Trans Masculine Geographies: On Navigating Urban Spaces and Negotiating Liveable Lives in Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa

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On Navigating Urban Spaces and Negotiating Liveable Lives in Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa

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Abstract: This dissertation is a qualitative, life history/narrative study that explores how 19 adult trans masculine people living in different urban areas around Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa navigate and negotiate liveable lives in the spaces and places they live and move in. This study draws from the theoretical and analytical traditions of feminist geographies, queer phenomenology, black trans feminism and the analytic of racial capitalism. To this end, this study brings forth a critical analysis of urban subjectivities and urban spatialities and traces the rhythm, textures and contours of trans masculine lives and how gender, space, class, race/ism, and sexuality shape the conditions of their possibility and emergence within the two cities. The cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town are hailed for their extensive historical and contemporary formations of queer and gender non-normative socialities. Through narrative analysis, this study shows how the classed and racialised gender-sexuality-spatiality formation marking the topography of the two cities animates the discursive and material constitutions of trans masculinities. Further, he discursive and material conditions variably permit trans masculine lives and complicate the emergence and visibility of trans masculinities, particularly that do not lend themselves to normative registers of gender and sexuality. Further, this study shows how trans masculine people strategically commit to expressions and practices of masculinities depending on the spatial context of their movements. These strategies make possible the safe negotiation and passage in different social spaces of the cities. Finally, this dissertation emphasises how spaces, places, and gender subjectivities become and are continually re/produced through practicing and embodying otherwise forms of being. Specifically, through the insistence on nurturing forms of sociality that displace the racialised gender and sexuality binary as the authoritative grammar and syntax for knowable and legible life.

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1. Introduction

When I began this study in 2020, the year in which COVID-19 brought the world to a standstill and aroused a fervent desire articulated in the grammar of 'returning to the normal', "as if that normal was not in contention" (Brand 2020)—I was curious about the knowledges, practices and modes of living articulated, imagined, and practised by trans and gender non-normative people in the country and elsewhere. I was interested in the interiority of trans and gender non-normative life, which is to say my own life too. Against a social reality overwhelmingly marked by precarity and violence, I was curious about how variously positioned trans and gender non-normative people navigate space and create liveable lives and the conditions that permit our life to begin with. I wanted to know how we survive, and how we might continue to survive. I pondered the forms of unbounded rehearsals and practices of living that suture the expansive lives of trans and gender non-normative people in South Africa. I use non-normative to gesture to processes and modes of being and becoming that "are not predicated on legibilising identities, knowledges or sense-making apparatuses already in place" (Bey 2021, 39). And so, this dissertation, is a gesture and a tending towards those knowledges, practices and modes of living that might offer us alternative ways to the impositional white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy—a term offered by bell hooks (1996) to name interlocking systems of domination that imposes a violent and hierarchical valuation of life.

This dissertation explores urban geographies of trans masculine people living in Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa and how they create liveable lives in the spaces and places they live and move.

About the Study

This study comes out of intertwining scholarly, political, and personal impulses to explore urban trans masculine geographies. To account for—with no intention to foreclose—the spaces in which we live and exist and how we

create our lives against, through, and beyond the overdetermination of trans lives in the current moment. The purpose of my study broadly emerges at the scholarly intersection of feminist, queer, and trans urban geographies and spatial analyses in critical men and masculinities studies. I engage with and respond to the need for more critical studies in critical queer and trans geographies scholarship more broadly—and in African queer and trans studies specifically—to track how urban trans and gender non-normative lives unfold within wider processes of subjectivation and overdetermination. 'Critical' here underscores an engagement and analysis that takes seriously the forms of power, exclusion, injustice, and inequality that underpin present formations of gender and socio-spatial relations. This study is a life history inquiry of trans urban spatial experiences that draws from the complex and unfolding life histories/narratives of 19 adult trans masculine people living in urban neighbourhoods in Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa. From their vantage points, I explore the socially produced imaginary and lived urban geographies of the two cities and how trans masculine people create and articulate liveable lives within them. Guiding this inquiry and analysis is the main question: **how do trans masculine people living in urban areas around Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa, navigate and negotiate liveable lives in the spaces and places in which they live and move?** Further, I ask:

1. What do trans masculine people think about and relate to the urban spaces they inhabit and move within? How do they articulate and make sense of their gendered, classed, and racialised experiences of space?
2. What strategies and practices allow trans masculine people to navigate and negotiate safe movement, activity, and participation through different social spaces?
3. From what resources do trans masculine people draw to create and negotiate liveable lives in the urban spaces where they live?

I use gender, space and liveable lives as the conceptual axis on which this exploration revolves. I index, gendered, racialised, classed, sexuality formations and narrative positionings of trans masculinities. Further, I explore the conditions that permit liveable trans masculine lives in the urban areas of the two cities. I approach the constructs of gender, race, class, and sexuality both as analytical categories and social identity markers that are sites of struggle frequently negotiated in inequitable power relations (Crenshaw 1990; P. H. Collins 2002). As socially constructed categories, gender, race, class and

sexuality are always in a state of becoming and constituting each other. Further, I use the category of trans masculinities not to define unified, coherent, and fixed gender modalities and expressions (Aboim and Vasconcelos 2022). Rather, trans masculinities name gender expressions that are anything other than what has been given, that is, cis-heterosexual masculinities. Trans masculinities also gesture to the possibilities of how different practices and modes of being and embodiment might be enunciated outside of the structure of the gender-sexual binary. Liveable lives is another term I use to gesture to the conditions of life that permit a viable and dignified life for people whose gender experience and articulation depart from normative cis-heterosexual constitutions of gender (Butler 2009b). *Trans Masculine Geographies* then contributes an analysis of trans masculine people's urban geographies in the cities of Cape Town and Johannesburg.

By geographies, I gesture to what geography scholar Katherine McKittrick (2006, x) calls "space, place and location in their physical materiality and imaginative configurations". I have turned to urban geographies and trans masculine subjectivities not to provide an alternative geography, nor to find 'hidden' urban trans geographies. Trans masculine subjectivities and their attendant geographies are neither hidden nor insignificant to the formations of urban spaces; rather, they form part of the everyday texture of the topography of urban spaces in the cities. Further, I suggest that the relationship between trans masculinities and urban geography opens a conceptual arena through which, to borrow from McKittrick (2006, xii), "more humanly workable geographies can be imagined and are imagined". In this dissertation, I explore the urban geographies of the two cities as "alterable terrains" that carry with them ongoing legacies of displacement, dispossession, exclusion, and marginalisation forged through the conjuncture of racial capitalism articulated and sedimented through apartheid (Clarno and Vally 2023; Levenson and Paret 2023). Thus, this dissertation contributes to both conceptual and empirical analyses of contemporary urban geographies, extending spatial analyses of trans masculinities through considerations of how these categories are variably constituted and constitutive of race-class-sexuality in unfixed, shifting, and sometimes contradictory formations.

The urban landscape in South Africa is a generative socio-economic, cultural and political surface from which to explore trans and gender non-normative subject positions. After three decades into a constitutional democracy premised in part on anti-discrimination, anti-racism, and human dignity, South Africa continues to be marked by extreme spatial and gender inequalities that shape the possible forms of liveable, dignified, and viable life. The intertwining class, spatial, and gender inequalities are further embedded

within high socio-economic inequalities buttressed by racism, cis-heteropatriarchy, and capitalism (McLennan, Noble, and Wright 2016; Turok 2018). At this backdrop, I argue that trans masculine lived experiences are significant for the analysis of the conditions that allow for viable life in a post-apartheid context. The 'post' in post-apartheid does not mean 'past'. Joel Modiri (Modiri 2022) notes that "it is a ruse to refer to South Africa as substantively 'post-apartheid' since the spatial design of the so-called 'post-apartheid' claims to have overcome colonial-apartheid remains firmly etched on the ground and soil of South Africa" (Modiri 2022, 41). In this study, I also emphasise this sentiment and gesture to the ongoing—although not uninterrupted—legacies of apartheid. Specifically, their mutations and convergences with socio-political projects of neoliberalism that shape contemporary life in democratic South Africa at present. Trans masculine lives are lived within a social, economic and political structure that is not untouched by capitalism. Further, in everyday administrative and public life, sex and gender are understood and practised as the fixed materialisation of male-man-masculinity and female-woman-femininity, articulated and embedded in space (Reygan and Lynette 2014). Within this racialised, classed, and spatialised understanding of gender, trans and gender non-normative people are invariably indexed by the blatant disregard of our constitutional rights manifesting through varying forms of violence—physical, psychological, and material—accentuated within transphobic and homophobic discourses and practices (Msibi 2009; Matebeni 2013; monakali and Francis 2022). While important legislation has been passed to protect the rights of trans and gender non-normative people in the country, the material realities reveal socio-spatial patterns of constricted life, marked by harassment, violence, and death, particularly for low-income and poor black trans and gender non-normative people (Maphanga 2020). Thus, I aim to explicate the contextualised workings and articulations of these geographies of domination (McKittrick 2006) and how trans masculinities emerge or fail to emerge in the context of the two cities.

While these socio-spatial patterns of constricted life have been documented in South Africa, they are not unique to the country. In various international contexts, there have been increasingly coordinated projects of nationalism and fundamentalism articulating anti-trans antagonism, resonant in anti- 'gender ideology', anti-queer, and anti-feminist political projects (Nyanzi and Karamagi 2015; Schilt and Westbrook 2015; Zaremberg, Tabbush, and Friedman 2021; Norocel and Paternotte 2023). These movements and political projects are intended to expunge trans and gender non-normative lives from public life and ultimately from existence (Riley and Haritaworn 2013). This

conjunctural moment is also indexed by multiple coinciding and ongoing catastrophes manifesting at varying levels and scales. These catastrophes include, but are not limited to the political, epistemological, social, material, and environmental. Scales at which the calculus of living and dying, to use Dionne Brand's (2020) formulation, is ever more pronounced.

Taking these intertwining impulses, in this study, I explore urban trans masculine geographies through a black trans feminist (P. H. Collins 2002; Da Silva 2018; Bey 2021) inspired life history/narrative methodological approach. Black trans feminism, as articulated in this dissertation, is both a yearning for and a practice towards a radical otherwise and elsewhere, untethered to hegemonic cis-centric ways of seeing and knowing. Narrative methods "allow researchers to apply insights from 'turn-to-language' approaches, while situating individual meaning in social context and so enabling simultaneous micro-analysis of talk and interactions, and macro-analysis of wider social contexts" (Phoenix et al. 2024). Theoretically and analytically, this study draws inspiration from critical and feminist geography, queer phenomenology, black trans feminism, and the analytical concept of racial capitalism. I bring these analytical strategies together to frame and analyse the onto-epistemologies of the production of space and explicate the conditions for the hierarchical formations of racialised and gendered subjectivities and masculinities. (I come back to the theoretical and methodological orientations in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively).

On terminology. To reiterate, my aim is not to compare the urban geographies and articulations of urban trans lives in the two cities—as no two cities are the same. Rather, I bring attention to how gender and space co-constitute each other in the metropoles through the vantage point of trans masculine life histories. Throughout this work, I use 'trans' as a modifier that marks gender transgression and index those modes of being that unsettle the binary gender-sexual formation (Radi 2019). It is important to make the distinction between trans and transgender, in part because not all transgender people move to unsettle gender categories, but rather find ways to negotiate their subject positions within the gender binary (Stryker, Currah, and Moore 2008). Thus, I do not claim that transgender people unsettle the gender binary, although, of course, changing one's gender location on the binary does trouble the notion that gender is fixed. Beyond that, I use transgender after Susan Stryker (2017, 1) to refer to people who move "away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender".

As I have discussed in the previous sections, the category of trans masculinity is important in this study to track the changing articulations and

embodiments of masculinities and how spaces give material form to popular, dominant, resistant, and new articulations and embodiments of masculinities, specifically, and generally of gender—as a construct that names a process and practice for organising social life. Trans masculinity constitutes the "expressive forms that are constantly emergent, ephemeral, embedded in daily life, given to extraordinary bursts of activity and rapid transformation" (Barber 2018, 13). Trans masculinity as an identity position, as I show in the empirical chapters, allows for tracing how emerging iterations of gender shift and intersect with other categories of identity, opening or foreclosing possibilities for modes of being that strengthen the conditions shaping viable and otherwise forms of life and subject positions. 'Gender' is understood in the Butlerian sense as "the apparatus by which the production and normalisation of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes" (Butler 2004b, 4). Gender determines and figures how bodies emerge and are understood in different cultural and social contexts. In line with this analysis of gender, I use the term 'subjectivity' both as a critical analysis that tracks the racial-gendered-classed-sexual formal conditions that permit a (trans) subject to emerge (Da Silva 2018) and as the grammar that holds the enunciation of being a subject. To clarify, I am interested in the racial and 'gender-sexual feature' (Da Silva 2018) 'that requests both the position of a subject and an object, troubling how these positions are manoeuvred, discarded, and/or reoriented'. To begin at the conditions of possibility allows me to analyse what articulations of trans masculine subjectivities become possible and what their enunciations can be in the spatial context of the urban without imposing a determinate definition of what those subjectivities might be. This orientation, as I show in the empirical chapters, thus unmoors trans masculinity as a subject position from the certainty of normative racialised and classed grammars of gender.

Lastly, I understand 'space' as socially produced, which is to say it is any landscape that arises out of social practices, that is, the historical production of spatiality through racialised, gendered, and classed forms of geographic organisation (Lefebvre 1974; Doreen Massey 1993; McKittrick 2006). I use the terms 'space', 'place', and 'geographies' sometimes interchangeably throughout this study. Space is a site of permeable social relations steeped in power relations that connect the built environment, symbolic meanings, and routines of life. In this study, I focus on Johannesburg and Cape Town as the reproductive sites of trans masculine people's life activities, focusing specifically on urban spaces—neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, social and leisure spaces—that shape the negotiation of liveable lives. In addition,

focusing on these two cities extends beyond borders to comment on and contribute to analyses of urban life and processes regimenting social relations in urban contexts, particularly in the so-called Global South.

Why Johannesburg and Cape Town?

In this study, I focus on people living in urban neighbourhoods in Johannesburg and Cape Town. My interest in urban landscapes of the two cities stems from, one, the extreme spatial and gender inequalities that continue to mark the neoliberal formations of liveable lives and, two, their positioning as powerful socio-economic and vibrant cultural spaces where queer life can thrive. Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (2008, 8) write that "a city is not simply a string of infrastructures, technologies, and legal entities…it also comprises actual bodies, images, forms, footprints and memories". Johannesburg is located in the Gauteng province and is estimated to have just over 5.5 million people (Cooperative Governance 2020b, 4). Cape Town, located in the Western Cape province, has an estimated 4.4 million people (Cooperative Governance 2020a). Johannesburg is South Africa's largest metropolitan municipality in population size and economy. Johannesburg and Cape Town are marked in varying degrees by extreme spatial and material inequalities, echoing the violent legacies of settler-colonial and apartheid segregation policies targeted at creating separate spaces and economies for 'separate races'—black, white, coloured, indian (Beavon 1982; Crankshaw and Parnell 2002; Murray 2011). Note that the terms 'black', 'coloured', 'white', and 'asian', which appear throughout this study, are racial categories constructed and used under the apartheid system and continue to be used in present day South Africa to classify people according to their 'race' (Posel 2001). These categories are, without argument, problematic. They carry a historicity steeped in the dehumanisation and exploitation of people considered non-white. Nevertheless, it is necessary to bear in mind the reality of race/ism and racialisation in South Africa, where constructions of race continue to hold social salience and configure identities hierarchically and relationally.

The urban trans experiences of these two cities contribute to elucidating and understanding the shifting conceptions, experiences, and articulations of embodied urban spaces in the post-apartheid context. The constitution and experience of urban spaces is further marked by continuities and processes of racial capitalism, made manifest in exploitation, dispossession, exclusion, and marginalisation within urban contexts. Contemporary topographies of Johannesburg and Cape Town bear juxtapositions in spatial and population distributions, which reveal extreme differences in the quality and value of life

in these spaces. Scholarly writing about Johannesburg emphasises the city's reputation as the leading location of economic dynamism, social life, migrant labour, and change (Mbembé and Nuttall 2004; Falkof and Van Staden 2020). In the introduction to *Anxious Joburg: The Inner Lives of a Global South City*, Nicky Falkof and Cobus Van Staden (2020, 19) write that "notwithstanding its renewed cultural capital, Joburg remains South Africa's gritty urban metropolis…a place where intense glamour intersects with intense poverty, where the ambitious and the volatile live cheek by jowl". The urban residential patterns of both cities are influenced by class and race, where suburban areas reflect well-resourced and maintained residential areas. Richard Ballard and Christian Hamman (2021) note that "newer suburban housing stock for the middle- and upper-market tends to be 'gated', ranging from high-end golf estates to more modest 'townhouse' clustered development. This new housing stock is generally built on land adjacent to former white suburbs". In contrast, situated on the outskirts of the cities are the densely populated working class and poor informal settlements and townships which are marked by poverty and scarcity of quality essential services, such as water and housing (Turok 2018). Townships—historically inferior residential spaces created under apartheid as cheap black labour reserves— are primarily located on the peripheries of the cities (Seekings 2008; Murray 2011). Ivan Turok (2018, 1) maintains that the factors sustaining these demographic patterns include "concentrated economic power, inertia in the built environment, and continuing unevenness in institutional capabilities across the country".

Queer geographical scholarship focusing on gay and lesbian geographies in Johannesburg and Cape Town highlights the classed and racialised experiences of queer life made visible through patterns of consumption (Tucker 2009a; Canham 2017). Within these analyses, affluent, predominantly white queer positionalities are rendered more visible and relatively safe to navigate (Tucker 2009b), while a perpetual wave of violence marks other formations of queer life, particularly black lesbian and queer of colour life (Matebeni 2011; Canham 2017; B. M. Müller 2019). Johannesburg is also significant in gay and lesbian South African history; represented by the gay and lesbian activism of the 1980s and 1990s led by prominent activists such as Simon Nkoli and Bev Ditsie (Matebeni 2018). The Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), founded by Nkoli in 1988, organised the first South African pride parade hosted in Johannesburg on 13 October 1990 (Matebeni 2018). Queer activism and the visibility and presence queer life form part of the city's history and present. As Xavier Livermon (2014, 512) notes, "For many black queers in South Africa, Johannesburg and Soweto itself emerge as a black queer space affording opportunities for sociality not available

elsewhere in the country". Cape Town, on the other hand, troubled with its jarring socio-economic inequalities, has gained the tourism-influenced reputation of the 'gay capital' of Africa (Oswin 2005; Rink 2013). The framing of Cape Town as Africa's 'gay capital' has implications for reifying specific subject positions as models for what queer life looks like. In the racialised and classed city's spaces, narratives of queer spatialities and gay friendliness are often articulated through a nexus of social positionings where race and class typically override sexuality. For instance, Gustav Visser (2013) notes that city spaces generally accept gay lifestyles as articulated through the experiences of white gay middle-class men. Visser (2013, 272) further argues that, for white gay men in these spaces, "all manner of homophobia can be negotiated all manner of homophobia can be negotiated, merely because in a racialised and classed society such as South Africa, being 'white' and broadly of the same 'class' – the 'us'– overrides sexuality as a major marker of difference". Taking these intertwining socio-economic, spatial and political realities of both cities, in this study I build on these insights and analyse the spatial experiences and enunciations of trans masculinities in the urban areas of Cape Town and Johannesburg. I argue that trans masculine geographies reveal complicated layers to the urban experience and the social, economic and political formations of the urban and urban subjectivities.

While trans and gender non-normative geography scholarship focusing on urban subjectivities is relatively nascent, it would be fatuous to dismiss the unfolding complex tapestry of writing on LGBT life in the two metropolises, which serves as a solid grip for informing an exploration of trans subjectivities in urban spatialities.

Situating my Research Context

My research collaborators[1] live in urban areas in and around Johannesburg and Cape Town. For most, their geographical origins run across South Africa, Africa, and Europe. As is true for most people living in Johannesburg and Cape Town, their geographical patterns are embedded within migratory patterns, which are a common feature within the socio-economic history of the country. The geographical trajectories of my research collaborators form an amalgam of patterns, inflected through different spaces and places shaped by socio-

[1] I use the term 'research collaborators' to acknowledge the collaborative nature of intellectual production towards this dissertation; the life histories that appear in the empirical chapters in this study are the result of collaboration and intellectual labour in which my research collaborators and I engaged.

economic aspirations for better conditions of life. Most of my research collaborators include people who arrived in the cities as students; job seekers; immigrants taking up temporary or permanent residence; and others who moved to the cities to join their families. Only a few were born and raised in the cities.

In Johannesburg, my research collaborators reside in varying residential settings, ranging from gated estates and suburban residential areas, the inner-city, to the biggest township around Johannesburg. These residential areas vary in the socio-economic index. My collaborators from Johannesburg come from varying class backgrounds and currently live in working-class residential neighbourhoods in the south of Johannesburg, middle-class neighbourhoods in the northern suburbs, while a few come from affluent gated estates also in the northern suburbs. In Cape Town, my research collaborators live in urban residential areas ranging from the Southern Suburbs, the Atlantic Seaboard, City Bowl, Northern Suburbs, West Coast and Eastern Suburbs. These neighbourhoods/residential areas also vary in class distribution, ranging from middle class to working class residential areas. Their population distribution also varies in terms of racial/ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds.

I focus on these two metropoles and their urban geographies, spanning townships, suburban areas and gated estates, to problematise their gender and spatial politics. Further, I focus on their socio-economic and cultural positioning and how they regiment the movement and experience of space.

Historicising Gender, Spatiality and Sexuality

The construction, management, and understanding of space in South Africa are entangled in the ongoing colonial-apartheid legacies of dispossession, exploitation, and displacement (Maylam 1995; Beinart and Dubow 1995). The country's geography and politics of space are replete with colonialism and apartheid's "juridicised systems of racialised spatial ordering" (Barnard-Naudé and Chryssostalis 2022, 3). In 1948, the formal adoption of apartheid, an instance of racial capitalism, was followed by a slew of legislations rooted in the logic and policies of "separate development" for the different "races", which determined the forms of movement, space and place permitted to "Whites, Blacks, Coloureds and Indians" (Maylam 1995; Posel 2001). I use the term post-apartheid to gesture to the ongoing re-articulations of racial capitalism, which were solidified in the apartheid state's "juridical foundations

of white supremacy and relied on violence and bureaucracy to buttress the crisis-ridden system. Legalised urban segregation and 'separate amenities' secured the white cities. Pass laws, police raids, deportations, and forced removals stabilised the migrant labor system" (Clarno 2022, 27). The brutal order and state-sanctioned "logic of separation" permeated and reconfigured "everyday relations…a process that also redefined the terms of humanity, belonging and subjectivity" (Modiri 2022, 43). The racial encoding of bodies and spatiality during apartheid worked in tandem with regulating sex, gender, and sexuality. Ideologies of racial purity "saw the enforcement of strict gender and sexuality codes, the legacies of which have contributed to a strict binary conception of sex and gender and an adherence to fixed and unchanging narratives of femininity and masculinity" (Mbasalaki 2022, 63). The apartheid state wielded racialised and classed spatiality articulated with hetero-patriarchal subjectivities, wherein racialised gendered subjectivity was constructed and visibilised through the register of normative hetero-masculinities and femininities.

The construction and regulation of normative racialised gender and heterosexuality also entwined the management and articulation of expressions of gender and sexuality. Throughout the 1960s, the apartheid government had been concerned with homosexuality, which was considered a moral threat to the heteropatriarchal religious morality of the state (Swarr 2012; Camminga 2019). The adoption of The Prohibition of Disguises Act of 1969 served to curtail gender transgressive behaviour and the so-called unruly bodies, "which targeted cross-dressing as deceptive and was based on assumptions that drag could be used to trick police" (Swarr 2012, 53). The Prohibition of Disguises Act of 1969 set a precedence in the criminalisation of drag, also fusing "drag and criminals in disguise within the category of transvestite" (Swarr 2012). B Camminga (2019, 46) notes that wearing clothes or attire made for the so-called opposite sex was not problematic on its own but that the state considered the act as characteristic of "the person's sexual proclivities, a suggestion of inherent deviance, which could be diagnosed". Transvestitism or transsexuality entered this discourse as an antidote to the perceived threat that homosexuality posed to the strength and structure of the gender-normative Afrikaner state (Camminga 2019). Since homosexuality and transsexuality were treated as two sides of the same coin, the apartheid government invested in the public medical management of sex and sexuality (Camminga 2019; Swarr 2012). It amended juridical apparatuses to make provisions for the so-called sex change in which there was a clear understanding that the right to designate sex lay within medico-legal framings and that the political state should have control over the designation of the correct sex (Camminga 2019).

Under the state-sanctioned "sex change" provisions, white transsexual South Africans had access to free sex reassignment surgeries and, following surgeries, could legally alter the sex listed on their birth certificates (Swarr 2012).

What emerges from this discussion are the contradictions that lay within the apartheid government's epistemologies, regulation, and management of sex, gender, and sexuality. The legislation adopted to maintain the fallacy of the purity of race, sex, gender, and sexuality contradicts the notions of natural sex and gender, where gender is constructed as inherent and fixed. The provisions made to allow mostly white transsexual people to undergo the then so-called sex change speak to the inconsistency of the category of gender and its attendant use in the management and control of people. Nevertheless, apartheid constructions of racialised spatiality, sex, gender, and sexuality still reverberate in post-apartheid South Africa, shaping the politics and discourses of trans and gender non-normative modes of being. In the following section, I attend to the significant changes in the realm of sex, sexuality, and gender in post-apartheid South Africa and the progressive moves that have rendered the country a LGBT rights champion, at least constitutionally, and what this means for an understanding of gender and spatiality.

Gender and Sexuality in the Post-apartheid Context

Since the introduction of democratic rule in 1994, South Africa has emerged as progressive for LGBT rights. The Constitution, adopted in 1996, is founded on human dignity, the advancement of equality, non-racialism, and non-sexism (RSA 1996). The most important chapter in the Constitution concerning human rights, titled The Bill of Rights (chapter 2), enshrines, among other liberties, human dignity (section 10), the right to life (section 11), and the right to bodily and psychological integrity (section 12(2)). The Constitution made South Africa the first country in the world to explicitly declare protection against discrimination based on gender and sexuality (De Vos 2017). This landmark juridical framework—particularly the clause prohibiting discrimination based on sexuality— has been instrumental in contesting the rights of gay and lesbian people in the country. In the contentious realm of sexual politics, the early lesbian and gay activism of the 1990s and early 2000s brought into political discourse the importance of recognising same-sex marriages, and in 2005, the Civil Union Act was adopted (Croucher 2002; Thoreson 2013).

Similarly, transgender and intersex activism in the country has also mobilised successfully for the legal recognition of sex and gender equality (Klein 2009). The Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act 49 of 2003

allows "any person whose sexual characteristics have been altered by surgical or medical treatment or by evolvement through natural development resulting in gender reassignment, or any person who is intersexed may apply to the Director-General of the National Department of Home Affairs for the alteration of the sex description on his or her birth register" (Government Gazette 2004, 2). Act 49, in tandem with the Constitution, provides strong and unequivocal support, recognition, and legal protection of trans, gender non-normative, and intersex people in the country. In April 2023, the Minister of Home Affairs published a draft of the National Identification Registration Bill (No. 48435) for public commentary. One of the objectives of the Bill is to "empower the Director-General to issue a gender-neutral identity number to non-binary person" (Government Gazette 2023, 9). The Bill is an important step towards ensuring the issuance of identity numbers that do not declare the sex status of an individual. South Africa remains the only country in Africa that not only recognises but also constitutionally protects transgender individuals, acknowledging the very existence of trans, gender non-normative, and intersex people (Camminga 2019). These important legislative frameworks state that gender is not fixed or determined at birth. These rights extend to those within the South African borderland, not just those with citizenship status (Camminga 2019).

However, as mentioned previously, current socio-politics of South Africa are marked by virulent transphobia, queerphobia, and (trans)necropolitical practices, which materialise in the state's everyday neglect and disregard for trans lives, exposing trans, gender non-normative, and queer people to unliveable life conditions and early death. 'Trans necropolitics' draws from Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics and defines the forms of power that mark some fraction of a population for death even while it deems other fractions suitable for life-enhancing investment. In a 2020 report compiled by Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) on "female and trans womxn sex worker deaths in South Africa 2018-2019", they found that "45% of 101 deaths of female and trans womxn sex workers were attributable to murder" (Tenga and Richter 2020). Between January 2021 and May 2021, eight black queer and transgender people were murdered in explicit acts of transphobic and homophobic violence (Gandar 2021). These violent deaths happened in various spatial planes: homes, communities, and workspaces (particularly spaces of sex work). The state's neglect and indifference towards transgender, gender non-normative, and queer people are underscored by how their deaths almost go unnoticed and unremarked.

It is against this socio-political and historical background that this study on trans masculinities and urban spaces in South Africa emerges. Understanding

the complex navigation and negotiation of trans identity allows for tracking emerging patterns in how gender relations, as implicated in socio-political and economic processes, shift and change, thus exploring the possibilities for trans and gender non-normative lives within this shifting landscape. In the South African context, while relatively fewer in numbers in relation to the larger population, transgender people have a socio-economic and political resonance for indexing the shifting constitutions and articulations of urban subjectivities and urban spatialities.

Chapter Outline

In this introductory chapter, I have stated the purpose and aim of this study and situated the spatial contexts within which this study is located. I contextualised and situated this research in the South African socio-political context as well as the international scholarly and political context within which trans and gender non-normative subjectivities are implicated. Further, I gestured to the scholarly fields from which this study emerges and engages. I have also discussed the historical and contemporary constructions and understandings of gender, space, sexuality and race in South Africa. In Chapter 2, "Urban, Trans, and Masculinities Geographies", I position this study within scholarly debates at the intersection of feminist, queer, and trans geographies and critical masculinities analyses of space. I engage these diverse fields of theory and empirical studies to articulate and defend the need for and importance of this study and situate its contributions to the fields. In Chapter 3, "Theoretical and Analytical Framework", I attend to the theoretical and analytical approaches anchoring the study, namely, critical and feminist geography, queer phenomenology, black trans feminism, and the analytical concept of racial capitalism. I bring these analytical strategies together to frame and analyse the onto-epistemologies of the production of space and explicate the conditions for the hierarchical formations of racialised and gendered subjectivities and masculinities. In Chapter 4, "Methodological Framework", I outline a black trans feminist inspired methodological framework I use in designing and carrying out this study. I discuss the life history and narrative research method approach, outline the data collection process through online and in-person life history interviews, and detail how I approach narrative analysis. In Chapter 5, "Inhabiting the City: Textures of Urban Residential Spaces", I analyse how my research collaborators position themselves in the residential spaces where they live through how they narrate their experiences of navigating and moving in

urban and suburban spaces. Chapter 6, “Normative Entanglements: Bodies, Masculinities, and Urban Spaces”, sutures key trans masculine narratives of embodying masculinity, the role of the body in navigating masculine subject positions, and how spatialised gender discourses impress upon the visibility of trans masculine bodies. Chapter 7, “On the Grooves of Leisure and Socialising Spaces”, this chapter takes as its point of departure trans masculine narratives of inhabiting urban spaces of leisure and socialising as well as how they are important performative spaces for trans masculine identity and their various other intersecting social identities. Chapter 8, “Narratives of Formations and Practices of Community as Constitutions of Space”, analyses what and how trans masculine life is rendered viable and liveable through practices and constitutions of community as constitutive of urban space. Chapter 9, “Conclusion: A Trans Sense of Space”, presents this dissertation’s contributions and concluding reflections.

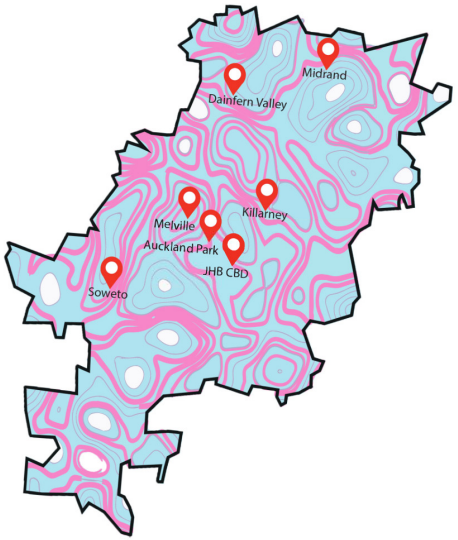

Fig. 1: Illustrated Map of Johannesburg with Research Collaborators Neighbourhoods Pinned (Courtesy of Lesedi Moleko, 2024)

Fig.2: An Illustrated Map of Cape Town with Collaborators' Neighbourhoods Pinned (Courtesy of Lesedi Moleko, 2024).

2. Urban, Trans, and Masculinities Geographies

In this chapter, I review the areas of scholarship within which this study is situated in dialogue and to which it contributes. In its broadest sense, this study is an interdisciplinary analysis of urban trans masculine geographies: how trans masculine people create and negotiate liveable lives in the urban spaces they inhabit and in which they move. The literature brought into conversation in this chapter converges around critical feminist and queer urban geographies, trans geographies, and critical analyses of masculinities and spatiality within men and masculinities studies. As such, this chapter is divided into three sections: the first section begins with a critical discussion of feminist and queer urban geographies. Specifically, it explores intersectional analyses within the emergence of feminist, queer, and trans subjectivities in urban city spaces. The second part of the chapter focuses on trans and gender nonnormative geographies scholarship, tracking the constitution of trans subjectivities in urban spaces in selected global Anglo context generally and in the South African context specifically. The third part explores scholarship on men, masculinities, and space, highlighting how masculinities are configured, negotiated, and understood in urban public spaces.

I bring these three thematic discussions to bear in this chapter and argue for a deeper understanding of trans and gender non-normative people's embodied experiences of urban city spaces and how these shape the emergence and articulation of trans subjectivities through unstable and varied processes of subjectivation. I emphasise public urban spaces as they are subjected appropriation by different institutions and discourses—to argue that public urban spaces, as networks of social relations, are crucial elements in the construction and experience of any city. reveal the socio-economic and political processes that govern social relations.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge that the literature surveyed and brought together in this chapter is wholly published in English and thus marks the scholarly contexts, agenda, knowledge production circuits, and conversations that this study engages, delineating how it adds to and diverges

from the theoretical and conceptual preoccupations of the scholarly work discussed below.

Critical Urban Geographies: Queer Trajectories

Urban geography is a broad field of inquiry, comprising overlapping fields and disciplines that have made significant contributions to the understanding of urbanisation, cities and the production of space and place (Kaplan and Holloway 2014). The urban here indexes "the co-presence of multiple spaces, multiple times and multiple webs of relations, tying local sites, subjects and fragments into globalising networks of economic, social and cultural change" (Amin and Graham 1997, 417-418). Inquiries into gender and geography have drawn from and contributed to the study of gender and geography, emphasising critical analyses of the constitutive construction of gender and space (McDowell 1983; Longhurst 2002; Bob and Musyoki 2002; Barriteau 2003; McKittrick 2006; 2011; Veleda da Silva and Lan 2007). Part of the foci of English language feminist urban studies from the 1980s onward probed into varying empirical and analytical questions regarding the women's conceptions, uses, and embodied experiences of urban spaces as well as critiques of patriarchy and gender roles as the dominant frames through which women's use and inhabitation of space were articulated (Hayden 1980; Wekerle 1980). In her critique of these foci, Linda McDowell (1983, 59) argued that it "stopped short at the description and analysis of women's behaviour only". Further, while this scholarship garnered essential insights into women's experiences of urban spaces and rightly levelled critiques at patriarchal constitutions of gender and space, they remained uncritical of the racialised gender binary (Amos and Parmar 1984). Feminist urban geography critiques attuned to the racialised and classed gender binary constitution of space, articulates in part the co-constitutive articulation of race, class, and ethnicity (McKittrick 2006; Noxolo 2024). Taking up intersectional analyses, feminist geography scholarship of race and ethnicity, gender and the urban, have focused mainly on geographical knowledge that bears witness to the spatialities of coloniality, exclusion, and dispossession along the line of race, gender, sexuality, and class (McKittrick 2006; Eaves and Al-Hindi 2020; Noxolo 2024). Further, this scholarship articulates in part dominant structures and practices within spatial relations and differentiated geographies (Barriteau 2003; McKittrick 2006; Noxolo 2024). I bring these partial threads in the study

of gender and geography to chart the debates I am specifically attuned to in this work and contribute to.

Indexing a shift in (urban) geography scholarship, P Price (2013, 578) names this moment in geographical theorising as an "intimate turn", a moment "wherein bodies and encounters figure prominently". Price further argues that "given the centrality of bodies and encounters in their emergence, race and ethnicity are at the forefront of this conversation" (578). I engage critical urban scholarship that takes seriously the matter of bodies and the co-constitutiveness of race, class, gender, and sexuality in urban formations of space as well as the construction of urban subjectivities. Within the vast lineage of gender and urban space scholarship, I am particularly interested in the intersectional and queer trajectories. While this chapter does not present any comprehensive genealogical overview queer urban studies, I take as a point of departure specific analytical and empirical preoccupations of this body of work. I proceed from intersectional and queer urban geographies for its generative empirical analysis of the co-constitution of gender, sexuality and the urban. As such, for the purpose of my arguments here, I have selected specific works, published in English, that trudge along the theoretical and empirical concerns I engage in this study. To put it differently, this study tugs at the theoretical and empirical insights of intersectional and queer urban scholarship to extend the analytical reach to considerations of bodies constituted outside of the normative configurations of the racialised and classed gender binary. Thus, proposing an unmoored analytic that decentres and departs from the racialised gender binary as an authoritative register for constituting, experiencing, and embodying urban spaces.

Queer Geographies

Despite their diverse agendas and formations, feminist and queer geographies have much in common historically, theoretically, empirically, and politically—each growing out of a set of social exclusions based on essentialist constructions of gender, class, race and sexuality (McDowell 1993; Namaste 1996; Valentine 2002; Halberstam 2005). Among the varying concerns with how dominant structures of oppression regiment and geographically constitute what iterations of gender and sexuality are acceptable (and, thus, made liveable), feminist and queer geography scholarship has taken up the question of women's and sexualities-based oppressions in varying theoretical and empirical trajectories that have overlapped and diverged at different points of their scholarly evolution (Browne 2006; March 2021; Johnston 2018; Oswin 2013). One of these overlaps is their insistence on intersectional analyses of

structural oppressions. The earliest work on sexuality and space sought to map the most visible lesbian and gay spaces within the Anglo-American and UK context, marking the constitution and articulation of lesbian and gay urban spaces popularised in the term 'gay villages' (Binnie 1997; 1995; Castells 1983). Alongside cataloguing gay and lesbian urban space, this early scholarship, similarly to early urban feminist scholarship, took up essentialist conceptualisations of gender, sexuality, and space in which gender roles were emphasised in the production of urban gay and lesbian spaces. For example, Manuel Castells (1983) argued that the geography of gay men and lesbians reflected their respective gendered behaviours. Early 2000s scholarship departed from essentialist notions of gender, sexuality, and space by calling attention to the active (and sometimes contradictory) production of space and levelling powerful critiques at the implicit gender normative and heterosexual bias of much geographical theorising (M. Brown and Knopp 2003; Oswin 2008; G. Valentine 2002). Another critical intervention of this scholarship has been the critique of gay and lesbian geographies that eschew internal contradictions, particularly in claims of presenting homogeneous, undifferentiated urban lesbian and gay subjectivities (Visser 2003).

Further, the critiques of the formations and articulations of gay and lesbian subjects extended to include the experiential knowlegdes of queer immigrants in conceptualising, experiencing, and embodying urban city spaces. This scholarship tracks the urban geographies of queer immigrants and how they are multiply interpellated into discourses of gender, sexuality, and mobility (D. Collins 2005; Gorman-Murray 2007; Luibhéid 2008). As well as how queer immigrant subjectivities emerge within the ebbs and flows of migration, shaping the constitution of both urban gay and lesbian spaces and urban spaces in and of themselves (Gorman-Murray 2009; M. Brown 2012). With this study on urban trans masculine geographies, I am particularly attuned to the intersectional trajectory in queer geography scholarship. I engage its insights and concerns regarding the subject positions of queer, gay, and trans people as well as the potential for articulating the changing and fluid contours of how these subjectivities are articulated and experienced in urban spaces.

Queer Geographies in South Africa

As intimated in the introduction to this dissertation, spatial and gender politics in South Africa are steeped in a complex, hierarchical systems of racialised, classed, cultural, and religious conceptions and articulations of gender and urban space. As discussed earlier, this complexity is a residue and a continuity of the racial capitalist logic of apartheid that constructed space through

racialised, classed heteropatriarchy. Thus, merging racist and classist ideologies with heterosexuality to maintain a binary construction of masculinity and femininity (Ratele 2009; Shefer 2010; Clarno and Vally 2023). Feminist and queer urban geography scholarship in South Africa highlights the racialised, classed, heteropatriarchal, and homophobic ideologies that continue to mutate and gain new adaptations that shape the spatial economies and social relations of democratic South Africa. These changing socio-spatial dynamics, complicate the movement of women and queer people in different urban spatial contexts (Gevisser and Cameron 1995; Hassim and Gouws 1998; Gqola 2001; Tucker 2009b). Scholars also note the weaponizing of historical, contemporary, cultural, religious, and legal discourses of gender and sexuality, which play a significant role in constructing acceptable and unacceptable embodiments and modes of being in the world, anchoring the violent policing of gender and sexuality in urban public spaces (Matebeni 2013; Reddy, Monro, and Matebeni 2018; Kiguwa 2019). Particularly, trans and gender nonnormative people from low-income areas, mostly historically under-resourced areas, are exposed to unliveable material conditions and lack of access to essential services, such as healthcare, education, and housing (Swarr 2012; Francis 2014; Haffejee and Wiebesiek 2021).

Within queer geography scholarship, research shows that anti-queer rhetoric as well as incidences of discrimination and violence in public spaces, particularly against black queer people, curtails the mobility and safety of queer people in public spaces (Ndelu, Dlakavu, and Boswell 2017). This happens in spite of a Constitution that promotes and protects gender and sexuality minorities' rights. Equality Clause 9(3) of the South African Constitution prohibits discrimination on gender, sex, and sexual orientation (RSA 1996). On the one hand, the commonly opposed realities of a progressive constitution that protects the rights of gender and sexuality minorities and a hostile socio-cultural and political climate signal the contours of legal protections and interventions in troubling and the dominant culture of cis-heteropatriarchal violence, manifesting through institutionalised rape culture and homophobia and transphobia. This encounter offers productive tensions and spaces for imagining counter-normative and liberatory embodiments of gender that challenge, modify, question, and disrupt normative constructions of gender and space (Jacobs 2020; Imma 2017). For example, the student social movements of 2015 and 2016 against exclusionary practices in South African universities also brought attention to the patriarchy, transphobia, sexism, misogyny, and gender-based violence that abounds in university campuses in the country (Ndelu, Dlakavu, and Boswell 2017). Similarly, LGBT non-profit organisations have been central in bringing to public attention the lived

realities of trans and gender-diverse people, primarily focusing on schools and working with the National Department of Education to challenge exclusionary practices and rituals (liberty Matthyse et al. 2020).

Queer geography scholarship in South Africa has also focused on various analyses: explorations of sexuality embodiment and expression within public spaces that trouble the constitution of heterosexualised spaces (Elder 1998); black queer space making (Livermon 2014); queer geographies of higher education (Msibi 2009; Rothmann 2018; A. Brown 2018); the embodied performance of sexualities in cities (Tucker 2009b; Visser 2013; Livermon 2012; Rink 2013); the spatial navigation of LGBT asylum seekers in South Africa's metropolis (Bhagat 2018); queerphobic geographies and queer experiences of public spaces (Ngidi et al. 2020; Canham 2017; Holland-Muter 2019); and queer bodies in healthcare spaces (Meer and Müller 2017; A. Müller 2018). This literature emphasises the heteronormative constructions of space prevalent in South African urban spaces where race and class play a significant role in determining the reception of different queer subject positions. The literature also pays specific attention to race and class as they relate to spatial planning legacies in South Africa, using intersectionality as a framework for highlighting the differential experiences and influences of space, particularly on black queer people (Canham 2017; Ngidi et al. 2020). In addition, the research calls attention to the unyielding (re)production of space as heteronormative, racialised, and classed, highlighting how queer people resist heterosexualised spaces by creating spaces where they can safely express their sexualities (A. Brown 2018). While the scholarship proceeds from a binary articulation of gender and sexuality, where lesbian and gay people's use of space is theorised as an alternative to heterosexualised and heteronormative space (Tucker 2009b), it has nevertheless established productive entry points into mapping the intersection of gender, space, race, sexuality, and class in contemporary South Africa. Within this scholarship, transgender experiences of space remain minute and under-theorised, with few but noteworthy exceptions (Patel 2017; Camminga 2019; Husakouskaya 2013).

This scant geographical research is done in the context of a general lack of research on transgender people. The available research on transgender identities is usually lumped with LGBT research, which includes very few transgender people in the participants' sample (Mavhandu-Mudzusi 2014). Transgender scholarship in South Africa has focused on various analyses, including autobiographical narratives of becoming and embodying transgender identities (Mabenge 2018; Morgan, Marais, and Wellbeloved 2009); trans activism (Klein 2009); and discursive constructions of trans identities (monakali and Francis 2022). Trans African studies also grapple with the

problem of language, theorising with indigenous knowledge to document the nuances of gender non-normativity from different linguistic and cultural contexts. While transgender studies have opened possibilities to think about gender in expansive ways, the Anglophone-dominated sphere of theorising oft runs into incomprehensibility when uncritically transplanted to contexts outside of its US-centric origins. For instance, the desire to use the concept 'transgender' to classify all forms of gender embodiment that eschew and deviate from the gender binary, without paying specific attention to socio-cultural and historical complexities and epistemologies of gender, cannot allow for a nuanced explication of gender within or beyond the binary. Camminga (2017, 5) also notes the epistemological shortfalls in transgender studies which, they argue, are "rooted in the field's implicit assumptions regarding the subject—usually white and western in origin—and its leaning towards imposed meaning, an underlying universality and linearity in the narrative". This study contributes to the growing research on transgender identities and transgender/gender non-normative geographies in the country, specifically and internationally. Drawing from the insights of queer geographies scholarship from the South African context, this study troubles the assumed homogeneity of space, the taken-for-granted racialised and classed constitutions of gender and space, and the presumed naturalness of gender and sexuality. It provides an analytic of urban trans masculinities that reveals the complex ways trans, and gender non-normative embodiments are constituted through shifting and unstable processes and articulations of race, gender, class, urban space, and sexuality.

