

## DICTIONARY OF QUOTATIONS – Black Lesbians & Other in South Africa ...

### AIDS

Every time I go in a taxi, I hear negative messages about HIV/AIDS. I have lots of support, especially from my mom. But I wonder what it must be like for someone who has no support to hear that stuff. Its up to people like me to get the message out.

- *Fezeka Khuzwayo*

We still don't know enough about AIDS.

On a personal level, I have found it extremely difficult to openly talk about HIV/AIDS. This is the main challenge we all face. Even the most progressive activists still make ludicrous comments and 'jokes' about HIV/AIDS. Even among activists we are unable to tap into one another for information and empowerment. Yet AIDS is no joke. I have already lost an uncle to the disease. Friends and peers are dying everyday from AIDS related illnesses. To my shock, parts of the population still believe HIV/AIDS is a homosexual disease.

- *Nomfundo Lufhondwana, Womyn magazine article, on lesbians and AIDS*

It took a longtime to find a girlfriend after I told people that I was infected in 1991. I was rejected over and over for four years. It was different in the rest of the world. When I went to San Francisco, every womyn wanted me!

It was unbelievable, I was so used to rejection, but when I said I was positive they said 'so what?' They were equipped with gloves, dental dams, everything. It boosted my self-esteem.

- *Prudence Mabele, Positive Women Network*

There are still to many people who believe that having sex with a young virgin will "cure" on the HIV/AIDS. The continuing rape and sexual abuse of young girls in part attests to this belief. Even students in institutions of "higher learning" continue to have the most ludicrous views, not only about homosexuality but also womyn.

- *Nomfundo Lufhondwana, Womyn magazine article, on lesbians and AIDS*

A lot of HIV-positive womyn who were previously heterosexual are now expressing interest in womyn and becoming lesbians. This is happening both internationally and here in South Africa over the last few years.

- *Prudence Mabele, Positive Women Network*

I'm naturally an open person, so I speak about my status easily. There's a parallel with being out about one's sexuality, until people realize that hetero isn't 'normal' and everything else 'abnormal' We have to make sure its in their faces. We have to force people to acknowledge that HIV exists and deal with it.

- *Fezeka Khuzwayo*

I find this interesting because I've always been criticized for being infected even though I am a lesbian. I've been considered 'bad', and have been stigmatized politically. It's painful

- *Prudence Mabele, Positive Women Network*

### Art Activism

Apart from the role of NGOs in drawing attention to the different factors that impinge on violence, writing and cultural expression that highlights this complexity has rapidly grown in recent years, especially among **black** women singers, artists and poets. An example is Makhosazana Xaba's poem, "The Silence of a Lifetime", which traces the story of a woman who is repeatedly raped throughout her life.

### Beauty

Afrocentric hairstyles and fashions that many women wear in South Africa would be publicly condemned in her home country of Jamaica. "There is a higher level of comfort in South Africa because people seem to appreciate natural beauty."

- *Donna Smith, 'Happy in our skin', Mail & Guardian (June 20, 2005)*

## Coming out

There are plenty of lesbians in the township, but most are in the closet.

I do wish for lesbians to come out and say 'yes, we are here!'

I am scared to do it for myself but I see many young girls being confused and I want to help. But how? Sometimes these tsotsis [gangsters] and these Jackrollers [a notorious Soweto gang] go out in gangs and rape women. The Jackrollers go particularly for lesbians, and when they catch one they say 'We'll put you right.' So it's really dangerous for a young woman living in the townships to be open as a lesbian. Or your parents could bring the priest for you. Then they will pray over you. I would hate that!

- Bongie

'True confessions of an amachicken'

*Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef, as told by Tanya Chan Sam for **Defiant Desire** edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, (1994)*

## Competition

I've really been enjoying" BBA: "It's a great concept and I believe they'll be doing another one.

-*Thando Mkhize, who earned plenty of hype during and after **BB2** as the show's first "black lesbian",*

(source: <http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/forums/showthread.php?t=62327&page=61> 30-08-2003, 07:19

## Conference

We are here in Africa. We live in the mainstream, we pay taxes like everybody else, we relate with people in the mainstream. We are a naturally occurring phenomenon in the universe.

- *Donna Smith, speaking at the second Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights, Nairobi (2006)*

Thabo Mbeki, has said as early as 1986 that, ANC is indeed very firmly committed to removing all forms of discrimination and oppression in a liberated South Africa... That commitment must surely extend to the protection of gay rights.

- *Cheryl Gillward, ILGA conference, Johannesburg (1999)*

## Constitution

Neither the state nor any person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, marital status, ethnic or social origin, color, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

- *Judge Jonathan Heher (1996)*

They are discriminated against, abused and they still suffer hate crimes.

Some don't know what the constitution says. It makes no difference in their lives.

- *Donna Smith, (2005) article – no freedom celebrations for black lesbians*

This country is going through a major social, economic and political crisis. We have got to ask ourselves where our constitution is in all of this? Where is ubuntu in all of this? Where is it really?

When we look at the killing of lesbians and foreigners we see how little this concept of ubuntu means.

When we wrote this constitution, it was to give people individual rights. People like gay people, were supposed to be given the right to choose and live freely. But what we didn't do was transform society, or the conditions people lived in. So in many ways this constitution is like a rainbow ideal, but out of touch with what is happening on the ground.

