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Beyond the surface

Understanding the cultural roots of corrective rape in South African townships

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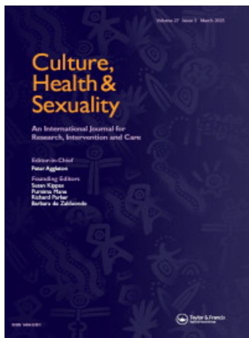

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Beyond the surface: understanding the cultural roots of corrective rape in South African townships

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ABSTRACT
This study engages with the abhorrent phenomenon of corrective rape as a form of sexual violence employed by perpetrators in an alleged attempt to 'correct' lesbians from their sexual orientation. It focuses on experiences in South African townships and the harrowing realities of Black lesbians who are regularly confronted with this act of sexual violence. Through critical analysis, this study demonstrates how heteronormative gender hierarchies and patriarchal cultural norms fuel the perpetration of corrective rape within these communities. Through an examination of cultural practices such as *ukuthwala*, or 'bride abduction', the article sheds light on the historical acceptance of sexual violence against women and the disregard for women's bodily autonomy. An exploration of the complex terrain of anti-rape advocacy highlights the challenges that homophobia in these areas causes. The article sheds light on the strategic weaponisation of colonial histories that deflects from factors currently contributing to harmful cultural practices. Ultimately, the analysis is driven by a commitment to reduced inequalities and social justice for African women. It seeks to contribute to the development of a more inclusive and equitable society in South Africa, in which the rights and safety of lesbians are protected, and gender-based violence is actively challenged.

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Introduction

In the heart of South Africa's townships, a deeply disturbing phenomenon persists, one that starkly illustrates the interrelationship of gender-based violence, homophobia and cultural beliefs. This phenomenon, known as "corrective rape," involves the sexual assault of lesbians by heterosexual men under the guise of "curing" their homosexuality (Brown 2012). The term corrective rape, itself used interchangeably with "curative rape" within this article, is used due to the global recognition of the term while firmly rejecting the notion that lesbianism needs correction or cure, as it neither requires a cure, nor can be "corrected".

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In South Africa, a township is a term used to describe a residential area or neighbourhood that was historically designated for non-white residents under a system of apartheid enforced in South Africa from 1948 to 1994 (Jürgens et al. 2013). Despite the end of apartheid, numerous townships continue to exist in South Africa today, although efforts have been made to improve living conditions and access to services in these areas. However, it is important to note that socio-economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, lack of good quality education, crime and high rates of sexual assaults, persist in many townships, contributing to ongoing social inequalities (Jürgens et al. 2013).

This article centres on Black lesbians in South African townships, a group disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, to shed light on the links between racial and sexual identities in the context of corrective rape. The decision to focus on this demographic was informed by scholarly sources such as Gaitho (2022), who highlights the compounded vulnerabilities faced by Black lesbians in these townships as well as the unequal representation of Black lesbians compared to other races as victims of corrective rape. The main ethnic focus in this article is on Zulu and Xhosa experience, as Zulu and Xhosa people constitute the majority in many townships (Campbell et al. 1995).

The research explores the multifaceted nature of corrective rape, including its underreporting, the cultural and patriarchal beliefs that perpetuate it, the experiences of victims, and the broader landscape of homophobia in South Africa. It also scrutinises the systemic failures affecting lesbians in these communities, from police and medical response inadequacies to resistance from the local community (Fletcher 2014).

Background

Although corrective rape is not limited to South Africa – as noted by Doan-Minh (2019) the phenomenon has been documented in neighbouring Zimbabwe, and in India, Jamaica and the USA – it is noteworthy that South Africa exhibits alarmingly high rates of sexual violence, with the nation being described as the 'rape capital' of the world in 2011 (Fletcher 2014) with the incidence of corrective rape being estimated at ten rapes a week (Gaitho 2022).