Transgender Geographies: International and National Trajectories

Intersectional feminist and queer urban geographies scholarship have been the generative backdrop from which trans geographies emerge, contribute, and depart. While there is a large body of scholarship dedicated to critical feminist and queer urban geographies, with generative intersections with masculinity studies and trans scholarship, the latter—in its focus on questions of space—is considered an emerging area within geographical scholarship. Before I turn to trans geographies as an emerging focus in critical geography scholarship, I briefly discuss and contextualise trans studies, within which trans geographies also sit. Current trans studies emerged as interdisciplinary scholarship, merging trans activism with scholarship that is primarily situated in

Anglophone contexts. Early transgender scholarship covered a wide array of topics, from examining the erasure of transsexual and transgender lives (V. Namaste 2000), gender normativity and bodily alteration (Spade 2006), to exploring the conceptual contours of binary genders through the affordances of trans theorising (Monro 2007), and transgender rights (Platero 2011). Building on this early work, recent interdisciplinary trans scholarship highlights trans identities and embodiment within, for example, understandings of nation and citizenship (Bhattacharya 2019; Monro and Van Der Ros 2018); transnational mobility and migration (Camminga 2019; Aizura 2018; Padilla et al. 2016), schooling contexts (Schmitt 2022; Martino and Omercajic 2021; Ullman 2017); trans youth (Linander and Alm 2022), transgender geographies (Halberstam 2005; Edelman 2014; Abelson 2016), and transgender histories (Snorton 2017; Stryker 2017; Gill-Peterson 2018). These are some of the analytical and empirical preoccupations of trans scholarship, where 'transgender' as an analytical category has been useful in tracing multiple and complex social processes and changes in different transnational contexts. It is important to note that, within trans scholarship (or scholarship on transgender issues) in the social sciences, the emergent patterns point to a need for scholarship that builds on (transgender) theory (Hausman 2001; Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010; Shuster 2020), and trans feminist and trans-of-colour methodologies and theories (A. H. Johnson 2015; Haritaworn 2008; Coleman 2020). In addition, recent research has maintained a critique of research ethics within trans research (Vincent 2018).

The need for transgender theory has, for instance, been argued for concerning the anti-normative limits of queer theory, which has been a widely used framework in analyses of transgender phenomena (Elliot 2016; Martino and Omercajic 2021). The anti-normative focus in queer theory "reflects a broad understanding that the critical force of queer inquiry lies in its capacity to undermine norms, challenge normativity, and interrupt the processes of normalization" (Wiegman and Wilson 2015, 4). Scholars have argued that the anti-normative focus also ignores the lived and embodied experiences of trans people by 'conceptualising and depicting gender as being primarily or entirely a cultural artifact' (Serano 2013, 117). These critiques are taken seriously in transgender theory, which brings together a set of conceptual and theoretical arguments for framing and understanding transgender identity. Transgender theory emphasises a conceptualisation of subjectivity that includes a 'both/neither' conceptualisation of gender identity outside of the male/female binary and centres on the physical, embodied lived experiences of gender (Roen 2019; Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010). Writing on how trans scholarship intersects with queer geographical work, Catherine Nash (2010) suggests that

trans theory offers geographers interested in the intersection between sexuality, gender, and the body alternative and challenging avenues of inquiry. Alongside theoretical developments in transgender scholarship, there has been an emphasis on engaging feminist theories, particularly intersectional approaches to studying and researching transgender-related phenomena. Nevertheless, this work has not fully embraced the potential for bringing decolonial, anti-colonial, and post-colonial thought into theorising and conceptualising trans (Silva and Ornat 2016; Chávez and Vázquez 2017; Tudor 2021). This study is critical of trans theory and its lack of analytical considerations of race and class as constitutive aspects of trans. The sole focus on gender as the main axis of critique loses sight of the co-constitutiveness of gender in other processes of subjectivation. As such, this study emphasises and draws from black trans feminist scholarship to explore trans and gender non-normative forms of embodiment, bringing to bear the racialised, classed, and spatially specific knowledges and experiences of gender non-normativity. It builds on the theorisation of trans conceptualisations, experiences, and embodiments of urban spaces, especially how the constitutions and meanings attached to urban space influence the liveability of trans lives.

Recent publications on historical trans research—drawing from an expansive and rich archive of black feminist, queer, and trans-of-colour critiques—intervene and contest the medicalised historical archive of transgender identity (Snorton 2017; Gill-Peterson 2018). It is important to reiterate that this scholarship is still predominantly produced in Anglophone Euro-American publications. In Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity, C Riley Snorton (2017, 6) builds on black feminist, queer, and trans-of-colour theoretical writings to examine the temporalities of the emergence of blackness and transness in the United States by examining how both have been "constituted as fungible, thingified, and interchangeable". Snorton's weighty analytic of the "collateral genealogies of blackness and transness" (20) shows the interrelated formulations in which "captive and divided flesh function as a malleable matter for mediating and remaking sex and gender as matters of human categorisation and personal definition". In another historical explication of trans, Jules Gill-Peterson's Histories of the Transgender Child (2018, viii) carefully rereads medical archives beginning in the early twentieth century to contest "one central libel that limits the livelihood of trans children: that they have no history, that they are fundamentally new and somehow therefore deserving of less than human recognition". Gill-Peterson argues that "trans children were central to the medicalisation of sex and gender during the twentieth century and made valuable through a racialised discourse of plasticity" (3). Gill-Peterson draws

upon trans-of-colour studies to contest the pervasive whiteness of the early twentieth-century medical archive. I specifically think with and engage this emerging historical trans scholarship as it bears familiarity with the different spatiotemporal interpellations of sex, gender, race, sexuality, and spatiality solidified in South Africa's recent settler-colonial and apartheid histories that persist in the contemporary political moment.

Trans Geographies: Emerging the Urban Trans and Gender Nonnormative Subject

Existing transgender scholarship exploring trans people's spatialities and drawing from feminist theorising tends to explore what trans people have documented as spaces of hostility in urban spaces. These include institutions that have been marked by normative registers that police gender and sexuality, such as schools, higher education institutions, and healthcare institutions. Emerging international transgender geographies scholarship pays attention to transgender people's encounters and experiences of public, semi-public, and community spaces (Linander et al. 2019; Edelman 2014); urban, educational, carceral, and rural spaces (Doan 2010; Jourian, Simmons, and Devaney 2015; Rosenberg and Oswin 2015; Abelson 2016); spaces of sex work (Sullivan and Day 2019; Sullivan 2018), (Sullivan and Day 2019; Sullivan 2018); queer/LGBT spaces in the UK (Browne and Lim 2010); and discrimination in healthcare and public bathroom spaces in South Africa (Patel 2017; Luvuno, Ncama, and Mchunu 2019).

Public bathroom spaces have become the centre of heated debates about gender and genitals and what kinds of bodies have the right to use public bathrooms (Seelman 2016; Doan 2010). This animated focus on public bathrooms underscores the unyielding hold of cisgenderism that shapes public spaces. 'Cisgenderism' refers to "the cultural and systemic ideology that denies, denigrates, or pathologises self-identified gender identities that do not align with assigned gender at birth as well as resulting behaviour, expression, and community" (Lennon and Mistler 2014, 63). Public bathrooms/toilets are productive spaces for gatekeeping sex and gender norms, where the infrastructure and symbols often indicate a binary conception of gender (Jones and Slater 2020). As such, bodies are expected to conform to masculinity or femininity standards, and the transgression of these norms is articulated through a language of violence and threat, primarily against women (Jones and Slater 2020). Joel Sanders and Susan Stryker (2016) note the "moral panic" over the presence of transgender people in sex-segregated public bathrooms and the violence trans people face in these spaces. Similarly, in higher

education, transgender people face discrimination and violence in accessing bathroom spaces in which they feel safe (Seelman 2016; Sanders and Stryker 2016; Patel 2017). While this study is not primarily about trans people's use of public bathrooms, I draw on this discussion to illustrate the unyielding hold of cisgenderism that shapes trans and gender-diverse people's use and experiences of public spaces.

Walking While Trans: Embodied Urban Trans Geographies

The invocation 'walking while transgender' has come to capture a collection of trans (specifically trans feminine) people's experiences of walking in urban public spaces and the attendant reactions with which they are met that curtail trans people's movements in public spaces (Edelman 2014; Carpenter and Marshall 2017). Analysing the regulation of trans feminine bodies of colour in Washington DC through neoliberal informed spatial policies, Elijah Edelman (2014, 172) highlights the impact of such spatial policies, which he argues are meant to regulate and "mark the visibility of trans feminine bodies of colour in economically viable space as a threat and as a criminal". Edelman conceptualises the trans feminine bodies of colour discarded from public spaces in the context of the US as "bodies that fail to be capitally productive" and thus are exposed to violence, including social and physical death (176). In a qualitative and phenomenological study exploring trans people's experiences of being in urban public, semi-public, and community spaces in Sweden, Ida Linander et al. (2019) found that "experiences of unsafety and discomfort in public and semi-public spaces limited the study participants' use of everyday spaces and caused them to refrain from social activities" (924). Similarly, research shows that trans people have to deal with transphobic and cis-normative healthcare spaces, where there is often limited knowledge on how to provide adequate medical care for trans patients (Dean, Victor, and Guidry-Grimes 2016; Luvuno, Ncama, and Mchunu 2019). The curtailing of trans people's movement in public spaces aligns with the regulation of spaces that uphold the illusion of binary gendered constructions. This scant literature alerts us to the impositional, racialised, and classed gender binary that renders certain trans and gender non-normative bodies disposable. In this study, I build on this insight and extend it to analyse how trans people resist and reconstitute urban public spaces by strategically engaging and drawing from otherwise formations of social relations, thus forging different ways of being and existing in public spaces.

Trans Geographies of In/visibility

In the literature exploring the lived spatial experiences of trans people, concepts such as vulnerability (Brice 2020); liminality (Arun-Pina 2021; March 2021), and precarity (Bonner-Thompson, Mearns, and Hopkins 2021) have also come to capture the work done in trans geographies. In their literature review of queer and trans geographies of liminality, Loren March (2020) notes that "liminality also references alternative time-spaces, haunted or spectral sites where multiple rhythms and temporalities collide and destabilise place-identity" (456). Within this conception, "trans geographies point in a different direction, toward the benefits of approaching liminality first hand, from an explicitly trans perspective" (462). Trans geographies scholarship foregrounds how space regulates and enforces normative gender performativity 9(Rosenberg and Oswin 2015; Arun-Pina 2021; Rogers 2019). Writing from autoethnographic sensemaking of "micro-liminal spaces of learning (and misgendering)", Chan Arun-Pina (2021, 509) notes the quotidian experience of misgendering they experience as a trans-identifying person-of-colour inside the classroom and their department as well as how they disrupted their contribution to and presence within conversations (512). Arun-Pina further states their alienation and "dis-belonging" in spaces of collective action where their ethnicity/racial identity and trans identity collided in ways that further invisibilised them (520). In studies of trans negotiations of higher education spaces, the research shows the enduring microaggressions meted out to trans people. Carl Bonner-Thompson et al. (2021) write about trans university students' experiences of bathrooms, classroom and student accommodations and other socialising spaces in Northern England. They found that "access to all-gender facilities is geographically uneven", which complicated the daily realities of trans students. The built environment, they argue, "denies existence", forcing trans people to "comply with gendered norms" (490).

In a qualitative exploration of how trans men negotiate pressures in higher education in the New England context of the US, D. Chase J Catalano (2015, 415) found that the trans men participants desired recognition on college campuses punctuated by navigating dynamics around embodiment and passing. Catalano also writes that the "participant's identification with being trans was complicated by their desires for, access to, and decisions about biomedical transition" (417). For the participants in his study, Catalano found that this meant that "to be taken seriously as trans by others means one must perform or embody a trans identity based on certain requirements" (418). Catalano also found that the participants described the importance of normative masculinities as a valid (and necessary) embodiment for trans men,

as these masculinities set up distinctions of authenticity and may have implications for how trans men locate and experience other men in college communities (419). Drawing on narratives of passing, Catalano also found that, for the participants in his study, making meaning of visibility as men and invisibility as trans (or their invisibility as men) was a delicate and complicated balance (420). In addition, Catalano writes that "participants described the experience of passing as cisgender as, on the one hand, an achievement, while on the other, passing resulted in silencing and invisibility" (420). The body emerges again as the focal point for gender expression. Catalano notes that the gender expressions of the participants were rooted in a presentation of the body that aligned with social and cultural expectations of masculinity: "For those willing to compromise their desired gender expression for the sake of readability as men, passing as a man is the only way for participants to be read as not-women, given naturalised assumptions about the gender binary" (422). Catalano notes that "trans students' lived bodily experience of passing or not passing became central to their gender identities, overshadowing their other feelings about their internal sense of gender" (425).

Empirical trans scholarship, using rich and complex qualitative methodologies and situated in efforts to respond to social inequalities, addresses how transgender people negotiate social life within a constellation of identities and spaces through engaging with various feminist, decolonial, and post-colonial theories. Camminga's (2019) *Transgender Refugees and the Imagined South Africa* study discusses the complex South-South refugee migration, paying attention to how transgender refugees are forced from their homes and embark on difficult journeys to reach and cross the border into South Africa. Camminga coins the term "gender refugee" to describe "people who can claim refugee status, fleeing their countries of origin based on the persecution of their gender identity" (1). This term sutures the participants' experiences in the study, providing a language that, while the participants use many other identities to articulate their subject positions, recognises the interchangeability of gender and homosexuality in the context of the study. Camminga nevertheless makes analytically specific the difference between "gender refugees" and "sexual refugees", the latter a more common analytical phenomenon in migration discourses in Southern Africa.

Similarly, in *Mobile Subjects: Transnational Imaginaries of Gender Reassignment*, Aren Aizura (2018) writes about tropes of transnational geographical travel central to the cultural and political intelligibility of gender reassignment. Aizura also scrutinises transnational imaginaries of gender reassignment and how mobility inflects trans subjectivity formation and critiques its geographical and racial specificity. Using a methodology they call

"following the actors" —patients, care workers, surgeons and themselves— Aizura examines "the material mobility of knowledge, people, and capital that constellate around gender confirmation surgery practices" (3). They note how gender reassignment behaves as a "commodity, a right, and a service" (3).

Situated across multiple sites of contestation, Miriam Abelson's study *Men in Place: Trans Masculinity, Race, and Sexuality in America* (2019) discusses how place, race, and class matter in shaping trans men's experiences with masculinity in the US. The work grapples with the ontological question of "manhood", in which Abelson asks, how should men be, what does toxic masculinity looks like, and what ought to be normative? Abelson's work situates an analysis of trans masculinity in various geographies across the US and moves towards including trans men in the analytical category of men and masculinities.

Writing on trans embodiment and men's prison spaces in the US, Rae Rosenberg and Natalie Oswin (2015) attend to the "prison industrial complex", defined as "a system that disproportionately affects people of colour and lower-income populations" (1271). In their study, the authors emphasise carceral spaces' coercive and highly gendered nature as well as how they regulate gender performance and enforce gender roles. Rosenberg and Oswin write, "masculine norms are imposed in prison spaces through disciplinary punishment and social repercussions such as verbal harassment, social isolation and physical assault" (1276–77). The authors report that many participants in their study received "disciplinary charges for wearing make-up and femininely altered clothing and were also denied tools to feminise their presentation, such as razors" (1277). Rosenberg and Oswin argue that disembodying effects of carceral masculine space index the embodiment of trans femininity in carceral spaces, "trans bodies are left in states of limbo where transitions are forgotten, and the consequences of such severe neglect are most often ignored" (1278).

The scholarship discussed in this section highlights the challenges trans people encounter in navigating different spatial contexts. It also shows expected and normative assumptions about space as somewhat fixed and inherently cis-normative. Importantly, this work brings together urgent questions concerning the understandings and experiences of space, place, and transgender subjectivities, moving beyond the binary female/male occupation within feminist and queer geographies scholarship. In my engagement with trans geographies scholarship, I extend both the empirical and theoretical analyses of trans and space by exploring the navigational experiences and strategies of transgender people in social spaces. This study also examines how different positionalities (racial, class, geographic, linguistic differences,

citizenship status) enable or challenge the safe navigation of social spaces and articulations of visibility and invisibility.

Men, Masculinities, and Space

In the next section, I bring into conversation men and masculinities scholarship's empirical and theoretical engagement with spatiality and masculinities, specifically looking into the developments around how masculinities and space/place have been understood and explained.

Masculinity and Urban Space: Global Context

Within studies of men and masculinities, the concept of hegemonic masculinity (R. W. Connell 1995; R. W. Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) has been the analytic axis upon which masculinities are conceptualised and analysed. Hegemonic masculinity is understood as a specific form of masculinity in each historical and society-wide setting that legitimates unequal gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities (R. W. Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 2019). Further, men and masculinities scholarship has approached the analysis of masculinity, men and gender power through indexing categories or types of masculinities, such as traditional masculinity (Everitt-Penhale and Ratele 2015), racialised masculinities (Mfecane 2016; van Niekerk 2019), genderqueer masculinities (Helman and Ratele 2018); young masculinities (Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman 2002; Langa 2010; Mayeza and Bhana 2021; Peltola and Phoenix 2022); and violent masculinities (Gqola 2007; van Niekerk and Boonzaier 2016), to name a few. A similar approach is taken by a trend in studies that indexes categories of masculinities that trans men desire and embody. For instance, Abelson (2019) proposes a type of masculinity—goldilocks masculinity— articulated and embodied by trans men in the Southern region of the US. Goldilocks masculinity is "hybrid and relational…an in-between masculinity that is not too masculine and not too feminine or effeminate and, in turn, shapes what people do in interaction".

Internationally, studies variously engaging with the abovementioned typologies have focused on the intersection of race, sexuality, masculinity, and space as a critical analytic for understanding the construction and experience of masculinities and space (Westwood 1990; Longhurst 2000; Day 2006; Hearn and Morrell 2012; Strayhorn and Tillman-Kelly 2013). In a recent

ethnographic study of how race/isms mark the fabric of various social spaces in the US, Elijah Anderson (2021, 14–15) brings to bear an analysis of being black in white spaces, which he describes as "a perceptual category that assumes a particular space to be predominantly White, one where Black people are typically unexpected, marginalised when present and made to feel unwelcome". In his extensive analysis, Anderson tracks the historical constructions of black masculinities and how they continue to evolve and mutate into newer forms for regulating and curtailing the movement and appearance of black masculinities in different spatial planes. I particularly invoke this scholarship, as it bears both contextual and historical familiarity with this study in how race, space, and gender work to shape the embodiments of racialised and classed masculinities.

Similar work exploring the racialised coding of space and place in South Africa attends to various residential spaces, from townships to rural areas, analysing how men construct and enact masculinities and the intersections thereof with sexualities and social class (Morrell 1998; Sideris 2004; Ratele 2016a; Langa 2020). This scholarship emphasises the shifting constructions and perceptions of masculinities alongside social class, notably articulated in consumption patterns in socialising and leisure spaces (Levon, Milani, and Kitis 2017; Leopeng and Langa 2019). Further, in studies of men and masculinities in South Africa, the concept of hegemonic masculinities found productive ground in both gender activism and scholarly studies of the changing landscape of gender relations as well as the legitimation of unequal gender relations, where men retain power over women, children, gender, sexuality, and non-normative people. Robert Morrell, Rachel Jewkes and Graham Lindegger (2013, 12) argue that "the power of the concept to make sense of the gendered landscape (and the position of men upon it) was complemented by a shift on gender politics in the post-1994 period during which gender activism was broadened and mainstreamed and began to involve men". Using the concept, research on men and masculinities in South Africa has sought to analyse the different articulations of masculinities and their associated social power, emphasising the distinction between hegemonic masculinities and dominant masculinities in different spatial planes (Morrell 1998; Luyt 2003; Shefer, Ratele, and Strebel 2007; Ratele 2016b). In another theoretical impulse, arguing for African-centred theories of masculinities, Sakhumzi Mfecane (2018) proposes theorising masculinities based on the concepts of personhood. Mfecane critiques hegemonic masculinities, noting the use of the concept in intervention programmes and their subsequent underperformance "due to the limited impact they have in transforming hegemonic gender norms at societal levels" (291). Mfecane's critique of the

utility of hegemonic, masculinity-inspired intervention programmes is premised on what he argues is the failure of Northern gender theories in accounting for "the complex life experiences of African men" (292). This theoretical disjuncture is important in exploring masculinities and spatialities in the country's context to flesh out how masculinities enfold into and constitute public urban spaces. While there is an urgent need for theorising gender—and implementing contextually and historically relevant theories of gender based on indigenous and African epistemologies—these critiques ought to steer from essentialised, patriarchal versions of gender disguised as historical (or pre-colonial) in which male/masculinity hegemony defines and determines social relations. This critique is resonant with the conceptual focus on binary articulations of gender. While men and masculinities studies have garnered important insights on the changing nature of male/masculinity hegemony and the ubiquity of patriarchal violence, this scholarship has not moved entirely to a conceptual critique of man/masculinity/manhood (Ratele 2016b). Here, as it is with the international scholarship on men and masculinities, masculinities are still conjured from a biological imperative of sex and gender. I depart from these approaches to categorising forms of masculinities and, instead, tend towards an analytic of masculinities that unmoors it from the normative grasp of the racialised gender binary. In this study, I build on this scholarship not to focus on the typology of masculinities trans masculine people enact, but to explore the embodiments and experiences of masculinities as articulated through the processes of becoming and embodying masculinities. Thus, trans masculinities here refer not to a type of masculinity but name the subject position of embodying and articulating masculinities from bodies culturally constructed through binary female sex/gender categorisation.

Trans Masculinities and Space

Trans masculine scholarship is still an emerging sub-field within the intersections of trans studies, men and masculinities studies, and gender geographies scholarship. Recent scholarly reviews of trans masculinities scholarship document and visibilise research coming out of the Global North, specifically the US, as the foundational scholarship in trans masculinities research. Research on trans masculinities focuses on how different spatial contexts influence the creation, navigation, and articulation of trans masculinities (Green 2005; Abelson 2016; Saeidzadeh 2019). For example, in their study of trans masculinities and place in the South, Midwest, and West regions of the US, Abelson (2019) explores the complex processes of trans

men as well as the shifting expressions and experiences of their identities. Abelson writes that, for the participants in their research, "expressions of masculinity and as men depended on the spaces and places they lived in and travelled through across their lives" (4). Further, Abelson shows how the stories of the trans men in their study are punctuated by experiences of race/ism, class, and sexuality. Abelson's work also concurs with conceptualisations of masculinities as contextual and "tied up in relation to others" (6).

In a study of the Southeastern US, Baker Rogers (2019; 2022) examines the influence of geographic location on trans men's identities. Geographic location is critical in determining how trans men "do gender". Rogers (2019) found that "trans men in the South largely attempted to blend in with cis men in their gender presentations instead of redoing gender by doing masculinity differently" (648). Rogers also found that, for most participants in their study, "being read as a man was important for their self-confidence and psychological health" (648), where body dysphoria and depression were mentioned as key factors in their need to pass (650). Rogers also notes their participants' navigations of privilege due to passing and the ease with which being read as men allows them to carry on with their lives (651). While there is mention of how passing privileges are manifested for white and black trans men in the south, there is no critical engagement with the intersection of race and gender in the study, save for a recommendation for further research on racialised trans masculinities. In their recent study of trans manhood in the South, Rogers (2022) found that the trans men in their study "largely understood gender as a binary and essential" (32) and "struggled with how to maintain the characteristics of southern manhood while also attempting not to be viewed as sexist or exploitative" (32), a similar finding to their previous article, in which Rogers (2019) writes, "[trans men] gained privilege and power through claims of sameness with other men" (33).

Sofia Aboim (2016) and others (Aboim and Vasconcelos 2022) also write about trans masculine embodiments and the materiality of gender in the context of Portugal and the UK. Aboim (2016) emphasises the need for conceptual connections between masculinity studies and studies of trans men, arguing for a sociological analysis of trans masculinities to bridge the gap. To do this, Aboim proposes that the "dissociation of masculinities from the material power of men involves an inquiry into the practice-based definition" (229). Central to Aboim's analysis is the persistence of "the masculine body" (231), where the participants in her study, she notes, continuously invoke the desire for a masculinised body and an explicit dissociation from "the feminine and femininity" (231). Aboim thus argues, "Being/becoming a man/masculine

ends up being shaped through the materiality of the body as the effect or a desire or an aspiration of becoming" (232). In sum, Aboim contends that "if masculinity encompasses a wide number of definitions, maleness (that is, bodily masculinity as 'flesh' or as 'moral genitalia') might be more monolithic" (232). Aboim emphasises that "masculinity cannot be understood without taking into account the materiality of bodies regardless of their diversities and transformations" (233).

Writing on the paradox of recognition for trans men in Sri Lanka, Kaushalya Ariyarathne (2021) writes that "socially accepted normative behaviours of gender influence how trans men negotiate their identities" (66). In this study, including the narratives of psychiatrists and trans men as respondents, Ariyarathne (2021) found that trans men are "accepted as citizens of the state based on the medical gaze on their bodies and the success of their performance of idealised male gender roles" (68). Trans men, in the study, navigate rigid ideas of idealised masculinity at the voyeuristic and validating gaze of medical institutions and the state while navigating their social identities and gender histories (68). In this qualitative study featuring 15 trans men, Ariyarathne found that "transgender bodies come under the scrutiny of the State" (75–76), aided by medical institutions where, to be recognised as citizens with their desired gender, trans people must behave in a way recognised as a disciplined proof that they are obedient to the norms of gender in front of the medical eye. Trans men's gender performance is also punctuated by the demands of the gendered labour market, where "whoever embraces a transgender identity must perform certain skills or have capacities to qualify as a 'worker' who can serve the economy of the country" (86).

In a similar study, Zara Saeidzadeh (2019), using qualitative interviews with 14 Iranian trans men, explores the interplay between normative gender ideals and the desire for trans men to be interpellated into the masculine/manliness norm promoted by the state and societal ideas about gender and sexuality. The trans men in the study, Saeidzadeh writes, "claimed that their masculinity is much more mature than that of natural men because the current gender regime in Iran allows natural men to grow up without taking responsibility" (301), also noting that "the trans men in the study define their masculinity concerning how attentive they are to towards women" (302). Saeidzadeh's study further shows that trans men in her study desire and pursue "surgical transitions" to embody a distinct form of masculinity that is heterosexual, financially stable, and relates positively to cis women (306).

Writing in the context of the Southeast US, Phillips and Rogers (2021) explore, through qualitative methods, the "manhood acts trans men employ to enhance their claims to masculinities and to compensate for their presumed

lack of biological maleness" (322). In this study, the authors found that "brotherhood—being part of a group of men is an important part of claiming manhood" and "benevolent sexism" where the participants "still held beliefs in gender differences that subordinated women" (325–33).

Within studies exploring the lived spatial experiences of trans masculine people, even less is known about the gendered, racialised, and classed realities of black and trans masculine people of colour (Jourian and McCloud 2020; monakali and Francis 2022). Exploring how "Black trans masculine collegians understand and re/de/construct Black masculinity at the intersection of gender and race", Jourian and McCloud (2020, 734) found that in a variety of spaces, the four black trans men's masculinities were shaped by anti-blackness, whiteness, racism, colonialism, and misogynoir (739, 744). They also found that, while these forces permeated various spaces, the trans men respondents engaged in strategies of "re/de/constructing these forces as well as their own identities, in perpetual relationality with other communities" (744).

The scholarship engaged in this section has taken various methodological and theoretical approaches to explore trans people's navigation of mobility, including national and cross-border movement, in pursuit of better access to life-giving medical, legal, and socio-economic resources. The studies highlight a trend in trans studies that shifts the framework from studying trans people "as exotic others to leveraging the experiences of trans people to make meaning of broader social processes, change and values" (Shuster 2020, 7). The work critiques the languages of degradation through which transness becomes intelligible in dominant representations of trans cultures and moves to a humanising language that pays attention to context-specific struggles and triumphs. This work also includes a rich engagement with how theory and methodology are deployed in scholarship about transgender people as well as how the generative insights gathered in this scholarship might be useful for analysing broader social processes and change. Nevertheless, this work also lays bare the ongoing colonialism, settler colonialism, and racism embedded within gender-affirming processes. The canonisation of gender diversity is (unwittingly) posed as the prerogative of the global north, usually centring the experiences of white trans and gender non-conforming people (Aizura 2018). This literature also invokes contradictory (and sometimes resistant) articulations and embodiments of masculinities by trans men. They also show the influence of localised articulations of masculinities on how trans men understand their relation to masculinities (particularly cis-masculine and other genders) and how they make sense of themselves as men from specific geographic locations. Within these debates, I carve an entry path into understanding trans masculinities in their variously interpellated and spatially

located enunciations. I depart from these studies by avoiding typologies of masculinities that trans masculine people express, paying attention to intersecting constitutions of trans masculine subjectivities, and highlighting the processes through which tarns masculine subjectivities emerge and are lived in the two cities.

Concluding Reflections

In this chapter, I have mapped the various scholarly debates and provocations with which this study engages and contributes. A significant insight cutting across the scholarship on trans, feminist, and queer geographies discussed in this chapter points to the need for trans and gender non-normative analyses of gender, sexuality, space, race, and class for understanding the various ways in which shifting conceptualisations of spatial and gender relations open or foreclose new/different ways of theorising and exploring gender and space. Trans research, as the discussion above shows, has a corpus of entryways into understanding how the dominant racialised and classed binary conceptualisation of gender and space is imbricated in different processes of subjectivation, in which racialisation, sexualities, class, and spatio-temporality mark key formations of life. This study anchors this insight and critiques it to understand the experiences of trans masculine people living in urban areas in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and how they navigate their lives in the spaces they inhabit and in which they move.

The next chapter discusses the theoretical and analytical framework anchoring this research.

3. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

In this chapter, I present a theoretical and analytical scaffolding to frame and analyse urban trans masculine geographies. I anchor this analysis using the concepts of space, gender, race, class, and sexuality interrogated through intersectionality. These concepts are elusive and fraught with contradictions. To explicate these key concepts, I draw specific ontological and epistemological insights from different theoretical and analytical traditions, namely: critical and feminist geography, queer phenomenology, racial capitalism and black trans feminism. I connect these different theoretical and analytical approaches through their shared social constructivist onto-epistemologies. Within this shared onto-epistemological thrust I further discuss why bringing them together in this manner is generative for an intersectional, anti-oppressive and anti-essentialist epistemology. Further, this approach to the reading of theory and concepts is informed by the empirical material in this study. An analysis that further challenges the conceptual leanings of this study.

This chapter is divided into four sections. I begin by explicating the connective tissue that allows me to bring these different theoretical and analytical frames together through an intersectional reading or interrogation. I then, bring together a theoretical discussion on the production of space (Lefebvre 1974; Doreen Massey 1993; 1994; McKittrick 2006) and argue that, while traditional spatial formulations are powerful, geography is also a terrain through which racialised and classed formations of gender are inscribed. I extend this discussion by considering the racial capitalism, as the underlying structure of economic, political and social life to emphasise the relationship between race, class and space (Robinson 1983; Bhattacharyya 2018; Clarno and Vally 2023; Clarno 2022). In the third section I move to unsuturing gender's integrity by considering how racialised gender constitutes the category of human (Butler 2004b; Snorton 2017; Aizura et al. 2020; Bey 2021) through a hierarchical valuation and how this shapes the conditions that permit liveable and knowable life (Bey 2021). To conclude this chapter, I draw from

black trans feminist (Bey 2021; Collins 2002) and queer phenomenological (Ahmed 2006) readings of the body as a site of inscription, I explore how bodies orient and are oriented in the production of space and offer a provisional reading of masculinities through gender radicality.

Intersectionality as a Mode of Interrogation

In her essay, 'The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought', Patricia Hill-Collins (1989) argues for an epistemological stance that reflects black women's standpoints. Collins critiques the dominant "Eurocentric masculinist epistemology" (752) that has routinely distorted or excluded black women's experiences of living and being from traditional academic discourse and what counts as valid knowledge. Black women's epistemes have historically emerged as subjugated knowledges. In a similar argument, Barbara Boswell (2020) argues against the exclusion of black women's epistemes in discourses on constructing a decolonial and democratic South Africa. In her book *And Wrote My Story Anyway: Black South African Women's Novels as Feminism*, Boswell (2020, 4) argues against the subjugation of black women's work towards a decolonial and anticolonial construction of the nation, noting that black women "have historically been denied access to sites of formal theory-making". Black women's work theorises space and apartheid spatiality as classed, racialised, and always gendered. In eliding and erasing black women from the construction of the nation, the androcentric formations of the nation uphold an androcentric and patriarchal formation of the nation. In this formation, then, being a subject emerges through a cis-androcentric frame that excludes subjectivities not considered male and cisgender, rendering them as the unthought. In the context of this study, I am inspired by Boswell's (2020) and Hill-Collins's (1989) critiques of the subjugation of marginalised people's knowlegdes, and centre trans and gender non-normative knowledges as critical for understanding the production of space and urban subjectivities. To this end, I proceed from an intersectional mode of interrogating theory and concepts. Intersectionality "make(s) visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it" (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006). Further, as a mode of interrogation, intersectionality is, as Roderick A. Ferguson (2007, 109) writes, "an ongoing mode of interrogation, ongoing because the social formations that it interprets constantly assume new types of imbrications". The categories I analyse in this study are "always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power—emphasis[ing]

what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is" (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 795). I use an intersectional analytic into power structures that shape and regiment knowledge production and the very social realities in which life unfolds. Gender, space, race, class, and sexuality—the key concepts I analyse in this work—are socially constructed and produced in varying ways that cannot be reduced to each other. Alongside this analytic of social identity as shifting, in this study I am attuned to moments of rupture, slipping, and shifts that emerge at the intersections of the epistemological constitutions of urban space and urban trans subjectivities. With this grounding, this study is bolstered by intersectionality. It offers a critical reading and theorisation of the production of space and gender from the site of anti-oppressive, anti-essentialist and intersectional epistemology to examine the practices and structures within which urban trans masculine lives are lived and negotiated. Below, I discuss the production of space.

On the Production of Space

Sociological and geographical theorising on space has emphasised conceptualising space and the social world as experienced and rendered sensible by social actors (Simmel 1903; Lefebvre 1974; Harvey 1993; Doreen Massey 1994). In *Social Justice and the City*, David Harvey (1973) writes that it is crucial to understand and reflect on the nature of space to understand urban processes under capitalism. To this end, I draw from critical and feminist geographies (Lefebvre 1974; Massey 1994; 1993) that theorise space as deeply implicated in processes of social reproduction and underscore the constitutiveness of gender and space. This approach is writ large in the spatial turn in spatial sociology and urban geography scholarship from the 1970s onwards. It is often situated within the scholarly works of Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, particularly his seminal work, *The Production of Space* ([1974] 1991), which provided the grounding for a Marxist spatial theory. Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1974) theorised space as a product of social relations. Feminist geographer Doreen Massey is another key figure of this spatial turn. Massey's seminal work, *Space, Gender and Place* (1994) emphasised that "spaces and places and our sense of them are gendered, through and through" (186). In the present moment, geography scholarship has engaged critical race analyses that bring to bear analyses anti-colonial and anti-racist analyses of space. Of importance in this work is Katherine McKittrick's (2006, 133) analyses of "spaces of Otherness…that may not be immediately available in

our geographic imaginations because Man's sense of place is naturalized as normal". In the following subsections, I discuss Lefebvre ([1974] 1991), Massey (1994;2005) and McKittrick (2006) theorisations of the production of space.

Space as a Product of Social Relations

Lefebvre's ([1974] 1991) theory of the production of space is always implicated in social and historical processes. Indebted to the work of Karl Marx ([1867] 2004), Lefebvre theorises space as both a product (a thing) and a determinant (a process) of social relations and actions. He maintains that "(social) space is a (social) product" (26). Further, there exists a relationship between social relations and space, in which social relations name "concrete abstractions [that] have no real existence save in and through space" (404). Lefebvre also understands space as the product of ideological, economic, and political forces that seek to delimit, regulate, and control the activities that occur within it and through it. Thus, social space 'in itself' does not exist; it is produced through social relations (Lefebvre 1974). In this rendering of space as a product of social relations, Lefebvre emphasises that space "subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity their relative order and or relative disorder" (73). In this rendering of the social production of space, Lefebvre also theorises that space embeds, and is simultaneously embedded within, social relations of production and consumption under capitalism. In theorising social space as a product and determinant of social relations, Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1974) proposed a three-dimensional conceptualisation and analysis of space. I lean on this explication of a three-dimensional space for how it lends itself to a phenomenological analytic of the phenomena constituting and constituted through social space. More precisely, my impulse in this reading is to underscore the role of the body in the production of social space. Space as a social product necessarily invokes social relations, activity, and movement; thus, the spatial triad, for Lefebvre, is important in understanding social space.

The three-dimensional concept of space includes spatial practice (perceived space) or what we refer to and perceive as physical space "which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristics of each social formations" (33). Representations of space (conceived space) refer to abstract mental spaces "which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose" (33). People conceive this space through mental activities, including thinking, imagining, and interpreting, a responsibility often controlled by professionals

or others with administrative roles. Representational space (lived space) "embodies complex symbolisms lined to the clandestine or underground side of social life" (33). Lived space "implies the social space and emphasises meaning and human experience. People live within this space and recall their unique or shared experiences, including loving, fearing, and remembering. The subjective or intersubjective experiences of lived space are not only rooted in the here and now but also connected to the past, present, and future" (Wang, Dubois, and Lu 2023, 4). I find these elements particularly generative for analysing how space and gender are co-constitutive. In this study, I understand and analyse social space through this three-dimensional conceptualisation to emphasise the physical aspects of social space and how social space is conceived, perceived, and experienced. I also pay attention to the ideologies and discourses shaping social space, which are significant for understanding, on the one hand, how gender and bodies are constructed and reacted to in social space. On the other, it allows us to see how space takes shape through how gender is embodied, practiced and regimented.

The triad of social space allows us further to illuminate the contents and activities constitutive of space. Lefebvre ([1974] 1991) begins by questioning the contents, or what occupies space. To this end, he offers "a body—not bodies in general, nor corporeality, but a specific body, a body capable of indicating direction by a gesture, of defining rotation by turning round, of demarcating and orienting space" (170). This idea of a body occupying social space invokes a generalised idea of a body unmarked by social identities—a corporeality characterised by its movement. Thus, in Lefebvre rendering of the production of space, to occupy space, as it were, relates to the activity and movement of unmarked bodies. That bodies inhabit/occupy space does not mean that space is a void "waiting to be filled by bodies…there is an immediate relationship between the body's deployment in space and its occupation of space" (170).

Further, spaces are governed by norms that shape how bodies appear and move within them. They create conditions for the inclusion and exclusion of bodies that conform or do not conform to the established and idealised understanding of space (Lefebvre [1974] 1991). Lefebvre anchors a generalised idea of a body and human action in the production and reproduction of space—for him, conceptions of the body and space are inseparable. Nevertheless, he does not inquire further into how social categories of difference mark the body and how that has implications for how social spaces are constituted. Lefebvre's thesis on the social production of space—specifically, the role and place of the body, its activities, perceptions, and orientations in the production of space—have been taken up by feminist

geography scholars. Both in critique and extension of Lefebvre's spatial theory to emphasise and centre the reciprocal role of gendered bodies in how space and place are constituted (Massey 1993; 1994). It is this explication of the space-gender and power relationship that I take up in the next section.

Power-Geometry of Space

Feminist geographer Doreen Massey (1994) propounds a theory of space critical of capital, as privileged in Marxist analyses of space (Lefebvre 1974; N. Smith and Harvey 1990; Harvey 1993). Massey (1994, 148) maintains that "there is much more determining how we experience space than what 'capital' gets up to". Massey's (2005) theory of space also privileges relationality above identity—the idea of spaces having whole, predetermined identities. Noting that "space is a product of interrelations", whereby "space [is] the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality" and "a sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist" (7). The interrelations suggest an open and critical constitution of space that assumes space comprises the activities, people, and things that constitute and are constituted within them. To say that space is a product of social relations alludes to how space is imbued with power and how "power itself has a geography" (Massey 2009, 18). Here, I find Massey's concept of power-geometry important to conceptualise patterns of unequal relationships within space regarding mobility/movement and activity in social spaces. On the power-geometry of space, Massey (1993, 61) notes, "the degree to which we can move between countries, or walk about the streets at night, or take public transport, or venture out of hotels in foreign cities, is not influenced simply by 'capital'". To inhabit space is to be implicated in power relations, which is also to say that power-geometries are relational. Massey (1993, 167) notes, "Instead of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings" (167). The constitution of space through interrelated power-geometries is useful for understanding how people are positioned and moved through space and the power relations that allow or constrict movement and activity in social spaces.

In her book *Space, Place and Gender*, Massey (1994) emphasises the direct and indirect ways in which constructions of space are always gendered and vice versa—arguing that spaces are "gendered in myriad different ways, which vary between cultures and over time", where "this gendering of space and place both reflects and has effects back on how gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live" (186). If space is relational and relative to what occupies it, so is any concept constitutive of it—including gender. This

understanding of space allows us to approach space as an emergent physical, affective, social and political reality continuously changing and shifting boundaries. The co-constitutive reproduction and management of space and gender manifests in spatial control, "whether enforced through the power of convention or symbolism or the straightforward threat of violence can be a fundamental element in the constitution of gender" (Massey 1994, 180). In addition, spaces reflect and affect how gender is constructed and understood; they limit "mobility in terms of identity and space," a practice and process that "has been in some cultural context a crucial means of subordination" (1Massey 1994, 79). The co-constitutive construction of gender and space within continuously shifting power-geometries shapes how gendered subjectivities and bodies emerge in and inhabit spaces. I anchor my understanding and analysis of gender and space on this point. The rendering of social space as gendered is central in this study and foregrounds a critical analysis and understanding of the situated spatial experiences of trans masculine people in South Africa. As I discussed in the introduction chapter, spatial relations in south Africa are marked by the weight of historical and contemporary processes of exclusion regimented, in varying intensities, through class, race, gender and sexuality. To further explicate the power relations imbued in space I turn to Katherine McKittrick's concept of geographies of domination.

Geographies of Domination and Racial Capitalism

In her seminal text *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, geography and gender studies scholar Katherine McKittrick (2006) presents an interdisciplinary analytic of "black women's geographies in the black diaspora" (x). In her theorisation of space McKittrick (2006) centres the geographical experiences of black women. She argues that "black women's unique geographic concerns are concealed by racial, sexual and economic processes" (121). Building on this insight, I want to consider how trans masculine geographies in the urban contexts of the two South African cities are variously subjectivated through the racial, sexuality and economic processes and structures. On this move I emphasise geography as "space, place and location in their physical materiality and imaginative configurations" (McKittrick 2006, x). The physical materiality and imaginative configurations of geographies also reflect and gesture to the sequestering of space according to fictive social differences. To this end, I find McKittrick's (2006) concept of geographies of domination useful for tracing racial, sexuality, economic and ideological practices and processes of domination in urban spaces. I argue that these processes "naturalise both identity and place, repetitively spatialising

where nondominant groups 'naturally' belong" (McKittrick 2006, xv). Here, I want to call to attention how the naturalisation of identity and place, which also subsumes bodies into its hierarchical valuation, bolsters the idea of space as transparent— "and the illusion that the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation and that what we see is true" (McKittrick 2006, xv). I argue for a critique of geographies of domination that challenges assumptions about space and gender and centres on the life histories of people who are often written out of how the social world is known. To further explicate the racial, sexuality, economic and ideological processes of domination in the constitution of space, I find the analytic of racial capitalism useful.

Racial Capitalism

Given the continuing power of racialised and classed geographies as well as inherited forms of capital accumulation, I use the concept of racial capitalism as analytic that allows for the "recognition that racialisation and capital accumulation are mutually constitutive processes that combine in dynamic, context-specific formations" (Bhattacharyya 2018). Further, as an analytic, racial capitalism "focuses analytical attention on the connections between racism, capitalism, colonialism, and empire; shifting articulations between race and class; and the impacts of neoliberal restructuring" (Clarno 2019, 5). The thrust of this understanding of racial capitalism, is not in its arbitrariness but in the real social effects of racialised and classed space on the constitution and maintenance of hierarchical geographies of domination. Contemporary social relations in post-apartheid South Africa are still marked by extreme income inequality, which manifests and is made manifest through spatial inequalities that determine the quality and availability of resources (education, basic services, land) to communities and groups of people. In her theses on racial capitalism, Gargi Bhattacharya (2018, x) describes racial capitalism as "a set of techniques and a formation and in both registers the disciplining and ordering of bodies through gender and sexuality and dis/ability and age". Taken together with the formulation of geographies of domination, I bring together these analytical concepts to examine the ways in which urban trans geographies are embedded in the dominating economic and social structure characterised by racial capitalism. I am interested in the processes of subjectivation and the trans subjectivities that are produced and emerge from the processes of racial capitalism. As Bhattacharya (2018, 6) notes "capitalism can make spaces differently and does so. This includes expelling some populations, containing others and adapting to local conditions to take a variety of mixed forms". In this study, I am interested in how spaces are experienced through as racial, sexual, economic and ideological and how

these frames unravel specific and contextualised iterations of trans masculine subjectivities. Bringing these approaches together yields two important analytical pathways important for this study: First, it emphasises the relationship between race and class. Racial capitalism underlies the dominant structure of economic life, which is to say political and social life. This is not to say that all aspects of economic, political and social life are reducible to capitalism, but to acknowledge the ways in which life is touched and positioned differently by the workings of capitalism.

As I have argued in Chapter 1, in my intersectional approach to the concepts and theories I deploy, I do not assume the concepts of race, sexuality, class, to be reducible to each other. Rather, I acknowledge that, to draw from Zachary Levenson and Marcel Paret (2023, 3404), "capitalism consistently operates through racial projects that assign differential value to human life and labor". I am attuned to how the effects of capitalism also generate necropolitical processes that are articulated through race and expose specific population groups to conditions that make life unbearable and unliveable through complex processes of dispossession, exclusion, and abandonment, to name a few. Foregrounding the co-constitutive aspects of spatiality, gender, sexuality, race, and social class is imperative for a more robust understanding of trans masculinities that takes seriously the dominant social and economic formations that shape the socio-political and cultural fabric of the South African landscape. In the next section, I discuss how racialised gender constitutes the category of human beings through a hierarchical formation.

Unsuturing Genders' Integrity: Trans Matters and the Conditions for a Liveable Life

That sex and gender are not biological characteristics but socially constructed is one of the major theoretical and empirical thrust in feminist, queer, and trans theorising (Stryker 1998; Butler 1988; 2011). In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler (2004b) writes that gender is one of the differential conditions (norms) for the qualified recognition of life, thus marking it as legible and viable. Butler (Butler 2004b, 4) maintains that "gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalisation of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes". Gender is also the apparatus that "figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity" (11). Constructions of acceptable femininities and masculinities shape how bodies

are fashioned and how they are read in the social spaces. The production of acceptable masculinities and femininities implies that there are forms of gender embodiment which are not permissible and, thus, cannot be recognised and affirmed through the humanising registers of the binary sexual-gender formation.

Gender as an apparatus that regiments the constitution of bodies also weaves processes of racialisation—a social process for marking racial boundaries—which constitute gender and race/ism to produce the category of human in hierarchical ways. The differential formations and qualifications of lives create uninhabitable and unliveable worlds. Writing on the work of Sylvia Wynter, Walter Mignolo (2015, 108) considers that "the problem of the human is not identity-based person but in the enunciations of what it means to be human – enunciations that are concocted and circulated by those who most convincingly (and powerfully) imagine the 'right' or 'noble' or 'moral' characteristics of human into the sphere of universal humanness". Gender marks one of the differential conditions (norms) for the qualified recognition of life, thus marking it for legibility and viability. For Butler (2004, 4), "the norms that work to govern idealised human anatomy work to produce a differential sense of who is human and who is not, which lives are livable and which lives are not". Further, Butler maintains that "a life for which no categories of recognition exist is not livable", just as "a life for which those categories constitute unlivable restraint is not an acceptable option either" (8).

