

Love as Method: Tracing the Contours of Love in Black and African Feminist Imaginations of Liberation

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ABSTRACT

What imaginations of the self are evident in Black and African feminist visions of Black liberation? How is love framed as a centring politics of Black liberation across social and political struggles? These two questions address two features of Black and African feminist social justice politics: first, a re-imagining of the self via routes of the communal self and love of oneself; and, second, a centring of love as fundamental to any project of Black liberation. Exploring these two trajectories, the article engages gendered love in terms of its material and affective registers within feminist struggles for justice and healing. To do this, select readings of African and Black feminist theorising, reflections, and activist works are explored including Pumla Gqola, Sharlene Khan, June Jordan, bell hooks amongst others. The intellectual diversity of these feminist contributions connects with reference to a feminist project that is rooted in (re)imaginings of love and self that are simultaneously personal yet also political. In the end, the project of Black liberation must address itself to the place of love in healing. The article explores what some of these features of love liberation could entail.

Keywords: African and Black feminism, love, self and other, activism

WHERE IS THE LOVE? MAPPING THE CONTOURS OF LOVE IN MODERN PSYCHIC AND SOCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

In this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. (...) This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I'm telling you. And O my people (...) More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize. (Morrison, 2005: 103)

'We now know that when men fight, women die,' Makhosazana Xaba writes in 'Women of Xolobeni' (Xaba, 2021: 11). Xaba is a South African poet and scholar, whose evocative poem bemoans the raiding of land brought on by foreign mining corporations; their cold threat against a people who have populated and cultivated that land over generations; the inevitable conflicts, divisions, and deaths that have occurred as different stakeholders attempted to lay claim to the land and its precious minerals. But more than this, Xaba also names the absent women of Xolobeni who have challenged this invasion of their land and homes. They are absent because their stories have been wilfully erased from the archival accounts of the community of Xolobeni and its struggles. Xaba's lament not only connects the struggles of the community of Xolobeni to land wars across the continent; she is also at pains to demonstrate that women's erasure from historical accounts of struggle against systemic, colonial, and patriarchal structures is a continuous practice. Her project, then, is both recovering and naming these women: 'While foreign capitalists and your brothers, fathers and sons fight for memorialisation in monuments, tombstones, songs and books we write your names in poems' (Xaba, 2021: 12).

Xaba makes it clear that the project of recovery and naming is also a project of form. In the absence of authorising national and institutional recognition of women's value and contributions to community building, the work of recovery and naming must engage forms of dialogue that reside outside these muting systems. Xaba's poetry engages resistance and recovery by speaking truth to power. This question of form is one that I will explore via a deliberate reading of women's writing as method. Xaba's naming project constitutes an important forum for

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us to consider the broader project of gender and love in feminist activism. Through naming, she excavates buried memories and histories; rejects the formalised and perhaps even valorised sites of memorialisation (monuments, tombstones, books, and songs) and returns these buried histories to a site that is made sacrosanct with honour and meaning. In the oral traditions of ancestors, in the practice of narration and storytelling, in the way that women across generations have passed on stories of their lives, Xaba is able to assert: 'The naming war has now been declared' (Xaba, 2021: 12).

In the quote that opens this article, US writer Toni Morrison (2005) in her novel *Beloved* engages love politics via the rituals of care that her character, Baby Suggs, advocates to the rest of her community. Suggs' project of recovery involves a ritualised care practice that centres love of oneself. Her incitement to the slave community centres a deliberate love of one's flesh and all of what it means to be Black in an anti-Black world, a world that actively hates this flesh and its material presence in the world. The religion she preaches takes love as its starting point for healing. Similarly, US poet Maya Angelou, describing her life's work, centres love as the thrust of redemption and recovery (1992).

In beginning with Xaba's honouring of the women of Xolobeni village located in Pondoland, South Africa, I connect with the historical and current struggles of Black and African women across the continent and the globe against diverse and interconnecting systems of oppression. The category 'Black' is used with full cognisance of its socially constructed and ideological origins rooted in systemic logics of racism and White supremacy, and also with recognition of the material and symbolic effects of these constructs for a designated group of people who have been categorised in this way. I will use it here to refer to all peoples across the globe who have been so categorised by these systems of logic, irrespective of geographical and other contextual particularities of racialising systems. In the South African context, I use the category 'Black' to include diverse population groups, such as Indian and so-called Coloured, which were part of Apartheid's hierarchical racial classification logics against the normative White category.

The category 'African' is also used with cognisance of the different and multiple claims to being African. I will use the category here to refer to Black women born in and who live in and from the continent. The categories 'Black' and 'African' are further used with appreciation of their intersectional underpinnings that influence how we live, love, and even die as Black and African women. I further agree with Shireen Hassim's (2022) recent caution not to read global North and South feminisms in over-determining frames that erase their synergies of struggles and politics. This is a sentiment echoed by Jennifer Nash (2018) and Falcón and Nash (2015) in their push-back against the critical trend to whitewash feminisms originating from the North in ways that erase Black feminist contributions and disconnect them from global South feminisms. These struggles attest to the long history of women's organising for change, for the betterment of their and their children's lives. From the Women's March of 1956 in Apartheid South Africa against the Pass Laws for Black women (led by Rahima Moosa, Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, and Sophia Williams) to women's protest marches across Nigeria early in 2022 against the National Assembly (which had initially rejected five proposed Bills that would see greater freedoms for women in the country). In South Africa the #TotalShutDown¹ march in 2018 was an intersectional womxn's² movement that aimed to address the crisis of gender-based violence in the country. In Namibia, the #ShutItAllDown³ marches across the country in 2020 were also aimed at addressing gender-based violence. In Uganda, the feminist and activist, Stella Nyanzi, waged a public protest against the dictatorial government of Yoweri Museveni, which resulted in her forced exile following imprisonment and intimidation by the police. On 4 July 2018, in the United States of America, Congolese-born activist and immigrant, Therese Patricia Okoumou, scaled the Statue of Liberty in protest against the separation of migrant families at the US-Mexico border.