The term corrective rape is a deeply problematic misnomer that falsely implies an act of rehabilitation rather than an act of violence. The terminology reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is both normative and enforceable through sexual violence, masking the brutal reality of this crime (Mayeza 2024). This term first entered into common usage after the brutal gangrape and murder of South African national soccer player Eudy Simelane in 2008 (Doan-Minh 2019). Simelane's story is a harrowing reminder of the dangers faced by lesbians in South Africa, dangers that persist despite the country's legal protections – on paper at least – for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual plus (LGBTIQA+) rights.

At the core of this investigation into corrective rape of lesbians in South African townships is the contention that cultural norms, attitudes and practices play a significant role in contributing to this form of sexual assault. Despite South Africa's progressive legal framework and constitutional protections for LGBTIQA+ rights, corrective rape remains a pervasive and under-addressed form of gender-based violence

rooted in cultural norms that enforce heteronormativity and gender conformity (Doan-Minh 2019).

Methods

The study reported here took the form of an extended literature review (Hemsworth 2024). The review involved a structured search using Google Scholar, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis Online, and EBSCOhost, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and NGO reports.

The search employed key terms such as "corrective rape," "gender-based violence South Africa," "lesbian hate crimes," "*ukuthwala*," and "patriarchal violence." The selection process prioritised literature published from 2000 onward, with older foundational texts included where they provided essential historical or theoretical context.

Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes and patterns occurring within the literature. The analysis focused on understanding the cultural influences in South African townships that perpetuate and enable corrective rape to occur. The selected literature encompassed both empirical studies and theoretical frameworks.

The review acknowledges the role of colonialism and apartheid in shaping the socio-political landscape that contributes to corrective rape in South Africa. However, it does not provide an in-depth analysis of these historical influences, as the focus is primarily on contemporary cultural and systemic factors perpetuating the corrective rape of Black lesbians in South African townships and excludes, to a large extent, a focus on the victims of other races or the rape of heterosexual women.

Findings

Corrective rape as a weapon

Doan-Minh (2019) identifies the similarities between corrective rape and rape used as a weapon of war. She explains how in both sets of circumstances rape is used as a means to deliberately and systematically exert power and control, demoralise communities and instil fear among those who are oppressed. Doan-Minh (2019) further explains how this tactic not only inflicts physical and psychological harm on the victims of rape but also has a ripple effect on the entire community. Corrective rape is similar since it involves the intentional use of sexual violence as a means of coercive control, dominance and punishment. It aims at inflicting physical and psychological harm not only on the victims directly affected but also the communities they come from. This may be emphasised by the murder of corrective rape victims and the display in the open of their often naked bodies (Koraan and Geduld 2015). Corrective rape "acts as a reminder to lesbians" (Doan-Minh 2019, 169) to not only stay in line with societal views of femininity but to accept that homosexuality will not free them from sexual assault.

Mulaudzi (2018) has challenged the nature of the term corrective rape in describing this heinous phenomenon, arguing that the term in itself is a misnomer, as the underlying objective of the offence does not "correct" an individual's sexuality. Although the term is a misnomer that falsely implies an act of rehabilitation rather than

punishment, it is used here due to its widespread recognition in academic and activist discourses (Di Silvio 2011; Mulaudzi 2018).

Impact on the victims and survivors of corrective rape

Examining gender-based violence more generally in South Africa, victim blaming is common response (Jewkes et al. 2010), with victims being questioned and blame based on their attire and/or their perceived promiscuity. In line with such a perspective, proponents of corrective rape argue that lesbians "desire to be subjected to rape" as a consequence of their decision to embrace masculine behaviour, with perpetrators targeting women whose attire is seen as "butch" (Doan-Minh 2019, 170). Recent survey findings suggest that up to half a million men in South Africa have assaulted women within a 12-month span, on the grounds that they were dressed in a manner perceived as masculine (Gaitho 2022). This same study revealed that Black lesbians in South Africa are more than twice as likely to be the victims of corrective rape as women of other racial backgrounds. This racial disparity sparks a need for exploration of the influences that contribute to these incidents. What then perpetuates the disproportionate representation of Black people as both the victims and the perpetrators of sexual violence within township communities.