Racialised gender also inflects and imbues the construction and (violent) maintenance of social spaces as predominantly understood through normative gender and class. The control of space (and gender) is enforced through various iterations of violence that are often marked for non-normative gender embodiments, or "bodies out of line", and disproportionately meted out to racialised people (Tamale 2020). The racialised and classed gender binary permeates both the constitutions and constructions of gender and space, manifesting in different iterations of violent regulation and control, particularly for trans lives and non-normative modes of being. In their essay 'Thinking Trans Now', Trevor Ellison (in Aizura et al. 2020, 132) notes that "looking at antitrans criminalisation, we can see how transgender materialised as moral panics around the contradictions of racist capitalist spatial development". Recent trans theorising, drawing from decolonial thought, offers critical interventions that disrupt reductionist, parochial, and provincialising colonial modern gender knowledges (Snorton 2016). For instance, Gill-Peterson (in Aizura et al. 2020, 130) further notes the "expert" discourses of medical scientific knowledge that have "singularised transness into a narrative of binary transition", thus dictating the normative terms through which trans lives

and modes of being become recognisable and legible. In these "expert" discourses, trans emerges through the racialised and classed colonial binary formation of gender as a move towards male-man-masculinity or female-woman-femininity only. Within this conceptual amalgam, I find these critiques of gender and the formation of human useful for analysing and understanding present formations of the subject as well as how trans emerges and is apprehended through the normative logics of gender. Through this, as I show in the analysis chapters, I want to understand how trans is figured through, resists, or troubles the normalising grammars and practices of the colonial modern gender system.

Liveability indexes the conditions of life that permit a viable and dignified life. I follow Butler's theorisation of liveable lives as a meditation on precarity (Butler 2009b; 2009a). Precarity, in Butler's terms, "characterises that politically induced condition of maximised vulnerability and exposure…for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection" (Butler 2009b, ii). Further, precarity is "directly linked with gender norms, since we know that those who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at a heightened risk for harassment and violence" (Butler 2009b, ii). The body, according to Marquis Bey (2021, 3), "has come to be the site that suffers oppressive forces because that is precisely how oppressive forces with to construct our subjectivities—to form to them and understand themselves as formed, in toto, by them". Gender norms orient bodies in social spaces and determine how a body is invited, made sense of, and reacted to in the social world. As such, the understanding of precarity and its link to gender norms is important not only in bringing together gender norms as a condition for making life liveable but also spatial norms, in their various intersections with race and class, and how they determine the conditions of entry into and use of social spaces. On this conceptual background, I contemplate the liveability of trans masculine lives in the spatial context of South Africa.

In the following section, I consider gender and spatial norms as orienting devices that shape how bodies emerge and are oriented in space. I then consider the implications for bodies that fail to emerge through normative constitutions of gender and space. I also offer an improvisational conceptual reading of masculinities through abolitionist gender radicality.

Dis/Orienting Bodies, Masculinities Off-Centre

In her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed (2006b) brings together queer studies and phenomenology to examine what it means for bodies to be situated in space and time: "A queer phenomenology might involve an orientation toward what slips, which allows what slips to pass, in the unknowable length of its duration. In other words, a queer phenomenology would function as a disorientation device; it would not overcome the disalignment of the horizontal and vertical axis, allowing the oblique to open another angle on the world" (566). She writes, "The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the here of the body and the where of its dwelling" (545). Ahmed maintains that "gender is an effect of the kinds of work that bodies do, which in turn directs those bodies, affecting what they can do" (61). In this formulation, gender is not only a distinct set of relations that shape how bodies emerge and are oriented in space, but it also shapes what bodies can do and how bodies occupy space. Thus, bodies are shaped by what they tend to—"tending toward produces certain tendencies" (131). Through repeated movement towards an embodiment of gender norms, bodies emerge and become recognisable as either masculine or feminine. To put it differently, the repeated performance of masculinity or femininity manifests as a "naturalised" property of bodies (58).

As previously discussed in the section above, space is not a void or container waiting to be filled by bodies. Similarly, Ahmed, arguing along the same lines as Massey (1994; 2005) and McKittrick (2006), maintains that "space does not contain the body as if the body were 'in it'; rather, bodies are submerged, such that they become the space they inhabit" (53). In this way, the habitual actions of bodies and their occupation and inhabitation of space create the shape of social spaces—"spaces acquire the shape of the bodies that 'inhabit them'" (131). In the same way that gendered bodies emerge and become recognisable through repeated performance of gendered objects and behaviours, spaces also become gendered through the bodies that inhabit them. Gender norms orient the body, directing its actions and emergence in space. Bodies, however, do not always fit neatly into gendered constructions of space, and those bodies that fail to emerge through the recognisable register of normative gender stand out and are rendered 'out of space'.

In this study, I am concerned with trans and non-normative embodiments that, by implication, are bodies out of the spatial logics of the normative sex-gender binary. I am concerned with the kind of life possible for bodies or modes of being that do not quite extend normative lines of gender and space. Ahmed offers an approach to thinking about the rupturing that 'bodies out of

space' do as a moment that creates possibilities for "new impressions, for newlines to emerge, new objects, or even new bodies, which gather in space" (62). The rupturing of gender norms also necessitates different strategies for imagining and embodying non-normative ways of being and living. In this study, I bring attention to the strategies that trans masculine people employ to negotiate the fault lines of normative gender inscriptions and orient themselves towards otherwise forms of being. Ahmed's analysis of gender and bodily orientations in space is generative for framing more precisely and expansively the connections within and between gender, spatiality, and bodies in their complex and multiple iterations. In the following section, I discuss an analysis and understanding of trans masculinities through hacking.

Masculinities Off-centre

The conceptual field of masculinities has offered different theorisations that have sustained both the empirical and theoretical work in this field (Connell 1987; Halberstam 1998; Beasley 2008; E. Anderson 2010; Bridges and Pascoe 2014). As discussed in the previous chapter, masculinities scholars have offered conceptualisations of masculinities that mark the space for the emergence of new forms. Raewyn Connell proposed the long-standing framework in masculinities research, hegemonic masculinities, in which she approaches masculinities as "configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting" (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 836). To date, critical men and masculinities scholarship continues to link masculinity with cis-gender male bodies, thus reproducing an understanding of masculinity that hinges on the cis-gender binary (Beasley 2013; Waling 2019). While acknowledging the utility of the conceptual offerings of masculinity scholarship, in this study, I want to offer a conceptual reading of masculinities that refuses the gender binary as an ontological premise for understanding masculinity. I read masculinities through an abolitionist gender radicality frame, conceptualised through black trans feminism (Bey 2020). In their book Black Trans Marquis Bey (2020, 3) maintains that black trans feminism is "an agential and intentional undoing of regulative gender norms". They further note that black trans feminism is premised on "the creative deconstructing of ontological racial and gender assault; a kind of gendered deconstruction, an unravelling that unstitches governant means of subjectivation; feminism as the reiterative un/gendered quotidian process of how not to be governed and give from without" (Bey 2020, 3). What I term here masculinities off-centre is a riff on B. Cole's construct of masculine of centre (MoC) a term used to refer to

masculine gender expressions typically by lesbian, queer or non-binary people-typically those assigned female at birth. Masculinities off-centre is an analytical term I offer that captures the very many expressions of masculinities that are articulated outside and refuse normative capture. In this study, I approach masculinity/ies by deconstructing and bracketing the normative assumptions tied to the ontology of the racialised gender binary. Through this approach, I also activate trans as a tool that "unfixes gender from essentialist moorings and posits itself precisely as that unfixation, as a departure from without the presumption of a stable destination, or indeed a departure that itself destabilises destinational desires" (Bey 2020, 3). Unsuturing gender (and, thus, masculinity) from its stable gender binary allows me to read into the practices, articulations, and understandings that emerge as 'slanted' and disorient the normative view of gender. This conceptual reading is improvisational, seeking not to find and index a version of masculinity but, rather, to imagine what is conceptually possible to articulate without a binary ontology of gender. Tending towards an abolitionist gender radicality is a critique of power and how masculinities manifest and are manifested through power geometries and geographies of domination.

Concluding Reflections

In this chapter, I presented a conceptual scaffolding that broaches how space, gender, class, and race constitute each other as well as how gender and spatial norms are dis/orienting devices that shape how bodies emerge and are oriented in space. I also discussed how gender is implicated in the formation of the category of human and the implications of different formations on the liveability of trans lives. Lastly, I offered an improvisational conceptual reading of masculinities through abolitionist gender radicality. In the following chapter, I explicate the methodological framework used in this study.

4. Methodology

In this chapter, I discuss my approach to life history and narrative research undergirded by a black trans feminist inspired epistemological. I also explicate why this methodological approach is useful and how it aligns with the theoretical orientations of the study. I invoke specific epistemological premises of black trans feminism, namely understanding knowledge as socially constructed, emphasising the agentic status of the trans masculine people in this study, and centring marginalised modes and practices of knowing in knowledge production as a practice of epistemic freedom (P. H. Collins 2002; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Bey 2021). By epistemic freedom I follow Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018, 18) conception to gesture to "democratising knowledge from its current rendition in the singular into its plural known as 'knowledges'. It is also ranged against overrepresentation of Eurocentric thought in knowledge, social theory, and education". These epistemic premises (or epistemic concerns as I frame them in this text) inform my method. Method or methodology names "the techniques of gathering evidence" (Harding 1987, 2). A black trans feminist epistemology informs the methodological orientations of my research study, guiding the research questions, instruments, and assumptions about what counts as knowledge and how I use and implement specific research designs, tools, and contexts.

With this grounding, this chapter is structured into four parts. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss the methodological orientations of this study situating myself in the epistemic lineage of black trans feminism. In the second part I explicate the research design in which I locate the research collaborators and describe the sampling and recruitment process. I also discuss doing online and in-person interviews, specifically in the context of doing fieldwork during and after COVID-19 lockdowns. In the third part, I describe my approach to narrative analysis—the analytical strategy used to analyse the life history interviews. The final part of this chapter reflects on reflexivity, positionality, and the ethics of doing trans research in the present moment.

Black Trans Feminist Methodological Anchoring

To orient this chapter and my methodological orientation (in line with theory), I approach the knowledge production process with anti-oppressive, anti-essentialist, and intersectional epistemic concerns. As an approach to methodology, these epistemic concerns are particularly deployed within the frame of black trans feminism, used here as a theory of power "and, more important, the subversion of it, in excess of wholesale notions of immediately discernible 'identities'" (Bey 2021, 5). Invoking similar epistemic concerns, feminist and trans studies primarily state as their subject of inquiry different (although not entirely) subjects, cis women and trans women, respectively. Black feminism emerges in part from the feminist standpoint theory, which emphasises that knowledge is socially situated and that research should take the lived experiences of marginalised people seriously as expert knowlegdes (hooks 2000; Collins 2002; Clemons 2019). The epistemic concerns of black feminism "provide a detailed view of the network of unequal relationships on the production of knowledge" (Radi 2019, 49). The black trans feminist analytic invoked here combines theoretical and empirical insights from black feminist, feminist, and trans studies, articulating similar epistemic concerns about the inequality of knowledge production, specifically who and what counts as knowledge and how marginalised people are treated in social scientific research as subjects of study (Collins 2002; Radi 2019; Noxolo 2024; Bey 2021). Trans feminism emerges in various geo-political contexts with a shared call for the inclusion of trans women in feminist politics and the fight to dismantle, in particular, gendered forms of oppression (Bey 2021; van der Merwe 2018; Silva and Ornat 2016; Araneta and Fernández Garrido 2016). trans feminism, according to Bey (2021, 52), "is an assault on the genre of the binary, that ontological caste that universalises itself and structures how we are made possible". Trans feminist inspired methodologies thus seek to engage "with the multiplicity of lived experiences of transgender people in order to offer a more accurate understanding that does not impose and reproduce cissexist authority over transgender experience" (Johnson 2015, 25). This is where black trans feminist epistemologies become important in this research to attend to how trans and gender nonnormative knowledges emerge and the differential processes of power that inflect on the in/visibility of nonnormative gender embodiments and knowledges. Drawing from Patricia Hill-Collins (2002, 168) I argue that trans and gender nonnormative knowledges, embodiments, modes of living "call into question the content what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth".

Two things are important to note here for my leaning on black trans feminist epistemic concerns: (a) the acknowledgement and recognition of marginalised people and knowledges as important sources and sites of theorising about the social world and social processes, and (b) the racialised and classed gender binary constituting non-white gender embodiments as excess to the normative registers of the gender binary. As such, considering the context and histories of the people and identities I study in this work, a black trans feminist epistemology and the analytical concept of intersectionality guides my orientation and process of knowledge production. To reiterate, the epistemic concerns of both black feminism and trans feminism regarding "who can speak, at whose cost, through which mechanisms, and in the name of what interests and who can produce knowledge about and for trans people" (Radi 2019, 49) allows for an epistemic orientation that is attentive to both the geographies and global circuits of knowledge and knowledge production about trans people and phenomena as well as the specificities of the geopolitical landscapes of South Africa and the emergent discourses of trans identities and trans knowledges. Writing on intersectional geographies, LaToya Eaves and Karen Falconer Al-Hindi (2020, 133) argue that "enacting intersectionality is an opportunity for geographers to include multiple subjectivities within methodological innovations, not just those that are familiar or comfortable to the researcher". The varied backgrounds and positionalities of the research collaborators in this study and the places in which they are located are instances in which the theoretical and methodological sensibilities of this study—embedded in black trans feminism and the analytic of racial capitalism—come together to provide an analytical ground upon which to examine the shifting and unstable co-constitutiveness of race-class-gender-sexuality-space.

Research Design

In this section I discuss the methodological tools I used—recruitment, snowball sampling, life history interviews, online and in-person interviews, and online recruitment. I also reflect on the deliberation process behind choosing and implementing these techniques for a study on the urban trans masculine geographies and the negotiation of liveable lives. This section focuses on how the research design came about and how black trans feminism shaped the research question and data collection tools. In thinking through the methodological tools, I posed the question: what might a black trans feminist

method allow me to consider differently in designing and conducting research with particularly trans and gender non-normative people in urban spaces?

Methodological contexts and tools

In their article on engaging marginalised populations in holistic research, Woodley and Lockard (2016, 321) argue that research methods "assist researchers in engaging marginalised groups in ways that are more natural and holistic for members of those groups". One of the central considerations in the research design for my study was the historical, cultural and linguistic context of my research field—South Africa, the context within which variously situated trans masculine people experience, live and negotiate their identities. Guided by an impulse to include variously positioned trans masculine people in this study, I tended towards research tools that would allow me to delve into what Blommaert and Jie (2020, 19) argue are "uniquely situated events" that reveal "the crystallisation of various layers of context, microcontexts as well as macrocontexts". Foregrounding microcontexts, I wanted to pay attention to the everyday choreography of urban trans masculine life as influenced by unpredictable everyday events (for example, power cuts and navigating public transport). On the other hand, focusing on macrocontext pays attention to "historical, larger political, social, cultural and less changeable and more stable events" (Blommaert and Jie 2020, 19). This broader contextual consideration keeps in line with the epistemic considerations of tending towards liberatory knowledges (another iteration of epistemic freedom).

Another specific consideration for the data collection tools and what kinds of data they would allow me to collect was my research context's cultural and linguistic landscape. As black trans feminist approach insists on a sustained critical and intersectional consideration of the histories of knowledge and the histories of the people and phenomena we research (Radi 2019; Bey 2021), I was cognizant of the language through which trans emerges and its translations and travels to different parts of the world. I was also attuned to how trans finds local enunciations and inflections through governmental policies, social media, movements, and various institutions (Edelman 2020). And how these trajectories might reveal the power dynamics embedded in specific formulations and enunciations of trans and gender nonnormativity. This consideration is in line with paying attention to the power dynamics in the modes and practices of knowing and languages (specifically English) that dominate the discourses of trans and gender nonnormativity and their implications for researching and understanding trans phenomena in the context. As Labelle (2020, 412) argues, "There is no methodology, or method,

that is inherently intersectional". As such, as a researcher working within the intersectional tradition, I emphasise remaining cognisant of the histories and present dynamics of the research traditions within which I work and to constantly trouble the power dynamics that emerge in my work (Ali 2015). Following the epistemic orientations of black trans feminism, contextualised understandings of trans are essential in bringing a diverse archive of trans studies that takes seriously diverse knowledges to better understand how gender as a tool and structure for social relations and social identities is constituted and articulated differently in different contexts. There is no one generalisable or universal trans knowledge. To this end, black trans feminism compels us to take seriously the insights of black, feminist and trans studies to create and produce liberatory knowledges. In the following sub-sections, I discuss how I went about conducting life history research, specifically outlining my recruitment strategy, life history interviews, online and in-person interviews, and how I conceptualise my data collection 'field' considering the cultural, historical and linguistic context of South Africa.

Life History Research and the Life History Interview

This study is a qualitative life history research that seeks to understand the spatial experiences of trans masculine people and how they negotiate liveable lives in the spaces they inhabit. I situate this study within the tradition of life history/narrative research that tends towards the "richness, depth, and complexity" of social experiences and emphasises the importance of lived experience as generative for understanding and analysing complex social processes (Creswell and Poth 2016). Life history as a methodology aligns with the epistemic concern, emphasising the acknowledgement and recognition of marginalised people's knowledges as important sources and sites of theorising about the social world and social processes. Life history research approaches have a long history in the social sciences (Hatch and Wisniewski 1995; Dhunpath 2000) and have specifically been a significant part of black, trans, and feminist scholarship to uncover and understand the social experiences and perceptions of multiply oppressed populations, whose knowledges and existences emerged only at the margins of social scientific scholarship (hooks 2000; Collins 2002; E. H. Brown 2015). Life history research is part of (auto)biographical tools in qualitative research that allow for the extensive and textured collection of social experiences. From a black trans feminist praxis, life histories hold the potential for producing critical and emancipatory knowlegdes. Put differently, the value of the life history approach is that the understanding gained from their writing can empower the marginalised groups

researched and, thus, contribute to enhancing critical social theory (Lather 1988). Trans studies and trans activism have centred the use of life history, often accompanying transgender (auto)ethnography, in oral history projects and research studies that seek to create knowledges directly from trans people (Brown 2015, 666). The life history methodology in this study enables a process of theoretical modification, whereby the research collaborators challenge the theories and concepts through their everyday narratives of space, gender, sexuality, language, and embodiment. While I do not aim to trace the trajectories of black trans feminist inspired life history methodologies and their liberatory praxis, I briefly bring up this history to emphasise the significance of the life history approach and to locate my orientation towards life histories as an effect of what they allow me to do in this study.

My approach to life histories is based on oral narratives emerging from semi-structured interviews. The interviews concerned the spatial practices of trans masculine people and how they create their lives in the spaces they live and in which they move. Conversations/interviews are a rich and indispensable source of knowledge about personal and social aspects of our lives (Cole and Knowles 2001; Brinkmann 2014). A life history is a written or oral account of a life (or segment of a life) as told by an individual (Cole and Knowles 2001, 18). Life history research is not about developing reductionist notions of lived experience to convey a particular meaning (Cole and Knowles 2001, 11). Lived experience is not taken uncritically, that is, without considering broader social systems and the historicity in which lives are lived. As Joan Scott (1991, 779) writes on the evidence of experience, "it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience".

Life history interviews allowed for an extensive engagement with the social experiences of trans masculine people, making it possible to connect the threads of their narratives to and against the broader social processes of change and meaning making in which their lives are constituted. Typically, in life history research, interviewing a person more than once is common and, in this study, I had one or two conversations with each research collaborator. The life history interviews allowed my research collaborators and I to delve into detailed reflections about their lives through the stories they shared. The life history interviews are an appropriate approach in this study, aligning with this study's theoretical and methodological commitments to contribute knowledge that is attendant to the depth and complexity of trans life (Allen 2012; E. H. Brown 2015). The life history interview also takes inspiration from the ritual of oral storytelling, which functions in most South African cultures as a cultural and political conduit for narrating and constructing identity as well as sharing knowledge (Mhlophe 1996). Stories convey human motivations,

desires, and intentions; they suture the past and imagined future and "bring into an understandable frame disparate ideas, characters, happenings" (McAdams 2008, 244). The stories my research collaborators shared with me were embedded in diachronic integrations of memory, discovery, recovery, reconstruction, and rupture at different times of their lives. The trans masculine stories also sutured spatialities, invoking affective experiences intended to communicate the complex, dreadful, and joyful experiences distilled through histories and the present that shape their being and how they move in the world.

I used the life history interview form to create rich and in-depth data/narrative data (Atkinson 2007) about the urban spatial practices and experiences of trans masculine people and how they create their lives in the spaces they live and move in. Life history in this work refers to "an extensive autobiographical narrative" (Chase 2007, 59) in oral form that covers different moments of my research collaborators' lives. The life history interview "provides a practical and holistic methodological approach for the sensitive collection of personal narratives that reveal how a specific human life is constructed and reconstructed in representing that life as a story" (Atkinson 2007, 224). Life history interviews were an 'instinctive' choice for this study. I put 'instinctive' in quotes to underscore the sedimentation of the place and experiences from which I think/emerge and how I am oriented and view the world. As a centre, I think and write from (South) Africa. (South) Africa here is not only a geographic context: it is the textured historical, cultural, political, economic, intellectual, and spiritual constellation of knowlegdes and experiences through which I emerge and am centred. With an 'instinctive' knowledge garnered from an attunement to the cultural, linguistic, and intellectual histories and present as well as scholarly training, life history interviews became the 'obvious' choice in line with the questions and theoretical approaches I use in the study.

While they emerged as an 'instinctive' choice, I also considered the life history interview form in the cultural and linguistic context of the country. The life story interview form takes advantage of the ritual of oral storytelling, prominent in most South African cultures, as part of the cultural and spiritual conduit for narrating and constructing identity (Nadar 2019). Stories convey human motivations, desires, and intentions; they suture the past and imagined future. Using stories within the feminist tradition, as Nadar (2019) argues, centres the subjective experience of individuals and allows for illuminating the constellations within which individual lives are lived and implicated. Thus, stories allow for critiquing "master stories" and "object to objectivity, privileging subjectivity" (Nadar 2019, 23).

The stories my research collaborators shared with me chartered diachronic integrations of remembering, discovery and recovery of rupture at different times of their lives. The stories shared sutured spatialities, invoking effective planes intended to communicate joy and dread, the complicated and riotously beautiful histories and presents that shape their being and how they move in the world. Further, the life histories carried in my study offer a look into how individual personal lives are lived in relation to others, over time, over distance, and how they echo with(in) more extensive social processes and structures that continuously shape and interact with individual lives to shape embodiment, to shape being. Incorporating context-specificities of storying lives into the life history interviews in the study revealed generative possibilities for contributing critical knowledges and narratives that have historically been ignored to the growing archive of marginalised gender knowledges that challenge the hegemonic hierarchical registers of the racialised gender binary.

Recruitment, Selection, and Research Collaborators

Writing on online recruitment and snowball sampling, Browne (2005, 48) notes that "recruiting research participants can be problematic when research focuses upon specific individual groups or experiences which are not validated by society". Further, Browne (2005, 48–49) wrote, "These individuals and groups are often hidden because openly identifying with specific factions or lifestyles can result in discrimination". I had a concern regarding the research recruitment stage, a concern that I do not share alone. The available trans scholarship in South Africa—emerging from more extensive studies on LGBT people—is primarily associated with various academic and trans and/or queer non-governmental institutions where accessing research participants is navigated through those institutions as gatekeepers with access to trans networks. Smaller academic studies, especially for degree purposes, have tended to have significantly smaller samples and rely on the gatekeepers to access trans research participants (monakali 2017; Camminga 2019). The smaller samples are also consistent with qualitative ethnographic and life history studies that take an in-depth look into specific themes and individual lives over an extended period (Hatch and Wisniewski 1995; van Santen 2014). The reasons behind the relatively small participation of trans people in academic research vary. One reason is that trans research in this context is developing, and there are not a lot of publicly visible or popularised academic studies on trans that have entered public discourse that may increase interest in participation. Further, being visible as trans still carries weight and an

increased vulnerability to harm. Again, these are the contextual specificities that a black trans feminist approach alerts this work to consider in the methodological considerations of this study. With this knowledge from literature and previous experience conducting research with trans people, for this study I relied on social media and personal academic and social networks to recruit research collaborators.

The sampling and recruitment process for this study took inspiration from black queer and trans empirical scholarship that emphasises a critical, social, and political sensibility towards designing research strategies about and with transgender people (Allen 2012; Brim and Ghaziani 2016). To recruit research collaborators, I posted the research invitation/flyer on my Facebook and Instagram accounts as well as on the trans and LGBT South African Facebook groups of which I am a member. I also asked my Facebook and Instagram friends to share the flyer on their pages/accounts. Being a part of Facebook groups and Instagram pages focusing on trans and gender non-normative identities offered a possibility to reach a diverse profile of trans masculine people in the two South African cities. Social media platforms simultaneously allow for the precise and broad targeting of potential research collaborators, particularly for the so-called "hard-to-reach populations" (Guillory et al. 2018). The invitation flyer included details about the study, who the potential participants it sought were, and how to contact the researcher. I also used personal networks to connect with organisations working with trans people to share my research participation invitation with their constituents, but these did not pan out. Almost all my research collaborators reached out to me via social media. The participation requirements included the following:

- adults (18 years—)
- self-identified trans masculine people
- living in Johannesburg or Cape Town (including people who have only lived in either city for a minimum of six months).

The criteria exclude transgender women and other transgender-identified people who were assigned male at birth. This is an arbitrary criterion, because gender identity categories are ever shifting and acquire different meanings and uses across various bodies. Nevertheless, I centre and highlight the experiences of trans masculine people in this research to contribute to their growing visibility through trans, geographical, and masculinities research. The criteria for participation also exclude people and children under 18 as well as people who have lived in either city for less than six months. The reason for the latter is that the study sought narratives about the spatial experiences of trans

masculine people informed by in-depth knowledges of the places they inhabit and how they navigate their lives.

While social media affords a broader network to recruit research collaborators, it has limits (Browne 2005). Using social media platforms meant that some people on those platforms would see my research flyer, and their interest in collaborating on this study was not guaranteed. As I soon discovered, the potential to reach a wider audience does not guarantee actual interest and participation in the study. Social media recruitment within the context of trans research also meant that the flyer would reach specific age demographics, consistent with broader national patterns of internet and social media usage and presence according to age precisely. While I had hoped for a diverse age demographic, the people who participated in the study were mainly among the younger millennials and Generation Z age cohorts. To supplement online recruitment, I also asked people who participated in the study to share the invitation to research with others in their networks, a process known as snowball sampling. Snowball sampling "has come to refer to a type of 'convenience sampling' especially concerning hidden populations, hard to reach populations, and sensitive subjects" (Woodley and Lockard 2016, 322). From these two strategies of recruiting participants, I ended up with a selection of 19 trans masculine research collaborators living in Johannesburg and Cape Town. For a life history study on urban trans spatialities and in the context of developing trans studies, this sample size—to my knowledge, the largest cohort of trans masculine people in a qualitative research study in the context currently—is encouraging in the direction of trans research and the involvement and participation of trans people in qualitative research.

Settings and Research Collaborators

My research collaborators live in urban, suburban, and township neighbourhoods around Johannesburg and Cape Town. Both cities are characterised by similar residential patterns that echo the steep socio-economic inequalities in the country (I come back to this point further down in this section). My research collaborators live in different residences: shacks, townhouses/stand-alone houses, apartment buildings, and houses in high-security estates. Five of my research collaborators live in their family homes, and the rest live in rented homes. Most of my research collaborators live with one or more people in their homes: a partner, family member, other students, or working people. Eight of my research collaborators were unemployed at the time of our interviews; one had decided, after attending a technical and vocational school (TVET), to go back and re-do his Grade 12 to obtain better

grades to apply to university. Another was a job-seeker who had recently completed undergraduate studies at university, three were graduate students at university, two were undergraduate students at university, and one was at a TVET. Most of those who were students reported receiving financial support primarily from family and/or romantic partners. All but one had completed high school, most had or were completing an undergraduate university degree, and one had completed a PhD.

Most of their geographical backgrounds are marked by migratory patterns across South Africa, the African continent, and Europe. As is true for most people living in Johannesburg and Cape Town (myself included, at different points in the past), our/their geographical patterns are embedded within migratory patterns that are a common feature within the socio-economic history of the country (Falkof and Van Staden 2020). Some of my research collaborators arrived in the cities from other provinces within South Africa and outside the country as students, job-seekers, and immigrants to take up temporary or permanent residence; others moved to the cities to join their families, and a few were born in and moved within the cities throughout their lives.

Out of the ten trans masculine people in this study who currently live in Cape Town, five were born and raised in the city, four had their roots in other provinces, and one migrated from Europe. Of those not from Cape Town, they came to the city in pursuit of higher education and have lived in Cape Town for an average of three and half years.

For my research collaborators who live in Johannesburg, their routes to the city reveal similar migratory patterns. Two of my research collaborators moved to the city from neighbouring countries as children to live, one moved from a neighbouring country as an adult for work, another two moved from a neighbouring province to study at a university. The other four were born and raised in the city and continue to live in Johannesburg. In terms of their neighbourhood/residential areas, my research collaborators reside in varying residential areas /neighbourhoods around the city. These range from gated estates in the north of Johannesburg, urban and suburban neighbourhoods in and around central and the south of Johannesburg, to the biggest township southwest of the city. These neighbourhoods vary in the socio-economic index, with six of my research collaborators residing in working-class and middle-class neighbourhoods and three from affluent northern suburbs.

In Cape Town, most of my research collaborators currently reside in working-class and middle-class urban and suburban neighbourhoods in the Southern Suburbs and the Atlantic Seaboard, working-class neighbourhoods in the City Bowl and Northern Suburbs, and working- and middle-class West

Coast suburbs and Eastern Suburbs of Cape Town. These residential areas/neighbourhoods also vary in population distribution in terms of racial/ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. While most of my research collaborators live in residential neighbourhoods with a mix of class positions—usually upper-working-class to upper-middle-class—their access and proximity to different social spaces in the cities are mediated through their varying economic, educational, and cultural capital.

My research collaborators chose the pseudonyms through which their narratives appear in this study. All chose pseudonyms in the same cultural, religious, and linguistic context as their actual names and identities. I have chosen to retain the names of the neighbourhoods in which my research collaborators live to provide nuanced analyses of the urban spatial contexts that appear in my research collaborators narratives. All other identifying information, such as names of workplaces, schools/universities, partners, family, and friends, have been removed entirely. All 19 of my research collaborators identify their gender as trans masculine, non-binary trans masc, or trans man. While I am not specifically focused on the etymology of each variation, how they talk about their gender and position their masculinity subjectivities in relation to their trans identities is a point of interest that I take up in the analysis chapters (see Chapter 6). All the research collaborators spoke fluent English, and the conversations took place mainly in English, with other moments articulated in IsiZulu and IsiXhosa—languages in which I am also proficient. I translated those instances to English in my transcription of the interviews, signalled by the square brackets []. Below, I provide brief introductions to my research collaborators:

Arlo (they/them) is a 25-year-old coloured graduate student who lives in Woodstock, Cape Town. Arlo has lived all their life in Cape Town, and, at the time of our interview, they had just moved out of home to a rented co-living apartment. They describe their sexuality as queer. At the time of our interview, Arlo was not medically transitioning.

Wanga (he/him) is a 25-year-old black trans man from Soweto, Johannesburg. Wanga has lived all their life in Johannesburg, and, at the time of our interview, he was redoing his grade 12. He currently lives at home with his family. Wanga describes his sexuality as heterosexual. He has been medically transitioning for over five years and has undergone top surgery.

Rosemary (they/them) is a 22-year-old white non-binary trans person who lives in Simon's Town, Cape Town. Rosemary currently lives at home with

their family. As a teen, they dropped out of high school and now work as a baker. Rosemary describes their sexuality as "non-binary lesbian". Rosemary considers themselves a "medical trans masculine person"; they medically transitioned as a teenager and are now medically detransitioning.

Ellis (they/them) is a 28-year-old white non-binary trans masc person who moved to Cape Town from Europe and lives in Claremont, Cape Town. At the time of our interview, Ellis lived with a friend in their rented house and worked as a post-doctoral student at a university. Ellis describes their sexuality as bisexual and has been medically transitioning for less than a year.

Venus (they/them) is a 29-year-old black non-binary trans masc person from Johannesburg. They currently live at home with their family. During our interviews, Venus was working in a corporate job. They describe their sexuality as "political lesbian", and they were not medically transitioning at the time of our interviews.

Mister J (he/him) is a 32-year-old Asian trans man born and raised in Johannesburg. During our interview, Mister J lived at home with his family and worked as a Twitch Streamer. Mister J has been medically transitioning since 2020 and describes his sexuality as bi.

Mpho (he/him) is a 24-year-old black trans man who lives in Auckland Park, Johannesburg. At our interviews, Mpho was completing his undergraduate degree at university and had moved from another province to attend university in Johannesburg. He has been medically transitioning since 2020 and describes his sexuality as bisexual.

Haydn (they/it) is a 21-year-old white trans man from Cape Town. At the time of our interviews, Haydn was in vocational school and working in retail. They have been medically transitioning since they were a teenager and described their sexuality as gay.

Fish (he/him) is a 21-year-old white trans man who lives in Greenpoint, Cape Town. He moved to Cape Town from another province and was a self-employed artist living with his ex-partner at the time of our interview. Fish has been medically transitioning since he was a teenager and describes his sexuality as bi.

Sam (he/him) is a 25-year-old white trans man who lives in Melville, Johannesburg. At the time of our interview, Sam was a graduate student at university. He had been medically transitioning for a couple of years, had undergone top surgery, and described his sexuality as bisexual.

Thirty (he/him) is a 30-year-old black trans man who migrated to Johannesburg from an African country less than five years ago and now lives in a township in Johannesburg. At the time of our interview, Thirty was employed and living with his partner. He has been medically transitioning since 2020 and describes his sexuality as heterosexual.

Loapi Tau (he/him) is a 30-year-old black trans man who lives in Killarney, Johannesburg. At the time of our interview, Loapi Tau worked for a tech company and lived with his partner. As a child, he moved to South Africa from an African country and has been living in Johannesburg ever since. He started medically transitioning after high school and has undergone top surgery. He describes his sexuality as straight.

Tyler (he/him) is a 25-year-old black trans man who lives in Midrand, Johannesburg. At the time of our interview, Tyler worked in corporate and lived in a security estate. He had been medically transitioning for a couple of years and described his sexuality as straight.

Max (they/he) is a 23-year-old white trans man living in Table View, Cape Town. At the time of our interview, Max worked in a corporate setting and lived with his partners (polycule). He had been medically transitioning for a couple of years and had undergone top surgery. He describes his sexuality as pansexual.

Qiniso (they/he) is a 25-year-old black non-binary trans masc person. A university graduate, Qiniso was unemployed at the time of our interview and had been living with a friend in Claremont, Cape Town. Qiniso began medically transitioning but had to stop due to financial complications. They describe their sexuality as queer.

King (he/him) is a 37-year-old black trans man who migrated to South Africa from a neighbouring African country over a decade ago. He currently lives in Johannesburg and works in the non-profit space. He had been medically transitioning for years and had undergone top surgery. He describes his sexuality as pansexual.

Zuan (he/him) is a 23-year-old white trans man from Somerset West, Cape Town. At the time of our interviews, Zuan was living at home with his family and attending vocational school while working as a fitness coach. He had undergone medical transitioning and had to stop due to health complications. He describes his sexuality as pansexual.

Tshepang (they/them) is a 21-year-old black non-binary trans masc graduate student living in Stellenbosch. At the time of our second interview, a year after the first, Tshepang had started medically transitioning and described their sexuality as queer.

Vuyani (he/him) is a 21-year-old black trans man who lives in Observatory, Cape Town. At the time of our interview, Vuyani was awaiting his first appointment to begin his medical transition. He is an undergraduate student at university and lives in a student accommodation.

Online and In-person interviews

Between 2021 and 2023, I conducted interviews 38 interviews both on Zoom and in person with 19 research collaborators. Each of the interviews lasted between 1.5 hours and 3 hours. Out of the 19 research collaborators, I met 12 in person and have only communicated with the other 7 via Zoom. I used an open-ended, semi-structured interviewing format, a conversational style that allowed me to be flexible and extend questions depending on the specificities of each person's life story (Hesse-Biber 2014). Keeping in line with a black, trans, feminist orientation towards remaining flexible in the research moment (Allen 2012; E. H. Brown 2015), the interview space gave way to a reflective and textured re-telling of trans masculine experiences of space. At the beginning of each interview, I shared a summary of what my study sought to do, read out what consenting to participate in the study entailed and outline the general questions I would ask. The interview questions included exploratory questions about the person's biographical information, their gender journey, and how they experienced different social spaces. Some research collaborators requested a list of questions prior to the interview to prepare themselves, to which I obliged. It mattered to me that my research collaborators could trust both the process of the interview and me as a researcher to not create a harmful space with intrusive and insensitive questions. All the research collaborators in this study freely gave verbal consent to participate in the study. During the interview, I emphasised that if a question was uncomfortable to address, it was

okay not to answer it, and none of the interviews were reported as having contained harmful questions, neither at the moment nor after.

The life history interviews conducted in person and on Zoom allowed me to observe the micro- and macro-contexts of my research collaborators and the urban spaces in which they moved and invited me for the interviews. Zoom is an online videoconferencing software that "offers a free basic program, and only the researchers are required to download the program; thus, the research collaborators in my study need not have the app on their phones they just needed the invitation link in order to access the platform and our meeting" (Gray et al. 2020, 1294; Howlett 2022). During my first fieldwork trip to Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa, in December 2021, COVID-19 regulations in South Africa were still enforced. Social distancing, wearing face masks, and a curfew were mandatory, shaping when, how, and where interviews could occur. The initial interviews were primarily conducted on Zoom for various reasons, including sickness, clashing schedules, and some of my collaborators outside of the country (South Africa) during my fieldwork. Writing on adopting online data collection approaches, Howlett (2022, 39) poses the question of the place of a field when using online interviewing methods. They argue that "conducting fieldwork without physically co-locating with the people we study begs whether digital methods are appropriate to answer the same research questions without the same immersive experiences" (Howlett 2022, 391).

Being in the 'field' and using Zoom to conduct interviews allowed me to conduct more than one interview per day, as it reduced my travel time (Howlett 2022). Zoom interviews have also been useful for reaching research collaborators who could not meet in person for various reasons. Using Zoom further allowed me to reach research collaborators from different parts of the two cities without immediately travelling to those places. Nevertheless, there were contextual considerations I had to make that complicated the interview process on Zoom. The Zoom interviews were impacted by the scheduled power outages, known as load-shedding, in the country. The power cuts happened at different times of the day and varied from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. These power outages permitted a relatively narrow window for my research collaborators and me to have the interviews while they navigated school, work schedules, and other life activities. Navigating these micro-contextual events impacted the timelines for the data collection and shaped the time and spaces where the in-person and Zoom interviews took place.

The cognisance of these socioeconomic concerns was crucial for observing and analysing how mobility in urban spaces is shaped by these dynamics of power cuts, shaping varied access to different urban public spaces. Thus,

shifting from in-person to Zoom interviews allowed for navigating and buffering personal scheduling concerns and the broader social contexts within which the interviews took place. While I remained cognisant of the social and economic contexts of my research collaborators' urban contexts, I would be remiss not to underscore the intersectional imperative of the black trans feminist approach to a qualitative methodology I use that revealed a potential for critiquing my methods. Specifically in how they are imbricated in, to borrow from Elwood (2021, 211), "intersectional processes of material and social differentiation" in how they tug at already existing and "mutually reinforcing impoverishment-enrichment dynamics of capitalist space economies". The space economies of my research collaborators, while they could enfold my research tools, they also were in excess of them. What I mean by that is, while life history interviews took place both online and in-person, within these spatialities themselves were diverse relations that revealed varied material realities and access to material resources, particularly for digital interviews which relied on stable internet/wifi connection via mobile phones, tablets/iPads and computers—technologies that use power/electricity.

Zoom Interviews

At the time of my first fieldwork trip to Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa, in December 2021, COVID-19 regulations in South Africa were still enforced. Social distancing, wearing face masks, and a curfew were mandatory, and they shaped when, how, and where interviews could take place. I conducted interviews both on Zoom and in person. Zoom is an online video conferencing software that "offers a free basic program, and only the researchers are required to download the program; thus, the research collaborators in my study need not have the app on their phones; they just needed the invitation link in order to access the platform and our meeting" (Gray et al. 2020, 1294). The initial interviews were mostly conducted on Zoom for various reasons, including sickness, clashing schedules, and some of my collaborators being outside of the country (South Africa) at the time of my fieldwork.

Being in the 'field' and using Zoom to conduct interviews allowed me to conduct more than one interview per day, as it reduced my travel time. Zoom interviews were also useful for reaching research collaborators who could not meet in person for various reasons (Gray et al. 2020). One collaborator, lamenting their busy schedule, shared their gratitude for being able to participate in the study and tell their story even if we could not meet in person. Using Zoom allowed me to reach research collaborators from different parts

of the two cities without immediately travelling to those places. Nevertheless, there were considerations I had to make that complicated the interview process on Zoom. The online interviews were impacted by the scheduled electrical power cuts in the country, known as load-shedding (Mlambo 2023). The power cuts happened at different times of the day and varied from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, thus making it difficult to synchronise schedules. Thus, the power outages permitted a narrow window for my research collaborators and me to have the interviews while they navigated school, work schedules, and other life activities. Nevertheless, my research collaborators were generous with their time, even agreeing to do the interviews well into the late evening.

As is customary in qualitative life history research, "the experience of fieldwork as an ethnographic practice remains an important and cool way in which we come to understand social settings and the lives of social actors" (Coffey 2018, 2). Cape Town and Johannesburg mark the expansive 'fields' under study. To echo Howlett (2022, 396), I conceptualise the field as "a continuum of spatio-temporal events and relations between people in diverse socio-political contexts". The field was first painted on Zoom through words and careful metaphors that, combined with and enfolded into the physical experience of being with collaborators in their various spaces, brought a more complex and dense confrontation with and understanding of the spaces from their perspectives. Given the constraints of COVID-19 and power outages, as discussed in the previous section, using Zoom interviews was a significant intervention in understanding how my research collaborators talk about the spaces they inhabit and move to give a linguistic description of the textures of the urban topography of the cities and the rhythms of trans life pulsating in the cities.

In-person Interviews

For in-person interviews, my research collaborators invited me to various spatial settings for the interviews. The spaces ranged from their homes to their favourite restaurants, bars, and wine farms; some invited me to visit cafés and coffee shops they had wanted to check out in their neighbourhoods, while others invited me to their workplaces. It's important to note how sharing some identity aspects with my research collaborators (Blythe et al. 2013), such as being non-binary, queer, black, in my late 20s (as most of my research collaborators are in their mid-20s), and a South African all facilitated how my research collaborators related to me and, thus, for some feeling comfortable to invite me into their homes and workplaces (I pick this point up again in the latter parts of this chapter when reflecting on researcher reflexivity and

positionality). Further, being invited to socialising and leisure spaces for interviews allowed me to feel and be part of the spaces as well as to see how my research collaborators interacted with the spaces at that moment. My familiarity with Johannesburg and Cape Town made navigating both cities easy. I often relied on Uber to get around the cities and meet my research participants. Using private transport allowed me the flexibility and security to travel with collected data safely, thus minimising possibilities for distraction. My cultural awareness and familiarity with the city's geography allowed me to move into different spaces. All the research collaborators I met in person cited privacy (being able to talk about their lives in expansive detail in a public place) and comfort in the spaces they chose to meet with me.

The in-person interviews illuminated the dynamics that would otherwise remain unknown through online interviews (Browne 2003; Hesse-Biber 2014). Having been away from both cities for over two years at the time of the first interviews, one of the jarring reminders of navigating both cities and their varying geographies was witnessing contradictory landscapes forged through extreme socio-economic inequalities. I saw how the physical landscape changed from lush trees arranged perfectly along the streets to chaotic, unwalkable city centres. For example, in one of my interview meetings in Johannesburg in January 2023, my research collaborator asked me to pick them up from their house so we could ride to the restaurant where we were meeting. This pickup required identification to enter the estate: a driver's license or an identity card, a code generated by my collaborator on their estates' security app, and a stated purpose for the visit when the security guards at the entrance asked. Driving into the heavily securitised gated estate (Blakely and Snyder 1997), the chaos of the city centre disappeared into serenity marked by narrowly detached row houses arranged along several looping streets, imbuing the space with a calm and quiet atmosphere. To occupy the same physical residence space with my collaborator, however briefly, in this gated estate put their narratives of home and community into perspective and allowed me to inquire more precisely into my collaborator's experiences of their residential space. I remarked to my research collaborator about the securitisation of home and community and my unease about being watched and being a stranger in this space that is mere kilometres away from the buzz of the city centre. This reflection prompted their own experiences and justifications for the excluded and securitised construction of the residential community they are a part of. In contrast, narrating space and experiences of place on Zoom relied more on detailed descriptions of what the spaces looked and felt like.

Alison Rooke (2009, 151) writes that "gathering ethnographic data depends on haptic human connection, closeness, understanding and a personal

engagement. This affective process requires a sensory involvement that takes emotions and feelings seriously to convey and make sense of embodied experience". The in-person interviews were more emotionally charged, intensified by proximity and the physical spaces where we met. Thus, forcing a visible acknowledgement of the emotions in the space, emotions shared between the research collaborators and me. Listening to difficult stories in life history research is part of the process, but it is nevertheless affectively weighty for the researcher (Ratnam 2019; Behar [1996] 2022). In the book *Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart,* Ruth Behar ([1996] 2022, 27) notes that "the genres of life history and life story are emerging with the testimonio, which speaks to the role of witnessing in our time as a key form of approaching and transforming reality". I argue that the interview moment is also a moment of witnessing, or 'bearing witness', a moment that is calibrated through vulnerability and sometimes intense emotions (Mampane 2022). For example, one collaborator invited me to their house for an in-person interview to conduct the interview. During our conversation, seated on his couch, he shared traumatic and painful experiences of their gender history and cried. In this moment of vulnerability, the acknowledgement of the emotions present in the space and shared between myself and the collaborator went beyond verbal responses to nonverbal cues like touching their hand to comfort. In in-person meetings, I was also aware that I did not need to contribute verbally to acknowledge emotionally heavy moments. Silence did not carry the anxiety of a disrupted internet connection and the "I think your connection cut out" often exchanged on Zoom conversations after a long silence.