These collective and individual acts of resistance by women and gender-nonconforming people attest to different legacies of challenging patriarchal violence in all its forms across the continent and globe. They have typically been read as rage-in-action against patriarchal and racially violating systems and cultures, which indeed they are. I want also to read them as love-in-action. Harrison, Phillips, and Jackson (2022) similarly read Okoumou's actions as embodied radical solidarity that is based on love. Okoumou herself, following her sentencing, described her activism as guided by empathy and care for those less unfortunate. Through practices of resistance and through radical writing practice, Black and African feminists across the world have protested systems of oppression, and they have also engaged love as praxis. In considering the situatedness of love, I must also flag a necessary caution. The temptation to take healing and community for granted within many feminist social justice spaces is a fallacy that must be named and addressed if healing is to be nurtured authentically. This article explores

¹ On 1 August 2018 thousands of womxn in South Africa from all walks of life marched in protest against the increasing violence against womxn in the country.

² In keeping with the movement's values of intersectionality and diversity, I retain the original usage of 'womxn' to encompass all women and gender-nonconforming persons.

³ Following the murder of Shannon Wasserfall in Walvis Bay, Namibia, in 2020, protestors embarked on massive protests against sexual and gender-based violence in the country.

two key contours of love in its exposition on some of the fallacies of feminist activism that may inadvertently fragment community and interrupt healing. This fragmentation is inevitable when a centring praxis of love is absent from our imaginations of freedom.

But why love? On the scale of desirable affects, it may be common to think of love as one of the more pleasant and necessary affects. Whether as a solitary or collective surfacing, love is often understood to incorporate a good feeling. Indeed, popular culture frequently decries love's absence as a key causal factor in many of our personal and collective ills. Despite this, early feminist scholarship on love has demonstrated the dark side of love, from its social construction to its function in solidifying women's lack of freedom in marriages (see Jónasdóttir and Ferguson, 2014). Furthermore, how can the surfacing of love be central to the surfacing of impermeable and bounded communities that actively hate? Put differently, 'What is the primacy of love in the stirring of hate?' For Sara Ahmed (2004), this is part of the political work of emotions: they surface bodies, align them to some bodies while simultaneously *aligning against* other bodies. In *Affective Economies* (2004), Ahmed presents a brilliant examination of love as an emotion that may be surfaced in both a negative and positive capacity. We may thus consider love as a socially shared emotion that does something, makes social and political realities im/possible, and sanctions the dehumanisation of real material bodies, while elevating other bodies to the status of human. Love as a socially shared emotion also attaches to social histories and practices that organise different material bodies as worthy of love. Love, then, is an important site of inquiry into understanding the politics of social order and disorder in modernity and in the framing of a social imaginary that considers the value of different bodies to building community.

If we agree with Maya Angelou's conviction that 'love liberates', what is it, then, that withholds love from us? What seems to wrestle love from its coveted status as a liberating force? In the rest of the article, I trace some of the contours of love within the work and activism of a cohort of Black and African feminists and activists. I am interested in how these womxn scholars not only question the problematic gendered social arrangements of society, but also consider the intricacies of intimacy and our relationships to others and to ourselves. I want to suggest that these scholars and activists implicitly engage love as a method. I trace two strands of this method: love of self and love of the other.

SITUATING THE MATERIALITY OF GENDER AND LOVE: FEMINIST AFFECTIVE IMAGINATIONS

And it is here, in this extremity, that as a Black feminist I ask myself and anyone who would call me sister, *Where is the love?* (Jordan, 1978/2003: n. p., 1978 opening address as part of panel on Black women writers and feminism at the National Black Women Writers Conference at Howard University, Washington, DC)