There are major disparities in poverty between communities in South Africa (Di Silvio (2011): with predominately black suburbs or townships having higher rates of unemployment and poverty compared to the suburban areas historically occupied by white majorities. Such a landscape fosters environments in which crime, including corrective rape, thrive (Jürgens et al. 2013). Moreover, townships are also settings in which particularly toxic forms of patriarchal norms prevail. Brown (2012) argues that within these environments traditional gender roles and societal views prevail that oppress women, and position them lower in the gender hierarchy. Women living in such neighbourhoods are expected to conform to the ideals of what is regarded as traditional African femininity, and those who deviate from these expectations become the targets of brutal wake-up calls for "correction." Lesbians within such communities are commonly perceived as threats to the cultural fabric and the gender norms that prevail (Brown 2012).

Corrective rape causes profound trauma, affecting not just the direct victims of this abhorrent practice but also permeating through entire lesbian communities within the township. Wyatt et al. (2017) describe how the effects of corrective rape extend well beyond the immediate physical violations, to mental health crises such as post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide and suicidal ideation. Victims report experiencing severe anxiety, depression, insomnia and distressing thought patterns. Wyatt et al. (2017) discuss how survivors of sexual assault have a diminished quality of life due to these mental health problems. They allude to the high prevalence of rape in South Africa as being linked to the elevated rates of depression documented amongst Black women in South Africa.

Relentless psychological distress makes it exceedingly challenging for the victims of corrective rape to reclaim a sense of normalcy and security following the event, which some may argue is the perpetrator's objective. Moffett further emphasises this by stating:

> Today it is gender ranking that are maintained and women that are regulated. This is largely done through sexual violence, in a national project in which it is quite possible that many men are buying into the notion that in enacting intimate violence on women, they are performing a necessary work of social stabilisation. (Moffett 2006, 132)

Police and medical professional incompetence

The survivors of gender-based violence, particularly lesbians, face significant barriers in accessing justice due to systemic discrimination and ingrained patriarchal norms in South Africa (SWEAT 2024). Reports of rape and sexual violence are frequently dismissed by the authorities, contributing to a climate in which perpetrators operate with impunity. This reality shapes the prevalence of corrective rape in townships. Lack of protection for marginalised women in South African townships is evident in police inaction, underreporting, and law enforcement complicity (Mayeza 2024). The SWEAT (2024) *Say Her Name* report documents multiple cases of police neglect and brutality against women, including members of the LGBTIQA+ community and sex workers, reinforcing how institutional failures leave women vulnerable to unchecked violence.

Gaitho (2022) argues that the inadequate police responses and legal protection from the police and courts perpetuate the underreporting of corrective rape. Many survivors lack confidence in the criminal justice system due to a history of discriminatory treatment and failure to prosecute perpetrators. This has led to many survivors of corrective rape feeling that there is no point in reporting the incident as the chance of their rapists being successfully charged are so low, with only three reported incidents of corrective rape resulting in a conviction in the last four decades (Gaitho 2022). This is a seriously low figure in a context where an estimated 10 women in South Africa are the victims of corrective rape each week (Gaitho 2022).

Vogelman and Eagle (1991) shed light on the abuse that victims of sexual violence face when reporting their experience to the police and medical professionals. When doing so, the survivors of corrective rape are often met with a gauntlet of scepticism, ridicule, and hostility from the very officials intended to protect them. This secondary victimisation is not an isolated occurrence but a pattern arising from entrenched homophobic and misogynistic attitudes among police officers. Such prejudicial treatment can range from callous indifference to the infliction of further harm, as some victims have reported facing additional sexual assault at the hands of law enforcement (Sanger 2010).