In person interviews provided a different texture to bearing witness to the affective histories and the complex lives of the trans masculine people in my study. They required an attunement to deep listening and being comfortable with discomfort when navigating moments that challenged my own emotional reactions. The in-person interviews were more emotionally intense, and my collaborators shared in meticulous detail their histories and experiences of living as trans masculine people. Compared to the Zoom interviews, these interviews also went on for longer and felt more connected. With Zoom interviews, on the other hand, it was hard for me to navigate emotionally difficult moments, where when a collaborator had teary eyes, for example, I could not see them as clearly as I did in person. I relied only on their voice and cadence to signal a moment requiring checking in to ask whether to continue or take a break. Thus, listening is a crucial part of doing interviews. Ratnam (2019, 20) explicates a two-fold process of listening to understand how participants often "told their stories through verbal and nonverbal modes". The first level involved the process of listening for words such as adjectives to

describe emotion, for example, “I was so disappointed when”, “it hurt me when”, “I was losing my mind at”, “it was hard to” etc. as signposts for the affective dynamic of the interview. Vulnerability manifested differently and navigated differently in in-person interviews compared to Zoom interviews. As reflected in this section, the in-person interviews were more open to sharing difficult and painful memories and experiences.

The in-person and Zoom interview moments emerged as different affective and embodied experiences in the data collection. While sharing similar cultural, residential, and social spaces with my research collaborators, their specific patterns and modes of negotiating and navigating public urban spaces significantly shaped how I understand and analyse their life histories in relation to the questions I ask and the study’s theoretical orientation.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis has a long history in qualitative research in the social sciences, particularly in the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology (Riessman 1993; Polkinghorne 1995; Georgakopoulou 2006; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006). Narrative research “was proposed as an antidote to rationality and the quantitative measures prevalent in the social sciences at the time as well as a political tool that celebrated lay experience and lay voices and created opportunities for them to be heard and validated” (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2011, 19). Narrative analysis comprise “a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common the storied form” (Riessman 2008). I use the term narrative here, following Riesmann (2008, 6), to capture three moments: the first being narrative as “the practice of storytelling” and meaning-making; the second is narrative data to refer to the life history stories/narratives that form the empirical material of the study; and lastly narrative analysis as “the systematic study of narrative data”. In working with life history narratives, I want to understand how narratives (the life histories) “reflect and build upon shared knowledge, belief systems and structures of social organisation” (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2011, 56). In addition, I want to understand how trans masculine people position themselves variously in relations to wider social processes. Narrative research “offer a way simultaneously to keep individual lives and social positioning in view, while focusing on people’s own accounts” (Phoenix et al. 2024). Choosing an approach to narrative analysis was informed by specific lineages of narrative research that centre on the experience of the research participants. This turn in

narrative research, as De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2011, 20) argue, "has distinctly qualified the narrative turn epistemology as interpretive, meaning-seeking, subjective and particularistic". The rich narrative analysis toolbox offers no distinct way of undertaking narrative analysis. For example, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2011) elaborate on the discursive perspective of narrative research, particularly concerning narrative as a method and the relation between narratives and power. They argue that "as an epistemology, narrative becomes much more than a set of techniques and tools for collecting and analysing data. It becomes a particular way of constructing knowledge requiring a particular commitment and even bias from the researcher in addition to a political stance" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2011, 19). I found this perspective useful to think within the context of my study and exploring how narratives of urban space resist, go beyond, and position and enunciate new understandings and formations of gender and spatiality.

The life history interviews collected in this study comprise narratives/stories that trans masculine people tell of their lives. The life histories/narratives frame understandings of trans masculine subjectivities and underscore the socio-cultural landscapes they are implicated in and the broader socio-political geographies and economic structures that inflect on and are also shaped by trans masculine lives. Given the large amount of stories I ended up with, a challenge then was to decide what elements of the interviews are important and how to interpret them (H. Fraser 2004; Chase 2007; Riessman 2008). To assist in the process of narrative analysis, it is important to remember that narrative research "should not only reflect reality but also challenge taken for granted beliefs assertions and assumptions including those made by revered social theorists" (Fraser 2004, 182). Narrative analysis is "designed to take up the challenges of interpreting and understanding layers of meaning in interview talk and the connections among them through narrative analysis researchers can understand the contingent the local and the particular" (Wiles, Rosenberg, and Kearns 2005, 90).

In deciding what elements of the stories to interpret in this dissertation I was guided by the research questions, theoretical and analytical framing of the study, the methodology and the stories themselves. For the purposes of my approach to narrative analysis, also I draw inspiration from Ann Phoenix's (2000) culturally situated approach that pays attention to the telling of narratives—narratives as storytelling/and as a story— and what the narratives achieve in the context of positioning urban trans masculine geographies within broader discourses and materialities of trans and urban spaces. In some approaches to narrative analysis, researchers often focus their narrative analysis often focuses on the temporal ordering of a plot or themes. In this

analysis, I combined the temporal ordering of the plots and picked up on themes and events within and across the transcripts. Thematic narrative analysis, Riessman attempts to keep the "story" intact for interpretive purposes. In line with black trans feminist epistemic concerns, thematic narrative analysis allows for attending to "time and place of narration and, by historicising a narrative account, reject the idea of generic explanations" (112). This approach keeps in line with the theoretical grounding in this study, which emphasises attending to the intersectionality of social identities by historicising and contextualising how gender and spatiality emerge through discursive and material realities, eschewing any essentialising and totalising assumptions and constructions of social identities (Ahmed 2006b; Massey 1994).

The thematic plotting of narratives also allowed me to pay specific attention to narrative contexts (Phoenix 2008, 66). I focused on the narration of specific urban geographies and their purchase in the narration of trans masculine lives. Specifically, I utilise the technique of the small and big stories in life histories (Phoenix 2008) to see the narratives that emerge in the different contexts of my research collaborators' life histories. Analysing a small story "enables attention to how people build their narratives and the performative work done by the narratives" (Phoenix 2008, 67). Small stories foreground the context within which particular narratives are produced (Phoenix 2008, 68). On the other hand, big stories which also frame the thematic ordering of the analysis here, "are often used to present grand narratives of one's life". I brought these strategies together as an approach that allows attentiveness to the dilemmas and troubled subject positions my collaborators negotiate as they tell their stories. Further, these strategies to narrative analysis allowed me to work with the large data set. I would be remiss not to mention that narrative analysis is always partial and contingent on the researcher, their philosophical and methodological orientations, the study's research questions and theoretical underpinnings. Further, the analysis of life narratives is fleeting and present a snapshot of a complex and evolving process of becoming.

Identifying Narratives for Analysis

The trans masculine life histories appearing in this study frame understandings of trans masculine people's urban geographies. They underscore the socio-cultural landscapes in which they are implicated as well as the broader socio-political geographies and economic structures that shape their lives. All 38 life history interviews were transcribed verbatim, except for changing the research collaborators' names and any names of places, people, and institutions that

may identify them. This is one strategy to make my research more accountable and keep the analysis trustworthy and authentic (Lincoln and Lanford 2019). As I have intimated at in the previous discussion, a challenge in narrative research is to decide what elements of the life history interviews are important and how to interpret them (Wiles, Rosenberg, and Kearns 2005, 90). My approach to selecting stories/narratives for analysis takes after Riessman's (1993; 2003; 2008) thematic content-coding, a process in which the content of the data is read and re-read to identify narratives and stories. The research questions, theoretical framework, and the data themselves guided this process of identifying narratives/stories. The thematic coding process enabled me to notice any rudimentary patterns or thematic codes within and across the transcripts. Codes are the building blocks of what will become key themes (Riessman 2003; 2008). I noted these emergent thematic codes on the transcript margins using track changes on Microsoft Word to insert comments and highlight parts of the data set that corresponded with an emergent pattern or theme.

Narrative analysis takes the story itself as its object of investigation (Riessman 2003). It is important to note that the terms 'narrative' and 'story' overlap in this study, as it is common in narrative research scholarship (Georgakopoulou 2006). While there is overlap, I also find Brett Smith and Javier Monforte's (2020) framing of narratives useful. They maintain that, narratives are "the crucial resources that provide people with a template—a scaffolding of sorts—from which to build and structure their own stories" (Smith and Monforte 2020, 2). The data contained content that was indicated as stories by research collaborators through signalling that they were sharing a story. For example, responding to a question about safe spaces, one research collaborator began their response with, "I'm gonna tell you a story about [name of queer club]", an utterance that introduced a lengthy and clearly structured story about their experience of queer socialising spaces. However, not all stories were indicated in the life history interviews and, thus, deciding what segments to use from the life histories was guided by the research questions and theoretical underpinnings of the study.

Following the theoretical and research questions, the emergent patterns were read and re-read, paying close attention to how my research collaborators constructed, positioned, represented, and related to their spatial worlds. They also paid attention to how event/story sequences were drawn up. Here, I identified descriptions and evaluations of the events/stories/spaces as well as how my research collaborators characterised and positioned themselves in relation to the characters and places they invoked in the stories. From this process, I identified the key themes (Riessman 2008) in the data that spoke to

the research questions and theoretical framework guiding this study and the data themselves. Initially, I identified 15 key themes in the data set. These themes helped organise the way the research collaborators' stories were told and were clustered around recurrent content in the data. For example, stories about spaces of affirmation were told around themes of friendship, relationships, family, and community. Thus, I collated these varied sub-themes around one key theme concerning the spaces where trans masculine people constitute and practice community. To summarise, key themes represented the repeated subject matter in the data (Riessman 2008).

Analysing Narrative Contexts and Narratives as Performance

The identified narratives were analysed with a focus on two simultaneous levels: (a) the cultural context (Phoenix 2008) within which trans masculine lives are lived and how their experiences index connections to wider socio-cultural processes, and (b) the performance, that is, paying attention to how the telling of the narratives accomplishes the articulation of specific subject positions (Riessman 1993). Analysis of the cultural context pays attention to how big and small stories are arranged in the narratives and what they accomplish (Phoenix 2008, 66–67). Small stories refer to "underrepresented narrative activities such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings and refusals to tell" (Georgakopoulou 2006, 123). Analysing a small story "enables attention to how people build their narratives and the performative work done by the narratives" (Phoenix 2008, 67). Small stories foreground the context within which particular narratives are produced (Phoenix 2008, 68). Further, Michael Bamberg (2006, 141) notes that the small stories approach "is able to theoretically and methodologically enrich traditional narrative inquiry by more radically re-positioning big story approaches as grounded in dialogical/discursive approaches". In this study, small stories comprise tellings of, for example, very recent or ongoing events that add context to the collaborator's narration of their life story, often interrupting a kind of linear telling of the life histories. For example, in one interview, my collaborator mentioned and asked to show me their new birth certificate that they had collected earlier in the day of our interview, highlighting it as a significant moment in their medical transition. The story of finally acquiring a new birth certificate marked the beginning of another process of altering their documents at a bank, which they embarked on that day without success. Such small stories, while fewer than the big, canonical stories, are important in life history interviews. They represent 'talk-in-action' (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006)

instead of a distilled narrative, that is, an event in the distant or recent past. Talk-in-action is shaped by the cultural context in which it is engaged; thus, the enfolding of small stories makes for an interesting and nuanced analysis of the messy co-construction of gender and spatiality. Small stories are not presented in contrast to, but in co-construction with, big stories. I combine these strategies as an approach that allows attentiveness to the dilemmas and troubled subject positions my collaborators negotiate as they tell their stories. Phoenix (2008) further writes that there are various ways in which researchers simultaneously attend to small stories and the wider cultural context, that is, big stories. For example, "focusing on the minutiae of the interactional context can facilitate analysis of wider canonical and cultural context since personal standpoints are built from often deeply contradictory and fragmented patchworks of cultural resources" (Phoenix 2008, 68).

Narratives as Performance

The interview moment is an instance of a cultural context within which the research collaborators and I, the researcher, perform our identities in ways that position us as certain people and not as others. The way stories are told is as important as their content. In analysing narratives as performance, I paid attention to how the research collaborators position themselves—for example, as either agent or victim—and other people they invoke in their stories as occupying specific subject positions to mediate the narration of their positionalities. For instance, in narrating their discomfort in being misgendered in public spaces, one research collaborator concluded their story by exclaiming, "I still walk tall though, cos I love myself". Analysing narratives as performance is in line with the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this study within the poststructuralist tradition, in which identity is constituted and situated in interaction with various discourses and is, thus, accomplished in social interaction (Butler 1988; 1990; Massey 1994; Ahmed 2006b).

I analyse trans masculine narratives in this study as stories of experience, not straightforward descriptions of events, as experience is where subjectivity is constituted (Scott 1991; Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou 2013). Thus, trans masculine narratives are understood as meaning-making units of discourse (Riessman 2003); they give an account of past actions narrated from a particular perspective to position the speaker in various ways. Positioning is a "discursive practice whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and intersubjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (Bamberg 1997, 336). Put differently, my research collaborators'

descriptions and narrations of their life histories, although incomplete, were always used for specific purposes—they communicate specific valuations of actions and moments in their lives. Analysing narratives as performance also allowed for understanding the diversity of trans masculine people's negotiations of their positioning within normative constructions of masculinities, gender, and space as well as the meanings and identities they make in the process within their cultural contexts (Bamberg 2006).

In paying attention to how my research collaborators narrate their lives about, how they embody masculinity, and how they navigate different urban spatial landscapes as multiply constituted people, I gained a better sense of how spaces shape embodiment. And how, in turn, the presence and movements of gender non-normative people in spaces constitutes those spaces, inflecting on them and exposing the hegemonic ideas that are woven onto the fabric of the space.

On the limits of narrative methods

One of the central aspects of narrative analysis (or narrative interpretive lens) is recognition of the dialectic of episodes and plots as they emerge in a given story. De Fina (De Fina 2021) notes that, "work on time and space from a context sensitive perspective has led to a recognition of the fact that narratives both are anchored in time and space and articulate those dimensions in different ways". This involves quite a specific mode of spatio-temporality in which there is a hermeneutical tacking back and forth between the events in question and the evolving whole to which they contribute (Riessman 1993; B. Smith and Monforte 2020). The life histories shared with me are brief stories related to more extended life stories, the sort we find in memoirs, autobiographies, and other such texts. In that sense, the life histories collected here through interviews are limited in 'size', considering each life's connectedness to the broad structures of the social and cultural world. That is to say, the life histories contained in this study are not all-encompassing of the individual trans masculine people's lives. Nevertheless, they are a window into complex and unfolding lives whose roots and routes cannot be simply distilled and reduced to a two-hour interview (or even less). Another limit connected to this partial unfolding and complexity is that these stories exist in time and space, representing the fleeting experiences regimented through time, space, and various other social categories. As I discuss in the following section, my positionality and how I stand in relation to the context and people I have interviewed for this study matters to this analysis. The narrative interpretation and analysis of the life histories happens within this hermeneutical backdrop.

Further, my understanding of the trans masculine life histories, their symbolic vocabulary, is made with the help of the research collaborators. Through asking for clarity, follow up interviews, re-checking the stories and their details, privileging the narrator's words—all these helped my narrative analysis to be best aligned with the narrative content, dynamics, and temporalities of the life histories. The approach resembles triangulation methods in its ambition to view data from different perspectives, seeking to verify meanings and add texture to their interpretation.

Reflexivity, Positionality and Ethics

Reflexivity is closely tied to the phenomenon and our understanding of it during fieldwork and writing (Riessman 2015, 219). Consistent with the social constructionist perspective, reflexivity exposes the constitutive nature of research: the inseparability of observer, observation, and interpretation (Riessman 2015, 221). Writing on transfeminist methodologies, Austin H Johnson (2015, 26) argues that "for researchers engaging in the study of transgender, acknowledgement and reflexivity are essential to breaking the cycle of transgender marginalisation wherein transgender people and their experiences are talked about rather than to". I approach trans masculinity as an analytical term and identity category from which I articulate my gender embodiment. It is a linguistic orientation I have used to fill up the space of my gender and also to mark the excesses of my black gender embodiment. I centre the category of 'trans masculine' as a significant category of inhabitation that marks a certain kind of orientation in the world.

In this study, I am an insider in the sense of studying a group of people—although not homogenous—with whom I share similar ways of being (gender) oriented in the world. An insider to the object of study refers to "when researchers conduct research with their populations of which they are also members so that the researcher shares an identity, language and an experiential base with the study participants" (Dwyer and Buckle 2009, 58). The study is also situated in my home country, South Africa. These two orientations mark me as an insider, familiar with the context and having researched trans masculinities. I am also an insider who shares cultural experiences living in Cape Town. Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer L Buckle (2009, 58) also note that "the insider role status frequently allows researchers more rapid and complete acceptance by their participants". Most of my research collaborators often said it was "nice to talk to someone who understands". While loaded, I

understood this phrase as a gesture of acceptance, an invitation to converse and reflect deeply and with tenderness (with knowledge, I, as a researcher, should be aware that traumatic and painful experiences of gender are common within trans and gender non-normative people). While a shared status made my connection with my research collaborators relatively straightforward, there is also the potential for shared cultures, identities, languages, and geopolitical histories to "impede the research process as it progresses in that participants may make assumptions of similarity and therefore fail to explain their individual experiences fully" (Dwyer and Buckle 2009, 58). To make sure that the assumptions of similarities did not impede on the full explanation of my collaborators' experiences, whenever collaborators would make a statement beginning or ending with "you know", I asked them to clarify their statements "to see if I understand what you're saying". This question facilitated a more descriptive explication of their experiences. There were also moments where my insights, knowledge, and experiences were not sufficient to understand my collaborators' experiences or to relate to them. For example, I did not share experiences of being an immigrant in the country, of being undocumented, of being an international student, and of being a parent, to name a few.

While an insider, I have not lived in the country full-time since 2020, a year of major turning points in the world and the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This spatio-temporal and socio-political puncture is important for consideration. Here, I am not suggesting that this period even remotely renders me an outsider in this context, but I want to suggest that it is a moment that I experienced differently from my research collaborators who navigated this time in South Africa while I did so in Sweden, where I completed my PhD. I invoke the time of COVID-19 here because most of my collaborators talk about the first wave of COVID-19 and its effects on how they navigate identity; some mention how it thrusts them into uncomfortable spaces. The point here is to mark the differential experiences of coming into this research during the pandemic as negotiations with economic and educational capital. I also want to emphasise that I am not entering this research as an all-knowing researcher. Still, I am limited by the spatio-temporal distance, COVID-19 marking that moment—or event that separates our experiences.

On Ethics

The Swedish Research Ethics Review granted this study (Dnr 2022-03379-01) ethical approval. The interviews for this study were recorded for transcription. All but one zoom interview opted for a video recorded Zoom interview. I stored recorded interviews an encrypted file under a code name on a secure

password protected computer and on an encrypted external hard drive that only I can access. The hard drive was stored in a secure storage in fireproof cabinet in a locked office and key to the storage stored separately. I transcribed the data as quickly as possible using pseudonyms to anonymise the data, as I have mentioned in previous parts of this chapter. The anonymised transcribed material was stored separately an encrypted external hard drive, that can only be accessed by the researcher. Usage of an encrypted external hard drive meets requirements from the GDPR guidelines and guidelines for information security at Lund University.

Representation, Language, and Objectification in Trans Research

In this concluding section, I further meditate on the ethics of narrative/life history research in tandem with considering the ethics of researching trans people and transgender phenomena. I am particularly attuned to discussions around representation and language (Smythe and Murray 2000; Marshall et al. 2022; Vincent 2018), the labour of knowledge production and compensation (Laher, Fynn, and Kramer 2019). As I noted in the opening section of this chapter, black trans feminist research, has one of its epistemic concerns, the representation of marginalised knowledges and generating knowledges and theories from underrepresented modes and practices of knowing and being. The issue of representation in how trans masculine and gender non-normative people are represented in research marks a crucial ethical point for continuous reflection in this research (Marshall et al. 2022). I want to highlight an ethical concern that is attentive to how research collaborators are described and their narratives presented and analysed.

Trans scholarship has outlined the ethical considerations in trans research (Vincent 2018; Marshall et al. 2022). For example, some of the apparent considerations in the context of data analysis and data collection compel researchers to pay attention to "reinforcing gender binaries in the written-up analysis, to collapsing gender identity and sexual diversity, and misrepresenting trans experiences through data manipulation" (Marshall et al. 2022, 196). Regarding reporting and publishing practices, researchers concerned with the ethics of trans research also caution against researchers "misgendering their research collaborators and the informational erasure when describing sample demographics and under attention to complex informed consent dynamics" (Marshall et al. 2022, 196-197). In this context, paying attention to the language trans masculine people use to refer to themselves and asking them how to refer to them in the written-up work works to counter the possibility of misrepresenting the collaborators. For instance, regarding anonymity, I asked my research collaborators to create a pseudonym to use in

the written-up work instead of assigning names to them randomly. This strategy is keeping in line with the knowledge that for trans people, the naming process is an important part of their identity, and as such, I take care in this research to use the names pseudonyms they have given me. This discussion also ties in with my earlier argument regarding how language travels through institutions, policies, and social media and how it is taken up differently in different contexts.

Nevertheless, these considerations are not absolute nor a sufficient response to the issues concerning established patterns of inequality in knowledge production and the unequal power dynamics between researchers as the storytellers in their various institutionally backed capacities and collaborators whose stories and life experiences they share in the process (Smythe and Murray 2000; Mampane 2022). Throughout the research process and in keeping with the black trans feminist epistemological considerations, I continuously grappled with reflexivity and positionality in relation to the research, the research collaborators, their life history narrative, the context of the research and the knowledge products of this study to avoid the pitfalls of falling into uncritical examinations and processes of research.

In addition, an important ethical consideration in trans feminist inspired methodologies concerns the objectification of transgender people in research. Objectification refers to the "disregard for an individual's personhood [that] strip[s] them of agency and position[s] them as a thing that is acted upon or used in interaction to the benefit of another" (Johnson 2015). Austin H Johnson (2015) further writes that a more common form of objectification in research with trans people concerns the "reduction of transgender people to their hormone or genital status" (29). In line with the study's intersectional mode of interrogation, I treat gender as a cultural construct that has appropriated the materiality of the body and other arbitrary social and physical markers as its axiomatic premise for validity. In my interviews with research collaborators, I knew I should not assume or replicate any normative language around gender and the body to suggest their coherence and reducibility. Reflections and narratives on bodies and transitioning were brought up by research collaborators as an elaboration on how they think about and navigate their gender embodiment and masculinities in different spaces. These narratives are mainly highlighted in Chapter 6 on bodies, masculinities, and space. They add texture and nuance to the understanding of the materiality of the body as well as how its conception morphs and embeds into expressions and negotiations of gender in public spaces. Not asking questions that assumed a fixed gendered materiality of the body allowed for research collaborators to share narratives of their gender—how they take shape and are expressed through, besides, or

without the body. These narratives opened different ways in which gender as a social and spatial category functions and is undone through and without the body.

Relationality, empathy, and care

The present life history inquiry is also guided by considerations (or principles) of relationality, empathy, and care (Cole and Knowles 2001). The history of trans scholarship, particularly clinical research, is punctuated by pathologising and harmful writings on (and framings of) trans identities (Swarr 2012). Thus, relationality in this research pertains to the relationship between the researcher and the collaborators which emphasises intimacy and authenticity as foundational to research quality (Cole and Knowles 2001, 27). To put it differently, intimacy in research attends to qualities such as mutual care, respect for personal vulnerabilities, and attention to issues of relational reflexivity and relational ethics (Johnson 2015). From the first communication with potential research collaborators, it was important for me to position myself and the research process not as an extractive, depersonalised, and detached. Rather, as a process that is attuned to the individual narratives and contextualised, historicised nuances of doing trans research, specifically in the country. In one private Instagram communication on Boxing Day, a potential research collaborator requested that I email them information about my studies and proof of previous work within trans-related research. I interpreted this request as a strategy to verify and establish, I surmised, my standing in relation to researching trans-related topics and my competence as a researcher. Most of my collaborators requested to know who I was, as a person and researcher, before deciding whether to participate. Eaves and Al-Hindi (2020) also suggest that intersectional geography scholars ask themselves, "How am I invested in the very systems I might criticise in my research?" In one instance, a potential research collaborator asked to meet with me before we did our first interview. We met at a café in Cape Town and spent the hour talking about who we were and the work we were doing, and they asked specific questions about my investment in trans research. This vetting process happened at varying scales, but not with all my research collaborators. Although partial, my life history is sutured through educational background, age, queer black non-binary articulation of identity, and current employment as a PhD student abroad (in Sweden). As the only available and inquired upon social identifiers, these are variously imbricated throughout the research process. For example, a common question surrounding doing trans research at PhD level suggested a kind of admiration and expected competence in doing research. And this was different from when I was doing research as an Honour's student, where being a green

researcher was met with different reactions often bordering on infantilisation. Doing a PhD is framed through racialised and classed respectability politics, and even so, doing it abroad at a European institution. Given how current valuations of excellence and success are figured in the socio-political and cultural landscape of the country, doing or holding a PhD is considered a valuable and, thus, respected achievement that accords one a sense of responsibility. So, my position as a researcher allowed for different kinds of rapport to emerge with my research collaborators.

Transparency

Transparency in trans research is important (Vincent 2018), particularly concerning the benefits of the research to the collaborators involved in the study. Research collaborators contribute their intellectual and emotional labour (Vincent 2018). As such, research collaborators in this study were each compensated with a R250 voucher as a token of appreciation for participating. This approach is informed by feminist ethics of care attentive to power disparities and readings of economic precarity (Warnock, Taylor, and Horton 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the economic precarity in South Africa and further increased the vulnerability of LGBT people (Reid and Ritholtz 2020). In my approach to respectful research practices, I recognise ethics of care as "contextual decision-making responding to embodied needs and relationships" (Warnock, Taylor, and Horton 2022, 196). That is, I understand that requesting research collaborators to give their time for free is not always an option for everyone. In addition, requesting collaborators to participate in a digital interview requires internet access through Wi-Fi or mobile data, which is expensive. Offering compensation to research collaborators does not come without its risks. Some scholars have argued that payment in research may affect research integrity, which "includes participants feeling greater pressure to provide the data that they perceive researchers to be seeking" (Warnock, Taylor, and Horton 2022, 197). Nevertheless, the assumption that payment distorts consent can underestimate collaborators' decision-making capacity (Warnock, Taylor, and Horton 2022). This study is designed in such a way as to protect the integrity of the collaborators as well as the research process to ensure the continuous maintenance of good research practice. The use of payment in this study was to thank the participants for their time and expertise. As Head notes, it is common for researchers to pay participants to "provide an expression of thanks for the time given by the participant to a study" (2009, 337). Another point of consideration in this research is the attentive consideration of socio-political and economic realities of the context and the emotional labour of participating in this kind of research.

Laher, Fynn, and Kramer (2019, 397) contend that "ethics in the global south community contexts should pay special attention to limited resources, power relations between researchers and participants, and participants abilities to consent, given language barriers and literacy". Life history research requires time; life history interviews are weighty in content and affect (Hatch and Wisniewski 1995). Throughout my data collection between 2021 and 2023, I conducted lengthy life history interviews with each collaborator at times more than once. During this time, my collaborators' lives have changed, some more than others. For example, one of my collaborators, who is an undocumented immigrant, has moved to different residential places multiple times since we first spoke in 2021, and another is currently unhoused. Finding time and resources to participate in this study is labour, which I acknowledge and compensated even though that compensation is insufficient in relation to their expansive and detailed narrative contributions to the study. While it is important to continuously reflect on our subject positions in relation to our research collaborators and the contexts we research, we ought to acknowledge that acknowledgement alone does little to challenge the unequal power dynamics that inherently exist in research processes and processes of knowledge production. I do not yet know what strategies better allow us to significantly challenge these specific power dynamics, particularly at the level of PhD student research.

Concluding Reflections

In this chapter, I introduced and discussed the methodological anchoring I used in this research, inspired by black trans feminist approaches to doing research (particularly with trans people) and explained the process of recruitment, sampling, and data collection, as well as the approach to narrative analysis. I discussed life history research as a significant approach to collecting storied data and how, through narrative analysis, I analysed the life histories. I also discussed some important ethical considerations with which I have grappled in this research, alongside notes on reflexivity.

The analysis of narratives of trans masculine people's negotiation and navigation of urban city spaces unfold in four chapters: In Chapter 5, "Inhabiting the City: Textures of Urban Residential Spaces", I analyse how my research collaborators position themselves in the residential spaces where they live through how they narrate their experiences of navigating and moving in urban and suburban spaces. Chapter 6, "Normative Entanglements: Bodies, Masculinities, and Urban Spaces", sutures key trans masculine narratives of embodying masculinity, the role of the body in navigating masculine subject positions, and how spatialised gender impresses upon the visibility of trans

masculine bodies. Chapter 7, “On the Grooves of Leisure and Socialising Spaces”, takes as its point of departure trans masculine narratives of embodying public socialising and leisure spaces, showing how trans masculinities are constituted and constitute leisure spaces. Chapter 8, “Narratives of Formations and Practices of Community as Constitutions of Space”, analyses what and how trans masculine life is rendered viable and liveable through practices and constitutions of community as a constitution of urban space.

5. Inhabiting the City: Textures of Urban Residential Spaces

In this chapter, I analyse how the trans masculine people in this study narrate their experiences of residing in the cities of Cape Town and Johannesburg. I also attend to how they position themselves through their identities and the urban spaces they move in to make sense of the influences of varying social processes shaping their everyday urban realities. This chapter weaves stories that trace the emergence of trans masculine identities through different social processes and how the grammar of inhabiting space from the vantage points of trans masculinity illuminates the journeys and forms of mobility enfolded into the urban geographies of trans masculine people in the two cities.

This chapter is divided into two sections/themes: the first part analyses how the research collaborators living in Cape Town and Johannesburg, respectively, talk about the neighbourhoods in which they live and how, through those narratives, they frame their position in relation to the spaces where they live. The second section brings together the research collaborators' experiences of coming out as an index and repository for the emergence and expression of trans masculinities in different urban spaces.

This thematic ordering corresponds to the common narrative ordering and threads in my research collaborators' life histories. Throughout this analysis, I critically engage the emergent narratives of trans masculine subjectivity and spatiality in reference to relevant theoretical and empirical discussions on gender, class, race, and spatiality. Keeping in line with the intersectional interrogation and "analytic sensibility", that allows for the and analysis and "conceiving of categories not as distinct but always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power" (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 795).

This chapter shows how urban trans masculine spatial experiences are enunciated from various identity locations, illustrating how, they co-constitute the urban trans masculine experience in different and unstable intensities, finds new articulations in processes of exclusion and displacement as echoed in the life histories of some of the research collaborators in this study.

Inhabiting the City: A Sense of Space

This section comprises narratives of inhabiting the city, of locating and being located, as well as the textures of residing in the city and its urban residential areas. These narratives echo the trans masculine sense of space and place articulated through the grammars of mobility, safety and belonging. For example, some of my collaborators talked about mobilities initiated by plans to attend higher education in Cape Town, while those who are native to the city narrated movement as a rite of passage, such as moving out of their childhood homes to live independently. Their experiences of the city are marked by movement to and within suitable and convenient urban residentials areas (for some being closer to their university campus and others closer to their places of work). The narratives also instantiate the practices and enunciations of positioning oneself in the city within, against, and through the complex socioeconomic and political formations (historical and present) of Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Another common narrative thread in my research collaborators' life stories concerns how they experience living in their residential neighbourhoods by invoking the images and characteristics of their neighbourhood as points of contention in how they feel to be part of the communities/residential neighbourhoods in which they live. The values and ideological characteristics of the neighbourhoods are narrated as marked by exclusionary ideologies that deem certain spaces as inviting and welcoming to specific classes of people. The racialised, classed, and gendered lines that divide spaces restrict the forms of identities that may appear in that space and determine what actions may occur (Lefebvre 1974; Ahmed 2006b). Inhabiting and experiencing the cities from the different urban residential areas illuminate the embodied and spatially embedded trans masculine and gender non-normative geographies constantly enfolding in and enfolded into the complex spatio-temporalities of the cities. The following sub-theme includes trans masculine narratives of living in Cape Town. Specifically, this chapter illustrates the complex conjunction of wider historical processes and their co-constitution and differentiation in the everyday lived, concrete realities of trans people.

"How do people have the gall, the liver, to come up to me and invade my personal space like that"

Rosemary (they/them) is a 21-year-old white non-binary trans person who grew up in the inner-city of Cape Town and now lives with their family in a

suburb in Simon's Town. Simon's Town is a picturesque seaside town on the South Peninsula at the southern edge of Cape Town. Simon's Town is one of the many suburban areas that were declared 'White Groups Areas' in 1967 (South African History Online, n.d.). Rosemary who was raised in Cape Town has lived in their neighbourhood for over a decade. For our interview, I met Rosemary, who was with their partner, in a small café on Hout Street in the City Bowl[2] in Cape Town. They decided to meet in town, as the city centre is sometimes called, on the same day they had to be at a food market where they sell baked goods. As an entrepreneur, Rosemary tells me they mostly travel to town for market day; hence, it was preferable for them to meet me on the same day: "two birds one stone", they said. Having lived in in Simon's Town for over a decade, Rosemary disapproved of the character and composition of their residential neighbourhood, saying, "It's very small—mostly middle-aged, regular white suburban people. There's a big trend in my neighbourhood of yoga, cultural appropriation, smudging, kombucha, incense sticks, dreamcatchers, all that shit. It's one of those neighbourhoods; I'm not proud to live there". Rosemary distances themselves from the common aesthetic and cultural practices of their residential area. In their characterisation of the neighbourhood, there is also a cultural temporality within which Rosemary frames their neighbourhood through cultural appropriation seen as a cringeworthy and "out of touch". Cultural appropriation is centred as an out of touch practice that mostly "middle-aged white suburban people" in the neighbourhood engage in. Rosemary also mentioned that, in their neighbourhood, they have a neighbourhood watch and a WhatsApp group in which they exchange all kinds of neighbourhood-related information. They mention this neighbourhood watch WhatsApp group as a concentrated space in which they witness another facet of the character of their neighbourhood, one that is steeped in anti-black racism and hate for the baboons in the area:

> There are these women looking out of their windows like, *mimicking texting on their phone* "Oh, there's a bin picker stealing my recycling. I'm gonna call the cops." And like, "We should kill the baboons because they're invading; I can't believe I have to lock myself in my home." But just don't put food in your rubbish, and baboons won't come into your house. (Rosemary, w/21)

I asked Rosemary, given the socio-cultural climate of their neighbourhood, how they feel to live there. They said:

[2] Cape Town City Centre.

> It is a space I feel safe in. It's less of a "I would choose to be here because I feel safe" and more of a "I feel safe here because I've lived here since I was ten." It's more like "I'm used to it here" than—I mean, as crazy as they are, there's not a lot of actual—I'm in a very privileged position to be someone who's lived there for ten years. I'm white, and we own the house. Personally, I'm not the target of a lot of the hatred and prejudice that goes on...There is a lot of racism, I mean a lot of racism. I mean like people would post a picture of a black guy sitting on a side of the road and be like "whose gardener is this, I haven't seen him before." And it's like maybe he lives here, you know. But oh no! he couldn't possibly live here, no, no. (Rosemary, w/21)

Rosemary positions themself as opposed to socio-cultural climate of their residential neighbourhood, rejecting the prevailing racism (and anti-baboon takes). On the other hand, Rosemary's acknowledges that being a white person and owning property in the area shields them from the common prejudice and racist practices in the neighbourhood. Their racial position (being white) and property ownership (owned by their parents) mark them as out of reach for the prejudicial lines that determine who belongs and does not belong in the neighbourhood. Rosemary's characterisation of their neighbourhood also echoes the current context of the residential spaces in the post-apartheid city, particularly those that were reserved for white people only, as peculiarly racialised spaces made manifest in prevailing cultures that emphasise racist spatial norms (Robins 1998; Lemanski 2006). These racist spatial discourses demarcate and regiment what kinds of bodies can and are expected to occupy urban and suburban city spaces (Nayak 2010; Elijah Anderson 2021). Racialised and classed spatiality remains a key feature of Cape Town and its neighbourhoods. Subjectivity emerges as fraught, complicit and rejecting simultaneously the continuity and newer enunciations of place and race in the neighbourhood. Race and class hold a particular salience in framing what kinds of subjectivities and bodies are expected in the neighbourhood.

Experiences of racialised and classed constitutions of residential neighbourhoods were also considered alongside the changing socio-economic and cultural dynamics of urban neighbourhoods, primarily driven by the introduction of new capital. My first interview with Arlo was on Zoom. We connected during my second round of fieldwork when I was in Cape Town in the summer of 2023. Arlo (they/them) a 25-year-old, coloured, non-binary, trans masculine graduate student—tells me they have recently moved out of their parent's house in the Eastern suburbs of Cape Town to Woodstock, an inner-city residential area in the City Bowl. Woodstock is a multi-cultural and racially diverse primarily suburban area and one of the urban neighbourhoods experiencing significant socio-economic and demographic changes due to

gentrification processes (Nhlabathi and Maharaj 2021). Arlo was raised in a middle-class family and has lived in Cape Town all their life. They expressed joy and relief at finally leaving their family home. They tell me they moved to Woodstock to be closer to their university campus. Moving out of home also gave them a degree of freedom to further explore how they embody and express their gender. Arlo reflected on their recent move to Woodstock:

> A friend of mine who lives around the corner [in Woodstock] was like, "Oh, my friend is looking for a roommate you should go," and I was like, "I can't move in with some random man," and then I just moved in with this random man. He's so chilled, and the house is like just two guys being dudes. And it's so funny because I moved in with this random man in Woodstock. I don't even have street parking. I'm driving a shit car; I can't buy a new car because I can't put something new thing in the street in Woodstock. But this is such a safe space in comparison to where I came from. (Arlo, c/25)

Arlo talks about moving closer to the inner-city neighbourhood, a place considerably safer than where they lived before in their family home, in the Eastern suburbs. Elaborating on their experience of Woodstock a month into staying in the neighbourhood, Arlo cited the socio-economic and political processes shaping the neighbourhood as particularly salient in shaping their experience of the Woodstock. Arlo explained:

> There's this constant battle—I've been here a month, but there's this constant battle with gentrification that's just going on and on. Living in a semi-gentrified place is so weird. They say there's a guy who shoots guns every night on [street name] to keep the rates down. And I'm like, he's so real for that though…It's also like, I would walk down the road, over the weekend, and I'd wanna go to the marketplace to get some ridiculously priced nonsense food and, like, the demographics just changes. And you haven't even walked like four minutes, and it's just like white people who are willing to spend a thousand rands on a vinyl versus here where they are stealing my light on the weekend *laughs*. So weird! But it's still very much a space where I feel like I can—you know, I'm just vibing; I dress the way I want to dress, and my hair is the way I want it to be. (Arlo, c/25)

In this excerpt, Arlo locates their experiences of the neighbourhood by drawing on gentrification as a significant socio-economic and cultural process that shapes the topography and interpersonal dynamics of the neighbourhood and, thus, shapes how they also encounter it. Scholars have noted the socio-political and economic impact of gentrification in inner city neighbourhoods and its potential for displacing communities, sub-cultures, and the lives of many

working-class people, including gender and sexual minorities (Bayramoğlu 2013; Teppo and Millstein 2015; Visser 2018). Alluding to the displacement of gender and sexuality minorities in particular, a historical character of the apartheid displacement processes in various inner-city neighbourhoods in Cape Town (Ramsden-Karelse 2020), Arlo lamented the lack of visibility of older queer people in their neighbourhood, saying, "You don't see older queer people. In my environment, you don't see older queer people. Older queer people are fucking wiped out". Arlo narrates a complex picture of "living in a semi-gentrified" neighbourhood, marking the socio-economic and cultural affordances and constrictions of the current state of the neighbourhood intersecting with their ability to express themselves in the ways they desire and in which they can feel comfortable. Although new in the area, Arlo's invoking of the socio-economic realities of their neighbourhood positions their subjectivity as being intertwined and understood within the realities of living in a space where precarity and affluence are juxtaposed, laid bare in the everyday realities of the space. The change in space dynamics within a "four-minute" walk speaks to the calculus of precarity—where visibility and safety become an urgent negotiation regimented through the spatio-temporality of liveable and unliveable life. This is made particularly clear when Arlo also tells me that driving home at night is an unsafe undertaking, where they must park on the street in the dark because the streetlights do not work. Whilst some parts of the neighbourhood become more accessible and safer for those with access to capital, some parts of the same neighbourhood wrestle with the effects of economic inequality, marking certain streets as unsafe to drive (or walk) at night. Arlo narrates their subject position as implicated within this continuity of historical and present socio-economic shifts that shape the experience of living in the neighbourhood.

The gentrification of neighbourhoods in the city also converges with a racialised and classed housing crisis (Levenson 2014; Dooling 2018). The city's housing crisis impacts the quality of the lives of many low-income people, particularly low-income and poor black and coloured and low-income communities. For most of my research collaborators, who like Arlo are students, navigating living in the city and its housing dynamics presented varying challenges which at times included contorting one's identity to fit into its dehumanising requirements for housing. This was the case for Qiniso (they/them), a 25-year-old black trans masculine person who's been living in Cape Town for a couple of years, having moved to the city from another province for studies at university. Qiniso completed their degree just before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. At the time of our first interview on Zoom in the summer of 2022 (December), Qiniso was unhoused

and unemployed, and had been living with friends in a suburban residential neighbourhood in Saldanha Bay on the West Coast[3]. When I met them in person for our second interview in February 2023, they had just moved in with another friend in the neighbourhood of Claremont in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town. Qiniso told me about their experience of living in Cape Town as an unhoused and unemployed person: "I was on the West Coast for some time, around nine months. Being in the West Coast, I had to take being misgendered, having the wrong name used on me, and how dehumanising that was". In this excerpt Qiniso narrates the concessions they had to make being housed in a neighbourhood that they described as "very conservative". Qiniso further reflected on navigating being unhoused in Cape Town:

> When I was moving up to Cape Town, I was initially moving to study (for graduate degree), but I didn't get in. And then I was supposed to move in with friends, and that didn't work out, and now I'm crashing at [name of friend] while I figure shit out. This city makes it difficult to have housing, even if you have the means. It will pick you apart *sigh*. Places would say that, maybe it's a shared place, "females only", "males only". How do I navigate that? I literally have to say, "You don't have to know my gender, its fine." I'm just gonna say "female" because that's what you're gonna assume anyway. There's a lot of violence around housing. I've been here for about a month; I moved back to Cape Town in February. In other ways so much has changed, but for me I feel like, shit not much has changed in terms of like *silence*…yeah…*sighs*. But I still stand on the same point that violence is the default; it's a default setting. (Qiniso, b/25)

What this excerpt gestures to is another layer to the housing instability and displacement that are part of the experience of living in the city for the unemployed, low income and poor. Also, Qiniso's narrative suggests the interplay of the racialised and classed gender binary as an index to the housing practices that trans and gender non-normative people are subjected to. The racialised and classed gender binary as an exclusionary aspect of housing practices is an embedded feature of the post-apartheid urban formations of the city (Beinart and Dubow 1995; Feagin 1999; Oldfield 2004). Racist and classist gender binary practices are built into a housing system that violently excludes variously marginalised people in the city, particularly black, coloured and gender non-normative people who are also disproportionately affected by unemployment and being unhoused in the city. Further, the practices informing access to housing also play into the constitution of the urban landscape through

[3] Saldanha bay is a town 105 kilometres northwest of Cape Town

specific socio-economic and political processes. Processes that, for example, compound the degradation and dehumanisation of low-income, poor, black trans and gender non-normative people in the city through transphobic rental practices that only recognise racist binary constructions and expressions of gender (cf. Bhagat 2018; 2023). These discriminatory rental practices also maintain for anyone whose embodiment is formed and articulated outside of the racialised gender binary that their housing needs are not a matter of urgency nor attentive consideration, thus rendering black trans and queer people's housing needs inconsequential. Qiniso positions themself as almost helpless against the overwhelming power of the city's housing practices that lend themselves to various iterations of violence meted out at those made unrecognisable and, thus, unaccounted for in the city's classed and racist landscape. Being unhoused and trans presents challenges to daily living, where negotiating space becomes a matter of life and death. Gender is a life-giving or -taking register and practice that determines the quality and place of a person's life in the city. The findings in this study corroborate the recent scholarship noting that the various exclusionary socio-economic practices that shape the constitution of and spatial profile of urban areas that privilege those with economic capital, regimented through racialisation and gender (cf. Melgaço and Xavier Pinto Coelho 2022). Moreover, the experiences of living in the city as a trans person variously located through gender, race and class echo recent similar reports on LGBTQ people's experiences of housing and homelessness in various city spaces, both in the global south and global north contexts (cf. Shelton et al. 2018; B. Fraser, Chisholm, and Pierse 2021).

For other trans masculine people in this study, experiences of housing instability and transphobia were articulated in the context of being temporarily housed with family. For example, Fish (he/him), a 21-year-old white trans man moved to Cape Town from another province after completing high school to live with his brother in Greenpoint, an affluent inner-city suburban area on the Atlantic seaboard of Cape Town. At the time of his moving, Fish had been medically transitioning for a year prior but due to his doctor putting him on a low dosage of testosterone as a teenager, he states that he had not experienced any noticeable physical changes. For our interview, I met up with Fish at a hotel restaurant in Greenpoint. Fish tells his story of moving to Cape Town and finding it challenging to exist in the city and at home with his brother. He elaborated:

> Coming to Cape Town, I lived with my brother, and he is a bigot. I will just straight up say it: he is a horrible human being. Still to this day does not gender me correctly, doesn't use my proper name. He still doesn't understand

> transgender no matter how many videos and articles I send. So, living here, going through so many changes with my hormones and living with someone who does not see me, sorry…*teary*…was very difficult. I went through a really great depression my first year in Cape Town. And then, during the second year, I got a job, and I moved out like immediately. (Fish, w/21)

From this excerpt, Fish narrates a complexity between living in a discriminatory household that was detrimental to his mental health. Fish positions his brother through a specific ideological orientation, "he is a bigot", a set of beliefs and practices through which his identity as a trans man is unacknowledged and disavowed. Thus, experiencing the changes from testosterone in a home space that is emotionally unsafe contributed to his depression. Reflecting on the forms of housing/living dynamics available to him as a self-employed artist, Fish emphasised shared housing/co-living with friends and/or romantic partners as the most viable form of accommodation for him in the city. Elaborating on co-living with their partner who was also living with their other partner, Fish said: "At first, I used to stay at my partner at the time's house all the time during the first year, just because I couldn't stand being at my brother's". Fish further mentioned:

> But when I got the job and I moved out, I stayed with them for a little bit, and then things evolved to the point where the other partner was no longer a part of our lives. So, he left because he just basically cheated with someone who sexually assaulted me. So, we decided that we would rather have him out of our lives. So, then it was just me and my partner in the house; there and then, we decided to move into this new house with two other people who are also a couple. (Fish, W/21)

In this excerpt, Fish positions co-living arrangements sutured through romantic relationships as a viable practice for navigating access to housing in the city. Similar insights on the shifting boundaries of queer romantic relationship arrangements in the city interwoven into the shifting dynamics of living arrangements have been noted in recent scholarship (cf. Kottmann 2022). This orientation and practice for negotiating living in the city rubs against a dominant socio-economic and political wave that is premised on nuclear, individualist formations of family and residence in the city (I come back to this insight in Chapter 8, specifically on the articulations and practices of community in the city's urban spaces).