US poet June Jordan's question in her 1978 opening address signals her centring of love to the feminist project of freedom and self-determination. Juxtaposed alongside the boundaries of racial and gendered oppression and the striving toward self-reclamation and healing, Jordan's question: '*Where is the love?*' tackles these dual continua of being-in-relation with each other and with ourselves. This centring of love flags a reading of love that foregrounds feminist and Black social justice organising focused on building communities of praxis and healing. In her question, she simultaneously underscores the presence and absence of love in our politics. Jordan's question invites us, her audience, to attend to the urgency of what may be missing in our imaginations of freedom and struggles for change. This quest for love's materiality similarly crosscuts Toni Morrison's interrogations of freedom in all her novels. While Wardi (2005) pinpoints Morrison's novel, *Love* (2003), as the moment Morrison directly engages love as action, that is, where she underscores love as a verb and not a noun, I would argue that this consideration of love in terms of its materiality and actions is evident in all her novels. This latter imagination of love as a question of what we *do* challenges popular constructs of love as interior feeling and emotion. In thinking through nuances of psychic and social freedom, Morrison centres and engages love as a fundamental constituent of freedom. She is not alone in her rendering of love via psychological and social embodiment and action. bell hooks (2000a; 2003) has been at the forefront of feminist explorations of love as central to self-healing and community building. In *All you Need is Love* (2000) and *Communion: The Female Search for Love* (2003), amongst others, hooks continuously centres love as revolutionary and as practice. The same trend is evident in Jennifer Nash's (2013) *Practising love: Black feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality*. Danai Mupotsa's debut collection of poetry, *feeling and ugly* (2018), explores nuanced ways of engaging feminist politics, by traversing domains of pedagogy, politics, and questions of what it means to be hopeful. Her quest includes grappling with positive and negative affects in what she interestingly describes as 'love poems'. As these examples show, feminist scholarship is at pains to unravel this complexity of love: its political work and capacity for healing.

While love studies has enjoyed a cross-disciplinary and wide-ranging interest amongst scholars, feminists have, arguably, shown a rather sparse interest in the field, maybe because of their suspicion of love politics for women (see Jónasdóttir and Ferguson (2014) for an overview). In her critique of feminists' ambiguous relationship to love, bell hooks (2000a) argues that academic feminist ambiguity toward love is tied to the erroneous postulation that love has no place in revolutionary theorising and struggle. She observes that the dominant feminist orientation involved the flawed separation of struggle for rights and power from the practice of love:

We were to do away with love and put in its place a concern with gaining rights and power (...) rather than rethinking love and insisting on its importance and value, feminist discourse on love simply stopped (hooks, 2000b: 102)

For Jónasdóttir and Ferguson (2014), however, love scholarship amongst academic feminists did not stop altogether but tended to emphasise love's ideological character and function in the subordination of women. Nevertheless, I agree with Jónasdóttir's (2014) sentiments that perhaps it is time to confront this character and function head-on. Indeed, perhaps it is time to render love worthy of study, to reframe it, explore its complexities outside relations of subordination. Thinking beyond the realm of the discursive, materialist feminists have been especially insightful in engaging love in terms of its embodied and material practice. Feminist theoretical contributions spanning from the 1970s document a significant body of contributions to love studies in terms of lived experiences and situatedness (Jónasdóttir and Ferguson 2014, 1-8). Jónasdóttir and Ferguson further identify three strands of scholarship:

1. *love as ideological force*: thematic work that is largely heterocentric in focus, exploring romantic love between men and women, and questions of sexuality and desire largely via a lens of patriarchal male domination and subordination of women;
2. *love as ethics*, centring a praxis of love as underscoring our knowledge of life and the world at large, and engaging a poetics of love that reimagines social practices of possession and objectification; and
3. *love as politics*, which considers the political work that the construct of love and its affective surfacing does.

In this article, to arrive at an analysis of love that engages its affective character, that is, in terms of surfacing bodies, I rely on a reading of affect that engages the *sociality* of love: that is, its relational character. My aim is to consider how political economies that frame racial, gendered, classed, and other social arrangements influence how we may love ourselves and others. As Judith Butler observes:

One finds that love is not a state, a feeling, a disposition, but an exchange, uneven, fraught with history, with ghosts, with longings that are more or less legible to those who try to see one another with their own faulty vision. (2007: 66)

Butler's relational framing detaches love from inward and individualising sentiment, which exists outside a social and political economy (Ahmed, 2004) and places it within these economies and histories. Love, as an exchange inflected by and within these social arrangements, becomes a radical strategy of resistance. While these and other examples of feminist scholarship on love have provided significant insights into love's politics and practice in both personal and social domains, I want specifically to attend to the contributions of Black and African women's writing. In so doing, I claim the reading of Black women's work and activism as a deliberate strategy of recovery and naming, akin to Xaba's achievement in 'Women of Xolobeni'. Similar projects of recovery include Yvette Abrahams's (1996), Desiree Lewis' (2011), Gordon-Chimpembere's (2011) and other community recovery projects of Saartjie Baartman. Also see Sisonke Msimang's (2021) recovery of Winnie Madikizela Mandela in *Surfacing: On Being Black and Feminist in South Africa* and Siphokazi Magadla's (2023) recovery of the life histories of women veteran who participated in the armed struggle against apartheid.

READING LOVE AS METHOD: BETWEEN SELF AND OTHER

Method is a procedure for approaching something. In making an argument for reading love as method, I argue that Black and African feminist and activist practices of resistance constitute a critical toolkit that engages procedures and strategies for achieving freedom and healing. Part of this toolkit, which I aim to trace via a reading of select texts, engages love as a site for recovery and resistance.

First, love as method is about exposure of *techniques of power and oppression* that affect women. This includes the project of naming women's agentic presence throughout history and current social and political contexts; of oneself as a being worthy of recognition for one's humanity; of naming silences and erasures that deny women's suffering and experiences of violence. The erasure of self has been a central dimension of the colonial and patriarchal project.

