

Introduction

Transition Matters

In 1994, transsexual Simone Heradien underwent sex reassignment procedures funded by the South African state. The timing of her personal transition was significant:

1994 . . . was also the year we were going through the democracy, the transition, so it was a lot of things. . . . When we were going through our transition stage, there was what we call the RDP, getting water and electricity to those who didn't have [them]. The RDP stands for the Reconstruction and Development Programme, and that was 1994, the same year that I had my op. So I said to everybody, well you've heard of the RDP, that's me! . . . I was definitely reconstructed and developed. (Heradien 1997)¹

As Simone indicates, South African gender liminality is intimately connected to the histories and political economy of South Africa itself. Under apartheid, many South African transsexuals had access to free sex reassignment surgeries and, following surgeries, were able to legally alter the sex listed on their birth certificates. Transsexuals' transitions were, in some ways, sanctioned by the state. But since the end of apartheid, publicly funded sex reassignment programs like the one accessed by Simone have largely ceased. And while the South African Constitution, one of the most progressive in the world, promises freedom from discrimination based on sex, gender, and sexual orientation, during the transitional years of South Africa's new democracy (1993–2003) it was legally impossible to change one's sex.²

What circumstances led to these apparent paradoxes, and what do they tell us about the materialization of sex and gender with race? This

question is the foundation for *Sex in Transition* and its exploration of the raced and classed contradictions constituting gendered boundaries. To date, gender liminality and transgender in South Africa, particularly their concurrence with South Africa's political transition from apartheid to democracy, have been largely unexamined. *Sex in Transition* exposes and analyzes cracks in the man/woman binary by investigating raced and classed challenges to dichotomous gendered norms. It does so through explication of the medical constitution of gender and sex, legislation under the apartheid and transitional states, specific instances of social discrimination, and narratives of gender liminality.

This book focuses centrally on concepts of transition. Dr. William Bridges begins his well-known series of books on life's transitions with an observation that transitions usually constitute three phases—an ending, a period of confusion and distress, and a new beginning (1980: 9). This formation is also replicated in understandings of transition in the social sciences. The political transition in South Africa has been well-documented over the past two decades, with the ending of apartheid, the simultaneous euphoria and panic that followed, and the promise of the new South Africa that has yet to be actualized. William Spurlin argues that the disruption of normalized social and political categories offered by the ending of apartheid, “. . . marks the transition as a *queer* space of analysis” (2006: 19). Gender transitions, while usually explained in medical terms, have much broader manifestations. During a group meeting of contributors to the important recent anthology, *Trans: Transgender Life Stories in South Africa*, participants described their understandings of this concept:

We had a lengthy discussion at one of our meetings defining what transition means and when this process begins. Robert felt that transitioning starts, “the moment you have confessed to *yourself* that your body doesn't match your gender identity,” and ties with the permission to think and feel about yourself in a different way. Tebogo felt that transitioning starts, “when a person starts to change living as their biological gender, when they start *living as the opposite gender* . . . maybe by binding and cross-dressing.” Robert reflected that in the stories we have collected, “all these people are *living* it, not *thinking* it. *Living* is a nice word, because living can be in a closed space

or an open space, it can be in your home.” (In Morgan et al. 2009: 11, emphasis in original)

It is the broadest sense of transition on which I focus in *Sex in Transition*. I am not interested in replicating medical models of linear and temporally-bound movement from one gender to another; instead I focus on the space of transition and its parallels and connections to South Africa’s political transition. One psychologist I interviewed who works with transsexuals explained the impetus for understanding gender during this political period:

I think because South Africa is kind of transitioning itself, it gives opportunities for debate. And because we’re transitioning society, I would think it makes it easier in some ways. But even within [gender] transition within this transitioning society, we still have very set ideas about our people. (Ryland 2007)

As Karen Ryland explains, the period of transition produced contradictory spaces for individual and social change. These contradictions are the subject of this book.

Also critical and related to the concept of transition is my focus on gender liminality in this text as an alternative to terms with medical histories or more widely-used notions of transgender, gender variance, or gender nonconformity. The concept of “liminality” originated with anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1909) and was further popularized by Victor Turner (1967 and 1969) to describe passage from one cultural state to another. Its use has grown to common parlance as a way to explain spaces between existential planes and sociocultural uncertainty that surpasses the individual. Central to this concept, and especially to my use of it here, are the ways that liminality works within hierarchies and institutions as both unsettling and formative. I prefer this concept to other alternatives because it is not geographically or disciplinarily bounded, nor does it assume a particular static gendered norm or a political position (e.g., conservative or radical). Further, it is important that liminality does not necessarily rely on movement—even Turner’s original formulation describes the potential for “permanent liminality” (1909)—though it has spatial and temporal components that allow for various and differing expressions of it. For these reasons, gender liminality in

this text works hand in hand with transition to describe spaces that both fall between and unsettle established orders while reworking them simultaneously.³

Throughout *Sex in Transition*, in different ways, I argue that South Africa's apartheid system of racial segregation relied on an unexamined but interrelated paradigm of sexed oppression that was at once rigid and flexible. Seemingly oppositional regulations of gender binaries and encouragement of gender liminality form South Africa's history of apartheid and political transition. Self-defined transsexuals, transvestites, intersexuals, butch lesbians, drag performers, and those who defy these categories speak to the violent ways that the borders of race, sex, and gender were policed under apartheid, as well as the creative ways that they have been subverted, articulating tensions between constraint and freedom. Further, varied narratives of South Africans living between sexed binaries provide opportunities for understanding the complex ways sex and gender are articulated with race.

