

A m a n d a L o c k S w a r r
R i c h a N a g a r

Dismantling Assumptions: Interrogating “Lesbian” Struggles for Identity and Survival in India and South Africa

Geeta and I were frustrated after watching *Fire*. We had heard about all the fuss it created in the cities, and it was so hard to watch it in our village . . . But when we finally did, we said, “OK, here are two Indian women in love.” But there was nothing in it that spoke to our experiences, or even our love . . . Delhi is not that far from Chitrakoot, but as far as we were concerned, those two women could be living in America!¹

—Manju, interviewed by Richa Nagar, April 24, 1999, Chitrakoot District

In 1999, the International Gay and Lesbian Association (ILGA), a federation of more than three hundred lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights groups from seventy countries, held its annual meetings in Johannesburg, South Africa. The theme was “Building Partnerships for Equity,” yet racial and class tensions emerged as a fistfight broke out between delegates and Sowetan lesbians volunteering at the conference to gain access to it. At issue was the election of paid members of ILGA leadership, a process from which vol-

Both authors have contributed equally to the conceptualization and production of this article. Our collaboration was made possible by fellowships from the University of Minnesota’s Graduate Research Partnership Program, Graduate School, Center for Advanced Feminist Studies, the MacArthur Program, and Grant-in-Aid of Research, Artistry, and Scholarship. We are indebted to Cora, Phakamile, Geeta, and Manju for sharing their stories and reflections, and for inspiring us to undertake this collaboration. In order to retain their anonymity, we have used pseudonyms and changed identifying details throughout this article. We thank Susan Bullington, Joel Wainwright, Khajan Singh, and David Faust for their support and critical engagement, and two anonymous reviewers for their invaluable feedback.

¹ Deepa Mehta’s now famous and controversial film, *Fire*, revolves around a relationship between two sisters-in-law living in Delhi.

[*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2003, vol. 29, no. 2]

© 2003 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. 0097-9740/2004/2902-0027\$10.00

unteers were excluded because of their class status, despite organizational efforts to act in their interests.²

—From Amanda Swarr’s journal, 1999

These accounts from India and South Africa demonstrate that contemporary politics of intimacy and survival cannot be approached through frameworks that create a simple binary between the proverbial First and Third Worlds. At the same time, they foreground the limitations of feminist theories emerging from Northern academic institutions.³ Can our existing frameworks adequately represent the struggles of women in same-sex relationships who are located in the most socioeconomically peripheralized areas of the world? Can we analyze the politics of sexuality and intimacy in their lives without diminishing the centrality of neocolonial histories and geographies and their everyday struggles over access to material resources? How, if at all, can we integrate insights from critical development studies and lesbian studies to address these contradictions and questions?

Development theorists often view homosexuality as an identity of the privileged, to be experienced and explored by those who have the luxury of not facing immediate struggles for day-to-day survival. Feminist theories of sexuality, however, often prioritize desire over needs, isolating homosexuality from struggles around resources, livelihoods, and sociopolitical empowerment. Taken together, these two approaches render invisible not only the experiences of a vast majority of poor women in same-sex relationships living in the global South but also the structural processes that mold sociosexual practices and struggles. Here we draw on the oral histories of four women—two living in the South African township of Soweto and two in the Chitrakoot district of Uttar Pradesh in northern India—to generate a new kind of conversation about the struggles of poor women in the South who enter into same-sex relationships. Our use of the term *lesbian* or *women in same-sex relationships* echoes the ways that

² For a fuller analysis of this controversy, see Bullington 2001.

³ We recognize the extremely problematic and loaded nature of overarching dichotomies such as *First World/Third World* and *North/South*. We use these terms interchangeably and capitalize them, not to homogenize diverse communities and places but to reflect the continued sociopolitical significance and deeply felt impact of these categories (and the discursive practices that accompany them) in contemporary global politics and in our research locales. These terms also allow us to acknowledge our embeddedness in an unequal structure of knowledge production—rooted in postcolonial hierarchies—in which intellectuals based in resource-rich institutions of the North frequently dominate the international context in which knowledge about Southern peoples and places is produced, circulated, and discussed.

our narrators choose to describe their own relationships and identities. While many Sowetan women in same-sex relationships identify as lesbian, the narrators from rural Chitrakoot see themselves as two women in a special kind of *sambandh*, or relationship. Despite their deployment of different labels to describe their sexual choices, however, the commonalities in these four women's experiences derive from their respective locations in peripheralized geographical regions of the Third World in terms of resources and infrastructure. Although it is easy to see the marginality of rural areas, many urban "slums," shantytowns, and periurban areas also share this marginalized status. We highlight how these women experience, analyze, and articulate their everyday struggles around sexuality in relation to other material and symbolic struggles central to their lives. We consider the multiple and contradictory ways in which nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as well as churches and informal associations, facilitate or stifle the emergence of sociosexual and political identities. Finally, we underscore the need for feminist scholars to bridge the gulf between development theory/praxis and lesbian studies by conceptualizing new frameworks that explore the mutually constitutive struggles for resource access and material survival on the one hand and sexuality, intimacy, identity, and community on the other.

Empowerment, homosexuality, and the erasure of "Third-World lesbians"

In recent years, the notion of "empowerment" has captured the imagination of development planners, scholars, and activists alike, and it is widely believed that the empowerment of the Third World's poorest women holds the key to solving some of the most difficult questions of global poverty, hunger, and environmental degradation (World Resources Institute, United Nations Environment Program, and United Nations Development Program 1994). Feminist scholars ranging from development economists to sociologists have variously engaged with and problematized the notion of empowerment and highlighted the intricate ways in which sociopolitical empowerment is connected with struggles over resources and entitlements as well as with processes of identity formation at various scales, from the body and the household to the transnational arena.⁴ Starting with the politicization and theorization of gendered access to property and resources, these scholars have radically altered preexisting discourses surrounding development by identifying domestic violence, re-

⁴ Kabeer 1994; Ray 1999; Katz 2001; Nagar et al. 2002.

productive rights, religious extremism, and women's control over their bodies and sexualities as key issues constituting the politics and praxis of development.⁵

Same-sex sexuality, however, has registered a silence in these conversations. Indeed, a review of this literature facilitates the impression that no poor lesbians exist in the South. This silence can be read in two ways: first, that poor women, especially in rural and periurban areas of the South, are so immersed in their everyday struggles for survival that they cannot indulge in the luxury of exploring/cultivating same-sex sexualities, or second, that homosexuality exists, but scholars do not consider it relevant to the issue of women's sociopolitical empowerment in the Third World.

At the other end of the spectrum are feminist theories that centrally address lesbian representation; examine the social articulations of and differences among gender, sex, and sexuality; and highlight the intangibility and instability of these categories (Rubin 1984; de Lauretis 1988; Butler 1990, 1993). Unlike development theory, which often tends to simplistically equate gender with women, this scholarship complicates gender, sex, and sexuality as a matrix produced by all people through everyday practices. However, most studies in this area remain disengaged with issues of resource access that development theorists and NGO workers have found so central to addressing women's struggles and to understanding strategies of mobilization and protest in the South.

