch lesbian bodies – masculine bodies – would carry babies. Many butch lesbians argued that it was a femme role to carry babies rather than butch lesbian; getting pregnant would problematize their masculinity. However, some butch lesbians were open to the idea of pregnancy and having a child.

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