Sex in Transition provides a threefold exploration of how multiple genders are formed through intersections with political economy, race, and colonialism. First, this text specifically *reconceptualizes apartheid as reliant on gendered disjunctures*. Apartheid's well-known racial policing was interwoven with gendered restrictions and manipulation, and apartheid's practices reveal similarly contradictory and complex ideas about race and gender. Gender was contradictory in the transitional state, as well; paradoxical social, medical, and legal treatment of gender liminal South Africans undermines generalizations about the "new" South Africa as a panacea or a catastrophe. This work expands important scholarship concerned with same-sex sexualities in South Africa by analyzing inconsistencies in trans/gendered categories. Critical to this growing field is the late Glen Elder's (2003) critique of South Africa's migrant labor system, in which he cogently evaluates ways that "heteropatriarchy"—the conjunction of heterosexuality with patriarchy—was critical to the apartheid state. *Sex in Transition* extends Elder's discussions by addressing how both sexuality and contradictory means of both encouraging and punishing gender liminality among different racial groups and in different periods were critical to the maintenance and composition of apartheid and the transitional states.

The second contribution of *Sex in Transition* consists of a *theorization of the paradoxes of raced gender* in varied contexts. The inseparability of gender from sexuality, race, class, history, and location has been

well-established, and within this context, gender is comprised of innate contradictions. Far from being surprising or unsettling, varied inconsistencies explored in *Sex in Transition* foreground the ways that paradoxes are at the heart of gender production. Gender and race function as norms, and normality relies on abnormality. Focusing on narratives of gender liminal South Africans within the context of the nation's colonial history of racial policing highlights narrators' own understandings of the contradictions of gender.

Third, *Sex in Transition* extends the emerging field of Transgender Studies from perspectives of those in the global South and highlights what South African legal scholar Angelo Pantazis calls “*extra-transsexual meanings*—meanings for people who are not transsexuals” (1997: 468, emphasis added). South African theorizations of trans/gender both utilize and challenge Northern-based terminology, such as “transgender” and “transsexual,” and the compartmentalization it affords, refiguring and undermining Northern hegemonic categories simultaneously.⁴ And, at the same time, the nascent South African transgender political movement, initiated in 2005 primarily through the emergence of a Cape Town-based organization called Gender DynamiX, further develops and puts into conversation Transgender Studies and the burgeoning field of transnational sexualities by attending to the role of racism and globalized medicine in participants' lives.⁵ The simultaneous locally-grounded and transnational meanings of gender liminality are critical to this project.

I. Transdisciplinary Situations

Although dualistic binaries (such as subject/object, mind/body, white/black) have been widely critiqued, the dichotomy of man/woman remains the bedrock of much work on gender. Further, while academic studies have addressed both drag and transsexuality, historically there has been scant discussion of the importance of race and class in shaping opportunities for gender expressions. Medical, legal, and academic discourses have tended to objectify gender liminality, paying little attention to the perspectives that individuals hold regarding their own lives. And rarely have any of these domains devoted significant attention to scholarship and activism based in Africa. *Sex in Transition* brings these divergent fields together to intervene into debates in Women's and Gender Studies, Transgender Studies, and African Studies.

Contemporary Women's and Gender Studies rests on two unstable concepts: woman or man (categories conceptually and practically tenuous) and location (often considered within the problematic boundaries of nation states). Developing these two directions for the field, *Sex in Transition* reads feminist theories of embodiment with transnational feminist theory. I put scholarship undermining biological expectations of gender into conversation with that focused outside of the global North.

Within the newly emerging field of Transgender Studies, two bodies of literature serve as inspirations for this research. In the past twenty years, books with strong autobiographical currents by activists from the United States and Europe have combined experimental writing styles with important contributions to transgender theory. The South African narratives highlighted here complement this scholarship and build on the recent contributions of *Trans: Transgender Life Stories from South Africa* (2009). Simultaneously, academic texts centered on trans narratives and activism have persuasively argued for the necessity of the inclusion of gender liminal voices in theorizing and historicizing gender liminality. Perhaps the most exciting directions in this field have been found in studies that address postcolonial/transnational concerns, gender, and sexuality simultaneously. Taken together and put into conversation, works such as these that are concerned with gender liminality and transnational sexualities promise to take LGBTQ/Queer/Sexuality Studies in exciting directions that inform this text.