The work of decolonial scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1981) and Walter D. Mignolo (2007; 2021), amongst others, have flagged this micro-politics of power: that is, the systemic attention to the interior lives of the colonised – as a significant aspect of countering state oppression. Questions of intimacy, how we relate to ourselves and others, are part of a micro-politics of freedom and these scholars have rightly argued that the project of decolonisation must also attend to how we recover dimensions of self. The explicit naming of love as a strategy that must be taken seriously, alongside other valorised strategies of resistance, has, however, been prominent in the work of feminists and women activists.

Second, love as method involves a strategy of *recovery*. I argue that Black and African feminists, in their myriad acts of resistance and writing, have always engaged this project of recovery in ways that centre love. The strategy of recovery includes the *recuperation* of lost stories and histories of women's lives; the *recognition* of the myriad forms of violence that influence how we relate to ourselves, our bodies and others; and it centrally aims to recover our voices and worthiness.

Third, love as method involves reflecting on and imagining *temporalities of past, present, and future*. Feminist imaginations have long grappled with the meanings of navigating past and present traumas and dreams of better futures. The work of temporality exists in the acts of refusal and protest against oppression. Love as revolution names the present in terms of its particular social and political ills; it recovers the past in its haunted memories; and imagines futures in its hopeful striving for something better. In Nyanzi's disruptive protest against corruption and dictatorship, in the 1956 South African Women's March to Parliament demanding freedom of movement and employment for Black women, and in present-day marches and protests against gender-based violence, women use their bodies to fight against their systemic violation and erasure. Women's acts of resistance re-imagine temporalities that bear the hopes for futures not yet seen. In considering these three intersecting strategies of love as method, I turn now to two specific contours that I identify in the writings of Black and African feminist writing: love of self and love of the other.

LOVE OF SELF: WHEN THE OTHER DANCER IS THE SELF

Homing in on love of self as a distinct project of recovery, I identify seven sub-themes across my selected texts that engage this feature of love as method. I am also questioning how systemic and micro-technologies of violence and power sediment and take hold in the lives of Black women. Elsewhere, I have discussed what I call the psycho-social entanglements of rage as an affective surfacing between Black women (Kiguwa, 2021) to argue that social and political histories of oppression influence how Black women not only relate to each other, but also how they relate to themselves. If we are to consider love, then, as a critical dimension of the project of recovery and decolonisation, what features of love of oneself do Black and African feminist writers engage? Earlier, I stated that resistance and protest by women activists must be read as instances of love and not just rage. I further this argument in highlighting the following seven interlocking features of the project of loving oneself: 1) the practice of naming; 2) relationship to one's body; 3) recognition as recovery; 4) engaging the feminine; 5) loving in a neo-liberal, capitalist, patriarchal and racialising context 6) rituals of love and care; 7) engagement-in-the-world and celebration of aliveness.

In the context of decolonising knowledge and knowledge production, Daley's (2021) interrogation of the encoded racial scripts of innocence and whiteness in popularised constructs and ideals of the development phase of coming of age is useful. She asks:

(...) if coming of age is foregrounded upon a naïveté and virtuous immaturity that is raced white, how do we then represent, understand, explore, and classify the maturation processes of Black girls? How do we recover, repair, and redeem their exclusion from the genre? (2021: 1036)

In proposing an alternate reading of how Black girls come to know and experience their social worlds, Daley introduces a new term: *'lit'*, to describe these nuanced experiences inflected via racial, classed, gendered, and other social registers. I would add that to enter symbolic and discursive worlds is to also encounter affective surfacing that interacts with one's embodiment as Black and woman. For Daley, this encounter includes coming-of-age in tandem with affective economies inflicted with, through, by, and in rage. Daley argues:

I argue that to be lit is to be young, Black, and female experiencing the light and shadows that result from life's euphoria and its withdrawals. I define lit as both the liminal space between Black girlhood and Black womanhood and the affective spectrum between Black-girl joy and Black-girl rage. As a result of these lit experiences, I assert that Black girls do not come of age. Rather, they come of (r)age. (2021: 1036)

These affective economies, which surface shame and hatred of self, are also part of Black girlhood. Thus, while Audre Lorde (1984) describes a lack of access to language that does not allow her 5-year-old mind and heart to understand the act of racism directed at her by an adult White woman on a train, her body is still able to read and recognise racial disgust as it unfolds on the woman's face. Her arrival at knowledge involves being able to 'read' this disgust as exclusively attached to and surfaced by her young Black body, that is, the mere existence and proximity of her Black body to the woman. Children's inability to access language and symbolic resources does not mean that they fail altogether to recognise the social and affective codes of language that may be surfaced within a given context. Alice Walker's (1983) autobiographical reflection in *Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self*, from which the title of this section is drawn, narrates her own entry into young girlhood and later adulthood. It attests to this intuitive insight to read how her young, disfigured body (she was permanently blinded in one eye by a pellet gun fired by her brother) invites disgust and ridicule. This first entry into a sustained habit of loathing her Black body is a critical site for interrogating beauty politics handed down to Black women. She observes that this 'erosion of self does not happen overnight' (Walker, 1983: 358) but is gradually inculcated into the imagination of how young Black girls, and later young and mature Black women, inhabit the world.