Living in the city means strategically negotiating economic access, trans and gender non-normative identity, and continually assessing spaces where it is safe to make your trans identity known or not. These are everyday decisions

with which the trans masculine people in this study contend as they navigate the hegemonically gender-conservative socio-economic and political landscape of the city. As shown thus far in the narratives of trans masculine experiences of Cape Town, their lives are variously enmeshed in unstable and changing socio-economic, political and interpersonal processes. These interwoven processes significantly shape how trans masculinity is positioned and framed in relation to the landscapes in which (and through which) trans masculine life can emerge and become possible.

While the gender conservative socio-economic reality shaping trans masculine life emerges in these narratives as making impossible trans life difficult, it does not however suggest it impossible. What it also alludes to is the experience and visibility of trans subjectivities as unexpected and involving a differentiated cost to living in the city's urban areas. This differentiated cost is illustrated in the negotiation of safety along racial and class lines where being visible and safely occupying public urban space necessitate a hyperawareness of body, space and gender expression. Being trans or gender non-normative in the city still carries the possibility of being met with violence. Speaking to this aspect of experiencing the city, Qiniso summed up their embodied negotiation of public urban spaces in Cape Town, saying:

> In the community at large, like Cape Town, I feel like there's palatable violences—there's stares and then there's people coming straight up to me. But also, how do people have the gall, the liver, to come up to me and invade my personal space like that and feel like they have a say in my beingness. It's always scary seeing how much people are…people feel entitled to my space, to my personal space, and that's quite scary. (Qiniso, b/25)

In this excerpt, Qiniso frames the violence they encounter along a grammar that enunciates the spectrum of palatability—not in the sense of pleasant and acceptable—but alludes to those violences that are not physical or proximal to the body but are still affectively dense and communicate a specific form of disavowal. The other end of the spectrum of palatability frames the shrunken spatio-temporality of violence where the boy space is invaded. Thus, inhabiting the city space is marked by relations of power patterned by different proximities and practices of violence. Qiniso's narrative of Cape Town as characterised by "palatable violences" gestures to the power-geometry of living in and navigating the city, against and beyond its popularised narrative as a 'gay capital' (Rink 2013). To this end, Qiniso bemoaned hailing the city as gay capital:

> You know what makes me upset about this city is the fact that it positions itself as the gay capital, which is an unearned title. And it being that, it only caters to certain types of queer and trans people. And if you're not any of that, then it will ensure that it continues to put violence and to erase as much as possible. And that's what marginalisation is, it's a thing of being pushed to the margins with the intent to erase. But it's impossible, because we're still here. We exist, and we're still gonna exist. (Qiniso, b/25)

Qiniso summarised their reflection on existing in and navigating the city by pointing to the contradictions of the gay capital image and the exclusions inherent in the construction of Cape Town as a gay-friendly city. The selling point of the city's gay politics through the frame of the 'gay capital' disguises the cost for being enfolded into the norm. In the excerpt above, Qiniso also points to the continuity of their life, of trans and gender non-normative lives, as resistance against practices of erasure and marginality that are meted out through the cultural hegemony of racialised and classed binary cis-hetero-patriarchy. Their insistence on not acquiescing to the norm and continuing to create their life over and against the palatable violences marks one strategy for negotiating a liveable life in the city.

For other trans masculine people in this study, a necessary practice for continuing to live in the city meant seeking mental health care. For example, Fish reflected on the decline of his mental health in the first year of living in Cape Town:

> I really wanted to move out of Cape Town in December last year; my mental health was not good. But then I booked myself into [name of psychiatric institution], which is a mental health institute, and I spent a month there and regained a lot of my self-confidence. Also, I'm completely sober now because I used to smoke a lot of weed and all of that stuff. (Fish, w/21)

In this excerpt, Fish talks about his experience with deteriorating mental health precipitated by his experiences of living in Cape Town. The ability to access and stay at a private mental healthcare facility marked the turning point for him and his decision to continue to live in the city. Quality healthcare services in the country, like many basic services, are still unequally accessible to the majority who rely on public healthcare, especially trans and queer people (cf. A. Müller 2017; Meer and Müller 2017)

In another narrative summing up the experiences of trans life in the city, some trans masculine people talked about being queer and trans as compounding the vulnerability of navigating the city. For example, Arlo reflected on what it is like to be a queer trans person in the city:

> As queer people, we're constantly in danger; we're constantly stressed. I'm walking around with my fucking knife; I want to get a gun. The result of me not feeling safe is me holding tension in my body and my mind, all the time. I literally have chronic pain from stress. Yeah, it comes from work as well; the thesis is driving me crazy, so I have like aches all over and I have to go do physio all the time. But a lot of that stress also comes from being unsafe and navigating spaces where I know I'm not—like you know, I can't be too loud about who I am. So that's the thing. So, what does the sense of unsafety do to you physically? I think a lot. (Arlo, c/25)

Walking while trans, as Edelman (2014) writes, indexes the anxieties tied to being visible as trans in public spaces, as Arlo narrates. In the excerpt above, regarding navigating their neighbourhood and the city, Arlo gestures to geographies of anxiety where walking in parts of the city is marked by constant anticipation of harm. Arlo also positions their identity in relation to being visible through a negotiation of safety to avoid being "too loud about who I am" in a space where the ubiquity of gender and sexual-based violence marks the social and spatial fabric of the city (I come back to considerations of the body in space in Chapter 6 in more detail). The embodied geographies of urban neighbourhoods in and around Cape Town are mediated through different strategies for creating and maintaining a viable trans masculine life. A significant suture for these strategies is access to economic capital (through work or family) that further makes possible access to services like mental healthcare, and safe and stable housing in safer neighbourhoods. Further, economic capital is interconnected with structural racism that lend themselves to processes determining the experience and profile of the urban. Another constitutive part of the production of trans urban trans lives through these structural processes and individual positions is manifested in trans necropolitics that render poor black trans lives as disposable and undesirable within the urban formations of the city. These intertwining mediations regiment the experience and emergence of trans masculine subjectivities in the city's urban neighbourhoods and the city at large. What these narratives also gesture to is the complicated negotiation that emerge patterns of urban life in which identity positions enfold with and against urban processes of housing, family and relationships. Manifesting in layered and textured compositions as well as, at times, seemingly improvisational ways of forging liveable lives in urban spaces that are constantly shifting and shaped by intertwining socio-economic, political, and interpersonal dynamics.

"I do feel like I belong in Joburg"

In Johannesburg, my research collaborators narrated being situated in their neighbourhoods differently from the Capetonians. Their stories emphasised an affective landscape of calm and chaos—particularly mediated by the affordances of class positions, citizenship status, and long-term residence in some neighbourhoods—that permeate their daily experiences of living in the city. This affective landscape is also regulated through the class positions from which my research collaborators narrate their experiences. Where, for example, for those who were born to and raised in middle to upper class families native to or long-term residents of the city, notions of calm formed part of their grammars of navigating and existing in the city. Meanwhile, for research collaborators from working class backgrounds whose situatedness in the city formed part of long and precarious recent migratory journeys, their positioning of the city and their relation to it invoked chaos as the standpoint from which they made sense of their experiences.

Over half of my research collaborators in Johannesburg trace their backgrounds to towns and cities outside of Johannesburg and some outside of the country. Their trajectories in the city entwined their desires to pursue a university education and find better opportunities for creating and maintaining liveable lives. In the country's/continent's popular cultural imagery, Johannesburg is known as the city of dreams, the city of gold, where people pursue their dreams (Falkof and Van Staden 2020). Encountering the city's rhythm through their neighbourhoods was revealed by some of my research collaborators as a jarring experience. For example, Mpho is a 24-year-old black trans man who grew up in a neighbouring province and moved to Jo'burg to study at university and lives in Auckland Park. Auckland Park is a trendy upmarket suburb closer to the Johannesburg CBD that is home to a large public university's campus, thus making university students among the most prominent of its diverse population. At the time of our interview, he had been living in Johannesburg for over three years. We had our conversation via Zoom, where Mpho shared his contrasting experience of living in Johannesburg:

> I'm a small-town boy. I can't get used to the fast-paceness of Johannesburg. It's quite weird cos I've been here for a while. I feel like, by now, I should be used to the way everything just goes; people get up very early in the morning, and they rush to get to wherever they want to. Nobody has time to say hi to you or even acknowledge your existence. That was another shocker because, where I'm from, if you say hi to someone, they'll say hi back. Here, they will, but some people will just ignore you, point blank. It's very loud as well. I'm very

> sensitive when it comes to noises; I find myself moving around Auckland Park trying to find a place where I can just be calm in my own place. (Mpho, b/24)

Johannesburg is a city constantly in motion. As in the excerpt above, Mpho narrates the loss of a kind of socialising and being in a community where casual greeting is a form of seeing and being seen. While noting the fast-paced rhythm of the city, Mpho also acknowledged that he does feel safe living in his neighbourhood. Being a student also orients Mpho's movements in the neighbourhood, mapping his movements primarily through being a student of a middle-class background where his parents support his livelihood that makes it possible to carve out a quiet life in the neighbourhood. Further, across my research collaborators' narratives, invoking the affordances of their middle-class positionings framed their experiences of residential spaces as calm against the backdrop of the fast-paced rhythm of the city. The "fast-pacedness" of Johannesburg is due to its extensive inequalities—namely, high unemployment rubbing against high cost of living (Masango 2020).

Tyler (he/him) is a 25-year-old black trans man who lives in a gated estate in Midrand, Johannesburg. Midrand, located in the north of Johannesburg, is popularly known as the halfway area between Pretoria and Johannesburg. Tyler was raised in…At the time of our first interview via Zoom, Tyler lived and worked in a suburb just outside Johannesburg. This was also during the COVID-19 lockdowns implemented by the South African government, which came up in Tyler's talking about movement, or lack thereof, in the city space where he lived. He said, "I like it here because it is calm; I don't feel like I'm anywhere. It sounds strange, but I don't feel like I'm 'in this place.' Maybe that's cos I'm in my apartment now because of COVID, so I don't actually feel that I'm anywhere." Over a year later, I met with Tyler in a café at a shopping mall in Midrand. I enquired about his move to Midrand and living in a gated community, if he feels like he is "anywhere" now. In a neutral tone, Tyler recounted:

> It is not so different; of course, there are less trees in Johannesburg, depending on where you live, of course. But it is a quiet and nice place; I barely see any people. But I'm still new there, so I guess in some ways I still feel like not being anywhere really. (Tyler, b/25)

Gated estates "are residential areas with restricted access in which normally public spaces are privatised. They are security developments with designated perimeters…and controlled entrances that are intended to prevent penetration by nonresidents" (Blakely and Snyder 1997, 2). Gated communities have become a permanent feature of the residential landscape of major cities around

the world (Webster, Glasze, and Frantz 2002; Chacko and Varghese 2009). In the South African context, gated communities are inhabited predominantly by the middle and upper classes (Durington 2006) and have been criticised for "embedding the existing patterns of socio-spatial urban fragmentation and protecting the wealth at the expense of the poor" (Lemanski, Landman, and Durington 2008, 135). The justifications for the enclaves vary, while the prominent justification for their existence in post-apartheid South Africa has been the fear of crime driving the heavy securitisation in gated communities (Lemanski, Landman, and Durington 2008). Tyler's narrative characterises living in a gated community as "not being anywhere", drawing a parallel to the absence of the kind of community and sociality he was a part of that the COVID-19 pandemic took away—and now, in some ways, being replicated by his living in a gated community. I got to experience Tyler's characterisation of "not being anywhere" on our way to dropping him off at his estate after our interview. Driving into the heavily securitised gated community, the fast-paced rhythm of the city disappears into a kind of "nowhere" in the narrowly detached row apartment blocks arranged along several looping streets, imbuing the space with a calm and quiet atmosphere. "This is it," Tyler said, gesturing to the rows of apartment blocks as our shared Uber ride arrived at his house. Gated communities offer a curated sense of safety and stability through the heavily guarded high-security estate. Here, affordance marks who can live and enjoy the safety of the gated community. As such, Tyler's experiences of calm are mediated through this affordance.

Other research collaborators shared similar experiences of living in gated communities in Midrand, where experiences of being sheltered marked the grammars of their inhabitation. Mister J (he/him) is a 32-year-old Asian South African trans man who lives with his family in a gated estate in Midrand. At the time of our first interview on Zoom, Mister J had been visiting family in Asia. On growing up in a large middle-class family in Midrand as a first generation Asian South African, Mister J described his experience of growing up as a 'sheltered kid', saying:

> I joke around and say I grew up on the rock and the rock is my family because it feels like I never really got exposed to a lot, not culturally. I didn't really go out with friends, I didn't watch a lot of movies, I just hid in my room and read my books, that was how I grew up. (Mister J, asian/32).

At our in-person meeting, Mister J also emphasised how central his community is to his identity and noted that living with his family and nearby his relatives mediates his experience of the space, especially after coming out as trans. Pointing his house out to me in the estate he said: "that's my house over there

and my aunt is just further down the street". Mister J narrates this proximity as the character of his family, one that also mediates his experiences of being trans in the space.

The narratives of residential spaces in Johannesburg also underscore the relatively welcoming spaces in which trans masculine people whose normative embodiments and practices of masculinity are enfolded into neighbourhood spaces and, thus, extend the contours of how residential spaces are constructed and construct identity. In Soweto, located in the south of Johannesburg, the sentiment of calmness was also shared and centred around family and community. Wanga is a 25-year-old black trans man who was raised in a working-class family in Soweto. Talking about his neighbourhood in Soweto, wanga framed as 'chilled'. Soweto is South Africa's largest township, with a population of over 1.7 million people (Statistics South Africa 2012). Soweto is simultaneously urban, rural, and suburban (Livermon 2014). Elaborating on the easy-going character of his neighbourhood, Wanga said:

> It's quiet this side; compared to muhamba uya [name of township] or the old [name of township], this side is very quiet. Yindawo yabogogo, sihlala nabogogo ngapha. It's very nice. It's chilled. So iyouth engapha sonke siyazi ukuthi our parents left us nabogogo ngapha… It's not really hectic like most amakasi la e Soweto. (Wanga, b/25)

> It's quiet this side; compared to when you go to [name of township] or the old [name of township] this side is very quiet. It's an old people's place; we live with our grandmothers here. It's very nice. It's chilled. So, all the youth on this side, we know that our parents left us with our grandmothers. It's not hectic like most townships here in [name of township]. (Wanga, b/25)

In this excerpt, Wanga tells a story of his neighbourhood by invoking the presence of elders in the community, particularly grandmothers, who are connected to the calm temperament of their neighbourhood. Wanga also gestures to another important factor that characterises his family, and his community, that of being a place where it is common for parents to leave their children with grandparents primarily for work. Wanga comparing his neighbourhood to other townships around, spoke fondly of his community, positioning himself as a child of the community, and mentioned it as a space where he feels safe and seen. Johannesburg, similar to Cape Town, has a long history of black queer sociality (Tucker 2009b; Ramsden-Karelse 2020). On the other hand, recent work on black queer geographies in Johannesburg (Canham 2017; Livermon 2014) underscore the differential access to spaces for visibly queer people, especially lesbian women and the sense of unsafety

they experience as black lesbian women. For trans masculine people, like Wanga, who have been medically transitioning for a while now and whose expression and practice of masculinity is normative, how they are perceived and navigate space is contingent on being 'under the radar' of racialised homophobic and transphobic violence.

Being 'under the radar' is also mediated by class and race. For example, Sam (he/him) is a 25-year-old white Jewish trans man who grew up in Johannesburg. Sam is a graduate student and lives in Killarney, a relatively affluent suburb in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg with a population of above 5000 inhabitants (Statistics South Africa 2012). Add more about Killarney. I asked Sam about his experiences of living in Jo'burg, and he responded: "I'm white, I'm upper class, I live in the northern suburbs, and I'm perceived as a straight white man, you know…I think I present very straight, which is also…I need to figure out ways of not doing that." Sam began his response by naming the different social identities he holds, to signal the position he speak from. In the naming of these categories, saying "you know" there's an expectation that I as a fellow scholar would understand what they mean, collectively. Our first interview was on Zoom during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sam bemoaned the inability to access certain spaces because of COVID-19, sharing that, now that he is perceived "as a straight white man", his range of motion has increased, and he can now walk to certain spaces in the city without fearing for his safety.

Reflecting on living in the south of Johannesburg, Venus (they/them) a non-binary trans masculine musician who grew up in and lives with middle-class family in Johannesburg, talked about their neighbourhood as relatively safe:

> I live in a neighbourhood where I am fairly, and I've always been fairly safe, presenting masculine. I don't walk around with the fear of somebody snatching or stabbing me in the street for being myself. It is not a fear that I'm faced with every single day, and I am aware of the spaces of where that could happen. And I have the privilege of choosing not to go to those spaces. (Venus, b/28)

In this excerpt Venus frames their neighbourhood as safe to live in as a trans masculine person and contrasts their safety and ability to maintain it through their "privilege". Living at home with parents or having a job and being able to afford an apartment in a 'safe' area (for some in gated estates) were some of the distinctive aspects of an experience of safety in residential neighbourhoods around Johannesburg. While class, more so than and race, variously mediate and buffer the urban trans masculine experience, an intersecting status of being an immigrant presented challenges for some of my research collaborators who had moved to the city from neighbouring countries. Further, for those who

came into the city for studies or work, the choice of where to live for most of my research collaborators connected with their places of work or school. For King, a 37-year-old black trans man who migrated to Johannesburg from Zimbabwe over a decade ago, moving to Johannesburg CBD was out of convenience; he wanted to get closer to his job. King moved to Johannesburg over a decade ago after being rejected and disowned by his family because he was as a lesbian. King's move to South Africa can be understood through the concept of gender refugees, a concept I borrow from Camminga (2019, 129) to refer to "those who can make claims to refugee status, fleeing their countries of origin based on the persecution of their gender identity". In Johannesburg, King first moved in with his sister on the promise that he "would change his lifestyle". Failing to change, King tells me that his sister asked him to move out of her house. Living in the CBD, King characterises the state of the Johannesburg CBD as a residential place as "way too busy to be a residential place; it's too loud, it's too busy, it's too dirty, it's just everything negative. I guess everybody lives here for convenience because everything you need is, like, within your reach". Inquiring further into King's explication of the inner-city residence as convenient despite its "loud" and "dirty" character, he explained:

> When I moved to SA, I lived in the north, and then I got a job, and I had—the company was in the CBD, and I had to move to the CBD because my salary was small, and I just needed to be able to walk and cut out few expenses. It was ok for me, I guess because majority of my time I was at work. If you have a busy schedule, you don't really feel the craziness and the busyness because you're hardly ever in the chaos. (King, b/37)

In study of the urban lives of the residents of Johannesburg's central business district, Mosselson (2020, 153) found that "life in the inner city is lived in relation to feelings of endangerment and anxiety". Similarly in this study, my research collaborators who live in the CBD, negotiating safe movement in this space is contingent on a heightened awareness of themself in relation to the spaces of the CBD. Further, King also noted that the chaos of the CBD makes it difficult for it to feel residential; it is not commensurate with gaining access to a community. King, condensed his analysis of life in the city saying:

> South Africa, it's not safe for anyone, really, for citizens and non-citizens alike. I live in Joburg CBD where all the crime—and I guess for me, because I'm on this side of my transition, you know, being a man there is that male privilege I get when I don't need it. So, to a certain extent, I am safe, but also, I have to then really be extra careful to make sure that people don't get to know that I am

> this, because once they know hell will break loose. It's a lot of things, but I am here now; I'm happy, content, and comfortable. (King, b/37)

Nevertheless, King positions himself as being at home in Johannesburg's CBD, "I do feel like I belong in Jo'burg", explaining that:

> I've actually figured out how to navigate the space being a non-citizen because, apparently, they have this thing where people that look foreign, or people that look Zimbabwean, and I guess I've just figured out how to blend in and dress in a way that does not make me stand out. (King, b/37)

The trans masculine narratives in this study also gesture to the idea of urban/city life and its affordances for queer and trans life. Negotiating the city's residential spaces involves considerations for how gender expression is received and reacted to. Becoming and existing in the city, for trans masculine people, is filtered through varying vantage points that coalesce and emphasise how identity norms—race, class, migration status—shape how bodies move and are invited into different spaces. Residential spaces are not fixed, and neither are trans masculine subjectivities. While cities are marked as relatively safe for certain forms of queer and trans life, these narratives reveal the nuances and complexities of violence, that is, they are not always grand bodily harms witnessed by others but happen in the everyday unnoticed moments: in conversation, in touch, in expressions. As this chapter suggests thus far, there are no linear, uncontested subject positions that are unmarked by varying degrees of constricted mobility in the city's urban spaces. This point brings me to how trans masculine people in this study distil and make sense of their presence in the cities, especially how they assess the condition of navigating the everyday landscapes of academic institutions and the city writ large. In these narratives, as seen in this section, the anticipation of spatialised violence and harm permeates the social fabric of the cities, shaping the textures of trans masculine life. Cutting across these narratives is the notion that violence is a perpetual and ever-present character of life in the cities, whether this violence comes in the form of transphobia, racism, classism, sexual violence, or other registers of violence. My impulse in bringing these narratives into this analysis is not to suggest that trans masculine lives are marked wholly by perpetual violence, but to suggest that the city space, in its currents and rhythms, is predicated upon and perpetuates varying iterations of violence that regulate and regiment gender subjectivities and modes of being in the city and its surrounding areas. That is, violence is not only one of the conditions of trans life but of life in the city in general; to exist in the city is to live with the possibility of encountering violence in various spatial landscapes.

In the following section of this chapter, I introduce another narrative arc framing urban trans masculine spatial experiences through the constitutive experiences of coming out, space and sexuality. Coming out was a common thread in the narratives of sexuality and the urban residential area. Drawing from these narratives, I use coming out as a spatial metaphor—suggesting emergence or letting into a space of identity and orienting oneself in space—to track how trans masculine people articulate and embody gender non-normative masculinities and sexualities in their immediate urban spaces. I also analyse the attendant navigational strategies that orient the process. Specifically, here I explore how trans masculine people orient and locate themselves through their coming out processes and what spaces come into focus in their narratives of coming out.

Coming Out, Letting In

Narratives of coming out are always narratives of place and space (Rhoads 1994; Smuts 2011; Nygren, Öhman, and Olofsson 2016). Queer geographical scholarship has emphasised the importance of attending to how queer sexualities shape and are shaped by geographies to map a geography of sexualities that is expansive as well as critical of hierarchies and essentialist constructions of sexuality identities and spaces (Elder 1999; Binnie and Valentine 1999; Oswin 2013; Johnston 2016). While scholarship on transgender geographies is still nascent, the available scholarship (drawing from queer geographies) marks an important turning point, where geographical scholarship pays attention to the binary articulations of gender that are taken for granted, illustrating how the binary construction of gender (and by extension sexuality) dictates how trans and gender non-normative people are treated and reacted to in varying spaces (Aizura 2018; Cotten 2012; Abelson 2016; Camminga 2019). The processes of negotiating trans masculine subjectivities are punctuated by narratives of how space shapes coming out and negotiating trans and sexuality embodiment. In the trans masculine narratives, coming out is both spatial encounter and identity movement, where gender and sexuality identity intertwine and becomes the register through which contentions with and constructions of space are fleshed out. Coming out as a spatial metaphor also registers the complex negotiation, orientation, and expression of trans and sexuality identity in urban social spaces. It also indexes the "push and pull", as one trans masculine research collaborator notes, of the choreography of navigating trans masculine identity against spaces that either

refuse or make possible the emergence and visibility of trans and gender non-normative subjectivities. To whom, how and where trans masculine people come out or "let in", as one research collaborator phrases it, is an important movement and encounter shaped both by discursive and material realities that frame space and gender embodiment. Under the theme of coming out/letting in, I analyse how coming out/letting narratives bring into focus the proximal spaces of home, school, and university and, thus, how they organise and embed understandings and constructions of the gender and sexuality.

"Cause now I'm stuck in the house with people who are like, 'You're a what, now?'"

Coming out and negotiating non-normative gender and sexuality embodiment presented different challenges to my research collaborators. Alongside coming out, some of my research collaborators who are university students began their medical transitioning journeys during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. They reflected on how the movement to isolation during the lockdowns meant that they had to come to terms with their identities and do this work while living with parents and other significant others with whom they had not shared or let in into their trans masculine identities. In similar reports, recent studies analysing the impact of COVID-19 on LGBT people show how the pandemic increased vulnerability, particularly among queer youth, as they spent more time in transphobic and unsupportive home spaces (cf. Paceley et al. 2021; Mitchell et al. 2022). For Tshepang, a 21-year-old black non-binary trans masculine graduate student, their coming out process coincided with being in their home province with family during the period when universities were shut down due to COVID-19. Tshepang grew up in a middle-class family in a neighbouring province and after completing high school they moved to Stellenbosch. Stellenbosch is a university town just outside of Cape Town. As a student, Tshepang spends time between their home province and their neighbourhood in Stellenbosch. Reflected on coming out to their family during their university break Tshepang recounted struggling with coming out to their family, saying, "I didn't know how this conversation was gonna go because, in the past, I was very hyper-feminine in my presentation, in the way that I spoke, and in the way that I interacted with people." As Tshepang continued to reflect on their process of coming out to their parents, they positioned themselves as anxious about the outcome when their gender embodiment had, up until that point, been "hyper-feminine". They continued:

> I kept it a secret, but in the same breath, I was building up a lot of resentment, because I was constantly being misgendered, and I was just like, I don't know how to tell them, and it was just like this tugging, push-pull, and then I decided to go back to Stellenbosch for a little break. Then I came back after my exams; I told them I was non-binary, my pronouns are they/them, and it didn't go well, like, it didn't go well. Just overall denial of what I was telling them. It's taken a long time, but now they are starting to get my pronouns right, and everything is cool, and we're Gucci again. (Tshepang, b/21)

The ability to move away from home is framed as part of the negotiation of coming out. Tshepang frames Stellenbosch as a space of respite in comparison to home, specifically for that moment of coming out. The "tugging, push-pull" points to the complex choreography of negotiating trans masculine identity in spaces where gender non-normative embodiment may not readily translate into the received vocabulary of gender embodiment. In a similar story, Mister J reflected on the timing of his coming out: "I came out when I got cancer, it was very much one of those like if I'm going to die, I would like to spend one day happy as who I am". At the time of his cancer diagnosis and treatment, Mister J had been living with his family and during the pandemic had to quarantine with them. He further elaborated:

> I've only been out as a man to my friends—I think, around 2018—and to my family around 2019. So basically, as the pandemic hit, I came out, which is not a smart move cos now I'm stuck in the house with people who are like, "You're a what, now?" And that's not the best place to be with my fragile state of mind. (Mister J, Asian/32)

In this excerpt Mister J considers the urgency of his coming out advanced by his cancer diagnosis and then having to live with his family as he was navigating his health. Like Tshepang, Mister J framed his family space as not particularly understanding of his transness, "My family, they are lovely, but I don't think they understand being trans and transition and all of those nuances." Home spaces shape how trans masculine people negotiate and navigate their identities. The discourses that shape identities within the home/family space and the attendant vocabularies determine how, when, and if trans masculine people can safely let in/come out to their families. Further, as the narratives in this study suggest, navigating trans masculine identity in a home space that is not completely understanding and supportive can adversely affect how trans people choose to embark on their transitioning journeys, further curtailing the spatio-temporality of trans identity.

For other trans masculine students living in shared student spaces, coming out was framed as an important part of connecting and showing up in that space as their authentic gendered self. This was the case for Vuyani (he/him), a 21-year-old black trans man student who lives in Observatory, a suburb in Cape Town. Obs, as the area is colloquially known, has a large student population and is located just outside of the Cape Town city centre. Vuyani grew up in a neighbouring province and recently moved to Cape Town for university. At the time of our Zoom interview, he had just moved to a shared student house. He talked about letting his housemates know his gender identity as an important part of establishing secure relationships within the space he lives. He said:

> I spoke to one of my housemates last week told them that I want to medically transition…and they were like, "Why don't you just embrace yourself, you have a beautiful smile." He's been more understanding since; he's teaching me how to play the guitar…I thought he was gonna be super judgemental about it after he said that, but he's fine, like, he was speaking to me about it and uyathanda ukwenza ijokes ngayo [he likes making jokes about it], so it's fine. (Vuyani, b/21)

In this excerpt, Vuyani positions his housemate as understanding despite starting off with a dismissive response to his coming out. An added layer to the complexity of home spaces concerns the language within which trans subjectivities are articulated. Most of my research collaborators' first language is not English, yet how they reflect on their identities is through English and the received grammar of transness permeating popular discourses of trans and gender non-normativity. The legibility of transgender identities is negotiated through a gender grammar that entwines medical speak. For my research collaborators who did not live with their significant others, the processes of coming out involved modes of communication that prioritised doing it from a distance to manage the anticipated outcome of the process. For example, Tyler reflected on how he waited to come out to his parents and, as his voice changed because of taking testosterone, he stopped talking to his parents on the phone. Tyler's biological parents live in another province in the country. Tyler has lived in Johannesburg for most of his life. He explained that, while his parents understood English, he wanted to write them a letter in Zulu to ensure the message would be fully heard and understood. Tyler said of his growing up: "I grew up with—my guardians are white, and I grew up with them for most of my life so I didn't learn how to speak Zulu the way most people would". Reflecting on his anxiety over the process, Tyler recalled:

> When I came out to my parents, I didn't wanna do it at home cos, like I said, my anxiety is through the roof. On top of that, I was like, what if something happens and I'm at home? I can't leave, you know, it's not safe…I asked my friend to—I wrote a letter, and I asked her to translate it to Zulu, because my Zulu is a bit tricky. (Tyler, b/25)

In this excerpt Tyler frames the letter as the best method of communicating with his parents. A letter in this context signifies importance and formality of the subject of its contents. On translating the letter, Tyler said, "Even when she [his friend] translated it, there was no Zulu word for writing transgender. Transgender was still one of the words written in English, but my mom understood." Similarly, reflecting on his coming out, Wanga notes how he did it gradually and allowed his family to notice the changes as he was medically transitioning. He said, "ngikhulume nogogo [I spoke with my grandmother] because she ended up asking me and I told her and told everyone else. I think things started to get real when they started to see changes and my whole face changing". Letting their family into the transitioning and experiencing the changes alongside them was important part of coming out. But this process was not always received well by family and other significant other. Some trans masculine people were violently discouraged from coming out and transitioning by their significant others. This was the case for Ellis, a 28-year-old white non-binary trans masculine person who has been living in Cape Town for over five years having moved from a country in Europe to complete his graduate studies in Cape Town. In their story of coming out, Ellis narrated a complex process with significant others and being met with violence. Elaborating on an incident after coming out to their then partner, Ellis said:

> I was hooking up with this guy, straight cis guy, and I was like, "Oh, I don't think I'm a woman," and he was like, "No, you're woman." I was just sharing my thought process as well, and I was like, "I'm a lesbian," and he's like, "But, like, you're hooking up with me; I don't think you're a lesbian." Anyway, this ended. And then, a month later, he came back in the middle of the night, and he raped me. And he was saying that he loves me and that I'm not a lesbian. It was really fucked up, and I was like, I'm definitely never gonna touch a man again. And I just pushed everything away, and I didn't think about it for a long time. (Ellis, w/28)

Ellis reflects on the traumatic process of coming out marked by sexual violence. In the context of gender and sexual based violence endemic in the country, Ellis's story invokes the all too familiar experiences of trans and queer people who experience sexual violence. Interpersonal sexual violence is

consistent with wider coercive patriarchal constitutions of gender and sexuality in which they are only accepted as articulated through cis-heteronormativity (Gqola 2007). Ellis also reflected on another complexity of their coming out process:

> I was like, I need to come out to my mother, because I can't just change without her knowing and then she sees me. So, I tried, and she was like, "I don't wanna talk about this; this makes my brain hurt," and she just hung up on me. She also said, "Oh, but you'll always be my beautiful girl." And I was like, "Why do I need to be a girl to be beautiful?" The fact that my mom didn't accept me, I was like, oh, I can't do this, so I put it off again for like nine months. (Ellis, W/28)

Decisions to come out and transition are enmeshed with family histories, even across borders, and interpersonal violence steeped in gender and sexual-based violence (cf. Aizura 2018). Trans masculine people's narratives in this study also lay bare the spatial and relational conditions of the emergence and visibility of trans masculinities, illuminating how trans identity is negotiated and experienced within networks of varying spatialities, including home spaces where familial support (or lack thereof) can upend the processes of becoming, for example, through medical transitioning or having one's home and body violently invaded because of heteronormative and patriarchal violence. The spaces in which trans masculine people come out affect how they express their identities, further shaping the decisions and timing for their medical transitioning.

"I didn't want to beg people to just accept me, you know?"

Research on trans people's experiences of university spaces, particularly classroom spaces, report on how trans students face a lack of support in terms of incorporating gender knowledges inclusive of trans students (Beemyn 2005; Jourian, Simmons, and Devaney 2015; Pryor 2015). Other recent studies on trans identity and higher education have shown how transphobia continues to mark the experiences of trans students on university campuses (Siegel 2019; Nicolazzo 2016). The narratives in this study also contribute insights into this growing area of inquiry. Specifically, in narratives of navigating the social spaces of learning, my research collaborators named academic spaces in which they are invested and spent most of their professional time as particularly exhausting, despite posing as liberatory spaces. As most of my research collaborators have a recently completed or were still in university, academic spaces were described with disappointment as being conservative and

inflexible to trans masculine and gender non-normative people. What is particularly illuminating in these narratives is not only that academic spaces are sometimes hostile, but how everyday microaggressions are experienced and negotiated, revealing the complex interplay of social identities and how variously situated gender non-normative people are invited to and interacted with in these spaces. For example, at the time of our first interview, Tshepang (they/them) had just graduated from university with their bachelor's degree, and they reflected on their experience at their university and how their changing gender expression and identity shaped their movement and negotiation of the space:

> OK, like I said, I was hyperfeminine *sings the word hyperfeminine*. Look, I was a woman, you know what I mean? I had braids, red nail polish, like, tight clothes…all of that stuff, and it was really different because, like, I like to compare to now and before the lockdown, it was a sort of perversion and objectification that I've been used to, if that makes sense. As a black cis—at the time, bi-curious woman—you know, I just felt like I was easily accepted into spaces *Zoom image freezes*, I just felt like this sort of presentation would get me a better, easy…more acceptable presence in the space. (Tshepang, b/21)

Tshepang talked about navigating a feminine presentation, although they were reacted to with "perversion and objectification" because hyper femininity was easily accepted into spaces of their university. Academic spaces are not exempt from cis-normative and hetero-patriarchal norms. Trans masculine people who transitioned while at university also spoke about encountering microaggressions that were a slight on their identity. Like Tshepang, Ellis, who joined a new academic department after completing their PhD said, "I got to introduce myself, and I've been telling everyone my pronouns are they/them, and my name is Ellis, and it's been a hard time *laughs*". Other trans masculine people preferred not to come out at university, expressing their reluctance based on not wanting to beg for respect:

> I was very anxious, scared of like breaking—scared of making things complicated for other people, inconveniencing people. I didn't wanna change anything, because I didn't want my last two years of varsity to being like me saying, "Please, sir, just do the right thing". Like, I didn't want to beg people to just accept me, you know? So, I decided I was gonna ride it this way. (Tyler, b/25)

In this excerpt, Tyler positions their university space as not particularly open to their identity, and the prospect of navigating coming out in the space heightened their anxiety. In a different constitution of the university space,

Qiniso, who was raised in the Christian faith, spoke of their university as a space that offered them freedom to explore their identity and, thus, became a space crucial to their embodiment and understanding of sexuality and trans masculinity. They tell me:

> As more people were starting to come out or let us in to their world —I don't like the term coming out—I was like, people are gay, you're not gonna die. And I had really started transgressing so many things in Christianity and I always find it so wild that I actually made a decision at that point that, you know, I'd rather go to hell actually. That I find very scary because I firmly believed in hell at that moment. (Qiniso, b/25)

In Qiniso's reflection, religion has an enduring hold on how trans masculine people negotiate coming out. Qiniso positions themself against Christianity as a behemoth of influence on their identity. Coming out is narrated as transgressing Christianity in a space that allows for the visibility and expression of gender non-normative and sexuality identities. Christianity is one of the country's most popular and influential religions and heavily influences the understanding and construction of identity and space. Queer scholarship has shown how Christianity regiments how bodies appear in spaces and inflects a gendered morality that curtails 'undesirable' gender and sexuality embodiments (Reddy 2009; Stobie 2014).

Although university spaces can be liberatory spaces for exploring and constructing trans masculine identities, for others, university spaces were encountered as dismissive and conservative. For instance, Mpho, who is also a university student, talks about coming back to university from home after the first COVID-19 lockdown, having started medically transitioning:

> Some people were excited to see me; some people thought I was lying about my identity when I'd come out as trans. The reaction I got at the time was always, "Why?" which was also weird. So, when I came back, and people are seeing these changes—my voice is different, grew a bit taller, physically stronger, and just a little bit bigger—they were like, "Yo, you were actually serious?" But, like, do you know how serious it is? It's not a fashion parade; I didn't pick something out from a trend and said that this is me. (Mpho, b/24)

For trans masculine people whose coming out processes began while they were still in high school, they recalled the scaremongering religious and moral judgements said to await queer and gender non-conforming people. For Arlo, who went to a religious school, reflecting on their coming out, they share a story of queerness that was talked about in their school context:

> I went to a catholic primary school; it was horrible. I have this memory of this teacher coming in—I was in grade six, and she came in the class, and she said, "Children, we must pray," and everyone is like, what is going on? And she's like, "I just heard this song now on KFM, disgusting." She's like, "This lady was singing about kissing girls and liking it; we must pray." And I was just like, bro, is it that serious? But it's kak funny, but also really horrible, because it's one thing to be taught that how you are is a sin and you're going to hell. She's like, "Everyone who is like this is going to hell." I'm like, brooo. (Arlo, c/25)

As the narratives in this study show, various discourses of identity shape and impress upon the spaces in and through which trans masculinity emerges, influencing how others are let in on the embodiment of gender non-normative identities. For trans and gender non-normative people, university spaces may offer freedom (cf. Pryor 2015; Jourian 2019) and distance from the primary spaces of socialisation—home spaces and residential communities—to explore trans identity. In this study, my research collaborators describe home spaces as both relatively constricting and reluctantly supportive.

Concluding Reflections

The life histories of trans masculine people reflect the complex processes of trans identity work and the embedded spatial influences on how identity emerges, is negotiated, and made visible or elided from recognisability in various spatial configurations. What is also glaring from these narratives is how trans masculine people negotiate their subjectivities—shifting, reticent, ambivalent—along other intersecting identities, where there are concessions and losses experienced in spatial planes, specifically where maintaining safety requires making concessions with normative registers of embodiment. The material realities of trans masculine people dictate the conditions of their lives and how they stake a claim to their identities in different social spaces. Further, the cities' political, economic, and social realities impress upon the materiality and syntax that animate trans masculine subjectivities (Desai 2023). Trans masculinities cannot be understood outside of these processes. While both the cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town are hailed for their extensive histories and presents of queer socialities, this study shows that racialised gender binaries and racialised spatialities animate the conditions that permit viable trans masculine subjectivities, complicating the visibility of trans masculinities. Thus, trans subjectivities emerge through hierarchies punctuated by undulating formations of class, gender, race, and space, in which class marks the dominant thread in how urban trans masculine subjectivities are negotiated and navigated in the urban contemporary moment. What is also shown is the varying residential configurations in and through which trans

masculine lives are lived and negotiated, emphasising that there is no one story of trans masculinities and, certainly, no one story of either Johannesburg or Cape Town queer and trans socialities. As Massey (1994, 155) theorised, "places do not have single, unique 'identities'; they are full of internal differences and conflicts". The different classed spatial configurations of both cities provide different affective dimensions to trans masculine life and, thus, create many possibilities and restrictions for how trans masculine subjectivities emerge (or fail to emerge) in the cities through normative registers of subjectivation (Tucker 2009b; Livermon 2012).

The emergent narratives in this section also point to complicated navigation of everyday life in the neighbourhoods where my research collaborators live. Institutionalised and systemic practices of neglect and degradation continue to shape the quotidian experiences of living for trans masculine people, where negotiations of safety and liveable spaces are regimented through racialised and classed gender binary frameworks. These are built into the fabric of the city and continue to find new, evolved ways through which to embed socio-economic and gender inequalities. For example, walking the line between economic inequalities and navigating safety of expression in a gentrified neighbourhood presents a complex array of contentions surrounding for whom the space is safe enough to live (and from what people need to be safe) and express their identities in the ways they feel comfortable. Further, transgender life in the city is regimented through access to economic capital that mediates the experiences of being trans against/within processes of gendered racialisation embedded in the topographies of the neighbourhoods and the city. Access to capital also mediates the forms of socialities in which trans subjectivity and embodiment are constituted as well as the grammars through which it becomes legible and visible (Desai 2023). In this sense, capital also regiments the grammar within which to articulate and make known differently positioned trans masculine embodiments—not only the grammars but the technologies of bodily modification that trans people can access.

In the following chapter, I analyse how trans masculine people narrate and constitute their bodies and masculinities, trace the logics constituting social spaces, and reflect on how trans masculinities are negotiated and experienced.

6. Normative Entanglements: Bodies, Masculinities, and Urban Spaces

In this chapter, I analyse how trans masculine people understand, shape and experience their bodies in relation to different constructions of gender and space. Structured into two thematic sections, in the first part of the chapter I analyse how trans masculine people understand their bodies in relation to gender and strategically draw from dominant formations of masculinities to safely negotiate public urban spaces. In the second part of the chapter, I analyse how they negotiate their identities in public urban spaces, focusing on narratives of encounters with racialised cis-heteropatriarchal constitutions of masculinities and analyses how race/ism and practices of toxic masculinities enfold the understanding and performance of trans masculinities in public spaces. This analysis is builds on the analytic of queer orientations (Ahmed 2006) and masculinities off-centre developed in Chapter 3. It is also situated within intersectional accounts of identity and subjectivity that emphasise the fragmented constitution of gender and the discursive operations that produce and conceal what qualifies as a masculine subject (Butler 1990; Collins 2002).

Embodying masculinities is a critical vantage point in this study that allows for an analysis of how trans masculinities are constituted within and against gender and spatial norms. A range of studies exploring the geographies of masculinities (Connell 1998; Reddy 1998; Berg and Longhurst 2003; Morrell and Ouzgane 2005) and recent scholarship on trans masculine geographies (Abelson 2016; Rogers 2019) have emphasised how masculinities are socially constructed and vary in their iterations in different spaces. These varied constructions and articulations of masculinities are also contingent on intersecting social categories such as sexuality, race, dis/ability, and age, shaping how masculine bodies appear, are read into, and are read in different spaces (Kimmel, Hearn, and Connell 2004; Peltola and Phoenix 2022; Shefer, Ratele, and Strebel 2007; Everitt-Penhale and Ratele 2015). Similarly, the key trans masculine narratives in this chapter underscore both similar and divergent

insights on the reciprocal constitution of bodies, masculinities, and space, pointing to a critical navigation and negotiation of trans masculine embodiment. Trans masculinities emerge within and against dominant discursive processes that regiment the constitution and viability of masculine subjectivities. These also follow spatio-temporal and economic patterns in which articulations, expressions, and practices of masculinities are contingent on (and are negotiated based on) the spatio-temporal context of the urban space and the economic and social affordances of each trans masculine person's social position.

Inhabiting a Body, (Un)inhabiting a Norm

The key trans masculine narratives of the body were enunciated through experiences of gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is "a sense of unhappiness over the incongruence between how one subjectively understands one's experience of gender and how one's gender is perceived by others" (Stryker [2008]2017, 17). For some, dysphoria curtailed the experience being at home and comfortable in their bodies when in public spaces. For others, understanding their bodies according to popular narratives about what 'trans bodies' look like heightened their experience of discomfort in their bodies. Narratives of what 'trans bodies' look like entwined essentialist masculine ideals. This was emphasised in how trans masculine people narrated feeling compelled to aspire to and fashion their bodies through similar frames and desires, specifically for muscular and thin bodies. Popular discourses of trans masculinity entwined in ideas of skinny/muscular/lean bodies are drawn on in trans masculine people's negotiation and are also encountered alongside disordered eating, self-harm, and other body and mental health issues (Galupo, Cusack, and Morris 2021). For trans masculine people in this study, dominant ideas of trans masculinity coalesce with already fractured relationships with their bodies. Thus, the body is enunciated the body as a battleground for contradictory feelings, desires, normative ideals of masculinities and bodies.

"My body is just a body": On In/Expensive Articulations of the Trans Masculine Body

Most of my research collaborators narrate their understanding and experience of their bodies through popular cis-normative masculinity body ideals that equate masculinity with muscularity. All but two of my research collaborators

have at various times and to varying degrees, undergone medical transitioning in the form of testosterone hormone therapy. While at various stages of their testosterone hormone therapies, the dominant narrative however centres around actively working towards accepting their bodies in the ways they currently are and working towards healthier forms of improving their body-gender relationships. In situating their embodiment of masculinity through dominant notions of cis-normative masculine bodies, the body emerges as indexed by both gender dysphoria and cis-normative notions of ideal masculine bodies. The ideal masculine bodies are also posited as an attainment that requires a lot of financial investment; an undertaking available to some but not others.

For example, at an earlier point in our conversation, Venus (they/them) who comes from a middle-class background, lamented articulated their discomfort in talking about their gender related struggles as a middle-class person. Citing that it often feels like unfairly taking up space as their socio-economic position shields them from the brunt of the violence meted out at gender non-normative trans people in the city. Nevertheless, bracketing their middle-class guilt, Venus reflected on the complicated relationship between their body and gender. Grappling with how their body materialises their gender, they invoked their slim body frame and difficulty in gaining muscle as a challenge to their sense of comfort in their gender expression, particularly in how they show up in public social spaces. Venus elaborated:

> I wanted to build muscle, and I could never build muscle working out in the traditional ways. So I started doing yoga, because I was like, I need to breathe, I need to work on my anxiety…even just the dysphoria is not as difficult, which has made being present in spaces—I can physically take up the space without feeling sorry for how my body is looking and focusing on the parts of my body that are not ideal to how I'd prefer them to look in a space. (Venus, b/28)

In this excerpt, Venus narrates their relationship with their body as one marked by anxiety over how the body appears in different spaces. The body itself is marked as a performative site for gender and the affective thrust of gender dysphoria is manifested through anxiety in taking up space and being visible in public social spaces. In dealing with dysphoric feelings that disconnect them from their body, Venus noted the importance of "the whole mental, spiritual, physical and striking a balance that does not make me feel dysphoric." To mediate dysphoric feelings, Venus gestures to considering their health not only from the bodily aspect (crucial for feeling comfortable in occupying social spaces) but also in other strategies for mediating comfort and presence with/in the body, such as yoga. The holistic outlook strategy is framed as allowing

Venus options to strategically negotiate their body and how they relate to and show up in different spaces.