Within African Studies, most conventional scholarship still depends on clear distinctions between women and men. While many texts concerned with gender in African contexts provide complex documentation of the lives and experiences of African women, they rarely explicitly theorize the constitution of sex—the body.⁶ *Sex in Transition* attempts to advance understandings of colonialism and apartheid offered by South African scholars and to offer new discourses about gender liminality and race. As Andrew Tucker has pointed out, “while the regulation of difference based on ‘race’ has been well-documented in South Africa, the direct effect it had on different queer communities has yet to be systematically explored” (Tucker 2009: 2). *Sex in Transition* is part of emerging texts being published on and in South Africa that look at sexuality and gender in the so-called “new” South Africa, illuminated by growing numbers of works by and about queer South Africans that are attentive to race (e.g., Hoad, Martin, and Reid [2005]; Hoad [2005]; Van Zyl and Steyn [2005]; Morgan and Wieringa [2005]; Arnfred [2004]).

Conversations among theorists based in the global North and those based in South Africa have been increasingly articulated in significant scholarship emerging from and about South Africa. Some of the theorists most critical to this text are well-known worldwide; for instance, Michel Foucault's ideas of power, biopower, and the state; Judith Butler's conceptions of gender and performativity; and Achille Mbembe's notions of necropolitics and the postcolony are central to the organization and framing of *Sex in Transition*. How do these ideas travel and map onto South African ideas about gender liminality and race?

Of these theorists, Judith Butler has had perhaps the most notable influence on South African scholars of sex and sexuality. In 2004, the prominent South African feminist journal *Agenda* published a special issue on sexualities that included an interview with Butler by South African feminist scholar Vasu Reddy:

The interview considers, in part, how ideas and problems in relation to the empirical context of "Africa" could enter into a meaningful dialogue with Butler's work. Likewise, the issues and ideas in this issue provide Butler with an understanding of how her work is understood and interpreted within this continent. (Reddy with Butler 2004: 115)

Reddy strives to make Butler's work accessible and relevant to *Agenda* journal readers—a mixed academic, political organizing, and popular audience based in South Africa—asking readers to engage with her ideas from an activist perspective. For example, Reddy queries Butler about the ways she intentionally unsettles categories including "man" and "woman" and the significance of her perspective. Butler replies, "You ask that the categories such as 'man,' 'woman,' 'male' and 'female' are displaced, and we have to consider what that displacement means. They may have lost their traditional place in a kind of political argument, but that does not mean that they cease to be an urgent political theme" (116). In this instance, the meaning of Butler's sometimes ephemeral work pointing out the instability of categories of sex is grounded in the political contexts of discrimination.

The influences of and conversations about Butler's work in South African contexts have been significant in other ways, as well. Equally notable, Mikki van Zyl and Melissa Steyn's (2005) publication, *Performing Queer: Shaping Sexualities, 1994–2004—Volume One* informs readers,

“The book derives its title *performing queer* from Butler’s (1999) notion of gender and sexuality as performance, and the inescapable fluidity of identities” (Van Zyl 2005: 20). Such dialogues within South Africa are increasingly common and quite important and indicate the extent of critical dialogical theory-building. Van Zyl further draws on Reddy’s interview with Butler in *Agenda* in her framing and descriptions of the chapters that comprise the anthology, *Performing Queer: Shaping Sexualities, 1994–2004—Volume One*.⁷

These representations of the utilization and reconfiguring of Butler’s work in South African contexts demonstrate the interplay and motion of academic theories. Neville Hoad’s analysis of South African interpretations of Gayle Rubin’s famous essay, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” suggests that, “the reception of [Rubin’s] essay in South African sex scholarship reveals something more like what Edward Said has termed ‘traveling theory’” (Hoad 2010: 120). “Traveling theory” is similarly useful to my articulation of the framework for this text. Said’s conception of traveling theory consists of the following trajectory:

First, there is a point of origin, or what seems like one, a set of initial circumstances in which the idea came to birth or entered discourse. Second, there is a distance transferred, a passage through the pressure of various contexts as the idea moves from an earlier point to another time and place where it will come into a new prominence. Third, there is a set of conditions of acceptance or, as an inevitable part of acceptance, resistances—which then confronts the transplanted theory or idea, making possible its introduction or toleration, however alien it might appear to be. Fourth, the now full (or partly) accommodated (or incorporated) idea is to some extent transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place. (Said 2000 [1982]: 196)

Taken together, these four points of consideration guide my use of the work of Foucault, Butler, and Mbembe in *Sex in Transition*. Applying and transforming theorists’ ideas across time and space and grounding them in the specificities of gender liminality in South Africa comprise one of the objectives of this book. This kind of mobile and transformative work been increasingly accomplished in transnational contexts.⁸

One of the most notable characteristics of the theoretical framework that underpins *Sex in Transition* is a commitment to foregrounding African (and Africanist) scholarship. Mbembe's notions of necropolitics and the postcolony, and my interpretations of the ways his theories travel, are one effort in this direction. The work of scholars specifically working on gender, sex, and sexuality in South Africa also provide ideas and concepts that are critical to this text. For instance, I have already mentioned the importance of Glen Elder's (2003) notions of "heteropatriarchy" as a way of articulating the heterosexist and gendered inconsistencies of apartheid and the transition.