In *Black Skin White Masks* (1967), Frantz Fanon's classic psychoanalytic reading of racialisation and its debilitating effects illustrates the abnormality of encounter with a hostile world that refuses to recognise one's humanity. For Fanon, a Black child's contact with a White world (and its predictable racial ideologies of Black inferiority) invites psycho-existential complexes centred on navigating and making sense of one's place in the world via an embodied Blackness coded as a problem (also see Du Bois, 1903). While Fanon and Du Bois explicitly engage moments of encounter between Black and White, I am also interested in the intra-group dynamics of Blackness. Part of the psycho-existential complex of racialisation, I argue, includes surfacing and circulating the affective economies of hatred of those who are similar to us (see Kiguwa, 2021). The South African feminist scholar, Pumla Gqola, reflects on this context in an autobiographical reflective essay in *Reflecting Rogue: Inside the Mind of a Feminist* (2017: 6):

I am seven years old; it is 1980 in apartheid South Africa. I live in what I am later to learn is something that can be called 'a remote part of the country' in a small town with much history (...) My teacher is not talking about a world in which white people are superior to Black people. This man is talking about gradations within Black society, within Blackness, between Black people, between who counts and who cannot. At this school I am to learn that the fair-skinned girls are prettier. Always.

Gqola's reflections on racial and gendered interiority as a young Black girl coming of (r)age in a society marked by systemic racial, classed, and gendered oppression of a Black majority is an important reminder of the social character of deeply personal feelings. These circulations of shame and disconnection from one's body must be understood within their social and political contexts. A situated feminist politics and analysis must therefore attend to the emergence of gendered and racial subjectivity by considering the psychic dimension of social lives and the social dimension of psychic lives. The problem of naming here evokes Lorde's embodied understanding of the events happening to her and her inability to engage language to describe it. Despite their insightful analyses of racialised subjectivity, Fanon and Du Bois fall short of engaging the intersections of race and gender. The work of Black feminist scholarship on intersectionality is therefore a much-needed analytic layer to further understand the intricacies of racial and gendered subject formation. What are we to make of young girls' entry into the patriarchal world? How does a Black girl child negotiate struggles of naming as part of her coming into (r)age? This difficulty in touching the meanings of experiences ignites feelings of gaslighting and alienation from one's own intuitive knowledge: '*Did I imagine the anguish of never looking up?*', the young, partially blind, Alice Walker continually asks herself in response to external invalidation of her experiences of violence and shaming (1983: 359, emphasis in original). Her entry into an interior and exterior world of shame and ugliness is solidified in her prayers as a young girl: 'I do not pray for sight. I pray for beauty' (1983: 359).

The act of naming what has happened to us is an act of recovery (Kiguwa, 2022). This is intertwined with recognition. For queer activist and feminist, Zethu Matebeni, recognition also encompasses what was stolen. In her autobiographical essay entitled 'Black Lesbian Feminist: Thoughts of a Born Queer' (2021), Matebeni reflects on what it means to be a Black woman with a sexual orientation that is not recognised by her society. Her early confrontation with a homophobic and patriarchal world takes multiple forms, including the erosion of female friendship and community (note: this is a critical strategy for destabilising women's resistance against patriarchal oppression more generally). But it is in a single act of direct violence against her body that Matebeni confronts head-on the systemic and insidious hatred of women and of lesbians. She reflects:

How do you hold on to yourself when you have been invaded? (...) Each day you yearn to come back to yourself. Yet fragments remain. (...) Reclaiming yourself is a difficult task. You did not lose yourself. Something was taken from you, a part of you. (2021: 136)

Ntozake Shange's classic play, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide* (1977) notes a similar act of theft of Black women's aliveness. Shange's play is an ode to Black women's struggles, celebrations, and recoveries of self. Central to the practices of recovery explored in the play is the recognition that Black women's selves have been stolen. Zethu Matebeni's reflections equally centre this recognition as a critical site of recovery. The act of naming and recognition of the violation against oneself becomes a site from which one may reclaim love: 'The recognition of theft is an important starting point' (Matebeni, 2021: 136). Recognition of a theft and recovery of self is also evident in South African poet Gabea Baderoon's poem 'The Word', which locates recovery of self in the act of writing (2018: 56):

Until one day I began to write
and I wrote until I could not forget
myself anymore
On the page appeared
each breath and gesture, each posture
of the body I had torn away
On the page appeared the years
and the words I could not speak
On the page appeared the pages
and the emptiness I had erased
On the page appeared my bones
and my memories
and at last I stepped again into my body. (2018: 56)

Against a background of the violation of women's bodily integrity through sexual and other violence, Baderoon, Matebeni and Shange centre the work of recovery that begins with recognising that a violation has taken place. Baderoon's recognition of a violation long suppressed becomes the step toward healing that recovers self, body, and wholeness.