Beginning in the 1980s, the scholarship of feminists of color in the United States challenged lesbian studies as monolithic, pointing out the limits of privileging one set of experiences without recognizing the partial and biased nature of conclusions enabled by such perspectives (Moraga 1983; Lorde 1984; Anzaldúa 1987). These critics began to disrupt the dominant assumption that "lesbian," for example, constitutes the primary identity for those who have same-sex relationships. But despite these interventions, multiple silences in contemporary lesbian studies persist, emanating, in part, from the fact that much of this writing is grounded in the cultural, political, and material realities of middle-class United States and Europe.⁶ This is evident in two core assumptions that endure in lesbian studies.

The first assumption is that abstract theorizing about lesbian subjects

⁵ Agarwal 1994; Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1999; Mathur 1999; Sarin 1999.

⁶ We use the term *lesbian studies* to refer to scholarship that directly addresses lesbian subjectivities and identities. We recognize that this field is interdisciplinary and its often-contradictory classifications—designated, e.g., as feminist theory, queer theory, transgender theory, and/or sexuality theory—are highly contested.

can be politically, historically, and geographically neutral. As Rosemary Hennessy (2000) points out, generalizations about an “imaginary lesbian” (de Lauretis 1994) or “postmodern lesbian” (Grosz 1994) tend to homogenize lesbianism and facilitate representations of a middle-class white Northern subject. Hennessy shows us how such accounts abstract desire from its economic and political realities. In so doing, scholars’ respective explanations of lesbian desire reproduce class- and race-specific accounts of lesbian subjects. Hennessy points to the ways that such accounts of lesbian identity are not only abstracted from issues of survival, they also inadvertently reproduce the boundaries between psyche and social, private and public, nation and colony, and body and market that reproduce capitalist privilege.

This links with a second assumption of lesbian studies, that pleasure and desire may be removed from or supersede economic needs. While we agree that sexuality is embedded in specific historical and geographic contexts (e.g., Almaguer 1991; Lancaster 1992; Kennedy and Davis 1993), we seek to reconceptualize desire itself not as innate or inherent but as emerging in conjunction with processes such as development, neocolonialism, apartheid, and liberalization. Accounts of lesbian identity that abstract sexual identifications and practices from their material context and individualize desire in isolation from the sexual and gendered division of labor are necessarily incomplete and occlude the impact and import of historical and socioeconomic forces.

Cheshire Calhoun argues that feminist theorizing, under which we include feminist development studies, “has failed to capture lesbian difference because it has not begun with a full-blown theory of heterosexist oppression fully parallel to race and class oppression” (1995, 29). Similarly, lesbian studies has not engaged with the complexities of living in places where political violence and struggles for resources as basic as clean water, food, and literacy directly inform women’s options, strategies, and means for articulating their sexualities. The silences and erasures that these two literatures inadvertently produce can be addressed by systematically identifying and challenging the assumptions that marginalize certain voices and experiences thereby creating spaces for new narratives to emerge. Our collaborative effort is a beginning in this direction.

Extending intersectionality through collaboration

We build on the growing body of feminist scholarship that recognizes the imperative of positing identity categories such as race, class, gender, sex, and sexuality as essentially interrelated and simultaneously experienced. It

is now agreed that one cannot speak about any one of these identities in isolation because of their “complex relationality” (Mohanty 1991, 13; see also Spelman 1988). Theories of development and queerness that posit sexuality or resource access as burdens peripheral to their analyses are necessarily incomplete. As Anne McClintock points out, “race, class, and gender are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence in and through relation to each other—if in contradictory and conflictual ways” (1995, 5).

At the same time, our analysis extends the idea of intersectionality beyond relationality and simultaneity of identities. Intersectionality is not solely about looking at various axes of difference as interlocking “social categories” or “identities.” These coproduced differences intersect with “interlocking relationships between the rules, resources, practices and power through which social inequalities of gender, caste and class are played out in different institutions in [a given] context” (Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1999, vii). In the case of lesbian identities and struggles, therefore, it is not simply a constellation of sexual practices that is critical in producing difference. Like globalization, difference too derives its specific forms and meanings through its “encounter with existing social relations and material social practices in particular places,” and our job is to expose the “tensions, contradictions and affiliations” embedded in these encounters (Katz 2001, 1228). Extending intersectionality therefore necessitates that we reconceptualize difference as constituted and (re)configured in relation to place-specific struggles over rights, resources, social practices, and relationships—including sexual and emotional intimacies—that people enter into with or without labels.

Our collaboration has evolved from our own intellectual struggles over the last decade within the subfields of lesbian and critical development studies, where Amanda Swarr has focused on transgendered communities in postapartheid South Africa and Richa Nagar has examined the limitations of empowerment discourses in women’s NGOs in India.⁷ As we grappled with multilayered narratives of “women” living in these places, we confronted the limits of feminist theorizations of development, empowerment,

⁷ We are both engaged in long-term projects involving specific reciprocal relationships with the narrators in this article, but we do not discuss this issue here because their complexities cannot be captured in a few sentences and we seek to avoid the ways “new bourgeois subjects are reproduced ideologically even in knowledges that profess a progressive reformulation of desire” (Hennessy 2000, 190). Instead of “doing” positionality by listing our attributes, we position ourselves by aligning our intellectual and political goals with those of our narrators.

and queerness that fail to address how the politics of intimacy, sexuality, and access to resources intertwine in everyday lives. A fellowship from the University of Minnesota's Graduate Research Partnership Program allowed us to analyze these issues in a comparative theoretical and empirical framework. We suggest that the invisibility of these women's lives and struggles in feminist discourses on development and sexuality is inseparable from the boundaries and divisions shaped by colonialism, developmentalism, globalization, and academic knowledge production. Our intersectional analyses of shifting, relational, and multiple identities and subjectivities must, therefore, engage seriously and centrally with materialities and discourses embedded in global capitalist processes and neocolonial histories and geographies.

In the following sections, we analyze the life stories of Geeta and Manju in Chitrakoot and Cora and Phakamile in Soweto to explore how their struggles over access to basic resources and rights are thoroughly entangled with struggles to exercise sexual agency and to create spaces where same-sex intimacies can be nurtured and sustained. Their stories demonstrate how women's identities and perspectives are informed by their simultaneous experiences of heterosexism and poverty and how seemingly disparate strands such as religion, political organizations, and child rearing are inextricably interwoven with the politics of sexuality and livelihood. They expose how identity markers, such as "lesbian" or "butch/femme," are understood differently in various spaces; how community networks are defined by and/or in opposition to homophobia, casteism, and classism; and the ways women determine their own commitments to same-sex sexualities within particular cultural contexts. By thus providing nuanced understandings of specific "lesbian" lives, our project begins to address major gaps in both academic literature and organizational strategies, and to illustrate the theoretical complexities of lesbian sexualities, intimacies, and everyday struggles for material and emotional survival in Third World contexts.