The lack of a robust response to such crimes signals a sense of acceptance of the perpetrators' actions. As Vogelman and Eagle (1991) explain, when offenders are not held accountable, this suggests a complicity that allows them and others to continue with such behaviour with impunity. This acceptance can normalise the violence and allow a cycle of abuse to continue unchecked (Moffett 2006). More specifically, Pinheiro and Harvey (2019) argue that an institutionalised indifference towards the violation of Black lesbians creates an environment in which offenders feel justified in their actions, secure in the belief that the system will not challenge them. It also discourages community members from intervening or supporting victims due to the perception that such efforts would be futile or even contrary to the cultural norms upheld by the authorities. To combat the prevalence of corrective rape in townships, it is crucial to address and clearly understand these systemic failures (Sanger 2010).

Homophobia in South African townships

Homophobia remains a prominent and pressing issue in Africa, where over 30 countries on the continent continue to criminalise homosexuality (Amnesty International 2024). African leaders have frequently politicised homophobia and outwardly expressed their disdain for gender, sexuality and sex diverse citizens and their allies Reddy (2002). However, Ratele (2014) has written South Africa distinguishes itself as one of the few African nations that not only decriminalised homosexuality in 1997 but also instituted marriage equality in 2006, becoming the sixth country in the world to do so. While this may suggest that South Africa is a tolerant country for members of the LGBTIQA+ community, Koraan and Geduld (2015) argue that the law and society have reached an impasse, necessitating the implementation of truly transformative constitutionalism. This need is evidenced by the fact that a former South African president (Jacob Zuma) stated that in his youth an *ungqingili*, a Zulu word for a 'homosexual', would not have dared to stand in front of him because he would have 'knocked him out' (Ismail and Afp 2006).

Homosexuality as 'Un-African'

As Mulaudzi (2018) explains, the family unit has a significant role to play in Black South African culture which is steeped in traditional gender roles and procreative expectations. This cultural context, impacted by the legacy of heteronormative ideologies, frequently positions homosexuality as being in direct conflict with ingrained societal ideals. The construct of the family unit is not only central to, but also deeply entrenched within, the cultural paradigm of Black South African communities (Mulaudzi 2018). The prevailing perspective on homosexuality as a disruptive force to established familial norms forms a significant part of the societal challenge to acceptance gender and sexuality diverse people in many South African communities, particularly in townships (Wells and Polders 2006).

This perspective contends that homosexuality, in its departure from conventional heterosexual relationships, fundamentally undermines the traditional construct of the African family unit. As Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022) illustrate, the African family is not only a social but also a religious and biological institution in which procreation has a central role to play, and African women are often perceived as conduits for childbirth, thereby ensuring societal continuity and growth (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford 2022). This viewpoint inherently objectifies women, reducing their societal contribution to mere reproductive functions. This reductionist viewpoint is harmful and perpetuates gender inequalities and consequently gender-based violence (Ratele 2014).

Added to this, and as Morrissey (2013) explains, in post-apartheid South Africa, homosexuality is mischaracterised as a Western import, and a product of colonial influence, therefore being at odds with African identity. This perspective, predicated on the notion of homosexuality as un-African, exacerbates cultural conflict and widens the gap between societal norms and the lived realities of same-sex attracted and practising individuals. Given South Africa's history of apartheid, it is not surprising that individuals living in predominantly black townships may disregard laws protecting the rights of LGBTIQA+ individuals and even harbour suspicions about such laws if

they believe that homosexuality is un-African. Furthermore, the perception of homosexuality as un-African and a Western import plays a significant role in justifying and perpetuating sexual violence against lesbians in order to turn them back into "real" African women (Ratele 2014).

In contrast to such perspectives, scholars such as Tamale (2009) argue that it was the West, through missionary work and anti-sodomy legislation, that introduced homophobia into sub-Saharan Africa and that homosexuality existed in Africa well before Western imperialism. People in pre-colonial African societies, including societies in southern Africa, frequently shared diverse sexuality and gender identities (Dlamini 2006). Therefore, it is homophobia rather than homosexuality that should be considered un-African.