Other research collaborators emphasised taking a similar holistic health consideration of their body and against gender dysphoria. Zuan (he/him) is a 23-year-old white trans man from a neighbourhood in Somerset West, a town within the greater City of Cape Town municipality. Zuan comes from a middle-class conservative Afrikaans family, and he began medically transitioning a couple of years ago but had to stop taking testosterone due to health reasons. In response to how his relationship with his body shapes his embodiment of masculinity, Zuan began by explaining how referring to himself as a transgender man thrust him into a series of processes that exacerbated his gender dysphoria. He says:

> I used to have a lot of gender dysphoria at the beginning when I identified and labelled myself a transgender man. So, I'm pre-surgery; I'm not afraid to say that. I will not go for any surgeries. I don't want to cut my body because, one, I used to self-harm a lot. I don't want any more cuts on my body, even if it is to make me more comfortable or whatever. I don't want that. That's one, but also, it's just super expensive. The way I view this is my body is just a body; that's what I believe, and that's how I view it. (Zuan, w/23)

Gender-affirming medical procedures, which are scantily available and usually expensive, are the bedrock of popular trans and gender non-normative narratives (Prosser 1998; D. Valentine 2007; Aizura 2018). Similar to recent research on trans people and coming out, most of my collaborators talked about encountering trans people and trans narratives on the internet, mostly on social media and television shows (Raun 2016; Haimson et al. 2021). They reflected on how trans surgeries and hormones were the defining aspects of being trans. For example, in the excerpt above, Zuan's narrative suggests a grappling with understanding his gender and body through the popular discourse that defines transgender through transmedicalism, "an ideology stipulating that both gender dysphoria and (a strong desire for) medical transition are required in order to be considered 'genuinely' transgender" (Konnelly 2021, 3). For example, Zuan positions his embodiment of trans masculinity against this popular discourse of transmedicalism, citing his complex relationship with his body, self-harm, and the cost of gender-affirming procedures. The compounding implications of transmedicalism discourses embed normative binary constitutions of gender and, thus, complicate and shape how trans masculine people think of their bodies, how they relate to them, and the kinds of masculinities they want to embody. The discourse of transmedicalism also embeds racialised and classed bodily and gender norms. The trans masculine

narratives in this study also point to the discursive and material barriers through which trans masculine people negotiate their embodiment. For example, Arlo who, at the time of our interviews, was not undergoing hormone replacement therapy, mentioned how their grappling with being trans also centred heavily on how their masculinity is expressed through the body. Saying:

> It's also interesting with trans masculinity that, if you are thin, it's like the most preferable thing compared to if you're someone with curves, cos that's me. So, I wear, like, a lot of baggy clothes; it's a mess. So, either I lose all my weight and become skinny, but that's also not healthy. I had disordered eating situations in the past. I'm in recovery from that still. But the thing is, lose all that weight and become physically unhealthy, then I'll feel at home in my body. But I don't think that is the answer. So, the answer for me, transitioning now for me is building muscle. I love the gym; it is a site of euphoria for me, gender euphoria. (Arlo, c/25)

In this excerpt, Arlo's reflection invokes the materiality of their body and how it fails to fit into the received standard for trans masculine bodies as either skinny or muscular. Becoming unhealthy, through losing weight and being skinny, is equated with feeling at home in one's body and inhabiting acceptable versions of trans masculinity, ones in which curvy bodies fail to make the cut. The curvy body is constituted as an excess to normative and acceptable masculinities, a body that needs to be tamed As Bey (2021, 9) suggests, "the body or what we have come to understand as our body is subject to epistemic scrutiny; it is not privy to unmediated knowledge or our unproblematic possession". In this invocation, Arlo's narrative gestures to the pervasive fatphobic constructions of the gendered body where being fat does not equate to masculinity. Further, Arlo positions their body contrastingly as a site of struggle and hope for embodying intelligible masculinity while, at the same time, being constituted as a materiality already discounted from the ideal masculine body because it is "curvy". This contrasting framing is also echoed within a critique of the notion of ideal trans masculine bodies. This critique departs from what trans masculine scholarship asserts is a desire among trans men specifically to embody cis-assumed masculinities (Kłonkowska 2016; Saeidzadeh 2019).

The trans masculine people in this study position themselves within these contradictory notions of masculinity and idealised notions of bodies. They critically consider what is at stake in the desire and pursuit of normative masculine bodies, that is, bodies devoid of markers of femininity (i.e. being curvy). They locate their hopes and resolutions within carefully considered

notions of accepting their bodies and themselves. Thus, strengthening their relationships with their bodies to be more comfortable in their own definitions and embodiment of masculinity and taking up space as who they want to be, not how they ought to be. Strengthening and improving the body-gender relationship allowed some of my research collaborators to exist and embody their masculinities in more comfortable ways. Comfortable masculinities are those framed as self-defined, self-determined masculinities.

Reflecting on embodying masculinities that cohere with what is comfortable for them, Mpho who, with the financial support of his family, has been medically transitioning since 2020, recalled his experience of coming into his masculinity and affirming his body through discarding stereotypical masculine expressions. He recalled:

> At the beginning, I remember wanting to fit in. Suddenly, I'm interested in things like working out so that I can have this kind of body, being this kind of person…I felt like a teenager again…there was a sense of being lost in the wind. Now, I just try to exist as me. I don't have to change myself again just to fit into this mould cos I never fit into it to begin with. I don't have to follow society's norms. (Mpho, b/25)

In this excerpt, Mpho positions himself against "society's norms" of masculinity after at first desiring and rearticulating stereotypical masculinities as an urge to fit in. In the rejection of cis-masculinity norms, the trans masculine narratives in this study also suggest an insistence on forms of embodiment that do not adhere to cis-normative ideals of bodies and masculinities, tending towards articulations of masculinity that go beyond and against the norm, or masculinities off-centre.

Discarding cis-normative bodily and masculinity ideals was narrated by other trans masculine people as a form of healing. Qiniso who, at the time of our interviews, had paused their medical transitioning, saying "I went through a period of masculine medicalised transition which was cut short. Access to healthcare sucks". They narrated how they are working to improve their relationship with their body:

> I've been coming into my body, having a relationship with my body. I've been so divorced from my body because of dysphoria and whole other things. And now, finally being like, "Hey, what if I just looked at my body and liked it?" I also try to be myself to the best of my abilities. Because if I'm not being myself in my body, then that makes me feel uncomfortable. (Qiniso, b/25)

In this excerpt, Qiniso narrates their experience of dysphoria as feelings of disconnectedness from their body. Dysphoria marks the displacement and disconnectedness from one's body. As Qiniso told me, their experience of dysphoria also connects to embodying a gender (trans masculinity) that others cannot understand for what it is, that is, a gender that fails to become legible and recognisable through normative constitutions of masculinities. Through this double disconnectedness, being disconnected from their body and from expressing their gender through their body, the gendered body becomes unrecognisable to the self and to others, as it fails to emerge through a knowable gender register. In this affective landscape of navigating expressing trans masculinities and taking up space in public spaces, the masculinity and the body emerge through a grammar of anxiety, disconnectedness, dysphoria, and a sense of being lost. As this study shows, trans and gender non-normative identities are not exempt from the force of dominant constitutions acceptable and desirable gendered bodies (cf. Riley and Haritaworn 2013). That is, trans masculinity is constructed and articulated within, and not outside of, racialised and classed binary gender and body norms. As suggested in the excerpts from trans masculine people's life histories, the conditions that permit trans masculine bodies to be recognised and affirmingly be constituted as masculine are not reducible to just the materiality of the body. In narratives like Arlo's and Zuan's above, the prevailing discourses of trans masculine identity are encountered through other intersecting struggles with mental health and economic capital that further complicate how trans masculine people's bodies are constituted and emerge in different spatial planes. Further, the thrust of family financial support is significant in these narratives, marking the major artery that supports the processes and desires for bodies that cohere around idealised or resistant iterations of masculinities. The narratives also suggest that the materiality of the body is not a singular point for materialising gender; rather, the body is implicated through other competing discourses that construct one's whole being—gender being one aspect among many.

In this section, trans masculine narratives of the body and of embodying trans masculinities are enunciated through (and as a refusal of) constituting the body through trans masculine discourses of bodies and gender. For example, the insistence, 'my body is just a body', displaces gender as authoritative and dictates how the body ought to appear and be understood. Here the body is constituted not as an index for gender, but a materiality that is valid outside of the grasp of gender. Trans masculine people understand and position the already fractured negotiations of bodily norms and consider it harmful to contort their bodies to fit into normative ideals of masculinities and bodies. The ideal and comfortable body is also articulated through a grammar of

affordability that subsumed the body under the regiment of capital, where thinking and fashioning ideal 'healthy' relationships with the body were predominantly framed as only attainable through processes of transitioning, yoga, and strict gym regimens. Here again, the body comes to be disciplined by both gender norms and capital.

"I need to look the part and even be more cis than cis men"

Another set of narratives about the materiality of trans bodies—threading reflections on how bodies inflect the process of navigating trans masculinities in social spaces—reveals the conditions that permit or elide their emergence as critical for safely navigating and existing in public urban spaces. While personal relationships with the body inform how the body is constituted, understood, and negotiated in public spaces, these internal negotiations also spill over to how the trans body emerges and is encountered in public urban spaces (cf. Doan 2010).

My research collaborators reflected on their bodies as both the constraint and the constrained modality for expressing gender. How gender norms constitute the body dictates how trans masculine people are reacted to and treated in public spaces. Tyler, who has been medically transitioning for a couple of years, considered how his body appears and is read in public spaces as a crucial point of concern that shapes his daily activities. He said:

> My body influences so many of the decisions I make on a daily basis. Like going outside, for instance, and being like, "Oh my gosh, I have to bind," you know? And it's, like, never mind how uncomfortable it is at times, and also, it's expensive to bind. It's complicated because, you know, trying to explain to other people why you make the decisions you make, "Why are you wearing a jacket, mans?" and you have to be like, "Mans is not hot." But I'm very hot right now; I wish I didn't have to wear this jacket. (Tyler, b/25)

Tyler reflects on the daily experience of having to shape his body to fit into a recognisable masculinity as an exhausting, uncomfortable, and costly process. Binding (wearing compression garments to make the chest area look flatter) is positioned simultaneously as both a constriction of an otherwise materialisation of the body and an enfolding into a normative and intelligible expression of masculinity. The binder (and the jacket) tames an excess of the body, an excess rendered unsafe to be visible in public spaces. Tyler's narrative suggests an ideal masculinity that, while seemingly unattainable, is strategically deployed as necessary to emulate to safely navigate public spaces

(cf. Abelson 2014). Elaborating on safely navigating public spaces, Tyler recalled his experience with using public transportation and the space of taxi ranks as a prominent example of thoroughly making sure he appears, without a doubt, as a normative masculine man. He further explained:

> I think my dysphoria is very much influenced by the binary. When I think about how I wanna present outside, I'm trying to fit as much into the binary of male as I possibly can, because I don't wanna make life any more ambiguous than it's been most of my life, where I'm like, I don't know what's going, or taxi drivers trying to figure out what the hell is happening with me all the time. Now that I pass for the most part, I'm trying to make my life as simple as I possibly can. (Tyler, b/25)

In the excerpt above, Tyler positions his negotiation of masculinity and space as complicated by the gender binary, which necessitates eliminating any ambiguity in his embodiment, expression, and performance of masculinity. Passing is constituted in these narratives as an ongoing process for performing legible and acceptable masculinities in public spaces. Passing is also a politics of mobility, a strategy and practice for navigating urban spaces marked by the power-geometry (Massey 1993) of normative articulations of space and gender. Further, as a condition of intelligibility and safety, avoiding gender ambiguity indexes the construction of trans masculinity as materialised through normative structures of masculinity that simultaneously eliminate its evidence through the body. Interestingly, Tyler invokes the figure of a taxi driver as one of the regulatory figures of gender in public spaces. In South Africa, men dominate the mini-bus taxi industry, and most taxi drivers are male. Taxi rank spaces, while transient, have been reported as spaces of gendered violence, particularly against young women as well as gender and sexuality non-normative people (see Gqola 2007; Eagle and Kwele 2019). The figure of a taxi driver, constituted through conservative gender norms, and the space of a taxi rank conjure up the anxiety for women, queer, and gender non-normative people in the country experience in these spaces. Tyler's narrative, drawing from common incidences of gender and sexual violence in taxi rank spaces, suggests the anticipated reaction from an imagined public audience in a highly gendered space, which figures prominently in how he plans his movements in the city.

The narrative of bodily discomfort, compounded by the anticipation of the coercive cis-normative gaze in public spaces, also emerged in the trans masculine narratives of negotiation masculinity and space. For example, some of my research collaborators talked about strategically negotiating when to take up certain masculine embodiments and performances to avoid "making

life more difficult", as Thirty told me. Thirty (he/him) is a 30-year-old black trans man from Zimbabwe. He began medically transitioning shortly after he moved to Johannesburg in 2021. Reflecting on his embodiment of masculinity, he compared his life before and after medically transitioning to highlight how he navigated masculinity and how his body was perceived. Articulating his strategy for negotiating masculine embodiment, Thirty emphasised, "I didn't want to go into the world and live as myself before I was passing." Thirty emphasised passing as a measure of safety, as it allows him to avoid any violations of his personal space—through the disciplining cis-normative masculine gaze and intrusive questioning—when he navigates public spaces. Recent scholarship on transgender people's experiences of space underlines the labour that trans people have to take on in order to merely exist in public spaces (cf. Hargie, Mitchell, and Somerville 2017). The narratives in this study also extend the contours of these forms of labour, pointing to the labour of negotiating trans masculinities against constricting and coercive cis-normative spatial and gender norms.

For Thirty, his immigrant status added another layer of complexity to the labour of passing (Camminga 2019; Marnell 2023). Thirty reflected on how, while passing may make his movements in the city possible, his undocumented immigrant status poses a more significant challenge to navigating city spaces, saying, "The challenge is always when you must produce your paperwork. As long as I exist in spaces where documents are not an issue, I am Thirty, and this is how I present." Thirty positions his trans identity as caught up in the combined regulatory force of his immigration status, framing his navigation of public spaces as a delicate balance between visibility as a man and the threat of being discovered to be undocumented. This narrative gestures to precarious conditions marking the lives of immigrant trans people in the city. This narrative also echoes findings from recent scholarship on trans refugees that highlight the complexities of trans immigrant and refugee life in urban spaces and the compounding conditions that constrict access to services that support their creation and maintenance of liveable lives (see Cerezo et al. 2014; Camminga 2019; Rosati et al. 2021). The narratives in this study index how the combined forces of rigid gender and spatial norms intersect with constructions of citizenship to constitute trans masculinity as a precarious subject position that can easily be undone and become unmoored from public socialising spaces. As in Thirty's reflection above, he talked about finding respite only in spaces where there are queer and trans people; only there can his trans masculinity be known (I return to this aspect of visibility in queer trans and immigrant communities in Chapter 8). Being undocumented and labouring to pass compounds the constriction of trans masculine geographies

in the city, where visibility is contingent on and regulated by administrative and legal logics of residence status. This also speaks to how conservative everyday public spaces in the city are. Whereby to safely navigate the city spaces, trans and gender non-normative people have to labour on their gender expression in preference of intelligible cis-normative masculinities to maintain gender coherence and avoid ambiguity. Maintaining gender coherence is a rendering of life practised through grasping at and performing cis-normative masculinities as a necessary act of negotiating a liveable public life in the city.

Strategies for maintaining gender coherence were also deployed through rigorous bodily practices to eliminate any possibilities for doubt about trans masculine people's adherence to and performance of normative masculinity. For example, King (b/37) is also an immigrant and spends most of his time in and around Joburg CBD, where he lives and works. He has been medically transitioning for a couple of years now and has undergone gender-affirming surgical procedures. He explained how and why he must ensure his body appears as masculine as possible:

> I feel like, for my safety, I need to look the part and even be more cis than cis men…I think it's a safety coping mechanism that I even over-workout sometimes to a point where I feel like I'm hurting myself…But also, just living in SA; South Africa is not safe for non-South African citizens. It's a place that I love to hate. It's a place that gave me King; it gave me this man with access to hormones and access to trans-related care. (King, b/37)

In this excerpt, King reflects on the bodily cost of achieving and maintaining the idealised masculine body and, thus, ideal masculinity. He positions his as a place of anxious arrangements and fixations that idealise normative masculinity through harmful exercise practices. In King's narration of how he navigates masculinity in public spaces, he emphasised "overpassing" as a manifestation of becoming and being more masculine than cis men. This framing—negotiating safety through emulating unattainable idealised masculinities—suggests trans masculinities and trans bodies as excessive to normative cis masculinities, where trans masculinities are oriented towards rigorous trimmings, expressions of and adherence to binary masculinities. At the same time, they already exceed what is constructed as acceptable cis-normative masculinities. In these narratives, normative constitutions of masculine bodies, exemplified in the muscular cis-male body, operate as a singular modality and enunciation of masculinity that is indexed and understood across the time-space of the city as a condition for the safe navigation of public urban spaces.

Another framing of masculinities predicated on cis-male masculinities ensured to protect against unwarranted and harmful gendered harassment revealed the cost to this strategy. Reflecting on their movement in different public spatial configurations in Johannesburg, the trans men in this study reveal the costly labour of adhering to normative masculinities that simultaneously erase the visibility and presence of their trans identities in public spaces. This also suggests that the trans masculine strategic embodiment of cis-normative masculinities is a kind of mask. Both for resisting (through self-preservation and avoiding potential harm) and conforming to the cis-masculine/heterosexual masculine gaze that dominates the constitution of public spaces—the domain of intelligible masculinity expressions and performances. Moving through public spaces, my research collaborators narrated how they orient themselves towards always grasping at intelligible and recognised masculinities. This process is, however, not without its losses and complexities, as King explained in his negotiation of barbershop spaces in particular:

> I have this thing where I wanna get into those spaces (barbershops), and I look more masculine than everybody that is in that space. But then again, when I've blended in perfectly and it's nice, things start happening that make me feel like, oh no! I'm losing a big part of myself, which is my queerness, my transness. I'm proudly trans, as much as I want to pass as a cis man. (King, b/37)

This excerpt suggests the complicated loss, elision, or erasure of trans masculinity and queerness in the very pursuit of passing, thus affording no room for expression and emergence in public spaces (see also Worthen 2016; Baldo and Fiorilli 2017). Further, in this excerpt, cis-heteronormative masculinities are constituted as the idealised version of passing as a man, and heterosexuality is also articulated as the unmarked norm. Cis-heteronormative masculinities are strategically taken up to negotiate safety when occupying and moving through public spaces, such as the space of a barbershop. The embodiment and performance of cis-heteronormative masculinities necessitate the maintenance of trans bodies to regulate their appearance and monitor their adherence to the norm. Trans masculinities emerge through the ebbs and flows of safety and strategies for minimising the potential for appearing in a gender-ambiguous way or "slantwise" (Ahmed 2006b) in public spaces. Thus, as this excerpt suggests, in public urban spaces trans masculinities are enfolded into cis-heterosexual masculinity norms that regiment the domain of gendered spatiality, especially in how bodies ought to appear.

The trans masculine narratives in this study constitute trans masculinity as an excess of normative masculinities—that is, while trans masculinities

emerge through the normative category of racialised cis-masculinities, they always already exceed that category (Radi 2019; Chaudhry 2019). Navigating these simultaneously constrained and excessive masculinities also hinges on the materiality of the body, the surface upon which registers of masculinities are inscribed and regimented. Trans masculine bodies, in their multiple enunciations and embodiments, variously rub against, enfold into, and orient away from normative constructions of masculinities, agitating spatialised gender norms.

Navigating Articulations of Racialised Cis-Heteropatriarchal and Toxic Masculinities

Thus far, this chapter has established how trans masculinities are constituted through multiple and simultaneously occurring discursive and material practices that regiment how trans masculine experience their bodies, embody masculinity and navigate public urban spaces. In this section, I analyse another salient constitution of trans masculinities through narratives of encounters with racialised cis-heteropatriarchal expectations of masculinities. I also explore how race/ism and practices of toxic masculinities enfold the understanding and performance of trans masculinities in public spaces. Trans masculine people described occasions when they experienced their masculinities being reacted to primarily from a racialised frame and talked about how these moments marked out their bodies with unverbalised, yet implied, stereotypical constructions of racialised masculinities.

"I find all these things affect my daily life in a lot of different ways"

Sam has been medically transitioning for a couple of years, and he told me early on in our conversation, "I'm perceived as a straight white man, you know…I think I present very straight". He recalled an instance where the perception of him as a "straight white man" became glaring to him:

> A couple of months ago, I was at a pizza place outside Rosebank[4] with a friend of mine; she's a black woman. I was talking to her about a non-binary friend of

[4] Rosebank is a suburban residential and commercial area in Johannesburg.

> mine who uses she/her pronouns. I said, "Yeah, she's non-binary." I think it's the exact sentence I used, and this person came up to us with 'they/them' nails. This white person was like—they were just walking by, and it was a busy main street in Rosebank— they said, "Actually if someone is non-binary, you use they/them pronouns." I don't know how much of that was because I was speaking to a black woman. I think that was one of the times I was affronted by how much of my queerness is hidden. (Sam, w/25)

Sam positions being perceived as a "straight white man" as conflicting with and erasing the visibility of his queerness. Suggesting that, had he been visibly queer and trans, he would not have been corrected on his knowledge of non-binary identities. Sam's story suggests that, outside of stereotypical markers of queerness and transness, trans masculinities are enfolded into normative understandings of racialised masculinities in the contexts of public spaces. Similarly, being perceived as a cisgender white man was articulated by Fish as a begrudged positioning. Fish elaborated:

> Through transitioning and all that, I am happy with where I am now. I know that when people look at me, they don't think 'woman'. But I also feel a type of way about people who look at me and think 'cis white male', cos cis white men have brought so much damage and just bad things. *Fish's phone vibrates, incoming call*. #recording paused# What was I saying? Oh, my battered relationship with masculinity. So yeah, I do struggle a lot with being perceived as a cis white male. Obviously, I know that's not true, but I am perceived that way and, when I go to queer spaces especially, I am perceived as a gay cis white male…So, as happy as I am with my own transition, there's also a sense of resentment towards what I am perceived as. (Fish, w/21)

In this excerpt, Fish positions his identity as different from cis white male identity. Being a white trans masculine person is juxtaposed with the "damage cis white males have brought" and set apart from that constitution of white masculinities as damaging and bad. Objecting to the misrecognition of their identities, Fish, like Sam, distanced themselves from their masculinity being perceived through the frame of white masculinities.

Embodying trans masculine subject positions also brought my research collaborators in direct conflict with readings and understandings of masculinities that previously animated their own ways of responding to masculinities in public spaces. Queer and gender non-normative experiences of space in the city are marked by anxiety over the pervasiveness of gender and sexuality-based harassment and misogyny (Livermon 2012; Matebeni 2013). For some trans masculine people in this study, embodying masculinities means being perceived as a potential threat, particularly to women. For example,

Venus reflected on how coming into and embodying masculinity confronted them with the weight of their own and other's experiences and understandings of masculinity as scary and a threat. Venus explained how, as a social justice worker and someone who, in the past, had identified as a political lesbian, their life has revolved around being in black women's spaces. Venus said:

> What was scary about my masculinity is that, firstly, I love black women; I respect black women with all my heart. I will show up in black women's spaces and fight, you know, because black women spaces were also the first spaces where I felt accepted, even before queer spaces. Black women's spaces are always a lot more welcoming and a lot more accommodating. Realising that, the more I embraced my masculinity, when I would present in a more of masculine way, and seeing the fear in a woman's eyes when she's having to decide whether you're safe or not is such a traumatic thing to experience if you work in these spaces. (Venus, b/28)

In this excerpt, Venus connects their experience of masculinity with both being previously perceived as a black lesbian woman and now witnessing how their embodiment of masculinity is experienced as a potential threat to black women. Further, invoking their "love" for black women as a point of departure gestures to contending with the complexities of occupying the subject position of black man/masculinity as well as the condensed contextual understandings of threatening and harmful masculinities. Thus, in Venus's framing, the very presence of a man/trans masculine person in women's social justice spaces, spaces created out of resistive impulses, is constituted as threatening. While Venus does not position themself as a threat to women, the excerpt suggests that embodying and taking up subject positions proximal to masculinities coded as threatening enfolds them into the received registers of masculinities in social justice spaces. In this case, embodying trans masculinities is already considered within the logics of threatening, harmful or violent masculinities. To be in women's spaces as a trans masculine person, Venus's narrative suggests, is to be cognisant of the histories and experiences of how embodiment and performance of masculinities can lean into harmful stereotypes. In this reflection, Venus also positions their embodiment of masculinities within a wider cultural context of endemic gender- and sexuality-based violence. Although, as a trans masculine person they do not occupy the same social, cultural and structural privileges as cis-heterosexual men, such distinctions become blurred in everyday spaces. Where the most immediate way a person expresses themselves and is perceived falls within the dominant racialised binary understanding of what masculinities look like. Studies exploring the experiences of transgender people in spaces identified as lesbian

or queer highlight how dominant constructions of gender embed themselves in the expected behavioural norms in the space as well as how representations of self are flexible and unstable, coming up against the limitations of what can be understood (cf. Nash 2010). The narratives in this section contribute to these insights.

Navigating racialised masculine subject positions was also narrated by some of my research collaborators as a practice of coming to terms with the overwhelming process of being/becoming black men. Wanga, a black trans man from Soweto, recalled the moment when this became a reality for him:

> I realised when my family held a family meeting about me; it was a surprise meeting. I was upset, but I realised when my aunts told me, ukuthi, "Uyindoda emnyama [you're a black man now] whatever that means to you, but you're a black man now." I'm not gonna lie, when they said that, it made me realise that, sure, you get excited about transitioning and finally being free from dysphoria but, yho, the weight of being a black man. The system, it's scary. I'm a black man now; it's not about the physical now, it's about being a black man in SA. (Wanga, b/25)

Wanga narrates his family's insistence on letting him know the weight of being a black man, particularly in South Africa, without elaborating on the specificities of what they meant. Wanga's narrative also invoked "the system", suggesting the sedimented constitution of black masculinities in the country. Thus, Wanga's trans masculinity is considered and enfolded into the sedimented constitution of black masculinities or being a black man in South Africa. There remains an unclarified but implied generalised understanding of what it means to embody black masculinity. Articulated through "the system" this generalised understanding elides the possibility for articulating otherwise iterations of black masculinities (Langa and Leopeng 2024). Similarly, Qiniso narrates how occupying the subject position of black masculine has opened them up to new and different enunciations and processes of gendered power relations with which they grapple in everyday public spaces. Qiniso elaborated:

> Being able to carry my presence and then see how people treat me when they perceive me as a black man sometimes and how they relate to me *sighs*. I remember we were having a conversation on Twitter [X], and we were talking about this, and somebody said, because we're trans we don't have the same access to power as cishet men. And that is very true. But at the end of the day, if I am walking behind somebody I assume to be a woman, and they just turn back, not necessarily looking at me and they see a masculine figure, because of the way that I present, I need to just move to the other side, you know what I

> mean? Because they don't know who is behind them; they don't know whether I'm trans or cis. (Qiniso, b/25)

Qiniso reflects on how they have to navigate being perceived as black men in public spaces while, at the same time, remaining cognisant of how their masculinity is read and experienced by women in public spaces. In this framing, Qiniso connects their responsibility towards embodying masculinities that do not threaten or could be potentially harmful to women through the mere act of walking in public. At the same time, trans masculinity and blackness are considered in relation to who is in the space and then modifying how they move to avoid being potentially perceived as a threat. The awareness of being potentially feared shapes trans masculine people's movement and navigation of space (cf. Day 2006; Jourian and McCloud 2020; Langa 2020).

Racialised masculinities are enfolded in the spatial gendered norms in which the visibility of black and white masculinities provokes and garners different reactions, coded through varying degrees of threat and violence. The narratives of navigating black trans masculinities in the city's public spaces also emphasised a kind of whiplash that comes with the experience of black masculinity being feared. Mpho shared a story about an encounter he had at a supermarket in Auckland Park, the area where he lives. He recalled:

> Mpho: I remember one time I went to Woolies[5]. I was tired, I just wanted to make nachos at home. Go to Woolies, get the ingredients, come back home, make nachos, sleep. So, I'm standing in the line to pay for my food, and the lady in front of me, she's white, she starts clutching her handbag the closer I got. And now I'm like "No ways," like, do you see how long this line is, firstly? Secondly, how am I gonna take your handbag and run out, I'm gonna get caught before I even—so that was, that was heavy, also it didn't make sense in the setting to do that, but I understood kind of why, I just didn't expect it at all.
>
> esethu: When you say you understood kind of why, what did you understand that moment to be?
>
> Mpho: I understand that white women, generally, there's quite a few of them that find black men—like, their default setting in their mind is, this man is going to harm me in some sort of way. Be it true or not, like, that is what is implanted in their mind. Could be for a plethora of reasons, could be because it actually

[5] Woolworths is an Australian multinational chain of supermarkets and is colloquially called Woolies in South Africa.

> happened, or it's just, I don't know, maybe she was brought up that way, I wouldn't know. That's what I understood in that moment. (Mpho, b/24)

I quote this part of Mpho's story in length to attend to its complexities and for what it allows us to glean, however briefly, as an instance of the interiority of black trans masculinity in everyday narratives, which appear rather thinly in the broader landscape of trans studies. In this excerpt, Mpho narrates an everyday experience of shopping for food as marked by racialised constitutions of black masculinities. Mpho story suggests how he experienced being positioned as a threat during this encounter. Mpho's story sits in a wider cultural and political context that constitutes and represents black masculinities as pervasively violent and aggressive (cf. Langa et al. 2020). The spatial context of the supermarket in South Africa is often marked by surveillance and securitisation in the form of security guards at the entrances to the supermarket, who keep watch for potential thieves, and video surveillance. Navigating this space, already coded with racialised representations of gender, Mpho's narrative suggests that, in the space, his masculinity is coded as potentially criminal and violent. Narrating this experience, Mpho gestures to fatigue from encountering the grotesque gesture of the white woman clutching her handbag as he gets closer to her in the queue. This gesture is grotesque in how it embeds itself in the pervasive construction and representation of black masculinities as violent and aggressive. A plethora of critical race scholarship marks how racism shapes the spatial relations between black men/men of colour and white women as marked by microaggressions that recreate and reinforce the victim/victimiser dichotomy, with white women seen as at risk from racialised others (Wise 1998; McCabe 2009; Yancy 2012). Black trans masculinities are not untouched by these constructions of racialised masculinities. How bodies encounter each other in the spatio-temporal context of a supermarket, where gestures communicate a historicity and present encoded on the surface of bodies and spaces that dictate how people variously constituted by race and class emerge and are reacted to. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon ([1967] 2008, 84) writes about the dialectic of blackness in which the awareness of his body upon being encountered and interpellated as a Negro, was displaced into three positions: "I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved towards the other…and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared". Black trans masculinities are encountered through racialised notions of masculinity and space and, thus, mark their bodies for discomforting experiences of racial microaggressions in public spaces.

While, for some trans masculine people, constitutions of racialised masculinities were narrated as intercepting their negotiation of space, others narrated how racialised discourses of masculinities, in which they were socialised, informed their thinking about being and inhabiting public spaces. For example, Sam told a story about walking to work, something he can do more often now that he has been transitioning and is perceived as a straight white man. Sam explained:

> I've started walking from Killarney to Rosebank to work. It's [Johannesburg] not a city where people walk, but now I'm able to feel very safe in that. I think there's, again, scripts that have been coded in me that I am trying to unlearn. I think so much of apartheid mentality is built around the idea of the black man raping white women…so much of apartheid propaganda was about protecting white women. I think I'm still working on getting that coding out of my brain. Because so much of my life, I've been taught to see myself as fragile and as this person who's gonna be a victim at any moment when moving around the city. (Sam, w/25)

In this story of walking, Sam narrates an increased range of mobility, including walking in the city to get to work, something he did not often do before being perceived as a straight white man in public spaces. In this story, he places his activity of walking to work alongside ideological and material histories that shape the contemporary terrain of the city of Johannesburg. The expansiveness of movement results from the intersecting privileges that Sam invokes, that is, his class and racial backgrounds. He coalesces them into the broader historical white settler and apartheid spatial discourses that shaped (and continue to shape) spatiality and subjectivities in the city (cf. Matebeni 2011). The construction of the city space entwines the construction of racialised identities that punctuate even the experience of walking in the city (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; Falkof and Van Staden 2020). In Sam's story of walking, he situates his movements within the city as experienced through being socialised and constituted through "apartheid propaganda" that still positions him, a white trans man, as fragile and needing protection. Sam's narrative further emphasises that embodying white trans masculinities in everyday spaces is filtered through frames of socialisation and wider discourses of racial, spatial, and gender norms.

While racialised constitutions of masculinities embed trans masculinities in the histories and contemporary constructions and representations of masculinities in city spaces, another vector of being situated through residence status was narrated as complicating the experience of existing in the city. For

King, negotiating trans subjectivity in Johannesburg is negotiated through multiple minority positionalities. He noted:

> I refer to myself and others like me as multiple minorities, because we belong to a multiple minority group; we're black, we're trans, we are migrants, it's a lot of things. So, I find all these things affect my daily life in a lot of different ways. If it's not my transness that's getting me into trouble, it's my blackness. If it's not that, then it's my immigration status. It's a lot, it's always one thing or the other. (King, b/37)

Multiple minority positionalities compound to shape the precarious conditions of living and existing in the city in which migrant subject positions become variously enfolded into precarious navigational patterns of the city's urban spaces (Camminga 2019; Camminga and Marnell 2022). In this excerpt, King emphasises the intersectional constitutions of his identity, the intensities of which are manifested differently owing to the kinds of urban spaces in which he finds himself. For instance, as stated in Chapter 5, King emphasises negotiating Johannesburg's urban spaces where his migrant status is subsumed under his black masculinity.

"I had a kneejerk reaction to toxic masculinity and patriarchal masculinity"

Trans masculine narratives of coming out (as explored in Chapter 5) intimated another dimension of negotiating masculinities in relation to others and different urban spaces. In this section, predominant negotiations of masculinities were articulated around unlearning toxic masculinity. This aspect of relational masculinities was echoed through socialisation within coercive cis-heteropatriarchal masculinities in which being a woman, femme, queer, or gender non-normative person is constituted through grammars and practices of violent subordination (Boswell 2022). Most of my research collaborators framed the beginning of their medical transitioning journeys as points of rupture, revealing internalised cis-heteropatriarchal norms of embodying and practicing gender. For Fish, who started transitioning as a teenager, starting testosterone therapy brought to the fore desires for versions of masculinities that he considered misogynistic. He explained:

> Fish: When I first started testosterone, I was faced with a lot of misogyny. I tried to make myself the most man that I could and, with that, came a lot of misogynistic views. Even to this day, I am still unlearning a lot of things that I taught myself due to the fact that I was trying to project a specific thing; I was

> trying to appear the most man that I could. So, I would be like, women are blah blah blah.
>
> esethu: Tell me more about that…
>
> Fish: I think anyone that initially starts transitioning goes through that phase of, I'm going to be the most man that I can, and with that comes misogyny, which it shouldn't, because that's not what man is, but it is. That's what I've gone through. And, till this day, I am unlearning a lot of views that I have, especially with my brother and the family that I grew up in, where I've always been told that the woman cooks, and the man goes away and works, that's just how it is.

Fish framed growing up in a "conservative Afrikaans home" as having shaped his orientation towards traditional gender roles. Citing his family background and socialisation, Fish narrated unlearning misogyny and posed it alongside holding an anti-racist politic. As gestured to his refusal and resentment towards being perceived as a white cis male, Fish positions his socialisation and current social identity as marked by constant unlearning.

For other trans masculine people in this study, being socialised in conservative patriarchal masculinity cultures was highlighted as a point of struggle in negotiating the kinds of masculinities they desire to embody. For instance, Qiniso reflected on masculinity, saying, "I've been philosophising on masculinity to everyone who listens. I say, masculinity is just a mask, it is a myth!". Elaborating on encountering masculinity as a mask, they said:

> I had like a kneejerk reaction to toxic masculinity and patriarchal masculinity, that was the first thing. I was like, whoa whoa whoa, this is not what I want to embody, and being somebody who was raised in Zulu masculinity, being branded as aggressive and all these things, I was like, whoa, what type of masculinity do I want to embody, to move in this world with? And I was like, not that. This is definitely a reaction I had from years of societal indoctrination of being like, this is what masculinity is, this is what, you know…and so, I really had to fashion my own idea of masculinity, cos I'm one that believes that each and every person has their own gender; there are not two people who have the same gender and, therefore, we all experience gender differently. (Qiniso, b/25)

This excerpt gestures to carving out versions of masculinities that cohere with their values and beliefs was articulated through deconstructing dominant constructions of masculinities to find out what remains. This was true also for Loapi Tau (he/him), a 32-year-old black trans man who lives in Killarney, a suburb in the north of Johannesburg. Loapi Tau moved to South Africa with his family when he was a child. He started his medical transition journey just after high school and credits this process as critical to his audit of masculinity

and going through a process of discarding long held beliefs about what it means to be a man. Elaborating on his process of deconstructing masculinity, he said:

> I arrived at a point where I was like, I don't know what masculinity is. I do know that, for the longest time, I grew up with an idea, you know, being conditioned to roles, expressions, and I'm like, this is the first stop…I was afraid of completely unpacking that, because it wouldn't hold any weight or power in my life. I think I also found some kind of security in the fact that I could be boxed, that there was a definition, you know? And I felt like that would carry me along. (Loapi Tau, b/32)

Loapi Tau lamented the comfort of already defined masculinities that, for a long time, he took up unquestioningly. He narrated how he used to model his masculinity after normative ideas, including what his body should look like and how he ought to behave as a man. For some of my research collaborators, internalising binary cis-normative ideas of gender foreclosed possibilities for imagining otherwise forms of gender/masculinities, especially regarding decisions to medically transition. This was true for Rosemary, who also began their medical transition as a teenager. At the time of our interviews, Rosemary mentioned they were detransitioning and were taking oestrogen hormone therapy. Reflecting on their perceptions of masculinity during their initial transition, they said:

> I feel like, once I started transitioning, it was only really reinforced by meeting trans men. And a lot of trans men have a lot of internalised misogyny, and toxic, very toxic, masculinity, like hyper toxic. Because of, like, it's like regular society toxic masculinity paired with the necessity to prove yourself. And I imagine my brain is like—I just felt like it was a very common narrative for a lot of trans masculine people to feel, fiercely, that they have to prove themselves. I mean, I feel like it because I felt like that. You know, when you've just come out, and you're grappling with the concept of passing, and the first time you pass, it is so thrilling that you're like, now I want this to always happen; I don't ever want anyone to misgender me again. (Rosemary, w/21)

The trans masculine narratives in this section point to the dominance of ideas and articulations of toxic masculinities, here articulated as normative cis-heteropatriarchal formations of masculinities that constituted everyone who is not a cis het patriarchal man through subordination. These articulations of toxic masculinities shape the landscape of what are acceptable practices of masculinity. Thus, trans masculinities become enfolded into these dynamics through desires for passing and negotiating the safe presence and movement in public urban spaces.

Concluding Reflections

The key narrative themes regarding masculinities, bodies, and spaces in this study position trans masculinities within (and as constituted simultaneously through) wider discourses of cis-normative and racialised masculinities, revealing, in part, the unyielding grip of the racialised and classed gender binary, especially how it impresses upon and shapes the syntax through which trans masculinities are constituted, embodied, and lived in the city's urban spaces. In another way, narratives embodying trans masculinities reveal how trans masculine people strategically commit to expressions of masculinity depending on the context of their movements and relation to social spaces. This means that trans masculinities are articulated through varying forms of masculinity expressions that make the negotiation of passage and comfort possible in different spaces. This is not to suggest an ever-fluctuating expression of masculinities, but to index context-dependent expressions and strategic negotiations of trans masculinities shaped by the people, spaces, and objects proximal to them (Ahmed 2006b). Importantly, the extent and effectiveness of the strategies of moving and bending gender and spatial norms are determined by how trans masculinities are positioned by discourses and material realities of class positions, race/ism, spaces of residence, and residence status (Camminga and Marnell 2022; Rogers 2019). What the narratives of trans masculinities allow us to see are the everyday complexities and contentions of how variably constituted trans bodies, masculinities, and spatial configurations coalesce to mark a specific experience of trans masculine geographies in the context of the city. Trans bodies, in their varying materialities, shape and are shaped by prominent discourses of masculinities and transgender identities that inflect how trans masculine people are perceived, reacted to, and react to how they are constituted in public spaces. These narratives also show how trans masculinities emerge "slantwise" in social spaces (Ahmed 2006b). The trans masculine narratives in this study contribute insights into theoretical and empirical scholarship, explicating a vantage point of masculinities that is still nascent in geography, men and masculinities studies, and transgender studies.

The following chapter traces the grooves and temporalities of urban leisure and socialising spaces, analysing the emergence of trans masculinities through the registers of sexuality, race, and class. The chapter also analyses spaces of leisure and socialising as performative spaces constituted through specific logics that extend visibility and recognisability to some identities but not others.

7. On the Grooves of Leisure and Socialising Spaces

In the preceding chapter, I analysed how bodies, masculinities, and spaces co-constitute trans masculinities as variously enfolded through historical and contemporary formations of gendered and racialised spatialities. The previous chapter specifically emphasised how constitutions and embodiments of trans masculinities are shaped by urban spaces. Moreover, internalised normative ideas of gender and bodies manifest in how trans masculinities are embodied and practised. In this chapter, I trace urban spaces of leisure and socialising. I explore how sexualities, gender expressions, class positions, and constitutions of socialising and leisure spaces are enunciated and experienced by trans masculine people. Individuals affirm the nature of their identities through various mechanisms, including participation in leisure activities in public urban leisure spaces that orient their identities towards specific iterations and not others (Ahmed 2006b). Through leisure activities, "we are able to construct situations that provide us with information that we are who we believe ourselves to be and provide others with information that will allow them to understand us more accurately" (Haggard and Williams 1992, 3). Leisure and socialising patterns are also spatial and classed (Oswin 2005; Tucker 2009a); their spatial structures and settings allow for certain activities to occur. Further, spaces of leisure and socialising are fundamental to understanding contemporary formations and enunciations of sexual and gendered identities and their constitutive power relations, which produce social difference, injustice, marginalisation, and exclusion. Specifically, this chapter takes as its point of departure trans masculine narratives of inhabiting urban spaces of leisure and socialising as well as how they are important performative spaces for trans masculine identity and their various other intersecting social identities. In this chapter, I include narratives of leisure and socialising spaces as consumption spaces to track trans masculine people's public leisure and consumption geographies. The enfolding of racialised and gender nonnormative bodies into social space(s) of leisure and the conditions for this enfolding bring up questions that concern the relation between the production

of social space and gender. Specifically, I am interested in how the constitution and viability of non-normative gender and sexuality subjectivities unfolds or fails/succeeds to extend normative spatialities—that is, the racialised, classed, and binary gendered and sexualised order. Thus, I do not include narratives of home spaces as leisure spaces, which appeared scantily in the narratives.

This chapter is divided into two prominent narrative themes developed from the data: in the first part, I attend to spaces of leisure and socialising as performative identity spaces, tracing the co-constitutive enunciations of class, sexuality, and race and how they emerge in leisure and socialising patterns. Within these narratives, I specifically want to highlight the enunciations of performances of sexuality that are embedded in classed and racialised assumptions that permeate spaces of leisure and socialising. The second part of this chapter zooms in on the constitutions of trans and separatist spaces of leisure and socialising, especially how they materialise trans and gender non-normative subjectivities. The questions leading the conversation on spaces of leisure and socialising was, "Where do you hang out in the city? And how is it like to be in those spaces for you?" While there were varying responses to the questions, most emphasised preferences for leisure spaces and socialising located around the city centre and leisure activities entwined with/enunciated through patterns of consumption. For instance, no one mentioned going hiking as a form of having fun (although that is not to say they do not engage in such activities at all). This analysis considers these proximities and temporalities of leisure spaces and socialising, considering these spaces as performative spaces and the identities they emerge as continually negotiated and contested. Put differently, there is no sexual or gender essence to spaces of leisure and socialising before their enactments. This chapter specifically brings to bear the complexly structured conjunctions of spaces of leisure and socialising and their processes of subjectivation. Through this complex conjunction, I pay attention to how the formation of sexuality-race-gender-space-class are co-constituted and negotiated by variously positioned trans masculine people and how articulations of liveable lives emerge through constitutions of urban spaces of leisure and socialising.

Spaces of Leisure and Socialising as Performative Spaces

Spaces of leisure and socialising in the two cities were emphasised as polarising spaces that are constituted through binary understandings of

sexuality and gender. Urban spaces have been highlighted through grammars of acceptance for queer visibilities (Browne 2006; Valentine 2002). Over the past two decades, urban city spaces have seen queer villages and queer club spaces becoming more popular and permanent fixtures of urban socialising and leisure spaces (Nash 2006; Visser 2008; Hattingh and Bruwer 2020). The interiority of these spaces and how they are experienced are important analytical points to track the logics governing how subjectivities emerge and extend in these spaces. As well as how bodies encounter these spaces and what forms of socialities emerge through spaces of leisure.

"I wanna get up and sing my indie soft boy songs in front of a bunch of other indie soft boys"

In the first set of Zoom interviews I completed, some of my research collaborators lamented the lack of queer spaces of socialising and leisure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Already fewer in number, the closure (and for other places, permanent closure) of queer spaces during COVID-19 lockdowns was framed as a kind of loss—a loss of spaces to creatively practice freedom and celebrate milestones. For example, Sam, a Jo'burg native, talked about undergoing top surgery at the end of 2019 and wanting to celebrate his milestone in a space that embraces and celebrates queer and trans people. Sam recalled a queer bar in Melville[6] that he used to frequent with friends as a space of affirmation for his queer and trans identity. Sam lamented the COVID-19 moment as curtailing a significant aspect of his identity performance and expression, saying:

> One of the things I miss the most about non-COVID life is…there used to be this queer-ish karaoke bar in Melville, and I just love karaoke. I had this big old idea that the day or weekend before my top surgery, I was gonna go and sing "My Body Is a Cage" by Arcade Fire, cos I'm like, this is a fucking big trans mood. Like, I wanna get up and sing my indie soft boy songs in front of a bunch of other indie soft boys. I haven't been able to do that because of COVID. That place has gone through different managers between COVID, and it's not even queer anymore. (Sam, W/25)

In this excerpt, Sam laments the lost opportunity of being in a space with other queer and trans people to mark his gender-affirming milestone. The queer karaoke bar is positioned as a space for communing and sharing one's gender-

[6] Melville is popularly known for its vibrant queer night life in Johannesburg.

affirming milestones, a space that can hold and extend that embodiment and expression.

A year after concluding the first set of Zoom interviews, I returned to Johannesburg and Cape Town in December 2022. For this second round of fieldwork, I met up with my research collaborators in person for follow-up interviews. With almost all COVID-19 restrictions suspended, I met my research collaborators at different leisure and socialising spaces, including restaurants, cafés, bars, wine farms, and coffee shops. I spent the latter part of January 2023 based in Melville, a suburban area in Johannesburg. Melville is a popular neighbourhood in Johannesburg known for its vibrant queer nightlife. I chose Melville because it was the closest point to all my research collaborators and because it was a place to experience the neighbourhood, as some of my Jo'burg-based research collaborators highlighted it as a central location for their socialising and leisure activities. I had not been to Melville in over five years and being back afforded me a fresh set of eyes to see and experience the area and its significance to my research collaborators' social and leisure geographies. Like Sam in the excerpt above, Melville and its queer night-time scene was framed as an important spatio-temporality for the practising and expression of one's identity without having to conceal any parts of it. The spaces where I met my research collaborators also signalled their relation to them as part of their routine socialising and leisure spaces.