- *Phumi Mtetwa (2008)*

As people of alternative sexuality, we celebrate the constitution which launched democracy in South Africa, this is the first constitution in the world to include sexual orientation in its equality provisions, and that's a real reason to celebrate!

- *Donna Smith, former CEO for the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), at the SAfrodykes arts festival, Constitution Hill (Sept. 14, 2004)*

## **Discrimination**

I get angry when people say I can't be a homosexual because I'm African, that it is again tradition. How the hell do people dare say I am not African on the basis of who I love? What is African, anyway? Is it the way I dress? Is it my language? The God that I pray to has never displayed any signs of discrimination.  
- *Zodwa Shongwe (interview in *Pride: Protest and Celebration*, a GALA publication) 2006*

## **Equality**

As far as the future goes, is there still a need for the Equality Project? If so, what shape and form should it take? How can we mobilize our energies to create an environment that allows for engaging with the very issues that crippled the organization – the underlying racism and racist policies, the class distinctions, and most importantly, the consistent discrimination against lesbian and transgender women? Finally, and most importantly, how do we ensure transparency, democratic governance and local ownership of the projects of the organization?

- *Wendy Isaack, *Feminist Africa*, Issue 6\_Inconversation with Pumla Gqola*

## **Family**

My family does not discuss homosexuality, and if they do, they talk about *stabane* and all that. So maybe I was scared to face up and say I like girls better because then they would call me *stabane*. I knew that logically I couldn't be *stabane* because that is a hermaphrodite, someone with both male and female genitals. Yet I was afraid of the stigma and sadness of *stabane*. I laugh when I think of how confused I was as a teenager; I even went to the dictionaries and looked up the word *stabane* and learned that word 'hermaphrodite.' It fascinated me I couldn't understand why.

It was only later, when I was older and I saw the word lesbian in a magazine that things became clearer. I remember the word almost jumped off the page!

I thought for a long time about it because I knew I was one.

- Thandazo Alice Kunene

'*Stabane* and all that'

*Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef, as told by Tanya Chan Sam for *Defiant Desire* edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, (1994)*

## **Female masculinity**

I was always a tomboy, a dyke. I love that word, dyke! It's me!

I look at other women on the street and if they remind me of myself or look butch I think, 'What a dyke!'

- Tilla Jantjies

*Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef, as told by Tanya Chan Sam for *Defiant Desire* edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, (1994)*

## **FEW**

Forum for the Empowerment of Women (founded in 2002).

## **Freedom**

I'm supposed to find this country beautiful now. But I don't love South Africa. I envy those who can celebrate Freedom Day. It should be called Freedom and Discrimination Day.

- *Kebarileng Sebetoane (2005) –*

**The Star** article, titled *No freedom celebrations for black lesbians*

## Friendships

Life at boarding school...

So you will be friends and share things. Very often this friendship can allow you to hold hands, kiss, talk in whispers: because you are sweethearts or sweeties. Sometimes it is also called *amachicken*, but that is the old word, and the girls don't like to use it too much. The *amachicken* are the younger girls who are looked after by older ones.

Many *amachicken* share rooms with the older girls. I myself had a sweetie, but my heart was broken when she had leave school. She was very good to me. She was very tender in love. I did love her, but I didn't think of it as lesbian.

- Bongie

'True confessions of an amachicken'

*Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef, as told by Tanya Chan Sam for Defiant Desire edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, (1994)*

## Hate crimes

### *The Rose Has Thorns*

In 2003: Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) initiated the Rose has Thorns Campaign, which was intended to deal with this issue of hate crimes against black lesbian and transgender women. "Curative rape" of black lesbian and transgender women is a term used to describe the sexual violence perpetrated against this group of people for the purpose of "curing them" of their real or perceived homosexual orientation and/or gender identity.

- Wendy Isaack, *Feminist Africa, Issue 6\_In conversation with Pumla Gqola*

Black lesbian and transgender women face violence at home, in schools, communities and various social spaces. For many, this violence has become a way of life. This systematic and institutionalized violence hurts bodies, minds and families because it is kept invisible. Many South Africans are homophobic, and this leads to a perpetuation of myths and stereotypes about lesbian and gay people. More importantly, it leads to the creation of an environment in which we, as black lesbian and transgender women, feel unsafe.

- Wendy Isaack, *Feminist Africa, Issue 6\_Inconversation with Pumla Gqola*

### Hate Crimes

"The law is different. We have some recourse now. But people's lives are not significantly different,"

- Donna Smith (The Star article, titled *No freedom celebrations for black lesbians – 2005*)

Curative or corrective rape is a term used to describe the sexual violence perpetrated for the purpose of supposedly 'curing' a person of their real or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

- Wendy Isaack, *Feminist Africa, Issue 6\_Inconversation with Pumla Gqola*

I wonder how many African lesbians were raped between the time he had made that remark and today. We cannot support such a man for the country's presidency at a time when Africa is looking towards South Africa for leadership, and as a voice for the underprivileged and oppressed communities in the continent."

-Donna Smith, former CEO of FEW. **Commenting on Jacob Zuma's hate speech (2006)**

They drove around with me. It was daylight and people could see what was happening. Whenever they saw boys or men they would stop and say, 'Here is a chick you can do whatever you want to do with her.