The work of reclamation further entails a recognition of the healing capacity of community. Audre Lorde (1984) eloquently locates part of this reclamation in terms of an erotic of feminine energy. She further engages the maternal as a site for theorising Black women's healing: 'the source of the romance between Black women and our mommas' (1984: 158). Paradoxically, this romance may sometimes exist alongside erasures of young Black girlhood by Black mothers. Danai Mupotsa (2018) captures this intergenerational rupture in her poignant 'Recitatif/For My Daughter'. In her poem 'listen up child' (2021), South African poet Natalia Molebatsi uses poetry as a medium to reflect on the generational differences between herself and her unborn daughter. Poetry is a tool for her to reflect on her own wounding, and potential for recovery and healing: 'infant of my skin, never step into boxes, these aren't enough to hold our stories alive' (2021: 74). Similarly, in her ode to her grandmother in 'Summers at Your Feet' (2021), Molebatsi further thinks through sites of woundedness and healing that cut across three generations, from her grandmother to her own experiences of being a Black woman growing up in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, to an unborn girl child with the promise of a different future. In 'When the Moon Waxes Red' (2019), South African feminist scholar and activist, Sharlene Khan, reflects on the challenges of telling women's stories. Khan's work engages the intergenerational experiences of gender of the women in her own family. The difficulty of excavating such secretly intimate experiences in the absence of linearity and even coherence. These absences and incoherence are tied to the silences passed down through generations of (non)storytelling, Khan wonders:

How to tell our story? (...) Not just our personal baggage and failings, but how to speak when those meet the social: colonialism, apartheid, racism, religious ethnic patriarchy, poverty, sex. How to speak and not be a 'type', 'representative', 'indicative', 'archetypal'? (2019: 8)

Reflecting on the recovery of herself in the aftermath of her violent encounter and the ritual of healing (*ijezua*⁴) prepared by her grandmother, surrounded by her sister, aunt, and mother, Matebeni (2021) likewise clearly identifies the women in her family as vital anchors. South African filmmaker and activist, Bev Ditsie,⁵ recounts a similar immersion in strongly female centred modes of care:

⁴ An IsiXhosa term for traditional medicine that includes a mixture of herbs.

⁵ Ditsie's activism spans a long history back to struggles against the apartheid regime in South Africa. She was also a key organiser of the first Pride March in Africa in 1990 and addressed delegates at the 4th UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. This was the first time that the United Nations was addressed on LGBTI rights and struggles.

I am very fortunate to come from a family of very strong, independent women. I grew up with my mother, my grandmother, my sister and many aunts and great-aunts, who all taught my sister and me about resilience and self-sufficiency. (2010: v)

Ditsie cites her grandmother's unfailing responses to the loud cries for help of women in her community in the face of attempted physical and sexual assault as her first real idea of women's activism. Recounting her own encounter with attempted violence in her home, surrounded by a group of at least 10 men, 'adamant that they had every right to teach me a lesson for daring to come out as a lesbian and demand equal rights'. Ditsie recalls her grandmother walking out 'with her iron rod and stop[ping] them before they even entered the yard; only she and God know how she managed that' (2010: vi). In *Queer in Africa* (2018), Matebeni and others note the struggles of many LGBTIQ communities across the continent who face hostilities and violence in the face of state-legitimated policies – remnants of colonial anti-sodomy laws – because of their orientation, identities, practices and gender expression. While South Africa is significantly different in its more liberal protection of all sexual orientations in the Constitution, many social and cultural norms remain deeply pervasive and entrenched in their rejection of non-heteronormative sexualities and identities.

In *South African Feminists in Search of the Sacred* (2021) another South African feminist, Fatima Seedat, notes the absence of recognition of African traditional spirituality. Describing the women's #TotalShutdown march to parliament in 2018 and the ensuing discontent amongst the group when the march was opened with prayers invoking Christian deity, Seedat notes: '[T]here was no woman *sangoma*⁶ asked to open the formalities and to bring African women's ways of Being Divine into the march'. Bemoaning the masculinist imaginary that takes for granted a universal imagery of spirituality, Seedat argues that 'feminist activist spaces either stumble carelessly when it comes to religious expression or remain oblivious to feminist readings of religion' (2021: 99).

Love as method is also centrally concerned with celebration. The conscious recognition of one's aliveness is a testament to survival and worthiness. Kevin Quashie engages a Black poetics of aliveness as a strategy of healing in his book *Black Aliveness, Or a Poetics of Being* (2021). I locate the celebration of aliveness (among other texts) in Lucille Clifton's 'Come Celebrate with Me' (2012: 427):

won't you celebrate with me
what I have shaped into a kind of life?
(...)
come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

LOVE OF THE OTHER: BUILDING COMMUNITY

This work is not for yourselves. Kill that spirit of self and do not live above your people but live with them, and if you can rise, bring someone with you. (Charlotte Maxeke, 1939, n. p.)

Charlotte Mannya-Maxeke (1871-1919) was a woman of many firsts in South Africa and Africa. One of her key achievements is being the first Black South African woman to obtain a B.Sc. degree in 1901. Honoured as the 'Mother of Black freedom in South Africa', Mannya-Maxeke's work and activism includes fighting for equality and betterment of lives of African women (South African History Online, 2022). In this section of the article, I want to engage love in terms of its exterior affective capacity, in which bodies are surfaced as part of a project of healing communities. I am interested in the ways Black and African activists and feminists have engaged a material love, that attends to new imaginations of social and political contexts. Mannya-Maxeke's call, in the excerpt that opens this section of the article, engages a love of self that is *rooted in community*. Mannya-Maxeke does not condemn the liberation of self, which I have advocated for in the first section of this paper, but a corrupted version of self-interest, which is complicit in the fragmentation of communities. In *All about Love* (2000) and *Communion: The Female Search for Love* (2003), bell hooks turns to this centrality of love in building communities. Nick Malherbe, in *Considering Love* (2021), similarly notes love's radical potential for engaging social justice struggles in building and healing communities with histories of trauma and violence. Likewise, the social activist Dorothy Day returns to love's affective energy at the end of her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness* (1952: 317):

⁶ Traditional healer in South Africa, highly revered, who diagnoses and performs rituals of healing.