Kopano Ratele's conception of "kinky politics" similarly links race, gender, and sexuality within the framework of South African histories and colonialisms. He explains the concept this way:

By kinky politics I want to indicate racial perversion. Kinky politics follows the fetish of, and refetishises, **race**. There can be no racism without this constant refetishisation. Indeed, one could say racism is kinky politics as it always involves a sexual warping of identity politics. Racism, together with (hetero) sexism, then, is what keeps us in awe, or fear, or ignorance of black and white, male and female bodies and sexualities in this society. (Ratele 2004: 142)

For Ratele, racism, sexism, and heterosexism are inseparable. And all three of these slippery categories are perverted. Perversion designates abnormality, usually along sexual lines, in this case indicating the sexualization of race. Further, to fetishize something is to attribute unwarranted power to it; or, in the Marxian sense (as with commodity fetishism), to transform social relationships between people to objectified relationships between things. And "kinky" is alternately used to refer to tightly curled hair or to deviance, especially sexual deviance. In all of these overlapping aspects of kinky politics, there is a reduction of personal relationships to ones dictated by and merged with the broader articulations of racism, sexism, and heterosexism in distorted ways. Ratele elaborates:

Kinky politics is personal and institutional practices, politics, programmes, cultures that naturalise, objectify, and stabilise difference, refusing to allow for its characteristic of movement

and change. In respect to racial difference, kinky politics shows itself when that difference is held permanently constant and becomes an explanation of what the idea of **race** or the policy of racial domination generates in the first place. (Ratele 2004: 143)

Ratele's kinky politics highlight the specific ways that the politics of apartheid have "inscribed race indelibly on the landscape of sexual identities for South Africans, at least for the moment" (Van Zyl 2005: 21). Queer theory, based in the global North, refuses heterosexism and is similarly focused on nonnormativity; however, it is not consistently attentive to the ways that race and nation shape sexual subjectivities. Kinky politics provide a different but parallel way to explain the instability of social categories within a specific South African context whereby the temporal consistency and immutability of race and sexuality are exposed in the places where they meet.

Another foundational concept to *Sex in Transition* is found in Marc Epprecht and Neville Hoad's significant scholarship concerned with sexualities in Africa. Epprecht's *Heterosexual Africa?: The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS* (2008) is primarily concerned with the development of the conception of heterosexuality, as the title indicates. Epprecht is not simply interested in documenting the existence of same-sex sexuality in Africa—as he points out, this has been done elsewhere over decades and largely overlooked. Instead, he traces patterns of heteronormativity and silences in the historical record that have been endemic and harmful. Neville Hoad, in his exploration of *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization*, similarly focuses on "the place of an entity that comes to be called 'homosexuality' in the production (discursive, material, imaginary) of a place called 'Africa'" (2007: xvi). Foucault's capacity to travel is again relevant here, since Hoad's discussion of this idea draws specifically on his and others' historical conceptualization of "heterosexuality" (59). Like these theorists' charting of an idea—in these cases, heterosexuality and homosexuality (and even Africa)—in some ways *Sex in Transition* also traces the idea of "sex," more than its tenuous reality. Unlike almost all analyses of sex in African Studies, however, I focus on sex not as sexuality, comprised of interactions and desire, but as the sexed body, encompassing physicality, appearances, and assumptions.

Sex in Transition is thus part of scholarship that integrates analyses of heteronormativity and gender normativity with apartheid and transitional literature, offering a comparative perspective on these periods in South African history. As Hoad put it in another context, “Arguably, apartheid places the question of sex as central to national and social as well as racial definition” (Hoad 2005: 23). And the aftermath of apartheid has led to similar revelations about the immediacy of race to sexuality during the transition. Mikki van Zyl reminds us, “to understand the workings of gender and sexualities in Africa we must always be sensitive to the issue of race in discourses concerning Africa—whether from the West or from within Africa” (Van Zyl 2005: 22–3). To accomplish these multifaceted objectives, my intention is not to focus on one theorist or disciplinary approach but to highlight various perspectives on and nuances of gender liminality in South Africa. Multiple and connected approaches to theory in this text are the core of this book, and use of this dialogic strategy foregrounds theorists’ juxtapositions and similarities through attention to the constitution of sexed and gendered bodies within the specificities of Africa.