Disrupting and reclaiming "empowerment": A story of Geeta and Manju

"The trees are fruitless, the earth is barren, the men are unfaithful, and the women, shameless!" This popular image of the Chitrakoot region as characterized by harsh climate, acute deforestation, and serious water crisis is further complicated by a history of bonded (indentured) labor, the dominant presence of bandits, and a general environment of hardships. With no profitable minerals or raw materials to offer for "development,"

the Chitrakoot district was systematically ignored in terms of human development by governments during colonial and postindependence periods and was driven instead by “the rule of the gun” (Vanangana 1998, 1). Social indicators place Chitrakoot at the very bottom of national averages in income, sex ratio, and female literacy (24 percent), with raping, burning, and battering of women as everyday occurrences. In this district, the launching of the Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women’s Equality, henceforth MS) sowed the seeds of what some have termed as a grassroots revolution (Menon 1995).

Initiated in 1989 by the Indian government and envisioned by some dynamic feminist activists, MS was an innovative scheme that stressed the need for a positive interventionist role of the national government in women’s empowerment and operated in collaboration with gender-progressive NGOs at the district level. Although urban women with formal education often held official positions in district level units, the pivotal forces were rural workers who mobilized village women and helped them form action groups to collectively reflect on their conditions and needs and to determine concrete strategies for their own empowerment. In this way, MS recognized that organizing the most disadvantaged rural women to discuss gender relations was a necessary step toward enabling them to pursue empowerment on their own terms (Agarwal 1994; Nagar 2000).

The work of MS in Chitrakoot first came into the national limelight when it accomplished the “incredible feat” of training the poorest and illiterate rural women from the lowest castes and the local *Kol* tribe as hand pump mechanics. While acute water scarcity and governmental apathy propelled rural women to master the technology of fixing hand pumps, the acquisition of this skill triggered a critical consciousness among women about caste, class, and gender relations and a deep desire to attain formal literacy. This gave birth to women’s literacy camps, followed by the establishment of a residential school, Mahila Shikshan Kendra (MSK), whose six-month courses provided literacy training to village women. Alongside these developments, a handful of MS workers also began to form new alliances that politicized domestic violence and triggered within MS a critical rethinking of instrumentalist versions of empowerment in development theory and practice (Nagar 2000).

Homosexuality, however, remained a largely forbidden topic in MS, and the only woman to openly challenge the organization’s stance on this issue was twenty-year-old Geeta.⁸ This case study examines Geeta’s per-

⁸ Nagar interacted frequently with Geeta over a period of approximately two months (March–April 1999) in a variety of social settings. Most of the quotations and details provided

sonal history, her relationship with Manju, her complex association with MS in light of her relationship with Manju, and how her involvement with MS has shaped Geeta's dreams for the future.

Born in 1978 in a *dalit* ("untouchable") family, Geeta was the oldest of five living siblings. Her father was a construction worker and carpenter, and her mother and paternal grandmother looked after farming and domestic work. Geeta lost her father at age twelve, and her uncle supported her schooling for another year, after which her aunt arranged her marriage to Ashok, a carpet weaver. Ashok had never been to school, was completely unattractive to Geeta, and inflicted verbal, physical, and sexual abuses on her. He relentlessly mocked Geeta about one of her eyes, which was deformed, and beat her until her body swelled.

In 1992, after living in her *sasural* (conjugal village) for eighteen months, Geeta met an MS worker who encouraged her to join MS's literacy training camp. At the completion of this training, Geeta began teaching women in her *sasural*. As Geeta's activism gained momentum and her social networks expanded, her in-laws started resenting her work and accused her of being immoral. One day when Geeta was four months pregnant and Ashok was away, her father-in-law punished her by beating her mercilessly with a baton. After this incident, Geeta left her *sasural* and moved to Karvi, where MS was headquartered. For a few years, Geeta taught in literacy projects in different villages. Her daughter, Shyama, was born in 1993, and in the absence of Ashok's support, Geeta left the baby with her mother. In 1996, when Geeta got a job with the newly started MSK program in Karvi, she brought Shyama back with her.

It is in MSK that Geeta became close to Manju, an *adivasi* (classified as tribal) woman from the *Kol* community, who came to study for six months and became Geeta's lover. Geeta was acquainted with Manju through an aunt who used to work as a nurse in Manju's village. Manju ran a grocery shop in the village, and Geeta insisted that some literacy training at MSK would help Manju tremendously. In Geeta's own words:

Manju is much older than me. Her daughter is now thirteen, and she left her husband when she was still pregnant. When you'll see her, you won't be able to tell she is a woman. Her face, her shape—

in this case study, however, come from a taped life historical interview with Geeta on April 22, 1999 (conducted in MSK), followed by another life historical interview with Manju and a general discussion with Manju and Geeta, both conducted on April 24, 1999, at their home in Madhopur. All interviews and conversations took place in Hindi and were translated into English by Nagar.

everything is just like that of a man. Nothing that she wears on her body is feminine—no *bindi* [dot], no necklace, no earrings. . . . Manju’s husband was a terror and kept her imprisoned in his house. . . . One day after they had intercourse, Manju was sleeping and he filled her body [vagina] with crushed red chilies. After that, . . . she did not want any more men.

Before Geeta met her, she had heard stories about Manju. One was about her role in the killing of an armed bandit called Sher Singh Thakur. Sher Singh had raped all the single women of Manju’s village and declared before the village that he would not rest until he brought Manju home for at least one night. So Manju’s mother gave her a pep talk, sewed her a pair of shorts made of blue jeans, and handed her an axe. Manju was dressed in those shorts, a turban, and her brother’s vest when Sher Singh marched in, calling her foul names. And Manju and her brother killed him. Geeta had also heard that Manju had a wild affair with another woman, but no one had the guts to say anything to Manju; they only bad-mouthed the other woman. Manju’s entire village worshipped her, Geeta was told, and no one held any major event in Manju’s absence. Her father, uncles, and brothers treated her like a man. She smoked *bidis* (hand-rolled cigarettes) and drank alcohol openly.

Clearly, Manju is a woman, but she refigures what it means to be a “woman” through her protective, sexual, and daily behaviors. Her masculinity brings her community recognition and, significantly, protection from harassment from men like Sher Singh. It also marks her as a woman who has relationships with other women, who is aggressive, and who overtly rejects predominant definitions of femininity. So what happened when Geeta met this “unreal woman”? Geeta narrates: “I do not know what happened to me when I met Manju but I forgot my man. I forgot that I had been married. We were so attracted to each other that we immediately felt like husband and wife. So terrible was that initial pull, that I got a fever. I didn’t eat anything for four days. After that, we did not leave each other. . . . I knew I could lose my job. But I also knew it was impossible for me to stop. . . . I was in the grip of magic.”