The final word is love (...) To love we must know each other (...) and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone any more. (...) We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.

Maxeke, as I mentioned, writes about 'killing' self-interest and embracing the practice of love of community that Day highlights: considering love in terms of care for the other and striving for utopian futures founded on the worthiness of the other. Circling back to the maternal as a driver for engagement in love politics, Stella Nyanzi, in an interview, locates her politics in her identity as a mother:

I think if I weren't a mother, I probably wouldn't do at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the activism I've done. If I were just thinking about myself, I wouldn't know if I would be fighting for a better Uganda. In a way, motherhood keeps me very grounded. The children who play with my children reveal the reality of everyday Ugandans to me. I think I wouldn't so much be interested in 'a good world' if I didn't have any children of my own. (Dania, 2021, n. p.)

Nyanzi's declaration articulates love through community engagement, being of service to one's community, and care for the environment. In a similar vein, Darnell Moore's public lecture 'On Love, Empathy, and Pleasure in the Age of Neoliberalism'⁷ engages love's affective energy to reflect on possibilities for bodies to serve as agents of change:

Love is a movement. Actually, love is *the* movement. It is that which *moves each of us toward one another*. That is to say, it is the eradication of the distance that exists between us and the other. Indeed, the radical potential in love is its ability to destroy the walls, fortifications, edges, spaces, which work to separate us. (2012: n. p., emphasis added)

In relation to Moore's observations, Zygmunt Bauman's (2003) dissection of love's fragility in modernity begs the question: What is the radical potential of love to imagine anew, to build a better world? If modernity is defined (in part) by the erasure of love, in the sense of care and goodwill for the other, what hope is there of engaging love as a radical site for revolution? Audre Lorde (1984) expresses a similar concern in her critique of capitalism. In *The Uses of the Erotic*, she bemoans the devaluation of the human in favour of profit. This devaluation erodes the sense of community necessary to fostering connections and working together to build lives in harmony with the environment. Similar concerns are echoed in the activism of the Kenyan environmentalist, scholar, and human rights champion, Wangari Maathai. During her lifetime, Maathai worked diligently to improve the lives of women and the environment. Her activism refused the binary opposition of human and natural ecologies, and considered the intricate ways in which gender politics is interwoven in environmental politics. In her Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 2004, she observes:

Throughout Africa, women are the primary caretakers, holding significant responsibility for tiling the land and feeding their families. As a result, they are often the first to become aware of environmental damage as resources become scarce and incapable of sustaining their families. (in Musila, 2020: 154)

To speak of the materiality of gendered love in postcolonial Africa is, thus, to attempt connections between situated contexts and the affective economies that circulate within them. The systems of governance and the social contexts that influence social formations must be analysed so that we can understand the intricate ways these formations become sedimented in our psyches. Considering the sociality of emotion, then, is to take seriously the work emotions do in sedimenting social formations and the organisation of social life (Ahmed, 2004). The 'female fear factory' that Pumla Gqola (2015; 2021) describes in her exploration of rape in South Africa exemplifies this. Earlier I argued that negative affects, such as shame, can form part of the constitution of a gendered subject. What would it mean to consider love similarly? That is, is it possible to consider the ways in which gendered love becomes distorted, trivialised, and even erased in the emergence of the gendered subject? I have argued elsewhere (Kiguwa, 2021; 2022) that such distortion, trivialisation, and erasure and is indeed possible in the context of neo-liberal and racist capitalist economies that favour the social organisation of subjects in terms of profit and not in terms of their humanity. In *Changes: A Love Story* (1993: 50) the Ghanaian writer and feminist Ama Ata Aidoo's fictional story tackles this entanglement of love with power and inequality head-on:

Love? Love? Love is not safe, (...), love is dangerous. Love is fine for singing about and love songs are good to listen to, sometimes even to dance to. But when we need to count on human strength, and when

⁷ Delivered as part of the Audre Lorde Human Rights Lecture Series on 7 November 2012 at Harvard University.

we have to count pennies for food for our stomachs and clothes for our backs, love is nothing. (...), the last man any woman should think of marrying is the man she loves.

Gendered social hierarchies and their interaction with social and political and economic arrangements is at the heart of many feminists' dissection of the politics of love. Also see South African activist Pregs Govender's (2007) *Love and courage: A story of insubordination*. For example, the Nigerian feminist scholar and activist, Amina Mama, identifies love as part of a system of social arrangements when she asserts that:

The confinement of women to the economically dependent role of housewife is a condition that has made it difficult for many women to leave otherwise unbearably violent situations. In other words, *the domestication of women is a precondition for the crime we define as domestic violence*. (Mama, 1997: 53, emphasis added)

The Zimbabwean feminist scholar and activist, Tsitsi Dangarembga, similarly uses her novel, *Nervous Conditions*, to make a biting commentary on the distortion of love in the context of patriarchal gendered inequality. The novel opens with the words 'I was not sorry when my brother died', spoken by her female protagonist, Tambu. She continues: 'Nor am I apologizing for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling. For it is not that at all. I feel many things these days' (1988: 1). Lauren Berlant's (2004) idea of compassion as an affect that is bound up with material practice, which may disrupt its moral character, is interesting to note here. Tambu's lack of feeling and inability to mourn the loss of her brother is tied to her awareness of the opportunity his death opens for her as a Black African girl: to receive a formal education. The gendered inequalities of young girls' access to education continues to be a concern across the continent. Ama Ata Aidoo (1990) reclaims African feminists' activism in terms of the broader political and social challenges of the African context (Frías Rudolphi, 2003). The articulations of affective states, and the material contexts that shape them, are vividly portrayed in Aidoo and Dangarembga's works.