II. Historicizing Gendered and Political Transition

The simultaneous importance and troubles of creating an historical account of gender liminality mirror the contradictions facing historians of sexuality in the same context. Neville Hoad explains some of the difficulties he and his collaborators Karen Martin and Graeme Reid encountered in anthologizing *Sex and Politics in South Africa* (2005), a compilation of academic and activist articles, narratives, interviews, and archival material from *Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action* in Johannesburg. The text focuses on historical accounts of lesbian and gay organizing, about which Hoad expresses the following reservations:

Obviously this is an overdetermined history, where one narrative line . . . will not suffice; and the documents, analyses and testimonials from the recent archiving of the history of lesbian and gay organising stand in various relations to the emergent historiographies of what is variously termed the post-apartheid state and civil society, or South African in an era of internally led structural adjustment. (Hoad 2005: 18)

Similarly, the narrative line of gender liminality is not clear and consecutive, best expressed in multiple forms and contradictions. The complexities of temporality, and critiques of dominant assumptions of the workings of time based in the contemporary global North, are also critical to understanding both individuals' narratives and the assumption of an historical queer progress narrative. Here, temporality figures as an historical metanarrative, circumscribed by colonial relations of power.

Gender liminal South Africans have had both notable raced and classed degrees of public visibility and acceptance and faced significant discrimination in various time periods. Concurrent with critiques of varied narrative lines and queer temporalities, attention to historical and geographic particularities helps to provide a context for these disparities. Further, as Gayle Salamon writes, following Foucault and others, "Bodies can only be understood, become legible, though their historically contingent specificity" (2010: 79). In South Africa, mainstream media accounts in the 1950s often featured flamboyant drag performers and accounts of coloured "drags" (private drag parties) (Jeppie 1990), as well as sensationalized narratives by black and coloured transsexuals (Williams 1994). Sex reassignment surgeries for many transsexuals were funded by the state beginning in the 1960s (South African Law Commission 1995), whereas laws like the Prohibition of Disguises Act 16 of 1969 made dressing in drag with "criminal intent" illegal (Cameron 1994). But what preceded and complemented these documented instances of gender liminality and how are they similar and different?

Colonial histories of the development and production of gender and the development of strict racial categories in South Africa are critical to this analysis. While European explorers sailed around modern-day Cape Town beginning in the 1400s, it was not until 1652 that Table Bay, in the southwest corner of South Africa, was settled by Dutch colonizers (Thompson 1995). From the origins of colonialism, two parallel themes emerged that shaped South African colonial and apartheid history—the struggle for control of land and labor. Colonization spread north through a series of wars between those indigenous to the region and white settlers. Despite their victories, colonizers were largely unable to force local populations into servitude, and they began to import slaves from West Africa and Asia to the Cape by the thousands beginning in 1658, establishing classes of landless poor people and promoting European superiority.⁹

In 1795, global struggles for economic and political power led the British into bloody combat with the Dutch for control of South Africa,

but despite the regime change, both powers had similar goals: to prevent “native wars” (particularly with the Xhosa), advance settler societies, and exploit the natural resources of the region (Fredrickson 1981). Tension between Dutch and British settlers complicated these objectives and increased “ethnic” and class distinctions between the British and the *Boers* (white Dutch Afrikaner farmers), while consolidating whiteness as a cornerstone of colonial power. The Great Trek (1836–1854), a mass migration of at least 10,000 *Boers*, exemplified colonizers’ continued struggles over control of land and labor, as it was initiated by Dutch settlers who were angry about their loss of land, slave labor, and status in the Cape (Thompson 1995: 87). The Great Trek greatly extended the geography of white colonization. White migration resulted in the violent displacement of indigenous black South Africans, and colonists merged race and class by forcing blacks to work or pay them for rights to live on marginalized rural lands.

National and class-based tensions among whites and blacks’ resistance to increasing state-led subjugation were only heightened by the discovery of diamonds in Kimberly and gold in Johannesburg in 1886 at the height of British imperialism. Together, capitalist and state leaders controlled migration, kept wages low, and managed black male labor within this emerging white-dominated capitalist economy (Kanfer 1993). Passes, initially instituted to control slave labor in the Cape in 1760, formed an integral and elaborate instrument of raced and gendered labor control beginning in 1895 and continuing through the period of apartheid (Harsch 1980), an issue to which I will return.