The attraction between Geeta and Manju is intense and almost instantaneous, though neither of them identifies as “lesbian.” Geeta relates that this attraction is not only sexual but also familiar “like husband and wife.” For Geeta and Manju, heterosexual marriage provides a model and terminology for describing their relationship, and this model makes their union recognizable and acceptable to their community. But they do not imitate heterosexuality through their masculine/feminine relationship

even though Geeta is clearly “feminine” and Manju “masculine,” in terms of appearance and behavior. They create a relationship that is very different from their violent heterosexual marriages and is informed deeply by a feminist consciousness that they have internalized as members of MS.

In the common public spaces of MSK, Manju and Geeta found each other, and their love blossomed. During mealtimes, they sat next to each other and ate. At night, they lay next to each other in the dorm hall where all the teachers and students slept. And in the shared washing area, they declared their love for each other by hand washing each other’s clothes. During the spring festival, *Holi*, Manju picked up Geeta on her bicycle and took her home, where she told her siblings, uncles, and parents about their relationship, and Geeta became a “daughter-in-law.” In a Shiva temple in Karvi, Geeta accepted Manju as her husband in the absence of religious authorities. Geeta’s mother first warned against doing anything that would make people talk, but she later accepted their relationship. For Geeta’s daughter, Shyama, Geeta was “Mummy” and Manju became both “Amma” (mother) and “Papa.” The only open opposition came from Ashok, who invited Manju and Geeta to his home one day and tried to kill Geeta. From that day, Geeta severed all contact with Ashok.

Although they worked in separate towns and Geeta often spent her nights at MSK, Geeta and Manju started sharing a home in 1996. In July 1998, they began renting a vacant one-room shop where they lived with their two daughters, and a year later, they purchased a plot of land to build a house together. In 1998, Manju also surprised Geeta by devoting all her savings to Geeta’s successful eye surgery.

As Geeta and Manju’s relationship became public, they were harassed by organizational workers. Twice, open meetings were called to discuss their relationship, and the woman in charge of the MSK declared “MS had no place for people like Geeta and Manju.” Geeta and Manju were infuriated. “We said, we do not want MS either. We said this before the highest officials.” Geeta explains, “Everything I said to them was connected with the feminist training I had received in the MS. I had internalized feminist thinking to the extent that I didn’t even want to look at anything called ‘man’ . . . Even in MS, many women think that if they don’t have a man, they don’t have a life. But why not think about living your life with a woman?” Then, Geeta told the district coordinator of MS, “Look . . . Manju and I are in a relationship—a different kind of intimate relationship. Now, what is your decision? Do you have a place for me, or not? Tomorrow, I do not want anyone to say that Geeta was thrown out of MS because she loved Manju. I will leave MS before MS asks me to leave.” The district coordinator immediately called a meeting

with the rest of the group, and Manju, who was offered a job at the MS after her literacy training, quit her job in anger. Manju threatened the MS officials, suggesting, “If you hurt Geeta for loving me, I will not let MS operate in this district, even if I have to befriend bandits to do this.” After this incident, the same people who had humiliated Geeta began to speak to Manju and Geeta in sugarcoated tones and welcomed them as a couple.

Even as MS stifled their relationship, however, the spaces created by this organization were the only possible spaces that Geeta and Manju could have found to cultivate their relationship. Geeta recognizes this profound contradiction as she articulates the influence of MS in her life. She is still bitter about the homophobia she encountered in MS, but ironically, Geeta would have neither found Manju nor the courage to fight for her right to be with Manju if it had not been for MS. She says:

MS changed my life. I didn’t want the life I lived before I came to MS. I could have ended that life by dying, but not while living. My family does not allow a woman to have another partner while her husband is alive—the caste allows it, but my family does not. . . . Even if I rebelled and left my husband, who would have guaranteed that I was not going to be in a more horrible relationship than before? . . . And now, I never want to return on that path with men. I understand that there are all kinds of men: good and bad, but no. I don’t want it. With men, you are always expected to bear children, and I cannot stomach the idea anymore. . . . It was only because of the thinking that MS inspired in me that a new life with Manju and with MSK became possible for me.

Geeta gained economic, familial, and moral support from MS at critical moments in her personal struggles—for instance, when she faced serious medical complications while giving birth to Shyama. Later, when Geeta and Manju triggered passionate arguments about their own place as a couple in MS, they found personal support for their relationship from influential individuals such as Indira, the former district coordinator of MS, who eventually helped Geeta divorce Ashok:

[Indira] arranged a *Panchayat* [council meeting of family elders] at her home. . . . My Uncle, my Grandfather, and Ashok came, and I was asked, “Will you go back with Ashok, or not?” I said, “No, I cannot go. I am already committed to someone else.” And I applied for divorce. After this incident, my interaction with my own relatives ended. . . . So MS is my family now. My original family is left behind,

but here at MSK, I laugh, I dance, I sing with the girls. . . . No other teacher likes to stay as many nights here with the girls as I do.

Although MS could shelter Geeta from the patriarchal pressures and heteronormative expectations of the outside world to a limited degree, the ideological beliefs and personal choices that Geeta and Manju made in the face of grinding poverty often generated painful disagreements and conflicts, especially when they discussed their daughters' futures:

Manju and I live very happily together for the most part, but sometimes she has grave doubts about what we have done. She thinks she has wronged me by loving me and this causes me grief. . . . Whether people think I am wrong or right, I do not want anything else, and I do not have anyone else. . . . Sometimes Manju and I talk about not having a son. She says, "What will we do? . . . Let's adopt a boy." And I say, "No. We cannot. We each have a daughter and they have full rights to everything we own. Once we adopt a boy, his ownership will get established on everything."

Geeta cared deeply for Manju's daughter, Tara, who was sixteen and studying in the village in the sixth grade when this research was conducted. For Geeta, Tara was "my own" and no different from her biological daughter Shyama. Similarly, Manju was a dedicated parent to Shyama; she looked after Shyama when Geeta lived at MSK, and Geeta was proud of their relationship: "Manju has trained Shyama so well that all my co-workers remark on it. . . . Manju wants Shyama to do really well in her studies. She wants my daughter to bring me the name I have never had."

Geeta had dreams for both daughters, but she avoided verbalizing her dreams for Shyama because Shyama was still very young, and Geeta did not want Manju to feel that she was worried about her own child. Geeta was more concerned about Tara, who was older, and there was increasing pressure from Manju's family to marry her off:

Whenever they bring up Tara's marriage, I resist it. . . . Manju and I will soon build our house, and then I want Tara . . . to study as much as she wants. And when she completes her education, I want her to get a job. But . . . the idea of marrying these girls does not even cross my head. . . . The restrictions imposed by our society are huge, but if you believe in something that involves a different approach . . . you have to come to the forefront and do it. . . . For our daughters, too, we have neither decided to marry them off, nor to match them up with the right women. . . . But I want them

to have a good, proper education so that they can make progress in life and become good human beings. . . . Manju worries sometimes, “my daughter is coming of age.” . . . But I tell her, “Never talk about their marriage. They will take those decisions themselves. Right now, let them continue their education.”