So some of the guys they just said, 'No' and others did whatever they wanted to do with me. They drove

around and offered me to one guy after another and then they called this older man. The filthiest man I have ever seen. I have never felt so dirty. They called him and said: 'Don't you want to have just one round?' 'We have got a fresh one for you.'

This guy was very hesitant he said, 'No, he just had sex with this other woman.'

Not one passer-by intervened, and every man who violated her believed doing so would 'straighten' her out.

I pleaded with them and said: You know what I have had it. I can't anymore.

They kept on saying they are going to turn me into a real woman. They are teaching me or giving me something I am missing in my life. According to them that is the greatest thing a woman gets.

*\*Tumi is a black lesbian. As a hate crime survivor, she suffered this terrible atrocity because of her sexual orientation. The homophobic gang forced Tumi to perform oral sex on the stranger.*

***Tumi is her pseudo name, she related her story on 'Black lesbians' on mnet's carte blanche 920070 (2007)***

I knew both Sizakele and Salome personally, and I guess this was my way of honouring them -- and not them alone but all the LGBTI individuals who have fallen, been degraded in any way and had their human rights taken from them solely because of their sexual orientation. As a black lesbian from the townships, it bothers me that we LGBTI people and our families and friends are living with the constant fear of a hate crime attack.

*- Musa Ngubane (2008)*

The police are apathetic, at best. They are often ignorant of the problems of the lesbian community and are sometimes guilty of 'revictimizing' the survivors of sexual abuse by the way they behave towards the complainants.

*- Donna Smith, Speaking at the ninth international conference of the South African Association of Marital and Family Therapy at the International Convention Centre (May 19, 2004)*

"I've been raped six times, five times just because I am gay, I was raped by men I know, who wanted to show me what it means to be a woman. They thought it would change me, that it would keep me from being gay,"

*AL - said a young black lesbian from Soweto who asked not to be identified for fear of reprisals.*

## **History**

Unless we as people with disabilities, as women, as black people, as lesbians, become the makers of own images, our lives will constantly be depicted on the basis of assumptions that others hold about who we are, how we live, and how we love.

*- Shelley Barry, Feminist Africa, Issue 6 **Disability and desire: journey of a filmmaker***

In the lead up to the Pride parade in 1998 I was part of a production called *After Nines*, a musical about South Africa's gay and lesbian past. It was produced by the Gay and Lesbian Archives and directed by Robert Coleman.

It was empowering to be able to say to the public, "These are our stories. This is fact. We are people with a history."

*- Zodwa Shongwe (Interview on Pride: Protest & Celebration, GALA publication) 2006*

History tells us that it was on the continent of Africa that humanity first lived – and loved... On the eve of a

new millennium, we, the lesbian and gay children of Africa, reclaim our birthright: our right to live and love in freedom in the sunshine of Africa... As we stand here in our thousands, we solemnly commit ourselves to meet again at this place in then year's time and tell another story of victory and triumph. It must be a story that tells of the elimination of discrimination against gays and lesbians throughout the whole of Africa... We make this commitment in the presence of the lesbian and gay ancestors of Africa.  
- *Excerpts from speech by Kevan Botha, representing the NCGLE at Pride 1999*

## **Homophobia**

What is un-African is homophobia. Some people believe homosexuality is an idea brought here by the white man. But it has always been here. What the white man brought was homophobia clothed in religious doctrines that we did not have before.

- *Donna Smith (Nov. 19, 2006) for Associated Press article 'South African Gays Often Face Harsh Reality*

Homophobia, like patriarchy and many other social evils and exclusions, is supported and justified in the name of religion, culture and tradition. Homophobia is also institutionalised in the economic system of capitalism. I can only speculate on the root cause of this prejudice and homophobia; people generally seem to have difficulties with concepts and ideas which are fundamentally different from their own – or which challenge heterosexist hegemony.

*Wendy Isaack, Feminist Africa, Issue 6\_Inconversation with Pumla Gqola*

A number of rape and assault cases have been reported to police stations. When one reports, the police respond by asking why one is a lesbian.

- *Fikile Vilakazi, Director of Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL) at the 2<sup>nd</sup> second Africa Conference on Sexual Health & Rights*

## **Homosexuality**

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### **Homosexuals increasing in Uganda. Who's responsible?**

At girl's schools, lesbian students 'adopt carrots, eggplants and bananas for penises. Such fresh fruits are usually available in the first weeks of term... When they run out [the girls] resort to test tubes.

- *Principal comments from Ntare School, Uganda on New Vision, September 1999*

Shock therapy might cure the deviants – enumerating the dangers of homosexual sex, one of which is that 'because oral sex can be vigorous, it could fracture the jaw.

- *Psychiatrist cited on the article*

The rule of Yoweri Museveni might have brought enlightenment to Uganda and other areas, but when Museveni's government rewrote the Constitution and the penal code in 1990, the maximum penalty for 'unnatural' carnality was increased from fourteen (14) years to life imprisonment. Indeed, Museveni pronounced in 1994 that his government would 'shoot at' anyone bringing the unnatural practise of homosexuality into his country; he reiterated, following the Ntare School scandal in 1999, that all homosexuals should be arrested and convicted.

- *Excerpt from Uganda's main newspaper New Vision article, September 1999*

If homosexuals did it quietly, they would be left alone:

Homosexuals are the ones provoking us. They are upsetting society. We shall not allow these people to challenge society.