One Friday afternoon, I met up with Venus at a restaurant on 7th Street (the "queer" street) in Melville. Venus drove from their workplace to meet with me. As is common on month-end Fridays, Melville was bustling with beautiful, joyous laughter and lively conversations from the many restaurants, bars, and taverns lining 7th Street. "This is my favourite spot, you know," Venus told me, gesturing to the restaurant, which was slightly empty that Friday afternoon. This restaurant also hosts live music concerts on selected days, and Venus told me they had performed some of their music there before. As the afternoon matured more patrons came in, some of whom Venus knew. We were greeted with warm hugs, and I was introduced to Venus's friends and acquaintances. Unlike Zoom meetings, in-person meetings like this resist any kind of structure, and so our afternoon unfolded, meandering from conversations about art, Melville, gender, sexuality, romantic relationships, and groove[7]. Venus emphasised how important it is to have spaces in which "queer and trans people can just be, without wondering and feeling guarded about who is in the space and what might happen to them." At just past six o'clock, as our conversation

[7] In popular South African youth culture, groove refers to any dance/music/clubbing space or event.

winded down and the place was now bustling with people (mostly young black people), load-shedding[8] started. A collective gasp filled the courtyard space of the establishment where most patrons sat. Venus quipped, "Welcome home." As I gestured to ending our interview, Venus suggested we move to another venue further up the street. Our meeting had now turned to a "club hopping" exercise, "for research purposes," they further added. An exercise I enthusiastically obliged. As we left the restaurant into the dark street, Venus reminded me to put my cell phone away "just for safety."

We tried out two clubs before we settled on a third, a popular karaoke bar that was full of all kinds of people. There were queers[9] making out, singing, and having fun. "There's no judgment here," Venus quipped. An artist themselves, it did not take long for Venus to take the stage. Singing a rendition of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah", the dimly lit karaoke bar erupted into a harmonious singalong. In this space, we moved fluidly, our bodies bumping against other bodies in the space. Courtesies and apologies exchanged with a gentle pat on the arm and a smile as we moved with and past each other. In this space, our black queer trans masculinities were woven into a beautiful tapestry of uninhibited expression, visibility, and joy. Inhabiting Venus's spaces of leisure, I experienced and understood the joy Venus had insisted on cultivating and being able to take up space in night club spaces. This practice of cultivating joy in nigh time spaces echoed what ashon t. crawley (in Persaud and crawley 2022, 2) offers as a description for joy, saying "Joy is a disposition. It is a mood that one must work daily to affirm and attempt to inhabit…Joy as the desire to cultivate or to really attempt to be tender with our fragility as human creatures". In this karaoke bar, both Venus and I embodied and experienced that joy.

In our first interview on Zoom, Venus remarked on cultivating joy in doing basic things in queer spaces. Venus shared:

> Everyday life can become a vacuum and a reminder of just how oppressed you are. Sometimes, you just need to laugh. Sometimes, you just need to be silly and just forget about the politics. Because they'll be there tomorrow, they're gonna be there when you fall asleep, they are gonna be there when you are eating breakfast, it's still all gonna be there tomorrow. So, make the conscious

[8] Scheduled power cuts that have become a character of and part of the experience of living in South Africa.

[9] My use of queers here is both a reference to queer genders and sexualities as well as sexualities that exceed given grammars of gay, lesbian, queer, bisexual—queer as in 'not straight' but could possibly be anything else

> decision—once in a while, I get silly and go out, do some basic things and have a good time; it's good for the soul. (Venus, b/32)

Doing basic things together marks the joy and play entwined in trans masc geographies of leisure and socialising. The emphasis on doing "basic things" in public spaces of leisure was also echoed by Mister J. I met up with him on a scorching Thursday afternoon in January at a small shopping centre in Midrand, a suburb north of Johannesburg. At our first interview on Zoom, Mister J narrated how he spends his leisure time doing "basic things" like going out around his neighbourhood and finding new cosplay[10] outfits. He has been cosplaying since he was sixteen and is part of cosplay communities in the city and online (I revisit this aspect of community in Chapter 8). Mister J invited me to meet him for boba at a small Chinese barbecue restaurant in the shopping centre. The restaurant was relatively quiet during the lunch hour. I arrived before Mister J whose Uber requests were being cancelled due to the drivers being unable to find the entrance to the gated estate where he lives. At the restaurant, I searched my brain for the little Mandarin I could remember—I wanted to impress—and ordered a large tapioca milk tea. Outside the shop were two empty tables; I took a seat and, moments later, the chef, a middle-aged Asian man I saw in the back kitchen of the restaurant, joined me at the table. He extended his packet of cigarettes to me; I pulled one cigarette out and thanked him. He lit it up, and we both sat and smoked in silence. Mister J finally arrived at the restaurant and greeted the four people working there; he was well-known there and told me that he often came to this restaurant: "It's literally five minutes away from my house." Apart from its proximity, I wondered why Mister J had chosen this shopping centre as a meeting place. It soon became clear. Mister J told me the shopping centre holds special memories for him. Pointing to a closed restaurant across the boba place, he said, "That restaurant, over there, is where I celebrated my 16th and 18th birthdays with all my family and friends there." As we walked around the relatively empty shopping centre with our tapioca milk teas on hand, Mister J recounted memories of gathering with friends after school at this place and how it formed part of his core memories of growing up in the area. At this shopping centre, we walked without much caution to safety as we google-searched the menus of the restaurants in before he suggested we go to a walking to a Teppanyaki restaurant, "they make the food right in front you", he told me. Temporalities and spatialities of doing "basic things" are mediated through patterns and spatialities of consumption. The different times of day brought

[10] Costume play.

different ways of inhabiting the two leisure/consumption spaces. From walking briskly from one bar to another in the dark load-shedding hours in Melville, to a leisurely walk in a shopping centre that sits proximal to a gated estate.

These are some instances of how trans spatialities in the city are enfolded into ordinary life activities that shape how trans masculine people move and inhabit the city's expansive geographies. Consumption spaces are central to these geographies, as they mark my research collaborators' proximities to and positions within class and social strata that allow them to access and inhabit these spaces of consumption. Leisure is a significant site of embodiment through which trans and gender non-normative identities are shaped by power relations that regulate freedom and possibilities for change.

"I am quite used to getting looks"

I spent the month of February 2023 in Claremont, Cape Town, meeting with my research collaborators who live in neighbourhoods around the city. They invited me to meet in different spaces, including their homes and leisure spaces (wine farms, coffee shops, hotel restaurants, and bars). For my research collaborators who had lived or studied in Stellenbosch, their stories of socialising often invoked experiences of going out to wine and strawberry farms around Stellenbosch. For example, Arlo. I met up with Arlo at a café in the Woodstock Exchange. The Woodstock Exchange sits on the busiest commercial street in Woodstock, Albert Road, and features artisanal cafes, clothing stores, and meeting spaces for creatives, designers, and tech people in Woodstock. As a Capetonian who had just moved to the neighbourhood of Woodstock, Arlo said, "I'm aware that I do pass as white in some spaces. Until I open my mouth and then they hear, oh that's [name of suburban area in Cape Town], that's northern suburbs." Arlo shared about their experiences of going out to wine farms:

> The wine farms thing is very different, because they are sacred white spaces, and I am quite used to getting looks for basically making the same amount of noise from the same number of drinks as everyone, if not less than everyone who's white around me. And they would look at you a certain way, and it's not the people who work there, because the people who work there are typically coloured and black, but like, they would check on you. But it's something I've tuned out anyway, because I'm not gonna sit here and deny myself an experience because other people will look; I'm gonna go to the fucking wine farm. (Arlo, c/25)

These socialising and leisure experiences mark a specific class aesthetic/lifestyle. Articulated through the aesthetics of middle-class socialising patterns, proximity to the spaces and the aesthetic pursuits of socialising lifestyles and social identities are rendered through class performance (cf. Mayorga, Underhill, and Crosser 2022). For Arlo, being a student financially supported by their family allows for specific practices of the spatial aesthetics and lifestyles to which access is marked by capital. For instance, wine farm culture is a glaring aesthetic and lifestyle practice which, although enfolded into an aspect of student identity, in these narratives, excludes students from poor financial backgrounds. Arlo also narrates their experiences of going to wine farms as marked by disciplining gestures that are racially and class coded. In her ethnographic essay titled "Queering Cape Town's Posture as Africa's Gay Capital", Stella Nyanzi (2023) argues that, in reading the 'queer metre' for life and death, location matters in the practice and predicament of marked forms of human sexuality (and gender). Navigating leisure spaces is marked by differential constitutions of spaces animated by racialised and classed frames of legibility. Economic capital and proximity to forms of cultural capital, like education, underscores the experiences of trans masculine people in these leisure spaces. Further, they highlight the everyday vocabularies and practices of difference that mark, in varying measures, certain gendered, racialised, and classed subject positions for disciplining gazes and reactions.

In Stellenbosch, Tshepang suggested we meet at a restaurant in a wine farm. They told me that they usually come to this place with their friends and had recently celebrated a friend's birthday there. Like Arlo's reflection above, wine farm spaces around Stellenbosch are classed and racialised spaces where most of the service workers are black and the patrons are mostly white. Tshepang reflected on how, in frequenting that space with their friends for various forms of gatherings, including birthdays, they have become acutely conscious of how they carry themselves. They said, "We'd be having a good time, laughing too hard, and of course, people will stare, as if to say you're being too loud, tone it down." On this day, Tshepang and I were among the handful of black and visibly queer and trans patrons in the restaurant. Wine farm outings are a common feature of the Stellenbosch student experience, with some student societies dedicated to wine culture and experience. While there are visibly classed, racialised, and gendered spatial formations, the spaces are variably accessible to students, like some of my research collaborators, who form part of the predominant populations frequenting these spaces.

For other trans masculine people, their experiences of socialising in fruit farm spaces were marked by cis normativity cited as a disciplining practice.

This was the case for Max (he/him) a 23-year-old white trans masculine person who lives in a suburb in Table View, Cape Town. He recounting his recent experience attending a friend's birthday party at a strawberry farm outside of Stellenbosch. The strawberry farm is a large space hosts a variety of leisure that also include family activities. Max recalled:

> There was an incident—I don't know if you've actually ever gone to a place called, um, that strawberry farm [name of farm]. So, I went there for [friend's name] their birthday. I went to the men's bathroom, and they only had one cubicle and I think it was full or something. My partner looked to see if it was full in the women's bathroom. It wasn't. So, I went in with them and some Karen came and called the bouncer (security) and the manager knocked on the door and told me to get out. And then told me, "What do you think you're doing in that bathroom?" Obviously, I'm not gonna out myself, so I was like "Oh, I went to pee, what do you want me to say?" She was so mad. There was no one else in the bathroom, the bouncer had a whole pep talk with me, and I walked away. (Max, w/23)

The refrain "what do you think you're doing in that bathroom?" cites an all-too-familiar grammar of disciplining trans people's bodies and what public spaces they can and cannot use (see Patel 2017). This macro-aggressive regulation of public toilet use reproduces the space of the farm as beholden to a binary practice of gender, a space in which strangers have to uphold the gender binary that structures and constitutes the space as cis-normative. While unspoken and unwritten, the stranger deeming it their responsibility to keep the bathrooms in this social space binary gendered spaces marks the presence of trans and gender non-normative practices in the space as transgressive. It is the citational practices and structures of the place that are invoked and put into action that mark space as privileging cis-normative modes of embodiment.

Alongside performances of sexuality are embedded classed and racialised assumptions about socialising and leisure space. Where the location of the physical establishments determines their accessibility and what forms of mobility allow people to access them. While my research collaborators' narratives of spaces featured spaces outside of the inner-city of Cape Town, or spaces accessible by private transportation. Others who lived at the periphery of the city remarked on the predominantly heteronormative spaces of consumption in their neighbourhoods.

In the township areas of Cape Town, public spaces of leisure and consumption are usually taverns and are mostly populated by cisgender heterosexual people. For example, Vuyani (he/him), a 21-year-old, black bisexual trans man first lived in a township in Cape Town before moving to

Observatory closer to the inner city. He reflected on the differences in the leisure spaces where they usually hung out. Vuyani narrated his experience through the predominant cultures in those spaces:

> Last year, I was spending most of my time ekasi [in the township], in the parks, in taverns. Literally, it was outdoors; park your car right there, there's someone selling beers, yinyama ngapha [there's meat over there]. It was mostly spaces like that—in Kraaifontein, Belhar, Bellville[11]. Mostly in spaces like that kugcwele amadoda kwezandawo [those places are full of men], straight men and a couple of women abazo ncwaswa [who will be lusted after]. (Vuyani, b/21)

Taverns, like night club spaces, are sexualised spaces in which queer and trans people are enfolded into the dominant frames of desirability that govern the space and reproduce its patrons' specific sexual subject positions (see Salo et al. 2010). In this predominantly heterosexual and cis-normative space, Vuyani positions his queer sexuality as recognisable only through the cis-normative body. To safely negotiate being in those spaces, Vuyani explained:

> I'd just tell them I'm a lesbian and not that I'm also attracted to men. Because if I did, they would think that I'm attracted to them…the men bazondincwasa [they would lust after me]. When I tell them I'm interested in women only, they'll tell me, "Oksalayo useyintombazana [nevertheless, you're still a girl]" and still lust after me and be all up in my space and hound me. (Vuyani, b/21)

In this strategy, Vuyani uses the category 'lesbian' to minimise the possibility of being lusted after by men and to also communicate a lack of attraction and desire for men. The refrain, "oksalayo useyintombazana" (nevertheless, you're still a girl), articulated in isiXhosa, carries an affective and disciplining density, working as a tool to position trans masculine sexuality in its 'original' placement, unable to escape the female assignment at birth.

My research collaborators in Cape Town also spoke in-depth about the complexities of navigating the city as young trans masculine people who are positioned variously by their gender, race, class, and the actual neighbourhoods in which they live. The specificities of everyday life and the violences, or what Qiniso called "palatable violences" (chapter 5), vary in their intensity and frequency. The banality of these violences prompts different but ordinary strategies for protecting oneself in the eventuality of being met with physical harm. One of my collaborators, Arlo, explained how they navigate the city and

[11] Kraaifontein, Belhar and Belville are large residential areas around Cape Town.

reflected on their strategies for staying safe. A couple of moments into our conversation at the café in The Woodstock Exchange where Arlo and I met, the waiter, a young white man (probably in his early 20s), approached our table. He held out his open hand and asked in a hushed tone, "I found this under the table. Did you maybe drop this by accident?" In his hand was a small diving knife in a beautiful brown leather pouch. Arlo, laughing, responded, "Yes, it's mine. Thank you." Then Arlo began narrating a story about the knife and how they got it:

> You know how I got this knife? My dad is a school principal. And in the old school he worked at in [name of the area], the school kids would bring these to school and guns, like fake guns with pellets and stuff. And then he had this box of guns and knives. So, I was like, oh cool, I'll take one. And he was like, "Yes, my child, protect yourself from the streets."
>
> esethu: Have you always carried it or…
>
> Arlo: Always, and a taser *silence*. I never feel safe…not just as a queer person but also as a female *in air quote*. I'm not gonna sit here and pretend I don't get read as a woman. That is the reality. And even if I were a cisgender heterosexual man, it's still dangerous to exist in these spaces. Like, when I go back to my flat at night, and its load-shedding and shit, like sorry, no, no. I want a gun. I'm not joking. (Arlo, c/25)

Narratives of safety in navigating the city, in general, were shared by most of the collaborators. They lamented the abiding register of binary gender normativity and its intersection with class, as exemplified in what kinds of neighbourhoods are considered safe enough to walk in at various times of the day and night. The economic and social implications of the longstanding electricity crisis in the country, for instance, pose significant threats and increase the vulnerability of people who already live with the threat of harm because of their gender non-normative subjectivities and who live in neighbourhoods that are considered less safe. Further, within this social context of increasing vulnerability, the (un)readability of the body as either male or female, as belonging either to a man or woman, becomes pivotal in how the trans masculine people in this study talk about how they navigate socialising in their neighbourhoods, specifically at different times of the day. The experiences of trans masculine people and how they navigate life in Cape Town speak to various intersecting complexities. Namely, neighbourhood leisure and socialising spaces pose significant challenges to exploring leisure and socialising activities with fewer constraints. The energy crisis, for one,

exacerbates the already compromised dynamics of safety and unsafety within neighbourhoods, highlighting, yet again, the violence of normative gender registers that expose gender non-normative life to harm.

Urban leisure and socialising spaces in the two cities are produced as fragmented and disciplining, extending normalcy to subjectivities marked by privileges along the lines of class, race, and sexuality. While economic and social capital marks the socialising and leisure geographies of trans masculine people, the prevailing logics constituting the spaces are entwined with constitutions of class that are marked and performed through certain lifestyles and as spatial markers of the construction of the subject position of a particular space. These logics also bend and twist, variously accommodating and delineating economic capital as privileged, and the experiences of such spaces are still marked by racialised and classed logics of subjectivity (Desai 2023). Economic capital does not override but works in tandem with racialised and heteronormative disciplinary logics; racialised trans masculine bodies still appear in slanted ways (Ahmed 2006b). Although the overarching notion shaping access in these spaces suggests that money/economic capital gets you in, it does not guarantee nor override other constituting logics of identity in the space. To reiterate, threaded throughout trans masculine people's experiences of embodied spatialities are normative sexuality registers that materialise trans masculine subjectivities and bodies as unexpected, out of place, conditionally invited and, at times, elided from legibility/visibility. Further, trans masculine people's embodied spatialities index the serrations that mark the surfaces of urban leisure and socialising spaces, where racialised sexuality and gender norms mark the desires for safe and/or inclusive spaces as intangible, if not tenuous.

Queer and Trans Socialising Spaces

Constitutions and experiences of urban queer spaces of consumption have been extensively explored in queer geographies scholarship (G. Valentine 2002; Binnie 1995; Bell and Valentine 1995; Oswin 2008; Visser 2008). For example, writing on Toronto's Gay Villages, Catherine Nash (2006) notes that queer spaces are "highly contested sites and critiqued landscapes", noting that queer space is "a location deeply scarred by myriad battles fought over the social, political and cultural meanings attributed to the existence of individuals interested in a same-sex relationship" (2). At the same time, this research focuses mostly on cis-gay sexualities and urban gay spaces of consumption

(Elder 2005; Tucker 2009b; Hattingh and Bruwer 2020). Trans masculine experiences of queer consumption spaces reveal the complexity and abiding logic of homonormative logics. In another way, the contested nature of queer spaces lends itself to another layer of complexity with the presence of trans and gender non-normative people as part of the public occupying queer spaces. Trans allyship in queer spaces has recently been explored, revealing insights about how cis-normative logics permeate the language through which trans and gender non-normative identities are "incorporated into new and hybrid cisgender subjectivities" (Miller 2021, 344). Building on this nascent scholarship, the trans masculine narratives in this study speak to the complicated negotiation of trans identity and sexuality in queer spaces of consumption and how the ideological contours of such spaces are made visible by the presence of trans masculine people/bodies. Specifically, the boundaries of gender and sexuality legibility in queer spaces lend themselves to narratives of safety and unsafety in which trans masculine subjectivities are negotiated alongside possibilities of encountering harm.

"I would never go to a random bar"

The narratives in this key theme cut across experiences of harassment as they intertwine sexuality and space. They also narrate how racialised sexualities, cis-normativity, and gay masculinities inflect the experiences of queer, trans, and other spaces of leisure and consumption in the city. My research collaborators shared stories of their experiences in gay clubs as specifically marked by harmful and sexually predatory behaviours. Sexual harassment tied to the trans masculine body, read in tandem with youth and a kind of fetishisation, marks the experiences of trans masculine people in these spaces. These experiences are distilled under the emphasis that there are no safe spaces for leisure and consumption in the city; even spaces that are advertised as particularly queer and trans-friendly are marred in sexually predatory and invasive behaviours and practices.

Most of the gay/queer leisure spaces that my research collaborators referred to in Cape Town are in the inner city. This speaks to my research collaborators' proximity, preference and access to the social scene in the inner city. For instance, Rosemary talked about how it has become difficult to drive into the city for clubbing since they live in a town just outside Cape Town. Nevertheless, they still explore the gay/queer night scene in the city and recount their experiences of clubbing:

> Mainly I go to [turns to their partner], what's the name of the club we go to, is it [name of night club]? It's like gothic, goth nights, like most alternative things. I would never go to a random bar. Most of the events and social situations I go to are ones that I've heard about through Instagram, or the people I follow on Instagram are part of the same circles as I am. I'd say the queer community in…this area, or at least in Cape Town, is very broad. (Rosemary, w/23)

In this excerpt, Rosemary positions their exploration of queer nightlife in the city as intentional and planned. They elaborated on the clubs they like to visit:

> It's a nice environment. I feel like, not safe, because you're never safe in a club in town. But I feel safer than I would if was like in a club full of cisgender people. I feel like I'm surrounded by people who are like me; I feel relatively safe. If something terrible were to happen at this club, at least one or two strangers would have my back, which is pretty good considering how clubs are. (Rosemary, w/23)

Gay/queer leisure spaces, which are so central to identity formation in much of the literature (Nash 2006; A. R. Anderson and Knee 2021), become important in the context of this reflection. Rosemary reflects on the importance of safety and emphasises shared sexuality and gender identity as potential sources of comfort in sharing night-time queer leisure spaces, particularly in the event of any emergency occurring, saying, "at least one or two strangers would have my back". This suggests an expectation that queer people will care about what happens to them in the space. This assumption of care in the queer night-time space also speaks to the caution trans people take when out at night in public spaces. This caution is connected to wider acts of violence and harm meted out at queer and trans people, especially public acts of violence that are witnessed by many people and yet seldom in reported cases; rarely do witnesses come forward, or no one steps in to stop homophobic or transphobic public harassment (Igual 2021; Govender, Maotoana, and Nel 2019). Max talked about the affective difference in being in queer spaces of leisure compared to other spaces:

> It feels like a natural and easy space to be in, not taxing like the rest of the world. It feels like, when I hang out with queer people for a long period of time—let's say even if it's like a day or a night at an event—walking out of the club or out of that safe space, feels like that bubble has been popped. It's quite sad, but it's good to know that spaces like that do exist where you can feel safe. (Max, w/23)

Some of my research collaborators who live in Cape Town emphasised safety as a heightened awareness when negotiating queer spaces of consumption, such as gay bars and queer events centred around leisure/fun. In these narratives, my research collaborators lamented the framing of queer spaces of consumption as 'safe spaces' for queer and trans people, while their practice differs from their stated intentions. For example, Fish, a bisexual trans man who has lived in Cape Town since 2020, narrated his experience of coming into his sexuality and exploring his sexual identity in the Cape Town queer scene. Fish's experiences of gay spaces of consumption mostly occurred in or around the area commonly referred to as Cape Town's gay village. He emphasised his disappointment with the purportedly safe queer spaces—specifically queer bars and curated queer events—which, in his experience, have been the opposite of safe:

> Queer spaces in Cape Town claim to be safe spaces, but a lot of the time, I feel objectified in them, especially by gay men, white gay men. A lot of the time, I'm inappropriately touched and inappropriately sought after, because obviously I'm not a…I don't know how to—I would say I'm like averagely attractive, you know what I mean? A lot of the time, when I go out to these spaces, I get objectified and inappropriately touched. Not only by gay men, but by nonbinary people as well, and sometimes women as well. And I think it's because of the stance of men and how people perceive men as in, "They'll always want that attention and affection," which is just not me, I do not like that. (Fish, w/21)

Fish narrates the sexual objectification they experience in queer spaces. As a young, white, bisexual, trans man, Fish's sexuality, gender, and body are read and positioned within the frames of the expected white queer man in the spaces of a certain age, usually a twink. The gay village spaces in Cape Town, as Gustav Visser and Andrew Tucker (2003; 2009a) write, are normatively constructed through homonormative frames of sociality, where the identities and subject positions expected in the space work alongside a fixity that both preserves the construction of the spaces as gay spaces and simultaneously produces gay subjectivities. Sexual objectification works to communicate the economies of sexuality in these spaces; the construct of the gay twink body is most desirable and thus made hyper-visible in this space (Browne and Bakshi 2011). Fish continued, "I look young. So, when they come on to me…I'm getting objectified as like a twink. As a young little boy that you now gonna want to have sex with." Gay vernaculars of desirable effeminate bodies in this space also speak to the constructions of what bodies are desirable. This framing and the attendant predatory sexual behaviours Fish encounters in gay spaces

of consumption are implicated in wider patterns of sexual violence that mark the cultural landscape, not just of the city but also of the country (Bhagat 2018).

To safely navigate queer spaces and avoid being objectified, Fish said, "When I go out to queer spaces, I try to not wear something too skimpy. I try to put on a very masculine look, and a very intimidating look as well, just so that I'm less approachable to people." This is a strategy to be invisible and therefore safe from sexual objectification in queer spaces, that is, dressing and performing a respectable masculine homosexuality/queerness. Self-governance and discipline are enacted through practising respectable masculinity, becoming less approachable, less 'inviting' to sexual objectification. A masculine look, citing heterosexual masculinity expression, is framed as sexually respectable and intimidating, helping to safely navigate gay night-time spaces. This strategy then forces Fish to embody threatening heterosexual masculinity in a space that seeks to be safe from threatening heterosexual masculinities and gazes. This strategy and its necessity mark the complicated and messy politics of gay/queer spaces, particularly those constituted along narratives of safety.

This experience of objectification in queer spaces of leisure and consumption has left Fish not wanting to further explore their own sexuality, particularly romantic and sexual desire with men. He says:

> I went through a phase when I was new in Cape Town, and I was coming to terms with my sexuality. I did see a couple of men, and I had my first experience when I was 21, and it was great. I was like, this is great, and I never saw him again. I just experienced what happened. And after that, going out to predominantly gay scenes, and also trying to—I'm tryna experience my own sexuality. I'm trying to understand what I like and then getting assaulted or even objectified by things I'm trying to understand within myself is so harming. Right now, I don't even look at men, I am so disgusted by men and their ability to do things that are uncomfortable with everyone else but them. (Fish, w/21)

Research on gay spaces of leisure and socialising in Cape Town shows that the politics and practices of desirability and sexuality generally recognise lifestyles and subject positions as articulated through the experiences of white gay middle-class men (Visser 2013). Nevertheless, the boundaries of socially acceptable formations of sexualities and genders are shifting, and trans and gender non-normative people are variably (albeit violently) enfolded into the sexuality and spatial politics of queer spaces of leisure, as this study shows. The trans masculine narratives in this study also point to the persistence of cis-normative and heteronormative logics in queer spaces of leisure. As queer geographies scholarship has shown, queer spaces of consumption, in

particular, are regimented by specific logics of homonormativity tied to the spatial-economic politics of queer spaces (G. Valentine 2002; Duggan 2002). Lisa Duggan (2002, 179) theorises homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised and depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption". While the US context within which this concept was first theorised differs significantly from South African queer politics, it is worth noting that South African queer culture and politics are undoubtedly part of global queer circuits while, at the same time, being rooted in local specificities (cf. Oswin 2007; Tucker 2021). In this context too, "homonormativity can be read as structuring the relations amongst LGBT people, marginalising certain groups and individuals" (Browne and Bakshi 2011, 182).

In another articulation of queer spaces of consumption in Cape Town, Arlo, a bisexual Capetonian, talked about their frustration with the city's queer spaces. They noted, "In Cape Town specifically, there is not a single safe—firstly, my issue is safe spaces for queer people, remove safe actually, throw safe out of the window, queer spaces are all jols[12]." Arlo narrated a seeming conflation of queer spaces as spaces of "jol" (fun) and consumption. Inquiring further into this framing of queer spaces as only spaces for fun that are not safe, Arlo elaborated on contested queer identities in queer spaces and how that shapes their experience of being in the space:

> This is my last story about [name of gay club]—I was dating a very confused, tenderqueer[13] type of person. I don't know what they identify as to this day. At the time, they were like, "I'm a cishet guy," and I knew that neeeh he's not, but it's fine man. He had a ton of gay male friends so then we're at [name of gay club] this one night, and his friends were like, we should come, and we went there. Now, I'm openly how I am at that point already, this was early 2019. I go there, I kiss him, not even like vrying [French kissing], I literally kiss him on the mouth and his friend goes, "Please, no heterosexual behaviour here." I was literally like, your poes [an Afrikaans derogatory word for vagina], and I left. (Arlo, c/25).

[12] Jol is another word for groove.

[13] Tenderqueer "is a contentious slang term used to describe an emotional LGBTQ+ person with a sensitive and openly emotional disposition who uses their knowledge of social justice language in order to be insincere or avoid accountability for their own actions." (Urban Dictionary 2023).

In this excerpt, Arlo frames dating a "cis het guy" as contradictory to the expected forms of sexuality in the space. The refrain, "Please no heterosexual behaviour here," suggests the expected behaviour as well as how their bodies are read and enfolded into a cis-normative and heteronormative logic within which the place strategically constructs itself. This construction further works to communicate the exclusion of heterosexuality and expressions of sexuality that are not readily readable or legible as gay, as in cis-gay and male. In other words, the knowledges framing sexuality and gender in the space curtsy at cis-normative and heterosexual frames to exclude bodies not readily read as cis-male and gay.

Arlo further explained why their public display of affection was not "allowed" by their friends in the gay club, saying "that space is for mainly cis queer men of colour. There would be trans girlies in the mix, but they are basically the 'other' in the space." This framing, then, suggests that bisexual trans masculine subjectivities are rendered illegible in this space that constitutes and is constituted through cis-gay male masculinities/femininities. Thus, trans masculine bodies that do not conform to normatively feminine or masculine gay bodies are positioned through cis-heterosexual frames and marked as out of place in gay male club spaces. Further, bisexual trans masculine people in this space, whose bodies do not conform either to the cis-male masculine or cis-male feminine norms, are not fully positioned through frames of non-normative sexualities; rather, they are arrested in biphobic and transphobic frames. The gender assignment, when known, arrests bisexual trans masculine people within the category of 'female' and thus becomes enfolded into grammars of heterosexuality when romantically and sexually coupled with a 'cis het man'. Being perceived as a woman through this act, both their bisexuality and transness are erased. That is, through this framing, trans masculine people who are sexually and romantically linked with cis het men are folded into compulsory heterosexuality, in which the refrain, "no heterosexual behaviour here" becomes a disciplining tool for bisexual trans masculinities in gay male night club spaces. The refrain also highlights how trans masculinity fails to be enfolded into constructions of male/masculinity; the trans masculine body fails to materialise as anything outside of female heterosexuality.

The narratives analysed in this section highlight how gay spaces of leisure and socialising are constituted as spaces with unyielding cis-normative and gay boundaries. These are spaces where other forms of sexualities and sexual behaviours are registered as outside of gender and sexuality norms of the space and thus policed. As such, the aspect of unsafety on which my research collaborators reflect is also tied to the gay identities that are expected in the

spaces (compared to those that are not immediately imagined to be present) and occupying the subject position of queer or bisexual in gay spaces. On the other hand, the specificity of gay clubs that present themselves as welcoming to people of colour and black people has specific resonances in Cape Town, where gay leisure spaces have been racially coded, with the inner-city gay spaces being predominantly populated by white, cisgender, gay, middle-class men (Visser 2003; Tucker 2009a). Trans masculine narratives of leisure spaces suggest that the meanings attached to these spaces and how they are constituted continue along rigid binaries of race, class, gender, and sexuality. As such, leisure spaces are not value-free spaces, even those that are constituted through separatist politics of non-normative gender and sexuality.

The complex constitution of leisure spaces articulated and regimented through sexuality, gender, and race reveals the tensions and struggles that allow for the changing and shifting logics of urban spaces. An expansiveness is forged through the ephemeral separatist spaces that hold and welcome trans and gender non-normative people. Tensions between gender and sexuality mark all forms of public socialising spaces that my research collaborators navigate and inhabit.

"Come on, bruh, we're here to have a good time"

The demographics of gay leisure spaces in the city have changed over the years, and the social boundaries of queer spaces have expanded. Nevertheless, the logics of racialised sexualities and cis-normative modes of gender expression still haunt queer spaces in the city, although through different grammars. For instance, queer separatist events in the city have proliferated over the recent years. With events specifically curated for queer and trans communities that are often excluded from the normative (predominantly white, gay, middle-class) gay cultures and spaces in the inner city (Nyanzi 2023; Matthyse 2023). Speaking on finding groove events and spaces, some of my research collaborators narrated how they seek out specifically curated queer events that emphasise the recognition and inclusions of trans and gender non-normative people. For instance, Ellis, who has lived in Cape Town for five years, talked about their negotiating process to go out in Cape Town. I asked them about where they hang out in the city:

> I don't know where [name of housemate] finds these cool spots; I just go with them. We've been doing a lot of the [name of queer and trans events curator] events. It's voguing and drag. Like Ki-Ki events. There are a few event series that I follow on Instagram and every time I see there's an event, I buy tickets.

> So, we've been to Death of Glitter, the Pink Party, Femmes & Thems. (Ellis, w/28)

While curating separatist queer and trans events is not new, the change in gender and sexuality politics has necessitated a reconfiguration of how younger queer and trans people negotiate queer spaces as well as how their identities are expressed and made visible in those spaces. As Xavier Livermon (2014, 518) notes in their study of how black queers create space in Soweto party culture, "the provisional spaces formed through the practices such as stokvels point to the possibilities of creating a more socially accountable post-apartheid South Africa for black queers". In a similar vein, the narratives in this study point to the need for representation—a significant factor shaping the creation of these spaces. The proliferation of queer, trans, and gender non-normative identities necessitates the constructions of spaces that affirm and recognise these modes of gender and sexuality in their varying embodiments, formations, and expressions. These spaces, however, are not exempt from racialised and classed politics that continue to shape gender and sexuality cultures in urban spaces. As Ellis recounted the queer and trans spaces and events that they frequent, they also reflected on their experience in those spaces, saying, "I mean, whiteness is definitely a factor." Inquiring into how whiteness is a factor in their experience of queer and trans spaces in the city, Ellis elaborated:

> Ellis: I mean some places are predominantly white, and it's easy for me to navigate. Actually, [name of housemate] and I spoke about this, like Femmes& Thems is predominantly black people, and I was there. I was like, "Oh shit, I'm uncomfortable now" *laughs*.
>
> esethu: Why did you feel uncomfortable, you think?
>
> Ellis: Because I'm not used to being surrounded by so many black people. I mean, it's not a really good reflection of myself *laughs*.

Ellis's excerpt positions experiences of queer and trans events as punctuated and mediated through affective landscapes shaped by the racialised and classed modalities constituting queerness and trans/gender non-normative identity. Nevertheless, this is not a new feature of queer and trans life in South Africa and other contexts too (Canham 2017; Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera 2021; Bhardwaj 2022; 2023). Thus, it is important to note how it continues to shape and inflect trans masculine and gender non-normative people's urban spatial experiences.

Experiences of queer and trans spaces were narrated as important, a much-needed break from the overwhelmingly cis-gay male and cis-normative dominated queer establishments in the city. Conversely, my research collaborators also critiqued the performative allyship towards trans people that often articulates the pervasive cis-normative understanding of trans identities. For some of my research collaborators, socialising spaces curated specifically for trans people were marked by various forms of harm and discomforts that reveal the ideological and political contours constituting those spaces. For instance, Qiniso reflected on an experience they had while out one night:

> One time, I was at groove. I'm having a nice time, and this person comes through and starts talking to me and they use the wrong pronoun for me. And I'm like, "Actually they/he," and they were like, "Oh, OK." And this person, in the middle of groove, goes on to ask me about my transition. And I'm like, firstly, you don't know me like that. "Have you thought about top surgery? Have you had top surgery?" And I'm just like, haybo, come on, bruh, we're here to have a good time, don't make me think about those things. (Qiniso, b/25)

In this excerpt, Qiniso frames the trans-separatist space as a space of microaggressions that are concealed as curiosity about trans identity, reducing transness to bodily materiality and modification. Qiniso further elaborated on what this form of curiosity, as a pretence, lends itself to:

> There's so much pretence. A friend of mine has this theory around cis-pretence—like cis people will pretend to see you, you know, when you pretend for a childlike, "Ah, it's not harming anybody, let's just pretend." So, I feel like that's what happens. And I feel like within the LGBTI community, people who are not trans are still going through it, like, so much gatekeeping. And onto masculinity within the community, it's like, you're not masculine enough, I need you to be more rrrroooughh. And I'm just like wrong bitch, wrong one. (Qiniso, b/25)

In this excerpt, Qiniso laments the abiding cis-normativity that permeates the understanding of gender in which trans people are framed, which is a prelude to questioning their identities and bodies, even in spaces of enjoyment and nightlife. Qiniso also positions this questioning through what they call "cis-pretence", as a frame through which (queer) cis people specifically engage trans people and feign an understanding of their identities, a kind of 'just go with it' way of relating to trans people. Within these spaces of leisure, my research collaborators' narratives suggest the contours of gender knowledges, whereby bodies are framed through a binary idea of gender that trans and

gender non-normative people are imagined to both desire and embody. Cis-normative ideals of the body permeate queer and trans spaces, marking them for the exclusion of people whose embodiment and expression do not fit the expected queer or trans-normative version of gender subjectivity. Within these spaces, queerness, trans, and gender non-normativity sit in tension with an invisible and idealised norm of cis-normativity that still presents itself and is taken up as a template through which gender embodiment is understood and made visible. The persistence of cis-normative and trans-normative frames of understanding and visibilising trans and gender non-normative embodiment sometimes lends itself to the same violences that trans people encounter in cis-normative and heteronormative spaces. For example, Arlo tells a story of being in an event specifically curated for trans and gender non-normative people in the city, where a well-known trans person and influencer from the United States had come to present at the event. After the presentations, Arlo told me they had to leave the afterparty early. I asked why:

> During the brief little party situation, I'm walking from the bar; why did somebody grope me? And 90% of people in that room were trans, I swear to God. So, that's supposed to be a safe space for trans people? No such thing as a safe space, at all. You can write it on my tomb stone, "There's no such thing as a safe space" …So, the point I'm at is I want to give myself the illusion of safety…I don't know what safety would look like as a trans person. I think safety for trans people would require a complete overhaul of society in general, realistically. There are no measures that can be implemented. You can safe space this and safe space that on your little posters in your gay club or any space, it means sweet fokol [nothing]. (Arlo, c/25)

Separatist trans spaces are necessary but not unmarked by the ubiquity of violence. The narratives of trans masculine people in this study speak to various complexities of navigating everyday socialising spaces of consumption as well as, specifically, spaces designed with queer and trans people in mind. The narratives in this section also speak to the complexities of everyday life, marked not only by gender and sexuality but also the fact of existing in city/urban spaces. Space and identity stand in perpetual tension, enclosing and rupturing, marking—however inconsistently—some subjectivities for varying iterations of violence and harm. While these are trans masculine narratives, they also speak to the condition of life in the cities, whereby identity continues to stand in tension with different spatial formations and the making or unmaking of space and gender. Their various intersections with other social identities tell us more about the socio-political and economic landscape of the cities.

Concluding Reflections

This chapter shows the complex and expansive urban trans masculine geographies of leisure and socialising spaces. The narratives in this chapter speak to the unyielding hold of classed cis-heteronormative grammars for understanding and articulating gender and sexuality embodiment and constituting space. These normative grammars are cited as the backdrop against which spatial configurations, including spaces constituted as gay/queer/trans, cannot seem to escape. This chapter also illustrates the complex and contradictory constitutions of socialising and leisure spaces and how varying performances and articulations of gender-sexuality-race undulate through different constitutions of spaces. Further, class positions mark certain formations of trans masculinities as proximal to and extended beyond the classed aesthetic lines of socialising and leisure spaces, while simultaneously being constituted outside of them. In addition, trans masculine geographies of leisure and socialising spaces gesture to how bodies come to materialise different identity positions, primarily in response to how performative spaces of leisure invite and extend visibility variously to sexuality, gender, and race. Trans masculinities emerge in these spaces as critical of the normative constitutions, but they also enfold variously through the same normalising logics regimented through economic capital.

The following chapter addresses how trans masculine people constitute and practice community and deploy various strategies for performing and enunciating trans masculinity to mediate their movement and inhabit urban spaces in the two cities.

8. Narratives of Formations and Practices of Community as Constitutions of Urban Space

Trans masculine people's narratives of dwelling in and navigating urban spaces have, thus far, gestured to the complexities of inhabiting urban spaces. These complexities mark the disconnects between, firstly, how spaces have been imbued with unstable and changing articulations of racialised, classed, and gendered meanings. Secondly, how their bodies are variously rendered illegible through racialised, classed, and gendered constitutions of urban spaces. Turning to a different articulation and formation of urban spaces, this chapter presents narratives of community as a strategic intervention into and negotiation of dominant and superimposing meanings of socio-spatial relations in urban spaces. This chapter sutures narrations of improvisational strategies and practices that trans masculine people deploy to negotiate and make life liveable in urban spaces. To this end, I examine narratives of practices and constitutions of community as iterations of social spaces sutured through varying forms of social relations and intentions. Through these narratives, community emerges not as a locale, but as collective resistance practices of space—the active, intentional creation of community as both an articulation of resisting the normative figurations of space and space as the physical, material space for dwelling, imagining, and living liveable lives. In this analysis, I am particularly guided by Massey's (1993; 2005) theorisation of space that proposes thinking of spaces/places, less as "areas with boundaries around" and more as "networks of social relations and understandings". Indeed, the trans masculine life history narratives analysed in this chapter reveal contention with spatial boundaries; they shift and dissolve with different iterations and constitutions of community and/as practice of space, both in physical and digital spaces.

As I will show in this chapter, the ideas and practices of community expounded in these narratives constitute community as neither a distinctive locale nor as homogeneous. Rather, the narratives gesture to shifting

articulations of community marked by power relations and "fractious political positionings" (Hines 2010, 606). Community as practice features both material and digital spaces in which trans and queer subjectivities are expressed and made visible (Tucker 2009b). The practices and articulations of community, both as a space and resistance to normative fictions of spatialised gender socialities, were narrated through two key formations, which I analyse in this chapter. The first formation concerns constituting and practising community through friendships, romantic and sexual relationships, and chosen family undergirded by intentional practices of care, pleasure, support, and affirmation. The second formation emphasises physical and digital spaces of community as surfaces upon which they imagine and practice freedom, primarily through trans, migrant, and queer visibility as a mode of resistance in public and digital spaces. The analysis in this chapter specifically coheres around the question concerning the kinds of resources from which trans masculine people draw to negotiate and create liveable lives in the spaces where they live and how they shape their mobilities in the urban spaces in which they move.

Articulating and Practising Community: On Friendships, Relationships, and Chosen Family

Narratives of practising and forming community as space emphasised specific relations such as friendships, relationships, and chosen family as key iterations. In this framing of community, through the three forms of relations, the narratives posit a heterogeneous formation undergirded by intentional practices of care, pleasure, support, and affirmation. Constituting the space and object of community as constitutive of myriad formations of social relations and subjectivities allows for an expansive but fragmented idea of community that is sutured by evolving needs and values—in this instance, needs for belonging, being seen, affirmed, and supported—in response to the socio-political landscape in which trans masculine lives unfold. Through friendships, relationships, and chosen family, the trans masculine people in this study gesture to the significance of their communities as a buffer and resistance to socio-economic precarity, offering affirming and caring spaces for exploring identity, creating spaces for belonging, and being seen. Constituting community through practices of affirmation and care as a strategy for resistance has a long history in feminist and queer mobilising, captured succinctly in Audre Lorde's popular declaration, "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde

1988, 130). In their narratives, my research collaborators constitute community through practices of care, support, and affirmation as tools for a structure and practice of community that defies normative formations and valuations of life, fortifying strategies for maintaining liveable lives.

Narratives of family and care were not extant; as I discussed in Chapter 6, family relationships are fraught with a lack of understanding. Trans people in this study talked about microaggressions within their families that make it difficult to explore emotionally supportive relationships. As Arlo said about being a trans masculine person at their family Christmas lunches, "And then there's just sitting around the Christmas table with your family, and you have to hear transphobic shit all the time, and then you start fighting with your auntie for that, and you start fighting with your other auntie for saying the k[14] word over, like, pudding." The intersection of transphobia and anti-blackness articulated within the spaces of family Christmas lunches is an example of the general feeling around the intellectual and emotional labour that trans people do to participate in their families.

"I've experienced a community and a care that's been sooo soft and so nice"

Across my research collaborators' life histories, friendships, relationships, and chosen families were narrated as the building blocks for community and indispensable tools for navigating urban spaces. Friendships from which care, support, and affirmation—articulated in reciprocity and attentiveness—allowed trans masculine people to navigate inequitable housing infrastructure, negotiate technologies and meanings of becoming and embodying trans identity, and simply create and hold space for trans and gender non-normative embodiment and modes of being. As introduced in Chapter 5, navigating unequal housing infrastructures in the city shapes the conditions and quality of life for some trans masculine people in this study. In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, Qiniso was unhoused, unemployed, and had just completed their community training in connection with their science degree. Being an unhoused and unemployed graduate in Cape Town during the pandemic, Qiniso reflected on how crucial their friendships were to them at that time and how they leaned into them to negotiate living in the city:

[14] The k word is a racist anti-black slur used to refer to black people, particularly during the apartheid period.

> Being in insecure housing and being unhoused, I'm currently being held by friends who have known me for, like, four months. They have so much kindness, care, and compassion for me because they see me, and they love me, and that just always brings me to tears. (Qiniso, b/25)

Qiniso reflects on navigating insecure housing, a reality lived by many other trans and gender non-normative people in the city, particularly poor black trans and gender non-normative people (cf. Bhagat 2018). In this excerpt, Qiniso positions their friendship network as a buffer against housing inequality and cyclical transphobic discrimination in the city's housing practices that prevent trans people from applying for and accessing housing due to being constituted outside of the humanising administrative binary formation of gender. Writing on friendships and care, Sophie Bowlby (Bowlby 2011, 607) argues that "the social roles of friends will be influenced by the care provided from other sources such as the state". This is echoed in Qiniso's reflection, which also gestures at the indispensable care in friendships as the basis for community and a strategy for surviving and living in urban spaces. The narratives on friendship and care in this study echo recent scholarship examining how trans people resist and navigate state neglect. Basic services such as housing and healthcare are provided by seeking support through their social networks and communities (cf. Edelman 2020).