If maintaining the African identity is in fact a priority, then one might argue that South Africans within these townships should not only acknowledge but also actively support the LGBTIQA+ community in counteracting the legacy of Western influence and the anti-homosexuality laws inherited from colonisation and the apartheid era. As explained by Morrissey (2013) the practice of violence against homosexuals, including the corrective rape of lesbians, defies logic and appears a misguided attempt at justifying an otherwise indefensible stance.

> African men continue to argue that Black lesbians deserve to be disciplined to "restore" a traditional South African identity, [yet] they are apparently fighting for an identity that has never been exclusively heterosexual to begin with. (Morrissey 2013, 81)

Cultural contributors to the prevalence of corrective rape

Culture, as explained by Albertyn (2009) encompasses the collective customs, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours shown by a specific group of individuals, forming the foundation of their societal identity and way of life. A society's culture is particularly important when defining gender relations. In patriarchal cultures such as those found in many South African townships, hierarchical structures manifest, notably in regard to gender dynamics where women are often "defined by their sexual and reproductive capacity" (Albertyn 2009). This effectively establishes a power dynamic that positions men at the apex of the hierarchy.

Albertyn (2009) elucidates the mechanisms through which these prevailing patriarchal cultural models perpetuate and reinforce hegemonic masculinity. By upholding and privileging certain masculine traits and behaviours, patriarchal culture upholds a system that systematically marginalises and subordinates women, resulting in gender inequality. This entrenched inequality, in turn, engenders various forms of harm and adversity specifically targeted at women, perpetuating a cycle of oppression and discrimination. Albertyn's (2009) research unveils the far-reaching consequences of patriarchal culture in South Africa's Black communities, specifically, how traditional cultural views on gender have become perilous for women, as the expectation to conform as submissive accessories to men creates a breeding ground for gender-based violence. Traditional male-centric views on femininity are reinforced through rigid societal norms and expectations, with punishment enforced on those who deviate from them (Msibi 2009).

In their analysis, Ferim (2016) argues that conservative patriarchal societies perpetuate a sense of entitlement over women: over their bodies, sexuality, and identity of femininity. Within these contexts, women are subjected to rigid expectations dictated by the dominant male figures in their communities. Consequently, any deviation from these prescribed norms, such as same-sex attraction or practice, becomes a stark transgression against the cultural obligations ascribed to women. Ferim (2016) has explored some of of cultural practices that underscore the ownership dynamic prevalent in South African townships, with a specific focus on *ukuthwala* (bride abduction) and *ulwaluko* (male rite of passage).

Ukuthwala and male ownership over women

Rice (2018) offers an in-depth exploration of *ukuthwala*, a cultural practice of bride abduction found in Xhosa and Zulu societies. Translating as 'to carry', *ukuthwala* involves the abduction of a young girl or woman by a man, often assisted by his family members, with the intent of coercing her family into accepting a marriage. Sometimes this arrangement may already have been agreed upon with the abductees' family's consent unbeknownst to the bride-to-be.

While corrective rape is often framed as an act of homophobic violence, its roots are deeply embedded in broader patriarchal structures that regulate and control women's bodies (Moffett 2006; Ratele 2014). Ukuthwala exemplifies how cultural norms reinforce male entitlement over women's autonomy, demonstrating that the same ideology that underpins corrective rape.

Ukuthwala operates within a broader patriarchal framework that reinforces male ownership over women's bodies. While ukuthwala is not exclusively experienced by lesbian women, it embodies the same gendered power structures that underpin corrective rape (Jewkes et al. 2010). The fundamental belief driving both practices is that women's autonomy, should be subject to male control (Mshweshwe 2020). Ukuthwala reflects the notion that women can be forcibly positioned into heterosexual marriage and reproductive roles, mirroring how corrective rape is used to punish and "realign" women who are perceived to deviate from these expectations (Karimakwenda 2020; Wood 2005).