- *Museveni, late 1999, succumbing to international donor pressure on his homophobia, Uganda's Museveni backtracked on his earlier extremism.*

## **Zimbabwe**

It is unnatural, and there is no question, ever, of allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs. If dogs and pigs do not do it, why human beings? We have our own culture, and we must rededicate ourselves to our traditional values that make us human beings.

- Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, 1995

Let the Americans keep their sodomy, bestiality, stupid and foolish ways to themselves! What is human rights?

Don't we have natural rights too?

- Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, 1995

Oh my God, no! Our war was to protect our culture. Not to destroy by allowing homosexuality to run rife in. It's not in our black culture and we don't want it!

- Mrs Mwangi, one the leaders of the ruling party's Women's League, also a member of Parliament. Her crude response to South African TV crew on whether the Zimbabwean war of liberation wasn't meant to free all people. (1995)

### **Race**

While white gay Zimbabweans were relatively safe, black gay Zimbabweans stated that they feared for their lives because for Mugabe to sustain his lie that homosexuality was un-African, had had to intimidate black gays into invisibility.

### **GALZ**

Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ)

### **Kenya**

Homosexuality is against African norms and traditions

- Daniel Arap Moi, backing up Mugabe's homophobia

### **Namibia**

Homosexuals must be condemned and rejected in our society

- Namibian President Sam Nujoma, at a Women's Conference (1996)

**He was backed up by an official statement, issued by the ruling SWAPO.** The statement called on - Namibians to 'revitalize our inherent culture and its moral values which we have inherited for many centuries from our forefathers. We should not risk our people being identified with foreign immoral values.

Homosexuality deserves a severe contempt and disdain from the Namibian people and should be uprooted totally as a practice.

- South West African People's Organisation (1996)

- South West African Peoples' Organisation (SWAPO)

NB: The party quickly issued a statement saying that it was a personal opinion not official policy

### **Swaziland**

These people are sick

- King Mswati III, at a meeting between the king and the country's religious leaders. (1997)

Your Majesty, such people hate God. According to the Bible, these are the people who were thrown into the dustbin. The Bible said they should be killed.

- Isaac Dlamini of the Swaziland League of Churches. (1997)

**NB: After having been detained briefly, the founder of GALESWA, Chief Mangosuthu Dlamini – a member of the royal family – wisely fled to South Africa**

Gays and Lesbians of Swaziland (GALESWA)

## **Zambia**

Homosexuality is the deepest level of depravity  
- *Zambia's Frederick Chiluba*

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## **Identity**

Sizakele was the butch lesbian, you could see even by the way she walked, the way she talked, everything. So maybe she did fight with them to show how strong she is.

- *Tshidi Legobye (2007)*

*On Black lesbians, M-NET Carte Blanche*

It has taken me a long time to grow into my body... At 19 I began to accept myself as a woman and love my body... Society's perception of my body does impact on my self-esteem... My sexuality as a gay woman is a part of who I am as Bev and the way I relate to the world and other people. I can be as butch or feminine as I want, it all depends on my mood.

- *Bev Ditsie, in a statement to Nkululeko Masinga (2005)*

## **Identity crisis**

All my gang are men, and the only feeling I have towards women is the same feeling any regular man would have. But to be with the silly creatures all the time and to listen to their foolish chatter, I would never be able to bear. If I cannot be in the company of men, I would rather be dead. My earnest prayer each night is that God would be merciful to me and change me completely into a man. If I could be done by any operation, I would gladly risk it as no pain could be too severe if it meant the fulfillment of my desire.

What the end is going to be, I don't know. There is no hope of marriage for us, and the raising of a family which I yearn for. We will have to spend the rest of our lives living like this, unless God is merciful and ... lets me become a whole man.

- Gertie Williams

'Lesbian Gangster': The Gertie Williams story – Drum, April 1956

*Excerpted from Golden City Post and Drum. Edited by Dhianaraj Chetty.*

*Later published in **Defiant Desire** edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, (1994)*

## **Law**

If our law does not accord protection to [homosexual unions], then I suggest it does so.

-*Justice Roux of the Pretoria Supreme Court, May 1999, on POLYMED case of Jolande Langemaat where she sued the police medical aid scheme for refusing to register her longtime partner and companion, Beverley-Ann Myburg, as a dependant.*

## **Life**

I am a lesbian. I am a black woman. I live in the township. Life is not very easy in the township, but I smile through it even though for me, as a black woman and a lesbian, life sometimes doesn't want to make me smile. I come from a Zulu family where men get first preference for everything, where they get to rule your life if you are a woman.

- *Sibongile: They fear me because I am a sangoma and a lesbian*

*Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef, as told by Tanya Chan Sam*

*for **Defiant Desire** edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, (1994)*

No one wants a wife who talks politics and wears mens' socks

- Zubeida

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They fear me because I am sangoma and a lesbian

- Sibongile

*Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef, as told by Tanya Chan Sam*  
for *Defiant Desire* edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, (1994)

I love that word, dyke!

- Tilla Jantjies

*Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef, as told by Tanya Chan Sam*  
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## Love

From the early age I knew I was different. I never had feelings for men, and I always had deep feelings for women. But I never had anyone in the village to talk about these feelings – in my village gays were unheard of. I tried to suppress these feelings, but eventually they came out. As I grew older I decided I didn't care what society said – I would be myself.