Geeta and Manju’s story illustrates the ways in which these two women have fought to create public spaces and to gain social acceptance for their relationship as well as for their personal and political commitments. It also vividly illustrates three specific ways in which issues of sexual agency and choices are entangled with struggles for everyday survival. First, this case study enriches and complicates the idea of masculinity/femininity in same-sex relationships by showing that the expressions and meanings associated with masculine gender identities cannot be understood in isolation from their sociopolitical context. In a place where there is no identifiable “lesbian community” or “lesbian culture,” Manju’s masculine gender presentation and behavior allow her to gain power in her *adivasi* and village communities and protect herself and her relationship with Geeta from violent threats such as rape and communal ostracism. Second, the intersections between sexuality and organizational ideologies shape Geeta and Manju’s complicated association with MS. The commitment of MS to advance the rights of the most marginalized women in Chitrakoot, as well as the spaces and communities of women that this organization fostered, allowed Geeta and Manju’s relationship to develop and grow. At the same time, MS itself became threatened by the nature of their relationship and found itself pushed and challenged in unanticipated ways. Geeta and Manju’s sexual politics reflected their commitment to their relationship and their open opposition to MS’s homophobia, but in the face of family ostracism and physical abuse, they also came to rely on MS economically and emotionally as a “family” and not merely as a “development NGO.” Finally, the thoroughly enmeshed nature of the politics of sexuality and material survival is evident in the difficulties that rural Indian women at the lowest rungs of class and caste hierarchies face in raising children together. Although Geeta’s politics make it difficult for her to envision their daughters’ marriage, Manju’s dilemmas on this issue are a constant reminder of the social structures and limitations within which they live. Further, their disagreement over having a son is strongly rooted in their concerns about their daughters’ economic future; as two women creating a family together, their already minimal economic and social power in the face of their patriarchal and casteist society is considerably diminished.

Subverting violence in postapartheid Soweto: A story of Cora and Phakamile

In sharp contrast to Geeta and Manju's environment in rural Chitrakoot, Cora and Phakamile live in Soweto where a vibrant history and culture of resistance has explicitly connected struggles against homophobia with those against racism and classism. Under the forced segregation and racism of apartheid that ruled in South Africa from 1948 to 1994, the Group Areas Act (1950) required that racial groups live in designated locales. For black South Africans, this meant being relegated to rural "homelands" with remote locations and barren land and to urban "townships" known for their crowded and substandard living conditions. Located outside of Johannesburg, Soweto has been characterized by violence and poverty despite its proximity to white-designated areas of great opulence (Thompson 1995; Bonner and Segal 1998). A site of intense community-based political struggles against apartheid, Soweto was intimately connected with the 1960 antipass campaigns, the 1976 student uprisings, and political tensions around South Africa's transition to racial democracy in the 1980s and 1990s. Gays and lesbians have been essential to Soweto's communities and activism but have rarely been acknowledged in scholarship.⁹

In this section, we discuss the story of Cora and Phakamile, two young residents of Soweto with whom Amanda Swarr lived and worked for six months in 1999 and 2000.¹⁰ The politics surrounding lesbian sexuality and poverty intersect in Cora and Phakamile's daily lives in three critical ways. First, their gender identities are shaped by the raced and classed constitution of masculinity and femininity in their specific geographic locale. Masculine "butchness" characterizes how most lesbians define their appearances and shape their social interactions. Though butches do not merely copy or mimic men, Sowetan butch lesbians' self-definitions must be understood in relation to Sowetan male heterosexual masculinity. Like heterosexual masculine men, Sowetan lesbians take up masculinity strategically to assert their agency, claim masculine privileges, and declare their desires for relationships with women. Butchness allows some Sowetan

⁹ With the exception of Krouse 1993 and Gevisser and Cameron 1994, scholarship on South Africa and specifically on Soweto almost entirely ignores the presence and role of gays and lesbians in this locale.

¹⁰ Swarr and her research partner, Susan Bullington, interacted and intermittently lived with Cora and Phakamile in Soweto and Johannesburg over a period of six months (September–October 1999, June–July 2000, September–October 2000), and the discussions included here are based on conversations undertaken during this time. Most of the quotations in this case study come from life historical interviews conducted in English jointly by Swarr and Bullington on October 14–15, 2000, in Cora's home in Soweto.

lesbians to achieve social power in the face of impoverishment, violence, and the racism of apartheid and colonialism.

Second, the historical and sociopolitical context of South Africa informs Sowetan lesbians' feelings and beliefs about religion. Unlike Geeta and Manju's association with a women's development NGO, Cora and Phakamile's primary affiliation is with a Christian Metropolitan Community Church. Religious spaces emerged as critical avenues of information, networking, and emotional support under apartheid. Unlike many places where religion is associated with homophobic repression, this church serves as a political and social space for Sowetan lesbians to articulate an ideology sensitive to their cultures and sexuality.

Finally, the violence and homophobic harassment faced by lesbians are directly related to their poverty. Both their modes of transportation and their insecure housing, as well as the degree to which they are known to be lesbians in their communities, make them vulnerable to attack. Thus, family acceptance and gender emerge centrally for all four narrators, even as their specific material and class-based struggles, as well as their relationships to religious and sociopolitical organizations, take very different forms.

Phakamile is a twenty-six-year-old woman who lives in an impoverished area where crime and gangsters are especially prevalent in a small structure she calls her "cabin," which is attached to her family's house. She is proud to have her own space, which is just big enough for a bed, in this wooden one room, a style of housing common in Soweto. During most of 1999 and 2000 when this research was conducted, Phakamile was unemployed; unemployment was common in her community and in 1997 was estimated at 57 percent among black South Africans aged fifteen to thirty (Forgey et al. 1999, 247). However, in the latter half of 2000, Phakamile worked as a waitress. Most Sowetans who are employed have "unskilled" service-based jobs in areas such as domestic service, factory, and mine work, and informal sector employment that keep them living at a subsistence level. Race continues to be an important determinant of wages, with blacks making less than 15 percent of what whites make. Further, the formal workforce is 60 percent male, making it more difficult for women to attain employment (Forgey et al. 1999, 259). This sporadic employment increases young Sowetan lesbians' reliance on their families for everyday survival.

Masculine "butch" identifications are critical to how most Sowetan lesbians characterize themselves and their relationships. "Butchness" exists as the rhetorical opposite to "femme," but most Sowetan lesbians identify as butch and have relationships with "straight" women who are bisexual in practice. Through butchness, Sowetan lesbians assert their masculinity and define roles in relationships, and these terms of identification are a

source of great debate and conversation among lesbians. Phakamile describes herself as very butch and masculine, despite her small size. She smokes tobacco and marijuana rolled in newspaper, a sign of her masculinity. Phakamile is a soccer player, and playing soccer itself is an assertion of her masculine butch gender identity.