One of the lesser-known means of maintaining low wages and managing black male labor was state acceptance of gender liminality and same-sex sexuality in the form of what scholars label “mine marriages.” Mine marriages were gendered relationships between black male miners that provided companionship, sex, domestic service (for masculine “husbands”), and protection (for feminine “wives”). Such relationships were quite common in the region; for instance, according to Marc Epprecht, one study suggests that 70–80 percent of Zimbabwean men working on mines took male wives (Epprecht 2004: 80–81). One of the arguments central to *Sex in Transition*, building on the work of Glen Elder, is that the degree of acceptance of gender liminality by state institutions often rested on the extent to which gender liminal bodies were under state control and supported institutional gendered ideologies. Further, this state acceptance can be a means of analyzing the extent to which class

and race are interpolated into citizenship. Beginning in the late 1890s, mine marriages served state and capitalist interests by organizing male workers in mining compounds away from their heterosexual families (Moodie 1989; Wa Sibuye 1993; Elder 1995; Epprecht 2004). As Epprecht cogently explains,

These temporary male-male unions often served (and were often self-consciously intended by the men themselves) to strengthen traditional marriage with women back in the rural areas. That is, “boy wives” allowed the men to avoid costly and potentially unhealthy relationships with female prostitutes, hence to be able, eventually, to retire as “real men” ruling over successful rural homesteads. (2009: 1266)

In this case, gender liminality was temporarily acceptable in broader contexts of labor, poverty, geography, and state interests.¹⁰

In this same period, the intersections of global imperial tensions, competing racial agendas, and capitalist greed (especially British fears of losing control of South Africa’s immense wealth) resulted in the violent Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902). Britain’s victory consolidated colonizers’ political power in South Africa (with the four white settler states in the Cape, Natal, Transvaal, and the Orange Free State incorporated as provinces), and in 1910 what was a British colony became the Union of South Africa.¹¹ Colonists continued to violently subjugate black South Africans, systematically retracting black people’s political rights and options for land-ownership through measures such as the 1913 Native Land Act, which severely restricted black people’s rights to purchase or lease land (Thompson 1995).

Black and coloured South Africans mounted multiple forms of resistance to colonial rule, but segregation policies and growing colonial political and military power largely overwhelmed the efficacy of their protests. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the National Party, formed to serve Afrikaner farming interests, gained support. In 1948 the National Party was elected, fueled by conjunctions of white Afrikaner disillusionment with British rule, class-based repression of striking white miners, and racist fear of growing black dissent. National Party leaders developed apartheid, literally “separateness” and based in British segregation policies and Afrikaner *baasskap* (supremacy), into a regime of strict but contradictory political, economic, and social segregation of blacks and whites and violent suppression of enemies of the state. Apartheid’s supporters aimed

to regulate all aspects of South Africans' daily lives, separating people according to race (Population Registration Act, 1950), outlawing marriage between people from different racial groups (Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, 1949), restricting land usage (Group Areas Act, 1950), and racializing education (Bantu Education Act, 1953). Whiteness was again consolidated through these policies, despite the "ethnic" political separations of Afrikaner and British citizens.

Deborah Posel argues that tensions between culture and biology were part of what made these apartheid measures of race so strong.

"Race" had both cultural and biological markers, each providing tautological evidence for the other (as mutually both the cause and effect of the other). It was this hybrid conceptualisation of race that lay at the core of apartheid's racial project, and which enabled a practice of racial differentiation far more insidious and tenacious in its grip on everyday life than might otherwise have been the case. (2001a: 59)

Like race, gender is commonly theorized as comprising social components (behaviors, attitudes, appearances) as well as somatic ones (conceived of as biological sex). The hierarchical relationality of race and gender and their connection to apartheid conceptions of order contributed to their virulence. Posel points out that versions of racial restriction and definition were authorized by the law that relied more on science and violent policing at some times and were more deliberately flexible and elastic at other times (2001a, 2001b).¹²

These restrictive measures instituted by apartheid leaders were met with intense resistance in multiple forms, led particularly by the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Though demonstrations were initially nonviolent, the apartheid government responded by brutally repressing grassroots protests such as the Sharpeville pass resistance of 1960 and the 1976 Soweto demonstrations against racist education. By the late 1960s, liberation movements turned to armed insurgency. Again, leaders of the apartheid government responded by declaring a state of emergency and by passing multiple pieces of repressive legislation that gave the white police flexible powers to arrest South Africans at will.

Not surprisingly, gender liminality converged with the powers of state control during this time. In the 1970s, according to historian

Denis-Constant Martin (1999), the apartheid state's acceptance of Cape Town's Coon Carnival, and the *moffies*¹³ that were an integral part of this annual festival, contributed to growing state-led hierarchies among racial groups, positioning coloured people as humorous and "deviant" when compared to "normal" whites and "threatening" blacks. In this same period medical postulations that black South Africans were far more likely than whites to be intersexed (Grace 1970) also formed part of the scientific racism and pathologization of black bodies integral to apartheid.¹⁴