I shocked the whole village in Standard 6, when a rumour spread that I had proposed to another girl. It's true, I was madly in love with this girl, and I would follow her everywhere, from the river to her home.

My grandparents were called before the village chief and his council of elders. The whole village turned up to the hearing, to insult me and make nasty comments. They assumed that because I had proposed to the girl I must be *stabane*, a hermaphrodite, with both male and female genitals. I was taken to a hut where a woman forced me to undress and examined me. When they discovered I was 'normal' the chief ordered that I be lashed. I don't remember how many *sjambok* lashings I received; all I remember is crying and screaming with pain as the whole village jeered at me. I was warned never to repeat such behaviour again.

- Vera Mavimbela. *On Climbing on her shoulders: Mike Olivier, an interview with Umtata's first lesbian* featured in *Defiant Desire* edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (1994)

I love women. I have always loved women. Women are wonderful to me. This thing started very young with me. I wanted very much to marry my best friend, who was a girl. My mother saw this thing and protected me from my family. She encouraged me to have boyfriends just for the family's sake. My uncles, of course, wanted *lobola*, the bride-price, so they were particularly keen on finding me a young man.

I cried and refused this, and this made my one uncle very cross. He rounded up all the boys in the neighborhood and when I came home from school one day I found them up in our backyard. 'Now', say my uncle 'you must choose one.' He made great fun of me and asked each one of the boys how many cows he would give for me. I was afraid to leave, too afraid even to cry. I felt like a toy he could just play with. He didn't understand about my life and my feelings.

- Sibongile: *They fear me because I am a sangoma and a lesbian*

*Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef, as told by Tanya Chan Sam*  
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## Love making

Doing it with a woman I look at her lips, breasts and curves. When I get deep I feel like kissing her, touching her. I get a sensation like butterflies in my stomach and the only way I can satisfy the sensation is to get naked, exploring her body and she exploring mine, our breasts touching...

Musa Ngubane (2006), *Article: How I became a homosexual*

([http://www.postnewsline.com/2005/09/how\\_i\\_became\\_a\\_.html](http://www.postnewsline.com/2005/09/how_i_became_a_.html))

As far as I knew, sex meant penetration by a penis.

I eventually plucked up the courage to sleep with my girlfriend, and I was so surprised that I was not rejected. She was the first woman who could accept me without a cock.

- Vera Mavimbela. *On Climbing on her shoulders*: Mike Olivier, an interview with Umtata's first lesbian featured in *Defiant Desire* edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (1994)

## Opinion

Homosexuals were sick and 'needed help'

- PAC leader, Rev. Stanley Mokgoba, during 1999 election campaign

## Photography

Speaking as a curator first, before I speak as a mother the photographer has gone into the subject matter with no apologies. One reservation that I have as a straight person if I were to deal with my sexuality, I would have or may have dealt completely differently from this.

- Bongzi Dhlomo, Artist & Curator, *Zakhe Arts*

"Especially the bandage piece for me stands out because it is that moment you have discomfort with the way you are, it is the sensitivity, it is the human-ness and the very closeness. The person who is taking the picture, Zanele in this case and the subject"

- Gabi Ngcobo, Visual Artist and Curator (2005)

"I think it makes you think about what it means to say period and in the sense of menstrual period and also period as full stop and so on and you think that in the naming and also in the interplay between the naming and the pictures themselves you are forced to think about the process of looking"

- Phumla Dineo Gqola, Gender Activist and Writer

This is taken of a woman two days after she was raped I think it is particularly difficult if you're someone who is gay woman and be raped I think it is double degrading and humiliating and difficult to come to terms with this is our most sacred area we don't allow other people into that area freely or willingly if you look at place where the hands are she is not quite

Her hands are not touching, they are above a certain area her most sacred place is being wounded only by concerned we allow other people to touch us there. Here she's been deeply violated she got to re-learn confidence in her sexuality

**(referring to hate crime survivor photo titled 'aftermath' - 2004)**

- Charlene Smith, freelance journalist and writer

This potential for cultural production is evident in the work of Zanele Muholi, a **lesbian** activist and photographer, who has recently been making major inroads into the existing talk about **lesbian** experiences in **South Africa**. The photograph below is called, "Aftermath", and is an image of the scarred thigh of a **lesbian** survivor of rape.

The purpose of the photograph is captured in the words of the photographer: 'It's not about causing controversy. It's an understanding of what they [the victims] suffer...It takes time for anyone who's been through so much trauma to heal' (quoted in Godana, 'Is Anybody Comfortable?' *This Day*. Monday 6 September. 2004:9). Muholi's photograph reveals the power of particular kinds of documentary photography in giving voice to many who have stories to tell, but whose voices are not heard at the level of prominent platforms of sex talk.

- Desiree Lewis, Feminist, Writer, Professor of Gender & Women Studies at University of Western Cape

My immediate reaction is shock but I am a lesbian woman, so I have an understanding of her work.

- Zandile Zwane, activist and business marketer (2005)

Black lesbians have very low visibility in terms of our past.

The images are very strong, and has a way of enticing people who are looking, first to see the images with their curiosity firstly aroused to go deeply into the text and read the text.