Phakamile's partner, Cora, is from a relatively prosperous area of Soweto and lives in a house with her mother, father, uncle, and niece. Their house was given to Cora's parents by her sister and has electricity and running water. Since Cora has lived in this house, many of the appliances and decorations in the house have broken, and some of the rooms have no furniture in them. Cora's parents cannot afford the upkeep for the house, but Cora, her mother, and her niece spend hours each day cleaning it. In the context of Soweto, this family is middle class. Cora is twenty-eight-years-old and athletic, and she realized that she was a lesbian when she was nineteen. She speaks of her gender as a "lesbian woman" and, unlike most of her peers, opposes butch and femme concepts. Cora has obtained sporadic domestic service employment, and she cleans buildings with her mother in a small Afrikaans city about a half-hour's taxi ride from Soweto. She has aspirations of living on her own, away from the control and lack of privacy she experiences in her family's home. Cora would like to have access to private spaces to explore her sexuality like upper-class black and white lesbians she knows, but her economic dependence on her family requires that she continue to live at home.

Cora is not directly open about her lesbianism with her family, although she and her many lesbian friends spend a lot of time at her house and even wear T-shirts that declare their sexual orientation. For the first few years of her relationship with Phakamile, Cora lived with her older sister, who was always skeptical of their relationship. Frustrated by her sister's strictness, Cora moved into her parents' home where her mother confronted her and Phakamile about their relationship: "She said, 'You, you are lovers,'" recounts Phakamile. Cora and Phakamile ignored Cora's mother at the time, and Cora does not want to come out to her family before she is ready: "I think I will tell them . . . when I've got my own place, and a permanent job, of course." But until they achieve economic independence, Phakamile spends the night at Cora's house regularly enough to be informally accepted as part of the family.

By contrast, Phakamile is open about her sexuality with her family, and they are accepting of her lesbianism. Phakamile states that her relationship with her grandmother has always been "so good and so I didn't have a problem. But at first I did have a problem. The only person who made me to go home and tell people, tell my family who I love, is [Cora]. I

loved her so much anyway that I had to tell them. They were patient about it. . . . [Cora] made me have my freedom. She made me.”

Despite this love, Cora and Phakamile have had an intermittent relationship from the time that they got together. Phakamile is much more interested in continuing the relationship than Cora, and this is partly because of the butch/femme dynamic between them. The meanings of “butch” and “femme,” along with the question of who should “propose” to whom and how, are constant topics of discussion. Phakamile describes the start of their relationship at a soccer game where she was one of the star players by explaining that she called Cora over and proposed to her. Cora laughs at this description, claiming that *she* proposed to Phakamile, “You know what . . . Phakamile, as butch as she is, I proposed to her. Really, really. Well, I could see that . . . she was interested and she was afraid, and so I thought let me make things easier for her, you know and propose. . . . Phakamile, she was scared of me.”

This discussion of fear and who proposed to whom is also related to their class differences, as Cora aspires to be middle class and Phakamile is clearly working class. For example, Phakamile describes her “cabin” with great pride and a sense of romance. But for Cora, the cabin “was a funny little house. . . . I just told myself, ‘Oh me, I would never live in one of those.’” Cora does not like to sleep at the cabin, which is another reason they spend so much time at Cora’s house, despite the acceptance of their relationship by Phakamile’s family. Cora says: “I have to wake up, boil water, take one of those dishes, pour water and wash. I’m not used to this kind of lifestyle. I’m used to this kind of lifestyle where I wake up, go straight to the bath. . . . You know, I’m spoiled.” This class tension also comes up when they envision the future of their relationship. Phakamile hopes for them to be together forever, but Cora hopes for a partner who is more wealthy and upwardly mobile than Phakamile.

While gender identity and class facilitate tension between Cora and Phakamile, the two women also share many of the same values. Both are practicing Christians and attend the same church each week—the Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church (HUMCC)—along with most of their friends. The Metropolitan Community Churches were founded as a space where gay and lesbian Christians could reconcile their sexual orientation with their faith. From its inception in the early 1990s, the HUMCC has attracted black South African Christians who are gay and lesbian to one of the most dangerous and notorious parts of Johannesburg, Hillbrow.

The HUMCC is both a political and social space for black gays and

lesbians. As well as serving as a source of faith and spiritual support, its two young pastors counsel members through familial rejections, relationship difficulties, financial crises, and numerous suicide attempts. Many of the HUMCC members struggle to reconcile their Christian faith and their homosexuality. Phakamile explains: "My family, most of them, they judge [like] God, so whenever they want to condemn, they tell you about the Bible. And then it's like you don't have any information." Information and emotional support come not only from the leadership but from the members of the church who create community with each other. Explaining why she decided to go the HUMCC for the first time, Phakamile says: "I was very much depressed, and I just felt like going to church." She and Cora were experiencing difficulties in their relationship, and she hoped to meet up with her there. This sense of community also carries over to social events such as picnics, discussion and Bible study groups, and gay and lesbian commitment ceremonies. The HUMCC breaks down the isolation of being gay and lesbian in Soweto and Johannesburg, bringing in new members at each service. For Cora: "I just felt comfortable there. Welcome. So, I left my church, said: 'Bye guys—see you.' Then I joined HUMCC. . . . I mean, I felt as if I belonged there."

The experiences of Cora and Phakamile speak to the complex social networks of relationships, both intimate and familial, formed through and around membership in the HUMCC. The church offers a new ideology of self-acceptance to its members, countering the judgment and homophobia they face in their daily lives. Members of the HUMCC community feel less stigmatized when they realize that there are others like them, role models with whom they find community. For Cora and Phakamile, like most of the members of the church, Sunday services are a place to meet regularly with friends. However, there are also ways in which coming together makes gays and lesbians targets for homophobic harassment. On a Saturday evening in August 1999, four HUMCC members were traveling home to Soweto from Johannesburg.¹¹ While riding the train in a car full of people, four men threatened to rape all three women and kill the man, Michael, because they were homosexual. One narrator remembers that at least one of them had a knife, and their words, "we're going to get you, and you, Michael, we're going to kill you." They were all paralyzed with fear until a man who was on the train with his girlfriend

¹¹ Details of this story were collected from an interview with Cora on October 14, 2000, and conversations with Michael in Berea, Johannesburg (June 2000); Rebecca in Zola, Soweto (October 1999); and Kim in Protea, Soweto (October 1999).

suddenly shot and killed three of the four men, saving their lives. When the train stopped, they all got off and ran from the station; it was a traumatic experience for the entire community.