Further, as Edelman (2020) argues in their study, and as I show in this analysis, practises of care in friendship are articulated as a buffer and resistance against structural and economic precarity that enfolds trans life through practices of disposability. In this way, care, support, and affirmation in friendships are also positioned as a political strategy against urban processes of marginality, erasure, and social and physical death. This is echoed by Qiniso's reflection on community care as a survival strategy:

> I learnt of this term called community care. I've wanted to focus on community care as a tool that trans people are using to survive and live past our short life expectancy. The power of community care, in tandem with self-care in this society that pushes self-care is—this year, I've experienced a community and a care that's been sooo soft and so nice. And this is a period in my life that I've sort of taken myself out of my family, mostly because I feel like I don't want to explain myself and I don't want to trigger myself. (Qiniso, b/25)

Community care, articulated in ambivalent parallel to self-care, is framed as intellectual and practical labour in friendships and community, oriented towards disrupting socio-economic processes that expose trans life to precarious conditions, making life unliveable. Further, this excerpt suggests

that community care is important for imagining and establishing practices that support living against and past the structures of trans necropolitics that systematically expose trans and gender non-normative life to unliveable life conditions. Trans necropolitics names the forms of power that mark some fraction of the population for death while it deems others fractions suitable for life-enhancing investments (Riley and Haritaworn 2013). Care in the site of friendships also holds the possibility for shifting or disrupting the logics that constitute a liveable life. Thus, in invoking the care and compassion experienced and nurtured in friendships, Qiniso's reflection echoes Hil Malatino's (2020) writing on care as central in the social reproduction of trans and gender non-normative subjectivities, where for some decentring the family is a necessary step.

In other narratives of friendship as an important aspect of community, friendships were articulated as significant in spaces in which trans masculine people feel seen and respected. For example, Tyler shared that he has mostly kept a small circle of friends who have known each other for an extended period. His small circle of friends, as he says, have seen him change and grow in his identity, supporting him throughout. Tyler also framed his friendships alongside his colleagues and family as connections that have been supportive in his journey:

> I'm very glad that I have the friends as well as the colleagues that I have and even my family. Because, I think, people go out of their way, not like out of their way to say, "OK, I have to, he said he is he," not like that, but like, they really do make an effort. I don't have to—you always find that people you have to remind [about your pronouns] a thousand times but, for the most part, people made it effortless. They took care of themselves, and I didn't have to take care of them. (Tyler, b/25)

In this excerpt, Tyler positions his friends, colleagues, and family as supportive and important in negotiating his trans masculine identity. Their support is framed as minimising the burden and labour of consistently explaining himself and reminding others to respect his identity using correct pronouns. Having this form of support, Tyler gestures to the ease it allows him to navigate his identity.

Other figurations of friendships as community emphasised shared identity as an important, although not entirely necessary, facet of friendship and community. Ellis who, at the time of our interview, was living with their trans masculine non-binary friend, also spoke of the importance of having trans kin in their housemate and friend, emphasising that "to have this kinship and to have my special bestie who understands me and who I can come home to, and

rant is priceless." Ellis suggests that being in community with trans kin is a strategy for creating expansive space to hold and affirm their trans masculine subjectivity. Similar to Z Nicolazzo et al.'s (2019) findings on nurturing trans kinship as a strategy for resilience, resistance, and coalition-building, the narratives in this study frame trans friendships as a kinship network and community that recognises and honours trans masculine subjectivity and provides a refuge, a sense of 'coming home', as Ellis's reflection suggests, that offers respite from the everyday intensities of cis-normative social worlds.

For other trans masculine people in this study, formations of trans kinship networks were also articulated as 'chosen family'. While birth/adoptive families were narrated alongside various aspects (such as coming out—see Chapter 5) of negotiating trans identity and space, chosen family was framed as an important site for articulating strategies for resistance through care networks. For instance, reflecting on their support networks and experiences of care in friendships, Arlo emphasised the importance of choosing and nurturing friendships that reciprocate care and are a safe space to be in. Speaking on care in their social networks, they said, "It really is my friends and my partner, I don't think its gonna come from any other people. Just like that RuPaul-esque saying, 'We as gay people, we get to choose our family'. I kinda hate RuPaul, but she was right there. So that's like my whole thing, my chosen family." Arlo's reflection also frames friends as 'chosen family', suggesting the all-too-familiar processes in which queer and trans people specifically are either severed from their birth families following coming out as gay or trans, or they separate themselves from birth families for various reasons including experiencing violent and unsafe home spaces (cf. Ream and Forge 2014; Shelton et al. 2018; B. Fraser, Chisholm, and Pierse 2021). Trans people then must find and nurture new forms of family and home in which their identity is respected and affirmed. Elaborating further on the importance of a chosen family, Arlo said:

> Deciding who I wanna surround myself with and going through that quite painful process of having to discard people from your past life, people who you don't align with their vision of themselves and vice versa, and for their social spaces and your social spaces. It is what it is, and it's not necessarily only for queer people that are, like, allowed in my space. It's just about choosing the right people to surround yourself with. Safe spaces for me are in people. There's no such a thing as a physical safe space; it's people for me. (Arlo, c/25)

In this excerpt, Arlo intimates the process of finding a network of friends based not only on shared identity but also on mutual respect and safety. The chosen family as a support structure is suggested here to offer a sense of identity and

belonging as well as alignment on key ideas and practices for how life unfolds, including respecting and acknowledging each other's identities. What is also important in these narratives is how the city spaces, in their expansive geography and demographic composition, offer opportunities for finding and establishing networks of support with people who are aligned with trans and gender non-normative life. Some of my research collaborators who were raised and continue to live in the city did not speak of going outside their cities to find social support networks. Instead, they positioned themselves as having a space in the city to navigate and cultivate new forms of kinship and chosen families.

While, at times, narratives of friendships and care invoked shared (gender or sexuality) identity as one of the key structuring facets of establishing friendships that embrace and affirm trans subjectivity, for others, like Arlo and Rosemary, identity-based friendships/networks of care were not positioned as critical to building and nurturing practices of communities. For instance, Rosemary reflected on the role of friendships and identity in their life and what it feels like to be part of a close-knit circle of friends, saying:

> It just feels like we're friends. It feels like identity has nothing to do with it which is the way I like it. It's therapeutic and important to have people that you relate to, who understand your experiences, but I think most people should have relationships that are not based on our identity. I feel like you should rather base your friendship around personal interest, like personality and stuff, cos that's how you're supposed to make friends. If you make friends with someone on the basis of having something in common with them with regards to a core facet of your identity, it's a good way to just have people around who are just really bad matches for you. Also, because anyone can be trans, just because they are trans doesn't mean they are a better person or more likely to agree with you on the most fundamental political ideas. You can never trust that. (Rosemary, w/21)

For Rosemary, shared gender identity is not necessary in cultivating friendships; rather, shared politics is more important. The desire for trans kinship in these narratives suggests that trans masculine people need spaces and social networks that affirm their identity and their lives. These spaces allow them to cultivate tools and practices of resistance to structural violence and precarity as well as to establish spaces of belonging that buffer the perpetual socio-political and economic threat of undoing trans life. As such, the importance placed on friendships as structures of care and resistance varies along how trans masculine people are positioned in relation to various resources that sustain and nurture the continuity of their lives.

While these constitutions of community go beyond trans identity, the narratives begin by acknowledging trans as informing their practices of community, framed partially through shared values and needs. Trans is also deployed strategically for its capacity as an epistemological tool for constituting networks of care and pleasure within community that tend towards articulating and practising a present and futurity that breaks with normative terms for gendered forms of sociality as well as inhabiting and constituting space (Radi 2019). Further, community is not taken as the panacea to the overwhelming and coercive classed and racialised status quo; rather, it is an evolving practice and articulation of being and becoming with others in spaces that support and affirm expansive iterations of trans masculine subjectivities in their myriad and fluid constitutions of sexualities, class identity, and anti-racist constitutions.

Articulations of friendships as community differed according to the needs and desires of trans masculine people. For those for whom economic precarity defined their most urgent needs, having access to networks of care and support marked the difference between being unhoused in the city without any form of support and being in community with friends who shared resources and supported a living shielded from the violence of being unhoused and trans in the city. For others, formations of community along friendship lines defined desires for being seen and expressing identity in relational spaces that are supportive and affirming. These narratives of care, as articulated by my research collaborators, gesture at the "affective connective tissue" practised and mobilised to offer "visceral, natural and emotional heft to acts of preservation that span a breadth of localities, selves, communities and social worlds" (Hobart and Kneese 2020, 2). While the identity-based community was not emphasised, it was intimated that being openly trans was an important part of being in community and nurturing collectivities that allow for and support the exploration and evolution of trans life.

"I've always felt so seen, so loved"

Other trans masculine people in this study found care and support within the spaces of romantic and sexual relationships. For example, Ellis who, at the time of our interviews, was in a polyamorous relationship, reflected on how crucial one of their partners, who is a cisgender man, has been in the process of navigating starting their medical transition. Ellis recounted:

> The main thing is, from the first date, he's been so supportive. I've always felt so seen, so loved. And to be able to share those moments of thinking about

> starting HRT. I think my ex-boyfriend, who is also trans, was like, pushing me, being like, "Go, go, go, do it." My boyfriend who is cis is like, "Do whatever is good for you," and I enjoy this neutrality, giving me the space to do whatever I think is best. (Ellis, w/28)

In this excerpt, Ellis positions their relationship as an important site of care and affirmation, particularly the affordance of "space to do whatever I think is best" when navigating their ongoing exploration and negotiation of medically transitioning. This positive framing of romantic relationships for trans identity exploration and expression supports the nascent scholarship on transgender romantic relationships (see Pulice-Farrow, Clements, and Galupo 2017) in which affirmation and support in romantic relationships play an important role in the wider socio-political context of interpersonal relationships and communities that support the navigation of trans identity and trans life. This is particularly important in the framing of existing supportive social networks that buffer against time-consuming processes of accessing healthcare for medical transitioning, compounding with the wider socio-political micro- and macroaggressions targeted at trans and gender non-normative people.

Care in romantic relationships was underscored in processes of medically transitioning in which my research collaborators positioned their partner and ex-partners as crucial to their process and navigation of hormone therapy. For example, Mpho began his medical transitioning while at university and, at the time, he encountered difficulties with COVID-19 and the changes in priorities for healthcare institutions, which made accessing trans-affirming transitioning services that much harder. Mpho recounts a time in which his ex-partner and their 'bond' were questioned by a classmate:

> So, we're standing outside at [name of university building], and I'm busy working on one of my sculptures, so he asks me, am I single now, and I'm like, yeah, and he's like, "But I always see you around your ex," and I'm like, "It's a long story." See, with my ex, we started dating right before I started transitioning, so she got to really see everything. She was there at my first doctor's appointment. She went with me. She went with me when I'd go to therapy; she was there. That kind of bond, for me, it can't be broken. Even right now, we're still in contact, that should tell you, I mean, from 2019 to 2023, there's something special. (Mpho, b/25)

Mpho narrates his relationship with his ex as critical to his medical transitioning and the changes he encounters in his university's space. Mpho positions his relationship as key, where he has solidified support and care beyond being in a romantic relationship to being sutured by a deep friendship.

This friendship is highlighted as an important part of his support network (Galupo et al. 2014).

Others narrated specifically trans-for-trans (t4t) relationships as key in their negotiations of identity and community. For example, Haydn (it/they) is a 21-year-old white trans man from Durbanville, Cape Town. At the time of our interviews, Haydn was in a relationship with their trans partner, shared how it is to be in a t4t relationship. Saying, "It's a t4t relationship, so we have a better understanding how to interact with each other's bodies, you know?! The way that my partner interacts with my body makes me feel really good about myself." Haydn positions the trans knowledge in their t4t relationship as important for navigating their bodies and how to be with each other physically as trans people. Max talked about his t4t polyamorous relationship in a similar way, emphasising understanding and shared trans knowledges as key for their connection:

> Both my partners are trans. One is trans masc, and the other is non-binary, and just discussing gender with them and deconstructing the ideas that we have, that we were taught of gender and made to believe, and doing this together as a group where we all have similar ideas and thoughts in various intensities it, that is like umm—I really wanna say it's stimulating in terms of gender euphoria. We all come from different backgrounds; it feels um…kind of like everything makes sense in the world for that moment. (Max, w/23)

The narratives in this sub-section gesture to varying configurations of relationships and how they buffer needs for being seen, belonging, and articulating trans identities in a safe space with people with adequate and expansive knowledges about trans identities. These relationships are instances of being in community with others, as some of my research collaborators mention being in small networks or communities where relationships are the connective tissue. Whether articulated as a triangulation of the birth family versus chosen family/community versus society, there seems to be a perpetual division between the social spaces in which trans life is not only a possibility but an affirmed and thriving mode of being and living, compared to a larger societal reality in which the contours of what is possible for trans and gender non-normative life are even more constricted and make no space for nurturing and exploring belonging. The spaces of friendship/relationships, chosen family, and community in which experiences of care, affirmation, and belonging figure trans masculine life as a reality, positing a continuity and futurity through which trans masculine people imagine, create, and nurture liveable lives.

Navigating Physical Community and Digital Communities Spaces

Thus far in this chapter, I have explored constitutions and practices of community primarily positioned and experienced through friendships, romantic and sexual relationships, and (chosen) family. These three formations were narrated as a buffer against wider and ubiquitous spatial experiences of trans micro- and macroaggressions. These enunciations of community networks of care and support mark the strategies and processes for carving life-supporting and life-giving experiences that allow for expressing and living within degrees of freedom. These practices also support the identity work of trans people, allowing them to exist in different spaces with a degree of freedom and confidence. The latter is made more prominent in how trans masculine people speak about the physical and digital community spaces to which they belong and what they do for their constructing of liveable lives.

South Africa is a predominantly religious country, with large populations of Christian, Muslim, African traditional, Jewish, Hindu, and other religious communities. In urban city spaces, most of research collaborators shared no significant connections to religion as an important facet shaping their spatial experiences. While narratives of religious spaces/institutions were not emphasised or remarked upon by most of my research collaborators, suggesting a relatively low investment or interaction with such spaces, my research collaborators who are immigrants in the country mentioned interacting with church spaces in their quest for seeking community and belonging.

"I think I was shocked myself at how I got embraced"

Two of my research collaborators who migrated to Johannesburg over fifteen years ago articulated the significance of their encounters with church institutions as, for one, a personal journey for belonging and pursuing a religious calling and, for another, one of the spaces they encountered in their quest to find and be in community with other trans, queer immigrants. The former was narrated by Loapi Tau, a Christian trans man preacher. Loapi Tau started his spiritual journey when he travelled to his home country when, he states, he suffered from major burnout from working in a trans NGO and doing outreach work. He said, "When I got home, I explored that spiritual calling and got involved with a local church, which became its own community for me." Trans masculine communities span geopolitical spaces and mark the mobilities

of trans masculine immigrants. Loapi Tau now has another 'home' church in Johannesburg, where he continues training and strengthening his relationship with God and his church community. Finding his first church community back home where he is accepted, Loapi Tau remarked on what that experience meant to him:

> I was like, if I ever believe that my creator has created me this way, then that's how I'm going to serve. That was my approach. I was like, this is who I am, and this is what I believe, and that's not subject to change. I think I was shocked myself at how I got embraced and how I was accepted and how much I grew. Loapi Tau (B/31)

Now a practising Christian and preacher in training in his community church, Loapi Tau credits his church for its openness and acceptance. He remarks on the importance of being in a space where he can contribute with his skills and gifts, saying:

> I think it's always amazing to see how much we grow when we are taken in for who we are, just human beings who wanna show up, who wanna be there, that's it. And I think it's so amazing for us as trans people when we get to show our skills and our talents, you know, and not as Loapi Tau, who is trans, but Loapi Tau who can do something. (Loapi Tau, b/31)

Trans-migrant community networks were positioned as sites for sharing resources as well as spaces of belonging and affirmation that offer respite from the everyday realities of living in Johannesburg as a trans immigrant (cf. Camminga 2019; Husakouskaya 2017). For others, contributing to and nurturing communities involved larger political projects for connecting and helping other trans, queer immigrants in the city by establishing physical, organisational spaces to gather and address trans, queer immigration issues. This project became King's focus as he sought to connect with other queer, trans immigrants in Johannesburg. King recalled his first few years in the city and how he sought community after being kicked out of his sister's house, his only relative in the city at that time, for dating women (then being a lesbian). King said:

> I remember from my research; I came across LGBT organisations…I then later met the [country name] LGBT community here in SA that I knew from home. One of them told me about an LGBT ministry at the [name of church] church in Braamfontein, so I went there. They were like, "No, you don't even need to start your own organisation, there's a space already that's doing the same thing, this idea that you have." Then I went to the church, and I attended a few

> meetings. I realised that this is like a psychosocial support type of space where we go just to be with others like us and we just talk about our struggles, and we keep each other company and just make friends. (King, b/37)

For King, he narrates his need and desire for community beyond psychosocial support. King recalled his experiences of being undocumented and emphasised how accessing services becomes difficult without papers: "Access in South Africa for our community has not been very easy." King positions himself as a key part of his trans-queer immigrant communities, saying:

> It's only now that you know the [name of institution] trans clinic is in existence, and I'm also the chair of the advisory board. It makes it every easy for—I will speak on behalf of the trans migrant, refugees, asylum seekers community everywhere, every chance I get. I use my position there to say, "Hey, you know what? We've got our people who struggle and have no documentation and every space they go; people want to see documentation or identification. And once they find that you're illegally in the country, then there's no service for you. What can you do?" And they help. (King, b/37)

For King, his idea and practice of community is positioned at the intersection of trans, queer, immigrant, refugee, and asylum seekers' need for practical services to make life easier to navigate in the city. He narrates his work to highlight and assist his community with accessing legal documentation to access jobs and improve their conditions of life. King's articulation of community suggests practices that support and seek to improve the precarious conditions undocumented into which queer and trans immigrants are thrust in the city's landscapes. King also started his trans and queer immigrant organisation to further his work in community with and for trans queer immigrants in the city. The enunciation of queer trans immigrant community as also a physical space that helps with administrative and legal processes was narrated by Thirty as key to navigating belonging and visibility in the city, especially amongst people with shared culture/background and identity. Thirty who, at the time of our interviews, had lived in Johannesburg for over a year, having moved from Zimbabwe, talked about his participation in a network/organisation of trans migrants in the city in which he has found community and friendship. Being a part of a trans queer immigrant organisation and community, Thirty reflected on what it means to exist in that space:

> Currently, the [trans queer immigrant organisation] has a skills workshop that they are doing. In that space, as far as really existing in a community, in a space where there are queer people, this has been the most because we're there for a

> week, we are sharing everything, we are sharing the space, we are spending time together, we are conversing and the like…When I came from home, I really didn't know anyone here except one person…the director of the [trans queer immigrant organisation]. They have workshops, like mental wellness…different workshops. I would attend those workshops, so that's how I then ended up meeting with one or two queer people. And in those spaces, I've also met people who I could relate to and call my friends, rather than someone that is part of the community. (Thirty, b/30)

Thirty emphasises and positions the organisation's space as central to his practice of and belonging to a community. He framed his experience of being and belonging in this network/organisation of trans migrants in Johannesburg by juxtaposing the affordances of his trans migrant network/community with the dominant, normative everyday space he calls "society"—a world in which he cannot fully express and embody his gender and sexuality. He elaborated:

> It feels like I am actually existing in two different worlds right now. There's a world where I am affirmed, where I can be me, and then there's another world that I was exposed to when I got here, and I was not passing as much. So, it's like these people know me a certain way, and then this other side, the community, these people know me for who I am and how I am. I don't have to even correct them with anything because they know, and it's safe. And then there's this other society that I am afraid to actually face it and think…as I am looking at myself transitioning sometimes, I wonder, "What are they gonna think?" but I can't really have that conversation with them because I don't feel safe. (Thirty, B/30)

In this excerpt, Thirty juxtaposes his community against a wider "society" in which he feels unsafe to express himself, fully articulating the condition for existing in the normative world through passing—being enfolded into normative logics of gender and bodily materiality. He positions his community of trans immigrants as a safe space for him to explore his identity and share his life with others (cf. Camminga 2019). Further, the juxtaposition of the two realities, or living in two worlds, is a continuous narrative in the trans masculine life histories. For instance, reflecting on what it is like to exist and experience himself as a trans migrant in a community/social network where he can express himself without fear or hesitation, Thirty said:

> Honestly, I feel more like myself. I don't really have to work extra hard at anything. Yes, I have…certain standards that I set for myself that, no matter which space I'm in, this is how I present, this is how I look like. But it has been a space where I can be myself; it's a space where I've had to learn to accept

> how it feels, like, to be affirmed because sometimes, we want it [affirmation], but sometimes we don't know how to accept it when it happens. It feels foreign, and the more time I spend in that space, I want more of it because it feels good to be in a space where you are affirmed. (Thirty, b/30)

In this excerpt, Thirty gestures to the affirmation and connection he has experienced finding a community of other trans migrants in Johannesburg since he moved and started his transition. He also talks about the difficulty of accepting being affirmed and being seen because much of his experience was located in spaces where this was absent. While juxtaposed, the two realities are implicated in one another, shaping how trans masculine life unfolds and is invited to different spatial formations.

Research on trans migrant communities in urban spaces shows how social support and connectedness are generative for trans people's increased positive mental health outcomes and well-being (Bowling et al. 2020; Husakouskaya 2017; Abreu et al. 2021). Similarly, in this study, trans masculine people's narratives of community care and support speak to the ways in which connectedness is crucial for bolstering feelings of belonging and being part of networks of care that are important for maintaining and nurturing liveable trans lives. For migrant trans masculine people, seeking and cultivating community with other trans people also led them to access trans-affirming resources through other trans migrants who had lived in the country for longer than they had and, thus, had an expansive knowledge of the networks of support available to trans migrants. For King, who has been living in Johannesburg for over a decade now and is from Zimbabwe, sharing his trans story at a community event led to him finding resources to help him start his gender-affirming care. Recalling the event, he said:

> It was [name of trans activist] whom I had an encounter with at a conference at the beginning of 2019, at the [name of trans event]. I stood up there, and I shared my story. I spoke about how I badly want to medically transition but finances and family and all of that. So, we became close, then we started talking, we exchanged numbers. One day, he gave me a call and he was like, "I still can't get over what you said at the conference. I remember that was me at some point and somebody came through for me, they held my hand and helped me financially also. What do you need?" He said, "Go get your tests done, whatever the outcome of your blood test, then I will help you to get your first few bottles of T so you can get started." So, it was then that I was like, you know what, let me dive in; here is the support I wanted. (King, b/37)

In this excerpt, King frames his speaking up and seeking out connections as a strategy that helped him access gender-affirming care as well as establish and

nurture community and friendship with people who share similar trans and migrant identities. King's narrative also shows how trans migrant networks and friendships can buffer against economic precarity. Roberto Abreu et al. (2021) found similar forms of community support among Latinx transgender people in the US, where they helped each other to access education and information that supported their process of starting gender-affirming care.

Other trans masc people also emphasised physical queer and trans community spaces for creating and practising freedom. Tshepang, a recent university graduate, emphasised taking up space in public spaces and communing with fellow queer and trans people. Tshepang reflects on how their practice of community is also a practice of freedom:

> I get euphoria essentially in community. I don't know if you guys had [name of wine bar and restaurant] when you were here. It's going to that place and getting a bottle of wine and playing games. I love playing games, like, there's 30 Seconds from last night on the table from graduation celebrations. Playing games with chosen family and chosen community, having a glass of wine and just being together…it's like an acknowledgement of who we are and the sort of spaces we encompass and the freedom that we experience in those moments and the recognition of the shackles we sort of had to break in order to reach a space of freedom, not necessarily to celebrate the pain but celebrate where we've come from that. (Tshepang, b/21)

In this excerpt, Tshepang recounts a practice of intentionally creating spaces to celebrate, play, and affirm each other's identities, journeys, and experiences. Across these narratives, there is an insistence on affirmation, being seen, pleasure, and celebration of trans masculine and gender non-normative identities as the modus for the charge that propels and animates trans and gender non-normative life, instead of centring and lamenting the pain and trauma perpetually meted out by a patriarchal, heteronormative society. Physical communities are narrated through physical spaces that provide possibilities to gather and be in community with other trans and queer people. Practising and constituting community through being physically close to each other allows for engaging in collective life-giving activities and creating spaces to play and be visible in public; it is a practice of freedom.

As the narratives in this section illustrate, community serves varying purposes: it allows for gathering in public spaces, and it is important for mobilising resources to help each other with legal and administrative processes. Community is also framed as a space for play, creating possibilities for existing together publicly, and as a practice of freedom. These enunciations and practices of community suggest community as constitutive of the spaces

that trans masculine people carve out for themselves in urban spaces and occupy publicly. Community here also suggests collectivity as the rhythm and life-giving force that allows trans and gender non-normative people to occupy and be visible in public socialising spaces. Collectivity intimates belonging to something, to a collective of people, where creative play, learning, and joy shape the moments of encounter and gathering. Community is also enunciated as friendship, building social bonds, and creating networks for play. Moreover, community is constituted through people who know each other and are connected, in part, by their gender and sexuality non-normative identities as well as shared desires to exist/be visible in and have a public life. This insight extends constitutions and enunciations of communities of care in trans scholarship (Barcelos 2022; Crath et al. 2021; Edelman 2020).

Further, these practices of community gesture to fragmented, specific, contextualised iterations of belonging. The community articulated in these narratives is conjunctural; it converges at the intersections of intentional practices of care, belonging, and being a part of afforming collectives. In queer and trans mobilising, the term community—as in 'queer community' or 'trans community'—is often used uncritically to gesture to an assumed homogenous collective of people who belong to that identity community. The trans masculine narratives in this study, while gesturing to the importance of being in community with people who share the same identity positions, also underscore the diversity of the formations of these communities. For example, in Thirty's invocation of his 'queer, trans, migrant' community, this formation was articulated as a response and resistance to the exclusionary practices of queer and trans mobilising in the city. Processes in which trans and queer migrants, as King emphasised, are often on the margins of considerations, specifically within equality, basic resources, and needs discourses within queer and trans organizations. Thus, to intentionally seek and nurture community along the 'queer, trans, migrant' identity formations is an act of laying claim to fragmented (and sometimes exclusionary) trans and queer communities in the city in which being a migrant creates degrees of separation and lack of consideration from the established and broader trans and queer mobilising organisations in the city.

"Existing on camera": On Digital Spaces

Practices of community also sutured the interplay between community as practice facilitated through social media/the internet and physical community spaces. Digital communities and digital practices of community were particularly emphasised as spatio-temporalities that are more fluid than

physical spaces of community and allow for negotiating identity in different ways. Trans masculine people could access and be part of diverse communities of interest that served varying needs and roles in their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic was especially highlighted as a moment of rupture for physical gathering spaces and community with others. Mister J told me about his gender journey; he came out as a trans man to his family a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic and narrated his practice of community. Desiring community during that time, he turned to his cosplay (costume play) community. Mister J has been in cosplay communities around Johannesburg since he was 16. During the first wave of the pandemic, Mister J noted how his cosplay community moved exclusively to online platforms, and he also began cosplaying on Twitch, a live-streaming service. Mister J said about his cosplay community, "I get a lot of gender affirmation and euphoria from my cosplay community, from TikTok and Twitch and all my friends who are online because I'm all alone in [Asian country]."

Online communities also facilitated feeling connected and 'together' while visiting his grandparents in East Asia during the first wave of COVID-19. Mister J noted how, being in East Asia, he was in a space where he got misgendered a lot, which made him temporarily live closeted. He said the presence of his online community and friends buffered against the effects of that experience.

> I have a Discord[15] spouse, and they would often refer to me as their Discord husband. If I jump into a group voice call and they are already there, I'd usually get a huge shout from them going, "Oh, is that my hubby?" and it would just make me very happy. Like, we're not dating, but it's that sort of terminology, the endearments that come along so naturally that's very obviously not forced, and there's no doubt in their mind that I'm a dude, that makes me very happy. (Mister J, asian/32)

In this excerpt, Mister J positions his digital/online communities to explore and express identity. Practices of kinship are fictional in the instance of "a Discord spouse", suggesting the re-articulation of kinship ties in a digital, although not fictive, space. In this sense, Mister J cosplays the normative formation of kinships through marriage (a spouse) and adapts them to his practices and articulations of belonging and community. In this space, then, Mister J's narrative suggests that using affirming and embracing language highlights the knowledges and languages available in digital communities that are expansive enough to hold and embrace trans masculine and gender non-normative people,

[15] Discord is an instant messaging and VoIP social platform.

affirming their existence. Mister J's excerpt also emphasises the joy and euphoria experienced in forming a community, particularly how his identity, connectedness and belonging are affirmed in various ways:

> I think that definitely helped me get in touch with myself, so I might not be what society expects me to be, and that's on…it definitely gave me that safe space. I think I needed to explore who I was a person so…umm, I also have obviously experienced a lot of hate for it, because if you are an online presence in any shape or form…I don't have a lot of following, but it's enough to have garnered a lot of hate. I get a lot of trolls who stalk me and send hate messages and death threats and that sort of thing, but like, I feel like with a lot of things you can't let that stop you. (Mister J, b/25)

During the pandemic, others turned to Zoom and WhatsApp groups as platforms for connecting and staying up to date with trans-related healthcare things, as the pandemic disrupted the production of synthetic testosterone in the country. Tyler mentions that having a small circle of friends and being able to join online groups created possibilities for making meaningful connections. He said:

> I haven't met a lot of people in person. I have this WhatsApp groups where people post questions and stuff like that, also the Zoom support group that happens every Wednesday and Tuesday, yeah, that's kinda as much as I have at the moment. But because of COVID, it's been a little bit hard to make more meaningful connections with people and know people personally, but like, my hope is that that could be a thing as well.
>
> …
>
> It has been useful, I think, whenever…more especially when you have a question that you assume, or it feels obvious to yourself that people around you are not gonna be able to give you answers to or assist you with that, are specifically related to being trans. I think giving answers to Home Affairs questions and things about the t shortage, I don't think I'd have known about it prior to actually going to try and get it. So, it has been helpful, yeah. (Tyler, b/25)

Digital communities and platforms also offer possibilities for identity work and expression within a space where trans people can control what they share and present to their audience. Qiniso reflected on what it means for them to forge community and create meaning on digital platforms:

> In knowing that the system wants us to only recognise and own our pain, it's a radical act for me to take in my pleasure, sit in my pleasure, and witness other people's pleasure. Black trans people's pleasure is *chefs kiss*…I like taking selfies of myself. Selfies are one of the most affirming things ever. Because I'm seeing myself and because, it's like the most accessible way to capture myself. And I get to control the narrative of what's happening and then, when I look at the picture afterwards, I'm like yesss….That's why I believe selfies are a radical way, because the world won't let us exist in other ways, and there is this new growing movement on TikTok around existing on camera when this world doesn't want you to exist in the so-called real world. So yeah, most of my life is centred around cultivating trans pleasure and cultivating rest. (Qiniso, b/25)

The narratives analysed in this chapter underscore how community spaces and subjectivities become and are made (remade) through practising and insisting on forming and nurturing forms of sociality (communities) that displace gender as the normative and authoritative grammar and syntax for legible and knowable subjectivities and modes of being (Bey 2021; Da Silva 2018). Put differently, the narratives in this chapter suggest displacing gender as a marker of knowable and legible being and liveable life. Forging these strategies also rests on that which trans masculine people in this study already have access. For example, being a student, Tshepang is supported financially by their family, and the social lives they talk about maintaining and articulating as instances of freedom rely on access to capital that allows access to the consumption spaces of the bar and the wine farm. Connected to the narratives of leisure spaces in the previous chapter is the importance of affordability in determining the kinds of spaces and communities to which trans people in this study lay claim. These spaces, while assumed (by those proximal to them) as every day, are also governed by a logic of capital and consumption in which trans subjectivities and gender non-normativity are enfolded (Clarno and Vally 2023; Desai 2023). Class, gender, citizenship status, and queerness become the defining features for accessing these spaces, and the quality of the experience in those spaces is further made complex through evolving articulation of class-gender-sexuality non-normativity in which formations of 'acceptable' articulations of sexuality and gender non-normativity are also tethered to a classed politic.

Conclusion

The narratives suture experiences of care, pleasure, and affirmation experienced in the spaces of friendships/chosen family, romantic relationships, and community (both physical and digital). My research collaborators framed the possibility and liveability of their lives through this triad. They emphasised

their insistence on and embeddedness within the spaces of friendships, family, and community that they choose as resistance and a liberatory act for continuity and survival. This suggests the collaborative and communal imagining and experience of trans and gender non-normative life as a practice not only in self-determination but also the right to be indeterminate. These narratives add to and extend a line of research on trans care and coalitional activism (cf. Edelman 2020; Crath et al. 2021; Barcelos 2022).

Further, the narratives suggest that trans masculine lives cannot be wholly determined and understood through cis-normative and heteropatriarchal formations of the subject. These narratives suggest both care and pleasure as resistance to the precarious confines that racialised gender binaries and other intersecting oppressions posit as well as a possibility for remaking worlds that exceed those offered by the logics of the racialised gender binary and its articulations of family/support networks. Further, care and pleasure are suggested as tools for cultural, intellectual, and action-oriented labour to disrupt social, political, economic, and cultural norms.

9. Conclusion: A Trans Sense of Space

In this dissertation, I have explicated a narrative analysis of urban trans masculine geographies and the complexities of creating liveable trans masculine lives in Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa. Emerging through varying and complex spatial and gendered registers, trans masculine lives in the two cities unfold within and rubs against a multiplicity of socioeconomic, cultural, historical and political processes that shape the conditions for liveable trans masculine lives. These processes further embed ideological constitutions of space that mark the contours of mobility for trans masculine people. In this concluding chapter, I want to bring the reader's attention to the key findings, arguments and contributions in this dissertation.

Key Empirical Findings

This study emphasises and illustrates the utility of a critique of the production of space enunciated through power-geometries, geographies of domination and racial capitalism. Through this amalgam of processes of subjectivation and spatial constitution, this study underscores the shifting and adaptive re-articulations gendered and spatial economies. Trans masculine lives are experienced and articulated through ongoing histories of displacement, dispossession, exclusion, migration, and marginalisation forged through the conjunctural of power-geometries, geographies of domination and racial capitalism. This articulates, for example, through the ongoing processes of gentrification and exclusionary urban housing practices that reveal the deeply rooted measures of life in contemporary South African cities. These practices are rooted in capital and its constitutive enunciations—the racialised and classed gender binary (Ahmed 2006; Bhattacharyya 2018; Jenkins and Leroy 2021). Alongside the complex encounters with capital's constitutive enunciations, the racialised and classed gender binary also shapes the constitution of trans masculine bodies. For example, the insistence on

imaginaries and processes for embodying 'ideal' gendered bodies articulates a persistent constitution and differentiation of bodies through racialised gender, sexuality, and class. Within this differentiation of bodies, this study has shown that understandings of gender are not only individualised processes and practices but also interplay with popular and wider constitutions of the body. These popular constitutions of the body formalise the accepted and legible bodily materialities that are also affirmed and regimented in urban spaces.

On the other hand, the varying alignment processes articulated through an ideal body reveal a contentious and almost singular imaginary of masculinity that cannot seem to writhe itself off from its overdetermination through a historically enunciated epistemology, that is cis heteropatriarchy. This epistemology undergirds the dominant construction of gender as a binary and constituted through heterosexuality and patriarchy. Thus, the urban spatial experiences of trans masculine people in this study point to treading a thin line of desire for their subject positions to be enfolded into the dominant racialised gender binary; however awkward their dwelling within its contours may be. The reason for this desire is articulated as safety and being able to exist in urban public spaces without perpetually fearing and anticipating gender-based harms/violence that mark the disciplining process for transgressing the received conceptualisations and understandings of gender. Cutting across the narratives in this study is the notion that violence is a perpetual and ever-present character of urban life. Whether this violence comes in the form of transphobia, racism, classism, sexual violence, or other registers of violence.

Further, while performances of cis-heterosexual masculinities were deployed as a strategy for safely existing in and navigating public spaces, another dimension of complication curtails trans masculine urban geographies. Being a migrant trans masculine person in the city compounds the labour of passing and maintaining normative gender coherence in public spaces. In addition, being an undocumented immigrant presents a delicate manoeuvring of urban spaces marked by the anxious performance of normative masculinities and avoiding urban spaces in which their immigrant status can be 'found out'. Collectively, these strategies for negotiating normative performances of masculinities were critiqued as erasing queer and trans identity, suggesting that the labour of existing and moving in public urban spaces requires muting certain parts of trans masculine people's identities. To exist in public urban spaces as a trans masculine person is to emerge only partially through the mask and performance of cis-heteronormative masculinities or, slantwise, becoming illegible and indeterminate.

The desire for safety is regimented by access to resources that might allow the trans masculine body to appear 'inline'. In the absence of these resources

and sometimes their failure to allow for shaping the body into a legible masculinity, what is revealed for some trans masculine people then is a tending towards an orientation and negotiation of a liveable life through emerging slantwise (Ahmed 2006b). The slant is both a site and a sight of emergence, a surface and image through which otherwise indeterminate articulations and practices of gender (masculinity) emerge and are visualised. The slant is also a classed emergence and holds the possibility of defining what becomes gender non-normative trans masculinity and normative trans masculinity. With black masculinities already constituted outside the racialising logics of gender proper, appearing slantwise may accentuate, if not expedite, the process of being enfolded into stereotypical articulations of black masculinities. For example, the reflection on the grocery store encounter of being confronted with a generalised and unspoken invocation of criminality and threat as the frames through which black trans masculinity emerges in this urban context. The slantwise emergence ties to historical formations of space and gender that lend different iterations of trans masculinities to different receptions in public urban spaces. Here, gender as an impositional category "is made to attach to bodies of a domesticised space, predicated on the integrity of an ontology constituted by a white symbolic order" (Bey 2021, 67). Thus, trans masculinities are considered through these varying positions and are positioned as a constant negotiation with power structures and normative discourses mediated through subjective gendered, classed racialised and sexuality positions. These negotiations with power structures manifested in urban spaces also index how trans mobilities are intertwined in the power-geometry of urban spaces where dominant and accepted meanings of gendered spaces regiment bodies and their emergence (Massey 1993). This study contributes these critical insights to the relatively scant engagements in trans masculinity analyses within men and masculinities studies (Aboim 2016). It emphasises the significance of analysing how race, class, sexuality, and space co-constitute and emerge trans masculinities. It also gestures to what we might know differently about these subject positions in the broader context of changing and shifting gender and spatial relations today.

In another emergence, trans masculinities rearticulate urban masculine gender expressions as almost a caricature of masculinity articulated as "overpassing" or of embodying masculinity proper. This exaggeration of normative masculinity through the trans masculine subject already undermines and unsutures the integrity of cis-heteropatriarchal masculinities and projects them as something akin to a costume or a mask, as one research collaborator referred to masculinity. What the life histories of trans masculine people also gesture to is the shifting and openness of identity categories. In this study, I do

not offer a fixed definition of trans masculinity or masculinity. However, I gesture to the varying practices and expressions that shift with context, time, place, and desire. Practices responding to a cornucopia of processes of subjectivation—predominantly articulated through the racialised and classed gender and spatial binaries. My research collaborators also did not define masculinity but narrated their lives and processes of becoming through an open and flexible conceptualisation of being and becoming trans masculine. In line with an analytic of abolitionist gender radicality (Bey 2021), this study has shown the analytical possibilities for what we can learn and understand when gender is loosened from its predetermined formation. This is evident particularly in the critique, refusal, re-articulation and re-constitution of the categories of identity in this study. These categories—trans masculinity, race, class, and sexuality—come together in complex and shifting ways. They figure trans masculine subject positions and become enunciated in varying ways that either connect or diverge owing to being historically and presently situated within social structures of power. As the current literature on trans masculinity shows, geographic location influences the expression and practice of trans masculinities (Kłonkowska 2016; Rogers 2018; Abelson 2019), and this study emphasises an important aspect of trans geographies rooted in an intersectional interrogation and one that analyses the processes of racial capitalism on the constitution, understanding and experience of gender.

In this dissertation, I also show how the presence and visibility of trans masculine subjectivities in leisure and socialising spaces underscores these spaces' contested dynamics and constitutions. Leisure and socialising form part of the choreography of social life in the urban contexts of the two cities. Trans masculine geographies of leisure and socialising highlight the class and sexuality aspects of urban socialising spaces and delineate the grammars through which they are invited and accepted into the spaces. Further, urban leisure and socialising spaces in the two cities are produced as fragmented and disciplining, extending normalcy to subjectivities marked by privileges of class, race, and sexuality.

Practices and negotiations of liveable urban lives are revealed as intentional practices of care within and through collective becomings—through community. Here, community stands for a web of intentions and practices that materialise practices and modes of negotiating urban spaces and living. Articulations and constitutions of community are offered as resistive strategies against the necropolitical processes of racial capitalism manifested in the unyielding and impositional racialised and classed gender binary that variably constitutes trans lives through precarity. The triad of strategic articulations of community also emphasises trans masculine insistence on and embeddedness

within the spaces of friendships, family, and community. These iterations of community are narrated as resistance and a liberatory act for continuity and survival. This suggests the collaborative and communal imagining and experience of trans and gender non-normative life as a practice not only in self-determination but also the right to be indeterminate.

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

Through the black trans feminist inspired theoretical and methodological approach taken up in this study, I have shown the thrust of this approach in how it allowed me to inhabit the spaces of my research collaborators. Allowing for a deeper immersion in their knowlegdes, practices and processes of negotiating urban spaces. As I reflect on the introduction and methodology chapters, the methodology of life histories took me into the spaces and experiences my research collaborators invoked. Being in their neighbourhoods and homes, and spaces of leisure and socialising brought to this research a kind of intimacy and depth that I would otherwise not have been able to forge. The life history approach used in this study emphasises the importance of experiential, embodied and practical knowledges of being and living. Using narrative analysis allowed for an analysis of the trans masculine life histories that engaged the complexities of trans masculine spatial experiences and carefully followed the intertwining trajectories that emerge and enfold trans masculine life in the two cities. Although not totalising by any measure, the life history interviews in this study provide a snapshot into a diverse profile of trans masculine people that tells the complex and ever-changing dynamics of gender and spatiality as lived and experienced in the shifting urban contexts of the two cities.

This study invites readers to rethink concepts of urbanity and urban subjectivities and how social identities collide with and are redone by the multiple impulses in the production of city spaces. Urban city spaces are multiple things at once. In this dissertation, I offer snapshots, cut-outs, moments, and ruptures of urban subjectivities and urban spatialities as experienced and lived by trans masculine people. As I argued in Chapter 2, this study has not aimed at cataloguing and delineating what is queer, trans or gay urban space—it departs from that line of analysing and "finding" queers and trans people through locating and fixing the where of their being in the urban city spaces. Although important, I argue for a conception of urban space that goes beyond and rejects fixed constitutions along the impositional racialised, gendered and classed space. In this dissertation, I have argued for and illustrated an analytic of space that takes the urban as multiply constituted

through shifting and sometimes elusive frames. This analytic disabuses any desire for capturing, fixing, and stabilising an authoritative index for space. Thus, arguing that there is no one narrative or experience of the urban from either a trans, queer or any identity perspective. To reiterate then, this study reveals the complex and elusive trajectories and navigational patterns of the urban subjects that respond to, resist, enfold and rub against the multivocality of urban spatial formations. This argument also echoes the black feminist, feminist and queer geography insights on the shifting articulations of power in processes of subjectivation and the urban. Power here indexes the dominant historical and contemporary processes of subjectivation and sociality—where dominant and hegemonic logics and practices are not totalising frames but can be challenged and malleable to some degree (Doreen Massey 1993; McKittrick 2006). Moreover, this is the thrust of this study's contribution to critical urban geographies, particularly the analytical trajectory emphasising intersectional, feminist, trans and queer theorising.

Further, the key narratives of trans masculine embodiment and spatiality in this study also index what I call a trans sense of space. A trans sense of space can be understood alongside Massey's (1993, 61) theorisation of a 'sense of place' through power-geometry, as discussed earlier in this dissertation. A 'sense of place' indexes differential movement through compressed time-space— "a phenomenon which implies the geographical stretching-out of social relations and to our experience of all this" (Massey 1993, 61). Movement within and through space is marked by the shifting dynamics and constitutions of social relations, in which we are variously positioned through formations of class, gender, sexuality, and race that also constitute our experience and understanding of space and place. Moreover, a trans sense of space indexes trans geographies and spatial practices and knowledges that forge an otherwise articulation of embodying gender and space. An otherwise that displaces racialised and classed logics as the authoritative index for subjectivation. That which structures a trans sense of space then is the resistance to cis-heteronormative logics made manifest in the ongoing processes of racial capitalism manifesting in the spatial and gender economies in urban contexts, such as Johannesburg and Cape Town. The research collaborators in this study position themselves and draw from broader discourses of gender, bodies, and embodiment to make sense of their embodiment and negotiation of masculine subject positions. Such invocations of the competing discourses of (trans)gender and space also reveal the material implications for how multiply situated trans masculine subjectivities are interpellated into and emerge through bodies and space. Thus, a trans sense of space indexes critical spatial knowledges of trans and gender non-normative

people that are significant for understanding the processual shifts and evolutions of how social relations and, thus, social spaces are articulated and constituted and constitute life and living.

As I have discussed earlier, I also offered the term masculinities off-centre as an improvisational and experimental approach to theorising trans masculinities that engages with black trans feminist studies' theorisations of trans as an orientation device that marks the refusal of determination from normative grammars of identity (Radi 2019; Bey 2020). As I show in the empirical chapters of this dissertation, I read trans masculinity as an engagement in the refusal of the sex/gender binary that establishes masculinities through the patriarch-form. The patriarchal form, defined by Denise Ferreira Da Silva, refers to "the formal condition of enunciation of any political subject, including social (racial, gender-sexual) subjects, as a thing with authority, that is a deciding entity" (Da Silva 2018, 26). Trans masculinities, figured as refusal, enunciate being outside the violating grasp of racialised binary gender, open the conceptual field of what masculinities can be and do. In their refusal, trans masculinities apprehend a mode of perpetual incompleteness, which can offer and extend black trans feminist thinking of gendered subjectivity that refuses knowability through intuitional forms or categories.

Future Research

Trans masculinities and urban research are a generative empirical and theoretical encounter that holds exciting possibilities for future research at this intersection. This study provides research entry points for further investigation into the aesthetics of urban masculinities, linking research on leisure and socialising to provide analyses on trans aesthetics, sexuality, and urbanity. Another entry point concerns the coming together of language, gender, and space and how this intersection might reveal alternative ways for understanding how the grammars and vocabularies of trans and space shift and change with/in broader discourses of identity to mark the urgencies around finding ways to articulate identity outside of the impositional violence of the racialised gender binary. A theoretical departure into future research could investigate and expand on the onto-epistemologies of trans in contexts beyond the so-called Global North and how they shift the sphere of theorising we call critical social theory.

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Trans Masculine Geographies

This study is a life history inquiry of trans urban spatial experiences that draws from the complex and unfolding life histories/narratives of 19 adult trans masculine people living in urban neighbourhoods in Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa. From their vantage points, I explore the socially produced imaginary and lived urban geographies of the two cities and how trans masculine people create and articulate liveable lives within them. Guiding this inquiry and analysis is the main question: **how do trans masculine people living in urban areas around Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa, navigate and negotiate liveable lives in the spaces and places in which they live and move?**

This dissertation engages with and responds to the need for more critical studies that analyse track how urban trans and gender non-normative lives unfold within wider processes of subjectivation and overdetermination.

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