- Ruth Morgan, former director of GALA, 2005

The images are in your face, so it is very hard to be in denial when you are looking at these images. At worst you know, they open people's eyes

- Donna Smith, former director of FEW, 2005

We are at crucial time where photography in South Africa, 10 years after democracy has actually now established a new identity. From a number of photographers there was a very support people believing strongly that these pictures need to be shown, need to get out. On the other hand there were people that felt that the photographs are too provocative that one should put a little bit of a layer before you show it to public. I think it was quite a shock to many of the classmates. A lot of uncertainty to pornography questions about what is your right as a photographer. There was resistance coming from them, which was good as the project continued. I think there were a bit more open and became more aware. I think it has been a learning curve especially for them, their own issues to learn about sexuality, about gay and lesbian issues I think they wanted a bit more neutrality but got aware of it.

- John Fleetwood, director MPW, 2005

Visual Sexuality takes you there, and it is not a pretty sight. Some images are graphic and raw: a woman strapping on a dildo, a soiled menstruation pad on a white plate, a woman's thigh with a long scar running down one leg. Other pictures capture moments of intimacy: two women kissing, a woman strapping down her breasts, a moody gangster exhaling a curl of smoke.

Her photographs are not artistically or technically brilliant – and some are downright disturbing, but the exhibition, and the responses to it, show some movement towards addressing the staggering absence of “out and proud” lesbians in South African society. One of Muholi's intentions was to address the lack of lesbian visibility and the identity confusion that it causes.

- Gail Smith, *Outlaw Culture* article published in the *Mail & Guardian*, 3-9 September 2004

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When choking on chunks of reality, some puke ignorance.

One of the more controversial images was that of a woman wearing nothing but a strap-on dildo with a condom wrapped over it. A couple of the tertiary students attending felt indignant, with one fellow demanding outright “an apology for having to be put through such trauma.”

Another image that some people found disturbing was the “pad on a plate” image. This was a photograph of a used sanitary pad on a plate with a fork and knife beside it. Explaining symbolism, Muholi asserted that “the same blood that defines us as women is the same blood which we [lesbian women] shed in the attacks against us. All this while, some make a meal out of their hatred for us”

- Nonkululeko Godana, *Is anybody comfortable?* article by published in *This Day*, 6 September 2004

## **Politics**

Gays and lesbians should be involved in general politics.

- Funeka Soldaat

(extracts from “*Gays Reap Rewards Slowly in Post-Apartheid South Africa*” article)

## **Position**

Muholi's journeys toward ‘becoming’ have been marked by various dis-locations as the daughter of a Zulu

mother and a migrant Malawian father, a child entrepreneur, a Bantu-school graduate, a Durban factory worker, hairdresser, secretary, and as a South African black womyn loving womyn experiencing the uneven degrees of citizenship offered in the Apartheid and post-Apartheid eras. The terrains of (sometimes contradictory) struggle and of building and re-building have, therefore, been on various fronts. But within each journey the communities Muholi has helped collectively to shape – for these are never simply inherited – have been defining for her, sharpening a consciousness that refuses essentialism, refutes labels, and instead honours the praxis and process of living and lived realities. As a specifically Zulu woman, the camera would come to her only through her own defiance of the gendered and cultural norms read off her female body. Yet, living on the margins, within and between different spaces and communities as she does, it is her consciousness, articulated in her visual language, which Muholi speaks to us in her photography.

- Sabine Neidhardt, *Biography, Enraged by A Picture* publication (2006)

### **Poverty**

"one young girl said `the Constitution means nothing to us because we are fighting for survival'." The black lesbian community had no social spaces of its own in the townships, yet regularly suffered from extreme violence, rape, victimisation, unemployment and psycho-emotional health issues, as well as HIV/AIDS.

- Donna Smith, *Extracts from an Anti-Repression Network (ARN) report on the Social Movements Conference, Johannesburg, October 28 & 29, 2004.*

### **Prejudice**

Once you take away prejudice, there is nothing left.

- Judge Albie Sachs

### **Pride**

We believe this festival is important to embrace empowerment, visibility, diversities and tolerance.

"Although we may now enjoy new constitutional rights, homophobia is still a big issue in South Africa.

- Donna Smith (*Pride, 2005*)

I came from an activist background, and I had joined the NCGLE because I was excited at the idea of fighting the struggle at the level of policy-making. But I had been frustrated to find the NCGLE somewhat sexist. For this pointed a bigger issue. While we all faced the common problem of homophobia, there had been no attempt within the LGBT community to unpack the baggage that comes with our past – things like racism, sexism and class discrimination.

I wanted to remind the crowd that LGBT issues cannot be looked at in isolation, and that it was necessary to involve ourselves in mainstream struggles around poverty, gender, HIV and racism.

We challenge all of you gathered here today to support the best interests of poor people, women and black people in our country. When we gather here again next year we must be proud of our achievements in this regard.(1997 speech).

- Nomfundo Lumphondwana, *PRIDE: Protest and celebration (2006)*

On reflection I felt that black people had not be visible enough in the parade. I think this is because people were still scared. With the democratic elections in 1994 we had achieved political freedom. But democracy was still new and we were operating within the confines of an interim Constitution. There was a sense that we should move forward in the same direction and it was difficult to claim the right freedom of sexual orientation in that context.

Pride is a very important date on our calendar. It is an annual reminder to society that gay and lesbian people do exist and that we are still fighting for our freedom. It's not over yet. I want same-sex marriage. I wan an end to hate-crimes. I want visibility for black lesbians. I don't want the next generation to have

these problems unresolved.