Individuals like Phakamile who are known to be lesbians in their communities and are outwardly butch also face social persecution for being lesbian. Phakamile is toughened from her experiences but describes homophobic verbal harassment as a daily occurrence. In one instance, she grew sick of the rape threats and exploitative treatment that are so common for Sowetan lesbians. Phakamile decided to take matters into her own hands: “I just went to . . . this main character’s house and asked him, ‘What is your problem? Do you have a problem around me or my lifestyle?’ . . . I was scared, [but] at the same time I’m telling myself I have to do something about this because most of my times I spend around here, and I walk everywhere, so anything is possible. . . . And then the next couple of days came, and he apologized to me.” While this story has a positive outcome, the stress and emotional toll it takes on Cora, Phakamile, and others like them is palpable. Suicide is a major problem in their community, and during 2000 at least two members of the HUMCC tried to kill themselves. Most members of the community admit to at least entertaining thoughts of suicide. Phakamile confesses:

For [most] of my life I’ve been suicidal. . . . That thing has entered my mind several times. . . . And then I’ll ask myself, “What’s the major reason for me to kill myself?” And I couldn’t find the exact problem. That’s when I decided to go to church. . . . If you are so proud, you don’t have the guts to tell people that you’re having that problem . . . that your relationship is going through rocks. You just pretend you’re okay. . . . I didn’t like to cry in front of Cora. . . . But she knows, when I feel like crying I cry a lot. . . . Sometimes she cries with me.

Suicide is increasingly common in Soweto and results, at least in part, from the despair wreaked by the racist economic policies of the apartheid government (Ashforth 2000). Phakamile’s sense of isolation is compounded by the stoic burden of masculinity that prevents her from discussing her feelings and from crying before others. Phakamile, like many of her peers, draws on her partner and her spirituality to confront this impulse.

Cora and Phakamile share the same lesbian community networks in Soweto, a network of friends and supporters who are primarily other black lesbians. Aside from the HUMCC, there are two organizations that constitute the formal part of this community. The first of these is Sistahs

Kopianang, an organization of black lesbians in Johannesburg. While intended to serve as a social space, this group also illustrates class and geographic tensions that poor black lesbians confront. Sowetan lesbians like Cora and Phakamile are often excluded from meetings because they do not have the money to come to Johannesburg and because the meetings are conducted primarily in English, which is not their first language.

The second formal community organization of note here is the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality. While peripherally involved with this group—which championed the sexual orientation clause, making South Africa the first country in the world to have legal protection for gays and lesbians—Sowetan lesbians like Cora and Phakamile do not consider themselves members. The Coalition often organizes around abstract ideas such as legal policy, which are perceived to mean little in the daily lives of black township lesbians. Further, more overt racism and sexism coming from the Coalition leadership historically has created a hostile space for many black women. Women such as Cora and Phakamile may volunteer at special events, but they are not part of the administration and goals of gay and lesbian NGOs. Consequently, these two organizations are peripheral to their sense of community.

Most of Cora and Phakamile's emotional, social, and financial support comes from the other black Sowetan lesbians. This is where they define their identities and meet many of their partners. Members of this network, most of whom are unemployed, spend time with each other daily. They visit each others' houses, talking, smoking, watching television, and playing cards together. They support each other economically, with money, food, and clothing; they counsel each other about problems with their families and relationships; and they serve as role models for each other, defining what it means to be a Sowetan lesbian. In the future, Cora hopes to be a computer technician, to move into Johannesburg, away from her parents, and to have her independence. Phakamile's hopes are more romantic: "The future, if she lets me, I want to see us being married, having our own home and a car. . . . Travel around. . . . Anything, as long as it supports my life."

Cora and Phakamile's story illuminates the problematic assumptions inherent in both development studies and lesbian studies. Their liminal gender positions and sexualities lead to their exclusion from the traditional category of "African woman," which simplistically assumes heterosexuality as a prerequisite for "authentic" feminine gender and thereby renders them invisible in academic and NGO-based discourses on "gender and development." Similarly, lesbian studies provides inadequate conceptual tools, if any, to grapple with the centrality of poverty, violence, and so-

ciospatial location in the articulation of their sexualities, genders, and relationships. Phakamile and Cora's narratives push us to bring these two fields of inquiry into a productive conversation and highlight the importance of social spaces where Sowetan lesbians define their relationships and the places where differences among South African lesbians get articulated. The intersectionality of their sexual, racial, and classed identities and the negotiations in and around their multiple relationships cannot be understood or theorized in isolation from their mundane struggles over resources (such as a shared living space, employment, or violence-free public spaces) in and through which their everyday identifications and negotiations are coproduced.

(Homo)sexuality and development: Reframing intersectionality

The manner in which Cora, Phakamile, Geeta, and Manju experience and narrate their interwoven struggles around sexuality, community, resource access, and everyday survival pushes us toward new ways of approaching difference and its construction. It is inadequate to see these women's identities as merely relational and simultaneous; rather, we must grapple with the intersecting social, material, and symbolic processes that produce their identity categories in specific contexts. Both examples underscore the mutually constitutive nature of same-sex experiences and practices, on the one hand, and the categories of race, caste, class, and gender, on the other. For all four women, their experiences as poor, less educated, and geographically isolated; as *dalit*, *adivasi*, or black; and as members of families struggling to muster adequate resources for their children often take precedence as they narrate their lives and define their identities, communities, relationships, priorities, and dreams for their future. At the same time, they are actively involved in the construction of viable identities and communities (including sexual ones) for themselves, their daughters, and other women like themselves. Thus, the labor of material survival and that of sexual identity/community construction in their specific locales are always interconnected and mutually constitutive.

In the Sowetan case, Cora and Phakamile identify strongly as lesbians, but this identification only finds its meaning in relation to their racial, class, and sociopolitical locations that critically shape the ways they find community, establish relationships, and survive daily challenges. In the case from Chitrakoot, the term *lesbian* does not exist as a reference point for Geeta and Manju; the organizational and ideological spaces of MS allow them to build an intimate emotional and sexual bond—a relationship for which they have to fight and push the boundaries of that very organ-

ization, but lesbianism itself does not operate as a central axis of difference in their lives and political battles. Rather, they (and their coworkers who “admire and envy” their relationship) distinguish chiefly between intimacies marked by the presence or absence of physical and emotional violence and repression and of spaces in which they can or cannot build healthy emotional and sexual partnerships.

Because of the material limitations they face, access to private spaces in which they can explore their sexual orientation is limited for Cora, Phakamile, Geeta, and Manju. Their stories also suggest that for a vast majority of socioeconomically marginalized women in same-sex relationships, exclusively lesbian community spaces and organizations are rare. Sowetan lesbians, including Cora and Phakamile, rely on gay and lesbian churches like the HUMCC as critical spaces for support and socialization. Such churches and political organizations found in urban and periurban areas, however, are not exclusively lesbian and may be plagued by racism and sexism. For most poor lesbians outside of the United States and Europe, such spaces and organizations, if they exist at all, tend to focus on the needs of middle- and upper-class gays and lesbians, such as establishing clubs and bars, legal rights to inheritance, marriage, artificial insemination, and gay business associations. Very frequently, then, poor and rural women develop and nurture their same-sex relationships and practices in the absence of any formal lesbian organizations or even an identifiable community of women in same-sex relationships. When there are groups that meet some of their needs, as in the case of the HUMCC, they usually face unreliability and a chronic lack of funding.