In both cases, sexual violence functions as a tool of discipline, ensuring women conform to rigid, heterosexual norms (Buhlungu et al. 2007; Toit 2014). For lesbians, the risk is compounded: where ukuthwala enforces forced heterosexual unions, corrective rape is deployed as an explicit mechanism of sexual and social "correction" (Koraan and Geduld 2015; Pinheiro and Harvey 2019). This entrenched entitlement over women's bodies not only sustains both practices but also normalises the use of sexual violence as a means of enforcing the patriarchal order (Moffett 2006; Sanger 2010).

As Rice (2018) observes, the incidence of ukuthwala has escalated in recent times and the practice has become increasingly more violent in nature. Despite this, some traditional leaders and cultural practitioners have resisted efforts to the criminalise ukuthwala, justifying it as a cultural act rather than an act of kidnapping and rape (Karimakwenda 2020). This viewpoint underscores the pivotal role of rape within the ukuthwala tradition, symbolically transitioning the girl or young woman into a "wife"

(Wood 2005). The sexual assault, often facilitated by the abductor's family, aims to assert the girl's "uselessness" to other men, given the cultural significance attached to female purity and the pervasive stigma against non-virgins:

> The act of sexual union marked the woman as belonging to that man: if the girl returned to her home after ukuthwala, the implication was that she was disgraced and "damaged" by the man's sexual marking and "owning" of her—a marking without substance (Wood 2005, 314).

Wood (2005) further illuminates the deeply ingrained connections between ukuthwala and the endemic culture of gender-based violence within South African townships. This cultural practice starkly exemplifies the prevailing attitudes of ownership and body commodification of women. When the perpetrators of corrective rape against lesbians rationalise their actions as "teaching" them to perform the roles of African women, they are implicitly asserting that African women lack autonomy over their bodies, irrespective of their sexuality or sexual orientation (Doan-Minh 2019). This connection between cultural tradition and gender-based violence is further entrenched by the belief that women's bodies exist for male regulation and discipline. From this perspective, corrective rape is not merely a sexual assault but a stark reminder of persistent gender oppression.

Ukuthwala, therefore, serves as a potent symbol of cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequality and legitimise sexual violence as an acceptable mechanism to enforce societal norms (Karimakwenda 2020). This patriarchal paradigm, which grants men unchallenged access to women's bodies, is internalised as an inherent part of the African female identity. Given this cultural backdrop, it is not surprising that rape becomes an instrument of "correction" for Black lesbians, who are perceived to be disrespecting societal norms (Morrissey 2013).

Ulwaluko and ideals of masculinity and gendered boundaries

Magodyo, Andipatin, and Jackson (2017) explain that the Xhosa practice of *ulwaluko*, a male initiation rite, signifies a crucial shift from boyhood to manhood through ritual circumcision, seclusion, tutelage, and mentorship. Unlike *ukuthwala*, which is present in both Xhosa and Zulu cultures, *ulwaluko* is distinct to the Xhosa people. The rite provides a means by which young men are educated about societal expectations of men (Mashabane and Henderson 2020). Following initiation, they will be viewed by their society as true men and will hold an elevated societal status above those who have not and/or cannot participate in the practice (Gogela 2020).

Gogela (2020) has examined how the practice of *ulwaluko* can contribute to the perpetuation of detrimental gender norms, despite not all initiates engaging in gender-based violence, since the rite inherently strengthens traditional gender roles and power hierarchies, underscoring respect for authority and perpetuating patriarchal norms. Magodyo, Andipatin, and Jackson (2017) explain how the teachings and cultural expectations associated with ulwaluko put an emphasis on teaching men to be tough, strong and aggressive. The mentorship and educational aspects of *Ulwaluko* endorse a 'hypermasculinity', in which violence becomes an accepted tool to assert power and control within and over their communities (Magodyo,

Andipatin, and Jackson 2017). In addition, the initiation process can instil harmful perceptions about women, such as objectification and submission, and the misguided belief that violence can be justified under certain conditions. Such perspectives can perpetuate gender-based violence and normalise harmful behaviours (Ferim 2016).