Nobody else is going to talk on our behalf. I'm not asking people to be activists or to toyi-toyi. I'm just asking people to make their contribution once a year. Go to Pride.

Be visible.

- *Zodwa Shongwe, PRIDE: Protest and celebration (2006)*

### **Pride & Lesbian**

One of the things that the Pride parade highlighted for me was the lack of visibility for women and black lesbians in particular.

- *Zodwa Shongwe, PRIDE: Protest and celebration (2006)*

### **Race**

In our black communities, homosexuality is still seen as a white phenomenon, un-African, an aberration, contrary to dominant religious beliefs and systems. I am not suggesting that only black people are homophobic, because this is not true – in any society or community where there are strong religious or traditional beliefs, you will find some elements of homophobic prejudice. In many communities of all races, lesbian and gay people are seen as threatening the social order: women because they seek to exercise autonomy over their bodies, while men are seen as traitors to masculine privilege because they are perceived to be adopting “feminine roles”. And transgender people call into question the traditional assumption that all humankind must fall irrevocably into one of two gender categories. Defiance of the “heterosexual norm” provokes moral condemnation, exclusion and violence.

- *Wendy Isaack, Feminist Africa, Issue 6\_Inconversation with Pumla Gqola*

### **Racism**

All gay spaces in Jo'burg and South Africa are just too white and it's deliberate. The niggers are kept out. It's not just the *niggers*, it's the poor *niggers*. There's a class thing. My friends and I are welcomed to the table because we are articulate and outspoken, and we have acceptable jobs. But if you're a township faggot whose English isn't that good then you're not welcome. It's poor, black gay and lesbian people who are putting leading the gay rights struggle – people like Simon Nkoli. And these white faggots owning their own bars and taking advantage of this lovely, fashionable Constitution and excluding black people from the very establishments that black people helped to create. That really irks me!

- *Carl Collison, PRIDE: Protest and celebration (2006)*

### **Rape**

What we're seeing is a spike in the numbers of women coming to us having been raped and who have been told throughout the attack that being a lesbian was to blame for what was happening to them.

- *Vanessa Ludwig, the chief executive at Triangle Project. (2009)*

*The Guardian Article: Fighting Misogyny & Women's Oppression In Africa, One Country At A Time*

When asking why lesbian women are being targeted you have to look at why all women are being raped and murdered in such high numbers in South Africa," "So you have to look at the increasingly macho culture, which seeks to oppress women and sees them as merely sexual beings. So when there is a lesbian woman she is an absolute affront to this kind of masculinity.

- *Carrie Shelver, People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA), a South African NGO. (2009)*

*The Guardian Article: Fighting Misogyny & Women's Oppression In Africa, One Country At A Time*

### **Religion**

We would condemn the practice of homosexuality as we would condemn the practice of adultery.

We encourage our churches to minister to people in need or in trouble-if a person was a practicing gay we

would try to minister to that person and help that person.

- Reverend Terry Rae, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of South Africa.  
(extracted from "Gays Reap Rewards Slowly in Post-Apartheid South Africa article)

## **Rights**

Not only are there legal injustices to be done away with, but mindsets and cultures have to be done away with too. It is one thing for you to have your rights and equality in the law, it is quite another to have them each day in the street, at work, in the bar, in public places where you socialize and where you cruise.

- Jessie Duarte, offered herself as a patron for the Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) (1996)

I'm very disappointed because I thought the new South Africa was going to be for everybody and we could be happy and enjoy our life. But for me my rights are limited.

- Nonhlanhla Zwane, Carte Blanche interview – hate crimes discussion on M-NET (2007)

## **Same Sex marriage**

We were trying to show them that we're people and we can live together.

- Nokwanda Ruiters (1994)

She took the Soldaat surname despite the fact that her marriage was not legal.

(extracts from "Gays Reap Rewards Slowly in Post-Apartheid South Africa article)

We don't think that (marriage) should be an election issue," said "Election issues must be around poverty and the important issues of reconciliation."

- Kevan Botha, legal advisor to the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality.

(extracts from "Gays Reap Rewards Slowly in Post-Apartheid South Africa article)

I think we're going to win the (marriage) case but I don't think it's going to be a walk-over.

- Matthew Chaskalson, lawyer for the Center for Applied Legal Studies.

(extracts from "Gays Reap Rewards Slowly in Post-Apartheid South Africa article)

Civil marriage officers working for the state are fully booked and religious ministers who are marriage officers do not yet have the licenses required in terms of the Civil Unions Act to marry same-sex couples.

- Fikile Vilakazi (2006)

My partner and I got married in December 2004. It was amazing, everyone smiling and happy. My partner's eldest daughter got up and made a speech. 'It's about bloody time that two of you got married after so many years living in sin!' she said.

But it worries me that our marriage is not legally recognized. If something happens to me today, my family will walk in and claim everything that my partner and I have worked hard to put together over the years.

Same sex marriage should be legalized. Marriage gave me a sense that I belong to someone. I feel dignified, respected and loved. I never had children, and suddenly here I have four.