Our case studies further emphasize how an analytical focus on organizations such as women’s NGOs, churches, and informal associations can help us grapple with the complex struggles in the lives of marginalized lesbians in Third World contexts. Such a focus allows us to connect struggles over resources with those over sexuality while simultaneously illuminating the extent to which the concerns and everyday experiences of the poorest lesbians have been peripheralized at the “grassroots” level in development projects at all scales. Women’s organizations may address critical issues such as skill building and sexual violence, but such initiatives are based on assumptions of heteronormativity and rarely acknowledge the existence of lesbians in their midst. Specific concerns of women in same-sex relationships, such as homophobic discrimination within their families or communities, may not be welcomed or may be actively silenced, and homosexual women often fear raising their own issues, which may be labeled “divisive” or “peripheral.” While attentive to homophobia, gay and lesbian organizations dedicate few resources to the concerns of poor

lesbians. By exploring some of these dynamics between specific NGOs and their lesbian members, we can begin to analyze the complex, contradictory, and incomplete nature of “empowerment”—whether that empowerment happens to take place on the terms of a foreign funding agency or on the terms of rural communities.

Our central aim here is to demonstrate how the world’s most economically and politically marginalized women exercise their sexual agency and publicly cultivate their sexual and emotional intimacies with women, how other axes and structures of difference feed into this process, and how women experience and articulate these intersections in relation to their other battles for everyday survival. Cora, Phakamile, Geeta, and Manju present nuanced critiques of the patriarchal structures and processes operating in their lives in highly contextualized, place- and class-specific ways. An engagement with their narratives enables us to extend intersectionality beyond identity-based categories such as “lesbian” and “bisexual,” or even *dalit*, *adivasi*, and “black.” Terms like *lesbian* can be incomplete, inapplicable, or even offensive depending on contexts and histories. But scholarship and organizations often rely on such terms, concepts, and identities—including their Western and imperialist trappings—with little or no interrogation.

By extending the work of feminist political and postcolonial theorists such as Judith Butler (1990, 1993), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), and Anne McClintock (1995), on the one hand, and of critical development theorists such as Naila Kabeer and Ramya Subrahmanian (1999) on the other, our intervention opens new spaces that allow (homo)sexuality and sexual agency in women’s lives to be understood in relation to their everyday struggles around development politics, resource access, and poverty. Cora, Phakamile, Geeta, and Manju not only expose the limits of existing discussions of intersectionality and of concepts and terminology used in lesbian and development studies, they provide exciting opportunities to generate more refined and context-specific conceptualizations of sexuality, difference, and identity without compromising an unequivocal political commitment to support struggles for access to resources, social equity, and justice.

Department of Women’s Studies
Barnard College, Columbia University (Swarr)

Department of Women’s Studies
University of Minnesota (Nagar)

References

- Agarwal, Bina. 1994. *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Almaguer, Tomás. 1991. "Chicago Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3(2):75–100.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute.
- Ashforth, Adam. 2000. "The Soweto Witch Project." *Transition* 9(1–2):22–51.
- Bonner, Philip, and Lauren Segal. 1998. *Soweto: A History*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.
- Bullington, Susan. 2001. "Fighting to Be Heard: Tensions among South African Gay and Lesbian Activists." Paper presented at the twenty-second annual meeting of the National Women's Studies Association, Minneapolis.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- . 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge.
- Calhoun, Cheshire. 1995. "The Gender Closet: Lesbian Disappearance under the Sign 'Women.'" *Feminist Studies* 21(1):7–34.
- de Lauretis, Teresa. 1988. "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation." *Theater Journal* 40:155–77.
- . 1994. *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Forgey, Herma, Anthea Jeffrey, Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, Cheryl Smith, Terence Corrigan, Thabo Mophuting, Andrea Helman, Jean Redpath, and Tamara Dimant. 1999. *South African Survey 1999/2000*. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations.
- Gevisser, Mark, and Edwin Cameron, eds. 1994. *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 1994. "Refiguring Lesbian Desire." In *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. Laura Doan, 67–84. New York: Columbia.
- Hennessy, Rosemary. 2000. "Desire as a Class Act: Lesbian in Late Capitalism." In her *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, 175–262. New York: Routledge.
- Kabeer, Naila. 1994. *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*. London: Verso.
- Kabeer, Naila, and Ramya Subrahmanian, eds. 1999. *Institutions, Relations and Outcomes: A Framework and Case Studies for Gender-Aware Planning*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Katz, Cindi. 2001. "On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26(4): 1213–34.

- Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky, and Madeline D. Davis. 1993. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York: Routledge.
- Krouse, Matthew, ed. 1993. *The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian and Gay Writing from South Africa*. Johannesburg: COSAW Publishing.
- Lancaster, Roger N. 1992. *Life Is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister/Outsider*. Freedom, Calif.: Crossing Press.
- Mathur, Kanchan. 1999. "From Private to Public: The Emergence of Violence against Women as an Issue in Women's Development Program, Rajasthan." In Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1999, 288–311.
- McClintock, Anne. 1995. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge.
- Menon, S. 1995. "Masons and Mechanics of Banda." *Pioneer on Sunday* (Lucknow), September 3, 4.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1991. "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism." In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, 1–47. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Moraga, Cherríe. 1983. *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*. Boston: South End Press.
- Nagar, Richa. 2000. "'Mujhe jawab do!' [Answer Me!]: Women's Grassroots Activism and Social Spaces in Chitrakoot (India)." *Gender, Place and Culture* 7(4):341–62.
- Nagar, Richa, Victoria Lawson, Linda McDowell, and Susan Hanson. 2002. "Locating Globalization: Feminist (Re)readings of the Subjects and Spaces of Globalization." *Economic Geography* 78(3):257–84.
- Ray, Raka. 1999. *Fields of Protest: Women's Movements in India*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rubin, Gayle S. 1984. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." In *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carol Vance, 267–319. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Sarin, Madhu. 1999. "'Should I Use My Hands as Fuel?': Gender Conflicts in Joint Forest Management." In *Institutions, Relations and Outcomes*, ed. Naila Kabeer and Ramya Subrahmanian, 231–61. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Spelman, Elizabeth V. 1988. *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. London: Women's Press.
- Thompson, Leonard. 1995. *A History of South Africa*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.
- Vanangana. 1998. *Campaign against Domestic Violence and Deaths within the Family: A Report*. Karvi: Vanangana Samooh.
- World Resources Institute, United Nations Environment Program, and United Nations Development Program. 1994. *World Resources, 1994–1995*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Copyright of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* is the property of University of Chicago Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.