Additionally, women's involvement in the *ulwaluko* process is reduced to manual labour, such as setting up ceremonial spaces, preparing food and brewing beer, with their participation in other aspects of the rite being strictly prohibited (Gogela 2020). This stands as a poignant illustration of gender inequality, whereby women are seen as inferior and relegated to subservient roles. The severe penalties for any women who seek to "meddle" in the initiation process, as articulated by Gogela (2020) include the threat of violence or death, reflecting deep-seated misogyny and intolerance of women in male spaces. This is mirrored in the rhetoric and actions of corrective rape perpetrators who aim to assert their dominant narratives concerning the boundaries between masculinity and femininity onto Black lesbians, by showing them that they are not men (Morrissey 2013).

Doan-Minh (2019) and Morrissey (2013) shed further light on this issue, highlighting how "butch" lesbians, due to their visibly nonconforming gender presentation, are frequently targeted for corrective rape. The masculine attire of these women is perceived as a direct challenge to cultural norms and gendered boundaries, thereby inciting the need for their 'correction' through sexual assault. The underlying intention of such violent acts is to reassert the patriarchal order by reminding "defiant" individuals of their "rightful" place within the societal hierarchy (Morrissey 2013). This brutal enforcement of gender norms through sexual violation can be seen as a violent attempt to mask the vulnerabilities of manhood in these communities (Gaitho 2022) where lesbians are perceived as a threat to male dominance by rejecting gender hierarchies and asserting their autonomy outside of heterosexual male control.Mulaudzi (2018) for example has stated states that men in South African townships may view lesbians as competition, perceiving them as "stealing" women to whom they believe they should have exclusive access. This insecurity, combined with a toxic masculinity (Harrington 2021), fuels the desire among men to assert their dominance and humiliate any perceived competition (Gaitho 2022).

Some final remarks

Phillips, Brennan, and Li (2018) have explained how culture is inherently a tapestry of collective identity. In the case of South Africa, this tapestry includes threads of resilience developed through the scars of colonialism and adversity, embodying the journeys of ancestors, and shared human experiences. While culture serves as a testament to resistance and survival, it can simultaneously perpetuate narratives of discrimination and violence. This tension lies at the heart of corrective rape, where traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms not only sanction but perpetuate violence against women who defy heteronormative expectations. Corrective rape, as analysed, is never an act of correction but a punitive measure rooted in the fallacies of gender hierarchy and the denial of same sex desires and practices place within African identity (Morrissey 2013).

While this paper has focused on some of the cultural factors that sustain corrective rape in South Africa, it is equally important to consider the strategies that might successfully challenge these norms. Community-based approaches to addressing gender-based violence, particularly those rooted in cultural frameworks such as *ubuntu*, which is a southern African philosophy centred on collective responsibility and interconnectedness, may perhaps offer pathways to addressing corrective rape in ways that are both locally relevant and sustainable (Mulaudzi 2018). Furthermore, engaging traditional leaders as advocates for gender equity could be a key strategy, as they hold significant influence in shaping cultural attitudes and norms (Mwambene and Mgidlana 2021).

In conclusion, it is important to stress that this article does not aim to vilify the diverse traditional cultures of South Africa but to highlight the need for solidarity with the Black lesbians in townships who grapple with the internal challenges of cultural identity and the social relationships that contribute to their harm. It can be argued that the major contributors to corrective rape consist of post-apartheid trauma, high levels of unemployment and crime within South African townships. These are fair arguments to make and most certainly do impact rates of sexual abuse within communities (Abrahams et al. 2020). However, this article stands firm in its assertion that while apartheid, unemployment, and poverty are significant influences, the cultural contributions to gender-based violence, and specifically corrective rape, cannot and should not be overlooked.

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