- Hazel, 'The way that I am' published in *Sometimes X, Sometimes Y* (2005)

## **Sangoma(ism)**

When I was 20 years old I told my family that I was a lesbian. It was not long after this that I got the calling to be a *sangoma* [traditional healer]. A friend had taken me with her when she consulted a

*sangoma*. After the consultation, the *sangoma* pulled me aside and said that I would one day be one too. At this time I was very scared: I didn't want such a thing. I avoided it for a long time, until I knew I was read for it.

I have a lover now. She is also a *sangoma*. We are both proud and happy to be lesbians. To be a *sangoma* has made me strong. I don't feel afraid of anything. Even when these rough boys come to me in secret, they only want advice and won't harm me. They fear me I am a *sangoma* and a lesbian.

I don't know what makes me *sangoma* and lesbian. I don't even know if the two have anything to do with each other. All I know is that it feels right that this is the way my life must go. I look after myself. I do feel for gays and lesbians who are confused, because sometimes they come to me for advice. As I am a *sangoma* I try to help, but I always tell these confused people they must look inside themselves for answers.

- Sibongile: *A lesbian sangoma*

*Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef, as told by Tanya Chan Sam for Defiant Desire edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (1994)*

A person needs to receive a calling from ancestors. Ancestors play a critical role in the life of a *sangoma* [traditional healer]. The ancestors are the holy spirits of deceased family members, and provide us with the gift of healing and the ability to predict what will happen in the future.

Although same-sex relationships within ancestral marriages are supposed to be taboo, some modern *sangomas* are using these marriages to have secret sexual relationships in rural areas. In urban areas some of them are being more public about their same-sex relationships. It's generally believed that women *sangomas* have always used ancestral wives as a way to have secret same-sex relationships. Obviously a well-kept secret, since so many people still think that same-sexuality is un-African!

- Nkunzi Nkabinde, *'The way that I am' published in Sometimes X, Sometimes Y (2005)*

## Scriptures

Jesus did not say, 'If I be lifted up I will draw some'. Jesus said, 'If I be lifted up I will draw all, all, all, all, all.' Black, white, yellow, rich, poor, clever, not so clever, beautiful, not so beautiful. It's one of the most radical things. All, all, all, all, all, all, all, all. All belong. Gay, lesbian, so-called straight. All, all are meant to be held in this incredible embrace that will not let us go. All.

- Desmond Tutu, **Greatest Lives: Pivotal Moments (2008)**

## Sexuality

... I am a feminist lesbian and a black working-class woman, my life has taken this course; there was no other alternative. When one grows up and lives in a society where being black and female arouses such hatred, there is no option but to take a position, especially when one does not have the economic resources to fit into some protected society or subculture. Growing up in rural KwaZulu-Natal, I constantly sensed that my sexuality offended many people, if not the entire community in which I lived. I was young at the time, so I could not understand why this was so. I spent a lot of time wondering why I was treated differently in public and educational spaces, why my attempts to access the legal profession through the normal route were unsuccessful, and why I was consistently intimidated into conforming to feminine gender roles and standards that were alien to me.

- Wendy Isaack, *Feminist Africa, Issue 6: In conversation with Pumla Gqola*

## Space

Now I'm very involved in Gay and Lesbian of Witwatersrand (GLOW), but I only like the Lesbian Forum and the things they do. When there are men at GLOW functions they tend to take over and this true for all

of them, black or white. They only think of themselves.

- Thandazo Alice Kunene

'*Stabane* and all that'

*Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef, as told by Tanya Chan Sam for **Defiant Desire** edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, (1994)*

We've got a place that we have opened for gays and lesbians to be free to be cuddled, to be free to do whatever they want to do, in their own space, where the security can be very tight.

- Phumzile Manikela (Pub Owner called the Breeze in Orlando, Soweto)

## **Sport**

I want to play for the national team. I want to represent my country. I want to show everybody that womyn do belong in cricket and I want to make a living

- Linda Mawunga, *life's a pitch* an article by Larissa Klazinga for *Womyn Magazine*, Dec 2000 – Jan. 2001

## **Soccer**

The lesbian soccer team is because we were currently and previously disadvantaged. As lesbians we are still oppressed as much as we were oppressed before. So nothing has changed. So we decided that we need the team that will identify with our sexuality, with everything that we are.

- Phumla Masuku: *Chosen FEW* former coach

Young lesbian women join teams, soccer teams in the townships. We have a national soccer team but they are not even able to play because there is still discrimination within female teams in this country. We have lesbian women being kicked out in their teams not matter how talented they are, they get kicked out of their teams. I think we generally need a social space that will make us feel comfortable and do not hide of who we are. Where we can express our identity while at the same time living our lives fully as lesbian women.

- Wendy Isaack: *Gender Activist, Lawyer*

## **State**

The state's response has been inadequate. The state has a very clear responsibility to address patriarchy and this is set out in international law. Almost each and every legal instrument that you look at that deals with women's rights. The state has a responsibility to act with due diligence to prevent violence from happening in the first place.

- Wendy Isaack: *Gender Activist, Lawyer*

*On Black lesbians on mnet's carte blanche 920070*

## **Tradition**

I want to show the black lesbians out there you can be gay and African.

- Nokwanda Ruiters, *talking about how next she will wear the traditional African dress of her country.*  
on "Gays Reap Rewards Slowly in Post-Apartheid South Africa" article

## **Women**

SA: None of us can ever be free until women enjoy their full right to dignity.

- *Issued by COPE Women's Forum Kiki Rwexana (2009)*