While gender liminality was used by the state to give further evidence of the deviance of black and coloured people, gender liminality among whites was especially alarming to the apartheid government. Gender liminality within the context of black same-sex relationships was tolerated, and even encouraged, by the apartheid state, such as in the form of the previously mentioned mine marriages, but gender liminality within the context of white homosexuality was usually stringently policed. For example, in 1966 police raided a large gay party in Forest Town, "a quiet and respectable old suburb to the north of Johannesburg" (Gevisser 1994: 30) and several men were arrested for "masquerading as women." The party, which was called a "mass sex orgy" in the media, was the catalyst for a parliamentary investigation of homosexuality.¹⁵ The interests of the white Afrikaner state were greatly undermined by white homosexuality for two reasons. First, Afrikaners were very concerned with racial purity and reproduction as a small white minority in the midst of a black majority. Second, same-sex sexuality among whites was perceived as morally tainting the Afrikaner nation.¹⁶

Although Afrikaner nationalism and the apartheid state were violently repressive, they were hardly monolithic. Even the epitome of state apparatus, the military, treated gender liminality in a contradictory manner. For instance, during the 1980s when apartheid came to crisis and the government issued states of emergency, utilizing unprecedented levels of military repression to maintain control of South Africa and the region, those in command manipulated military drag shows to reinforce gender stereotypes (Krouse 1994).¹⁷ This deployment coexisted with homophobic discrimination and medical abuse of white gay conscripts, including electroshock therapy to "cure" homosexuality and forced sex reassignment procedures that sought to eliminate gendered nonconforming expressions by reinforcing gender binaries and the necessity of their congruence (Van Zyl *et al.* 1999). Though these strategies appear contradictory, institutionally they both served similarly repressive goals.

How did race and gender materialize together during apartheid? Many people have theorized the critical differences between race and gender, but Deborah Posel's cogent analyses of components of apartheid racial reasoning (2001b: 70–73) can help us theorize their similarities to the boundaries of gender during this period, as well. This is particularly important to highlighting gendered bodies (sex) as constituted by apartheid. First, Posel represents “race and racial difference as self-evident ‘facts’ of experience.” The presumed reality of gender and sex binaries and divisions similarly remained the bedrock of all debates about their parameters. Second, she identifies race as “a mix of biology, class, and culture.” Posel contends that apartheid conceptualizations of race relied on phenotypical differences, social components of everyday life, and class privilege. In the latter, “products of a more ‘civilised’ ‘way of life’—were considered to be markers/evidence of biological superiority.” As we will see in Chapters 1 and 2, apartheid conceptions of gender were similarly reliant on socioscientific designations along raced and classed lines. In Posel's view, under apartheid race was also “ubiquitous” and came to be attributed to things including choice of hairdresser, food and alcohol, sport, clothing, styles of dress, and interactions with neighbors. “By elasticising the official definition of race beyond merely biological factors, the apartheid state created a mechanism for investing all facets of existence with racial significance.” Similarly, policing the boundaries of gender was located in and on everything; this book will speak to various forms of this policing in detail.

Posel further claims that under apartheid, race was “essential rather than accidental or contingent.” Ways of thinking about both race and gender under apartheid relied on the idea that all races are different from each other and, I suggest, that men and women are different from each other. This was the basis for ideas of racial separation upon which apartheid was based. Posel also asserts that race was “the primary determinant of all experience”; this is a difference between gender and race. I'm not convinced that race always superseded sexuality, gender, or class, or that we can hierarchize social categories, but it certainly worked in concert with them. Finally, Posel identifies “race as the site of white fear.” Anxieties about racial mixing were paramount under apartheid. As we will see, gender-based fears, including those rooted in heterosexism, occurred within racialized frameworks.

Apartheid's simultaneously restrictive and flexible designations of gender and race met with continued defiance from South Africans as well as international supporters of the anti-apartheid movement, with

waves of economic sanctions imposed globally. The 1980s were repeatedly marked by uprisings and recession, and eventually apartheid became fiscally and politically untenable. In 1990, ANC leader Nelson Mandela was released, and despite widespread violence and negotiations in this period, he became South Africa's first democratically elected President in 1994.

Since 1994, the economic and racial divisions and inequities of colonialism and apartheid have been difficult to dispel. Initial optimism about the transition to democracy has given way to disillusionment with the failure of the ANC to make material changes in South African's daily lives. Mikki van Zyl notes, for instance, that "apart from the creation of new black elites, the dynamics of economic power have remained mostly unaltered for the majority of South Africans—whites (12% of the population) still earn more than half the country's income" (2005: 26–7). Reconciliation (particularly through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and nation-building have posed new sets of challenges. As Van Zyl reflects, "[t]he ten years of democratisation have brought about major shifts in the way we South Africans see ourselves and others [and] . . . we have all had to reorient ourselves to a new political order" (19).

Since the end of apartheid, visibility, medical treatment, and legal protection have increased for some groups and decreased for others. While same-sex sexuality became legally protected by the 1996 Constitution with varied ramifications, medical sex reassignment programs were increasingly difficult to access. And whereas the repeal of laws outlawing sodomy initially brought greater expectations of safety for gay South Africans when the transition began, the simultaneous repeal of laws that allowed transsexuals to change the sex listed on their birth certificates in 1993 left those who underwent medical sex reassignments without legal rights after their physical transition. South African progress narratives of freedom and the hopes based in rights discourses have been undermined by these contradictions.