These articulations are also present in social organising against injustice in different contexts (Shaw *et al.*, 2022). Yaliwe Clarke and Constance O'Brien's (2019) documentation of women's activism in Northern Uganda in the aftermath of war highlights the social and cultural fragmentation that happens in a context of destabilisation. The fragmentation of patrilineal ties and other social strongholds facilitated the active organising of women in the community in working to rebuild and engage a practice of community care as part of healing and recovery. The women's work included building care groups for orphaned children; building small group savings schemes; soliciting aid from humanitarian groups; harvesting; working the land, and so on. Clarke and O'Brien find it noteworthy that women's peace activism in this context involved occupying spaces previously held by men and engaging a reimagined gender politics that place women at the forefront of change and community building. In her work and activism focused on women's experiences of trauma, the South African scholar, Puleng Segalo, engages forms of critical participatory action research with women in the Daveyton community to reflect on the structural and everyday violence in their lives. Segalo asks: 'What does it mean to theorise suffering and trauma as gendered?' She argues:

Many women are suffering from 'enforced' amnesia, which may be personally or systematically imposed by the ruling structures. When encouraged messages are that of forgiving and forgetting and the promotion of equality without acknowledging women's everyday lived experiences, then 'amnesia' kicks in – society starts to forget. The challenge becomes the ghosts that continuously haunt these women. (2022: 4)

Segalo's task is to engage modes of listening and telling women's stories that are not recognised in formal dialogical spaces. I began this article with Makhosana Xaba's project of naming in her poetry about the women of Xolobeni and their struggle against land invasion. As poetry is to Xaba as medium and as a site for honouring women's lives and stories so is Segalo's reimagining of embroidery as a critical site for reclaiming voice and agency.

In the women's marches against gender-based violence in Namibia, Nigeria, and South Africa, a reimagining of material, social and political contexts is at the heart of women's resistance. Reimagination is also at the heart of Wangari Maathai's project, including inculcating a sense of accountability in agents of both state and community to the environment. In activism, scenes of love are intrinsic to practices of refusal and resistance. In demanding social accountability, women activists perform an act of hailing (Althusser, 1970) that simultaneously brings to light their interpellation in society as disempowered but also refuses the simple interpellation as non-agentic subjects. They do this via a surfacing of a gendered subject both within and outside law. The hailing of women's activism surfaces a subject worthy of love and not just a subject recognised in law. In this vein, Diana Fuss (2017) reframes hailing acts as moments of recognition that embody love: 'these scenes of ideological recognition are stories not of suspicion but of friendship, not of guilt but of anticipation, not of law but of love' (2017: 354).

As I have argued, it is useful to think about women's acts of refusal through the lens of love. Feminist refusal incorporates feminist rage to imagine new configurations of social formation. Gqola (2017) suggests that continued acts of refusal must be thought of alongside re-energised feminist activism. Given the configuration of social formations via affect, refusal and resistance should also be imagined in terms of their affective energies and capacities. I read these activism as labours of love that engages the erotic potential of the human in terms of full understanding and acceptance of our interconnectedness. For example, for Maathai, her environmental activism and struggle for women's rights aims at women in the community 'com[ing] to recognize that they are the primary custodians and beneficiaries of the environment that sustains them' (in Musila, 2020: 155). The Ugandan feminist scholar, Sylvia Tamale (2020), similarly centres Africa's decolonial project alongside gender struggles, both within the decolonial narrative and more broadly as part of the contributions of Afro-feminists. These activists and scholars foreground justice as love. They do not engage love in its abstract and perhaps apolitical form: rather, they conceive of love via a social justice lens that firmly locates justice for women at the centre of their activism. The labour of love that they perform is their fight for social justice. In the end, then: 'Love, empathy, and pleasure may be the types of affect necessary to transform our selves, our communities, our world, our souls: that which is necessary to move us to do our work' (Moore, 2014: n. p.).

CONCLUSION

I will learn to love myself well enough to love you (whoever you are), well enough so that you will love me well enough, so that we will know, exactly, where is the love: that it is here, between us, and growing stronger and growing stronger. (Jordan, 1978/2003: n. p.)

'*Where is the love?*', June Jordan's important question to feminists, activists, and social justice movements, remains fundamental in considering situated feminist knowledges. In Jordan's view, genuine community-building is only possible because one can love oneself. Self-love underscores love of the other. The complexities of love for feminists notwithstanding, the article has demonstrated that love remains a critical starting point for change. In reading love as method, the article explores how women's bodies are surfaced within patriarchal and racialising contexts, and in turn recovered in feminist activism. Through a select reading of Black and African feminist texts, I have demonstrated that these scholars and activists engage a politics of love that attends to love's labour: *love of self* and *love of the other*.

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