III. Simone Heradien: July 24, 1997

The movement to and in this transitional period is the focus of *Sex in Transition*. Two life historical interviews conducted ten years apart provide a particularly poignant theoretical and analytic framework through which to conceptualize the dual meanings of "transition." In 1997, I met Simone

as she was in the midst of her surgical sex realignment transitions in Cape Town. She was in her late twenties and identified as a “so-called coloured.” At this time, she made important connections between her life and the political economic histories of South Africa, linking the transitions she experienced as a South African and a transsexual. She also personally utilized the power of the new South African Constitution to force changes in her legal identification during the political transition. Simone articulated a theory of self-acceptance and confidence that guided her decisions and ran counter to prevailing medical and legal accounts of transsexuals’ supposed illness and instability. Here I share her thoughts from 1997, and I return to her narrative from 2007 in the Conclusion. Simone reviewed both of these narratives in 2011.

Groote Schuur hospital where Prof. Barnard performed the first heart surgery . . . [did] realignment surgery since 1970 . . . up till about 1994.¹⁸ There were two others after me but very close, we were all like one month apart. Because with our health, going through all this process and transformation and budget cuts here and budget cuts all over the show, those ops have been suspended until further notice. . . . So for psychiatric treatment, assessment, and the actual surgery, Groote Schuur was your most viable option.¹⁹ . . .

In South Africa, or actually at Groote Schuur, [the sex realignment procedure] was covered by health expenses, which most South Africans do not want to believe. . . . In South Africa, even in our apartheid years, if you passed the test it was seen as a necessary procedure and not cosmetic.²⁰ Therefore, the state would pay if you couldn’t afford to pay for it. They still did up till ’94, but I was on medical aid, a private patient. The state was going to pay for me, but then my medical aid decided they would pay for the operation when they were confident that it’s not purely cosmetic. . . . But most of the cases are state[-financed]. You would pay a nominal amount, like maybe your visitations, after-care, and when you go every six months for . . . your hormonal prescription, which you have . . . to take for the rest of your life. So suppose for that, you pay your 34 Rand or it’s now 35, but for the actual surgery the state covered it.²¹ But it wasn’t a widely publicized procedure [and] that is why even up to today if you tell people that you’ve had your operation done at Groote Schuur, a lot of South Africans won’t believe you. Because it’s always thought that you had to go overseas for these operations, and they don’t even know that. . . .

The process took me about a year. And it was also because of it being postponed and not knowing when [the attending physician] was coming

back . . . and strikes and things like that. That was also the year we were going through the democracy, the transition, so it was a lot of things. Anyway, when we were going through our transition stage, there was what we call the RDP, getting water and electricity to those who didn't have water and electricity. The RDP stands for the Reconstruction and Development Programme, and that was 1994 the same year that I had my op. So I said to everybody, well you've heard of the RDP, that's me! . . . I was definitely reconstructed and developed. . . .

At the moment [doctors at Groote Schuur are] doing pure cosmetic procedures with respect to sexual realignment. Like I've still got too much skin on my labia, so they're going to remove it. It was going to be done six months ago, and I was on the operating table when I started putting on my Joan Collins prima donna act and said, "I don't want to go in [for] this operation!" <with affected accent, laughing> So they're going to do it now in the next month. But you know everything [else] is done, everything is over. It's just excess tissue that I want them to remove. It's not a necessity. I don't have [to have] it done, it's not gonna kill me. And they all said to me, "You've been through the major part of surgery, you've been in hospital for the first part for something like twenty days. This is like nothing. . . . Two stitches, in two days you're out and about." I just couldn't take one more day of lying in hospital with anesthesia in my system and stitches and pain, and I just couldn't.

I just have to bite through the last part because I'm also having my nose done as well. I know you're going, "There's nothing wrong with your nose!" I suppose like in my case or a lot of TSs would feel this way . . . for instance, the doctors agree with me that to refine my nose is going to feminize my face more. So that is why I feel unhappy with my nose, and after that just have my chin chiseled a bit, just about a few millimeters shorter. Once you have your breasts and your vagina and you can dress the way you want to, I don't think you ever get out of that euphoric state totally. I don't think so. . . . I've always been this way, I've always looked this way, I mean since the age of 18, I'm 34 now. . . .

Since the age of 18 I've dressed up like a female and lived as a female, I've worked as a female. . . . I was employed as a secretary, full knowing that I was still a so-called male. That was in the apartheid era when we still had blacks and whites and coloureds, and different houses of Parliament and everything. I was employed as a female secretary with them full knowing. And, also, I went through my surgery while still in the government employ. My op itself wasn't that painful like a lot of girls or guys whichever way say it's